

economic recovery. So far there has been little explicitly political resentment or open hostility from Irish citizens, but this may change if unemployment persists and the prospect of recovery recedes. The newcomers are not responsible for the economic crisis and should not be blamed for it. We have gained a lot from the experience.

Analysts are now debating whether this period will mark a reversal of these large-scale migrations and see a return movement by most workers. It is surely too soon to say that is so about such a complex issue. Demographic factors, for example, complicate the picture, so that countries with ageing populations like Japan or Sweden are prepared to make special provision for skilled migration.

Death of Frank McCourt

FAME CAME late to Frank McCourt. At the age of 66, he became a literary phenomenon when he took two of life's most potent ingredients — tragedy and humour — and turned them into a best-selling memoir-novel that caught the public imagination and brought its author international recognition that reached its height with the prestigious Pulitzer Prize.

With its focus on a bygone Ireland, *Angela's Ashes* did for the Limerick of his working-class childhood what O'Casey had done for Dublin and its tenements — but without the ideological polemic. Like O'Casey, he was first and foremost a storyteller who could hold and transport his legions of devotees. With his intense love of language, he had what was once described as “the perfect Irish brogue: lyrical but penetrable”.

As a memoirist he can be credited with the re-creation of a genre — misery lit — that went on to have a succession of lesser imitators. His more significant legacy, however, is that he took into the realm of book-reading a new audience which might otherwise not have discovered the value and pleasure of literature.

While McCourt became synonymous with Limerick, it came as little surprise that his autobiographical account of poverty and squalor did not initially receive a similarly enthusiastic reception in the city where the book was set. McCourt himself recalled his “epic of woe” as having been “denounced from hill, pulpit and bar stool”.

Posterity, as always, will be the final arbiter on McCourt's literary merits, but as a record of a time and a place and the grim circumstances of a past generation — even with its hints of literary embellishment and tinted perspective — *Angela's Ashes* will endure as a significant and evocative social document.

But it should not be forgotten that his subsequent books — *Tis* and *Teacher Man* — are worthy additions to the literature of emigration; his personal life straddled the Irish-American experience and was a wonderful triumph of the human spirit overcoming the adversities handed to him in his Limerick youth while his family's return to the United States opened to him the possibilities of the American dream which he embraced with the determination of a true survivor to become not only an accomplished writer but also an inspirational teacher in New York. As well as his charm and wit, perhaps McCourt's most endearing characteristic was reflected in the *New York Times* review of *Angela's Ashes* when it noted that he looked back on his tough formative experiences “with no trace of bitterness”.

during which time our economy will continue to deteriorate. What we, the people, require is immediate action — not more fudging and accommodation of vested interests.

There is absolutely no excuse at this time of national emergency to hide behind contracts, terms and conditions, etc as a reason for inaction. Once the Cabinet gives way to one lobby group the whole McCarthy report will be rendered toothless.

Please Mr Cowen and Mr Lenihan, will you just do what you were elected to do and govern this wonderful country without fear or favour? — Yours, etc,

MIKE CORMACK,
Ardagh Close,
Blackrock,
Co Dublin.

Madam, — If John Gormley believes that the “Bord Snip” report is a “menu of choices” (“Report a ‘menu of choices’ and hard decisions must be made — Gormley”, July 18th), could we ask that his restaurant be closed down due to health violations, thus requiring the chef, his maitre d' and the junior bottlewasher to seek alternative employment? — Yours, etc,

DECLAN HYNES,
Priory Grove,
St Raphael's Manor,
Celbridge,
Co Kildare.

Madam, — The cruellest cuts of all have been to the overseas development assistance budget. If the Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach take the advice of the “Bord Snip” report and implement further cuts they will literally be severing a lifeline to the world's poor.

In 2000 this country made a solemn and binding commitment to the international community to achieve the UN target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNP on overseas assistance. During the boom years, even though we never achieved this target figure, we had on over-

€135 million a year to Government coffers (€150 per week each for 52 weeks) Secondly these people would then be entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance costing the State €180 million a year (€200 per week each for the year). Then there would be the additional cost to the State of providing all these people with medical cards, rent allowance (say €800 a month), back-to-school allowances for their children, etc. Allowing for the additional costs at a very conservative rate of €6,000 per annum this would be an addition cost to the exchequer of €104 million a year. All this would cost the State €419 million a year as opposed to the €588 million a year it would cost to keep people employed on average industrial wage of €34,000.

But then you have to consider redundancy payments. As these would have to be agreed by unions a “sweetener” would have to be offered before they would accept it, say six weeks' pay per year service. Let's assume all workers have at least five years' service, so it would result in 30 weeks' pay. If they were on average industrial wage of €34,000, the total redundancy pay would be approximately €339 million. This figure would increase if duration of service is greater than five years or if people are earning a higher salary.

This means the overall cost to the exchequer would now be at least €758 million.

This report is supposed to be a blueprint for our nation's survival, but it seems to me a recipe for prolonging the recession by starving the economy of much needed money and demoralising over 17,000 additional workers by placing them on the live register with no hope of being re-employed in the foreseeable future. — Yours, etc,

RICHARD McCORMACK,
Woodstown Way,
Knocklyon,
Dublin 16.

Recruitment embargo and tourism

Madam, — Much has been made of the need to cut back on public service pay, with an existing embargo on recruitment / replacement of personnel already in place, but there seems to have been little thought given to the effects on tourism.

In Kinsale, a heritage town of international fame, our museum remains closed at the height of the tourist season because the Kinsale Town Council claims that the retired part-time caretaker cannot be replaced because of this embargo.

As a result, we now have the ridiculous situation where the room where the inquest on the *Lusitania* was held in 1915 as well as a treasure trove of artefacts telling the history of the town remains off limits.

Every morning and afternoon I

stand in front of that building telling the tourists of the heritage of our town, while apologising for the closure of our museum. I am lucky to have a unique selection of maps and photographs (even a *Lusitania* medallion!) to illustrate the story of the town, but this is no substitute for those who want to visit the museum itself and the collection.

At a time when tourism is under threat, Minister for the Environment John Gormley, and those responsible for local government expenditure, should be aware that the blanket embargo that prohibits the employment of a person to open the museum should be re-examined. — Yours, etc,

DERMOT RYAN,
Kinsaleheritage.com,
Winter's Hill,
Kinsale, Co Cork.