The collapse of social partnership: The Irish public sector trade unions' response to the 2008 economic crisis and the lessons learned

Neil Ward, BSc [Hons], MA [Hons]

Thesis submitted for the award of PhD

School of Communications
Dublin City University

Supervisor: Dr Mark O'Brien

September 2021

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: 

NEIL WARD

STUDENT No: 12210815

Date: 30 July 2021

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to Dr Mark O'Brien who encouraged me to take on this journey and has advised me every step. His support, enthusiasm and analysis of my productivity proved invaluable.

I would also like to thank all of my interviewees who made the time during their busy schedules to recollect and reflect upon a turbulent economic crisis that impacted so greatly upon Irish workers, both in the public and private sectors.

As a practicing director of strategy and communications throughout the turbulent economic crisis from 2008 to 2017, I formed the opinion that a careful study and analysis of the Irish public sector trade unions' response was imperative or the opportunity would be lost with the passing of time. I hope that this study contributes, however incrementally, to the knowledge of the trade union / staff association communication with public opinion, mediated through organisations predominately adversarial to workers' collectives.

Without the full support of my wife Denise this enlightening and fulfilling experience would not have been possible. Denise – thank you so much. I hope that my children; Finn, Oisín and Niamh will be inspired by the fortitude of their parents to get us this far.

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

Timeline of major events during the debate of public sector pay
This timeline of events is deemed useful to include here as many of the other findings refer to these events.

15 September 2008	Lehman Brothers file for bankruptcy in USA
29/30 September 2008	Irish government decides on bank guarantee
27 November 2008	Government establishes Special Group / An Bord Snip Nua
3 February 2009	National pension reserve utilised to recapitalise Irish banks
27 February 2009	FEMPI Act signed: 'pension levy' cuts public service pay
8 April 2009	Government announced expenditure cuts of €3.25bn in 2009
16 July 2009	Publication of Special Group report
8 September 2009	Formation of 24/7 Frontline Alliance
30 September 2009	PDFORRA instructed to leave 24/7 Frontline Alliance
7 October 2009	ICTU meet 24/7 Frontline Alliance in Tralee
6 November 2009	ICTU Day of Action; protest rallies around Ireland (time off)
11 November 2009	24/7 Frontline Alliance Protest Rally – Dublin
17 November 2009	PSC/ICTU and 24/7 Frontline Alliance issue joint statement
24 November 2009	ICTU Day of Action; public service strike
1 December 2009	ICTU suggests deal has been reached on 'unpaid leave'
3 December 2009	Proposed ICTU Day of Action (strike) - CANCELLED
4 December 2009	Social Partnership pay talks collapse
9 December 2009	Budget Day – universal public sector pay cuts
15 December 2009	Final meeting of 24/7 Alliance campaign committee 2009
25 January 2010	Public sector unions begin industrial action
30 March 2010	PSC / ICTU and government agree Croke Park deal
6 June 2010	Croke Park – Public Sector Pay Agreement 2010-2014
28 November 2010	Ireland accepts EU / IMF emergency funding

ABBREVIATIONS & IRISH EXPRESSIONS

AGSI	Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors
ATGWU	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union
AIB	Allied Irish Banks
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
CIF	Construction Industry Federation
CORI	Conference of Religious of Ireland
CPSU	Civil Public and Services Union
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
ECB	European Central Bank
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
FEMPI	Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest [legislation]
GRA	Garda Representative Association
HSE	Health Services Executive
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IBOA	Irish Banking Officials Association [now Financial Services Union (FSU)]
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions – or simply 'Congress'
IFUT	Irish Federation of University Teacher
ILDA	Irish Locomotive Drivers' Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INM	Independent News and Media
IMPACT	Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
INO / INMO	Irish Nurses Organisation [latterly the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation]
ISER	Incentivised Scheme for Early Retirement
ISME	Irish Small and Medium Enterprises
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers Union
ITUC	Irish Trade Unions Congress [until 1959]
LRC	Labour Relations Commission [Now WRC Workplace Relations Commission]
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NERI	Nevin Economic Research Institute
NUJ	National Union of Journalists

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDFORRA	Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association
PNA	Psychiatric Nurses' Association
POA	Prison Officers' Association
PSC	Public Services Committee [of ICTU]
PSEU	Public Service Executive Union
RTÉ	Raidió Teilifís Éireann [Ireland's public service broadcaster]
SBP	Sunday Business Post
SIPTU	Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
TASC	Think-tank for Action on Social Change
TD	Teachta Dála [Irish Member of Parliament]
TEEU	Technical Engineering and Electrical Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress [UK]
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
UCD	University College Dublin
24/7 Frontline Alliance	Alliance of AGSI, GRA, INO, PDFORRA, PNA, POA, SIPTU

