

No more Troika, no more excuses

ON DECEMBER 15, after three years, Ireland finally left the bailout programme and the infamous Troika left our shores. The government, understandably, made great play of the Troika's departure and, indeed, the Taoiseach addressed the nation on that Sunday evening.

An immediate benefit of the Troika's departure is that we will no longer see a group of people enter the Department of Finance to tell us how to run our country. It always struck me as sad and ironic that this group were leaving a very expensive hotel, where they were staying during their visit, to tell us we had to cut an essential allowance to society's most vulnerable. The fact that the cost of one night in said hotel was equal to two or three weeks of the allowance they wanted to cut never seemed to dawn on them.

The departure of the Troika and the ending of the bailout programme gives our country back an enhanced degree of economic sovereignty. The government can no longer use the ready-made excuse of "we have to do this because the Troika says so". It now has the opportunity to implement policies that acknowledge our right to be a society and not just an economy.

So, what will our government do with this greater degree of independence and what choices will it make to ensure that ordinary families have hope; that our school leavers can expect to gain employ-

ment; and that our public services are fit for purpose?

A first positive step for the government would be to acknowledge that public servants, including nurses and midwives, play an essential, crucial and priceless role in Irish society – they are not a drain on resources or a waste of taxpayers' money. This could be done, in the short term, by ensuring that workloads are manageable, standards are exemplary and the long-standing threat of further cuts in pay and conditions are permanently removed.

Free now from the vested interests of Europe protecting banks and multinationals, the government could widen our tax base (this does not mean increasing taxation upon low and middle incomes). This would allow us to increase our tax revenue and maintain essential public services for low and middle income families.

The wealthy will always be able to access essential services, whether in education or health, but the vast bulk of the population must rely on the State to provide these services.

To do this we must adequately fund health and education by raising taxation, directly and indirectly, on those who can afford to pay. The past five years have seen ordinary families, on ordinary incomes, shoulder the burden of recovery with the well-off continuing on their merry way.



Another step the government could take is to finally tackle the mortgage debt that is currently crippling many families, as a result of the property bubble. ICTU has an excellent policy in this area, following the adoption of a motion sponsored by the INMO, which involves giving mortgage relief to hard-pressed families. This calls for the market value of the family home to determine the repayment thus ending the paying of exorbitant mortgages into dead banks. It provides scope for spending in our indigenous economy thus promoting economic activity at local level.

The government now has no Troika to keep happy. Therefore, it has no excuse to avoid looking after our society, rather than just running Ireland as an economy. Let's hope that it rises to the challenge, makes the correct choices and gives us all a reason to look to the future with hope.

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