

# PEOPLE:

**THOUGH** entering only its ninth week the Unemployment Centre in Limerick has now firmly established itself.

Located at 33 Thomas Street, the Centre offers advice and counselling, information, education and training and leisure activities to the approximately 8,000 unemployed persons in the city.

And this week we visited the Centre, one of 10 set up as part of a national pilot scheme and talked to its director, Mr. John Ryan and to Ms. Helena Close, social welfare counsellor and advisor.

According to its director, the Unemployment Centre is filling a void here in the city.

"Unemployment is crippling our city. Since we opened at the end of January we have been inundated with enquiries. We have over 150 people calling in every week.

"We have over 8,000 unemployed persons in the city, and I am surprised at the response. Our callers are not levelling off, they are on the increase," he said.

Attitudes towards the unemployed are changing. It is now a problem that's not just confined to any one area — its a problem that hits right across the board. Even those who appeared to have secured futures are now becoming unemployed.

## Gauge

"Of course it is difficult to gauge how successful we have been, but now many of the people who come in for advice have been recommended by friends or family, and some are returning calls, which is a good sign."

But they deal not just with queries from people in the city catchment area, but from all over the mid-west region.

Their phone number is displayed in all the libraries and churches in this area, and if people can't call to them then they will contact them by phone.

And at the moment John is examining the possibility of setting up a mobile information unit.

"What we would like to do is to go out to areas with this unit, on certain days, and people could come in to us."

Without doubt there is a stigma attached to being unemployed. And now what they want to do is to go out to the people and not to have them come to them.

With this in mind the Unemployment Centre has now applied to Limerick County Council, and Corporation with a view to establishing such a unit in the near future.

According to Helena, the Centre is badly needed. The response from the many people who have made use of the Centre has been encouraging. Callers have expressed their surprise that at last they have found some one to help them. "They all have said that it is great to have someone on their side," she claimed.

"But such was the frustration of people looking for information prior to the opening of the Centre, that many have asked how much they owe for the service."

That people are willing to pay for this information, is certainly a sad reflection.

## Employed

At the moment there are 21 people employed in the centre, all of whom have been unemployed at some stage of their careers. These include promoters, receptionists, administrators, advisors, educational officers, recreational advisors, publication officers, caretaking and catering staff.



John Ryan, Limerick Unemployment Centre.

Running costs for the year are estimated at £130,000 — most of which is being financed by the National Manpower Agency. But John reminds us that to keep this number of people on the dole it would cost the Government in the region of £89,000.

He believes that full employment for everyone is not

ment of Social Welfare, Limerick for his help.

They have full co-operation from this department in Limerick, and this has made their job easier.

"It would be an exceptional case now where they wouldn't have the information."

And in the coming weeks the Centre hope to instal a

# JOHN RY.

Everyone wants to be part of our society and most people will admit that the greatest problem with being unemployed is having nothing to do all day.

And while some people feel that they should concentrate some of our resources developing their recreational activities, John disagrees.

"It's jobs people want. If we expanded our national resources then we would have lots of jobs."

Their aim is to see this Centre redundant.

But for the moment the entire building at 33 Thomas Street is a hive of activity.

Since it opened classes on topics ranging from art, photography, Irish and European history, basic maths and English have been held.

"We have had a far greater response than the resources available and now we are looking for sponsorship from companies and employers throughout the region to help us to expand these classes.

"Any financial help would be appreciated."

And to keep employed informed ties at the Centre set up an informal dole office.

They like to people to help them they act as the mediator in some

But their main campaign for a ment, and to raise consciousness in soc is possible.

Some of the b present unemp tion is placed technology — Japan and Switzer their technology almost full empl

"With the pres climate, employ they can get aw: ing less money. F work, but they decent wage.

"And it is tota for unemploye survive on the welfare paymen Change is vita insists.

# IN SEARCH O SOLUTIONS

A RECENT EEC survey throws light on the condition of working women who are not in paid employment.

in practice men the same occ also want a s problem of mat

Behind the clumsy expression "working women other than those in paid employment" are women you see every day — in the corner grocery, the lawyer's office and, most notably, in the countryside.

They are the eight million married women who share their husband's occupational activities, and another five million who are either self-employed or employ others.

Two very dissimilar groups, of which the first clearly has more problems by far. Three out of four women in the first group have no legal responsibility in the running of the business, while nearly one in two receives no payment for her work. And the great majority of these eight million women would be unable, were their husbands to die or leave them, to continue the business or retain control of it.

Women who work for their husbands are keenly aware of being under-paid, but nine out of ten accept their situation; only two out of ten would change occupations if given the choice. What they mainly want (42%) are improved retirement benefits, although some 34% also stress the need for greater equality in law and

## Normal

The difficult normal family the five million are self-employ own bosses, ev situation is less they enjoy gr fraction. Few discriminated gards pay, b regret being elected to, or h responsibility organisations. find it more di to obtain bank these women about their w that it depen them whethe continue in it.