IRISH-LANGUAGE TERMINOLOGY

An Garda Síochána / Garda	national police force
Bord Snip Nua	Special Group [jocular title in the media]
Dáil Éireann	lower house of Irish parliament
garda[í]	police officer [s]
Iarnród Éireann	Irish Rail
Oireachtas	Irish parliament
Seanad Éireann	upper house of Irish parliament
tánaiste	deputy prime minister
taoiseach [plural *taoisigh*]	prime minister
Teachta Dála [TD]	Member of Dáil Éireann

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

INTERVIEWEES IN THIS STUDY

Date	Name	Organisation	Position
21/05/2019	Begg, D.	ICTU	General Secretary
04/09/2019	Buckley, O.	Dept of Finance	Assistant Principal
28/05/2019	Carr, J.	INTO	General Secretary
25/06/2013	Cawley, A.	Liverpool Hope University	Lecturer/media and communications
25/06/2013	Clinton, J	POA	General Secretary
16/05/2019	Cody, S.	IMPACT	Deputy General Secretary
22/05/2019	Connolly, F.	SIPTU	Head of Communications
04/06/2013	Dirwan, J.	AGSI	General Secretary
14/06/2013	Doran, L.	INO [INMO]	General Secretary
13/12/2018	Harbor, B.	IMPACT	Head of Communications
20/09/2019	Herbert, C.	Dept of Finance	Advisor
20/06/2013	Higgins, C.	IRN	Assistant Editor
14/03/2019	Horan, B.	CPSU	General Secretary
25/05/2013	Kavanagh, D.	PNA	General Secretary
11/06/2019	King, P.	SIPTU/ICTU	Vice President
19/02/2020	McDonnell, T.	NERI	Director
30/05/2019	McLoone, P.	IMPACT/ICTU	General Secretary
01/06/2013	Miley, I	RTÉ	Industry & Employment Correspondent
15/01/2019	Moore, R.	Dept of Justice	Press Officer/Personal Advisor
11/07/2019	O'Connor, J.	SIPTU/ICTU	President
05/06/2013	O'Reilly, L.	SIPTU	National Nursing Officer
24/05/2019	Sheehan, B.	IRN	Editor
01/07/2013	Stone, P.J.	GRA	General Secretary
18/06/2013	Wall, M.	The Irish Times	Industry Correspondent
09/09/2019	Wall, M.	The Irish Times	Industry Correspondent
11/06/2019	Walsh, A-M.	Irish Independent	Industry Correspondent
28/05/2013	Yeates, P.	24/7 Frontline Alliance	Public Relations Specialist

ABSTRACT

The collapse of social partnership: The Irish public sector trade unions' response to the 2008 economic crisis and the lessons learned

NEIL WARD, DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

This research is concerned with the impact that the Irish economic crash had on the communication strategies of the trade union sector – specifically, how the trade unions in the public sector responded, how national newspapers reported and treated that response, and any lessons learned by the trade union movement. Three levels of analysis are presented within the research: 1) a quantitative content analysis of national newspaper titles to determine the levels and type of press attention paid to the economic crash and the response of the trade union movement; 2) a qualitative sentiment analysis of that same press coverage with a specific emphasis on the news values that informed such coverage; and 3) an extensive set of 27 in-depth semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the main trade unions, their press advisors, the industry correspondents of key national media outlets and a smaller number of interviews with government advisors active at the time. Research emphasis is put on these interviews due to the paucity in the existing literature and because they give a deeper context than media analysis alone. The research findings indicate that the trade union movement was wholly unprepared for the communication challenges posed by the economic crash and while government and media were similarly unprepared, the solutions to the crash proposed by government and amplified by media outlets doubly disadvantaged the trade union movement – i.e. not only was it unprepared for the communication challenges posed by the economic crash, it was also forced into a defensive mentality by virtue of the solutions proposed. It finds that one of the key legacies of this bruising episode for the trade union movement is a need to be continuously proactive in communicating its economic perspective – as evidenced by its establishment of the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI].

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2007 it was commonplace domestically to be told by politicians, economists and media commentators that Ireland was now among the richest nations of the developed world [O'Toole 2010, 111]; the 'miracle' of the 'Celtic tiger' and subsequent government policies had attracted foreign direct investment and multinational corporations to Ireland. The country's 'light-touch regulation', low corporation tax, low-cost borrowing and neoliberal ideology had embraced the global financial marketplace that helped drive the economic success of a relatively small state on the edge of Europe. But during 2007, the rest of the world sensed that something was wrong with the Irish banks. Investors began selling off their shares [Murphy 2009, 51] and a share slide began in August 2007 with foreign investors citing fears about Irish banks exposure to big commercial property. Ireland's then finance minister Brian Cowen [RTÉ *News at One*, 25 January 2008] said he "did not believe the current turmoil in world stock markets would have a bad effect on the Irish economy". In April Cowen was elected as successor to the retiring taoiseach Bertie Ahern. His optimism was proven wrong by unfolding events; he was among a select few politicians including the new minister for finance Brian Lenihan who issued a statement to guarantee the liabilities of the Irish banks on the night of 29 September 2008, subsequently enacted by parliament on 2 October, when the state began its slide into freefall. Ireland's economy crashed and throughout subsequent years unemployment rose sharply and the state was ultimately "forced to accept a humiliating 'bail-out' from the EU and IMF" on 21 November 2010 [Finn 2011, 5]. So began a period of sustained austerity.

