



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Ceisteanna - Questions	263
Priority Questions	263
Northern Ireland Issues	263
Middle East Issues	265
Biofuel Obligation Scheme Targets	267
Humanitarian Aid	268
Middle East Issues	271
Other Questions	273
Military Aircraft Landings	273
Nuclear Proliferation	276
Ministerial Meetings	277
Topical Issue Matters	282
Leaders' Questions	283
Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)	291
Cabinet Committee Meetings	291
Cabinet Committee Meetings	297
Death of Former Member: Expressions of Sympathy	304
Order of Business	313
Local Government Bill 2013: Second Stage (Resumed)	319
Local Government Bill 2013: Referral to Select Committee	321
Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2013: Referral to Joint Committee	321
Supplementary Estimates for Public Services: Motion	322
Supplementary Estimates for Public Services: Referral to Select Committee	322
Topical Issue Debate	323
HSE Staff Remuneration	323
Primary Care Centres Provision	325
Fuel Laundering	328
Job Protection	330
Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013: Order for Second Stage	336
Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013: Second Stage	337
Youth Employment: Motion [Private Members]	339

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 19 Samhain 2013

Tuesday, 19 November 2013

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Ceisteanna - Questions

Priority Questions

Northern Ireland Issues

81. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has made a formal submission to the panel of parties in the Northern Ireland Executive; if he will provide an update on any discussions he has had with Ambassador Richard Haass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49226/13]

Deputy Brendan Smith: I welcome the Haass-O'Sullivan talks process and earnestly hope for a successful conclusion. The issues under discussion are important for this entire island, as Ambassador Haass's remit includes issues surrounding parades, flags, emblems and the past. Mechanisms must be developed to resolve, once and for all, the ongoing disputes over these contentious issues. The period from December to March last winter was a dark time for Northern Ireland because of the flag protests and the negative impact of that misbehaviour, to put it mildly, which included a sharp decline in business, particularly in Belfast. Unfortunately, last summer we also saw thuggery associated with parades.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I met with Dr. Richard Haass on 31 October in Iveagh House. We had met previously in New York on 25 September and agreed to keep in close touch. I believe that close and ongoing contact with Dr. Haass and his team is preferable to a formal submission at this stage in the process. While Dr. Haass's primary reporting lines are to the Northern Ireland Executive, the British and Irish Governments take seriously our supporting responsibilities in the context of the process. During our meetings, we discussed each of the issues that he has been asked to address by the Northern Ireland Executive. including parades, flags and emblems and the past. Dr. Haass has committed to concluding his work by December and, to that end, he has embarked on an ambi-

tious programme of work. He returns to Northern Ireland this week and again in early December, when I understand he also intends to visit Dublin and London.

I am very supportive of the process of consultation with wider society undertaken by Dr. Haass and his team. I believe this is an essential component of a successful process. I have been struck on my visits to Northern Ireland and in my engagement with stakeholders by the widespread support across society for progress on these issues. On 30 October I partnered with a number of peace-building and peace research actors to host a reconciliation networking forum in Dublin Castle which brought together many diverse groups working in the community, business, faith and other sectors. There was an overwhelming consensus, especially from younger speakers, that there is an opportunity to make progress on these issues. I welcomed Dr. Haass's decision to meet members of the 15 Years On group, who formed the steering committee for the reconciliation networking forum, while he was in Dublin on 31 October.

The Government believes that the process presents an opportunity to reaffirm the commitments made throughout the hard-won peace process and to make further progress towards advancing reconciliation and the creation of a truly reconciled and prosperous society in Northern Ireland. During our meetings to date, I have assured Dr. Haass that he and his team have the full support of the Government in the pursuit of their work and that we are ready to assist them in any way we can. Dr. Haass and I have agreed to remain in close contact and to meet again in the coming weeks.

Deputy Brendan Smith: This is the first time in decades the Irish Government has not been involved in an important talks process. Does the Tánaiste agree this is a retrograde step? Crucial matters are under discussion and, I hope, due for resolution. The two Governments are co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement and the opportunities of the Agreement for the people of all of the island have yet to be achieved. This takes into account and recognises the huge advances that have been made, including devolution, stability and parliamentary politics and a society opposed to terror. The last major talks resulted in the devolution of policing and justice issues. None of the major items was achieved without Dublin and London working together and driving the process forward. Does the Tánaiste agree that the work, influence and capacity of two sovereign Governments are needed to drive on and resolve these issues? We cannot have another winter, spring or summer of discontent, as we witnessed last winter and summer. From regular contact with parties in Northern Ireland, we know there is considerable concern in many communities about the lack of economic progress and progress in general in achieving the potential of the Good Friday Agreement.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is not true to say the Irish Government is not involved. It is very much involved, as is the British Government. The Haass process was established by the Northern Ireland Executive; it was an initiative taken by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. In May the strategy, *Together: Building a United Community*, was launched, as part of which the Northern Ireland Executive established a panel of parties and decided to invite Dr. Richard Haass to chair the discussions. We must understand the initiative to invite Dr. Haass was taken by the Northern Ireland Executive and announced by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and it is supported by the Government. From the beginning, the Government engaged with Dr. Haass. I telephoned him straightaway following his appointment and have met him on two occasions. My officials are in regular and continuing contact with his team.

Deputy Brendan Smith: The Tánaiste knows that participating in the talks is different from having regular consultation and being involved as a participant around the table with all

of the other parties. On the several occasions when substantial progress was made, for which I commend everyone involved, it was driven by two sovereign Governments working with the relevant parties. The Tánaiste used nuance in replying on the issues of participation and consultation. Is he confident Dr. Haass and Ms O'Sullivan will be able to bring the talks to a conclusion by the middle or end of December? Some of the Belfast newspapers referred to the Secretary of State convening meetings with the smaller political parties in Northern Ireland from mid-January. It is essential not to have a quick fix but to get a proper fix on these important and contentious issues.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Dr. Haass has set the objective of having the talks concluded by the end of the year. It is an ambitious timetable. I discussed the timetable with him and he expressed confidence in being able to conclude the discussions. It is important to recognise that he will only be able to reach a conclusion provided there is political commitment and a political will on the part of all parties involved. In that respect, the Irish and British Governments - I have discussed this with the Secretary of State and we are of one mind on it - are in close contact with the officials in the talks process. We very much welcome that this initiative was taken in Belfast by the Executive, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. We are working with it and I have a continuing contact and dialogue with Dr. Haass, which we will maintain. The success of the process will depend to a large measure on the willingness of the parties in Northern Ireland to fully engage with the process and work to find solutions on the issues of flags parading, and, most important, the very difficult issue of the past.

Middle East Issues

82. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the Swiss forensic test which suggests that Yasser Arafat was poisoned with radioactive polonium and that this led to his death; his views on whether this will have an impact on the current negotiations between Palestine and Israel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49071/13]

Deputy Seán Crowe: I suppose this is moving from one talks process to another in a different region. Since we last had Question Time, compelling evidence has been released from Swiss forensic scientists suggesting that the former leader of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, was killed by radioactive polonium. There is a question of what effect the results of these forensic tests will have on the talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. What is the attitude of the Government in that regard?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am aware of media reports that Swiss forensic experts have detected the radioactive element, polonium, in samples taken from the remains of President Arafat, who died in November 2004. It is reported that the levels detected are unlikely to have been natural, and therefore that grounds exist to investigate the possibility that he was poisoned. The Government has no official information on these results or means of investigating the matter. I understand a French judicial investigation into the circumstances surrounding President Arafat's death was launched in August 2012 and is ongoing. There is obviously a concern that this allegation could have a disruptive influence on the current negotiations. I note that many Palestinians, perhaps not unexpectedly, have stated their assumption that Israel was responsible for poisoning the late president.

It is clearly regrettable that, despite widespread rumours of foul play at the time, no tests

were carried out - at a family request - on President Arafat's remains at the time of death, and that this suspicion should arise now at the very moment when, after long efforts, direct negotiations between the two sides have been resumed. President Arafat spent his whole life in the pursuit of Palestinian freedom and an independent state of Palestine. While it is quite legitimate to pursue questions about his death, it would be a tragedy if this was to jeopardise the best, and perhaps the last, chance to achieve what he worked for. I would therefore hope and urge President Abbas and his administration not to allow themselves to be distracted from continuing to engage fully in the crucial peace talks now under way.

Deputy Seán Crowe: It is nine years since Yasser Arafat died and the event still brings more questions than answers. The recently released forensic report indicates results from Yasser Arafat's body moderately support the proposition that he was poisoned with polonium 210, which will surprise few. Polonium 210 killed Alexander Litvinenko and it is a rare and highly radioactive isotope that is extremely hard to detect. It is so toxic that a fatal dose would kill an individual almost immediately.

It has been well documented that the former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has been vocal in admitting that he tried but failed to kill Yasser Arafat. Famously, in 1997 Israel botched an attempt to poison political leaders in Hamas. The big concern is the impact this may have on the talks, and other actions have already been taken by the Israeli Government, particularly with regard to new and illegal settlements. Will the Tánaiste support the investigation by the French and use his influence to call on Israel to end its illegal practices, which threaten to undermine the peace process?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: As I stated, the French authorities have an investigation under way. Deputy Crowe mentioned Ariel Sharon, who was the Israeli Prime Minister at the time of President Arafat's death. Mr. Sharon has been in a coma since January 2006. The focus of the international community must be on supporting the talks process after many years' lack of activity between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to achieve a peace settlement. I very much welcome the fact that talks began at the end of July and have proceeded continuously, with one or two sessions most weeks to date in Jericho and Jerusalem. On the positive side, the talks are continuing and both sides remain engaged and are maintaining confidentiality. The United States has a commitment to those talks. I commend the initiative of the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, in getting the talks under way. There are challenges facing the talks, including announcements of settlements, but we must concentrate on supporting the talks process and work for a peace settlement.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Yesterday, the Palestinian delegation to the UN cast a ballot for the first time in a routine General Assembly. That is the one positive message. We hope that symbolic and important action will lead the Palestinians closer to UN membership. Unfortunately, last night there were reports that Israel had bombed Gaza, which led to Palestinian deaths. Palestinians know that the way to peace and freedom is through negotiation. The timing of the report is bad but it is important that we pursue all avenues in regard to it. Is the Tánaiste working with his European counterparts to ensure that Israel abides by international law and fully commits to the talks?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Together with our European partners, we have been very much urging the commencement of peace talks and we very much support the talks that are under way. Both Ireland and the European Union will work to support those talks in every possible way. Ultimately, as in any peace talks, the key participants are the sides in the conflict - in this

case, the Israeli side and the Palestinian side. The opportunity must be taken to conclude a settlement. Some big issues have to be negotiated and decided. It is important that both sides concentrate on the talks process and do not allow themselves to be distracted or deflected from the core objective of trying to achieve a settlement. This country has consistently expressed support for a settlement in the Middle East and that is very much the position of the European Union. I will work with my European Union colleagues to support the process.

Biofuel Obligation Scheme Targets

83. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade following the Minister of State for Development’s statement to supporting a 5% EU cap on food based biofuels because of its implications for land and food security in Africa, the reason the Department of Communications Energy and Natural Resources has reneged on this by supporting a new 7% cap which has potentially devastating effects in the developing world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49072/13]

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: My question relates to what the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is saying about biofuels and what the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources is saying. There was a commitment to 5% by one and 7% by the other. What is the Irish position on biofuels?

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): My colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, has lead responsibility for Government policy on biofuels. By 2020, 10% of energy used in transport must come from renewable sources, according to the 2009 renewable energy directive. In October 2012, the Commission proposed amendments to mitigate the potential negative effects occurring as a result of the use of certain biofuels. These would limit the use of food-crop-based biofuels for renewable energy to 5% by 2020. Some member states argue for a higher cap or no cap at all on relevant biofuels. Others want a cap lower than the 5% proposed.

During Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union we worked hard to facilitate consensus, but at the moment there is no agreement in Council. biofuel production and use, unless properly regulated, could have a negative impact on food production and food prices and might increase the emissions of greenhouse gases. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, has conveyed to member states the need to be cognisant of these potentially adverse impacts of biofuels on land use in developing countries.

Ireland argues for a restriction on food crop-based biofuels and for incentives to develop advanced biofuels. Our preference is for as low a cap as is achievable. To help reach agreement on the Commission’s proposal, Ireland has been practical by supporting the Lithuanian Presidency’s compromise providing for a reduction in a cap of 7%. The proposals tabled are part of the normal process of identifying a workable compromise.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: That is very disappointing. The bottom line is that the production of biofuels should not undermine food security. There is no doubt that the biofuels mandates are having major negative effects on food production. It is almost as if there is a conflict between the production of food for the world’s poor and fuel consumption by the world’s rich. It is very disappointing that Ireland regards the 7% cap as being as low as is achievable and that we are supporting it. Why are we not continuing to support a cap of 5%? The merits

of such a cap were borne out at the Mary Robinson conference on climate justice which Ireland hosted. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, when he met representatives of the NGOs, certainly gave the impression that they had made a compelling case for not applying the higher rate of 7%. We are aware that a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Belgium and Luxembourg, have committed to having a cap of 5%. Italy has lowered its cap from 7% to 6%. A cap of 5% is advocated by the European Commission, but the Presidency is supporting a cap of 7%. My question is on policy coherence between the two Departments.

Deputy Joe Costello: What I said was that during our Presidency we had fought hard to make the Commission's amendment, namely, a rate of 5%. We failed to obtain agreement at that point. We would like to achieve the lowest possible level, but at this point there is very substantial disagreement among member states, particularly Poland and eastern European states, which want a higher level. Many of them want no cap at all because of investments they have made in biofuels in their territories. Other countries such as the United Kingdom and Denmark want a lower level, just as Ireland wants the lowest possible level that can be achieved. In this matter, as in most matters in the European Union such as the multi-annual financial framework voted on today in the European Parliament, there is much desire on the part of Ireland and other countries to have a greater amount of finance for the period 2014 to 2020. Eventually, a compromise is brought forward. We have opted for the upper end of the compromise figure, which is 7%. We would prefer if it were 5%. If the cap is achievable, it will certainly be better than the 10% that obtains at present.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Failing to have an agreement does not mean that Ireland should give up on this issue. An interesting report produced recently by Action Aid examines the difference between the rates of 5% and 7%. The difference is such that if the former was adopted, over 68 million people could be fed. It is all very well to say we might have the lower cap by 2020, but by then how many more people will have died from hunger? I acknowledge what the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Irish Aid do to relieve hunger, but it is as if we are giving with one hand and taking back with the other. I urge the Government not to take the issue of the cap off the agenda and to continue to argue for a figure of 5%. Ireland should join the group with the United Kingdom and the other member states which are supporting a cap of 5%; it should not regard 7% as a compromise.

Deputy Joe Costello: The current position is that the cap is 10%. It is an amended position put forward in 2012. The Deputy should not forget that the original position in 2009 meant a cap of 10%. That will remain the position, unless we make an amendment securing a reduction. It is a question of working towards the best cap we can get and continuing with that work. We fought hard during our Presidency for a reduction to 5%. One should remember that all Irish biofuel is from waste material and that we do not use any food crop in its manufacture. We are setting a good example in that respect and will continue to seek a further reduction.

Humanitarian Aid

84. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with his counterparts in the EU Foreign Affairs Council and with the European Commission the need for the EU and the international community to respond with the utmost urgency to the current humanitarian crisis in the Philippines; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [49227/13]

Deputy Brendan Smith: The tropical cyclone 11 days ago was one of the strongest ever recorded. It is estimated that 13 million people or over 10% of the population of the Philippines were directly affected. I take the opportunity to compliment the Tánaiste and the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Joe Costello, on the rapid response of the Government in directing the release of very necessary aid funding. It was also heartening to see, at churches and other collection centres last weekend, the great response of the Irish people to this humanitarian disaster. I also compliment the Irish NGOs that are working with local sister organisations and have people working in the field. I commend them for their work.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Current estimates indicate that typhoon Haiyan has affected 13 million people across 41 provinces, representing over 10% of the country's population, with up to 4 million people displaced. Official estimates indicate that at least 3,600 lives have been lost. However, it is likely that the full picture of the human cost of the disaster will only emerge in the coming days as relief teams get to remote areas which are without power and communications following one of the most powerful storms ever recorded.

Despite the many logistical challenges to the relief effort, the response of the international community has been rapid, with a large UN Disaster Assessment and Co-ordination, UNDAC, team and a team of experts from the European Commission's Directorate for Humanitarian Assistance and Civil Protection, ECHO, being deployed to assist the national authorities to assess the impact of the disaster as early as Friday, 8 November.

A UN flash appeal was jointly launched by the United Nations and the Government of the Philippines on Tuesday, 12 November. This appeal calls for funding of just over US \$300 million to cover immediate emergency relief and continued support for the affected populations in the coming six months. To date, US \$78 million or 26% of the funds requested under this appeal have been received. Ireland will examine the potential for contributions, within our means, to the relief programmes identified within the appeal.

While the situation in the Philippines was not on the agenda for yesterday's EU Foreign Affairs Council, the meeting did provide me with the opportunity to hear from my EU counterparts on the wider EU response to the crisis. In the light of her visit to the Philippines over the weekend, I also availed of the opportunity to receive a briefing from the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, on her impressions of the situation and her views on the manner in which the response was being co-ordinated. My officials are in regular contact with ECHO and, in particular, the EU Emergency Response Centre. The European Union has made available €10 million in emergency funding to support the immediate relief efforts in the areas worst affected by the typhoon and pledged a further US\$40 million in longer term development assistance to assist with the Philippines' efforts to recover from this devastating disaster.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

For our part, Ireland was among the first countries to respond to the disaster and, on the basis of pledges announced to date, our contribution currently stands as one of the highest amounts provided by a bilateral donor. On Sunday, 10 November, the Government announced emergency funding from Ireland of €1 million towards the relief effort for typhoon Haiyan.

One week later, as the magnitude of the disaster became apparent, this sum was increased to €2.25 million. A separate dispatch of over 100 tonnes of essential shelter items for distribution to families worst affected by the disaster, to the value of €510,000, was also authorised. Ireland's airlift of these relief items was among the first delivered to the Philippines, arriving in Cebu on Wednesday, 13 November.

Irish Aid is preparing for a further airlift of essential shelter and water and sanitation items in the coming days. My officials are also in daily contact with UNOCHA, UNICEF and the WFP on requirements for deployment of technical experts from the Irish Rapid Response Corps. An Irish captain and engineer in the Defence Forces was deployed on 17 November to support the WFP's operations in the Philippines and an information management specialist was deployed on the same day to support UNICEF's operations. We expect further deployments in the coming days. In addition, we have authorised the release of €425,000 in funding which had been pre-positioned with trusted NGO partners for sudden onset emergencies such as this. That brings the total sum of Ireland's contributions to date to over €3 million.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Tánaiste for his reply. It is welcome that the matter was discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting; it should be on the agenda for forthcoming meetings for some time to come. The typhoon hit the Philippines one month after a major earthquake, measuring 7.2, which directly affected 350,000 people. This shows how disaster prone the country is, with two major disasters in a single year. Is the Tánaiste confident about the capacity of the United Nations to co-ordinate the relief efforts in an effective and timely manner? While it is welcome that there seems to have been a significant improvement in the relief efforts in recent days, it has been reported that up to 600,000 people have not yet been reached with food, which is a frightening prospect. It seems that those in very remote regions have not yet received direct assistance. We must remember that we are talking about very vulnerable people, including children, pregnant women, the elderly and people who are sick. I have tabled this question in order to highlight the need to ensure added impetus is given to the co-ordination of relief efforts by the United Nations and the international community.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I acknowledge what the Deputy said about the Irish response to this disaster. We were one of the first countries to respond officially and I agree with him about the generous response last Sunday in churches and the generous response of the NGOs. On the basis of the pledges announced to date, our contribution currently stands as one of the highest provided by a bilateral donor. On Sunday, 10 November the Government announced emergency funding from Ireland of €1 million towards the relief effort. A week later, as the magnitude of this disaster became apparent, this sum was increased to €2.25 million. A separate dispatch of more than 100 tonnes of essential shelter items for distribution to families worst affected by the disaster to the value of €510,000 was also authorised. Ireland's airlift of these relief items was among the first to be delivered to the Philippines, arriving in Cebu on Wednesday, 13 November.

Deputy Brendan Smith: While it is obvious and necessary that our focus should be on the immediate needs of the people, there is a longer term need for continued assistance. In one remote region, 90% of the people have lost their livelihood. They were in the fishing industry and all their boats were smashed. They are totally dependent on fishing for their income. Will the Tánaiste ensure that the needs of the people in this region are not forgotten when the immediate crisis eases?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: They will not be forgotten. There is a plan. Approximately

500,000 people are in need of immediate water, sanitation and hygiene supplies. Essential health services are being provided for almost 10 million people, along with nutrition services for 100,000 children and 60,000 mothers, and shelter and urgent household items for 560,000 people. The work is being co-ordinated by UN agencies, and clusters have been identified for the co-ordination of the entire effort at both field and global levels. These include nutrition, which is the domain of the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF; health, which is the domain of the World Health Organization, WHO; water and sanitation, which is under UNICEF; emergency shelter, which is the area dealt with by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; camp co-ordination and management, which is under the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration; protection, which is under the UNHCR and UNICEF; early recovery, which is under the UN Development Programme; logistics, which is under the World Food Programme, WFP; and emergency telecommunications, which is under UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF and WFP.

A co-ordinated effort is operating through the UN agencies. We are working with them and the NGOs. This was the worst typhoon on record and an ongoing body of work will have to be undertaken over a long period.

Middle East Issues

85. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the pressure his Department is putting on the Israeli Government, through the Irish embassy in Tel Aviv or other channels, to address the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza; if he will provide details of his Department's most recent correspondence with the Israeli Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49260/13]

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Tánaiste rightly described the need for urgent action following the natural disaster that has afflicted people in the Philippines. However, a man-made disaster on a similar scale has been occurring in Gaza every day for years and the humanitarian situation is worsening by the day. When will we say "enough is enough" to Israel? The lack of fuel at Gaza's power plant means there are power outages for between 12 and 17 hours a day. Patients in hospitals with leukaemia and rheumatoid arthritis do not have the medicines they need. Fishermen were shot at by the Israelis for the umpteenth time in the past week 1.5 km from the Gaza coast as they went out to fish. Israel is trying to strangle and decimate Gaza. Is it the case that the only time we care about the people of Gaza is when they are being bombed, and we ignore their plight while they are being slowly strangled by a vicious and concerted campaign of destruction being wreaked on them by Israel? What are we doing about this?

Deputy Joe Costello: It is not the only time we care about the people of Gaza. We are concerned about the situation there all the time. Amid the turmoil in the Middle East, it remains essential to keep a focus on the unacceptable and unsustainable conditions in Gaza which I visited last month as part of a visit to view the Irish Aid programme in the occupied Palestinian territories to see what conditions were like on the ground. Subsequently, I made a report on the visit to the foreign affairs committee. While Israeli restrictions have eased marginally, clearly the overall situation in Gaza has deteriorated in recent months as Egypt has acted against smuggling into Gaza owing to its own security concerns. This has impacted principally on supplies of fuel and building materials, adding to an existing fuel shortfall which, in turn, is impacting

on domestic use, electricity supply and water and sewerage facilities, with obvious negative effects for residents.

Ireland has consistently stressed that it is essential that Israel move progressively to the full opening of Gaza's borders to people and goods, subject to normal security measures. I also deplore efforts by some groups in Gaza to attack Israeli border posts, which only helps those who wish to treat the situation in Gaza as purely a security issue. All relevant actors, inside and outside Gaza, should consider how their policies are impacting on ordinary people who are innocent victims of larger forces.

Ireland raises the problems in Gaza, among other issues, both directly with Israel and through EU engagement with Israel. This includes regular contact between the Irish Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israeli authorities, as well as between officials and the Israeli embassy here. In addition to my visit, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade also travelled to Gaza last year to highlight the conditions. Ireland also raised the issue of Gaza in the universal review of Israel at the UN Human Rights Council last month. We will raise it again with Israel at senior official level in the next few weeks.

While it is right that priority attention is given to supporting the political talks taking place, in Ireland's view, the international community has not pressed as hard as it should on the issue of Gaza. We will continue to argue that case wherever possible.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I thank the Minister of State for his response. I asked specifically in my question if he could furnish us with copies of communications he had had with Israel, whether with the embassy here or Tel Aviv. We need to know what is being said.

The blockade has been ongoing for years and it is just getting worse. I do not doubt that the Minister has taken action. He has made public statements in the Dáil that I welcomed. However, nothing has changed; in fact, the position is getting worse. I do not condone border attacks, but the problem is the Israeli blockade and Israel's concerted policy to strangle Gaza in the most vicious and cruel way. The blockade is hitting the sick and the young. If the Minister of State had been there, he would know about the appalling conditions in which 1.7 million people are living.

When are we going to stop treating Israel as if it is just a normal state? It does major trade with this country and Europe, having favoured trade status with the European Union.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call the Minister of State. I will come back to the Deputy for a further supplementary question.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: How can we allow this to continue when Israel is doing this to the Palestinians, particularly Gazans?

Deputy Joe Costello: I replied to the Deputy on the issues that he has raised again. I agree that the situation is getting progressively worse. For a considerable time essential supplies for Gaza could be moved through tunnels on the Egyptian side. Since the overthrow of the Morsi Government in Egypt, 85% of these tunnels have been closed which has meant food, medicines, building materials, water and other essentials coming through from Egypt have virtually ceased.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: They should not have to rely on tunnels for such materials.

Deputy Joe Costello: Israel is not allowing access through the natural hinterland for Gaza

through to Israel and the West Bank. As I said in my reply, we have constantly raised these issues with Israel. They are not security issues. Security measures can be put in place. These are restrictions on a population of 1.2 million, 800,000 of whom are reliant on American Near East Refugee Aid, ANERA, for essential food supplies on a daily basis.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: Can we have sanctions?

Deputy Joe Costello: We raise these issues regularly at every level.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: When will there be sanctions? With South Africa's apartheid we reached a point where we said "enough is enough" and imposed sanctions. Surely the clock has run out for Israel to be just asked nicely to stop doing what it is doing to the Palestinian people. Should we not publicly demand that sanctions be imposed? Is it not unbelievable that Europe gives favoured trade status to Israel when it flagrantly flouts all human rights obligations? Israel even refuses MEP Emer Costello entry to Gaza. European delegation officials alleged that they were beaten by Israeli soldiers when they tried to access certain areas of the West Bank. When will we say, "Sorry, this is not acceptable and we are going to impose sanctions on you people"?

Deputy Joe Costello: Ireland acts in conjunction with the EU on sanctions. We have already made a strong stand on the guidelines and that has had an impact on the peace talks. In the context of what is happening, peace talks are under way and we hope that some progress will be made in that area. Meanwhile we will continue to raise the issue at the levels we can, including the EU and our position on the Human Rights Council, and any fora we have on a bilateral basis with Israel.

Other Questions

Military Aircraft Landings

86. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a new special arrangement in place regarding refuelling for Canadian military aircraft at Shannon; if sovereign immunity has been granted to them by the Irish Government; the international law or treaty under which this is being permitted and whether it should not be superseded by our neutrality and the UN Convention against Torture. [48803/13]

115. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 727 of 5 November 2013, the basis for granting sovereign immunity; the law it is in accordance with; the way this impacts on Ireland's responsibility to uphold international treaties like the Geneva Convention, Hague Convention and the UN Convention Against Torture. [48925/13]

Deputy Clare Daly: As the Tánaiste is aware, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Canadian military aircraft using Shannon Airport. In a written answer to my question last week the Tánaiste told me he was not in a position to provide any information about that. I want to know why that is the case. Does the Tánaiste not know, or does he know but does not want to tell us? Neither answer is acceptable in a country which claims to be neutral.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 115 together. I am not aware of any new special arrangement in place for the refuelling of Canadian military aircraft at Shannon Airport. In accordance with Article 29.3 of the Constitution, Ireland accepts the generally recognised principles of international law as its rule of conduct in its relations with other states. Sovereign immunity, also known as State immunity, is a long-standing principle of customary international law. Sovereign immunity is recognised as applying in respect of foreign state or military aircraft. Sovereign immunity is not granted by any decision of the Government, but applies automatically as a matter of law. However, there are legal rules governing the entry of foreign state aircraft into Irish territory.

Under the Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, all foreign military aircraft require the permission of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to overfly or land in the State. Permission is requested by the embassy of the country concerned. When overflight or landing permission is granted to foreign military aircraft, certain conditions are normally applied, such as that the aircraft are unarmed, are not carrying arms, ammunition or explosives, are not engaged in intelligence gathering and are not taking part in military exercises or operations. These conditions apply to all military aircraft landing at Shannon Airport.

The doctrine of sovereign immunity is recognised in Irish law, although there is no domestic legislation on the topic. This was acknowledged by the Supreme Court in the case of *Canada v. Employment Appeals Tribunal*, 1992. There is no incompatibility between Ireland's respect for the principle of sovereign immunity and its traditional policy of neutrality, which is characterised by non-participation in military alliances. Similarly, as the doctrine of sovereign immunity is recognised by the international community, respect for the principle does not interfere with Ireland's fulfilling the obligations arising from the international treaties to which the State is a party.

Deputy Clare Daly: I am not sure I am any the wiser following that response. What the Tánaiste seems to be saying is that there is sovereign immunity but that it is subservient to other aspects of international law, that it is not something that is sought. He goes on to say military aircraft landing at Shannon Airport require permission from him as Minister and that they are required to adhere to certain rules such as being unarmed and so on. Obviously, one aircraft was caught out as its arms were so visible they could not be ignored. However, how does the Tánaiste know aircraft landing there are not armed? How does he know they are not carrying military personnel if no checks are carried out? There seems to be a discrepancy between the role of the Garda and the Department. The Garda believes it has a role and takes on board complaints made about this matter. Members of the Judiciary have adjudicated on the issue and referred residents with complaints about searching aircraft to the Garda. However, the Tánaiste seems to think that is not necessary. I wonder why so many soldiers or passengers are being carried by military aircraft and landing at Shannon Airport if they are not engaged in military activity.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I have answered the two questions tabled by the Deputy on sovereign immunity and how it operates. As I said in my reply, sovereign immunity is not something that is conferred by the Government from time to time but a matter of international law. The position on military aircraft landing in this country is very clear and governed by statute. There is a requirement on any country wishing to land a military aircraft in Ireland or overfly Irish airspace to apply to me for permission. The conditions attaching to that permission are very clear. The aircraft must be unarmed and cannot be part of a military mission. These issues are decided on a case by case basis.

Deputy Clare Daly: The problem is that they are not. Last week I asked the Tánaiste in a question tabled for written reply about a specific Hercules aircraft that had been at Shannon Airport on 6 November and whether it had been carrying passengers or cargo. We were led to believe it had been carrying passengers because of where it had landed. However, the Tánaiste's response to me was that he was not in a position to give that information. If he is not in a position to know whether it was carrying passengers or cargo, how does he know the criteria of international law which he has specified to the House today are being fulfilled? How does he know the criteria are being fulfilled in terms of treaties such as the Geneva and Hague conventions, the arms trade treaty, the UN convention against torture, all of which we have signed up to, and how does he know these military aircraft are not breaching these criteria? How does he know if the aircraft have not been searched? With aeroplanes that had not been searched, it had to be acknowledged that there were breaches when they were so obvious. How do we know other aircraft are not doing the same?

Deputy Mick Wallace: On Friday some 43 people died in clashes between militia in Libya; on Sunday some 22 people died in bomb attacks in Iraq and now in Helmand it is commonly expected that there will be a return to power of the Taliban. All of this is the result of uninvited military interventions to topple installed governments, all of which ended in disaster. Although Ireland claims to be a neutral country, we have played our part in this. We have helped to bring it about by facilitating the use of Shannon Airport by the US military authorities. We have facilitated military activity in these regions. When the Tánaiste was in opposition, he wanted aeroplanes to be inspected. We are not taking a neutral position. Why does the Tánaiste not want aeroplanes to be inspected now?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The scope of the question has been widened somewhat. The question tabled was about sovereign immunity. The position is clear in that there are conditions attached to the landing of any military aircraft at an Irish airport. The aircraft must have permission to land. The conditions attached are that they must be unarmed and they cannot be part of a military operation. On the specific case of Canada, it is the case that a small number of Canadian military aircraft land at Shannon Airport each year. Therefore, their presence is not particularly unusual. The number is relatively small in comparison with the volume of US military aircraft which transit through the airport. I understand Canada is considering the possibility of increasing the number of aircraft which use the airport for refuelling purposes, but no special arrangements will apply to these aircraft. They will have to comply with the same conditions as all military aircraft landing at Shannon Airport.

