

BAD FOR WOMEN, BAD FOR CHILDREN, BAD FOR THE ECONOMY

7 Dec 2010

LENIHAN'S BUDGET IS BAD FOR WOMEN, BAD FOR CHILDREN, BAD FOR THE ECONOMY, SAYS NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF IRELAND.

A recent poll showed that 8 out of 10 Irish people would favour some sort of Wealth Tax. Yet the government persists in making the poorest pay the most for the economic catastrophe. There will be a lot of women this morning making their way to work and wondering if they can afford to continue to do so. Families in this country pay exceptionally high childcare costs, the highest in Europe, and they rely on child benefit to pay it, though it is already inadequate for that purpose. The fact that the budget offers no measure to compensate women on the lowest incomes for the loss of child benefit is particularly cruel.

There will be a lot of women on social welfare wondering this morning how they are going to cope with cuts both to the child benefit they rely on and their benefits. More women than men rely on means tested social welfare payments, so the cuts for working age people will affect more women. Single adults will suffer an €8 weekly cut, couples a cut of €13.30. These amounts don't sound like much if you are a senior civil servant on €250,000, the new cap for such salaries. But cuts like these will ensure that child poverty will increase. Currently almost 100,000 children live in consistent poverty. It is already a shameful figure. The cuts to carers, most of them women, and to people with disabilities are disgraceful.

The Minister for Finance boasted of his government's commitment to cutting the minimum wage. Good for competitiveness, he said, and claimed that those on the reduced minimum wage will be kept out of the tax net. That is just not so. They will have to pay the new Universal Social Charge. Over 60% of those on the minimum wage are women, so they will bear the brunt of a further cut which will, in fact, have no impact on overall competitiveness or unemployment.

Even the IMF recognised that in fact we have no hope of economic recovery unless women are supported to stay in and to join the workforce. That is why it proposed a tax adjustment for women. With little support from the government, women made a huge contribution to Ireland's economic growth. This budget is a poor reward. It is bad for women, bad for children, bad for the economy.