

# Emphatic 'No': government must listen

THE proposals to extend the Croke Park Agreement have been rejected by the vast majority of public servants. The final tally showed that 14 separate unions rejected the proposals with only five voting to accept them. This result indicates that more than 70% of public servants of every grade, group and category rejected these flawed and deeply unfair proposals.

The rejection by more than 95% of INMO members, in a very strong turnout of 68% in the ballots, confirms that our members listened to and understood Executive Council's recommendations to vote these proposals down. It also vindicates the INMO's earlier action to withdraw from the talks process because the government's terms were wholly unacceptable to members.

It is necessary to acknowledge the impact of the campaign for a 'no' vote, organised by the registered trade unions: the IMO, CPSU, UNITE, the 24/7 Front-line Services Alliance and the INMO. The campaign, which included 11 town-hall meetings nationwide, was honest, transparent, and ultimately successful. It resulted in the rejection of government proposals right across the public service. I wish to extend the INMO's appreciation for the team effort put in by all unions and organisations involved.

The failings of the government proposals were independently validated through

an 'equality audit' by an expert in the field of equality, Niall Crowley, and the independent actuarial report by Joseph Byrne. These independent reviews confirmed that the government's proposals disproportionately hit specific groups in the public sector, and shift workers.

Any future proposals, if they emerge through negotiations, must be equal, transparent and fully cognisant of the fact that low, and middle income, public servants have absolutely nothing more to give.

Prior to the final decision, some ministers stated that the rejection of government proposals would lead to the introduction of draconian legislation to implement the cuts without agreement. Since the rejection of the proposals, the government has made subtle indications that an attempt may be made to re-engage in talks, and that there will not be an immediate, knee-jerk reaction from government.

This reaffirms our view that the public statements from ministers during the balloting process were simply a blatant attempt to interfere with the ballot process and frighten members into accepting cuts in their pay which are unwarranted and counterproductive.

The government's initial proposals cannot be rescued by simple tweaking or small concessions. The government must remember that its demands were



wholly disproportionate and particularly unfair to female workers, those with caring responsibilities, and shift workers. What is required is a fundamentally new approach by the government, which does not seek to single out public sector workers, particularly those on low, and middle incomes, just because they are government employees and easy targets.

What happens next will be determined by the government. If it recognises that public servants on low and middle incomes cannot afford another cut in their pay, and that austerity is not working, then progress can be made.

However, if it seeks to impose pay cuts and unilateral changes to other conditions of employment, the INMO, with other unions, will undertake a public sector wide campaign to protect our members.

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