Deputy Seán Crowe: With regard to the fixed-weapon aircraft which landed at Shannon Airport, the Tánaiste stated previously that it had been an administrative error. The difficulty is we do not know what is on board many of the aircraft. It is like Donald Rumsfeld's unknown unknowns. As we do not seem to carry out any inspection, it will continue to be unknown. The concern of workers and civilians using the airport is that we do not know what is on board. The Government has a responsibility in this regard and we would like it to inspect some of the aircraft. Are there plans to do so?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I have replied to parliamentary questions - another question has been tabled today - on the one occasion on which a US military aircraft did not comply with the conditions set down. This was reported to the Department through the Garda Síochána and the authorities at Shannon Airport. We brought in the US Chargé d'Affaires and made it very clear what the position was. We received an explanation for what had happened and assurances that steps were being taken to ensure it would not happen again.

Nuclear Proliferation

88. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the current multi-country talks on Iran's nuclear programme will achieve a positive outcome; if he has discussed the issue with his European counterparts taking part in the negotiations; and his views on whether it would be timely to organise a delegation of Irish parliamentarians to that country. [48956/13]

Deputy Seán Crowe: This question relates to the situation in Iran. There is huge potential for an agreement and we are closer now than ever to one. The mood music seems to be good. There have been recent difficulties as the French Government expressed negative reports in the media. Has the Government had discussions with its European counterparts on this issue? Is it possible that a delegation from Ireland will visit Iran?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government has consistently stressed Ireland's firm support for the efforts to achieve a diplomatic solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear programme. I am very hopeful such a solution may now, at last, be within reach. Negotiators for the E3+3 and Iran met in Geneva from 8 to 10 November. High Representative Ashton led for the European Union and was joined later by US Secretary of State Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and the United Kingdom. All parties are wisely maintaining confidentiality as to the details of the negotiations. We should discount reports that have appeared attributing blame for the failure to reach agreement to one or other participant and which have been dismissed by those participating in the talks.

Unlike many previous occasions, the Iranian delegation came ready and authorised to negotiate. The E3+3 made a unified and comprehensive proposal on the way forward and concrete and intense negotiations then proceeded on these elements.

It should not surprise anyone that final agreement was not reached in one effort, but it is clear that real progress was made. The two sides are not yet at the stage of agreement on an interim deal, but they have substantially narrowed the gaps. Differences remain but are felt to be bridgeable if the real commitment evident in Geneva is maintained. The two sides have agreed to meet again tomorrow, 20 November.

This is a vital issue for international peace and security and there is an opportunity now to resolve it and turn a new page in our relations with Iran. We should allow the negotiations the time and space they need to succeed. What matters is a successful outcome with which all can live and that restores regional and international confidence in Iran's activities. I commend all members of the E3+3 and the Government of Iran for their engagement on this issue.

The question of a parliamentary visit is one for the Oireachtas. However, I think it would be important to keep the timing and substance of any such visit entirely separate from the nuclear issue so as not to send any confusing signal.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I accept what the Minister of State said about a parliamentary visit. However, foreign affairs Ministers and parliamentary delegations from other countries have visited Iran. There is a need to create an atmosphere of openness and to promote the idea that

the West wants to work with Iran in order to solve issues relating to it and other countries in the wider region. Governments and parliamentarians in many other European countries have been encouraged to take action in respect of this matter and this seems to be having a positive effect within Iran. During the summer, the former British Foreign Secretary Mr. Jack Straw referred to the real potential for a deal, but he also referred to difficulties relating to the Bush Administration in the US during his period in office. The Government of France appears to have a number of difficulties with the talks process at present. Has the Tánaiste discussed these difficulties with the French authorities?

Deputy Joe Costello: The Minister has had discussions with the French authorities on this matter. The possibility of a parliamentary visit is a matter on which the Oireachtas must decide. A high-level group from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has visited Iran. If the Deputy wishes to seek informal advice from my Department on this matter, the officials there will certainly offer it to him.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I am not overly fixated on the idea of the visit itself. However, our small country should do whatever it can to assist in respect of this matter. As already stated, other countries have sent delegations. The most important step we can take is to encourage everyone involved in the discussions at present. The most important thing is that people continue to talk. A solution to this problem, which is having a huge effect on the region, will hopefully emerge from those discussions.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Minister had a bilateral meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mr. Zarif, at the United Nations General Assembly on 26 September last. They discussed a range of matters including the nuclear issue, sanctions, Syria, human rights and bilateral relations. The good news for Ireland is that Iran has agreed to remove the long-standing restrictions on beef exports from Ireland. This opens the way to a resumption of trade in beef between the two countries.

Ministerial Meetings

89. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action he has taken in response to the demand by Germany's Social Democratic Party that Ireland raise its corporation tax rate; if he has raised this issue with his foreign affairs counterpart in Germany; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48973/13]

Deputy Brendan Smith: There has been considerable coverage of the decision by Germany's Social Democratic Party, SPD, to place Ireland's corporation tax rate and its opposition to an EU financial transaction tax on the agenda of discussions being held in Berlin on the formation of a new coalition government. Corporation tax is a national competence and cannot be decided at EU level. This competence was clearly reaffirmed in both the Lisbon treaty and the fiscal treaty. The Tánaiste should deliver a clear message to the SPD that its posturing on the future of Ireland's corporation tax regime is unacceptable and should stop. He should reiterate in very strong terms that there will be no change in this regard.

108. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the exact number of meetings he has had, either in person or by telephone, with Peer Steinbrueck, Martin Schulz and Olaf Scholz of the Social Democratic Party, SPD, of Germany in the past 12 months; if he is concerned that the positions they are adopting on behalf of the

SPD in German coalition negotiations are hurting Ireland's interests in allowing the European Stability Mechanism, ESM, to directly recapitalise banks in the future or retrospectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48971/13]

(Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 108 together.

Since assuming office, the Government has engaged extensively and continuously with governments and key political actors across the EU and beyond. This is very much the case with Germany and its political leadership on all sides. My Department and our embassy in Berlin, in particular, maintain ongoing and regular contacts, including with the SPD. In conjunction with official contacts I have had with the outgoing German Administration, I and colleagues maintain regular personal contact with the SPD, including through our parties' shared membership of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

3 o'clock

Group members regularly meet ahead of Council meetings in Brussels. As the House is aware, I also worked very closely with SPD member and President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz, MEP, during Ireland's Presidency earlier this year. In addition, I met Peer Steinbrück, a former German Finance Minister and the party's candidate for Chancellor in the recent German elections, in Dublin in February.

I spoke very recently with the SPD leader, Sigmar Gabriel, to discuss post-election political developments in Germany, update him on developments in the Irish economy and underline the importance of fully concluding the banking union, including with regard to the role of the ESM. I stressed that the success of Ireland's recovery efforts and our forthcoming exit from the EU-IMF programme were very important for both Ireland and the EU as a whole.

German coalition negotiations are ongoing and indications are that a new government may be formed in mid-December, at which point its exact policy programme will be known. The SPD party has included sustainable growth in the European Union and a focus on youth unemployment among its top policy priorities in these negotiations, something that is consistent with Ireland's priorities.

The Government's position on key policies such as our corporation tax rate has not changed and will not change, a position of which the entire political system in Germany is well aware. We will continue to emphasise the need to deliver on EU-wide commitments on stabilising its banking system and ensuring sustainable recovery, including in Ireland.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Tánaiste for his reply. He stated there would be no change to our corporate taxation rate, which has been the policy of successive Governments and a necessary part of our economic and industrial policies. Is he not concerned that two senior figures in the SPD - namely, the party's budget spokesperson and general secretary - have described our corporation tax rate as too low? While the Tánaiste referred to a number of issues he raised with senior members of the SPD, he did not indicate whether he specifically raised the issue of corporation tax or reiterated the strong message that the Irish corporation tax rate will not change and that taxation is a matter of national rather than European Union competence.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I have made it very clear in all of the discussions I have had with colleagues in the SPD that our rate of corporation tax stands and will not be changed by the Government, that our corporation tax rate has been a long-term part of our industrial strategy

and that corporation tax is a matter of national competence. I spoke with the leader of the SPD, on a party-to-party basis, about the discussions that are taking place on the formation of a new government in Germany and wished him well in those discussions. The ten-point priority list that has been presented by the SPD as part of the discussions does not include a specific reference to Ireland's rate of corporation tax.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I thank the Minister for his initial response. The concern in this regard is that a strategic and structured diplomatic offensive appears to be lacking in response to alarming statements that have emerged from Berlin in recent weeks and months. As the Tánaiste is aware, Chancellor Merkel and the Taoiseach made a clear statement some months ago in which the Chancellor reiterated her view that Ireland is a special case, enjoys special status and is distinct from the other programme countries. This is critical as we pursue our agenda of ensuring debt sustainability.

Mr. Joachim Poß, the SPD finance spokesman, made the following statement in the past two months: "The SPD's position is very clear: we do not support direct ESM aid for banks." If the SPD does not support direct ESM recapitalisation for banks, the chances of retrospective bank recapitalisation are even slimmer. Throughout the negotiations, the party has repeatedly and consistently, rather than in a few vague statements, raised the prospect of forcing the introduction of a financial transaction tax and a common consolidated corporate tax base, CCCTB, which would be an assault on our corporate tax regime. Ireland has been mentioned repeatedly. It is small solace that the Tánaiste met Mr. Peer Steinbrück in February last in Dublin. We need to see a much more comprehensive and strategic approach.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We will not re-fight the German election here in the Chamber.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: That is not the point.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The position is that the political parties in Germany, including the SPD, know our position on corporation tax, banking union and the ESM. I am satisfied from the discussions that I have had on a party-to-party basis with the leadership of the SPD that it is supportive of Ireland and that if the negotiations for the formation of a new government in Germany are successful, if anything, our position as a country in our relations with Germany will be enhanced. I say this because the new coalition arrangement, if it is a coalition of Chancellor Merkel's party and the SPD, will reflect the political composition of the Government here and will enable us to have political contact with both of the parties in government, and that would be very much to our advantage.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Creighton wants to ask another question. I must ask the Members who tabled the questions. Deputy Clare Daly wants to come in, as do Deputies Wallace and Mathews. I will call them in due course.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I suppose there is an additional element to this. I am not convinced by the Tánaiste's response that, simply because of the political composition of government reflecting the political composition in this country, it will somehow miraculously turn out to be a better arrangement for us given the commitments that were made clearly by the previous German Government and the contradictory statements which have been repeatedly made by the SPD.

Since I put down this parliamentary question, there has been a further development. Last week the Government deliberately put out the line that the SPD was demanding a hike in cor-

porate tax in exchange for a precautionary credit line and this has fed into the narrative over the past number of days as to why the Government did not seek a precautionary credit line. Mr. Derek Scally, in *The Irish Times* last week, put paid to that notion and made it clear that such is not the case. No approach was made to the future German Government on the question of a credit line and no negotiations were opened. It would be helpful if the Tánaiste could clarify to the House that there was no risk to our corporate tax rate on the basis of a credit line. In fact, Mr. Scally, in his article last week, quoted senior sources in government and senior sources in the socialist party in Germany stating that they were quite concerned that we had not sought a precautionary credit line.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Government made a decision last week to exit the bailout without seeking a precautionary credit line. We did so because we believe that the time was right to make that decision. A precautionary credit line would last probably for a year. The State is fully funded for well beyond a year. The issue of what would happen this time next year would arise. The response to the Government decision, by the institutions, by other member states, including Germany, and by the markets, confirms clearly that the correct decision was made.

In the middle of negotiations for the formation of a government, in Germany or anywhere else, of course, there will always be issues that will be speculated on. The SPD has set down its priorities in terms of those negotiations. They have ten priorities that all relate to domestic German issues. As it happens, they are largely issues with which the Irish Labour Party and the Irish Government would find significant degree of comfort.

Deputy Clare Daly: The Tánaiste will be aware that Ireland has one of the lowest corporation tax rates in Europe. In fact, our effective tax rate is even lower. Does he see a certain irony in the fact that he, as somebody who claims to be a socialist, would staunchly defend that low rate yet he does not show any shame in attacking elderly citizens, etc.? Should he be agreeing with his socialist colleagues in Europe that Ireland's corporation tax is far too low and companies could pay substantially more than they do?

Deputy Mick Wallace: I understand the Europeans told us we should cut medical cards for pensioners. It would be strange if they could not tell us how to handle our taxes. Does the Tánaiste agree that, with some healthy thinking in Europe, the Europeans are eventually going to realise low corporation tax rates represent a race to the bottom and are unsustainable in the long term?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Deputy Clare Daly is absolutely wrong on the issue of corporation tax. Our 12.5% rate is one of the measures we have in place to attract investment into the country and create jobs. I would have thought the creation of employment was one of the first priorities for any socialist, no matter where he or she might be on the political spectrum. In regard to the idea that if we increase corporation tax we will somehow raise more revenue, we might in theory, but how many jobs would we drive out of the country? How many more people would end up out of work and how many potential jobs would we keep from being created through lack of investment? Let us be clear: our rate of corporation tax has been established for quite some time. It is 12.5%, transparent and based on statute.

Deputy Peter Mathews: That is not the effective rate.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Deputy is wrong.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Go on, Deputy Mathews, give him some welly.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The effective rate of taxation is close to the headline rate. It is one of the features of the economy which is successful in attracting overseas companies to invest here to create employment and grow the economy. The Government will stand over the rate of corporation tax. We do not intend to change it and will not be subject to outside influence or persuasion from anywhere.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: Unless it needs emergency funding.

Deputy Peter Mathews: In the light of the discussion thus far, I ask the Tánaiste to re-member several issues and place them high on the agenda in negotiations with the European Union and Germany. Ireland's needs come first and should be articulated robustly. Creditors should be told the €28 billion in long-term bonds that replaced the pro-notes is misplaced and odious. Arrangements should be put in place to eliminate the bonds. Wolfgang Schäuble has stated everything in Ireland is fine. That seems to echo what was said last week when a stand-by line of credit was not considered necessary. Even the strongest companies in the world of free markets and capitalism organise stand-by lines of credit not just with one bank but with syndicated banks. We definitely need a stand-by line of credit. In March 2011 the prudential capital assessment review of the banks indicated further capitalisation. That was carried out in July 2011 and €16 billion of the National Pensions Reserve Fund disappeared. We have €20 billion in cash and do not know what is around the corner. The way we will create jobs in the economy is by strengthening underlying growth through a rebalancing of the combination of taxation and cuts in order to distribute income and restart the economy.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Why do some Members of the House keep clutching at every second-hand, dúirt bean liom, statement made by somebody somewhere to do us down?

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: It is because the information is not forthcoming.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: The Taoiseach was an expert at it in the past.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The fact of the matter is that the Government decided last week, rightly, to exit the programme without recourse to a precautionary line of credit.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The NTMA has been very silent on the issue.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is disappointing that some Members, instead of supporting and welcoming that decision as an opportunity for the country to recover, are grasping at every possible opportunity to do it down.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The Tánaiste sounds like Bertie Ahern.

Deputy Peter Mathews: What is wrong with having a safety net?

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We made a decision.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: As Members of Parliament, we are entitled to express our concerns.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It was the right decision. It will ensure the country will recover. On employment creation, we have established a good track record of creating 3,000 new jobs per month which we obviously need to increase. We want to see more people back at work and

a reduction in the rate of unemployment. We are going to do this. It is disappointing that some Members-----

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: The Government is taking a gamble in cutting us off from funding.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We are not cut off. Stop making it up.

Deputy Lucinda Creighton: I am not making it up.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Deputy is making it up.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: That is an outrageous statement about a former colleague who stood by the Tánaiste in difficult times.

Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 27A and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Peadar Tóibín - the need to legislate for the placing of all 400 kV cables underground; (2) Deputy Billy Timmins - to ask the Minister for Finance the reason the Government decided not to avail of a future precautionary credit line for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter; (3) Deputy Paul Phelan John - the need for full engagement by Eirgrid on all options under consideration with the communities which have concerns about the proposed Gridlink project routes; (4) Deputy Ciara Conway - the need to fill vacancies in the speech and language therapy services to the rehabilitation centre St. Patrick's Hospital and community care in Waterford city; (5) Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy - the need to provide grant aid for the installation of renewable energy products; (6) Deputy Paudie Coffey - the need for meaningful engagement by Eirgrid with communities on the proposed Gridlink routes; (7) Deputy Mary Lou McDonald - the decision by a majority of ESB union members to vote for strike action; (8) Deputies Robert Dowds, Jack Wall, Seán Crowe, Clare Daly and Emmet Stagg - the threat to jobs at Lufthansa Technik and Pratt and Whitney Aerospace; (9) Deputy Pat Deering - the need for meaningful engagement by Eirgrid with the communities which have real concerns about the proposed Gridlink routes; (10) Deputy Gerald Nash - the absence at local authority level of guidelines on the introduction of through-floor lifts in housing adaptations; (11) Deputy Martin Heydon - the need for meaningful engagement by Eirgrid with the communities which have real concerns about the proposed Gridlink routes; (12) Deputy Seamus Kirk - the withdrawal of EU funding for the Narrow Water bridge project; (13) Deputy Denis Naughten - the decision by a majority of ESB union members to vote for strike action; (14) Deputy Billy Kelleher - the current status of the 35 proposed primary care centres announced in July 2012; (15) Deputy Derek Keating - the uncovering of a fuel laundering plant in a commercial premises in rural Waterford; (16) Deputy Gerry Adams - the funding of the Narrow Water bridge project; (17) Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin - the celebrations planned to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Clontarf; (18) Deputy Seán Kenny - the disruption of Dublin DART services owing to a bridge strike; (19) Deputy Dessie Ellis - the planned demolition of unfinished estates; (20) Deputy Kevin Humphreys - the overspend of over €20 million on client services and public relations related to the Poolbeg incinerator; (21) Deputy Pat Breen - the need to include Ennis, County Clare in the list of primary care centres; (22) Deputy Mick Wallace - the ordering back to port of fishing vessels at Kilmore Quay, County Wexford; (23) Deputy Sean Fleming - the payment

of salary top-ups to senior staff in various areas of the health service; (24) Deputy Robert Troy - the reports by the national review panel for serious incidents and child deaths; and (25) Deputy Barry Cowen - the demolition of certain ghost estates.

The matters raised by the Deputies Sean Fleming; Pat Breen; Robert Dowds, Jack Wall, Seán Crowe, Clare Daly and Emmet Stagg; and Derek Keating have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions

Deputy Micheál Martin: Reports in *The Irish Times* today make the disturbing revelation that more than one quarter of the country's health and disability agencies are in breach of public pay policy. There are related stories in the *Irish Independent* and other media. Given that it is only a few months since the Haddington Road agreement, it beggars belief the allowances have been sustained and, more importantly, kept from public view and hidden under the carpet. It appears they have been exempt from the cuts applied to all other public servants and those who work in various Departments. The Taoiseach will recall that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform declared a *fatwa* on all allowances more than 18 months ago; for example, he pursued people in the mental health sector who were getting a sleepover allowance of only €8 per night. All of these allowances, from footwear allowances to a range of others in public services, were considered fair game. However, it appears these Premier League allowances were exempt from the review and are tolerated on an ongoing basis. Many of the people who receive services from these agencies have witnessed savage cuts to disability and other services. Thousands of children suffering from delays in development have to wait up to access vital specialist and assessment services. Day and residential services have been cut and there is reduced access to respite care services. In the case of people working in the sector, the newly qualified nurses salary was reduced by 20%. In many instances, the basic income of nurses does not equate to the average top-up allowance the executives are being awarded. Fairness is at the heart of this. We are saying to newly qualified nurses that they must survive on €23,000 and that it is okay for someone at the top to take €30,000 above and beyond two sets of income they may be in receipt of, one HSE-funded and one agency-funded. It reduces a sense of collective approach, solidarity or that everyone is suffering at the same level. What is consistently happening is that those at higher pay echelons are being exempted from the kinds of cuts that those on low and basic income in the public service and elsewhere have had to endure.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Disgusting.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Were the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health aware of the allowances in the health and disability agencies? Were the allowances brought to the attention of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, and what was done about them? What does the Government intend to do about them now?

The Taoiseach: These issues are emerging as a result of an audit carried out by the HSE of section 38 agencies, which are hospitals and disability agencies. I do not know when these were originally sanctioned or when they came into being. This Government is attempting to weed out additional sweeteners and expenditure in the health service at a time when any funding, Exchequer or private, should be going into the provision of services to patients and not to unsanctioned payments to senior managers. Front-line staff working in the health services are working within the Government's pay policy and playing their part, a critical part, in the reform

of health services through new working practices and rosters. The same rules must and will apply to senior managers as those on the front line. We need a clear picture of the position. On foot of a circular sent out in September by the Department of Health, clearly restating public pay policy, the HSE wrote to all agencies, of which there are 38. On 30 September, copies of the HSE audit, which I have here, were circulated to each of the agencies setting out Government pay policy. The agencies were requested to respond by 28 October, ensuring compliance. Some 33 agencies responded, some with a holding position and others requesting to seek legal advice. On 5 November, the HSE wrote to the agencies reiterating the requirement to respond and to ensure compliance with the deadline of today, 19 November. Before I came to the Chamber I checked on this and, of the 44 agencies involved, seven have confirmed compliance, 13 have confirmed non-compliance and others need more time to determine compliance, require more time to get legal advice or have not responded. The information sent out as part of the documentation circulated by the HSE states:

The Department of Health Consolidated Salary Scales (1 July 2013), as sanctioned by the Minister for Health, sets out current salaries for public health service staff. These salary scales must be strictly adhered to and in no circumstances should an employee receive remuneration in the nature of pay and allowances of any amount greater than the amount prescribed. Non-Exchequer sources of funding may not be used to supplement approved rates of remuneration.

It is very clear and straight.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Will heads roll?

The Taoiseach: What I and the Minister need is for the agencies involved to respond fully to the HSE double request that they comply with the public pay issues outlined here. Clearly, non-Exchequer funding to top up allowances is not allowed. Therefore, I expect the HSE to provide the Minister for Health with a full picture. The report will be published on the Department of Health website and will be discussed as a matter of some urgency in the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children. People in the health service, above anyone else, have taken serious structural changes, to their credit, in an attempt to reform the health system. We cannot have those at higher levels being in receipt of allowances outside the agreed public pay service scale. That picture will emerge fully and clearly in the report to coming from the HSE to the Minister for Health shortly.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach said the same rules must apply; they do not apply. There seems to have been a vow of silence on the issue in the lead-up to the Haddington Road agreement. I recall the major attack on allowances by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, which went on for six to nine months without any mention of these super allowances for people at the top. The concentration was on the footwear allowance, the clothing allowance and cuts to EMTs and extra allowances for emergency workers on the frontline. That was the entire focus. A letter written on 18 June from the national HR unit at the Department of Health to the national director of human resources at the HSE calls for the application of the reduction in remuneration to certain public servants on salaries of €65,000 and above. The table afterwards relates to the HSE element of the salary and is silent on anything outside of that. It seems that there was an awareness of these additional top-up allowances but people left well enough alone during the Haddington Road agreement negotiations and during the Minister's review of allowances.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is a cover-up. It is disgraceful.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There was knowledge that cuts being effected elsewhere were not being effected here and the situation was left to drift. The picture is well known and we do not have to wait for a fuller picture. Can the Taoiseach indicate the policy and what actions the Government will take with these agencies to make sure they fall in line with everyone else in the public service?

The Taoiseach: What is required is for the letter sent out by the HSE to each of the section 38 agencies to be adhered to and to be seen to be adhered to. We cannot have a situation where those further down the line, who have taken serious change in the restructuring of the health system, have borne the brunt of the situation while some people who have received non-Exchequer top-up payments amounting to, in some cases, more than the basic salaries of those further down.

Top-up payments of this nature first came to light in May 2012, when HIQA published a report into governance at Tallaght hospital and it emerged that an employee of Tallaght hospital was receiving an additional €150,000 in payments since 2005. In total, five senior management staff had received €739,000 in top-up payments between 2005 and 2010.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Did they pay it back?

The Taoiseach: In May of last year the Minister for Health requested that HIQA carry out an internal audit on all section 38 funding recipients to ensure similar unsanctioned payments were not being made in other locations. The HSE audit report concluded that there were 36 types of allowances being paid to 191 senior managers at an annual cost of €3.224 million. Some of the allowances were for clinical directors in compliance with salary scales as negotiated under the 2008 consultants agreements. In some cases, private funding was used to top up approved rates of pay, and 13 agencies pay additional remuneration or benefits such as company cars, car expenses or pension contributions to a total of 34 managers, with a value of €912,472. The Minister for Health, Deputy Reilly, and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, issued correspondence which is very clear in indicating that salary scales must be strictly adhered to and in no circumstance should an employee receive remuneration in the nature of pay and allowances of any amount greater than the amount prescribed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: But they are.

Deputy Finian McGrath: They are on the Taoiseach's watch. The Minister for Health is asleep at the wheel again.

The Taoiseach: This is emerging because of the internal audit being carried out. I will not mention the name of any individual but we need the full picture of all the section 38 agencies.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: We need honesty.

The Taoiseach: Today is the last date for receipt of the information from the 44 agencies that were written to, and all the responses have not yet been received.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are way over time.

The Taoiseach: Let me confirm to the House that when the report is submitted by the HSE to the Minister for Health, it will be published on the Department website and it can be dis-

cussed by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children and the Dáil. The position is very clear and public pay service agreements should not and cannot be breached by unapproved non-Exchequer payments such as those detailed in some of the emerging information.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is happening under the Taoiseach's nose.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath should try to keep quiet.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá sé soiléir d'achan duine nach bhfuil sé ceart ná cóir go bhfuil daoine áirithe i gcúpla áit áirithe atá ag fáil pá atá i bhfad ró-ard. Tá sin ag briseadh rialacha an Rialtais. Dúirt an Taoiseach nach raibh a fhios aige faoi seo. The master of the of the Rotunda is receiving a package of more than €300,000. We have the master of the National Maternity Hospital receiving a package of more than €281,000 and the chief executive of the Central Remedial Clinic received more than €242,000. This is when thousands of children with developmental delays and behavioural issues are waiting over a year to see specialists. It is when this Government has so far failed to provide funding for bilateral cochlear implants for profoundly deaf child and babies with tracheostomies in Our Lady's Children's Hospital at Crumlin will spend a second Christmas in hospital - although they have been declared well enough to go home - because the HSE has not sanctioned safe levels of home care. In the mean time exorbitant top-ups are being given, for example, to the chief executive of the children's hospital at Crumlin.

It is not right, as people know if there are savage cutbacks to disability services or hard-pressed families are forced to fund-raise to help provide services for children. Surely the monies gathered on the campuses or hospitals should be used for services rather than topping up the salary of very well-paid executives. My question is straightforward. How long have the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health been aware of this issue and, equally important, what does the Minister intend to do about it?

The Taoiseach: It is a fair question. This came to light last May in respect of the governance of Tallaght hospital. Following the information I have given to Deputy Martin, the Minister for Health ordered an internal audit in respect of all the section 38 hospitals and agencies involved. As I have already indicated, today is the closing day for the receipt of return information following the internal audit, with a very clear letter having been sent to each of the chief executives.

Deputy Adams is aware that there is clearly a difference between HSE-run hospitals and voluntary hospitals. The HSE knows what it is paying chief executives in respect of all the HSE hospitals, and these payments are strictly in compliance with the public pay service agreements. In regard to voluntary hospitals under the section 38 arrangement, the HSE has a contract with each of these agencies. It is only appropriate that the Minister and the HSE should have at their disposal the truth in the information as requested twice by the HSE to each of the agencies involved. I hope the report can be published quickly, furnished to the Minister, put up on the public website and discussed in the Oireachtas.

The position is very clear. The Minister and the HSE have made it clear to the agencies that they are not entitled to have unapproved non-Exchequer funding used as a top-up arrangement which breaches the public pay service agreement. The letter quite clearly states:

Section 38 providers should provide written confirmation to the HSE that:-

1. Remuneration payable is in accordance with the Department of Health consolidated salary scales.
2. Non-Exchequer sources of funding are not used to exceed approved rates of remuneration.
3. The payment of all unsanctioned payments has ceased.
4. The recoupment of any overpayments will be pursued as expeditiously as possible.

That is the position.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Is it not part of the problem that the Cabinet is in breach of Government guidelines in the pay being awarded to some special advisers? Is that not a difficulty for the Government? Some of the reports in the media suggest the Department of Health has been aware since at least 1998, although I do not know the truth of that. The reports indicate that from 1998 some of these organisations have paid chief officers over and above HSE pay scales through other resources. In the children's hospital at Crumlin, a €30,000 top-up came from the proceeds of the shop. Is this where fees for car parks are going? Are they going to elite personalities? More top HSE executives are on salaries of over €100,000 this year than there were last year. The problem is there is still a culture of privilege, which permeates into this institution and the Government which the Taoiseach is charged with leading.

Does the Taoiseach agree there needs to be leadership by example and this culture of privilege is fuelled by the actions of the Ministers in breaching pay guidelines at a time of major hardship for the vast majority of citizens? I hope the refusal to provide bilateral cochlear implants or help children with disabilities will be rectified if we are still providing large top-ups. This is a call that the Taoiseach should act on in dealing with and getting rid of this culture of privilege.

The Taoiseach: The call has been made and we are acting upon it. The Minister and the HSE are awaiting receipt of the information requested. I repeat that on 30 September a circular letter was sent from the national director of human resources in the HSE and it could not have been any clearer. It required that the agencies involved respond in writing by today to the HSE and that:

1. Remuneration payable is in accordance with the Department of Health consolidated salary scales.
2. Non-Exchequer sources of funding are not used to exceed approved rates of remuneration [to give rise to rates of individual remuneration that exceed Department of Health consolidated pay scales].
3. The payment of all unsanctioned payments has ceased.

In addition, where appropriate, such as under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act, this should be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. The information arose from the analysis of last May, followed by the instruction by the Minister for Health to carry out an internal audit. That audit has been sent to all the agencies involved, with two clear, strong and straight letters, and a reply is to be received by today so the Minister and the HSE can have a clear picture of what is involved. As I mentioned to Deputy Martin, people in the Department of Health and across the public service have seen serious change and their lifestyles impacted

upon.

At certain levels, unapproved payments have been made from other sources to top up people's salaries. I hope that is clear. When the report comes to the Minister from the HSE it will be published and debated. The HSE has contracts with the section 38 agencies and can follow through in respect of the recoupment of any such unauthorised allowances as part of the contract.

Deputy Finian McGrath: There will be more cuts.

Deputy Joan Collins: I wish to continue with the same theme, as it is important and the Taoiseach has not really given an answer. Last week it was reported that seven children at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, who are ready to go home and whose parents have been trained to bring them home cannot do so because the HSE cannot provide home care packages for them. The mother of one child has to come from Kilkenny every Monday, go home on Thursday and come back at the weekend with her family to be with her child at the hospital. It is an outrage that such a thing can happen in this day and age.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Hear, hear.

Deputy Joan Collins: We have found out that the CEO of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, is getting a €30,000 top-up payment in addition to his HSE payment of €110,000. The secret top-up is taken out of receipts from the shops in the hospital. I am sure the people working in the shops only get the average minimum wage.

In a statement the hospital board complained that the information had been given in confidence to the HSE. It seems that board members were upset that a secret payment had been made known to the public at a time when there are cuts in services for children and when staff are expected to take more cuts on foot of the Haddington Road agreement. The arrangements were seemingly made between the boards and the CEOs. There are political appointees on every single hospital board in this country. There are a Labour Party councillor and a Fine Gael Party councillor on the board of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin.

Deputy John Halligan: Did they know?

Deputy Joan Collins: One could ask whether they were complicit or whether they knew about it. Did they vote on it and just not tell anyone about it, or were they not there?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Of course they did.

