

Submission to the Public Sector Pay commission.

By People before Profit TDs

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1. The People before Profit Alliance want at the outset to state that it has little faith in this commission arriving at the same conclusions that we have. We are submitting this for the record and to state in the clearest terms possible how appallingly this and previous Governments have treated both public Sector workers and the public sector in general.
2. At the very start of the 2008 economic crash, many commentators aided by the previous Fianna Fail/ Green administration spun a narrative that the problem with the public finances was the overpaid and over staffed public services. The nurse, teacher, guard, and countless others were targeted and scapegoated in a deliberate fashion. Various reports were marshalled to prove how we couldn't afford to pay public sector workers basic entitlements that previous generation of workers had fought for and won; a secure job, a pension, a sick scheme and access to decent union representation. Suddenly these workers, not bankers, financiers, or developers were enemy number one.
3. That pretence has been kept up by the two subsequent administrations. The reality, which this commission is well aware of ,is that the vast bulk of our public servants are underpaid, overworked, subject to ever diminishing conditions of employment and that in stark contrast to the rhetoric neither their pay nor numbers are inflated in comparison with other northern European economies.
4. The desperate search in previous reports to prove that pay rates and numbers in our public service are outliers in comparison with other

jurisdictions is a politically driven exercise to justify savage attacks on the workers as well as on the very idea of a public service.

5. Any report or recommendation based on comparisons with elsewhere will do well to factor the immense difficulties workers in this state face; rents that have risen by 30 -40% since 2011, the unaffordability of housing, the true and hidden cost of our “free” education system, the high costs of our “free” health care system as well as the astronomical rises in GP cost, private health care, public transport fares, etc. etc. All at a time when, over eight years, there has been only wage freezes, cuts and increases in stealth taxes.
6. We would also highlight the effects that the past cuts have had on various conditions previously enjoyed by public sector workers and how these have impacted especially on low paid grades within the service and especially on woman with children. So past family friendly policies that allowed certain flexibilities in working rosters have been ditched. New recruits will remain on just the statutory minimum of 21 days holidays per year. Any comparison with other jurisdictions might do well to examine how the number of public holidays and annual leave compares there to here as well as the availability of a sick scheme. If any report from this commission negates or selectively picks the true costs of living in this state it will be treated with the derision it deserves from the workers whom it purports to examine.
7. Similarly, as part of the concerted attack on the public sector, there has been an attempt to compare it unfavourably with the private sector. Where evidence could be found of private sector workers been subject to

more pain, it was used to justify further attacks on the public sector. Again we repeat; a secure job, a pension that safeguards your retirement years from poverty, access to health and sick schemes; these are not “gold plated conditions” but the entitlement of every worker. That the balance between workers’ rights and employers rights has been so lopsided over recent decades cannot be taken as a justification for extending those conditions now so common in the private sector to state employees and the public sector. The appalling abuses of workers under “zero hours”, “if and when contracts”, or bogus self-employment ruses and the driving down of wages to the minimum legally required are not the basis on which any society can go forward and must be rejected as a rational for how we should organise our public sector. Indeed we would argue that the attacks on the public sector are part of a wider pattern of attacks on all workers in this state. For some employers and those in higher echelons of our society the very idea of a secure job and pension or indeed of a trade union to represent you is anathema. We therefore reject the politically motivated false comparisons with the private sector. The bizarre logic seems to be that if one sector has decimated its workers right to a pension and secure employment, then this is the ideal level to which we aspire to place all workers.

We therefore propose to the commission that the very minimal steps it should recommend are as follows;

1. The immediate repeal of all Fempি legislation and their attendant cuts to pay and conditions

Far from the doomsday scenarios painted by apologists for this draconian legislation, any monies returned to public sector workers will be spent in this economy and will help this economy. The actual cost, taking in account the return to the state in taxes etc, as opposed to the headline figures is thus not as astronomical as many would pretend. The precedent of a Government legislating to cut pay, pensions and conditions of its own employees is an abuse of the parliamentary system and basic democratic rights of workers. The Fempি act continues to be abused by the present Government as is evident in its use to browbeat trade unions who have refused to embrace the Haddington Road and Lansdowne road agreements. This legislation is an attack on workers right to collective bargaining and as long as it remains it will be used by Government's to force public sector workers into agreements. Witness the present bullying of ASTI and other unions.

