

BUILDING FOR EMPLOYMENT

The Government is coming under pressure to respond to the unexpected surge of redundancies in the high-technology sector. Politicians are never slow to claim the credit for creating jobs when some major project arrives. So, when jobs are lost, they are expected to do something about it. Unfortunately, there is a limit to what the Government can do in the short term. The losses highlight the fact that jobs growth cannot be taken for granted, and in this context, there is much that policy-makers need to address.

Behind all the business jargon, one fact is clear – demand for the products of the information technology and communications sectors has fallen sharply. And with a sharp slowdown in the US economy, it was perhaps inevitable that there would be significant job losses here.

The scale and speed of redundancies in recent weeks has been striking. Most of the companies involved supplied valuable jobs over a lengthy period. But this will have done little to offset the shock to those who have lost their jobs. Some will quickly find new employment, but others now face considerable uncertainty and difficulties.

The State agencies should do all they can to help those affected. Some will need to be retrained, while others will need the support of the welfare system as they search for new careers. It is important that IDA Ireland strives to retain the highest number of jobs and to encourage firms to move from basic assembly work to higher value activity.

Mr Sean Dorgan, the IDA chief executive, maintains that what we are seeing in the technology sector is a "slowdown, not a meltdown." This is correct, but it is a serious slowdown and, as he points out, it is now likely to go on well into next year. Yet it is important to remember that many other sectors continue to grow – albeit more slowly because of the international slowdown – that unemployment remains low and that the economy continues to expand.

The Government's industrial policy needs to go beyond the establishment of local task-forces to seek replacement jobs. The key issue is the rapid development of our infrastructure.

It is extraordinary that the operators of the national electricity grid now question whether it can supply any further significant industries. The spread of broadband technology across the State is delayed. And planned investment in railways, roads and airport links, under the National Development Plan, continues to proceed slowly – often delayed by planning hold-ups.

These are the kinds of issues which the Government must address to lay the foundation for further

SOCIETY AND CRIME

Sir, – Lara Marlowe's report (August 22nd), on the rising tide of crime in her adopted homeland provided a telling insight into the genesis of this problem, though perhaps not quite in the way she intended.

In her feature, Ms Marlowe charts a seemingly inexorable surge in burglaries, assaults and carjackings in France and bemoans the fact that in terms of a convincing solution, none has yet been put forward. Even President Chirac appears at a loss to adequately explain this frightening trend – preferring instead to resort to the traditional fallback of blaming his Prime Minister, Mr Jospin.

However, the closing paragraph of your Paris correspondent's article provides the answers the French are so urgently seeking.

Subjected to a horrific attack by teenage thieves, an unfortunate woman reflects on her ordeal and decides that her assailants aren't to blame. They were, after all, simply expressing their anger at a system that has failed them.

This remarkable denouement to an otherwise excellent piece of reportage tells us all we need to know about a Western society in

which those who commit violent crime against the life and property of law-abiding individuals are now seen as the real victims. Disaffection, disadvantage, exclusion, even racism, all are put forward as excuses for criminality and eroded responsibility.

Thuggery and theft are legitimised as forms of self-expression in a response to the perceived unfairness of the "system". Society, yet again, is to blame.

Under relentless battering from this new orthodoxy, church, State and parents have largely abandoned their duty in offering children moral guidance and leadership. Good and evil are derided as old-fashioned, redundant constructs.

People surround themselves with fences, walls and burglar alarms, wondering why it is happening to them. In theory, the solution is a restoration of a value system comprising decency, obedience, respect and hard work. In practice, of course, the libertarian revolution of the late 20th century has ensured that this can never happen. – Yours, etc.,

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NOONAN AND COLLINS

A chara, – Any right-thinking person or indeed any true admirer of Michael Collins must reject out of hand the attempt by Michael Noonan to resurrect old ghosts of bitterness and division in his speech at Béal na Bláth last Sunday (August 20th). One would be hard pressed to find its equal anywhere in modern Irish history.

Mr Noonan accused Fianna Fáil of anti-Collins bias. Well Mr Noonan, a former deputy leader of your party, Peter Barry, in the course of a speech in the not too distant past, lamented that Fianna Fáil had put in place most of General Collins's "stepping stones". Mind you he did omit to mention that this was done in the face of stiff and continuous opposition from Fine Gael! This opposition should not have caused surprise as the then new successor to Cumann na nGael contained not just nationalist elements, but also the remnants of Southern unionism and O'Duffy's fascists.

Some tribute to Michael Collins's memory!

Turning to Mr Noonan's assertion that Fianna Fáil refused permission for the Army to attend the annual commemoration over the years, I find this remark offensive and misleading.

The only time in modern Ireland that the Army attended at Béal na Bláth was under a Fianna Fáil government in 1972 when the wreath

was laid by a Fianna Fáil Defence Minister! As for their non-attendance now, Mr Noonan gives the answer in his speech, which was political in tone, content and presentation. In no way can the Army be embroiled in such controversial gatherings.

However, if those organising the commemoration genuinely want to honour the memory of this great Irishman then they must do so in a way that is totally non-political. This would not only facilitate the Army's attendance, but would also allow those of other modern political thinking to attend.

In conclusion, a question begs to be asked of Mr Noonan.

Why, when Fine Gael were in power did their ministers not allow the Army's attendance? In the very recent past, Mrs Nora Owen (she who must be mislaid), a great grandniece of the man himself, gave the oration at Béal na Bláth. She was Minister for Justice at the time. Why did she not organise with her ministerial colleague in defence for the Army to attend? In the 1970s Paddy Donegan as Defence minister under Mr Cosgrave never allowed Army attendance.

Was this not a thundering disgrace Mr Noonan? (oops, sorry). – Is mise le meas,

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Baile an Chollaigh,
Co Corchaí.