Deputy John Halligan: It is outrageous. It is disgraceful.

Deputy Joan Collins: These are serious questions that must be answered about the payments that have been made.

We now also have senior HSE sources saying the level of cuts required next year will be approximately €1.2 billion, which is double the figure presented by the Government in the budget only a month ago. Three members of the Cabinet are responsible for the health service and various aspects of it, but it seems no one is responsible.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could Deputy Collins ask a question, please?

Deputy Joan Collins: The situation is a shambles. The people in charge should be sacked.

Is it not time for the Taoiseach to make changes?

The Taoiseach: I read the report last week about a number of children in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin with tracheostomies. I understand parents have been trained to deal with the very difficult issues that arise for them personally due to their young children requiring such serious operations. They need to be able to deal with suction of the children's air passages. Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, has done extraordinary work with babies and young children for many years. When parents are trained to deal with the problems that arise frequently in babies and young children, it is important for hospital staff to be fully satisfied that all the facilities in respect of home care packages - not least of which is the training given to parents, which I am sure is exceptional - are entirely focused on the protection, comfort and development of the baby or child. I have asked the Department of Health for a report on the issue. I would be happy to talk to Deputy Collins about it again.

In respect of the chief executive she mentioned, no more than anyone else, I have read the reports. I already answered questions from Deputy Martin and Deputy Adams on the matter. We need a complete picture of all of the section 38 agencies, of which there are 44. Today was the last day for receipt of the information. It is clearly stated in the circular letter and the internal audit information sent to all the agencies that non-Exchequer funding such as the receipts mentioned by Deputy Collins should not be used for top-up payments that are in breach of the public service pay contract.

There is a contract between the HSE and the voluntary hospitals. As we move towards hospital groupings, which will evolve into trusts, it will be possible to deal with all such situations in the future. We have a problem currently. I do not have the information because it will not be available until the close of business today. I hope that will be the case. When the report is furnished to the Minister for Health, he will publish it and it can be debated and dealt with in the context of the contract that exists between the HSE and the voluntary hospitals and agencies.

Deputy Joan Collins: The Taoiseach's reply is, again, not good enough. It seems that those people who were used to living Celtic tiger lifestyles have kept them. In the meantime, people on the front line and at the coalface have had to take massive cuts in their wages and conditions. There are political appointees on all of the hospital boards. Were the appointees aware that the top-up payments were being made to CEOs and other hospital staff? Was the issue discussed by the boards? When Deputy Eric Byrne was a councillor, he was a member of the board of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, for many years. He was replaced by Councillor Michael O'Sullivan. Did those people report to their party leaders that such practices were going on? If they knew what was going on, why did they not report it? If they did not know, why did they not know about it?

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not in order to question the integrity of any member of a board.

Deputy Joan Collins: I am asking the Taoiseach a direct question.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Collins knows that as well as I do. She does not need me to tell her. That is totally out of order.

Deputy Joan Collins: It is a really important question. The Taoiseach said he had only become aware of such a practice now, but given that there are political appointees on the boards, he should have known about it before if the matter was discussed. It is not good enough to come to the Dáil today to say otherwise. The Taoiseach should admit in the Dáil that it is an

outrage, that it will not happen again and that it should never have happened. He should also explain how we will get the money back from those people.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Halligan: That is what we want - the money back.

The Taoiseach: I am not aware of when this kind of arrangement was first approved and how far back it goes. I do not agree with the practice. The instruction from both the Minister for Health and the HSE to the section 38 hospitals and agencies is very clear and is not in contention. It was said that they must comply with the direction that non-Exchequer payments could not be made to chief executives, putting them in breach of agreed public pay policy.

Public pay policy is decided by the Government in negotiations. Such payments are paid for by the taxpayer. The buildings - in this case, hospitals - where such people work are also paid for by the taxpayer. We cannot and will not have a situation in which chief executives breach the public service pay agreements through unauthorised non-Exchequer payments.

Deputy Joan Collins: The top-ups were agreed by the board.

The Taoiseach: In the HSE-run hospitals it is very clear what people are paid, but because the voluntary hospitals are run by boards - yes, with political appointments - they operate in a quasi-independent way. Unauthorised top-up payments are now subject to a contract that can be assessed against public pay levels. That instruction has gone out following the internal audit of the HSE.

I hope we understand a few basic principles in everyone's interests. Those further down the line in the health service, who have accepted serious structural change involving roster reform and pay reductions, will not be treated any differently from chief executives-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: But they are.

The Taoiseach: -----with regard to the information that is now coming to light because of the internal audit carried out on the instructions of the Minister for Health. We must sort out the issue and that is what we will do.

An Ceann Comhairle: That completes Leaders' Questions. The next item of business is questions to the Taoiseach. I note that in the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery we have representatives of the Power family, who are present for the expressions of sympathy on the death of the late Paddy Power, a distinguished Member of this House. Unfortunately, I do not know whether it is as a result of a breakdown in communications that the expressions of sympathy are listed after Taoiseach's questions. My only difficulty is that some of the Deputies for the Kildare constituency are not present and may be under the impression that expressions of sympathy are not taking place. My comments are just to let the Deputies know the position. I am sorry if there is any delay.

19 November 2013

Ceisteanna - Questions (Resumed)

Cabinet Committee Meetings

1. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on EU affairs met last. [39244/13]

2. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on EU affairs last met. [42215/13]

3. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach the number of times the Cabinet committee on EU affairs has met since the summer recess. [45920/13]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, together.

The Cabinet committee on EU affairs met last month on Wednesday, 23 October in advance of the October European Council meeting in Brussels.

During Ireland's successful Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of this year, the Tánaiste and I met Ministers daily to discuss a range of EU policy areas. The full calendar of Presidency events and meetings, and the need for rapid responses to EU policy questions daily, meant it was not always possible to maintain the regular structure of meetings of the Cabinet committee.

Now that we are in the post-Presidency period, with a focus on capitalising on the goodwill and expertise that was generated in the first six months of this year, a more regular schedule of meetings was resumed. In total, the Cabinet committee has met four times in 2013. I chaired meetings on 5 May, 13 May, 14 June and 23 October.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The role of the Cabinet committee on EU affairs is to oversee our preparations for Council meetings and ongoing negotiations with European Union partners. Given what the Taoiseach said last week about the decision on conditional funding emerging from what were called intensive discussions with EU institutions and governments, we must presume the Cabinet committee was involved.

The Taoiseach will recall that on 6 September, in advance of a meeting of EU finance Ministers, the Irish Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, told the *Irish Independent* that he would be seeking a conditional credit line of €10 billion. The chairperson of the Eurogroup welcomed this and the Taoiseach confirmed it. He went as far as to say how appropriate the figure of €10 billion was and how it represented the responsible thing to do.

Since 6 September, the eurozone economy has weakened significantly. Can the Taoiseach explain why he and his colleagues reversed the position adopted in September? What changed on the agenda of the Cabinet committee that saw it completely reverse its position in the past two months?

We were promised last week the background information used by the Government to justify its decision not to seek any conditional credit line. Where is it? Why has it not been published yet? Will that material be published? Could the Taoiseach indicate the role of the Cabinet committee in the decision, given that it met four times - twice in May and also in June and October?

An Ceann Comhairle: This is a fairly simple question, asking when the Cabinet committee on EU affairs last met. We are straying into territory that is not included in the question. However, it is up to the Taoiseach to respond.

The Taoiseach: I answered the question on when the committee met. I chaired the meetings myself. I must say, for Deputy Martin's general information, that from January to the end of June, the number of meetings involving the diplomatic services, Ministers, Ministers of State and civil servants at many different levels ran to a couple of thousand. From my point of view, Ministers were really active, both here and in Brussels, at various meetings. It was just not feasible to have regular, set meetings of the Cabinet committee on EU affairs. I spoke to the Tánaiste daily. Ministers were involved in various elements of their negotiations. We were in very regular contact in that regard.

With regard to the decision to exit the programme on 15 December, there were three options: a precautionary credit line; a precautionary credit line involving the EU and IMF or the IMF; and no credit line at all. The Minister referred to the fact that Ireland would have to borrow approximately €10 billion next year, and that this would be considered. However, the answer to the Deputy's question is that no formal request was made for any precautionary credit line from a European point of view.

The background information relevant to exiting a programme is already on the websites of the ESM and the IMF. We did not make a formal request for an exit with a precautionary credit line. One does not have volumes of information about any of that. The background to the exit, in its various dimensions, is already published on those websites. We requested that the Minister for Finance go to Brussels, Frankfurt and Washington. The Tánaiste spoke to his counterparts and I spoke to mine. Putting all the information together, the Government made a very clear, straightforward and decisive decision to ensure certainty rather than a drift into uncertainty and consequent confusion. Stability is very important to government. Certainty is very important in our decision for Ireland and its people. The Deputy should bear in mind the background to these developments, including interest rates, buffers for the NTMA and the eurozone buffer of €500 billion. All of these things led to the Government's clear decision about what will happen when the programme ends on 15 December. The barrier will be removed and we will stand again as a full member of the eurozone, with the opportunities, constraints and securities that it offers. The decision is clear and straightforward and, I hope, very decisive, so there will be no confusion for anybody.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin-----

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not getting involved in that. It is a simple question.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Howlin, did promise last week that he would publish all documentation that informed the Government's decision not to apply for a credit line. He said he would publish that documentation and that he would have no difficulty in doing so. Will the Taoiseach confirm that it will be published?

An Ceann Comhairle: A question to the line Minister would be better.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is a very basic question.

19 November 2013

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a very basic question but it is not the question on the Order Paper.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We are very restricted in what we can ask.

An Ceann Comhairle: I know and appreciate that, but it is up to the Deputy to change the rules. I call Deputy Higgins.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We cannot, because the Taoiseach-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy, having been in Cabinet himself for a long time, will know that the matters discussed at Cabinet committees are not to be discussed here.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I am not talking about that.

Deputy Joe Higgins: On what date did the Taoiseach say the Cabinet committee on EU affairs last met? There was a lot of noise at the time he was responding.

The Taoiseach: The dates were 5 May, 13 May, 14 June and 23 October.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Does that not mean that the Cabinet committee on EU affairs was in no way involved in the Taoiseach's decision not to seek a precautionary credit line on Ireland's exit from the troika-led bailout? What does that say about how the Cabinet, or the Taoiseach, deals with crucial issues affecting our economy and our people in regard to the number of Departments, or Ministers responsible for Departments, that the Taoiseach involves or does not involve in the making of crucial decisions? Is it not the case that the Taoiseach's decision not to seek the precautionary credit line was to make big men, mar dhea, of the members of the Cabinet on leaving the troika behind? Is it not the case that this was a political decision to allow the Taoiseach and EU establishment to posture based on the fiction that three years of bitter austerity was somehow good for the Irish when it was, in fact, a disaster?

Is it not the case that the Cabinet committees the Taoiseach set up, supposedly to provide more effective government for the Irish, are really a charade?

4 o'clock

What we have is the dictatorship of the Government politburo, known as the Economic Management Council, EMC, which makes all decisions. Members of the European affairs sub-committee include the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Education and Skills. These Ministers are in charge of Departments for which decisions the Taoiseach makes on this issue have enormous implications, particularly regarding jobs. What is the purpose of Cabinet sub-committees if the new politburo makes all of the decisions?

The Taoiseach: The troika programme in which we were involved for the past few years was a programme of the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission. The Ministers mandated to deal with the troika were the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. We were included in this programme a number of years ago and were determined to exit it. That exit would depend on a recommendation brought to the Cabinet by the Minister for Finance, in particular, following his analysis of the information, advice and comhairle from a lot of sources. The independent, respected Governor of the Central Bank was very clear on this issue. While the director of the NTMA might have had a preference in the beginning for a precautionary programme, he was very happy, following analysis of the bond markets, that

this was the right thing to do. The NTMA has already confirmed that it intends to set out its schedule to the markets for returning to normality from next January. It is very clear from the comments made by representatives of the NTMA that the buffer built up by the agency while we were technically still in the bailout programme gives us sufficient resources to fund the country until the end of quarter one or quarter two of 2015.

Of course, the Ministers to whom the Deputy referred are impacted on by this decision, as is everybody else. I have to say as a citizen and a politician, as distinct from the position I hold in this House, that the reaction across the country has generally been very favourable. I do not accept Deputy Joe Higgins's assertion that members of the Cabinet want to go around the country like "big men", as he put it. Nothing of the kind is the case. We have a long way to go. The Deputy has never heard me refer to the much abused terms that were bandied about by too many people for a number of years, nor will he ever hear me use these terms. We have a challenge. We must get the deficit below 3% by 2015. The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is in India negotiating further investment in this country, with the potential to create new jobs. The line of investment into the country is very strong; exports are at unprecedented levels and interest rates have fallen to 3.6% or 3.7%. These are strong indicators, but they do not negate the challenge we face. The scale of debt in the country is enormous. The national debt is still exceptionally high. Because of our sovereign rating and the scale of our debt, we have spoken to German colleagues about officials from the Department of Finance working with German officials in respect of the triple A-rated KfW bank. I hope we can put in place a structure to provide access to credit at much lower rates for small and medium enterprises which would have a direct impact on job creation. Officials will be in Berlin for the next few days to discuss this very matter. It was for all of these reasons that the decision was made.

The Deputy has asked me what the sub-committee on European affairs does. Clearly, for the first half of the year the committee and its members - various Ministers - were focused on their own responsibilities in Dublin Castle, negotiating with Commissioners and their colleague Ministers and Ministers of State. I had to travel to Brussels on a number of occasions with the Tánaiste to discuss difficulties that had arisen in the drafting of the European budget. The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Simon Coveney, was involved in very intensive discussions about CAP reform. We were able to hold on to 97.5% of the funding, despite predictions that it would drop by 20% or 30%. The Minister was also involved in the reform of the CFP. These activities were assisted in various ways by the sub-committee on European affairs. However, it was not a function of the sub-committee to make the recommendation to the Cabinet about the circumstances in which we would exit the programme, which will close on 15 December. That was a matter for recommendation by the Minister for Finance who was assisted by every other Minister, as well as by the Tánaiste and me in terms of advice and the contacts and consultations that we had had with other leaders. As I said to Deputy Micheál Martin, we made a clear decision which we announced with certainty. It is a statement of confidence about Ireland. While we recognise that we still have many challenges ahead, we are not constrained by confusion about what might or might not apply in other circumstances.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is very clear from the Taoiseach's answers that the sub-committee on European affairs was not directly involved in the decision not to seek a conditional credit line. I repeat what I said earlier, that the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, did say to the *Irish Independent* in September that he was seeking a €10 billion credit line. This was not general talk about what the Government had to spend or would need to secure. It was said very clearly that the Minister was seeking a €10 billion credit line, which the Taoiseach

publicly supported at the time. The Taoiseach and the Minister have changed their positions since, as they are entitled to do. In changing that position the Taoiseach, the Minister and others weighed up the pros and cons of the decision, with the key issue being the impact of any credit line on the cost of borrowing in the next few years. The simple question was whether the impact would be positive or negative and how it would affect our debt levels.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, said last week that he would publish all of the documentation that had informed that decision, that is, the decision taken by the Government. I am not talking about general memoranda or documentation pertaining to what Europe or the EMS has. I am talking about the analysis the Government undertook to inform its decision not to seek a credit line. The Minister said on Sean O'Rourke's radio programme that he would publish that documentation. He said he would have absolutely no difficulty in publishing it. I ask the Taoiseach to confirm that the Government will publish it.

The Taoiseach: Obviously, if the Minister made the comment, here or elsewhere, I am quite sure he will follow through on it.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I beg your pardon.

The Taoiseach: I am quite sure he will follow through on it. If he said he had information that he wanted to publish-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: It was not his decision. It was the Government's decision.

The Taoiseach: The Minister, Deputy Brendan Howlin, made the comment to which the Deputy is referring. I have said-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: He is on the EMC.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, Deputy, but this is not Leaders' Questions.

The Taoiseach: If Deputy Brendan Howlin made a comment as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that he would publish information on this issue, I am quite sure he will do so. Information on the nature of an exit from a programme like ours has already been published on the EMS website, as well as on the IMF website. This country did not make a formal request for a credit line.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I did not suggest that we had.

The Taoiseach: Nor did the Minister for Finance bring a recommendation to the Government that we seek a €10 billion credit line. It was not a case of the Minister changing his mind at all. The time had come to make a decision, based on an exit date of 15 December. The Government stated it would make its decision before that date. Make your mind up time had arrived. The Government was very clear. We said that, on the basis of all the evidence, including independent reports and independent commentary that was favourable, as well as on the basis of all that had been achieved through the decisions taken by the Government and with the people, it was the right time to make the decision and that this was the right decision for the country, rather than leave confusion. As the Minister pointed out, if precautionary lines were used, they last for 12 months with the possibility of an extension and a second extension plus the European response to bank stress tests being carried out in the autumn of next year. One does not know the answers to all these things yet.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is anything clear?

The Taoiseach: We know where we stand now. We were clear and decisive. It was “make your mind up” time. The Government did so clearly, decisively and with certainty about where we are headed.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Is it not the reality that the Taoiseach’s choice was between the sharks in the financial markets who will gouge the Irish people for all they can get over the next few years on the one hand and, on the other, falling back on the piranhas that are the EU establishment and the ECB who represent the financial markets as well, as they have demonstrated in forcing Irish people to carry massive private debt that had nothing to do with them? Will he recognise that either going back to the cesspool of the markets or relying on the neoliberals of the EU and ECB is not the way forward for the economy and the people and it is a question of repudiating this massive debt that is destroying the economy and provoking the horrific austerity the Government is imposing, which will continue for years to come to destroy the livelihoods of our people and the future of young people? The Taoiseach should recognise those realities at least.

Deputy Gerry Adams: As I understand it, the role of the Cabinet committee on European affairs is to provide the Taoiseach and the Government with strategic direction, coherence and co-ordination on European affairs. That is obviously an important function. In preparation for today, I went on the website of the Department of the Taoiseach and the members of the committee are listed. Lo and behold, it includes Minister of State, Deputy Lucinda Creighton. I thought I would inform the Government that she has left the Government and a new Minister of State is in place, Deputy Paschal Donohoe. Clearly, a committee charged with such an onerous responsibility to co-ordinate and give strategic direction should at least have that right.

The Taoiseach will also recall that prior to the last EU Council meeting I raised with him the issue of surveillance of member states by the US National Security Agency. He never answered me. He ignored my question and then it became a huge topic at the meeting on the back of the revelations by Edward Snowden. Has the issue of surveillance, which clearly goes beyond security concerns as it deals with business and financial matters, been discussed by the Cabinet committee? Has the Taoiseach established whether the surveillance and bugging that have been going on include him, Ministers or agencies of the State?

An Ceann Comhairle: I remind the House once again that it is not in order to ask what is discussed by Cabinet sub-committees nor is it in order to give information as to what is discussed.

The Taoiseach: The information I have refers only to the Cabinet sub-committee that was the subject of the questions. As a matter of general observation, I said to Deputies Martin and Adams previously that perhaps a change in the way Taoiseach’s Questions are structured might give each of them a priority question or two relating to specific matters they might wish to raise and I am willing to do that. These kind of questions leads to generalities all over the place.

They are important obviously but the question of the exit from the bailout is the subject of a response to a recommendation from the Minister for Finance because this was an issue between the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform and the troika.

Deputy Higgins asked a question about the markets. He will be aware that this is the place where we have to raise money and he will also be aware that we have been blocked out of them

for a considerable time. That is why the troika came in here. Interest rates were 14.5% and Ireland was blocked out completely. Some people might want us to continue in a bailout situation and others might want us to continue in a semi-bailout position. Taking all the factors into account, the Government made its decision for Ireland and it was clear, strong and decisive. It has been commented on favourably by other countries, institutions, ratings agencies, the Central Bank and the NTMA.

The decision in respect of the ESM from 29 June last year still stands and those discussions and negotiations are still for the future. That decision has been referred to repeatedly since last year and holds out the possibility of a variety of ways of recapitalisation in respect of banks.

The surveillance issue was raised at the European Council meeting, in particular by Germany and France. It was referred to by a number of other countries and Spain, for instance, had a particular view. Clearly the US has responded to this. I am not aware of the detail that has followed in respect of Germany and France in so far as the US is concerned. The Tánaiste referred to the situation in so far as Ireland was concerned and the information that apparently was out there in the public domain was that there was no listening post in Dublin. Are we being watched? Is that somebody listening? The fact of the matter is these days if one makes a call on one's iPhone or whatever and it is associated with electronics or satellites, somebody will always be able to track it. That appears to be a fact of life these days. I am not aware of surveillance being placed on Ireland or on members of the Opposition or the Government.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Taoiseach can take it that it is.

The Taoiseach: I do not know but I have had a view for a long time that if one wants to say something to somebody, one should say to his or her face. Perhaps it should not be shouted out loud.

The Tánaiste has raised this issue with the US authorities. I understand there never was a listening post in Ireland and I hope that, as Chancellor Merkel pointed out, while this has been a serious blockage to discussions and negotiations, we want to move on to the future. I hope that can be ironed out.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet Committee on Irish and the Gaelteacht last met. [39245/13]

5. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach the number of times the Cabinet Committee on Irish and the Gaeltacht has met since the beginning of the year. [40731/13]

6. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Taoiseach the number of times the Cabinet Committee on Irish and Gaelteacht has met since the summer recess. [45921/13]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 4 to 6, inclusive, together.

Bhí dhá chruinniú ag an gCoiste Comh-Aireachta ar an nGaeilge agus ar an nGaeltacht go dtí seo i mbliana, an ceann is deireanaí ar 22 Iúil seo caite.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is léir nach raibh ach dhá chruinniú ag an gcoiste ar an nGaeilge

agus na Gaeltachtaí le linn na bliana. Is oth liom a rá go bhfuil sé le feiceáil i bpolasaithe an Rialtais i leith na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachtaí nach bhfuil an choiste ag teacht le chéile go minic. Tá díomá ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta go bhfuil easpa béime á leagan ag an Rialtas ar pholasaithe i dtaobh na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachtaí. Is dócha go léiríonn an t-eolas a thug an Taoiseach dúinn inniu go bhfuil an ceart ag muintir na Gaeltachta agus muintir na Gaeilge go ginearálta nuair a bhíonn siad ag gearán faoi pholasaithe an Rialtais. Is léir freisin nach bhfuil mórán ag tarlú i dtaobh na straitéise 20 bliain, a chuir na hiar-Airí, Pat Carey agus an Teachta Ó Cuív, le chéile. Bhí gach éinne sásta leis an straitéis sin, ach níl mórán dul chun cinn le feiscint agus níos mó ná dhá bhliain imithe ón toghchán deireanach. Iarraim ar an gcoiste seo teacht le chéile i bhfad níos minicí sna míonna atá le teacht agus sa bhliain atá romhainn. Ba cheart níos mó béime a chur ar an nGaeilge sa chóras oideachais. Is léir sa tuarascáil nua a fuairamar maidir le múineadh na Gaeilge sna scoileanna go bhfuil i bhfad níos mó le déanamh sa chomhthéacs sin. Tá an-chuid le déanamh ag an gcoiste faoin cheist sin. Bhí díomá ar beagnach gach éinne, ach amháin an Rialtas, gur cuireadh an toghchán le haghaidh bord Údarás na Gaeltachta ar ceal. Beidh an tionchar agus an chumhacht go léir maidir le baill Údarás na Gaeltachta ag an Rialtas as seo amach. Is olc an scéal é sin. Is oth liom a rá go léiríonn an t-eolas atá faighte againn - gur tháinig an choiste le chéile faoi dhó i rith na bliana - an meas atá ag an Rialtas ar an nGaeilge agus ar na Gaeltachtaí.

The Taoiseach: Níor bhuail an choiste le chéile ach dhá uair i mbliana, ach ní hé sin le rá nach raibh obair ar siúl ag an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta agus go mórmhór ag an Aire Stáit, an Teachta Mac Fhionnlaoich. Tá an tAire Stáit tar éis cuairt a thabhairt ar chuile Gaeltacht - Dún na nGall, Maigh Eo, Gaillimh, Ciarraí, Corcaigh, Port Láirge, Ráth Chairn i gContae na Mí agus sa Tuaisceart - ar a laghad cúpla uair. Bhí sé sa Tuaisceart freisin. Bhí sé i gceist aige an réamhbair a chur ar bun ó thaobh straitéis na Gaeilge a chur i gcrích. Bhí an-chuid díospóireachtaí aige le comhlachtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta i leith na straitéise. Nuair a tháinig sé chugam roimh an mbuiséad, bhí sé ag iarraidh suas le €500,000 i dtreo is go mbeadh plean réitithe agus aontaithe i leith tosú na straitéise. Tugadh €500,000 dó sa bhuiséad. Tá sé i dteagmháil le chuile Gaeltacht ag an bpointe seo chun an obair sin a chur i gcrích. Aontaím leis an Teachta ó thaobh an méid cruinnithe a bhí ann. Ní léiríonn sé sin go bhfuil easpa suime ann ó thaobh an straitéis sin a chur i gcrích. Bhí mé i gcuid de na Gaeltachtaí agus chas mé leis na comhlachtaí ansin. Tá siad sásta leis an obair atá déanta ó thaobh an straitéis a chur ar bun agus a chur i gcrích. I gcomhthéacs an plean a thug an tAire Stáit dom roimh an mbuiséad, tá €500,000 curtha ar fáil don bhliain 2014 chun tosú láidir a dhéanamh agus é sin á chur i gcrích. Tá súil agam go dtarlóidh sé sin as seo amach.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Níl mé sásta leis an bhfreagra sin. Ní bhuailéann an coiste Comh-Aireachta go rialta mar nach bhfuil an Rialtas seo dáiríre faoin Ghaeilge. Is í sin an fhírinne. Go háirithe, níl an straitéis 20 bliain á chur i bhfeidhm ar scor ar bith. Chuir an Rialtas stad le toghchán Údarás na Gaeltachta. Bhí sé i gceist sa straitéis go mbeadh daltaí ag freastal ar ranganna taobh amuigh den rang Gaeilge, ach níl ar rud ar bith déanta faoi sin. Bhí sé mar rún sa straitéis Irish language resource centre a bhunú i mBaile Bhúirne, ach níl sé sin déanta. Tá an Coimisinéir Teanga ag tabhairt amach faoin tslí nach bhfuil an Rialtas ag leanadh ar aghaidh leis an Official Languages Act. Nuair a dhéanann daoine iarracht seirbhísí a fháil trí Ghaeilge, caithfidh siad go leor fadhbanna a láimhseáil. Tá Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta faoi bhagairt. Tá Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta gan aon airgead. Beidh sé imithe um Nollaig. Sílim go bhfuil an tAire Stáit, an Teachta McGinley, ag glacadh airgid as Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta. Tá sé an-deacair eolas a fháil ón Roinn faoi sin. Tá mé ag lorg eolais faoi seo ón Roinn Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta sa Tuaisceart fosta. Níl an Aire ó Thuaidh sásta ós rud

é nach bhfuil sí ar an eolas faoin rún sin. Má ghlacann an tAire Stáit funding ó Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta - b'fhéidir nach ndéanfaidh sé é sin - caithfidh sé dul tríd an North-South Ministerial Council. Tá rudaí ar barr rudaí ar barr rudaí. Níl dul chun cinn á dhéanamh ag an Rialtas ar scor ar bith. Ní bhím i nGaeltacht Tír Chonaill rómhinic - cúpla uair in aghaidh na bliana - ach tá a fhios agam nach bhfuil daoine ansin sásta ar scor ar bith leis an tslí ina bhfuil an Rialtas ag dul ar aghaidh.

The Taoiseach: Nuair a bhí mé i nGaeltacht Ghleann Cholm Cille le déanaí, chas mé le go leor daoine atá ag breathnú amach go géar ó thaobh láimhséail na straitéise a chur i gcrích. Mar a dúirt mé leis an Teachta Ó Máirtín, tá an plean a leag an tAire Stáit amach réidh agus aontaíthe. Tá an-chuid oibre déanta ina thaobh. Dúirt an tAire Stáit go raibh €500,000 ag teastáil agus cuireadh an tsuim sin ar fáil sa bhuiséad. Tá sé ag dul ar aghaidh le comhlachtaí Gaeltachta agus muintir na Gaeltachta chun é sin a chur i gcrích. Ní aontaím go bhfuil an méid a dúirt an Teachta faoi mhuintir Ghaeltacht Dhún na nGall fíor. Casaim leo go minic. Bhí scéal eile le rá acu le déanaí. Ba mhaith le chuile dhuine i ngach áit ar fud na tíre go mbeadh fostaíocht ar fáil, infheistíocht á dhéanamh agus jabanna ar fáil do dhaoine óga. Is í sin an phríomhaidhm atá ag an Rialtas agus cúrsaí caiteachas poiblí á láimhseáil againn. Táimid ag iarraidh postanna a chruthú agus jabanna a chur ar fáil.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá na daoine óga san Astráil.

The Taoiseach: Tá a fhios ag an Teachta go bhfuil athrú tagtha ó thaobh an t-údarás de. Tá bord nua le bunú. Beidh sé dírithe ar chúrsaí Gaeltachta. Tá pleananna leagtha amach ag chuile Ghaeltacht ó thaobh forbairt agus stádas na Gaeltachtaí éagsúla. Sílim go bhfuil sé sin tábhachtach. Tá a fhios ag an Teachta go bhfuil neart áiteanna a dtugtar Gaeltachtaí orthu, ach nach bhfuil focal Gaeilge labhartha iontu le fada. Caithfimid an fhírinne a dhearbhu sa chomhthéacs seo. Is é sin an fáth go bhfuil brú ar na grúpaí Gaeltachta plean a nochtú agus a chur i gcrích ó thaobh stádas na ceantair Ghaeltachta. Tá an tAire Stáit iontach láidir faoi seo. Tá a fhios ag an Teachta go bhfuil níos mó in ann an Ghaeilge a labhairt anois ná mar a bhí le fada. Tá neart Gaeilge acu. Sílim go gcuireann sé isteach ar dhaoine go minic má tá brú orthu Gaeilge chruinn cheart a labhairt an t-am ar fad. Is cuma má dhéanann siad botúin, nó nach mbíonn a gcuid Gaeilge go cruinn ceart an t-am ar fad. Is rud iontach tábhachtach í ár dteanga dhúchais Ghaelach. Nuair a théim thar lear, bíonn difríocht i gceist ós rud é go bhfuil mé in ann teanga dhifriúil a labhairt. I rith na toghcháin deireanach, ghlac mé féin, an Teachta Ó Máirtín, an Teachta Adams agus----

Deputy Micheál Martin: An Tánaiste.

The Taoiseach: ----an Tánaiste páirt i ndíospóireacht.

Deputy Micheál Martin: An cuimhin leat é?

The Taoiseach: Don chéad uair riamh, bhí ceathrar ceannaire in ann díospóireacht a dhéanamh go poiblí as Gaeilge ar an teilifís. Mar is eol don Teachta, ceapadh bean iontach láidir go dtí an Chúirt Uachtarach le déanaí. Tá sí in ann triail iomlán a láimhseáil as Gaeilge sa chúirt sin. Taispeánann sé sin go bhfuil meon an Rialtais fabhrach dár dteanga dhúchais. Sílim go bhfuil sé sin tábhachtach. Bhí cruinniú idir Airí ón Tuaisceart agus Airí ón Rialtas anseo in Ard Mhacha le déanaí. Bhí an LeasChéad-Aire ann mar ionadaí ó pháirtí an Teachta Adams. Molaim go mór an obair atá déanta, mar is eol don Teachta, ó thaobh Gaeilge Uladh de. Tá súil agam go mbeidh gach éinne in ann aontú le chéile i leith na hoibre tábhachtaigh atá á dhéanamh

sa chomhthéacs sin.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Táimid ag caint faoin nGaeilge i nGaeilge anois. Níl mo chuid Gaeilge rómhaith. Tá mé fós ag foghlaim. Tá mé ag déanamh mo dhícheall. Is í sin an fhadhb mhór atá ann. Táimid ag caint faoin nGaeilge i nGaeilge. Ní dhéanann muid ár gcuid gnó anseo sa Dáil trí mheán na Gaeilge ach amanna. Ba cheart don Taoiseach éisteacht leis an méid a dúirt Conradh na Gaeilge faoin bpolasaí agus faoin straitéis ag coiste Oireachtais le déanaí. Tá sé soiléir nach bhfuil an straitéis á cur i bhfeidhm ag an Rialtas. Is í sin an fhírinne. Aontaím leis an Taoiseach agus creidim é nuair a deir sé go bhfuil grá mór aige dár dteanga dhúchais. Nílimid ag caint faoi sin, áfach - táimid ag caint faoin straitéis agus faoin pholasaí. Níl go leor déanta ag an Rialtas seo nó na Rialtais roimhe seo i dtaobh na Gaeilge. Is í sin an fhírinne. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil níos mó daoine ag labhairt na Gaeilge. Bheadh i bhfad níos mó daoine ag labhairt na Gaeilge dá mbeadh polasaí maith i gceist.