1.1 Pay cuts: the only game in town

Throughout the period of crisis and turmoil between 2008 to 2010, there was unrelenting public debate on how to respond to the seismic hole in the public finances. The Irish media was crucial to this public discourse [Rafter 2014, 598] by interpreting and seeking to explain the ramifications and actions open to government. Political communication was multi-faceted, contentious, often angry, and sometimes inflammatory. Economic forecasters had either failed to foresee the economic shock or had been ignored as 'doom-mongers'. Popular perceptions on the state of the economy are, to an extent, driven by news organisations and the main theme was that the Irish economy was heading for a 'soft landing'; we can now see that this was driven by both the political elite and accommodating media – but in early 2009 the public finances were sufficiently diminished for senior civil servants to begin briefing the leaders of public sector trade unions on the extent of the fiscal deficit. The rhetoric moved

away from a ‘soft landing’ for the economy; and into a perceived ideological conflict of interests between the public sector ‘waste’ and private sector ‘efficiency’, with media commentators voicing opinion as fact that the public sector were paid around 25% more than their counterparts in the private sector. Employers’ group IBEC immediately called for a 20% reduction in public sector jobs. The general secretary of Ireland’s second-largest public sector trade union [IMPACT], Peter McLoone, responded by saying that public service pay cuts would likely trigger a downward recessionary spiral sucking demand out of the economy.

Responding to reports that the minister for finance intended to implement public sector pay cuts, union leaders had warned the government that they could not solve the economic crisis at the expense of workers. SIPTU President Jack O’Connor said all sectors of society had to play their part in resolving the crisis. However, he said there would be huge resistance if the Government tried to impose pay cuts on workers. Peter McLoone of IMPACT said nobody in the trade union movement wanted to turn their back on the problem, but that he had no mandate to discuss pay cuts. Referring to the crisis, the *Sunday Tribune* [11 January 2009] noted that:

> Cowen is also likely to demand changes to lucrative public sector pensions – which now cost €2bn a year – particularly the system whereby pay increases given to state employees are automatically passed on to the pensions of retired public servants . . . One possible compromise solution that may be more palatable to the unions is the option of a four-day week for workers, other than gardaí, medical staff and teachers.

A chorus of trade unions in the public sector warned of strikes and legal challenges if any such cuts were unilaterally imposed without consultation. In a memo to members Public Service Executive Union [PSEU] general secretary Dan Murphy said the IMF normally proscribed job losses without compensation for those dismissed – and imposed pay cuts on everyone else. However taoiseach Brian Cowen denied that the IMF was ever mentioned in government briefings, telling journalists it “showed the need for people to ‘get real’ about the economic downturn”. Presenting the trade union movement’s proposals to tackle the exchequer deficit, Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ general secretary David Begg said they were open to discussions with the government and the other social partners on how to constrain growth in public sector pay and pension costs including “conditions for deferral of pay increases, restrictions in overtime working, incentivised career breaks, flexible working hours and other innovative measures”. The red-line issue for the unions was “a reduction in basic pay”.

This proved to be the opening salvo of discussions on public expenditure cutbacks that culminated in the government introducing a 'pension levy' for public sector workers in February 2009; a pay cut in all but name. Those working for the trade unions were invited to speak to the media; especially radio stations eager to fill network time discussing the economic crisis. In many respects, those trade unionists anticipated hostility that was subsequently delivered, and they failed to have sufficient alternative economic ideas on the macro level; trade union leaders were well-versed in productivity and working conditions but had few or no salient answers for explaining the economic fallout or proposed solutions. The debate had already been framed in that the country had run out of money and sacrifices in public spending had to be made. The government had established a Special Group whose terms of reference were to examine public expenditure and where reductions could be made – and they duly reported in the summer of 2009. The report was published while the Dáil was in recess – on its return it became the centrepiece for public debate ahead of a tough Budget to be announced in December. To borrow a salient phrase used from Benchmarking to the latter unwinding of the legislation underpinning those pay cuts – it was 'the only game in town'.

1.2 Context of study – political / economic / media / international

The power relationships between politics, economics and the media are key to understanding society; since the onset of globalisation of the 1980s this takes on an international context to such relationships. Across the world undoubtedly there was widespread public anger when it became apparent that the financial elites had based their unsustainable growth utilising speculation in the housing and property market; and it had spectacularly collapsed taking share prices with it. Following the bank guarantee in Ireland the population became overtly aware that reckless lending had threatened the whole financial system and the government had borrowed billions of euro to invest in failing banks in the hope of releasing credit. National resources were mobilised to support banks facing acute difficulties; aberrantly resulting in the majority of the population living under austerity programmes that attacked public services, wages and conditions of employment.

