

'Frontline' staff stage huge pay cut protest

THOUSANDS of health staff, gardaí, prison officers and firefighters yesterday protested over proposed pay cuts, warning they would not be backing down.

Just days after tens of thousands of public sector workers demonstrated across the country, a huge march three times bigger than expected weaved its way across Dublin.

In passionate speeches outside the Dáil, the Government was accused of protecting the wealthy while targeting the ordinary worker.

Eugene Dennehy, deputy general secretary of the Prison Officers Association, said public sector workers were engaged in a 'battle for survival'.

'I think today we have sent a signal to the Government that we are prepared to fight for as long as it takes,' he added.

Organised by the 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance, the march began in Parnell Square and moved through the city centre to Molesworth Street, led by a

vintage ambulance, garda car and fire engine.

Dublin Fire Brigade Pipe Band also performed while gardaí wore baseball caps with the garda insignia instead of their uniform.

Trade union chiefs handed in a letter of protest to the Department of Finance for Brian Lenihan.

Gardaí said between 3,000 and 3,500 people took part in the march though organisers estimated the turnout at more than 5,000.

Jack O'Connor, president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, claimed a wealthy elite in the country were not prepared to shoulder their share of the economic burden.

Mr O'Connor said the Government was committing the country to a period of unrelenting debt through Nama, which he branded heinous.

BY COLM KELPIE

THE FUTURE IS AT HAND



Minister Conor Lenihan TD was on hand to launch the 'Fusion Expo' at DCU yesterday, promoting Fusion as a future energy choice. The exhibition runs until tomorrow

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METRO Weather

■ TODAY: A dry start, becoming very windy and wet. Max: 11°C

■ TOMORROW: A bright start, turning wet and windy. Max: 10°C

LOTTO

■ WEDNESDAY'S DRAW
04 06 20 21 24 33 Bonus: 01

Plus 1: 02 05 08 15 33 44 Bonus: 23
Plus 2: 03 05 07 08 49 30 Bonus: 40

Healthcare firm to cut 250 Sligo jobs

ONE of the world's biggest pharmaceutical firms is to shut a Sligo medical plant it took over just three-and-a-half months ago, with the loss of 250 jobs. Healthcare giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is winding down operations at the Stiefel plant in Sligo over the next four years. GSK said the decision to shut the business was due to under-utilised capacity in Stiefel factories and across other GSK sites. The company bought Stiefel, which specialises in the manufacture of skincare products, in a \$2.9billion (€1.9billion) deal in July.

Shut 15,000 hotel rooms - report

A QUARTER of hotel rooms in Ireland need to close because the hotel sector is insolvent, according to a report by economic consultant Peter Bacon. The report, commissioned by the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF), states the 'orderly elimination' of 15,000 hotel rooms should begin before next summer. Some 26,802 new hotel rooms were opened in Ireland between 1999-2008, but the stock of new hotel rooms has been insolvent since 2005, Dr Bacon's report states.

MEP jailed over false expenses

A FORMER MEP in the UK who fiddled £39,000 (€43,000) in expenses was jailed for two years yesterday. Tom Wise will also have to pay the prosecution's costs over his 'blatant dishonesty'. Judge Geoffrey Rivlin said the 61-year-old UKIP member's scheme to funnel money into his own account to spend on fine wines and a car amounted to a gross breach of trust. Jonathan Fisher, Wise's QC, told the court: 'To describe this case as a disaster does not begin to convey the humiliation and distress Mr Wise and his wife are experiencing.'

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Welfare bonus cut branded 'shameful'

CUTTING the social welfare Christmas bonus was yesterday branded 'shameful and mean' after the Taoiseach flatly refused to reverse the cut. Brian Cowen claimed the country could not afford the €223million payout, scrapped in April's emergency budget. But Labour leader Eamon Gilmore hit out at the Taoiseach, saying the elderly were shouldering the burden of Fianna Fáil's economic mismanagement. 'It is a measure of the mess that Fianna Fáil has made of our public finances that we now find ourselves in a situation that, for the first time in 30 years, pensioners will not get the small bonus that has been paid to them in years past,' Mr Gilmore



Hitting out: Eamon Gilmore

told the Dáil. He added: 'I think it is mean and I think it is shameful, Taoiseach.' The Christmas Bonus is paid to a range of social welfare recipients, including pensioners, carers and those on disability. Mr Cowen said he was reluctant to go-ahead with the plan but the social welfare budget could not be immune from cutbacks.