The Taoiseach: Mar a dúirt mé leis an Teachta Ó Máirtín, bhí plean i leith na Gaeilge - an straitéis - le blianta anuas. Tá cruth curtha air anois. Dúirt an tAire Stáit liom go raibh €500,000 ag teastáil chun tosú láidir a dhéanamh agus é seo á chur i gcrích. Tugadh an t-airgead don Aire Stáit sa bhuiséad. Bhí an Teachta Adams i nDoire nuair a bhí an fleadh cheoil ar siúl ann. Ba iontach go deo an méid Gaeilge a bhí le cloisteáil ag an ócáid cheoil sin. Tarlóidh an rud céanna an bhliain seo chugainn i Sligeach, áit nach fíor-Ghaeltacht é.

Tá a fhios ag an Teachta cad a tharla nuair a cuireadh na Gaeltachtaí agus na breac-Gaeltachtaí ar bun sna 1950í. Bhí scéalta ag dul thart ag éirí as sin. Mar shampla, bhí fear pósta ag iarraidh an deontas a fháil. Ní raibh an bhean a bhí in éineacht leis an lá a tháinig an cigire pósta leis ar chor ar bith, ach bhí sí in ann an Ghaeilge a labhairt le haghaidh an triail Ghaeilge a bhí le déanamh. Bhí an bheirt acu ag iarraidh an deontas as ucht labhairt na Gaeilge a fháil. B'fhéidir gur phós an fear thall i Sasana agus ní raibh a bhean chéile in ann an Ghaeilge a labhairt ar chor ar bith. Cheap an cigire go raibh siad in ann an teanga a labhairt nuair a rinne sé an triail Ghaeilge. Tá deireadh leis sin, obviously.

Tá pleananna á gcur i gcrích ag muintir na Gaeltachta ó thaobh an stádas Gaeltachta atá acu. Sílim go bhfuil sé tábhachtach dóibh an stádas sin a choimeád. Ba mhaith liom go mbeadh an tír ar fad mar Ghaeltacht. Ba cheart go mbeadh daoine i gContae Loch Garman, i gContae Ros Comáin agus i gContae Lú, srl., in ann iarracht a dhéanamh triail bheag a bhaint as an teanga nuair is cóir.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Tá géarchéim sna Gaeltachtaí maidir le labhairt na Gaeilge agus an-chuid gnéithe beatha eile. Dúirt an Taoiseach linn gur tháinig an fochoiste maidir leis an nGaeltacht le chéile nach mór leathbhliain ó shin. Nach bhfuil sé soiléir nach bhfuil dáiríreacht ar bith sa Rialtas seo maidir le fadhbanna teanga agus fadhbanna Gaeltachta? Sa bhliain 2007, déanadh scrúdú cuimsitheach teangeolaíoch ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. Ba cheart don Taoiseach an scrúdú sin a léamh. Cé gur cuireadh an tuarascáil le chéile sé bliana ó shin, tá pointí cumhachtacha fós le léamh inti. Léiríonn an scrúdú go méadaíonn fadhbanna teangeolaíochta sa Ghaeltacht nuair nach gcoimeádtar céatadán ard de chainteoirí Ghaeilge san áit. Más rud é go dtiteann an céatadán den phobal a labhraíonn an Ghaeilge sna Gaeltachtaí, beidh géarchéim i gceist - beidh níos mó brú ar an nGaeilge mar theanga phobail. Is é sin go díreach atá ag tarlú.

An aontaíonn an Taoiseach go bhfuil nasc díreach idir polasaithe eacnamaíochta an Rialtais agus na ceisteanna seo? An aontaíonn sé go bhfuil céatadán labhartha na Gaeilge ag titim ar

an gcúis go bhfuil daoine óga agus daoine eile ag imeacht mar nach bhfuil postanna ar fáil sa Ghaeltacht? Tá bánú na Gaeltachta ag tarlú de bharr polasaithe déine an Rialtas seo agus an Rialtas roimhe seo le cúig bliana anuas. An dtuigeann an Taoiseach go mbeidh géarchéim níos measa fós i gceist muna cuirtear deireadh leis na polasaithe seo? Ba cheart polasaithe a chur i bhfeidhm a chuirfidh infheistíocht chun cinn sna Gaeltachtaí i dtreo is go mbeidh saol agus beatha le fáil ag muintir na Gaeltachta ina gceantair féin. An dtuigeann an Taoiseach gurb é sin, i ndáiríre, an freagra atá ar an bhfadhb seo? Deireann an tuairisc seo nach mbeidh an Ghaeilge á labhairt sna Gaeltachtaí taobh istigh de 20 bliain má leanann an Rialtas ar aghaidh le polasaithe áirithe - na billiúin a thabhairt do lucht na speiciléireachta agus na baincírí, srl., thar lear - seachas an t-airgead sin a chur isteach in infheistíocht agus, go mórmhór, i bpostanna sa tír seo chun daoine a choimeád sa bhaile.

The Taoiseach: Ní aontaím leis an Teachta go dtiocfaidh an toradh sin as. Sílim go mbeidh i bhfad níos mó Gaeilge á labhairt thar fud na tíre go coitianta agus de ghnáth. Ba mhaith le chuile duine go mbeadh jabanna, postanna agus infheistíocht le fáil sa Ghaeltacht i dtreo is go mbeadh daoine in ann maireachtáil agus slí bheatha a bhaint amach ansin. Tá sé deacair infheistíocht den tsórt sin a chur isteach i ngach áit. Nuair a dhéantar iarracht infheistíocht a chur chun cinn sa chóras séarachas, sa chóras soláthar cumhachta nó sa chóras leictreachais - mar shampla, i gcás na muilte gaoithe - is minic a thagann na cúrsaí seo os comhair na cúirte. Ní féidir an chumhacht a láimhseáil gan infreastruchtúr a chur ar bun chun é sin a dhéanamh. Bhí cuid de mo chlann féin thiar sa Ghaeltacht, ghlac siad páirt sa ghrúpa do dhaoine óga ar a dtugtar Spleodar. Ba é an rud is tábhachtaí a tháinig as sin ná go raibh na daoine óga seo ag labhairt na Gaeilge eatarthu féin nuair a tháinig siad abhaile. Anuas ar sin, téann siad go dtí cruinnithe de ghasúir agus daltaí óga ar a labhraítear an Ghaeilge agus múintear na focail dóibh. Tá sé sin ag ardú agus ag neartú. Tá an scéim maidir le scoileanna lán-Gaelacha neartaithe thar fud na tíre freisin agus tá brú ann faoi láthair go gcuirfí meánscoileanna lán-Gaelach ar bun. Is iontach láidir an tsuim atá ag tuismitheoirí agus daltaí sa scéim seo.

Maidir leis na córais cumarsáide nua atá ann, tá apps as Gaeilge agus cúrsaí cumarsáide as Gaeilge ar fáil. Tá córas ina bhfuil daoine in ann caint le chéile, ach ní hamháin sin, tá siad in ann an duine eile a fheiceáil agus iad ag caint. Tá na teachtaireachtaí ar na meáin cumarsáide nua seo ar fad as Gaeilge chomh maith. Ní aontaím leis an Teachta go bhfuil deireadh ár dteanga dúchais ag teacht. Má tá an brú ann ó thaobh straitéis na Gaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm, beidh sin á láidriú agus á neartú as seo amach. Mar Gaeilgeoir fíor chruinn é féin, tá dualgais cin-nireachta á láimhseáil ag an Teachta féin agus is maith liom é a chloisint ag labhairt Gaeilge na Mumhan chomh breá agus chomh láidir agus a labhraíonn sé í.

Maidir leis an straitéis, mar a dúirt mé leis an Teachta Martin, tá seo á chur i bhfeidhm faoi láthair, agus an chéad bhliain eile, nuair a bheidh tuilleadh airgid le fáil, tabharfar é sin don Aire Stáit chun obair a dhéanamh le muintir na Gaeltachta, muintir cumarsáide agus muintir lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. I dtaobh na pleananna atá curtha i gcrích chun stádas Gaeltachta a chruthú nó, muna bhfuil siad sách láidir, chun iad a laghdú, beidh an córas sin á phlé. Mar Teachta agus mar Taoiseach, ba mhaith liom go mbainfeadh an méid daoine is mó gur féidir triail a bhaint as cúrsaí Gaeilge labhartha a chur ar bun.

Luaigh an Teachta an tuarascáil agus an chaoi in ar féidir an córas nua cumarsáide a láimhseáil, ó thaobh múineadh na Gaeilge, na fuaimneanna agus an Ghaeilge a labhairt, cuireann sé sin ina luí ormsa go bhfuil ré nua amach romhainn ó thaobh labhairt ár dteanga féin de. Nuair a bhí mé mar chuid den Fhreasúra, labhair mé go minic faoin bhrú agus an dualgas a bhí ar daltaí Gaeilge a labhairt agus faoin chonspóid a chothaigh sin agus an Ghaeilge á bhrú orthu.

Tá ré nua tagtha anois agus má ghlacann muid leis an obair atá á chur i gcrích, beidh an teanga neartaithe agus níos láidre ar fad.

Is maith liom go bhfuil an Teachta Martin, an Teachta Adams, an Tánaiste, an Teachta Higgins, an Teachta Ó Fearghaíl agus gnáth daoine eile ar fud Tithe an Oireachtais in ann Gaeilge a labhairt agus triail a bhaint as.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Táimid uilig go maith, ach táimid ag caint anseo faoi pholasaí agus faoin straitéis. Níl an Rialtas ag leanúint ar aghaidh leis an straitéis. Sin an fhírinne. Creidim an Taoiseach nuair a deireann sé go bhfuil grá mór aige dár teanga dúchais, ach níl an cheist chomh simplí sin. Bhí Conradh na Gaeilge isteach le coiste an Oireachtais agus bhí sé go han-soiléir nach bhfuil an Rialtas ag leanúint ar aghaidh leis an straitéis. Thug mé sampla don Taoiseach - an lárionad i mBaile Bhúirne. It is not there and there is no movement on that. Sampla eile, an dualgas go mbeadh daoine ábalta ranganna a fháil trí Ghaeilge. Níl sin déanta.

Maidir leis na toghcháin don údarás, dúirt an Taoiseach go raibh sé i dTír Chonaill, ach tá daoine ansin an-feargach mar nach bhfuil aon toghchán ann fá choinne an údarás. Níl aon democratic input ó muintir na Gaeltachta.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Níl mórán dul chun cinn le feiscint in aon chor i dtaobh an straitéis 20 bliain, go háirithe i gcomhthéacs cúrsaí fostaíochta nó cúrsaí oideachais, go háirithe múineadh trí Ghaeilge. Bhí moladh sa straitéis maidir le lárionad oideachais do mhúinteoirí atá ag múineadh gach ábhar trí Ghaeilge, go háirithe múinteoirí i nGaelscoileanna agus sna Gaeltachtaí. Chuir mise moladh mar sin ar aghaidh nuair a bhí mé mar Aire Oideachais. An moladh a bhí ann ag an am ná moladh an t-ionad a lonnadh i mBaile Bhúirne, in iar choláiste Íosagáin, ach bhí deacrachtaí maidir leis an suíomh agus mar sin de.

Ba mhaith an rud é dá mbeadh an tAire Stáit nó an Rialtas sásta dul ar aghaidh le togra mar sin, ionad oideachais a bhunú mar áis do mhúinteoirí, mar fós tá easpa téacsleabhar trí Ghaeilge in ábhar mar bitheolaíocht, ceimic agus go leor eile. D'fhéadfadh ionad mar sin áiseanna eile a chur ar fáil do mhúinteoirí atá ag múineadh trí Ghaeilge i gcoitinne sna Gaelscoileanna agus ag an dara leibhéal. Tá géarghá ionad den saghas sin a chur ar bun agus i bhfeidhm. Tá an moladh sin sa straitéis 20 bliain. Dá mbeadh an Taoiseach nó an Rialtas sásta béim faoi leith a chur ar an togra sin, bheadh dul chun cinn le feiscint as sin amach.

Maidir le fostaíocht, tá muintir na Gaeilge agus ionadaithe poiblí sna Gaeltachtaí amhrasach faoin treo ina bhfuil an Rialtas ag dul. Tá amhras orthu go bhfuil an cumhacht a bhí ag an údarás maidir le cúrsaí eacnamaíochta laistigh de na Gaeltachtaí imithe. Tá amhras orthu go bhfuil an cumhacht sin meallta go dtí údarais eile ar nós Fiontar Éireann nó an IDA. Os rud é nach bhfuil na toghcháin á reachtáil a thuilleadh agus nach féidir le muintir na Gaeltachta duine a thogh don údarás, is droch scéal é sin do na Gaeltachtaí. Tá easpa tionchair acu as seo amach ar chúrsaí fiontair agus fostaíochta de dheasca an cinneadh atá déanta ag an Rialtas i dtaobh an údarás. Bhí ról speisialta ag an údarás maidir le fostaíocht.

Maidir leis na mná tí, rinneadh iarracht na deontais dóibh siúd a ghearradh siar. Tá na mná tí lánach ó thaobh na Gaeilge de sna Gaeltachtaí. N'fheadar cén fáth go bhfuil an Taoiseach ag gáire. Níl na mná tí sásta ach an oiread leis an méid atá déanta go dtí seo i dtaobh na háiseanna agus an tacaíocht a fhaigheann siad.

Tá a lán nithe ag cur inní orainn. Níl sé soiléir go bhfuil an fuinneamh sa Rialtas na rudaí seo a dhéanamh. Ní aontaíonn an Taoiseach liom, ach is léir sin ó nach raibh an fo-choiste sásta

teacht le chéile ach dhá uair i rith na bliana seo. Tá sin dochreidte agus is olc an rud é. Is oth liom a rá go léiríonn sé an easpa measa atá ag an Rialtas faoi fhorbairt na Gaeltachtaí ag an babhta seo. Tá i bhfad níos mó le déanamh agus tá sé in am dúinn sin a dhéanamh.

Deputy Joe Higgins: Le 30 bliain anuas tá fás agus borradh ar ndóigh tar éis teacht ar scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus a leithéid agus is breá sin. Tá sin tábhachtach agus tá sé tábhachtach go dteastaíonn ó an-chuid daoine agus daoine óga a bheith in ann an Ghaeilge a thuiscint agus a labhairt. Is rud dearfach é sin amach is amach. An rud atá i mbaol anois ná go leanfaidh an Ghaeilge mar teanga labhartha agus mar teanga phobail sna Gaeltachtaí. Sin an dainséar atá os comhair na tíre seo anois.

Ag deireadh thiar thall, maraíonn an caipitleachas cultúr mionlaigh agus teanga mionlaigh. Tá sin tar éis tarlú in an-chuid tíortha. Ní thuigeann an Taoiseach cé chomh práinneach agus chomh géarchúiseach agus atá an scéal seo muna dtuigeann sé go bhfuil na polasaithe déine atá á chur i bhfeidhm aige ag cur isteach go mór ar na Gaeltachtaí agus ar an Ghaeilge mar teanga labhartha mar tá daoine óga ag imeacht mórthimpeall na cruinne seachas bheith in ann fanacht sa bhaile - cur fúthu ansin agus clann a thógáil - rud a chinnteodh go mbeadh an Ghaeilge i bhfad níos láidre mar theanga labhartha.

The Taoiseach: Tá teachtaireachtaí láidre curtha amach ag na Teachtaí. Labhair an Teachta Adams faoi Chonradh na Gaeilge. Tá a fhios ag gach éinne go bhfuil iarratas foirmeálta faighte ag Uachtarán na hÉireann dul trasna go dtí an Bhreatain ar chuairt Stáit go dtí Banríon na Breataine. Nuair a tháinig sí anseo cúpla bliain ó shin, bhí “a chairde” i measc na chéad fhocail a dúirt sí nuair a labhair sí i gCaisleán Bhaile Átha Cliath. Ní bheidh mé ag scríobh ráiteas an Uachtaráin, ar ndóigh, ach tá súil agam go mbeidh sé in ann cuid dá ráiteas a dhéanamh i nGaeilge ar mhórthír na Breataine.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Tá mé ag caint faoin pholasáí.

The Taoiseach: Sílim go mbeidh áthas ar mhuintir na hÉireann anseo, agus orthu siúd a bheidh i láthair chun an tUachtarán a chloisteáil, má dhéanann sé é sin. Is é an polasáí atá againn, chun freagra a thabhairt don Teachta, ná an straitéis 20 bliain a chur i gcrích. Tá an straitéis aontaithe agus tá an plean réitithe. Nuair a tháinig an tAire Stáit chugam, dúirt sé go raibh €500,000 eile ag teastáil chun tosú láidir a dhéanamh ar an obair seo. Tugadh an t-airgead sin dó agus away leis anois thar fud na Gaeltachta chun é sin a chur i gcrích.

Labhair an Teachta Ó Máirtín faoin moladh a cuireadh chun cinn ionas go mbeadh múinteoirí in ann an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim in aon ionad múinteoireachta amháin. Roghnaíodh foirgneamh san iar-Choláiste Íosagáin, thíos i mBaile Bhúirne. Nuair a bhí mé thíos ansin ar lá iontach fliuch, taispeánadh dom an áit inar chuir an iar-Aire, Michael Woods, sluasaid airgid thíos sa talamh chun an bhunchloch a leagan. Ní dhearnadh tada faoi ó shin. Chun an fhírinne a rá, tá sé iontach éasca córas cumarsáide ó thaobh labhairt, feiceáil agus múinteoireacht na Gaeilge, nó teanga ar bith eile, a chur ar fáil ag an bpointe seo. Nuair a bhí mé thuas in Oideas Gael i nGleann Cholm Cille le déanaí, dúradh liom go bhfuil daoine ó chuile thír ag foghlaim na Gaeilge ní hamháin san ionad ach freisin ina dtíortha féin ar fud an domhain agus meáin nua á húsáid acu.

B'fhéidir go mbeimid in ann cúpla uair an chloig a chaitheamh ar díospóireacht anseo faoin straitéis, faoin Ghaeilge agus faoi na Gaeltachtaí roimh dheireadh na bliana. Ní thuigim go díreach an méid a bhí le rá ag an Teachta faoi na mná tí. Tá siad iontach tábhachtach ó thaobh

múinteoireacht agus labhairt na Gaeilge. Cuireann siad smacht ar dhaltáí trí iad a spreagadh chun coinneáil leo an Ghaeilge a labhairt nuair a bhíonn siad ag freastal ar chúrsaí Gaeltachta. Is maith an rud é sin. Sílim go bhfuil siad tábhachtach. Bhí mé ag féachaint ar chlár teilifíse cúpla seachtain ó shin mar gheall ar mhuintir na foraoise móire sa Bhrasaíl, atá féachaint ar mheáin chumarsáide nua chun déileáil leis an domhain mór amach rompu. Bhí fiú mairnéalach na réalta, an Commander Hadfield, ag tvuíteáil as Gaeilge faoi chomh hálainn agus chomh glas atá an t-oileán seo mar chuid den phláinéad.

Death of Former Member: Expressions of Sympathy

An Ceann Comhairle: We will now hear expressions of sympathy on the very sad death of our former colleague, former Minister Mr. Patrick Power, otherwise known as Paddy. I am delighted to welcome here this afternoon to listen to the expressions of sympathy his daughter Mary, her husband Kieran O'Donnell and their children Kieran and Michelle, his son Gerry and his wife Teresa, his son Patsy, his wife Clare and their children Laura and Liam, his son Seán, another former colleague of ours, his partner Michelle and their children Robert, Shane and Lisa.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Táimid bailithe anseo inniu chun comhbhrón a dhéanamh le muintir de Paor as ucht bás Paddy. Is léir d'éinne a raibh aithne acu ar Paddy gur fear mór lách cneasta a bhí ann. Ceannaire agus Teachta Dála den chéad scoth a bhí ann. Múinteoir, cainteoir agus seanchaí den chéad scoth a bhí ann freisin. Ba iontach iad na hócáidí nuair a tháinig gach éinne le chéile i dteach na bPaorach. Bheadh Paddy ann ag insint scéalta do chách, agus baineadh gach éinne taitneamh as. Is fíor a rá go raibh sé ar a shuaimhneas i measc a mhuintir féin. Bhí muintir an phobail ar a shuaimhneas nuair a bhíodar le Paddy. D'oibrigh sé go dian dícheallach ar son muintir a dhúiche féin agus ar son muintir na tíre. Is léir go raibh sé an-sásta ag déanamh an obair sin. Bhain sé taitneamh as an méid oibre a bhí faoi chaibidil aige i rith na mblianta. Bhí sé gcónaí.

Today is a sad occasion of reflection for the family of Paddy Power who have gathered here on what would have been his 85th birthday. I hope, however, that what is no doubt tinged with a deep sense of loss for them is also a moment of pride in a lifetime's work and enduring legacy. Paddy's wife Kitty, his ten children JJ, Mary, Gerry, Brendan, Seán who is a former colleague of ours who entered the Dáil as a Deputy on the same day as me in 1989, Patsy, Tony, Enda, Rosario and Loreto, and his grandchildren and in-laws can reflect on a life committed to a greater purpose. I am delighted they have joined us today in the people's Chamber, where Paddy served Kildare and Ireland for 20 years, as we pay tribute to him.

A big and burly character, whose immense physical presence was matched with his oratorical power, Paddy developed a strong political niche for himself in some of the most turbulent political days the State has ever endured. Born in the broad windswept plains of the Curragh he settled in his beloved village of Caragh where he first arrived at a primary school teacher in the mid-1950s. Before he moved into national politics, Paddy established a formidable reputation as a community activist. Perched on a hill which towers over the village of Caragh, the local church built in 1960 is a testament to Paddy's work on the ground. A new primary school in the heart of the community, which formed his new teaching podium, was also a product of his work. In the lush large field behind the school his lifelong love of the Gaelic Athletic Association shone through as it was transformed into the nursery for the local Éire Óg hurling team he

helped to found. In the classroom there was not much academic objectivity as a Fianna Fáil view shone through in any political discussions.

Across Kildare he forged a reputation as a storyteller *par excellence*, a singer and a raconteur. An old folks party from the Bog of Allen to the Wicklow foothills was not complete without his famed storytelling, a trait which made him popular within these walls also. Paddy was elected to Kildare County Council in 1967 and moved into national politics in 1969. His political life was characterised by his commitment to his constituency and to his community. He was always rooted in his community and was a very strong advocate for it.

5 o'clock

Deputy Ó Feargháil stated that he would use three words beginning with the letter “F” to sum Paddy up - namely, fair, fierce and fervent. In that context, he was fierce in both his loyalty and his commitment to people and causes. The latter describes him very well indeed.

Paddy had a deep sense of patriotism. A Saturday evening at the Power household became a part-social, part-clinic and part-family night, with a carnival of friends, constituents and family gathered around a door that was always open. His tireless work for the people of Kildare is the binding thread of his life's labour.

Paddy Power left his own inimitable mark on the international stage. His brief tenure as Minister for Defence from March 1982 until the fall of the embattled Government of the day later that year was dominated by the international furore of the Falklands war and the fragility of Anglo-Irish relations at the time. Ireland was sitting on the UN Security Council in 1982, adding weight to its role in the diplomatic swirl surrounding the escalating conflict. Our original support for the British stance changed after the now-notorious sinking of the *General Belgrano*, in part thanks to the strident views of Paddy Power. After the *General Belgrano* was sunk on 2 May 1982, Paddy stated at a Fianna Fáil meeting in Edenderry, County Offaly: “Obviously Britain themselves are very much the aggressors now.” This comment was subsequently printed in the *Irish Independent* and gained international attention. He was the first member of a government in the Western world to publicly criticise the sinking. Apparently his name was chanted by crowds in the streets of Buenos Aires after that intervention against Britain, which probably remains the only time a Fianna Fáil comhairle Dáil ceantair meeting has had such an international impact.

The then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, summoned Paddy Power, then a Government Minister, to his office and demanded that he withdraw the comment, which Mr. Haughey deemed to be inflammatory. However, Paddy refused outright to do so. Over subsequent days, as national opinion turned against the sinking of the *General Belgrano*, the then Taoiseach shifted ground, backed up Paddy Power's stance and became more critical of the invasion of the Falklands. On 4 May 1982, the Irish Government called for an immediate meeting of the UN Security Council to prepare a further resolution for an immediate ceasefire. At the UN Security Council, Ireland sought to give a mandate to the UN Secretary General to forge a diplomatic solution to the crisis, with Charles Haughey quoted in media reports at the time as saying this was part of Ireland's role as a “peace-loving nation”. Of course, this stance was not without its cost or critics. It generated significant controversy, but we will leave it to the historians to dwell upon that. Suffice to say that a man who was straight-talking and held to firm beliefs and convictions was not for moving. Paddy stuck to his guns and was subsequently vindicated by history.

Paddy Power's life's labours are now at a close. His final resting place is guarded by the old schoolhouse where he first taught. Around it is a transformed village and the county with which he was so in love. The political battles and arguments have faded away into memory. Instead, the legacy of men and women such as Paddy Power is their fundamental guiding commitment to the idea of public service and community. Those who answer the call to work for the greater good in public life can draw inspiration from the example of the noble endeavour of the people who have gone before, particularly the late Paddy Power. I trust that Kitty, the entire Power family and his wide circle of friends and supporters draw strength from the knowledge of that lasting inheritance in the face of their personal loss. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

The Taoiseach: On behalf of the Fine Gael Party and the Government, I wish to sympathise with the Fianna Fáil Party on the passing of the late Paddy Power. Today would have been Paddy's 85th birthday. As Deputy Martin indicated, he was first elected to the House in 1969. I was always happy to meet him in the environs of the Dáil because of his remarkable strength and sense of humour about life in general and about the activities that took place here and his part in them. I am not sure whether he acquired that from his family, as a result of his years as a primary school teacher or on the basis of his own observations of life. However, he was always on the point of bursting into laughter, regardless of how difficult a situation might have been. He served the Fianna Fáil Party on a number of occasions in the House when, as he would have said himself, things were "ropey enough".

Paddy served with a great degree of distinction and pride as Minister for Defence. He came from the Curragh in County Kildare and was very proud of his seal of office, of the fact that he had responsibility for the Defence Forces and of those who served in the Army, the Naval Service and the Air Corps. He also served as Minister for Fisheries and Forestry and Minister for Trade, Commerce and Tourism. I held the latter portfolio in later years under the title of Minister for Tourism and Trade. Paddy Power represented Leinster in the European Parliament and I know that he regaled those he came across there with stories of Ireland in a very Irish way. Those who met him recognised that he was a fount of wisdom, endeavour, realism and humour. Deputy Martin is correct: I am sure there were thousands of occasions when - at locations throughout the country, but particularly in his constituency - the melodic voice of Paddy Power was heard reciting stories. I am sure those present listened in some wonder.

Paddy's personality was extraordinary and, as the Ceann Comhairle is aware, he related to people at all levels. The latter led to his being regarded with a great sense of fondness by the people of Kildare. *The Kildare Nationalist* put it very well when it stated:

Paddy will always be remembered as a raconteur, someone who could weave a story and deliver a punchline perfectly. He enjoyed socialising and interacting with people and despite serving so many years in politics, never lost his very deep sense of connection with the local community in Caragh and across Kildare generally.

That is a very fair summation of somebody who crossed the landscape of Kildare on so many occasions and who became part of the fabric of the county and its community. His personality and passion were inherited by his son Seán, who later represented the same Dáil constituency and who upheld his father's legacy in the House. Seán is present with us this evening.

I am not quite sure that the comhairle Dáil ceantair meeting of the Fianna Fáil Party to which Deputy Martin referred was the only one that made international headlines. I could supply him with a long list of such meetings. On one occasion, Seán Lemass was quoted as stating

that Fianna Fáil was a slightly constitutional party. In my part of the country, there have been some wonderful exponents of the art of Fianna Fáil-ism. Many of the activities that took place at comhairle Dáil ceantair meetings made national and international headlines.

The loan of Paddy Power to Ireland, the Dáil and Kildare by Kitty, his wife, and their family has been replicated on many occasions by others, but one has to be in the job in order to understand the impact politics can have on family life and relationships. If the spouses of those who serve here do not understand what public service is all about, then it is extremely difficult for them to do their job to the best of their ability. The vast majority of people here - myself included - understand how important the support of family is, and we are very grateful to Kitty Power for what she did for Ireland and Kildare by lending them her late husband, Paddy. Kitty did so out of both love and an understanding of what family means. I thank her and all of her ten fine children - J. J., Mary, Gerry, Brendan, Seán, Patsy, Tony, Enda, Rosario and Loreto. As Paddy would have said, they had three quarters of a Gaelic football team.

Paddy served his constituency, his county and his country with distinction. On behalf of the Government, I extend my sympathy to the members of the family present on the passing of a benign spirit who, deep down, had a real sense of what public service is all about.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

On behalf of the Labour Party, I join Deputy Martin and the Taoiseach in expressing sympathy on the death of Paddy Power, a former Member of the Dáil who represented the people of County Kildare for more than 20 years. During his time in the House, he served with distinction as Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, Minister for Defence and Minister for Trade, Commerce and Tourism. In a long and distinguished career, he also served as a Member of the European Parliament and county councillor.

As I was elected to the House in the year Paddy Power retired from it, I did not have the opportunity of working with or getting to know him personally in the House. From speaking to my party colleagues in County Kildare, Deputies Stagg and Wall, I know, however, that he had enormous commitment to his county and showed great dedication to serving its people. This dedication was not confined to politics and was evident in his early days as a teacher in Caragh national school and after his retirement from the House when he remained active in his local community for as long as his health permitted.

As I stated, I did not know Paddy Power as a Member of the Oireachtas. However, I came across him as a local authority member attending various local authority events, including the General Council of County Councils, as it was then known, and other local government organisations. He was always very courteous and kind and I was always struck by the valued contributions he made to these bodies and the wealth of experience he brought to their deliberations.

I am also aware that Paddy Power was something of an expert master of ceremonies in Kildare, where his wit and great collection of stories and yarns made him the main attraction at many events throughout the county, somewhat to the envy of his political opponents. Perhaps he was also a scourge on them because many of them featured in the stories he told.

As Deputy Martin noted, Paddy Power also made a unique contribution to Anglo-Irish relations during the course of the Falklands war. While the former Taoiseach, Mr. Haughey, was always given the credit afterwards for having taken the British to task over the sinking of the

General Belgrano, the history books and any examination will show that the issue was first nailed by Paddy Power at a meeting of the Fianna Fáil comhairle ceantair in Edenderry at which he described the sinking as it was. Within days, the then Government tabled a United Nations resolution and took a position on the sinking that has been vindicated with time. The issue certainly caused considerable controversy and probably will be the subject of debate for a long time.

While Paddy Power's former constituents and colleagues will undoubtedly miss his engaging presence, it is always at home that loss is most keenly felt. I extend the deepest sympathy of the Labour Party to his wife, Kitty, and children, J.J., Mary, Gerry, Brendan, Patsy, Tony, Enda, Rosario, Loreto and Sean, a former colleague in this House with whom I had the privilege of serving on many Oireachtas committees. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Deputy Gerry Adams: Ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a dhéanamh le clann, bean agus teaghlach Paddy Power ar fad a chaill fear chéile, daid agus daideo. Ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a dhéanamh fosta le Fianna Fáil, mar chaill siad fear mór. Ní raibh aithne agamsa ar Paddy Power agus is mór an trua é sin, go háirithe tar éis a léigh mé faoin fear uasal seo, go háirithe faoin méid a dúirt sé faoin Belgrano. Tá mé cinnte go bhfuil Kitty, a bhean céile agus a teaghlach uilig go han-bhródúil as obair agus saol Paddy Power.

