

Social Partnership in Ireland - A Trade Union perspective

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IMPACT

Origins

- ▶ NESC study: 'A strategy for development 1986-1990'
- ▶ Economic conditions
 - GDP 64% of EC average
 - National debt > 1.5 GNP (one third of tax revenue to service)
 - 18% unemployment
 - emigration
- ▶ Thatcher/Reagan effect
- ▶ Poor free collective bargaining outcomes 1981–86
- ▶ Leadership

Development

- ▶ Vision deepened and expanded (1991 onwards....)
- ▶ Jobless growth initially
- ▶ General increases supplemented by tax reductions
- ▶ Local bargaining/public service settlement (late '90s)
- ▶ Further increases fuel public service benchmarking (2002)
- ▶ Model embraces social, community, voluntary and environmental pillar.

Access or influence?

- ▶ Partnership agreements v political/government programmes
- ▶ Emphasis on pay and dispute resolution
- ▶ At the expense of a social vision (social wage)
- ▶ Weakening of connection with the workplace/workers (despite efforts to develop workplace partnership)
- ▶ Declining density – FDI/non-union

Key elements

- ▶ Stability, certainty, relative industrial peace
- ▶ Young, well-educated, English speaking population
- ▶ Problem solving ethos
- ▶ Flexibility

Weaknesses/breakdown

- ▶ Failure to develop sufficient understanding and popular support for model
- ▶ Failure to address respective concerns e.g. union density, competitiveness
- ▶ Unilateralism. Government decisions in February 2009/December 2009
- ▶ Patchy operation of agreement in private sector/job losses
- ▶ Public/private divide
- ▶ Absence of political belief/support
- ▶ Media attacks
- ▶ Replacement with concession bargaining in public sector, accord in private sector

Today

- ▶ Absence of effective social dialogue
- ▶ Social partnership has a 'bad name' – unfairly
- ▶ 'National Economic Dialogue' – July 2015
- ▶ Still need for genuine tripartism