It is the media's role to communicate events and explain their meaning so that their audience can understand what has happened and what are the ramifications. When a modern media organisation is privately owned it is invariably part of the corporate sector; if publicly owned then forms a part of the government sector and this demonstrably impacts on viewpoint. Hallin and Mancini [2004, 8] posed the idea that the news media was not created and neither

does it operate in a vacuum, but must be examined with an understanding of the "nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society, among other elements of social structure".

It is common in Ireland for government advisers to be recruited from media organisations; a steady stream of former journalists supply government ministers with expertise on news production and news values – often communicating directly with former colleagues, successors and acquaintances. Such direct contact is perhaps unavoidable in a relatively small state. The problem for a liberal democracy is the erosion of the required separation of media and state. It is argued that the media in Ireland gave up all pretence of checking governmental power, and often advised the government on how to implement austerity measures and limit trade union influence and the quality of working conditions. Mercille [2015, 131] stated, "One main figure in this respect is Stephen Collins, *The Irish Times*' political editor, who is often indistinguishable from a government public relations agent."

The Irish media sought to report and explain the financial crisis using those same elite sources that had been in part responsible for the crisis; economists attached to financial institutions and the political elite [Rafter 2014, 598] or specialised journalists interpreting events. A narrow range of opinions was expressed and the resultant shaping of the narrative was that Ireland was effectively broke and would inevitably struggle to borrow from the markets under such conditions. Similarly, the situation in the UK reflected a lack of idea-exploration. Through source and thematic analysis of the national broadcaster's flagship radio programme, Berry found a "narrowness of opinion was common" [Berry 2013, 267] and that despite vested interests, "City sources are treated as impartial experts".

Once Ireland had adopted the euro as its currency, the previously used option to devalue had been removed; so reducing public expenditure was a devaluation of sorts – but there were a raft of alternatives that were not given the oxygen of debate, including leaving the euro. This study discusses reasoning why the news organisations in Ireland would align their opinion and editorial viewpoint with the dominant political and financial elite – and so often informing the political elite through its agenda-setting properties. This study will also outline how media reports directly influenced government backbenchers to intervene in social partnership talks aimed at finding alternatives to imposed pay cuts through the laying off of public sector workers through a process of 'unpaid leave'; resulting in the collapse of a corporate model that had served the country for more than 20 years.

Put succinctly, the dominant solution was that only the free market could solve the problem whose root cause was this same neoliberal ideology. There were other voices reported, with alternative ideas, but were not representative of the general trend and such attempts were often opened to subsequent derision or pejorative scorn. Many commentators adjusted the narrative to suggest that Irish public spending had gone out of control; and this fed into 'conflict' between the [efficient] private sector who were 'shouldering the burden' through pay cuts and job losses while a cosseted public sector were refusing to 'share the pain' [Cawley 2012].

In Ireland the news value of 'negativity' was predominant yet extended beyond the economic crisis and resultant fiscal deficit to the subsequent 'blame game' where public sector pay and the perceived intransigence of the public sector trade union movement was assigned responsibility for the state's growing debt. The decontexualised coverage of the crash focussed on immediacy required a clear narrative of 'someone to blame'; attached to the trade union movement. It became increasingly apparent that the trade union movement had difficulty gaining media traction to its side of the story: Where access to amplification through the media was provided, throughout 2009 the trade union movement was largely unprepared, wrongfooted and lacked credible sourced economic expertise to counter the neoliberal framing of the economic news.

Such a discussion suggests that the decontextualised coverage of the financial crisis in Ireland is based both on the ideological bias of media organisations espousing simple market solutions where context is perhaps too complicated and outside of the news frequency; and also a function of modern media – where immediacy is king. Where the public service workers did gain some empathetic media response, this too was often with a news value of negativity – the impact pay cuts would have on individuals. The media narrative often seeks 'case studies' whereby individual anecdotes can be used to illustrate statistical evidence or the impact of governmental policy upon a range of professions and pay grades. This offered an opportunity for trade unions and staff associations to influence public opinion through anecdotal evidence, compelling when cumulative, but placing societal and emotional strain on the individual workers courageous enough to reveal their personal circumstances for critical review in the public sphere during a period of economic uncertainty and social turmoil.

Any event taken from its context invites interpretation. Decontextualisation of the economic crisis focussed public attention on the effects – and away from the causes; and the cumulative impact of salient messaging through commentary, editorials and opinion pieces encouraged consensual solutions. If there is perhaps one phrase that encompassed the context supplied by

the dominant elite to support the framing of any subsequent debate it is from economist Colm McCarthy who retorted to workers' groups' objections to imposed pay cuts [*Irish Examiner*, 10 September 2009]: "this country is bust. The government is not short of compassion, it's short of money."