I extend my condolences and the condolences of Sinn Féin to Paddy Power's family, his wife, Kitty, and children and grandchildren, and Fianna Fáil, which has lost an industrious member who had a long career in politics and contributed significantly to the party. The real loss, however, is to Paddy Power's family and I am sure his children and mother miss him every day.

As we heard, Paddy Power was a former national school teacher who served on Kildare County Council and was elected to the House in 1969. He served the Kildare constituency diligently for 20 years, before representing us in the European Parliament in the late 1970s.

While I never met Paddy Power, it is clear from those who did and from what I have read about him, particularly on his contribution following the sinking of the *General Belgrano* and the contribution he made as a Teachta Dála, Minister and Member of the European Parliament, that he was very well thought of and highly respected. To his wife Kitty especially and to all his children and grandchildren, I express our deepest condolences. I would like to think it is of some small consolation to them that they can take comfort in the knowledge that he made so many positive contributions during his life to the well-being of the people of Kildare and the State and to the welfare of the people of the island of Ireland. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Catherine Murphy, who will speak on behalf of the Technical Group, is unfortunately absent as she is taking part in a radio programme. I will call her when she returns.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Having had the pleasure of serving alongside the late Paddy Power for a long time on Kildare County Council and in this House, I came to respect him as a great public representative and a decent and honest man. In football and hurling parlance, he would be regarded as a hard hitter who did not take prisoners readily or expect any mercy in return. He and I had some great jousts over the years and from time to time we entertained each other and those who were looking on.

Paddy Power was a politician whose sole purpose in life was to work on behalf the people.

He respectfully listened to their views, came to a conclusion and represented them in the way he thought was right. While he did not always agree with them, he certainly represented them. He was a great headline for the rest of us and those of us who were young at the time learned a great deal from him, as Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail will agree. He was able to impress on those who opposed him the need to keep in mind at all times the job they were elected to do, namely, to represent the public and maintain a high level of public interest and public spiritedness.

Paddy Power was a great race goer, fiercely loyal GAA supporter and lover of all sport. He was also a great raconteur who told great stories, even against himself. He famously told one about a particular occasion when he received a hostile reception at a particular house while canvassing. Unusually for him, he retreated from the house and as he prepared to open the gate of the next house, the lady called after him that it was vacant, to which he responded, "I am not surprised."

Paddy Power was a great headline for the rest of us in the sense that he worked hard. He was not a great man for soundbites or public relations; one saw what one got. He worked extremely hard, however, and was extremely honest. All of us were impressed by the dedication and honesty he showed in representing his constituents. He gave new meaning to the word "soundbite". If he did not like the sound of the questioner, you got the answer quickly and it was more of a bite, but his bark was always worse than his bite. I was greatly honoured to have the privilege to serve alongside him. He did a great deal of work for the people of Kildare, and he will be remembered for that. The fact that there was such a huge crowd at his funeral service is a great indication of the fondness in which he was held by the people of the county of Kildare.

I am delighted to see Kitty and the family here. Kitty is a decent, honest woman who was recognised as the power behind the throne. Along with him, she reared a fine family of which they both were proud, and the family was equally proud of them. It was great to be around and to have the experience of working with him. I hope the lessons that he gave us will live with us long, long afterwards.

I could not finish without making this one point. When we were younger, we used to try to rev his engine at local authority meetings. There was the giveaway signal, when he was beginning to respond, when he tossed the curls in the front of his hair with the back of his hand. That was always a signal, we had determined, that we were beginning to wind him up, and he also recognised after a time that we were winding him up. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail: I join with my party leader, the Taoiseach and other Members in expressing heartfelt sympathy to Seán and to the members of the Power family, and, of course, to Kitty. The people of Kildare, when they elected the late Paddy Power, got two for the price of one because both of them gave loyal and dedicated service. We all realise that Kitty was the power behind the throne. She was, in many respects, a guiding light within the family.

My party leader stated that I used three words to describe Paddy: fair, fierce and fervent. They are fairly accurate descriptions. I never knew him to be anything other than fair in his dealings with the public or with other public representatives, and I had the privilege of working with him from the late 1970s onwards. He was fiercely loyal. He was loyal to his family, he was loyal to the people of Kildare and to the country, and he was loyal to his political party, and he never wavered in that loyalty. He was also fervent. One thing one would have to say about the late Paddy Power was that he was never half-hearted. He was never a milk-and-water type of individual. If he supported a case or a cause, by God did he support it entirely. On the many

occasions on which I attended meetings with him, I have fond recollections of the table being banged and of Paddy insisting that whatever particular course of action was to be taken should be taken.

I considered it a great privilege to know him and to work with him. I believe I learned a great deal from him and from his exemplary commitment to public service that he demonstrated at every opportunity. He was somebody whom, throughout my life, both as a resident of Kildare and as a public representative, I admired and looked up to. For many who have entered public life in County Kildare, his example is one that we can look to, follow and hope to emulate. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Deputy Jack Wall: In sympathising with the Power family and with Fianna Fáil, I would be probably right in saying that, apart from the Power family themselves, I knew the late Paddy Power earlier than anyone else here. I first met him in Coffey's field, outside of Caragh, at the under-14 football trials in 1959. At that time, he and a Fr. Lawlor from Robertstown looked after the team. He did a good job of it at that stage and we went on and won the Leinster final in Graiguecullen in Carlow.

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil has mentioned that Paddy could be described as fair, fierce and fervent. I probably met the three of them two years later when Éire Óg played St. Dermot's in the junior hurling final on the windswept fields of the Curragh and Paddy was playing full forward. As a result of that match, there was a famous heading in the local newspaper, "A Town of Angry Men". Unfortunately, it was Castledermot that was the town of angry men. Indeed, Paddy went on to write a famous poem about that particular match, *A Town of Angry Men*, and he often recited it to me in later years.

As everyone has said here about Kitty and Paddy, they were a famous couple. My party leader, Deputy Gilmore, was correct about the number of conferences and seminars they went to, and their activity gave hope and direction to so many who attended those. Paddy, unfortunately, was poor of hearing in latter years, yet he was up at the front and he knew what was going on. He knew also the advice to give to young pretenders about political life. That advice was given free of charge. It did not matter of which party the person was a member; he was still willing to do that.

When he became Minister for Defence, right across political lines in Kildare there was a fierce sense of pride that at long last this man who had given his all, in education, in community activity and in political life, had gained the ultimate reward for all that effort. Everyone who met him was delighted in that regard.

I attended a function in the Keadeen Hotel when the Power family celebrated 40 years of involvement in public life - 20 years in the case of Paddy, God rest him, and 20 years in the case of Seán. Surely that must be a record that will be hard to beat, if ever matched, in this House. On behalf of the Labour Party in south Kildare, I offer my deepest sympathy to the Power family. I wish Kitty well. All the family have given so much. Irrespective of whether it was in political life or community life, the Power family has always been to the fore. That was something they learned from Paddy through his efforts. Indeed, I still think Deputy Ó Feargháil might have been right about the "fair" part of it but, certainly, I saw fierce and fervent in their full light the day he was wielding that hurley upon the Curragh.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I join with others in paying tribute to the late Paddy Power.

19 November 2013

Paddy was more my sparring partner than my friend in politics in local Kildare. Indeed, I knew him best at local government level, where Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil used sit beside him. Paddy was a little hard of hearing, even at that time, and I would interrupt him while he was speaking. He would be saying, “What did he say? What did he say?”, and Seán would say, “Don’t mind him. Don’t mind him.” Eventually, I would get him going. I got his dander up on many an occasion.

Paddy made a very positive contribution, particularly right across local government - that is where I knew him - in Kildare and in the VEC, of which he was chairman for many years. He developed a VEC scheme in Kildare that is second to none in the country. He was one of the drivers of that.

Probably, we both mellowed in our relationship as the years went on. I remember that when I was a junior Minister in the government with Fianna Fáil and I was at a local authority meeting talking to councillors about housing, he said at that public meeting that I had greatly improved since I had become associated with Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Micheál Martin: There you are now.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: From that time on, we were quite friendly.

I had great respect for Paddy Power and for the work he did. I join with others in offering my sympathy to Kitty and her clan, who are here and elsewhere.

Deputy Martin Heydon: It is fitting that we are here today on the late Paddy Power’s 85th birthday to remember a man with a remarkable legacy in this House, in the local authority and in public life in general. My dealings with Paddy were in the autumn of his life when he had retired from public life, but he was still a great character to talk to and to learn from.

My stepfather remarked to me early on when I got involved in politics that he remembered Paddy Power cycling past the house where my stepfather lived on his way to his first job, which was a teaching job in Grangecon in County Wicklow. For anybody who knows the geography of that area, it is a long cycle from the Curragh to Grangecon, and I mentioned that to Paddy at the time. I heard that if Paddy was attending a meeting in Athy, perhaps on Woodstock Street or the Stradbally Road, he would park at the Grove Cinema at the opposite end of the town and give himself plenty of time to walk to the meeting to make sure he met as many people as possible along the way. That is a lesson for all of us in politics.

For somebody from an inland county like Kildare to be Minister with responsibility for fisheries, it does not cause too many problems with constituents, but for someone born and raised on the Curragh, there can be no greater honour than becoming Minister for Defence. I know it was a huge honour for Paddy, his family and the Fianna Fáil Party in general and it was a position he occupied with distinction. He also showed himself to be good at multi-tasking in serving as an MEP between 1977 and 1979.

Paddy had a long legacy in politics, but, with a wife and family of ten, he also had a long legacy outside it. Every family makes sacrifices when the father or husband is a Member of the Dáil, a Minister and a public representative. Days like today, however, prove that the sacrifices such families make are more than rewarded by the recognition of great public service such as that Paddy provided for the people of County Kildare. On behalf of Fine Gael and the people of Kildare South, I offer my sincere sympathy to the Power family and Fianna Fáil.

Deputy Anthony Lawlor: I, too, express my sympathy to the Power family. I first came across Paddy Power as a wee nipper in 1974 when my mother stood for election to the local council. He was a big man, not only physically but also as a presence in the county. I will always remember him as a family man. It reflects well on Kitty and Paddy that their family have turned out so well. They reared a tremendous family, each of whom is a decent person. We in County Kildare like decent and honest people. It is interesting to see that a family member from the third generation is trying to emulate what the father started out to do. I wish him the best in the future in politics, although not too much luck.

I got to know the members of the younger generation by playing football against them and meeting them in business. When my mother passed away and I was co-opted onto the council, the first person to take me under his wing to offer advice was Paddy Power. He reminded me that we had been elected by the people - although I was co-opted - and that our duty was to the people rather than the officials of Kildare County Council. I recall that when he stood up and was in flow, the officials became visibly nervous. He was the epitome of what a local and national politician should be. We were on the board of directors of Kildare County Council and it was our duty to keep account of the officials. In fairness to Paddy, he taught me how I should treat officials. They were the servants of the people whom we were representing.

I had numerous opportunities to listen to Paddy as he regaled his audience. He always had Kitty by his side to give him a dig with her elbow if he got stuck in a story. There was never a shortage of good stories and he was always great company, whether he was telling a yarn or singing a song. On behalf of my own family who knew the Powers for many years, I offer my deepest sympathy. It was a big loss to County Kildare on the day Paddy passed away.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I offer my sincere sympathy to the Power family. I know some of the family members well because I served with Paddy Power and his sons Seán and J. J. on Kildare County Council at various times since 1991. Paddy was elected in 1969 and served as a Deputy and a Minister. He had a lifetime of political experience behind him before I was elected to the council in 1991. Essentially, he was as an adversary.

Paddy was a very proud Kildare man and those of us who were blow-ins to the county got to know this quite quickly. As others noted, he was a devoted family man and we got to know not only him but also his wife, Kitty, because she accompanied him to many events. He was hugely proud of his large family. He was a terrific story teller and a social magnet because he would always be in the middle of a group telling his tales. One dared not to interrupt him because his story telling was always intense. The stories usually ended with the group erupting in laughter. I had the pleasure of being in a few of those huddles to hear his yarns. Some of his sons are lucky enough to inherit these traits.

It is often said politicians cut their political teeth at local level. Paddy was the one who ensured we cut our teeth as Opposition members. I was elected to the council after being involved in an acrimonious campaign on service charges during the 1980s and, as such, I arrived complete with cloven hooves. On my very first day he told me I need not think I was coming in to sweep out the cobwebs. He was putting down a marker straightaway. He was also fiercely loyal in whatever he was involved in. When he discovered by accident that some of my ancestors had been in Fianna Fáil, the ice melted and I was not seen in as bad a light as previously. Over time we made our peace, but I remember the great rows between him and Deputy Emmet Stagg which took up the first 30 minutes of every council meeting. They often resulted in a piece of poetry being devised.

19 November 2013

The last time I met him was in Punchestown a few years ago. We had a great chat and it was nice to meet him as a friend. Again, I sympathise with his large family. I know he was proud of them and I am certain that they, in turn, were proud of the role he had played in the Parliament, for the State and County Kildare.

Members rose.

Order of Business

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 9, motion re referral to joint committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2013; No. 10, motion re leave to Introduce Supplementary Estimates -Votes 20 and 24; No. 11, motion re referral of Supplementary Estimates - Votes 20 and 24 - to select committee; No. 4, Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013 - Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. Notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, Nos. 9 and 10 shall be decided without debate and, subject to the agreement of No. 10, No. 11, referral to select committee, shall be decided without debate and any divisions demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith. The motion re Government decision on exiting the EU-IMF programme shall be taken tomorrow after Oral Questions, and the following arrangements shall apply: the speech of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order and who may share their time, shall not exceed 20 minutes in each case; the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case, and such Members may share time; and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed five minutes. Private Members' business shall be No. 128, motion re youth employment.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with Nos. 9, 10, 11 - motion re referral to the joint committee of the proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2013, motion re leave to introduce Supplementary Estimates and motion re referral of Supplementary Estimates to the select committee - agreed to? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with motion re Government decision on exiting the EU-IMF programme tomorrow agreed to? Agreed.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In communities across the country, there is deep anger and considerable concern and uproar about the EirGrid proposal to erect pylons as high as 50 m. People are concerned that pylons will be put near their homes. There are environmental concerns, and some of these areas are the most scenic in the country, such as the Comeragh Mountains. There has been a huge groundswell of opposition-----

An Ceann Comhairle: What legislation does this relate to?

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Government is committed to putting EirGrid on a statutory basis through primary legislation. The Minister Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Rabbitte, is ploughing ahead and is determined to ignore the concerns of citizens and to be dismissive of what is being said in communities across country. Some 15,000 people marched in Waterford and there were a thousand meetings in halls up and down the country. At the moment, EirGrid is established by statutory instrument. Is the Taoiseach satisfied that it has the necessary powers to do what it is doing? In the context of the promised Bill, the EirGrid Bill, can the Taoiseach ensure there is a statutory obligation to consult meaningfully

with communities across the country?

The Taoiseach: The legislation is listed for next year. Work has begun on it in terms of EirGrid's statutory responsibilities. I share the view of Deputy Micheál Martin that there must be meaningful and proper consultation by EirGrid and every other entity where a major development is proposed. No one can disagree with that.

Deputy Gerry Adams: The programme for Government commits to greater all-Ireland co-operation to accelerate recovery and the creation of jobs and to identify new areas of North-South co-operation. The Good Friday Agreement underpins this. Last week, the Taoiseach indicated support for the Narrow Water bridge. Since then, there has been a withdrawal of the offer from the special EU programmes board, SEUPB, for the project. That can be quickly and speedily reversed if the Government can work with all of those who want the project to go ahead. An all-party delegation from Counties Louth and Down met the Deputy First Minister yesterday. The group sought an urgent meeting with the Taoiseach, and I ask the Taoiseach, in keeping with the programme for Government commitment, to meet the group as soon as possible.

The Taoiseach: I do not object to meeting people. The problem is finding an appropriate time to do it. The Deputy is aware of the position in respect of the Narrow Water bridge. There was a discussion about it prior to the North-South Ministerial Council meeting, at the meeting and afterwards. The agreement was to keep alive the principle of providing a bridge across the inlet. The outcome was that officials would do an analysis of scale of the tenders that came in. We did not have control over the SEUPB. The position is that the Executive and the Government here, along with Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council, support the concept. We will follow through in the best way possible but I cannot sign a blank cheque for it.

Deputy Seamus Kirk: This is a follow-up question, which could concern road traffic legislation. There have been hurried meetings in the past few days at Louth County Council and at Stormont. The two key people involved are the Taoiseach and the First Minister. The possibility that the Taoiseach, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister could meet to address the issue of the bridgeable gap in the funding and to bring the most symbolic and iconic project contemplated-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Seamus Kirk: -----as an invaluable peace dividend to the north east and to the country as a whole is too important to let go. The Taoiseach has a personal interest.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kirk was in this Chair. He knows the restrictions under which I operate.

Deputy Seamus Kirk: With the agreement of the Taoiseach, if he is prepared to hold a meeting urgently, the SEUPB is prepared to put on hold the decision to withdraw funding, assuming other arrangements can be put in place as quickly as possible.

The Taoiseach: We discussed this. The First Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive has a process of validation and value for money audits for any infrastructure, including this, and the SEUPB has given its analysis that this is a worthwhile prospect. The problem is that I cannot commit to writing a blank cheque. We must follow through on the analysis of the tenders

submitted and determine how we can come to an arrangement so that the Narrow Water bridge can become a reality.

Deputy John O'Mahony: Is there a timeframe for the proposed legislation on broadcasting charges to replace the current television licence?

The Taoiseach: It will be taken next year.

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: Will legislation be published on the motorised transport and mobility allowance schemes? The HSE is assessing applicants for primary care certificates and there is no scheme in place.

The Taoiseach: The motorised transport scheme is to come back from the Minister for Health shortly to Cabinet. Did the Deputy ask about primary care centres?

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: No; I am making the point that the HSE is assessing applications for primary care certificates but there is no scheme.

The Taoiseach: The Minister will bring a recommendation to Cabinet shortly.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The courts listing system is outdated and extremely costly. Dozens of witnesses hang around for hours and days. Surely it should be reformed. If a case is taken, it should go ahead on a scheduled and orderly basis.

An Ceann Comhairle: What legislation is the Deputy talking about?

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I am asking about it in respect of the courts (consolidation and reform) Bill.

The Taoiseach: There is no date for publication of the courts (consolidation and reform) Bill, although a great deal of work has been done on it. I will advise the Deputy in due course.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: The maritime area and foreshore (amendment) Bill is in section A of the Government legislative programme. When will the Bill come before the House? It is of huge importance to the development of ports, particularly from the point of view of planning, including the port of Foynes, County Limerick.

The Taoiseach: A draft of the Bill went to the committee for pre-legislative scrutiny this morning. It is part of the process of moving towards taking advice and reflections on Bills from Oireachtas committees. The Chairman will decide how to consult about it.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I thank the Taoiseach for his commitment to the Narrow Water bridge. At all times, the Taoiseach kept his promises.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are not going there again. We have crossed that bridge a few times.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: When can we expect publication of the human tissue Bill? This will meet the key recommendations of the Madden report that no hospital post mortems may be carried out and that no tissue may be retained after post mortems without consent. It will also address other matters relating to human tissue, including consent arrangements for transplantations and research purposes.

The Taoiseach: There was a public consultation process and the matter has been concluded. Reflections will take place on the outcome, but no date has been set for publication of the Bill.

Deputy Joe O'Reilly: When does the Taoiseach envisage the Road Traffic (No. 2) Bill being brought before the House? My interest arises because it is only possible to impose a maximum sentence of six months for a hit-and-run offence and there is only a three hour window for gardaí to test a suspect. I know family members in a case in my constituency in which a young cyclist was tragically killed in a hit-and-run incident in 2011 and the driver had failed to stop. This is important legislation.

The Taoiseach: The Bill is before the House and the debate will be resumed. The Bill is moving through the process.

Deputy Sean Fleming: The Taoiseach is aware that EirGrid is involved in so-called consultation around the country on plans for new 400 kV lines traversing the land. He is also aware that there are only two such major lines in the country from Moneypoint to the Dublin region.

An Ceann Comhairle: We have been dealing with that issue.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Both were built approximately 30 years ago. EirGrid seems to be approaching the public and planning process in the way one might have done 30 years ago, which is not satisfactory. When will we see the EirGrid legislation which should give statutory effect to a proper public consultation and assessment process? It could also consider the issue of whether EirGrid should put the lines overground, as well as underground.

The Taoiseach: I have already indicated that the legislation will be brought forward next year. In its current format EirGrid is obliged to engage in proper and meaningful consultation. The proposition for the grid around the country was made during the term of the previous Government. There is a need in all the circumstances for a rational, meaningful and proper discourse about what we are at. We cannot leave the country stranded and bereft of a power supply in terms of investment in job creation. Unfortunately, it is not possible to transmit power without cables. If we are serious about keeping Ireland in the 21st century, we should be mature enough to have a rational and common-sense discussion about what we must do. EirGrid has an obligation to consult communities meaningfully.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: There are two questions, one on the ordering of business and the other on pending legislation. The Taoiseach is aware that local authorities across the State are preparing budgets and organising workshops and there is much anger evident among local authority members because they are doing this work in a vacuum as the local government fund has not been announced. There is a feeling the water services (No. 2) Bill which is to be published in this quarter and needs to be passed through both Houses to transfer assets from local authorities is connected to this issue. Will the Taoiseach confirm when he expects to see full passage of the Bill? Is its passage connected with the announcement which is eagerly awaited by local authority members on the local authority fund? Will the Taoiseach shine some light on when local authorities will know about it, as many managers thought they would have known by now?

There is a change to the Order of Business for tomorrow. I welcome the proposed discussion on the credit line. As I have indicated before, we support the end result in that respect. We need to have an informed discussion. I know that last week the Minister stated in the media that the options being examined by the Cabinet would be published. Will the Taoiseach indicate whether these options will be laid before the House this evening in order that we can have an

informed debate tomorrow on why we did not seek a second bailout or credit line?

The Taoiseach: The relevant Minister, Deputy Phil Hogan, has already indicated that the water services (No. 2) Bill will be brought before the Cabinet on 26 November which means that it will not be long before councils are properly informed about their remit.

With regard to tomorrow's discussion, as the Deputy is aware, the Minister for Finance will take Question Time in the morning when a number of questions related specifically to this issue will be taken. I answered questions from Deputy Micheál Martin in this regard also. The background to the exit strategy has already been published on the websites of the European Stability Mechanism and the International Monetary Fund. Ireland did not make an application for a formal precautionary credit line based on the information, comments, observations and advice of a range of independent entities such as the Central Bank and the National Treasury Management Agency, elements of the troika and political leaders, as well as other parties. The Government has made a very clear and decisive move to exit without a credit line. The Minister for Finance will give any other detail available tomorrow morning.

The Deputy referred to a comment made by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, on some information that he wanted to publish. It will be published. There is nothing to stop that happening.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Will it be published before the debate takes place tomorrow? It is welcome that it will be published.

The Taoiseach: Ireland did not apply for a credit line. The exit strategy conditions for any country are published on the websites of the ESM and the IMF. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, indicated that he wished to publish some information and he is quite free to do so. I cannot speak for him now, but I expect that he will make the information available. The Minister for Finance will answer parliamentary questions in the morning before the debate takes place and I am sure the Deputy will have the opportunity to put any question he wishes to him.

Deputy Simon Harris: I have two issues to raise. I welcome the Taoiseach's comments on the human tissue Bill and ask that it be fast-tracked or expedited as quickly as possible. I know a significant amount of work has already been done on it. I welcome the Cabinet's decision on the public health (standardised packaging of tobacco) Bill, the heads of which were agreed to by the Cabinet this morning. When is that legislation expected to be brought before the House?

The Taoiseach: Public consultation has finished on the human tissue Bill. The submissions are being reflected on and we do not yet have a date for publication. We will follow through on the legislation.

The Deputy asked about the Bill dealing with the packaging of tobacco products. The Bill was brought before the Cabinet this morning and approved. The draft heads will go before the relevant Oireachtas committee for pre-legislative hearings, as is the proper process.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: To what degree has the children's hospital development board Bill been advanced? Have the heads been improved on and when is it expected the Bill might be brought before the House in preparation for the logistical process of progressing the development?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the Bill have not yet been approved. I met the hospital development board and other associates and the strategy is now in place. It will be published shortly in order that there will be clarity about the timelines involved and the work done to date in the preparation of the legislation.

Deputy Frank Feighan: There are many outstanding issues regarding the regulation of vehicle clamping and towing. When will the regulation of vehicle immobilisation Bill be brought before the House?

The Taoiseach: That is locked away until next year and I cannot give an exact date. It is to be clamped until 2014.

Deputy Frank Feighan: Perhaps it might be unclamped.

Deputy Michelle Mulherin: When will we see legislation to put in place a new tenant purchase scheme? Many local authority tenants do not have the option of buying their houses and have been in limbo for a while. In some cases, if they were to buy the house, the monthly mortgage payment would be lower than the rent being paid to local authorities.

The Taoiseach: That is an issue the Government has considered and it will form part of the housing Bill. The legislation may come before the Cabinet before the end of the year. The Minister of State responsible for housing, Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, is concerned about this issue and anxious to have this and a number of other elements put in place as a package to deal with the problems arising in different locations.

Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil: What is the current status of the long-promised monuments Bill? Have the heads been considered by the Cabinet?

The Taoiseach: The heads were approved and published a long time ago.

6 o'clock

The Bill is static but is expected some time next year.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: In early December the Health Insurance Authority is to publish a detailed report on the state of the health insurance market in this country, but we are due to have a debate on the Health (Amendment) Bill which will be before the Dáil this week. Would it be possible to shelve that debate until such time as we have had a detailed discussion on foot of the analysis by the Health Insurance Authority because of the fragility of the health insurance market? More than 6,000 people a month are leaving the private health insurance market. We would, therefore, be discussing the Bill in a vacuum. Will the Taoiseach consider parking it, given that he is in such a good mood for clamping?

The Taoiseach: No, the Bill is on the Order Paper for debate this week and the debate has to be finished before the end of the session.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It does not. The legislation will only come into effect in March.

The Taoiseach: Asking the Minister to park the Bill is not a solution. The House will have to deal with it.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Bill will not come into effect until March. We could have the debate in February following a full detailed analysis to be carried out by the HIA.

19 November 2013

An Ceann Comhairle: That completes the Order of Business. I am sorry, but we are not having a debate on the issue.

The Taoiseach: During the course of the debate the Deputy will get all of the detail he wishes to have. Sometimes it can be too much.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is not forthcoming.

Local Government Bill 2013: Second Stage (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: A division was challenged last Thursday on the question that the Local Government Bill 2013 be read a Second Time. In accordance with an order of the Dáil of 14 November, that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 75; Níl, 40.	
Tá	Níl
Barry, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.
Breen, Pat.	Broughan, Thomas P.
Burton, Joan.	Browne, John.
Butler, Ray.	Calleary, Dara.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Collins, Joan.
Byrne, Catherine.	Colreavy, Michael.
Carey, Joe.	Cowen, Barry.
Coffey, Paudie.	Crowe, Seán.
Collins, Áine.	Daly, Clare.
Conlan, Seán.	Doherty, Pearse.
Connaughton, Paul J.	Donnelly, Stephen S.
Conway, Ciara.	Ellis, Dessie.
Corcoran Kennedy, Marcella.	Flanagan, Luke 'Ming'.
Costello, Joe.	Fleming, Sean.
Creed, Michael.	Halligan, John.
Daly, Jim.	Healy, Seamus.
Deasy, John.	Healy-Rae, Michael.
Deering, Pat.	Higgins, Joe.
Doherty, Regina.	Kelleher, Billy.
Dowds, Robert.	Kirk, Seamus.
Durkan, Bernard J.	Kitt, Michael P.
English, Damien.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
Farrell, Alan.	McConalogue, Charlie.
Feighan, Frank.	McGrath, Finian.
Fitzpatrick, Peter.	McGrath, Michael.
Flanagan, Charles.	McLellan, Sandra.

Dáil Éireann

Gilmore, Eamon.	Martin, Micheál.
Griffin, Brendan.	Murphy, Catherine.
Hannigan, Dominic.	Nulty, Patrick.
Harrington, Noel.	Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
Harris, Simon.	Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Heydon, Martin.	Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
Howlin, Brendan.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
Humphreys, Heather.	O'Brien, Jonathan.
Humphreys, Kevin.	O'Sullivan, Maureen.
Keating, Derek.	Pringle, Thomas.
Kehoe, Paul.	Smith, Brendan.
Kenny, Enda.	Stanley, Brian.
Kenny, Seán.	Troy, Robert.
Kyne, Seán.	Wallace, Mick.
Lawlor, Anthony.	
Lynch, Ciarán.	
Lyons, John.	
McCarthy, Michael.	
McEntee, Helen.	
McGinley, Dinny.	
McNamara, Michael.	
Maloney, Eamonn	
Mitchell, Olivia.	
Mitchell O'Connor, Mary.	
Mulherin, Michelle.	
Murphy, Dara.	
Murphy, Eoghan.	
Nash, Gerald.	
Neville, Dan.	
Nolan, Derek.	
Noonan, Michael.	
Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	
O'Donovan, Patrick.	
O'Dowd, Fergus.	
O'Mahony, John.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
O'Sullivan, Jan.	
Perry, John.	
Phelan, Ann.	
Phelan, John Paul.	
Reilly, James.	

19 November 2013

Ryan, Brendan.	
Stagg, Emmet.	
Stanton, David.	
Tuffy, Joanna.	
Varadkar, Leo.	
Wall, Jack.	
White, Alex.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe; Níl, Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Seán Ó Fearghail.

Question declared carried.

Local Government Bill 2013: Referral to Select Committee

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Sub-committee on the Environment, Community and Local Government, in accordance with Standing Order 122(1) and paragraph 1(a)(i) of the Orders of Reference of that committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2013: Referral to Joint Committee

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I move:

That the proposal that Dáil Éireann approves the following Order in draft:

Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2013,

a copy of which Order in draft was laid before Dáil Éireann on 12th November, 2013, be referred to the Joint Committee on

Agriculture, Food and the Marine, in accordance with Standing Order 82A(4)(j), which, not later than 3rd December, 2013, shall send a message to the Dáil in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 87, and Standing Order 86(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates for Public Services: Motion

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I move:

That leave be given by the Dáil to introduce the following Supplementary Estimates for the service of the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2013:

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána

(Supplementary Estimate).

Vote 24 — Justice and Equality

(Supplementary Estimate).

Question put and agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates for Public Services: Referral to Select Committee

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I move:

That, subject to leave being given to introduce the following Supplementary Estimates for the service of the year ending on 31st December, 2013, the Supplementary Estimates be referred to the Select Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, pursuant to Standing Orders 82A(3)(c) and 159(3) and paragraph (8) of the Orders of Reference of Select Committees, which shall report back to the Dáil by no later than 21st November:-

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána

(Supplementary Estimate).

Vote 24 — Justice and Equality

(Supplementary Estimate).

Question put and agreed to.

Topical Issue Debate

HSE Staff Remuneration

Deputy Sean Fleming: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise the issue of salary top-ups to senior staff in various areas of the health service. I am very pleased the Minister for Health, Deputy James Reilly, is present to respond. He will know that the public was shocked by the coverage in recent days of the secret top-up payments to staff in very well paid jobs in some major hospitals. Recent newspaper reports, probably based on the internal audit report produced for the HSE on this exact topic, which was finalised on 15 March 2013, list hospitals such as Holles Street, the Rotunda, the Coombe, Crumlin and the Mater in

respect of top-ups for individual members of staff in addition to their basic salaries, which are already paid for and financed by the taxpayer. There was a top-up in the order of €45,000 in one case, €20,000 in another, €53,000 in another, €30,000 in another and €26,000 in yet another. I will not mention any individuals as I am not in the business of carrying out a witch-hunt of individuals. The issues have been well publicised and the people are shocked that staff on salaries in the order of €200,000 are receiving these types of top-ups. All the hospitals in question are substantially funded by the taxpayer. Some extra funds from fund-raising and other sources are received by them. Income from initiatives such as car parks and shops may have been used to pay some of the allowances. It is disconcerting to know that some people who have been involved in fund-raising activities on behalf of the hospitals have been paid an allowance to engage in some of the activities.

