

Public servants must vote 'no'

ALL public service unions will ballot their members on the government's proposals to extend the Croke Park Agreement. This issue of *WIN* contains a four-page pull-out section ahead of nationwide INMO information meetings and workplace balloting, which will be held from April 3-15.

The INMO Executive Council recommends that INMO members vote 'no' on the basis that the proposals are unfair. They involve disproportionate pay reductions for public servants who work shifts, and are anti-family and potentially discriminatory.

In its proposals, the government is essentially asking public servants to vote for a pay cut, not only for themselves, but also for their public servant colleagues. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the proposals are shaped in such a way that they do not have an equal impact on individuals who might be earning very similar salaries. This is because of the proposed reduction in premium payments, and also depends on the point of the salary scale you are on, whether you are working reduced hours and various other circumstances.

In this context, it is not appropriate for members to vote based solely on their own circumstances. All public servants must also be conscious that a 'yes' vote could impose greater pay cuts on fellow public servants, who could be earning less than they are. Such an outcome would go against every facet of trade unionism. It is

also contrary to the solidarity that workers must show to each other if we are to survive the current austerity measures and related challenges.

As if the proposals to reduce income were not insulting enough, they also seek to minimise other terms and conditions of employment, which have been hard won over the past 10-15 years. The proposals are particularly injurious to a predominantly female workforce where the incidence of work sharing, job sharing and flexitime work is considerable.

On top of this, the proposals require members to agree to a longer working week. This would see nurses and midwives reverting to a 39-hour week, just five years after we secured the reduction to 37.5 hours. Apart from reducing the hourly rate of pay, this could also result in roster changes that could negatively impact the work-life balance of many members.

It must be realised that it is not sufficient for INMO members alone to reject these proposals: Members of other public sector unions must also vote 'no'. We need a strong, loud and robust rejection of these proposals so that the government is required to think again and recognise that public servants, the majority of whom are on low and middle incomes, have paid their fair share towards the country's recovery.

Voting 'no' does not mean that you are voting to strike. The government has threatened to legislate, but this is not an



automatic or guaranteed consequence of a 'no' vote. The government could not argue, in bringing forward any legislation, that it is a national emergency, as it has engaged in seeking a collective agreement with unions, which has been rejected.

In other words, no one can guarantee what will happen if we vote 'no'; but voting 'yes' certainly constitutes voting for very significant pay cuts and reductions in entitlements, which are wholly unwarranted and damaging to all public servants.

So, the INMO is urging a 'no' vote. The call is out for you to encourage your colleague public servants, whatever their profession, grade or category, to also vote 'no'. This will demonstrate that public servants have paid their share; they have given enough and quite bluntly, have no more to give.

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