1.3 Media and trade unions – the state of play

The normalisation of journalistic practice and the political economy of the of the media prevent left-wing collectives and workers' groups receiving a fair portrayal [Glasgow University Media Group 1976; Beharrell and Philo 1977; Mercille 2015]. Ownership and control of the media has a relationship to the production of news, reflecting the dominant interests in society and also influencing societal decision makers and public opinion in a tripartite relationship. Public opinion has electoral currency. As democracy has evolved out of feudalism, political power has often been enforced through the bearing of arms; strengthened and controlled by the propagation of ideas, beliefs and values to manufacture the consent of the population. For over two centuries, those dominant interests in society – those who own the means of production – generally employ others whose collective voice has been made through the establishment of trade unions. There has been bitter and brutal conflict that both the historical and contemporary analysis is often airbrushed out by news organisations as the actions of a militant few.

The establishment of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union [ITGWU] by James Larkin in 1909 and its successful tactics of solidarity between workers radicalised Irish trade unionism. The 1913 Lockout was a showdown between the ITGWU and the Dublin Employers Association headed by William Martin Murphy, proprietor of Independent Newspapers. Murphy had purged the IGTWU members at the *Irish Independent* ensuring his own 'commercial empire' was free of 'Larkinite contamination' [Yeates 2013, 582]. *The Irish Times* accused the ITGWU of 'exercising an abominable tyranny over the working classes of the city' [O'Brien 2017, 25-27]. At this time, Ireland was still a part of Britain, and as Ireland was gaining independence the British Labour movement was launching without the support of a single national daily newspaper [Curran 1988, 31]. The twentieth century proved to be a recurring conflict between capital and labour. Overall, trade unionists felt they got a 'raw deal' from the media [Griffiths 1977, 70].

The neoliberal politics of the Thatcher and Reagan era in the 1980s reduced the power and influence of trade unions and the media adapted accordingly [Manning 2001, 176]

downplaying their newsworthiness. The ensuing marginalisation of unions reduced the importance of labour and consequent industrial relations coverage declined on the newsdesk. Unions were effectively removed from the heart of the political process. The number of specialist correspondents working the labour beat declined and an adversarial approach to journalistic inquiry became commonplace – and often antagonistic. This study attempts to gain an authentic insight into the perception of this style of media production from the modern trade union leader and also from the media professionals in an Irish context. Sweeney [1980, 127] argued that many unions see such an adversarial position as the natural order in an unequal society while others feel cast into this adversarial role because the industrial relations process is seen as essentially 'negative' by management. In the public sector, management is government. This research attempts to ascertain whether antagonism [or negative 'tone'] is equally distributed towards powerful regular news sources such as politicians and economists - and the less-powerful counter-definers of the trade unions. Winston [2002] suggested that if we accept that industrial news has been replaced by economic news, then the reporting of industrial relations issues will be considered accordingly.

For more than a century, newspapers have told us what is going on in the world. They have the power to frame the debate through the news values and production practices within their media organisations. Trade unionists in Ireland and the UK remained hostile or indifferent to the media, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s [Ó Ceallaigh 1981, TUC 1979]. Jones [1986, 205] noted that a sea-change began to happen among British trade unions towards the media and they began to develop communication strategies:

> "During the early 1980s there was a major reassessment of traditional trade union responses to advertising and public relations. After three or four million union members had voted for a Conservative government in both the 1979 and 1983 elections, the movement recognised its inadequacy in conveying information to the membership and in winning the support of the public."

Management could still exploit the slow take-up of modern marketing and communication techniques. The failure of the wider union movement to keep abreast of the advances that employers had made in improving direct communications with employees had not been lost on management [Jones 1986, 49]. In the absence of political and industrial power, communication strategy is one area still within the sphere of influence for trade unions. Manning [2001, 183] stated;

> "Trade unions around the world are turning to news media work as a strategy to be employed during harsh times in which neoliberal governments appear determined to administer the *coup de grâce*."

The trade union movement has often been found wanting when faced with economic crisis – failing to understand the economic problem, or moreover, failing to reframe them in a way that gains traction with the media or public opinion. ICEM [1996, 67] advised that the trade union movement should mobilise their resources to present positive labour alternatives for economic and social development. Not an easy task, as this study posits. As Hall [1978, 64] outlined, even the regularly accessed sources like official trade union spokespeople must respond in terms pre-established by the primary definers and using the set, privileged definitions if they stand any chance of gaining traction in the political economy of Hallin and Mancini's [2004] Liberal Model media organisation.

The economic and social system is treated as 'normal' and the model of journalism reporting and analysing developments does so within this frame of reference; when crisis strikes and there is conflict for resources – the scapegoat is often the trade union movement. Strikes and stoppages were blamed for the economic woes of the 1970s and 1980s; and these were addressed in Ireland by the adoption of a social partnership model throughout the economic 'boom' of the 1990s and early 2000s. This study examines the impact of the economic crisis that unfolded in 2008-2010 and the tripartite relationship between the state, the public sector trade unions and the Irish media.