The Minister has known about this issue for a long time, yet he concealed it. I am looking at the report he would have seen last March. It is clear from page 16 that, in March 2012, *The Irish Times* reported that three senior executives in a HSE-funded organisation were being paid for private work on top of their public commitments.

In May 2012 HIQA published a report on Tallaght hospital which found a lack of clarity around decisions to pay substantial additional remuneration to individual postholders for taking on additional roles, to the tune of more than €150,000 in one instance. In June 2012, almost a year and a half ago, the *Sunday Business Post* reported on the remuneration packages of the CEOs of four of the section 38 funded organisations. A memo from the Department of Health in June last year stated it knew that some of the salaries of the CEOs were being topped up from other funds. This was all well known to the Minister and his Department. When did he decide to take action? I am very concerned that during the negotiations on public service pay he presided over the talks on the health services area and set out to reduce weekend pay rates for nurses, emergency medical technicians and others. When the Haddington Road agreement was being negotiated before the summer recess, he insisted on cuts being made to increments for some front-line staff. He is part of a Government that forced the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act through this House in July, yet many of the 44 agencies had not replied at the time and were not in compliance with the basic rules. He was aware of this while he was asking nurses to take pay cuts and various other health service workers to forgo their increments. He knew this was going on and in the light of the sacrifices people were being asked to make, it was most unfair that he sat on this information, did not bring it to light and did not have the issue dealt with as part of the Haddington Road agreement earlier this year.

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I will deal with some of the specific issues raised by the Deputy. First, this is a Government which is actively pursuing reform of the health service. The issues emerging are as a result of a HSE audit of section 38 bodies, both hospitals and disability agencies. This is a Government which is trying to weed out additional sweeteners and expenditures within the health service at a time when any funding, whether Exchequer or private, should be going into the provision of services for patients, not towards unsanctioned payments to senior managers. Front-line staff in health services are working within the Government's pay policy and also playing their part in the reform of health services through new working practices, rosters, etc. The same rules must be applied to senior managers as to those on the front line. I take the opportunity to commend the great work done by those on the front line to keep health services safe. I also commend them for the improvements made in terms of the numbers who have to endure long waits on trolleys. There has been a 34% improvement in that regard since we came into office.

What we need is a clear picture of all payments made. On foot of the circular issued in September by the Department of Health clearly restating public pay policy, the HSE wrote to all of the agencies in question. On 30 September copies of the HSE's audit report and Government pay policy were sent to all section 38 agencies with a request that they respond by 28 October, ensuring compliance. In total, 33 agencies responded, some with a holding position and others requesting to seek legal advice. On 5 November the HSE again wrote to them, reiterating the requirement that they respond and ensure compliance, with a deadline of today, 19 November.

Every organisation that receives public funds must be accountable and transparent. The Department of Health will receive a comprehensive report within the next few days from the HSE on compliance with public pay scales which I will publish on my Department's website.

As the House will be aware, top-up payments of this nature first came to light in May last year when HIQA published a report on governance at Tallaght hospital. It emerged that an employee of the hospital had been receiving an additional €150,000 in payments since 2005. In total, five senior management staff had received €739,000 in top-up payments between 2005 and 2010, when Deputy Seán Fleming's party reigned supreme. Last May I requested that the HSE conduct an internal audit of all section 38 funding recipients, both hospitals and disability agencies, to ensure similar unsanctioned payments were not being made in other locations. The HSE's audit report concluded that there were 36 different types of allowance being paid to 191 senior managers at an annual cost of €3.224 million. In fairness, some of these allowances such as those to clinical directors are in compliance with salary scales as negotiated under the 2008 consultant agreements. However, in some private cases private funding is used to top up approved rates of pay. A total of 13 agencies pay additional remuneration or benefits such as company cars, car expenses or pension contributions to a total of 34 managers to a value of €912,472. In response to the audit, my Department has issued correspondence which clearly states "salary scales must be strictly adhered to and in no circumstances should an employee receive remuneration in the nature of pay and allowances of an amount greater than the amount prescribed".

Deputy Sean Fleming: I thank the Minister for the summary information on where we stand today in terms of the background to the report, the internal audit report and the circulars, reminder circulars and deadlines issued by his Department. That is all fine, but the question now is: what action will the Minister take on foot of the information now in the public arena? This is the last day for section 38 organisations to submit the information requested. If it is helpful, this House will support the Minister if he chooses to call in the chairperson of each of the boards of the organisations which are not in full compliance or which have not confirmed that they are in compliance. Officials in the Minister's office should telephone the chairpersons tomorrow morning to arrange to meet them straightaway in order that he can lay it on the line to them that they must implement Government pay policy. These organisations receive substantial funding from the Exchequer.

The people also want to know when these payments will stop. That is the issue. We know the payments were made and that matter has been examined, but when will they stop? That is what the people want to know, particularly in the context of the various cuts made to health services, with children waiting for cochlear implants, tracheotomies and so forth. I spoke to two mothers last week whose children had been in Crumlin Hospital for over 12 months because budgeting issues within the HSE meant home care packages had not been put in place for them. While this is happening, certain individuals are able to receive these extra payments. The Minister is also aware that many persons undertake voluntary fund-raising for these organisations

and that people are happy to give generously when they know that all of the money is being spent on patient care. They will be disturbed to see that some money from private sources is going to already well paid executives. It is important, in the interests of public trust in voluntary fund raising, that the Minister give a commitment that as of the close of business today, payment of all of these allowances will stop. He would be doing a good service for the House and the institutions in question if he were to give us that assurance.

Deputy James Reilly: We expect all of the disclosures to be made by the close of business today, 6 p.m. The HSE will then take some time to examine them, with any extenuating circumstance and any contractual or legal issue that arises. The Government is committed to public pay policy being adhered to in section 38 agencies and hospitals. The rationale is quite simple. Staff of these bodies enjoy all of the privileges, including permanency and other arrangements, enjoyed by public servants generally. Therefore, they must be held accountable and submit to the arrangements that apply to public servants in general.

It is interesting to note the spirit in which Deputy Seán Fleming has raised this issue and his questions about the action we are going to take. It was during the terms of office of successive Fianna Fáil-led Governments that these arrangements first started and were allowed to continue. It is only now, when the Government has identified them and is taking action, that the Deputy and his colleagues have become concerned.

Deputy Derek Keating: The Deputy has some neck.

Deputy James Reilly: We will taken action, unlike the previous Government, and bring transparency and fairness to the system, as we promised to do. The HSE will issue a report to me in the coming days and advise me on the best way forward, given the circumstances that may pertain in different areas. That is something to which the Government and I are committed and which we have every intention of pursuing. The people can be assured that this issue will be addressed comprehensively.

Primary Care Centres Provision

Deputy Pat Breen: I welcome the opportunity to raise this matter and thank the Minister for Health for being present to answer my query. I acknowledge the progress he is making in reforming the health system, particularly when economic resources are scarce. Tweaking the existing health model as the previous Government did would never have delivered the fundamental change this programme of reform will deliver. I commend the Minister for his courage in reforming and restructuring the health system, building the children's hospital, changing the way consultants work, reducing drug costs, improving waiting list and trolley waiting times, providing free general practitioner care for the under fives and, in time, introducing universal health care which will lead to an improved patient experience for all those who interact with the various medical services every day. That is important. If the health care system is to be transformed, we must eliminate the two-tier health system and provide a better service that will be more easily accessible. Primary care centres fulfil that role. They provide a broad range of services under one roof - a one-stop-shop for the provision of local medical services. These centres are the first point of contact for the patient and in the long run will provide considerable cost savings for the health system, given that they increase the lifespan of patients attending because they tackle small problems before they become big ones.

The Minister will be very much aware of the benefits of such centres having visited a facility in Ennis earlier this year. I am glad to report that planning permission has been granted for another centre in the vicinity of the town. However, these centres are being developed thanks to the efforts of GPs and private investment. The advantage of a HSE centre is that it provides equality of access for people across the board. We were all under the impression that Ennis would be included in the first round bundle of primary care centres to be developed and I was disappointed to hear yesterday that the HSE had not included it in its list of 16 projects to progress. Given the changes that have occurred in the hospital structure in County Clare in recent years, the development of a primary care centre in Ennis would alleviate pressure on resources at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in Limerick. The HSE had indicated Ennis would be on the list of 16 projects to proceed.

I raise this issue on behalf of the people of County Clare. Are there obstacles to developing the centre at this stage? Is the HSE engaged in ongoing discussions with GPs to pursue the project as an operational lease arrangement rather than a public private partnership, PPP? Is this the reason for the delay? Will it be impossible to include a primary care centre in 2014? Has the development of private centres played a role in the decision? My office received a number of calls earlier from people expressing concern following a debate on Clare FM this morning. The Minister is committed to the health service and the delivery of health services for the people of County Clare. I would appreciate it if he could give an explanation to the House and provide the background, which might help to clear up the uncertainty that has arisen as a result of this announcement.

Deputy James Reilly: I am grateful to the Deputy for raising this issue. I am glad to tell the House that significant progress has been made in the development of primary care centres. A total of 34 centres have been built since the Government took office. On average, one primary care centre opens every month. Some 35 primary care centre sites were originally identified to be built by PPP, 16 of which have been identified as suitable. Many of the remaining primary care centres, including the one in Ennis, should progress and could be built by operational lease or inclusion in the capital plan.

The programme for Government sets out the Government's commitment to ensuring a better and more efficient health system and a single tier health service that will deliver equal access to health care based on need, not income, which the Deputy mentioned. In a developed primary care system, up to 95% of people's day-to-day health and social care needs can be met in the primary care setting. The key objective of the primary care strategy is to develop services in the community which will give people direct access to integrated multidisciplinary teams of GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other health care disciplines. This is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high quality, integrated and cost effective health system. Modern, well equipped primary care infrastructure is central to the effective functioning of primary care teams. These teams enable multidisciplinary services to be delivered on a single site, provide a single point of access for users and encourage closer co-ordination between health providers. The infrastructure development, through a combination of public and private investment, will facilitate the delivery of multidisciplinary primary health care and represents a tangible refocusing of the health service to deliver care in the most appropriate and lowest cost setting.

The intention to date has been that, where appropriate, infrastructure is provided by the private sector through negotiated lease agreements. Where service needs dictate, accommodation will be provided in primary care centres for mental health service delivery. I had the pleasure

of opening a centre with Deputies Catherine Byrne and Michael Conaghan in Inchicore last Friday. Not alone is a mental health facility provided for the community there, a 50-bed long-term care facility for older people is also being provided. New arrangements are being put in place to have specialists in older people's medicine visit both the long-term unit and the primary care centre. This is part of our underlying plan and adheres to our principle of not only treating the patient at the lowest level of complexity that is safe, timely and efficient but also as near to home as possible. We must stop this idea of 50 people having to travel miles to see one person when a single specialist could travel to the centre and see the people there. That is what is happening in Mitchelstown, County Cork. Complete antenatal care is delivered in the primary care centre and patients do not have to travel to hospital in Cork to be seen unless they develop a major complication.

In 2012 the HSE embarked on a prioritisation exercise for primary care centres. However, the exercise is dynamic in nature and constantly evolving to take account of changing circumstances, including the feasibility of implementation. It is the Government's intention to develop as many primary care centres as possible using one of the following methods: direct build by the HSE funded entirely by the taxpayer, or leasing arrangements with the private sector or PPPs. Considerable progress has been made in the delivery of primary care centres and 34 centres have opened since May 2011.

Ennis was one of the 35 potential locations for primary care centres to be developed by means of a PPP, but that has changed, as GPs were not in favour of that process. Ennis remains on the HSE's schedule of primary care centres to be developed. An operational lease is being considered as the best option and it is the preferred choice of local GPs. The HSE continues to engage with potential developers who have expressed an interest with a view to making progress on this development as soon as possible. However, we will not build primary care centres that will lie idle, while GPs sit outside asking how much they will be paid to go in. That would not represent value for the taxpayer and it will not be allowed to happen.

Deputy Pat Breen: I thank the Minister for his reply and clearing up the uncertainty. I am delighted that he is committed to continuing the good work done, with 34 centres opened. Will he elaborate on the operational lease option? What is the timeframe involved? He said the HSE was continuing to engage with potential developers. I hope something will happen in 2014. The Minister's commitment to the Ennis project should be commended. I will keep the pressure on him and the HSE to ensure the project goes ahead, given the changes to health services in County Clare in recent years. I raised the issue this evening so as to clear up that uncertainty. The Minister has provided some clarity and I hope the issue will be resolved in 2014.

Deputy James Reilly: We will continue to press for the development of a centre in Ennis, as well as at other locations. The critical point is to have the agreement of the general practitioners in the area to come to these centres. We are offering modern purpose-built premises where they can also interact with many other members of the primary care team. From my professional experience, if one has access to a physiotherapist, one sees the opportunities for one's patients to be treated by that physiotherapist. However, if the physiotherapist is based many miles away, very often other modalities of treatment are brought into play or the patient has to be referred to a hospital to access physiotherapy services.

The same applies to mental health services. Many patients cannot afford to attend counsellors privately. If there were a public health counsellor in the primary care centre, a patient could use that service. What we would like to see in the future is a GP being able to refer patients

directly to a counsellor without having to involve the psychiatric service because that is an inappropriate use of the psychiatric team's time. The GP is well positioned to determine whether medication would be best delayed and counselling sought first. It has been well proved, both here and in other jurisdictions, that the latter modality of treatment has very good outcomes.

The potential for primary care centres and their use by GPs is enormous. Earlier I referred to Mitchelstown, County Cork. There is another large primary care centre in Mallow covering three separate practices. They refer to the fourth practice which allows them to deliver a range of services that no one practice could deliver on its own. With the volume of doctors and sub-specialisation among GPs, the centre is able to offer a much wider range of services to patients, obviating the necessity for patients to have to undertake long journeys into Cork city to avail of specialist care in hospitals there.

Fuel Laundering

Deputy Derek Keating: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for giving me the opportunity to raise this issue and the Minister for Finance for attending the Chamber to respond to it. It involves a serious criminal matter. The Garda in Waterford was tipped off about the theft of a trailer and, as a result, obtained a search warrant which was executed last Friday. It resulted in the seizure of several large tanks and equipment which had the hallmarks of fuel laundering on a large scale. To date, the information available from the Customs service shows this plant for laundering diesel was fully operational up until recently. It was sophisticated, involving bleaching, namely, the removal of green dye from legitimate diesel.

This is a new development as the majority of laundering operations have been found in the Border counties, operated by subversive groups. These operations defraud the State of millions of euro in revenue every year. They also damage cars and industrial equipment because of the substandard product that is circulated. Revenue has shut down over 100 fuel outlets and over 20 fuel laundries with sophisticated equipment.

A major side effect for the State is the clean-up operations after these criminals dump the sludge, in many cases on the side of the road. Louth County Council has received extra funding to address the crisis of sludge being improperly disposed of, causing not only a toxic threat but also a highly expensive recycling process.

For the first time in the most southern part of the country, a serious development of criminality has occurred, a massive shock to the local community in Waterford. Does the Minister believe a specialised Garda-Customs service unit needs to be established, particularly since that if it were not for the finding of a stolen trailer, there was every possibility the Waterford operation would not have been discovered?

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Revenue Commissioners inform me that they are acutely aware of the threat posed by fuel laundering to remove the marker added to rebated fuel for off-road use. Fuel laundering to remove the marker from rebated fuel has been a persistent problem during the years. However, it remained a marginal activity because the sulphur content of marked fuel was higher than that of road fuel. Accordingly, the sulphur content continued to distinguish laundered fuel from genuine road fuel. Environmental standards for the sulphur content of fuel changed from the beginning of 2011 which resulted in marked fuel with the same sulphur content as road fuel coming onto the market. With this

change, fuel laundering became more viable and criminal gangs intensified their laundering and distribution activities dramatically from the first half of 2011.

Revenue collects some €1.1 billion annually in excise duty on road diesel. Therefore, the potential for loss of tax revenue from this fraud is significant. This type of criminality also undermines the competitiveness of legitimate businesses, damages the environment, can damage consumers' vehicles and sustains organised criminal gangs which are the prime movers in this illegality.

Recognising the threat this illegal activity poses to the Exchequer and legitimate business, the Revenue Commissioners have made action against illegal fuel-related activities one of their top corporate priorities, adopting a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem with several elements. The licensing regime for auto fuel traders was strengthened with effect from September 2011 to limit the ability of the fuel criminals to get laundered fuel onto the market. A new licensing regime was introduced for marked fuel traders in October 2012, which is designed to limit the ability of criminals to source marked fuel for laundering. New supply chain controls were introduced from January 2013 that required all licensed fuel traders to make monthly electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions. The first returns were received by Revenue in February. It is using the data to identify suspicious activity and is investigating several traders.

Enforcement action, involving close co-operation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the Border, has been intensified with the aim of closing down fuel laundries and dismantling criminal networks involved in the activity. Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs are co-operating closely to ensure both agencies pursue an effective and joined-up approach to tackling the problem. In particular, Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs are working together to identify a more effective marker for use in both jurisdictions. A joint invitation to make submissions process is close to conclusion and a decision on the new marker is expected shortly.

Revenue regularly reminds motorists and the public generally that, in addition to its impact on the Exchequer and legitimate trade, they should be aware of the risks posed to their vehicles by using laundered fuel, as well as the fact that sourcing fuel in this way is funding criminal activity. Retailers who suspect or have evidence that laundered diesel is being sold in their area can help by reporting their suspicions to Revenue either directly or through their representative associations. Such reports are treated as confidential and fully investigated by Revenue.

Revenue's enforcement strategy in the fuel sector continues to yield results. In the past two years 107 filling stations across the State were closed for breaches of licensing conditions. Including the most recent detection in Waterford, over 2.9 million litres of fuel have been seized and 28 oil laundries closed down since 2011, including eight oil laundries to date in 2013. The illegal laundry detected in Waterford had the capacity to launder approximately 10 million litres of fuel per annum, with a potential loss to the Exchequer of approximately €5 million per annum. A number of large tanks and ancillary equipment were seized and the laundering plant was dismantled. Investigations into the laundry operation are continuing.

I am satisfied that the strategy being implemented by Revenue is proving successful. Legitimate traders have welcomed the new supply chain controls and provided anecdotal evidence of reduced competition from rogue traders and reduced availability of laundered fuel. Consumption of auto diesel has increased by some 5% in the 12 month period to October 2013, in

comparison to previous years when consumption was largely unchanged. I strongly support the current strategy being implemented by Revenue and I am confident that it will succeed with the co-operation and support of the legitimate trade. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the industry has worked very closely with them in developing and implementing their strategy. We are grateful to Revenue, the Customs service and the Garda Síochána for their ongoing work in this area.

Deputy Derek Keating: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive report which reflects his awareness and appreciation of the seriousness of this crime and the effect it has in terms of the loss of revenue, as well as on local businesses, the environment and the morale of the local community. The report will help to reassure the local community, particularly in Waterford. That is one of the reasons it is so important we have had this discussion in the Dáil to assure everybody that the Government and the authorities are very serious about this matter. We want to raise awareness of it. As always, as the Minister would agree, we appreciate the co-operation of everybody in the local community in our efforts to deal with this growing crime threat.

Deputy Michael Noonan: The initiatives taken in the last two Finance Bills are working, especially the one on traceability. In one case, thousands of litres of fuel were being delivered to the equivalent of a corner shop where, obviously, there was no outlet to sell it. Traceability is the key. Previously there was no traceability of the identities of the customers of the big fuel farms which supplied central heating oil. Since the initiative on traceability was taken it has been possible to identify, all the way from the port of import or point of refinery to the end user, if huge amounts of fuel are being delivered to locations that cannot legitimately include them in the retail trade. Investigations usually end up with the discovery of a fuel laundry. The legitimate trade takes the view that this initiative is working and that the sale of diesel has increased by 5% in 12 months, partly due to a little growth in the economy but mostly because the illegitimate traders have been taken out.

Job Protection

Deputy Robert Dowds: With my colleagues, Deputies Joanna Tuffy, Emmet Stagg and Jack Wall, I am very concerned about the risk to more than 400 jobs at the Lufthansa Technik plant at Rathcoole, County Dublin. These are highly skilled jobs of a type of which we do not have enough in Ireland and it would be a major blow to our area and the country generally if they were lost. It is welcome that the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, has asked IDA Ireland to engage with this case and that there is a 30 day consultation period. I urge IDA Ireland, the management and the trade unions involved to come together to see if it is possible to do something to save all of the jobs, if possible. If it is not, it would be most welcome if an alternative operator could be found. It is very important that these jobs are kept in the country. In an ideal world I would like Lufthansa to continue because from my consultation with the workers, it has proved, up until now, to be a good employer. Everybody can empathise with the workers because they face a very bleak Christmas and an uncertain new year and every effort must be made to save as many jobs as possible. Given that we have a major expanding private airline in Ireland, I wonder if it is possible to put out feelers to see if it has jet engines that could be serviced at this plant.

I support the remarks I know Deputies Emmet Stagg and Jack Wall will make about the PWAI. Those jobs are equally important. Although fewer in number, it is very important that

they be kept in Ireland.

Deputy Jack Wall: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for taking these two matters, both of which are relevant to the aerospace industry. Many of the employees of the two companies involved are constituents of mine in Kildare South and there is grave concern about their employment opportunities. This is a specialised field which we should not give away lightly. Talking about IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland being involved is one thing, but the necessity for the Minister to adopt a hands-on approach cannot be overstressed. Some of the employees have been with these two companies for 30 years. The PWAI plant has expertise that is available nowhere else. That has been proved because when the company tried to show that the work could be done elsewhere, the plants to which it intended to move the business had to send engines back to Rathcoole to have them serviced. We cannot afford to lose the high level of expertise that has been generated during the years. There has never been an industrial dispute at the company. There has been nothing but co-operation between the workforce and management to achieve a successful progressive company. The line Minister must become involved. There is no point telling me that he is close at hand, as he said in a written answer to Deputy Emmet Stagg's question. This issue is too important for such contact. It must be dealt with hands-on by the Minister. These jobs must be protected because the aerospace industry is going to progress, as we have seen with Ryanair's purchase of new airliners. We should hold onto this industry. It is important that the Minister be involved personally.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I agree with the other speakers. We are talking about viable, high quality jobs in profitable companies. According to its website, Lufthansa Technik had a turnover of €205 million in 2011. Its workers were called to a meeting last Friday when the manager read a report and talked about possible job losses. He said it was not because of the workers and that he was happy with their work. It was not due to the restructuring in which they had been involved. It was due to outside factors. These are very skilled jobs which we cannot afford to lose. The lives of 411 employees and their families are in turmoil. Many of the workers have been at the plant for 20 or 30 years. As there are many couples among them, whole families are affected. It is not just one individual but whole families. The impact is felt by families, the broader community and the local economy. Does the Minister of State accept that there is no clear rationale as to why this is happening? Is there anything he can do to secure the jobs? What, if anything, can he say to reassure the workers in the companies involved? What other State agencies have been involved? Workers want to hear what the Government is going to do about this issue. They do not want to hear that it will just stand by or that there is nothing it can do. I hope it will be able to address the issues involved.

7 o'clock

Deputy Clare Daly: There is a certain irony in the fact that the Minister with responsibility for jobs is in India trying to scrape up a few jobs for us while in the background hundreds of highly skilled and important aviation maintenance jobs are on the line. We must view this against the backdrop of the loss of 1,000 such jobs in SRT. Ireland was a world leader in aviation maintenance. If these two companies are allowed to fold, we will lose that skill, on top of what already happened in north County Dublin. The loss of these jobs would be a body blow. We need only look at what happened to the workers in SRT. Many of them have not got jobs since, and that is the future that faces people in Lufthansa Technik and Pratt & Whitney, unless the Government steps in now.

There are a number of issues we must consider. Both operations have been in existence for

decades. Pratt & Whitney is highly profitable, its order books are full and its pension scheme is in top class order. However, that company is now collateral damage in the parent company's dealings with Singapore Airlines. More than 75% of Pratt & Whitney's customers come from outside of the company. This is a viable business. Over decades, the workers have delivered first to market ground-breaking aircraft maintenance and engine casing works which have become an industry norm internationally. We cannot allow that to go. These companies have done very well out of the IDA. The Pratt & Whitney site was donated for a song decades ago. The company has even managed to make quite a lot of money from selling off parcels of that land in the past.

Workers have put forward a number of propositions to management, in terms of the idea of diversifying and taking in some extra work from the parent company. They have also proposed that Pratt & Whitney should consider the sale of the operation as a going concern. I want the Minister of State to assure us that the Department is fully involved in these discussions and that the State will step in if necessary. The issues are too important not to do so. The financial reports speak for themselves. These are highly viable industries.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: I appreciate that the Minister, Deputy Bruton, is in India doing his job on our behalf and I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Perry, for coming in to take this debate.

I join my colleagues in expressing my support and empathy with the workers in PWAI and Lufthansa Technik. I wish to emphasise that the situation in PWAI is more urgent than critical. This is a workforce of highly skilled operatives who have a perfect industrial relations record, whose plant is highly profitable and which has a full order book. I have been in contact with the Minister and wish to thank him for his detailed response. I am aware he is employing the full resources of his Department and the agencies available to him to leave no stone unturned to try to save the industry in both plants and the valuable jobs involved. As Deputy Wall has said, the Minister needs to be involved directly, on a hands-on basis, in this matter to ensure this is achieved.

If a rescue is not possible, it is imperative that alternatives are found to ensure the valuable and unique skills of that workforce are kept in productive use.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Perry): I would like to thank Deputies Wall, Stagg, Dowds, Daly and Crowe for raising this important issue. The Minister is on an important trade mission to India and regrets he is unable to be here.

I share the concerns of the Deputies in regard to the jobs being lost at Lufthansa Technik Airmotive and Pratt & Whitney Aviation International, PWAI, at Rathcoole in Dublin. My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, has been in close touch with both these cases and met with senior management from Lufthansa last Friday. Both companies have had to undertake a global review of their operations. In Pratt & Whitney's case, a decision was taken by the parent company to transfer dwindling customer requirements to a site in the US. This has resulted in the phasing out of older technologies and products. However, the company still has excess capacity across its engineering, maintenance and repair operations.

Four other such sites have been already closed by the company and this is the key determi-

nant in its decision to cease production at the Rathcoole plant and to introduce a redundancy programme there, on a phased basis, over the next 18 months. Some 107 jobs will be impacted by the programme. PWAI has made it clear that it is fully aware of the productive nature of the Irish site and of its skilled workforce, but has said that the decision was a purely commercial one, based on wider market conditions. As Deputies will appreciate, the ultimate decision in these cases is made by the parent company, on strictly commercial grounds and on what is seen by the company as being in the best interests of the group as a whole.

IDA Ireland has met with senior management in the US to discuss the closure of the site and any options for its retention. In addition, the IDA met with management and workers' representatives at the company recently and it was agreed that the agency will liaise with the general manager at the site, with a view to helping the company create a profile of the plant, the workforce and their skills for marketing purposes by the IDA's global team. The IDA will remain in ongoing contact with PWAI during the next 12 to 18 months. In addition, the Minister has arranged that Enterprise Ireland will engage with the company to explore whatever other options might be possible, taking into account that agency's remit and experience in supporting the Irish-owned engineering sector.

In the case of Lufthansa, the decision to close the Rathcoole plant with the loss of 408 jobs was taken following an extensive review of operations, in the context of declining revenues and shrinking international market opportunities. The company has pointed out that the enhanced quality and efficiencies of the new generations of aircraft engines, with reduced need for overhaul, has impacted on their business, with fewer engines becoming available. Complex changes in the dynamics of aircraft maintenance worldwide have knock-on impacts in facilities such as those in Ireland.

The Minister is conscious of the highly-skilled workforces at both companies and has asked the IDA to explore the possibility of securing a takeover or buy-out for either company. I therefore want to assure the House that all that can be done by the State's agencies in an effort to secure a positive result for the employees is being done and will continue to be done. It is of course extremely regrettable that 107 jobs are to be lost at PWAI and 408 at Lufthansa. Both the Minister and I appreciate that these closures will have a devastating impact on employees and their families.

In the wider context, as a Government we have put in place strategies for job creation that are now starting to bear fruit. Unemployment levels have started to reduce and we have had a number of good job wins for the country in recent months. Our key driver to turn around the economy and to concentrate on job creation has been the Action Plan for Jobs and through that strategy the Government has been working to ensure we transform the Irish economy. We are in a situation where the private sector is now creating 3,000 jobs every month, thereby helping to turn around our unemployment levels. While this will be of little immediate consolation to the Lufthansa and PWAI employees and their families, it is a clear sign that Ireland is starting to see better days ahead in the jobs market.

With the right skills programmes in place and with the enterprise agencies working closely with company management, we will do all we can to try to secure a positive outcome for the PWAI and Lufthansa plants. Deputies may rest assured that the Minister will deal decisively with the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and all the State agencies to try to find a solution. The IDA and Enterprise Ireland will remain in close contact with the companies and are arranging to meet with relevant company management regarding the proposed redundancies. They will ar-

range for a skills base of the workers involved to be put together quickly in a bid to advertise both the plants and the availability of skills to possible third parties. This is a very competitive industry and because aircraft can be easily flown to competing facilities all over the world, it is truly global, with consequent extreme competitive pressures. Nevertheless, we have a vibrant aircraft maintenance sector which employs more than 4,000 staff, with two very successful companies at Dublin Airport and several operations at Shannon Airport, including other Lufthansa operations, and facilities elsewhere also. In total, we have 14 companies in the sector. These are skilled, high quality jobs and the two State agencies are very active in supporting their client companies in the sector. Ireland has a thriving wider aerospace sector, with several significant aircraft leasing companies supporting more than 3,000 jobs, innovative IT companies developing aviation software and engineering companies supplying components to major aircraft manufacturers.

Deputy Robert Dowds: I thank the Minister of State for his reply, only some of which has been circulated. I ask him to circulate the rest of it. I call on the Minister to brief us on what he can do to get on top of this issue. There is an air of pessimism in part of the Minister of State's reply, particularly with reference to Lufthansa. The fact that there is a 30 day consultation period means, I hope, that there is a window of opportunity to make progress. I urge the Minister of State to do this and anything else that can be done with regard to PWAI.

Deputy Jack Wall: Why did the Minister meet Lufthansa and not Pratt and Whitney Aviation International? It seems from the reply that when IDA Ireland met senior management in the United States, there suddenly seemed to be a negative about the possibility of saving the company because IDA Ireland then met local management to prepare a briefing on the potential to develop the plant further. Why have we given up on this company which has everything going for it? It is profitable and has been pared to the last in the economic approach to job creation, yet the Minister has walked away from it. Will the Minister of State ask the Minister to look at the company's situation because of its profile and it has everything going for it? As other Deputies stated, we cannot afford to lose this type of industry.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The Minister of State said it was regrettable that 107 jobs would be lost at PWAI and 408 at Lufthansa and that both he and the Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, appreciated that these closures would have a devastating impact on employees and their families. That is an understatement. Many of the employees and their families are probably listening to this discussion and were under the impression that the jobs were still there. The Minister of State has just announced that they are gone. I hope something will be pulled out of the hat. The staff were informed by management last Friday that there was a 30 day window and were asked to come back with plans and suggestions. That is what is happening today is about. We are looking to the Government to come up with new ideas and suggestions. However, the Minister of State seems to have said the jobs are gone. That is not the message people want to hear. Perhaps I picked up on him wrong. This will be devastating not only for the employees and their families but also for the entire area. It is not one in which there is a huge amount of jobs. It has been devastated by unemployment and has some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. There is very little in what the Minister of State has said we can take back to local people. What can we say to them? Is the Minister of State saying there is nothing we can do?