The expects these two gre especially a adequacies o tion in general in relation to the application of equal treat men and wom activity in e capacity, as w tion of self-e during pregna tive was ado Council of M member.

# By MARY HEENAN

just a dream. It can become a reality, as was recently outlined in a detailed policy document produced by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

But for the moment he is concentrating his resources on ways to improve the plight of the unemployed.

## I.D. cards

And just this week the first batch of I.D. cards arrived at the Centre. These will entitle the unemployed to discounts at cinemas and certain stores throughout the city.

This is a step forward, John believes. While the concept that the unemployed may have lots of free time, is true, their resources are very limited, and for them to hand out £3 on a leisure activity would be considered an expense.

And following the two day successful seminar on activity and retirement, recently held in the Centre, they now have plans to organise a number of others. The theme for the next seminar will be 'The Lone Parent.'

Their first session has been extremely successful as it allows people to come together for information and advice from qualified personnel.

And in the coming weeks it is hoped to have a canteen open.

According to John and Helena, the main problems which seem to be presenting themselves on a regular basis are social welfare and queries concerning the recent E.E.C. Equality directive.

Our social welfare system is old fashioned, claimed John. "It needs to be examined with a view to reform in the near future. And we would like to see the Government implementing some of the recommendations produced by the Commission on Social Welfare."

"We have 44 different categories of Social Welfare benefits and some of these have sub-sections — you would just want to be a genius to understand the system."

However, they are indebted to Mr. Michael McDonnell, information officer, Depart-

modern filing system which will contain all copies of leaflets produced by the Department of Health and Social Welfare.

## Plight

The plight of the 'lone father' is something which is causing grave concern for the Unemployment Centre. There is no status for the single father, and this is something they feel very strongly about. For example the deserted wife or unmarried mother with one child, is entitled to £56.15 per week, but a father in the same situation is only entitled to £45 per week.

Both have the same needs and they have had a number of fathers who went in to them with regard to the present situation.

And Helena feels that they have a case here for the High Court.

Discretionary payments made by community welfare officers are also causing concern to many people — as the term suggests these payments are made at the discretion of someone.

"People come in here to us and while we may feel that they are entitled to rent allowances, we are not in a position to decide."

Of course the community welfare officer is also dependant on the finances that are available.

John is also very critical of the present conditions at the Labour Exchange, particularly the women's exchange.

"Conditions are just disgraceful — it is a condemned building and this has an effect on the people using it."

"And if you have a problem, queuing up at a hatch with people listening on is not the ideal way to solve anything."

"The recurring message from the unemployed people who come into the Centre is that they want to work," said John, a former NIHE graduate.

"We go through the education system being geared for a productive role in our society — then it is taken away from us, and we are left without a role to fulfil."

**Now 25 Free Gifts on Milk Cartons**



**Also 25 extra gifts available in our Ellen Street Shop**

WHILE STOCKS LAST

- 26. STARWARS ..... 10 10 NEW KINDS.
- 27. SUSIE DOLL ..... 10.
- 28. AFTERSHAVE ..... 10. 40 LEFT.
- 29. BUCKET ..... 20.
- 30. BASIN ..... 20.
- 31. CHALK BOARD ..... 30.
- 32. HELMET ..... 30.
- 33. LOVE BEAR ..... 40.
- 34. TWO-IN-ONE ROBOT ..... 40.
- 35. DIARY ..... 40. NOW ½ PRICE.
- 36. COLOURING SET ..... 40.
- 37. BLACK STAR ..... 50.
- 38. FIRE ENGINE ..... 60.
- 39. JUG AND 6 GLASSES ..... 60.
- 40. FRUIT SET ..... 60.
- 41. 4 LUNCH BOXES ..... 60.
- 42. REMOTE CONTROL BIKE ..... 60.
- 43. LINEN BASKET ..... 80.
- 44. AMERICAN FOOTBALL ..... 100.
- 45. KITCHEN SCALE ..... 120.
- 46. DINNER SET ..... 120.
- 47. DINING-ROOM CLOCK ..... 400.
- 48. 4 PIECE CUTLERY ..... 20.
- 49. CASSEROLE SET ..... 240.
- 50. CURLING TONGS ..... 150 50 ONLY.

The Only Free Gifts Guaranteed Until 1988.

ELLEN STREET GIFT SHOP. Open Tue. to Sat. 10 am to 6 pm.

**Maddens milk**  
Parteen Tel (061) 346777



Garry and Karen Keenan, Nolan's Co opening of the footbridge at the Pota Saturday last.