As McNair points out [2006, 170], the Glasgow University Media Group fuelled the trade unionists' understanding that there existed media 'bias' against their viewpoints on economic issues. In terms of communicating politically their viewpoint, the Irish public sector unions, under the banner of the ICTU, tried twice in 2009 to present strategies ('There is a better, fairer way' and again 'There is still a better, fairer way') that, in a raft or policy measures, sought to increase tax for high earners, tax capital at the same rate as wages and establish a national recovery bond; and all measures to reduce the fiscal deficit over an elongated time period. Neither attempt gained any serious traction – but gave some key journalists the opportunity to ridicule the sectional interest nature of trade union political communication. The trade unions, private sector employers' groups and the government all competed to influence public opinion through the media – and the trade unions quickly understood that the debate had already been framed by economists who emphasized that the country had run out of money – hence the need for austerity. The battle for public opinion was thus limited

to where the cuts in public spending would fall. The unions were also made aware, through painful experience, that their communication channels with members had become outdated – principally relying on printed circulars that were out of date by the time they were printed and posted on large scales. One interviewee pointed out that the *Sunday Independent* could reach their members faster and more effectively than the unions could; and to compound the problem, the unions no longer had the shopfloor meetings and network of branches had been superseded by the need for direct connections via digital technologies. They had failed to invest maintaining their political communication apparatus and methodologies.

What did come back to the unions was a stark message; the members were not prepared to call indefinite strikes – they didn't believe they could win them and with personal debt levels exacerbated by cheap credit could not afford to risk losing more pay than was already taken from them. The public sector trade union leaders decided early in their campaign that they could not lead their members into a situation like that in Greece – direct conflict with government – that would inevitably lead to substantial job losses. Instead, it was decided to attempt to gain some influence over austerity through a negotiated settlement utilizing limited industrial action as a sanction of last resort. The trade unions were in an unenviable position and were negotiating how €4billion was to be saved by the department of finance with the minimal impact to each public sector worker. In such a situation, this study attempts to examine the trade union response to the economic crisis; how the unions responded and what strategic thinking underpinned the [limited] collective action and political communication of the time – hence the need to carefully deconstruct newspaper coverage of key events and analyse alongside the in-depth semi-structured interviews with those leaders making the strategic decisions and implementing the tactical planning.

The unions were limited by their weakened internal communications and relied increasingly on disseminating their viewpoint to members, other unions and the Irish public through a predominantly privately owned media – and the national broadcaster RTÉ. The trade union leaders and communication specialists recounted their perception of open media hostility towards their views, the pre-framing of debates and overt criticism, indeed ridicule, of their economic proposals. For the public, the cycle of communication might have suggested that the unions were 'out of touch' and needed a 'reality check' as many of the newspaper salient headlines suggested. This study seeks to extract and analyse the strategic and tactical response of the trade union movement to an economic crisis not of their making; when a liberal model media was pivoting towards finding a solution to Ireland's financial deficit identified as expanding due to a 'bloated' public service with a 'big ticket' pay bill and

'gilt edged' pensions. The trade unions identified a stark choice between outright conflict or measured communication – and when confronted with Ireland potentially defaulting on loans and being unable to borrow on the financial markets – chose the latter. This study attempts to examine and understand both the motives as well as the actions of this political communication strategy.

1.4 Research questions

The key research question that this study attempts to address is: *How did Irish public sector trade unions **respond** to the 2008 economic crisis and what, if any, lessons were learned from that crash?* If there are lessons to be learned for the trade union movement, they will need to address any perceived failings of their respective response, both individually and collectively – whether that be through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU] or through the alliance of trade unions and staff associations that formed the 24/7 Frontline Alliance in 2009.

Previous studies [Cawley 2012, Berry 2013, Rafter 2014] showed that the trade union perspective was relatively marginalised when the emerging economic crisis was being defined and explained through the media; as elite sources and journalistic interpretation overshadowed the trade union voice. However, as the narrative moved beyond the background issues of the causes of the crisis were overshadowed by the foreground issue of the immediate response to the crisis; the trade unions were brought into the debate – often as primary sources. It may not be an overstatement to suggest that the public sector unions were the primary counter-definers against austerity measures in welfare spending, education and the wider public service. Within the political elite, few within the Opposition benches were advocating for a Keynesian response to the financial deficit.

The financial crisis incubated for several years in Ireland, but from the bank guarantee of 30 September 2008 it unfolded into a fiscal deficit that was addressed throughout 2009 by the imposition of a 'pension levy' and subsequent pay cut, and a negotiated public sector agreement in June 2010. For the public sector trade unions it was an unprecedented period in their history and with implications and repercussions that this study attempts to examine. This study attempts to improve the understanding of how the political communication of Irish public sector trade unions influenced or shaped public policy during the economic crisis of 2008-2010. An examination of the content of national broadsheet newspapers throughout September to December 2009 included a sentiment analysis [tone] towards the trade unions,

trade union spokespeople, public servants and the public service; this was conducted in both news stories and opinion pieces. A key area of concern for this study is what factors ensured such media coverage was so weighted against the trade union perspective - and how these factors could be addressed in the future.