Deputy Clare Daly: I also highlighted the same part of the Minister of State's contribution. It is incredibly defeatist and will not be good news for the workers involved. This exposes the problem of over-reliance on the Government's strategy for multinational corporations. The problem is not the viability of the sector but that these operations do not fit in with the parent

companies' plans. That is its essence. Pratt and Whitney Aviation International's Irish operation is a market leader, but it has decided, as part of a deal with Singapore Airlines, to cut off the Irish arm of the operation and allow some of the maintenance division to be developed over time in Singapore. That cannot be allowed to happen. This outfit has benefited enormously from its operation in Ireland and continues to do so. It is highly profitable and the order books are full. If it thinks it is divesting itself of this outfit, the State should step in and take it over as a going concern. The parent company does not want it, not because the work is not there but because it would then be in competition with the parent company's outfit. The other Deputies and I state it would be economic sabotage if these jobs were to go and we want the Government to go in and bat with both companies to state they are viable jobs, that the companies have got a lot out of Ireland and that it is about time they gave something back and stood by the workers. They cannot be allowed to exit.

Will the Minister of State deal with the issue of pensions in Lufthansa because there are slight differences between the two companies and workers in Lufthansa might be slightly more vulnerable than the others.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The most positive part of the Minister of State's contribution is missing from the script circulated and I ask him to arrange to have the full script circulated as soon as possible. I am very disappointed at what he has had to say because there seems to be an acceptance that it is a *fait accompli* without making any real effort to reverse the decisions the companies have made or are threatening to make at least. It has been presented as black and white, that the deal is done and the job is finished. If that is the case - perhaps it is - the Minister of State needs to expand on the efforts made to find alternatives, an issue on which he touched in the last part of his script which was not circulated. All of the agencies involved and, as Deputy Jack Wall stated repeatedly, the Minister need to be involved directly in finding alternatives. We cannot afford to lose what is a very special skills base in these two companies and this particular industry.

Deputy John Perry: The Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, does not consider it a *fait accompli*. We are restating the facts as announced last week. The Government is actively working with IDA Ireland and the other State agencies involved and meeting the management. It is important to understand the decisions being taken by PWAI and Lufthansa arise from international economic conditions, but there is a thriving market in Ireland and the Government will do everything possible with IDA Ireland which does a very good job and Enterprise Ireland. The Minister has met one of the companies, but I cannot confirm whether he has met the other. I am quite certain IDA Ireland met it and the Deputies should be assured that no stone will be left unturned. The Minister will return from India next week and I am quite certain a meeting with all of the concerned Deputies can be arranged. I will ask him to arrange a briefing in his office with all of the Deputies who have raised the issue and to invite IDA Ireland to it in order that everyone can clearly see the potential.

This market is driven by external forces. We can create the environment in which jobs can be created and the Government has made its best efforts to make the economy more competitive, encourage enterprise and create jobs. This is a very disappointing announcement for it to make. We do not consider it to be a *fait accompli* and anything we and IDA Ireland can do to encourage a rethink will be done. The manufacturing sector is a key one for the economy. It is important to state the manufacturing development forum established last year by the Minister has been involved in helping to activate the recommendations contained in Forfás's manufacturing strategy. Through this initiative, the Government has a target of creating an additional

20,000 jobs in manufacturing by 2016. That is its job. However, we need to be mindful of changes in operational practice in many manufacturing areas and the aerospace sector is no different. IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland are active with companies in the aerospace sector in Ireland with a view to enhancing the potential of good start-ups and encouraging the retention of overseas companies here. I know from personal experience that they have dedicated teams involved.

In general terms, it is important to remember that Ireland continues to be competitive in attracting new investment. More than 1,000 multinational corporations have chosen Ireland as their strategic European base. Multinationals currently employ 146,000 people. The positive impacts of the Government's policies on job creation are beginning to show. In 2012, the number of jobs in IDA Ireland-supported companies increased by 12,722. This shows the effectiveness of IDA Ireland. The immediate outlook for Ireland's foreign direct investment portfolio is positive, with a strong short-term pipeline. IDA Ireland is confident of securing further investment, including a number that will be capital-intensive in nature.

I will speak to the Minister, Deputy Bruton, when he returns to Ireland next week and ask him to engage in a round-table discussion with the Deputies who raised this matter. I will also ask him to discuss it with the management of both companies and IDA Ireland in order to discover what might be done and ensure that there will be no ambiguity whatsoever. The Government cannot sway multinational companies if they have made decisions but it will certainly do everything in its power to find a resolution in respect of this matter. Deputies may rest assured that the Minister, the Taoiseach and the Government will be 100% committed to finding such a resolution.

Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013: Order for Second Stage

Bill entitled an Act to amend the Health Insurance Act 1994 to specify the amount of the hospital bed utilisation credit applicable from 1 March 2014; to amend that Act to specify the amount of premium to be paid from the risk equalisation fund, in respect of certain classes of insured persons, from 1 March 2014; to make certain other amendments to that Act; to make consequential amendments to the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999; and to provide for related matters.

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Health Insurance Authority, HIA, is due to publish a detailed analysis of the health insurance market on 18 December. Would it not be more appropriate to debate the Bill when the HIA has issued its report, which will contain detailed information on the health insurance market and the difficulties relating to same?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): I have given the Deputy some latitude but I do not intend to continue in that vein.

Deputy James Reilly: If the Deputy sits down, I will address that matter during the course of my Second Stage speech.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I could oppose the Order for Second Stage.

Deputy James Reilly: By all means.

19 November 2013

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): The Deputy has that right.

Deputy James Reilly: This is a democracy.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): Is it agreed that Second Stage be taken now?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: It is not agreed.

Question put and declared carried.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): As the Opposition has conceded, we will proceed to Second Stage.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: We were defeated; we did not concede.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan): We will not go that far. Perhaps “vanquished” would be a better word to describe it.

Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013: Second Stage

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I welcome the opportunity to address the House on Second Stage of the Health Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2013. I would like Deputies to note that when the Bill was scheduled, the new rules with regard to the process of pre-legislative scrutiny had not yet been established. Of course, I will take the appropriate action in respect of any new legislation I bring before the House.

With regard to the issue raised by Deputy Kelleher, 18 December is the last day on which the Dáil will sit prior to the Christmas recess. The House will not be reconvened until January and what is proposed needs to be done now in order to give insurers proper notice in order that they might regulate their products for the beginning of the new year. What the Deputy is seeking to do would just not be workable.

Last week I announced changes to the risk equalisation credits and stamp duties that will apply in the private health insurance market from 1 March next. The Bill before the House will provide the legislative basis for those rates to apply. My reason for announcing the rates last week, prior to their applicable date, was to provide as much advance notification as possible to the commercial insurers to allow them to trade the new rates into their business strategies for the year ahead in a planned manner and allow them sufficient time to consider and review any actions necessary to avoid simply levying the full impact onto consumers directly.

The revised risk equalisation credits are the latest measure to be introduced as part of an ongoing strategy to keep health insurance as affordable as possible for everyone. Community rating, reflecting the principle of intergenerational solidarity, is a fundamental cornerstone of the Irish health insurance market. Under community rating, everybody is charged the same premium for particular health insurance plans, irrespective of age, gender and the current or likely future state of their health. Intergenerational solidarity between younger and older people also requires solidarity between healthy and less healthy people. As a result, younger and

healthier people effectively subsidise older and less healthy people on the understanding that they themselves will be subsidised by future generations when they reach old age or become less healthy. To achieve this, we need risk equalisation to act as a critical support to our system of community rating.

The aim of risk equalisation is to take the market as a whole and distribute fairly the differences that arise in insurers' costs due to the varying health status of the entire insured population. Risk equalisation aims to make health insurance more affordable for older people by supporting community-rated premiums. In general, younger people pay more and older people pay less than that which would normally apply in a risk-rated system. Only through the use of risk equalisation can solidarity and cost-sharing be effectively implemented between the generations that hold private health insurance. The benefits of our system of community rating can best be seen as supporting the market as a whole and ensuring that, through the provision of risk equalisation credits, older customers can be helped and supported in purchasing health insurance at an affordable price.

The number of people who currently hold private health insurance is 2.05 million, or 44.9% of the population. The number of people insured has been in decline since a peak of almost 2.3 million at the end of 2008. However, even in the current difficult economic circumstances, the vast majority of consumers are retaining some level of health insurance cover. There are four commercial insurers operating in the private health insurance market here. There is, however, a clear disparity in the membership profiles, and thus the associated costs, of the various commercial insurers. Community-rated health insurance systems across the world use risk equalisation as a mechanism to distribute fairly some of the differences that arise in insurers' costs due to the differing health status of their customers. A company with a worse-than-average risk profile - and therefore higher claims costs - will be a net beneficiary from the risk equalisation scheme, while a company with a greater proportion of younger and healthier customers will be a net contributor to the scheme. The latter will, of course, benefit considerably from having much lower claims costs.

Risk equalisation creates a level playing field in the market through a system of credits, based on age, gender and the level of cover held by persons. The scheme is funded by a stamp duty payable by health insurers in respect of every health insurance policy written. Ultimately, the Bill before the House seeks to strengthen and maintain stability in the private health insurance market. It is important to note that compensation is set at particular levels in order not to encourage inefficiencies. Insurers should then compete for market share by providing better services rather than competing for younger lives. This is the type of competition that is good for the economy and the consumer. The risk equalisation scheme is self-funding - that is, the cost of credits is met by the stamp duties raised. In effect, the price of a health insurance premium payable by an older person is discounted by the appropriate credit for his or her age. This means he or she actually pays the same price for the same product as a younger, healthier member.

The maintenance of a healthy and functioning private health insurance market is an essential step in facilitating the transition to a market-based universal health insurance system. In addition to the support the revised credits will provide to the current health insurance market, the revised rates also serve an important function in helping to maintain the private health insurance market in the lead-in to universal health insurance. Work is under way in respect of the key building blocks that will pave the way for the introduction of the latter. I wish to take the opportunity to update Members on progress in some of the key areas in this regard.

As well as ongoing efforts to protect community-rated health insurance for all through enhanced risk equalisation within the private health insurance market, other major areas of progress include the strengthening of primary care services to enable the delivery of universal GP care without fees for the entire population - the Government has announced, as part of budget 2014, that it will commence the roll-out of a universal GP service by providing all children aged five and under with access to free GP services; the work of the special delivery unit in tackling waiting times and inefficiencies in hospitals and allowing front-line staff to deliver the excellent services they have been trained and want to deliver; the reorganisation of public hospitals into more efficient and accountable hospital groups that will deliver improved outcomes for patients - this was informed by two expert reports entitled “The Establishment of Hospital Groups as a Transition to Independent Hospital Trusts” and “Securing the Future of Smaller Hospitals: A Framework for Development”, which were both published on 14 May 2013; and the publication of a money-follows-the-patient policy in February 2013 to provide for a fairer and more transparent means of funding health care. Preparations for the roll-out of the latter policy are ongoing and include a shadow funding exercise, which is under way, and detailed plans for the commencement of phased implementation of the new system in January 2014. These plans are in the process of being finalised.

Debate adjourned.

Youth Employment: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Jonathan O’Brien: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- our young people want to work and contribute but are starved of the opportunity of quality employment;
- 64,700 young people are officially unemployed;
- the unemployment rate for persons aged under 25 is almost 30%;
- many thousands more are not in employment, training or education but not captured in the official statistics;
- the number of young people in employment has fallen by 18,000 since Fine Gael and the Labour Party took office;
- since 2010, 105,000 young people have emigrated;
- under the Government the rate of overall emigration and net outward migration has increased;
- budget 2014 only provides an additional €14 million for the youth guarantee scheme; and
- according to the National Youth Council of Ireland, budget 2014 will, at best, provide 3,250 new labour activation places for persons aged under 25;

and calls on the Government to:

- adequately fund a youth guarantee scheme that provides all young people with a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed;
- allocate €400 million for this purpose, as recommended by the National Youth Council of Ireland and the International Labour Organization funding model;
- make youth employment a key priority and theme for the Action Plan for Jobs 2014;
- set annual targets for youth employment and reduction in emigration; and
- reverse the cuts to the basic rate of jobseeker's allowance for persons aged under 26 years that were introduced in budget 2014.

Before discussing the substance of the motion, I propose to comment briefly on the Government's amendment. Reading through the text, one is given the impression that the initiatives and policies the Government is implementing to address youth unemployment are working. The way in which figures are massaged in the amendment is insulting to those young people who will board aeroplanes tonight and tomorrow as they seek to find employment elsewhere. I ask Government Deputies to knock on doors in the housing estates they represent and ask those who answer whether Government policies on youth unemployment and emigration are working.

It is clear the Government is living in denial, while our young people are living in London, Sydney, Chicago and other cities around the world. Various Ministers and Deputies will speak at length tonight and tomorrow on emigration. What we will not hear in this Chamber are the voices of the young people who have been forced to emigrate. For this reason, I will commence the debate with the words of a young lad, Anthony McDermott, who was forced to emigrate to Australia. Before he left, he wrote the following:

Will they meet us on the runway, and welcome us home with great cheers? And will the men in power and the bankers, give us back our long, lost years? Now my generation's leaving, a generation going away, a generation that didn't cause this mess, but the generation that has to pay.

These words sum up the views of many young people who have been forced to emigrate. A whole generation is leaving. Last year an average of 1,700 people left the State every week and more than 250,000 have emigrated since 2011. More people are leaving the State than left at any time during the 1980s. Of those leaving, 70% are in their 20s and 62% are graduates. These highly educated young people are the lifeblood of the State and the people we need to grow and nurture economic recovery. Unfortunately, however, many of them are leaving for foreign shores, not to speak of the suffering the families of young emigrants are enduring.

Different Ministers have spoken in the past about emigration being a choice, as if it were a good thing. Listening to some of them one could conclude that emigration is some kind of school exchange programme for one year and that the young people who emigrate are having the time of their lives. A recently published report on emigration found that while 39.5% of all recent emigrants would like to return within three years, only 22% of them consider this pro-

pect likely. In addition, 78% of emigrants did not envisage returning to Ireland within the next three years. These unfortunate figures are a damning indictment of the response to emigration of the Government and its predecessor.

We have lost a generation which wants to work and is seeking employment and access to training and education. I note the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, is present. She is cutting benefits to young people, while the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, fails to recognise that we have a crisis. His Department has failed abysmally to create jobs for young people. Last year the key Government programme for employment creation, the Action Plan for Jobs, set out 333 areas across government where action was to be taken to increase employment. Only five of these areas related to young people, while this year none of the seven key themes the Department identified for its Action Plan for Jobs explicitly refers to youth unemployment.

The Minister for Social Protection and the Taoiseach have made much of the upcoming youth guarantee programme which aims to ensure every young person is given an opportunity to access quality employment, training or continuing education. Every question on the youth guarantee and job creation that my party has tabled to the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has been transferred to other Departments. Given that he will not even answer questions on the youth guarantee and job creation, it appears youth unemployment is not an issue for the Minister.

Sinn Féin has long called for the development of a youth guarantee to address the problem of youth unemployment and help to stem the flow of emigration. My colleague, Senator Kathryn Reilly, has been particularly active on this issue and acted as rapporteur to the Joint Committee on European Affairs which produced a report on the youth guarantee. The Irish Youth Council has indicated that approximately €400 million would be required to adequately fund a youth guarantee, while the International Labour Organization has called for the allocation of funding of approximately €435 million. Last week, while in Paris to discuss the issue of youth unemployment, the Taoiseach promised a fund of approximately €200 million in the next two years. The budget in October allocated only €14 million to addressing the issue. The Government must come clean during this debate on precisely what will be invested in the youth guarantee scheme and from where the money will be come. The House and, in particular, those who are contemplating emigration need this information because they must be given some hope the crisis will be addressed. The Government must set targets for stemming emigration and creating jobs, particularly for young people. Without proper funding, plans and targets, all we have, unfortunately, is more political rhetoric.

Much will be made in this debate of the JobBridge scheme. The title of the scheme suggests it is a bridge to full-time employment. In my other role as Sinn Féin spokesperson on education, I have discovered that a number of teaching positions have been advertised under the JobBridge scheme. The Irish National Teachers Organisation has been highly vocal on this practice, describing it as the exploitation of young teachers. Participants are being asked to work in highly pressurised jobs teaching future generations for an additional €50 per week, without even being given a guarantee that they will be offered employment on the back of participation in the scheme. This is nothing more than an attempt by the Department to shore up declining teacher numbers. It also constitutes, *de facto*, abolition of the minimum wage. Figures available to me indicate that, as of 1 November, 58 teaching positions have been filled under the JobBridge scheme. I ask the Minister for Social Protection or her colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, to indicate how many teachers under the JobBridge scheme will secure

full-time employment at the end of their internship. Given the nature of the education system, I do not believe any of them will be offered a job.

Young teachers who are not being exploited under the JobBridge scheme are being told their future lies elsewhere. I know of one young music teacher from Drogheda who, when she went into her local FÁS office, was told that there was a job in Madrid teaching the violin and she was advised to apply for it. That is what she was told in a centre that was there to help young people into employment. It is a scandal. It is merely another signal by the Government of an on-your-bike approach to job creation.

The outworking of the Government's economic policy, from where I stand on this side of the Chamber and from where many outside this Chamber stand, is high unemployment and emigration. The response by the Government in its amendment to my party's motion is deeply cynical. The do-nothing approach, which has been the hallmark of the Government, and the attitude of hoping that the problem will go away are quite literally working, because the problem is going away. Unfortunately, it is going away on planes and boats. It is emigrating and there is little prospect of it returning. The young people who should be contributing to economic recovery and building our future in Ireland are to be found in Australia, Canada, England and the United States.

The Government's lack of action has undermined the long-term sustainability of the economy. It has wrenched families and communities apart. However, this problem can be resolved. Our young people are looking for hope and opportunity. I genuinely hope that over the next two nights they hear some of that hope and opportunity from all sides of the House. It is not beyond the Government's capability to use some of the State's wealth - we do have some wealth - to instill that hope and deliver that opportunity. I commend the Sinn Féin motion to the House.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Some say we have a problem with unemployment in this country. In reality, we have a jobs and training crisis, a crisis which, since 2011, has resulted in approximately 150,000 young people in their 20s leaving Ireland for a decent job, a decent wage and a decent life somewhere else. They seek these needs as they are the right of everyone and are the most basic goals that we all strive to attain, but they seek them elsewhere because they are denied them in their homeland. They are cruelly denied these basic needs, first, due to the economic collapse of this State presided over by Fianna Fáil with tacit support from Fine Gael; second, because Fine Gael and the Labour Party in government have worked to stay the course of austerity started by Fianna Fáil with the bailout; and, most crucially, because they are seen as expendable and the Government has for the past two and half years been more interested in meeting bailout targets than investing in young people and their future.

Young people have been hit repeatedly by austerity. They never voted for the Governments that gave us an unstable, unequal boom and an inevitable, crushing bust, and they never cheered for the kinds of policy that landed us here, yet they are so harshly made to pay the price. Not only have they been treated harshly, they have been insulted most despicably by the Labour Party Ministers who treat them as lazy, feckless leeches who would rather watch daytime television and live on a pittance than work for a decent wage. The truth is that our young people are working, but they do so in London, Sydney, Liverpool, Melbourne and Toronto. The truth is that our young people want training, but they want it to be accessible and useful. They want it to lead them somewhere.

Young people are not stupid and they are rightly insulted by dead-end courses or dole cuts

being offered while third-level fees go up and up. It sickens me to think that those who want to work and want to make their way in life are painted as lazy if they have the wit to turn their nose up at the yellow-pack rubbish such as JobBridge. Of course the Minister can wheel out the odd person who has gained real, valuable experience and ended up getting a job, but for every one of those there are hundreds of unpaid internships as potato-peelers and farm hands. In a short glance at JobBridge today I found these examples of supposed opportunities, although maybe someone will be lucky enough to get a “scam-bridge” internship within the Labour Party, gaining valuable experience in how to sell out 400,000 voters and most of one’s backbenchers for a few ministerial seats.

However, worse than all of this are the positions that require qualifications that are clear signifiers of existing experience. These are the proof, if any was needed, that Deputy English was correct when he stated that JobBridge was “free labour”. They also show that it is a tool for displacing workers and driving down wages in the long term. The opportunities have included positions as a school principal’s assistant and clerical officers in the HSE. Is it any wonder that the chair of the JobBridge steering group, the interestingly named Mr. Martin Murphy, looked for an intern in his company? I wonder whether this intern will get paid employment at the company. This might be a novel ideal for Fine Gael, but surely I am not being naive to think that some Labour Party TDs still believe that people should be paid for work. As my constituency colleague, Deputy Lyons, stated, “If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.” That is the reality of what a youth guarantee is about for the Government. Given the meagre sum being put towards this initiative, it is clear to most that the only guarantee on offer is that one can expect to be mistreated, exploited, insulted and abandoned if one stays in Ireland.

Fourteen million euro for a guarantee is very little. The Government spent as much in its attempt to abolish the Seanad. Similarly to its approach to the Seanad, the Government is intent on not tackling the issue but hoping it will just go away. The International Labour Organization stated that a real youth guarantee would cost more than twice the amount pledged by the EU. Ireland is approximately €333 million short of the investment it needs. There is no money to invest in the future of our people, but the Government was always generous when bondholders came calling.

What we have is a Government that never really set about tackling unemployment or improving access to training or education. This is a Government that decided to do everything in its power to get out of the bailout only so that it could say it had done so and pretend that really meant something, while our children emigrated and we faced decades of repaying debt we had never incurred in the first place.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Tonight I will focus on the issue of youth unemployment, underemployment and emigration, particularly its impact on young people and on the community in general in areas outside the bigger cities, such as the west and the north west, which is the area I represent.

A good many years ago when I was a young lad doing the leaving certificate in Sligo, times were hard and workers were on fairly low incomes. In those days, some had to emigrate to find paid employment, yet I can remember there was always hope for a better future. Young people such as myself could realistically hope to find paid employment locally if we did not wish to emigrate, parents could hope that their children would be able to use the education they had gained in finding employment at home, and grandparents could realistically hope that they would see their children and grandchildren grow up living someplace close to them. What have

we now? Particularly in the smaller towns and villages and in rural areas, I am afraid we have communities without hope. That is the worst the Government has done to the people of Ireland. It is bad enough to inflict austerity on people, to repeatedly cut their wages or their social welfare payments and the small additions they get, and to cut back on the public services of which they avail, but the biggest and most damaging thing the Government has done to communities and those within those communities is that it has taken hope from them.

The Government talks about how it values our young people. Frankly, that is hypocrisy. How can it value young people and then turn around and say that it will give those under 25 years €100 per week because they did not emigrate? That is what we are saying to them. We have managed to wreck the economy to the point where we are not providing jobs or an infrastructure that would support the creation of jobs, yet we are penalising the people who had nothing to do with the banking system that caused the wreckage. Young people in this country had no hand, act or part in destroying the economy. It was the fault of politicians, regulators and greedy, unscrupulous investors and bankers but the young people are having to pay.

Four months ago I received a telephone call from a young neighbour of mine who was in a pub outside Melbourne in Australia. He had counted 25 people from north County Leitrim attending a birthday party in the pub. I could not find 25 young people in a pub in my town of Manorhamilton because of the numbers who have emigrated. Years ago, emigrants sang about their love for the land of their birth. What will our young emigrants sing about the land of their birth and of the politicians who allowed this to happen? Shame on all of us for allowing this to happen. Austerity cannot fix a broken economy. It destroys real economies and if people want to know the Government's response, they should read the amendment it has moved in response to my party's motion. It is a sad day to see what it is offering our young people.

Deputy Seán Crowe: All of us in this House are frustrated at the slow pace of change. That attitude is reflected not only in Ireland, but across Europe. Every opportunity I have had to speak on this issue, whether in addressing the Taoiseach regarding meetings of the European Council or speaking at the Joint Committee on European Affairs, I have noted that there is little recognition of the crisis that faces many young people. There are discussions in Europe about the increasing rate of unemployment among young people but I do not get the sense that the issue is being addressed with urgency in meetings of the Cabinet or the Council. I do not think the difficulties facing young people across Europe are impacting on politicians. During the budget debate on how we would tackle youth unemployment, it became clear that we were not stepping up to the mark.

Like many people, I am concerned about the slow pace of implementation of the youth guarantee and the low level of investment from the Government and the European Union. This issue needs to be grabbed by the scruff of the neck and made into a priority not only for this Government, but right across Europe, because otherwise we will continue to see young people emigrating or becoming trapped by long-term unemployment. Unfortunately, I have also seen the intergenerational impact of unemployment in many estates both in my constituency and in other constituencies across the country. That is a failure of politics.

People do not want to see politicians wringing their hands or expressing sadness; they want to see action. Our motion seeks to develop a youth guarantee fund that is fit for purpose, as recommended by the National Youth Council. We seek to make youth unemployment a key priority under the Action Plan for Jobs. We would set annual targets for reducing youth unemployment and emigration and reverse the budget's cuts to the basic rate of jobseeker's allow-

ance for those under 26 years. These are practical measures. Young people want to know what we intend to deliver in regard to jobs.

We are all aware of the statistics indicating that 1,000 young people leave this State every month. However, in many constituencies young people are not emigrating to the same degree because they do not have the option. They may not have the necessary skills or education, with the result that unemployment rates are above average in certain constituencies. Even the potential hope of finding a job overseas is not offered. They are relying on what the Government and Europe can create for them.

We are told the fight against youth unemployment remains a key objective of the Government's strategy to foster growth, competitiveness and jobs but the money that is being put aside is too small to make a significant dent in youth unemployment. The National Youth Council has highlighted the Swedish model as the preferred option for Ireland and suggests it would cost an estimated €6,600 per person, or approximately €400 million, which could be provided through a combination of Exchequer funding and matching funds from the EU. The International Labour Organization has estimated that it would cost Ireland approximately €435 million to adequately fund our youth guarantee scheme. After the Paris summit, the Taoiseach stated that the scheme would now be funded to the tune of €200 million over two years, which is much less than what we believe is necessary. The Taoiseach also stated that one third of the funds would come from the Government and the remaining two thirds from the EU. That means the Government will provide €66 million, or €33 million per year. However, the Government has only allocated €14 million for the scheme in budget 2014. How will the remainder be provided?

To make matters worse, Labour Party and Fine Gael MEPs recently voted against increasing EU funding for youth employment measures. In light of what is happening not only in this country, but across Europe, why did they do this? I do not understand the logic that brought them to that decision. It is easy to see that while the Government and its MEPs can talk the talk about the youth guarantee, when it comes to real jobs, they cannot walk the walk.

Earlier this evening we discussed an issue pertaining to my own area, as well as Kildare and Clondalkin, whereby 107 jobs will be lost in Pratt and Whitney Aerospace and 408 jobs will go at Lufthansa Technik. While we are not dealing with a large number of young people, both companies employ people, including couples, who have worked with them for 20 or 30 years. These closures will have a major impact but there was no hope in the response from the Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Perry.

8 o'clock

At this stage, there is no hope for these people. We hope that young people will move into hugely skilled jobs. In 2011, the turnover of Lufthansa Technik was €205 million. It was supposedly a successful company but it is pulling out of the country.

The Government's policies for young people have been to push them towards emigration or JobBridge internships where they work full-time jobs. We know the income they receive. The announcement to cut jobseeker's benefit for those under 25 years was further proof of this. Young people aged 21 to 24 will lose almost 33% of their weekly payments, while a 25 year old will lose 25% of the payment. I do not know the impact of this in respect of other public representatives but in my constituency young people were devastated. Young people asked me how they could manage. They asked me how they could go home and say to their parents

that the payment was being cut. Many of the families were already at subsistence level. This brings about tension in the home and problems. Young people were looking for answers but I did not have answers. I did not have answers as to why it was happening. Perhaps Government Deputies from the constituency can inform people and others in the House may be able to inform their local constituents. Government Deputies have led a barrage of insults against young people, which reached the height of one Deputy blaming youth unemployment on young people sitting at home all day seven days a week watching that flat screen televisions. That was a throwaway remark made by one Deputy. Given the first real opportunity at getting a decent job, young people will jump at it. We need seriously to examine the issue. There must be additional funding and we need to come together to come up with a strategy for jobs for young people, not promises. There is an onus on us to deliver jobs. We need to provide hope. There is no potential for hope and it needs to be delivered by us all.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I commend my colleagues for bringing this important issue to the Dáil. When it comes to caring for and investing in young people, we must face it that the State's record is pretty dismal. Historically, Governments have had little tolerance for young people, particularly those who come from poorer backgrounds or who have been failed by our education system. For many people, the Labour Party's lurch to the right on social and taxation issues since entering government has been hard to take. In advance of the 2011 election, there was real hope out there that Labour would soften the worst of Fine Gael and that social justice would prevail in the coalition Government. Labour Ministers, on taking up office, soon put paid to any prospect of this. When it comes to the Labour Party's treatment of our young people, the numbers speak for themselves. Since this Government took up office, 105,000 young people have left the State. There are 18,000 fewer young people employed since Labour and Fine Gael entered government. These are startling figures. Official youth unemployment is at 30% but many thousands more are not captured in the official figures. Youth unemployment in Ireland is 17% higher than the EU average.

What is the Government response? Budget 2014 promised a paltry 4,500 additional places for young people. Last year, Labour promised 10,000 training places but has delivered only 5,500 so far. The Government's over-promised and under-delivered Action Plan for Jobs contains 275 recommended actions, of which just four relate to youth. I find this astonishing when youth unemployment and emigration is at an historic high and the Government response is to allocate just over 1% of an action plan on jobs to getting our young people back to work.

Not satisfied with those acts of negligence and merely to kick someone when they are down, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, delivers a whopping cut of 30% to young jobseekers despite promising time and again that the Labour Party would protect basic social welfare payments. So much for that. What makes this dishonesty all the more unpalatable is the absolute brass neck of the Labour Party to flounce around the capital city holding public meetings advocating the benefits of a youth guarantee, one it is actively failing to deliver on. Just two months ago, Fine Gael and Labour MEPs voted against increasing the EU budget allocation for youth employment measures. Meanwhile, at home, the Government allocated a miserly €14 million although no one, including the Minister, seems to know what exactly this drop in the ocean will be spent on or what new and additional spending, if any, is to go towards its youth guarantee.

Sinn Féin has put forward a solution to the challenge of funding an ambitious youth guarantee programme. We have proposed ring-fencing wealth tax income for jobs for young people. This would provide the necessary scale of investment to get our young people into appropriate

training and back to work yet when we raise the prospect of a wealth tax it is Labour Ministers who shout loudest against the very idea.

Deputy Joan Burton: On a point of information, the wealth tax proposal was dropped.

Deputy Joe Costello: That proposal was made last year.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: So far has the party's gaze turned to the right that it cannot even consider social and taxation policies that were once part of its DNA. My colleague has mentioned the recent musings of a Government Deputy who believes jobless young people are more interested in watching flat screen televisions than going to work. That is a pathetic attempt to conceal the Government's failure to invest in jobs, training and the huge resource our young people represent. The Government needs to change tack and drop policies that actively encourage or force young people to emigrate and provide them with a full opportunity of real work in real jobs in their home area. I conclude by commending the "We're not Leaving" campaign and congratulating it on the success of the young people's assembly held earlier this month in Dublin.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: In 1987, the activist Raymond Crotty wrote a book entitled *Ireland in Crisis: A Study in Capitalist Colonial Underdevelopment*. He revealed that, from the foundation of the State until the period he wrote the book, half of all Irish citizens who survived childhood had left the State and emigrated. That is a horrendous figure.

What is the real manifestation of it in communities? I can only talk about my community but I will, in the first instance, talk of my family. My grandfather had to leave his home and work on building sites across England, be apart from his wife and bring back the money to build a modest home in Buncrana. He was away for long periods, leaving behind a heartbroken wife and family. That was not just his story but that of his community. When it came to my father's time, he left his home town of Buncrana before he was 15 years of age to work on the building sites in England to become a man long before his time working in steel fixing and hard labour. Almost all of his peers, all young people in his school photograph, followed that path of emigration to Britain. When it came to my time, I had to leave when I was younger to get work. That has been the story of rural communities throughout the history of the State. That has been our reality.