We would also point out the following to the commission;

The largest cohort of public sector workers earns fewer than 40,000 euros per year. Over 248,000 public sector workers earn less than 60,000 euros per year. These workers have suffered a gross loss in income over the years of Fempি and the pension levy of over

16,000 euro for someone on 30,000 per year

38,000 euro for someone on 50,000 per year,

Even with the present “unwinding” of Fempি that this Government proposes, the average worker will still, by 2018 be earning anything from 1,500 to 2000 euro less per year compared to 2009. So even with the Governments proposed steps toward what they deem a “fair and just” correction for public sector workers earnings, the reality would be that over the next two years a public sector worker on

30 000 euro will *still* lose 2700 euro,

40,000 euro will *still* lose 8500 euro

50,000 euro will *still* lose 18,000 euro

compared to what they would have earned in 2009. How this is “just or fair” escapes us.

Additional the continued expectation that public sector workers should effectively work many hours per month for free under the Croke Park agreement (The Croke Park hours) must end. It beggars belief that this Government and its predecessors expect, for example, a nurse in a underfunded hospital, facing huge stress and difficulties of overcrowding in wards and A& E departments, and having already seen their salaries cut are then asked effectively to work a shift per month for free.

While the Government has been lauding its achievements in exiting the financial emergency and restoring growth to the economy, it remains an insult to public sector workers to have legislation on the statute books which continues to drain income from them and is only constitutionally possible because a Minister must pretend that a fictitious financial emergency continues.

2. The reversal of cuts to starting salaries of all public sector workers.

Cuts to the salaries of newly qualified public sector staff are having a corrosive effect on both moral of workers and on the service provided to the public. In key areas such as health and education it is difficult to retain qualified workers. The scale of the cuts in both 2010 and again in 2011/2012, and the removal of various conditions allowances (such as supervision and substitution in teaching) have created a two and even three tier workforce with the same work being done by workers in the same workplace but on hugely different wages and conditions. This must end and end immediately. The scale of pay inequality in all of the public service has reached scandalous levels. It is estimated that a newly qualified teacher for example will lose in the region of 250,000 euro plus over their career compared to a fellow worker who may have started just a few years before,

In teaching, the withdrawal of payments for substitution and supervision is costing workers €1,769 per year (or €1,592 per year for those who are on the post-2011 pay scale) for each of the last 3 years. Similarly the loss of qualification allowances not only discriminates against newly qualified staff but is a strong disincentive to workers to improve their skills.

Such measures were short sighted and targeted vulnerable workers with no recourse to defend themselves against such attacks. They remain grossly

unfair and an insult to basic trade union principals' and workers' rights. Whatever justification previous administrations sought for them cannot be used today and they should be ended immediately to stop them further damaging key areas of the public service.

Conclusion;

The People before Profit deputies believe that this commission is a thinly veiled exercise in political manoeuvring by the present Government and the Fianna Fail Party. It is an exercise to try to stifle the huge and mounting anger of hundreds of thousands of workers at their treatment. Its aim is to suggest that something is being done about the theft of their salaries and conditions. That, if patient, they will be rewarded with partial reinstatements of lost earnings. Provided of course they don't rock the boat or upset the present Fine Gael/ Fianna Fail partnership. The Commission may very well buy the present administration some time, it may very well return some of the stolen salaries and conditions of some public sector workers; a theft commissioned by Fianna Fail and continued by Fine Gael to pay bond holders and reckless financiers. We do not believe this commission is a vehicle that can neutrally arbitrate or deliver justice for those workers; only the collective action of workers themselves will do that.

Lastly, we would pre-empt the argument that the country cannot afford to restore public sector workers pay. Such arguments ring hollow when we remember that these cuts formed part of a collective theft of ordinary citizens to fund over 64billion in bank bail outs. While the state continues to turn a blind eye to tax avoidance and makes little effort to collect even the nominal tax rates applicable to many large business and wealthy individuals, such affordability arguments ring very hollow indeed. We would however point out that giving young teachers or nurses a boosted income is not as economically foolish as lavishing tax rebates and sweet heart deals for private equity funds or vulture capital. The teacher and nurse will pay their taxes in this state and buy goods and pay rents here. The same cannot be said of those who receive special and truly pampered treatment and to whom the state has no problem dispensing billions of euros in largess with very little return for the country's citizens,