This study also completed a significant number of interviews [n = 27] with trade unionists, government advisers, trade union communication advisers and key specialist journalists many of whom contributed to, or featured in, the items in the broadsheet newspapers in the content analysis. For instance, journalist Martin Wall of *The Irish Times* was interviewed twice for this study [2013 and 2019]; and of the 1,016 items reviewed in the content analysis, Wall is credited in this authorship of 106 of the items. Such key findings in the content analysis can be triangulated with this series of semi-structured interviews that to drill down and gain a deeper insight into motivations, perceived threats and the actors' overarching understanding of the context of the arena in which they were participants. The trade unionists were afforded the opportunity to discuss and opine on a range of sub questions on their appraisal of media coverage; so too were specialist journalists and communication specialists who were acutely aware of the commentary – even if they were not directly involved in such production.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The research drew on the techniques of content (deductive) analysis to quantify the coverage and cluster (inductive) analysis to draw out the dominant and recurring themes with the coverage; this study focuses not on replicating these findings in terms of identifying or quantifying primary definers, but on conducting a sentiment analysis of press coverage of the crisis in an attempt to establish the relationship between news values, media coverage and the economic crash.

- How did the national newspapers cover the crash in terms of news values?
- What context was outlined within newspaper coverage?
- Was there a differential tone between news and opinions pieces?
- What were the tactical responses proposed by actors to address the strategic issues?
- Were alternatives to austerity discussed thoroughly?
- Is it possible to quantify any perceived hostility towards the public sector trade unions?

Such a quantitative analysis was used to inform how the news values deployed in the newspapers coverage of the crash may have impacted upon the reputation and legitimacy of the trade union movement as a credible actor in resolving the crisis. The themes and key findings from such primary research material is used as a measuring rod to calibrate and authenticate the research sub-questions emerging from the interviews. Interviewees were typically asked whether the proposed response to Ireland's economic deficit was framed by neoliberal economists and whether they felt the media was hostile to public sector trade unions and public servants. Interviewee' responses is analysed alongside the data summarised in the content analysis.

This research does not inform us as to how the media organisations decided upon their viewpoint; but it does indicate that the public sector trade unions were largely told that the country could not afford to pay their 'gilt-edged' salaries, pensions and the unearned 'perks' that they were refusing to forego. The public sector trade unions were derided for attempting to protect the sectional interests of their members, which was their role and function.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The interviews are summarised across three chapters. Each chapter attempted to understand and inform key research sub-questions that could feed into the overarching research question. These included:

- How did the Irish public sector trade unions respond to the economic crisis?

- Did neoliberal economists frame the debate on solving the financial deficit?
- Was there measurable hostility in Irish media towards public sector workers?
- What did the trade unions learn from the economic crisis?

The first interview chapter [Chapter 7] examines the context of the crash; summarised interviews on the themes of the immediate issues and problems that arose in the context of the crash; and how the trade union movement responded and realigned tactics in the light of developments. This is broken down into the immediate response to the economic crash; the perceived conflict between public and private sectors; the issue of trade unions protecting 'core pay'; the emergence of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as political actors and primary definers. The second interview chapter [Chapter 8] assesses the possibilities of conflict or communication as the key strategic priorities of the trade union movement during the crash and how effectively these were pursued. Interviewees opined on the probabilities of avoiding a pay cut for public servants; the failure to agree alternatives in pay talks; the trade union response to the collapse of social partnership in December 2009. The third interview chapter [Chapter 9] is concerned with communicating the crisis – focussing on how the trade union movement viewed the media coverage of the crash and, specifically, the reporting of the trade union movement. The key questions are developed around the importance and efficiency of internal communication within the trade union movement; the media framing of the economic crisis; perceptions of media hostility towards the trade union sector; tactics deployed by the trade union movement as it sought to protect its members from media hostility.

1.5 Research methods

The Irish financial crash of 2008, after the Irish government decided to guarantee the liabilities of the Irish banks, the state began a slide into freefall. Unemployment rose sharply and the state was ultimately "forced to accept a humiliating 'bail-out' from the EU and IMF" [Finn 2011]. Such a seismic change in a nation's fortunes prompted much academic and journalistic study.