In Donegal today, once again the spectre and dark cloud of emigration hangs over us, as 49% of our young people between the age of 18 and 24 are unemployed, according to CSO figures. That masks major emigration in all those communities from the Inishowen peninsula, where I come from, as well as in the north, west and south of Donegal. Every GAA team and soccer team can tell a story of struggling to continue to field senior teams, and there has been a loss of a whole generation of our young people because of a failure of political leaders in the economic crisis. It comes despite the debates and issues we have rehearsed in this forum. That is the scale of the crisis and the reality in the community I come from. I have no doubt the Minister is aware of this as representatives of Fine Gael and Labour are in those communities as well. We all feel the same.

Everybody watches "Reeling in the Years" on television and from time to time I have seen images of the current leadership of the Labour Party when they were student leaders. They were young idealists and people who promised to change Ireland from what had come before it, the Ireland Raymond Crotty had so painfully painted in his book *Ireland in Crisis*. The cur-

rent leadership of the Labour Party are in power after what was an unquestionably incompetent Government left us in the way that it did. Nevertheless, the Labour leaders have made abhorrent decisions and choices, looking to allocate €14 million to a youth guarantee scheme while at the same time cutting three times that amount to the youth dole. That reduced some young people's payments to €100 per week. To recap, €14 million has been put to the youth guarantee and tackling the crisis I have outlined along with everybody else. The Government has implemented cuts totalling three times that amount to the dole.

How can the Labour leaders look back to the young activists they were, remembering days of idealism and promise in the Labour Party, while they stand over what has been done? At what point will they admit that it would take €400 million to really have a youth guarantee and keep our young people here, reversing a trend that has occurred throughout our history. That is what it would take and the Government has the power to act. It is about choices. The Government used to blame the troika but it is not here any more; the Government definitely has nobody to blame. The justifications have rung hollow and there is no more room for them.

The Minister must explain this to the next generation of Labour Party activists, who have put a vote of no confidence in the party leadership. They will have to explain how this issue will be changed and how the Labour Party will return to the young people at its roots and the images we have seen in the images of "Reeling in the Years". It is a challenge and the Government has two more years. I appeal to the Labour Party to work with us and others on the left who want to give hope to these young people and provide a future for them. It is a choice and I hope the Government acts on it in the next two years.

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"notes that:

- the number of people in employment grew by 34,000 in the year ending June 2013, compared with a reduction of employment of more than 300,000 in the three year period ending March 2011;

- the rate of unemployment in Ireland has fallen to 13.2 per cent at the end of October 2013, down from a peak of over 15 per cent in early 2012;

- the number of people unemployed, seasonally adjusted, at the end of the second quarter of 2013 is 296,000, down 22,000 on the first quarter of 2012;

- the number of unemployed young people aged under 25, seasonally adjusted, has fallen to 60,000, a reduction of 20,000 since it peaked in 2009;

- the seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment for young people has fallen to 28 per cent in recent months, down from a peak of over 31 per cent in early 2012;

- notwithstanding these positive developments, unemployment, and in particular youth unemployment, remains a serious concern;

- the Government:

- has prioritised actions to stimulate employment creation and reduce unemploy-

19 November 2013

ment under the Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work strategies; economic recovery and employment creation resulting from these policies will be the surest way to improve the unemployment situation, both overall and for young people;

- prioritised youth unemployment as an issue to be addressed at European Union level, leading to agreement, under Ireland's Presidency, of a Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee; this recommendation calls on member states to guarantee each unemployed young person under the age of 25 a job, training or education opportunity within four months of registering as unemployed; and

- is preparing a plan for the implementation of the Recommendation commencing in 2014; the plan will build on the existing large-scale provision of training, education and work experience places for unemployed young people, and will be transmitted to the European Commission by the end of 2013;

- the cost of the existing provision for unemployed young people is substantial – estimated to have been at least €170 million in 2012 – and expanded provision will be required; initial provisions totalling €46 million have been made across several Government Departments in Budget 2014;

- in this context, it is to be welcomed that Ireland is likely to receive supporting funding from the EU, under the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Social Fund, of approximately €60 million in respect of each of the years 2014 and 2015; and

agrees that:

- the continuing growth in employment and the reduction in unemployment are to be welcomed;

- the Government should continue in its efforts to further increase employment and reduce unemployment, with a particular and urgent focus on youth unemployment;

and

- the implementation in Ireland of the Youth Guarantee, agreed under Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers, should form a pivotal part of the Government's response to the challenge of youth unemployment.

I propose to share time with Deputy Lyons.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Joan Burton: The central purpose of progressive politics is to ensure that people achieve their innate potential and reach the full extent of their capabilities. I entered politics in order to change society part by part and step by step so that ordinary men and women would have a greater chance to live a better life. Central to this effort is to ensure that we create a productive economy of work with employment for all.

The Government's determination to transform our economy towards full, fair and productive employment stands in stark contrast to the credit-fuelled Fianna Fáil casino that destroyed

this country and the culture of dependency that is central to Sinn Féin's poverty of ambition.

Listening to Sinn Féin's comments tonight, it seems that the party, in a way, does not really want young people to work, as it seems to have so little faith in them or their abilities. These competing visions are at the heart of tonight's debate and I am confident that the young men and women whose lives we seek to improve and transform stand squarely with this Government in rejecting the Opposition's delusions.

The evidence is irrefutable that youth unemployment does lasting damage to the individual and the society at large. For example, the renowned economists Bell and Blanchflower found that youth unemployment continues to impact negatively on an individual up to two decades later in a number of ways, including unemployment, health status, wages and job satisfaction. This is in contrast to unemployment in one's early thirties. They conclude that there are "permanent scars" from youth unemployment in that even a short spell of unemployment when young continues to have a harmful impact in later life. In short, the "scarring effects" of youth unemployment are a personal and societal tragedy that cannot be tolerated by any government.

Due to the severity of the current economic downturn, people in all age cohorts find themselves in a position of unemployment that they would never have contemplated. Many of our young graduates are experiencing severe difficulties in finding a demand for their skills among employers, particularly in the areas of property and construction, which have been so decimated by the recession. Side by side with the higher-skilled young jobseekers are unskilled young people who are drifting into long-term unemployment. In recent years, ESRI researchers have examined this cohort and made some stark findings about the risk factors associated with youth long-term unemployment in Ireland.

For those of us who are honest in the Chamber, one of the startling facts about Fianna Fáil's period of office in the height of the boom was the unfortunate number of families without any adult in employment, which increased dramatically. That is one of the reasons that in certain areas, including Donegal, youth unemployment, even before the recession, was quite marked. If we are having a debate, it is better to be honest about this, and I am sure the Deputies recognise that as a fact. Unsurprisingly, young men and women with previous experience of long-term unemployment, literacy or numeracy problems, no formal education qualifications and who live in large urban areas have a higher risk of becoming long-term unemployed. However for young women, additional factors, including whether they have children, spousal earnings and the number of welfare benefits that they receive all had a significantly negative effect on the probability that they would move from unemployment to employment before 12 months. Furthermore, the negative impact of these factors for young women is much larger than for women in general. These findings come from the ESRI.

This research underpins my strong conviction that we need to decisively shift the emphasis of our policy interventions for young people from passive income support alone to a renewed focus on skills, including a massive increase in numeracy and literacy. We also need to ensure that the benefits system does not become an obstacle to young people seeking employment. It is really important to have an honest debate about this.

When the Government took office in 2011, the unemployment rate was approaching 15%, with 500,000 people on the live register and youth unemployment levels perilously high and facing an upward trajectory. That was Fianna Fáil's legacy which was a difficult one for the incoming Government. In October this year the live register fell below 400,000 for the first time since 2009.

I wish to correct some of the figures given for youth unemployment. I cite the figures from the Central Statistics Office. The rate is 28%. The average number of young people unemployed in the first half of 2013 was approximately 59,000, down by 11,000 in 12 months. The unemployment rate for young people in the first half of the year was 28%, down from 31% in 2012.

Deputy Jonathan O'Brien: Why?

Deputy Joan Burton: In the three years before the Government took office in March 2011 the number of people in employment fell by 300,000, one of the worst employment shocks any country had ever experienced following on from the disastrous bank guarantee. The number of people in employment has started to grow again and rose by 33,800 in the year ending in June 2013. In terms of the economy, that is a positive development. While there are still far too many people unemployed, both young and older, the trend is moving slowly but surely in the right direction. It is not moving as quickly as I would like, but it is moving in the right direction. This has had a beneficial impact on young people because the downward movement to a 28% youth unemployment rate in the first half of 2013 has bucked the trend in the European Union as a whole, in which youth unemployment has continued to rise. I am confident these positive trends will continue as the economy recovers. It is not fast enough for me and the Labour Party, but we are slowly but surely improving the situation.

Notwithstanding this return to growth, there is a requirement for specific national and EU-wide strategies to address the youth unemployment problem. The best way for young people to reach their potential is through decent, secure and fairly paid work. That has been my abiding political conviction since I first entered politics and it has informed me throughout my career. Sadly, we live in a world in which the availability of decent, secure and fairly paid work has contracted massively since the financial crisis. In addition to the scarring effect, there is an even more insidious aspect to youth unemployment - the bias and discrimination those who are unfortunate enough to be unemployed face in re-entering the labour market. Employers have a significant job to do in this country and on the island to get young people back to work. They have a critical role to play. My attention was recently drawn to US research which had found that employers would rather call back someone with no relevant experience who had been out of work for a few months than someone with lots of relevant experience who had been out of work for longer than six months. In other words, it does not matter sometimes how much experience one has. It does not matter why one lost one's previous job; it could have been bad luck because one's firm closed down and it had nothing to do with the individual. If a person has been out of work for more than six months, one faces an enormous uphill struggle to return to employment. That is particularly the case for young people who have never had a job or have limited work experience. That is why I have long advocated a formal guarantee that any young person will receive training, work experience or an apprenticeship within a short period of becoming unemployed.

The Government and the Department of Social Protection were at the forefront of securing agreement on the adoption of the European Council's recommendation on the youth guarantee. I decided to prioritise the recommendation as part of Ireland's EU Presidency knowing that it set a significant target to achieve. It was not a case of running away and criticising but setting targets for achievements for young people. That was agreed at the meeting of social affairs and employment Ministers on 28 February in Dublin Castle under my chairmanship and formally adopted by the European Council in April. The recommendation urges member states to ensure all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, contin-

ued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

As part of the European Council's agreement on the EU budget for the period 2014 to 2020 it was decided, in association with the agreement on the youth guarantee, to provide €6 billion for a new youth employment initiative for regions with particularly high levels of youth unemployment. This funding will consist of €3 billion from the European Social Fund and an additional €3 billion from a new youth employment budget line. While it is recommended that the guarantee be implemented as soon as possible, it is recognised that implementation might be more gradual in some member states experiencing the most severe budgetary difficulties and higher rates of youth unemployment. At EU level, the Irish Presidency pushed for early production of implementation plans in all member states and payment of the €6 billion youth employment initiative to be front-loaded, in particular in the next two years, 2014 and 2015. Both suggestions were taken up by member states such as Ireland hoping to benefit from the youth employment initiative. As required, we are producing implementation plans by the end of this year and the remaining member states will produce their plans by next April. The €6 billion youth employment initiative is being front-loaded as suggested by this country. For our part, the Government is reviewing the current range of youth employment policies in Ireland to assess what measures will need to be taken to commence implementation of the guarantee. In line with other member states benefiting from the youth employment initiative, we intend to produce a concrete plan for implementation of the guarantee before the end of this year when it is to be formally decided and agreed to by the Heads of State.

Ireland was successfully awarded funding from the European Commission for a pilot youth guarantee project in Ballymun earlier this year. Numerous stakeholder organisations such as IBEC, Ballymun Job Centre and the National Youth Council of Ireland have agreed to participate in the pilot project. The Government has commissioned the OECD to assist in developing a youth guarantee implementation plan. It has been asked to identify best international practice and how it might best be applied to Ireland. The development plan will be completed before the end of the year in time for the commencement of the 2014 budget. The Taoiseach and I spent a day in Paris last week meeting our counterparts, the Ministers for social affairs and employment and the respective Heads of State in a series of discussions under the aegis of the French President and my counterpart, the Minister for employment and social affairs, which confirmed continued support for the youth guarantee with a view to implementing the programme in 2014.

It is important to recognise that we already operate a number of programmes to assist young unemployed persons and keep young jobseekers close to the labour market. Five main approaches are being taken to tackle youth unemployment: education, training, job search assistance and guidance, work experience and encouraging job creation. These actions range across a number of Departments and agencies and include the JobBridge national internship scheme overseen by the Department of Social Protection which is focused on providing work experience for young people aged under 26 years. A recent independent evaluation of the scheme by Indecon Economic Consultants indicates that three out of five of those who complete their internships subsequently progress into paid employment. This 61% progression rate is one of the best outcomes for such a scheme anywhere in Europe. Thirty-three thousand people have been involved in JobBridge, which is entirely voluntary. More than 9,000 firms and organisations have offered to host JobBridge internships. Both figures are quite remarkable in such a short period.

With regard to education and training, the Youthreach programme provides 6,000 inte-

grated education, training and work experience places for early school leavers without qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. The back to education allowance scheme run by the Department of Social Protection provides income maintenance for unemployed people returning to further or higher education. More than 6,500 young people participated on this scheme in the previous academic year. There have been well over 20,000 participants overall.

Approximately 12,000 persons aged under 25 completed a training course with FÁS in 2012. This excludes apprenticeships and evening courses, which are additional. This year, MOMENTUM, a scheme for education and training interventions that is part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs initiative, has been rolled out by the Department of Education and Skills.

A new recruitment incentive called JobsPlus, established in July, has been developed by the Department of Social Protection. Under this scheme, employers will receive an incentive of €7,500 for recruiting a person unemployed for between 12 and 24 months, and an incentive of €10,000 for recruiting a person unemployed for two years or more, paid monthly by electronic funds transfer for each month of employment the employer gives. At a typical starting wage, this incentive covers the cost of approximately €1 in every €4 of an employer's wage costs. This mirrors what happens in countries such as Austria where there is a direct wage subsidy to the employer. Young people are likely to be major beneficiaries of this initiative as employers tend to hire young people when there is a recovery in employment. From 1 January, the scheme will be open to any young person under 26 who is unemployed for more than six months. There will be much interest among employers.

The scale and nature of any additional measures required for the implementation of a guarantee at national level will depend on the trend in youth unemployment and, in particular, the number of young people likely to experience periods of unemployment of more than four months under current policies. While recent trends have been positive in this regard, the implementation of a guarantee will almost certainly require an expansion in the range of opportunities on offer to young people in the form of further education and training internships, subsidised private sector recruitment and supports for self-employment. Expenditure on these programmes is substantial. It is estimated that the cost of participation on relevant programmes by unemployed young people in 2012 exceeded €170 million. This relates only to programmes aimed primarily at the registered unemployed. There was substantial further expenditure on schemes such as Youthreach, which is aimed primarily at younger early school leavers.

As I stated, we are extending JobBridge to those who are unemployed for just six months and in the relevant age group. An additional 1,500 young people will be allocated positions under the scheme. We are ensuring an additional 1,000 places on the Tús scheme. We are developing a pilot programme to support young unemployed people under EURES. Some 2,000 training places for under-25s are being ring-fenced by the Department of Education and Skills under the MOMENTUM programme, and we are starting a young entrepreneurs programme through the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. In total, the provision across these headings in the 2014 budget is €46 million. I am not quite sure where the Sinn Féin figure came from. I suspect it is one figure in the budget of the Department of Social Protection alone. I can check it for the Deputies. I believe their figure is erroneous.

I look forward to the negotiations reaching a successful conclusion. Next year, we will be spending close to €100 million on the relevant programmes in addition to what we have been

spending. I look forward to young people getting a series of expanded opportunities.

Deputy John Lyons: I have a question for Sinn Féin, which tabled this motion. How important is youth employment to it really? Although its budget proposal states on page 26 that it would ring-fence money obtained from a wealth tax for jobs for young people, Deputy Pearse Doherty, the party's spokesman on finance, stated in an article in *The Irish Times* on 22 September that Sinn Féin's proposed wealth tax, which it would use to create jobs for people, would not be included in its alternative budget this year. If Sinn Féin is genuinely concerned about doing something for young people who are out of work, why was this measure put in an addendum as opposed to its being included among the real budget figures the party presented? The difference between Sinn Féin and us is we included our measure in a budgetary submission. We are doing something. It is disingenuous to state what one would do and yet not include that as part of this year's budget proposal. If youth unemployment is so important to Sinn Féin, why did it not include its figures on the wealth tax in its proposals instead of another provision that it did include? I am a little perturbed by that. There is some running with the fox and hunting with the hounds on the part of Sinn Féin.

With the exception of Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Seán Crowe, most Sinn Féin Members came into the House and read entirely from a script. There is not a bit of passion about the issue at all. It seems Deputies Mac Lochlainn and Crowe were definitely able to speak from experience, which stood out. I speak from experience also, but I believe it is very insulting for a Member to come into the House and pretend to care so much about an issue while having included that issue as a mere addendum in his party's alternative budget.

The reality is we have to deal in facts. Some 8,000 jobs were lost per month before we came into government. Some 3,000 jobs per month are being created at present. This is not ideal but it is better by far than the set of circumstances we inherited. Every Member would agree it is highly unacceptable to have 59,000 unemployed young people, but the difference is we are doing something about it.

The Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, mentioned that during the Irish Presidency, she fought for the youth guarantee to be EU policy, and it is EU policy. The Minister also fought for the money to be front-loaded in order that we could deal with the unemployment issue over the first two years of the new budget rather than over a budgetary term of seven years. This is not ideal but we are doing as much as we can. The areas the Deputy opposite and I represent are quite similar. As mentioned by the Minister, there is a startling issue whereby there are second generation jobless households. Many in the area I represent have never had anybody in their family work.

A decision was made on the rate of jobseeker's allowance for new entrants from 1 January. I do not like it but the reality is we are spending twice as much as we are saving by making the reduction. As a teacher who worked for 13 years in two disadvantaged schools, I believe the children there are equal to others and could be as motivated to reach their full potential if given the right resources. If any one of the pupils, who are adults when leaving school, were to come to me and did not know what to do and did not have a place in college, I would tell him to get into education and training. I would not tell him to do anything else because I know the value of education and training and that they create opportunities and open doors that would not otherwise be opened. The reality is that the people the Deputies opposite and I care about are those whom I want to have the best opportunities in life. The best opportunity is afforded to somebody by giving him or her the possibility of education and training. This is why the addi-

tional money is being used to create additional spaces. It is in order that the people about whom we all care and for whom we want to ensure a fairer society will have that opportunity. Some will say that the jobs are simply not there for everybody at the moment, and we all know that is true. However, we know there is a momentum building in the context of job creation. We also know from research that the next best thing we can do for those who are unemployed is to keep them close to the labour market. That means giving them a reason to get up every day, a sense of dignity in their lives and a sense that their community and their State cares about them. That is the purpose of the youth guarantee and the various youth employment initiatives. The aim is to create opportunities for young people under the age of 25 who find themselves, unfortunately and through no fault of their own, out of work for more than four months. We know from the projected figures for next year for people under the age of 25 who are out of work that there will be sufficient places, due to the additional 20,000 places that will be provided from January 2014 as well as the existing 60,000 places for jobseekers. I have no doubt that places will be found for everyone seeking to improve his or her quality of life. That is why we are doing this. That is also why I have been speaking about this since before I became a Deputy. I pushed the whole idea of a youth guarantee in this House long before anyone else did. Lots of people followed afterwards when it became popular, not only in Deputy Mac Lochlainn's party but in other parties too. We are taking action. We are trying our best and making a difference. Do we have infinite resources? No, we do not, but we have to deal with reality we face.

We should be judged on what we have done and any debate on this issue should be based on facts and figures and nothing else. In that context, we must have a debate at some future date on emigration. Figures were mentioned here this evening that I would dispute. I agree that emigration is unfortunate, and nobody wants to see a family member or a neighbour leave this country. However, the figures that were bounced around here tonight do not show the real impact of emigration. Nobody referred to the fact, for example, that 5,000 people migrated back to Ireland from Australia this year.

Deputy Willie O'Dea: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this very important motion, which I am happy to support. Possibly the biggest challenge facing the European Union at the moment is youth unemployment, which is economically destructive and socially corrosive. There are more than 5.5 million young people under the age of 25 throughout the EU who are without jobs. In the lead-up to the Irish Presidency we had several jamborees, pronouncements and newspaper interviews in which the Minister for Social Protection was central, telling us that she was going to propose a youth guarantee to her colleagues in the EU during the course of Ireland's Presidency. She said she was going to take charge of it and that it would be a scheme to end all schemes. It was the subject of several newspaper articles, particularly in Sunday newspapers; I stopped counting after four but I am sure there were more than that. The net result of all that boasting and all those acres of newsprint was a commitment or pledge by the European Union of €6 billion for a youth guarantee scheme. One does not have to be a mathematical genius to know that if there are more than 5.5 million people unemployed, a sum of €6 billion to be spent over seven years equates to less than €200 per annum per person. That demonstrates a distinct lack of will on the part of the EU. An attempt was made in the European Parliament to increase that figure substantially but that was inexplicably voted down, with the assistance of MEPs from Fine Gael and the Labour Party. That is a matter of public record.

In view of the lack of will on the part of the EU, each nation state is thrown back on its own resources. As evidence of its commitment, the Irish Government, in its wisdom, decided to allocate the princely sum of €14 million for a youth guarantee scheme here - that is, to guar-

antee everyone under the age of 25 who is unemployed for more than four months either a job, education or training. The sum of €14 million equates to €211 per annum for each individual who falls into the aforementioned category. The experts, including those in the International Labour Organization and the National Youth Council of Ireland, tell us that to have a proper youth guarantee scheme in this country along the lines of the one operating in Sweden would require an investment of more than €400 million. I believe the figure cited was €420 million. We are providing a mere 2% of that figure. The Government would be more honest if, instead of spreading €14 million across all of those under 25 who are unemployed, it gave a guarantee to two out of every 100, because that is exactly what the funding will cover.

The official unemployment rate in this country is 13.2%, while the figure for youth unemployment is in the region of 30%, which is considerably higher than the European average. However, those official figures mean less and less. They fail to take into account, for example, emigration. Gross emigration from this country in the last 12 months ran at a rate of 1,600 per week, which is well in excess of 200 people per day. The true rate is also masked by the fact that a lot of those people under the age of 25 who are in jobs fall into the category of the underemployed. Many of them are in part-time jobs. I know some people who are officially registered as employed but have only a very marginal connection to the workforce. Furthermore, the figures for youth unemployment also fail to take into account the fact that there are many people who are not in a job, education or training who are not picked up by the system at all. The most reliable statistic we can use is that three or four years ago 16% of the Irish population was under the age of 25. That cohort has fallen by a quarter, to 12%, which is proof positive, if proof were needed, that the youth are voting with their feet and leaving the country.

The Irish Organisation for the Unemployed has said that the way to encourage young people and stop them drifting into long-term unemployment is to have a proper activation system, not to be cutting their social welfare payments. Everybody, including the OECD, the IMF and the European Commission, knows that the activation system we have here is nothing short of a joke. The Minister for Social Protection spoke about honesty, but does any Deputy on any side of this House honestly believe that the current activation system is working? How many people have been taken off the live register? The Taoiseach said that 100,000 would be taken off the live register within 18 months. How could this work when there is only one case worker for every 800 people who are unemployed? How could that system possibly work? The Government policy has been to cut social welfare benefits for young people. How does cutting the unemployment benefits of those who have plenty of qualifications and do not need any further education or training help the economy or create more employment? How does it help to cut the social welfare benefit for a young person because he or she cannot access a non-existent training or education place? The Government's policy on youth unemployment is, like its policy in so many other areas, a triumph of spin over substance. However, it is not really a triumph at all because in this area in particular, that spin will dissolve on its first contact with reality. The young people of this country know that their benefits have been cut for an excuse that is nothing short of a fig leaf. They also know that the Government's policy on young people is to hurry them along to the nearest airport, even giving them directions and getting jobs for them in Canada so that the unemployment figures will look better. It is a case of spin over substance, but the Government should bear one thing in mind. When the time comes, it will be on the substance they will be judged, not the spin.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I also thank Deputies Mac Lochlainn and Crowe for submitting their motion this evening because it gives us an opportunity to reflect on this subject. I have

consistently welcomed the youth guarantee and welcomed the promise of that guarantee. In fairness to Deputy John Lyons, he was the first person to debate that concept, and during meetings of the Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation he has been a very passionate advocate of the guarantee. He has put an enormous amount of work into it. However, my concern all along regarding the youth guarantee, which is now being realised, is the funding issue. I also concerned that the silo mentality of the Government and its predecessors still predominates and the guarantee will be its latest victim. The Department of Social Protection will ring-fence its resources and it will not share information or resources with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation while neither of them will bother talking to the Department of Education and Skills. The guarantee, even if it was properly funded, still would not have the impact it could because of the way of we do government. The Government is making little effort to try to break down those silos. When 59,000 people under the age of 25 are out of work and seeking an employment opportunity, what more incentive does one want to tear down those walls? The youth guarantee is the vehicle to do this and it provides a perfect excuse to do so. This is the opportunity but the ink is hardly dry on our EU Presidency and the guarantee is running into funding difficulties.

I was critical of the Taoiseach last week for heading off to Paris. The Minister boasted about being in Paris earlier yet there are funding issues here. As Deputy O’Dea said, the European funding is inadequate but responsibility for the impact of the funding issue on the 59,000 young people in Ireland lies in Dublin. It is beyond me why we have a national training fund with €112 million sitting in it and we are squabbling over funding the youth guarantee. The purpose of the fund is to enable people to take upskilling opportunities to become skill ready for the labour market and gain employment. When they are in employment, their employer makes a contribution to the fund and, therefore, it is self-paying and self-fulfilling.

Many sectors are crying out for labour, one of which is tourism and hospitality. The Restaurants Association of Ireland has an ambitious proposal to train chefs because there is a shortage in the economy. On the one hand, the Government is investing significant money with, for example, the 9% VAT rate costing the Exchequer €330 million but, on the other, it does not have the money to train chefs. This is a perfect example of the silos to which I referred. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has a need but it will not talk to the Departments of Education and Skills or Social Protection about funding that need or funding a small plan that could train 5,000 young people not only to have a job in the hospitality industry, but a long-term career. CERT was subsumed by Fáilte Ireland a number of years ago. It used to provide hospitality training and at this time of the year when hotels closed seasonally, they were often turned around to provide training opportunities. Many hotels are closed for other reasons now and they would be perfect for doing this but Fáilte Ireland is getting out of hospitality training and leaving it up to the Department of Social Protection and the private sector to provide training. This is an example of a demand for employment but resources are missing, even though they are sitting in a fund. They would be targeted properly if there was a plan behind the ambition of the youth guarantee.

We all share that ambition and we all want it to work out. Deputy Lyons referred to second generation unemployment and I can point to families with third generation unemployment. We need to break that cycle. We need to show that employment is good and creates opportunities. However, without skills, one will not secure employment. If we are honest about this, the ambition of the youth guarantee will be watered down in funding rows between Departments and it will be seen as another missed opportunity with more spin than substance in the context of

what needs to be done.

The Minister of State has a personal involvement in the guarantee, which needs to be fought for. Somebody in Cabinet needs to stand up. The Minister's contribution earlier was mostly along the lines of her creating the world in the first six days and resting on the seventh.

Deputy Joe Costello: So did God. There is no five-day week for the Minister.

Deputy Dara Calleary: It was only towards the end of her contribution that she referred to the substance of the motion. I always find it ironic when she lectures us about responsible opposition having listened to her between 2007 and 2011. The Minister lecturing about responsible opposition is like Silvio Berlusconi lecturing about fidelity and compliance. When she was on this side of the House, responsible opposition was about getting her elected and bringing a few party colleagues with her. She abused the Opposition earlier and did not acknowledge the ambition of the youth guarantee. We all buy into, believe and support that but the implementation of the guarantee is weak and it is being let down. She has resources at her disposal if she is willing to use them. She loves lecturing employers. She tells them that they have a critical role and that is the case but by forcing them to cover additional sick pay and abolishing the redundancy rebate they used to receive them with her Department targeting them in the past three budgets, she is taking away their ability to play that role to give opportunities to people.

She has introduced good schemes, including JobsPlus, but they are the equivalent of putting a finger in a dam. Perhaps whoever responds on behalf of the Government will reply tomorrow about why the national training fund is not being used. Why are Ministers not acknowledging there is a problem with 59,000 people needing an opportunity when there are resources which should be matched to them but this is not happening? If they did, we might begin to believe the ministerial spin. If anything comes out of the debate, at least I hope I get an answer to that question and a commitment on the part of the Government parties to not just spin the guarantee, but to implement it and to say to the 59,000 people aged under 25 who do not have an opportunity that they believe in them and that their future lies in Ireland, not in Canada.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I was struck by the questions asked during Leaders' Questions earlier. A recurring theme is the excessive salaries paid to executives in organisations. It is still not clear whether the top-up salaries came from their fund-raising activities, which involve tremendous work on the part of parents, volunteers and friends of the organisations. They see this as funding for essential services but we do not know if that is the case. In addition, there were newspaper reports at the weekend about the case of the wife of a recently discharged bankrupt. The judge felt that €9,000 a month for living expenses was appropriate but this is being funded by the taxpayer. There is a disconnect between those issues and this issue in the context of available funding.

We are discussing the implications for young people when it comes to unemployment. Budget 2014 provided €14 million for the youth guarantee scheme but international parallels with countries where similar schemes are in operation show that much more is necessary if it is to have any chance of success. Many young people are emigrating. We must consider the cost to the State of putting these articulate, bright, highly skilled young people through second and third level education and even postgraduate education and of losing the various skilled tradespeople whom we will need who are leaving the State. Those skills and knowledge will benefit other economies.

The Government amendment states the unemployment rate has fallen. While this is always welcome, how much is due to emigration? There is a need to examine the correlation between the numbers who have emigrated and the fall in unemployment. The youth guarantee will work if it is properly and adequately resourced. Everybody hopes it will be but there are serious doubts on the part of organisations that work with young people. They estimate only half of the places needed will be available next year. The Minister of State and I represent the same constituency and we are both aware of the problem of homelessness among young people. Will this be added to? Once people enter emergency accommodation, they are unable to access education and training, and cutting welfare payments will add to the problem, not solve it.

The youth guarantee scheme reduced youth unemployment and inactivity in Sweden and Finland but only among the short-term unemployed. There is the Action Plan for Jobs and the Pathways to Work strategy but there must be more emphasis on action.

9 o'clock

Deputy Joan Collins: In supporting this motion, I want to put particular emphasis on the demand to reverse the cuts to jobseeker's allowance for those under 26. This €32 million cut was presented cynically as a jobs-activation measure, to quote the Government, "to ensure young people are better off in education, employment or training than claiming". The implication is that we have a country full of work-shy youngsters, who as Deputy Eamonn Maloney of Labour disgracefully said during the budget debate, are "sitting around watching their flat-screen TVs, seven-days a week."

There is no evidence to back up these slurs on our young unemployed people. The fact is 85% of those aged between 18 and 24 on the live register had previously worked. When the jobs were there, even with low pay and poor conditions, young people were prepared to work. The problem is not a lack of motivation but, simply, that the jobs are not there. There are 32 unemployed people for every job vacancy in the economy. The impression is also given that young people do not need this money. The reality is that jobseeker's allowance is means-tested which can include the income of a partner or a spouse, as well as the benefit of living with parents. To gain the allowance, one must need it.

According to EUROSTAT in 2011, 42% of 18 to 24 year olds were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For those living at home, this cut is yet another cut in family income. The rate of unemployment or jobs availability varies across the country. Many people outside major urban areas have to move to find work. This measure is a real disincentive in this regard. Is the real measure from the Government to ensure young people consider they are better off migrating rather than claiming? Even the Nevin Economic and Research Institute, NERI, has stated the cut to jobseeker's allowance is a blunt instrument used against our youth. The stated aim is to ensure younger workers are better off working or in further education. The notion that the young are work-shy is clearly not supported by the evidence, however. It is shameful that the Government claims to have saved €32 million through this cut. It should be instead creating jobs, education and training places while maintaining the protection of jobseeker's allowance for those under 26.

Debate adjourned.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.05 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 20 November 2013.