Mercille [2015, 32-44] outlined how the Irish media failed to predict the collapse [or 'bursting'] of the housing bubble and instead "relied on so-called 'experts' from the financial or real estate industry to describe the market, which thus received invariably upbeat analysis". Fahy, O'Brien and Poti [2010, 18] reported that Irish journalists continued to draw upon those same financial experts reporting after the economic collapse. Cawley's

[2012] study involved a content and cluster [source of news] analysis of the mid-market and quality Irish newspapers from July 2008 to June 2010 examining the framing of news. His selected methodology was to 'draw out the dominant and recurring frames' and to 'identify the key institutional sources' in the framing contests over this two-year period. Rafter [2014] focussed on the 'experts' chosen as the sources to in the construction of the public discourse in Ireland's national morning radio news at the start of the financial crisis; finding "elite-orientated coverage with official sources having strongest access in the 3-month period after the announcement of the controversial bank guarantee" and whose findings suggested that trade unions had limited access at only 3%.

Similarly there are a several journalistic overviews of events including those of Matt Cooper, Fintan O'Toole and Shane Ross; with a number of journalistic works focussing on the role played by the Anglo-Irish Bank by David Murphy, Simon Carswell and, again, Shane Ross – former business editor of the *Sunday Independent*. Absent from much of this analysis was the trade union movement – a significant player but one that is not visible in the existing analyses. It is to this lacuna that this work is addressed. It is suggested that trade unions were excluded from the framing /shaping of the debate on causes and ramifications; but when the debate moved to towards economic solutions to Ireland's fiscal deficit, the trade unions were targeted by the elite-centred primary definers as obstructing the necessary 'fiscal corrections'.

This study incorporates a full and comprehensive content analysis of each Irish broadsheet newspaper article between September and December 2009; to ascertain that each relevant item could be coded and included in the study. This was not based on any sampling within the time period; and the articles were drawn from digital editions of the newspapers or from microfiche copies held at the National Library of Ireland of those newspapers not available on either the Irish Newspaper Archives or Irish Times Digital Archive. It is perhaps a significant feature of the LexisNexis database that around 15% of the articles sourced in this way do not appear on the database; despite intricate and itemised searches by date and key words. This is perhaps an issue of editionising; it is suggested that there is greater accuracy in obtaining such a comprehensive sample via the archives and further investigation may prove fruitful for further study. The period was selected because it was the period on which everything rested – including the possible collapse of social partnership that had been credited with providing industrial peace as the foundation of economic growth. The particular timeframe of September to December 2009 was the key battleground in relation to public opinion and political reaction – everything led up to and followed on from that key period.

The unique perspective of this doctoral thesis is that it interrogates the voices and extracts the contribution of the trade union movement to this critical period through an extensive set of interviews with trade union officials, communication specialists, specialist journalists, and government advisors that were at the heart of the economic crisis. Each interview chapter counterpoints the views of each of the four distinct groups.

An interview is the most prominent tool used in qualitative research to explore participants' perceptions, meanings and definitions of the topic being researched [Cohen, Manion and Morrisson, 2011]. A properly constructed interview allows the participant to articulate their views in greater depth [Jones, 1985]. According to Deacon et al [2007, 68] generating richer data to the study "which means there is more opportunity to explore complex and sensitive social and personal issues". This study incorporates the direct testimony of actors – adding their contribution to research knowledge through interviews a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than obtained from purely quantitative methods. The vast majority of previous work was solely based on content analysis; this current work incorporates content analysis coupled with an extensive set of detailed interviews of those directly involved in events, thereby providing heretofore hidden context and additional detail to such analysis.

In the normal working of trade union / media relations it may not be prudent for trade unionists to attack the media or to criticise individual journalists with whom they have ongoing relationships; but interviews, certainly many years after events, facilitate reflection. Arthur Scargill, leading the UK mineworkers' union in the bitter strike of 1984-5, made a calculated decision to attack the news media in key speeches; taking the resultant applause as proof that union members and the public were particularly opposed to news values and judgements of the print and broadcast media [Jones 1986, 94]. This was not tested in Ireland in 2008-2010.

Social science research is increasingly interested in interview-based studies involving a small sample of respondents [Crouch and McKenzie 2006] with its corresponding labour-intensity required to deliver such in-depth analysis. This is arguably paramount where respondents were closely associated with divisive and uncertain outcomes for people's lives. The key emphasis is on the depth provided by 27 interviews to gather the testimony of those who were at the forefront of the perfect storm that was the financial fallout and distribution of state resources following the economic crash; some 300,000 workers received pay cuts and changed working conditions and austerity measures affected the health and education provision for a generation of Irish people. Many families suffered hardship; many utilised Ireland's traditional pressure-valve of emigration.

The Liberal theory of press freedom would suggest that newspapers submit to market forces, in that sales and advertising depend upon public consumption – likening it to the equivalent of an election [Curran 2000, 287-288] but instead of serving all citizens equally "it tends to result in newspapers that represent the world in ways consonant with the interests of dominant groups'. Or as Beharrell and Philo [1978, x] stated, a society based on private ownership and power could be expected to generate conflict, news organisations view such a social system in its "normal workings" that "will somehow automatically benefit everyone who is part of it". In Ireland in 2009, solving the financial deficit as if it were a household budget was portrayed as the national interest; but whose national interest? Allen [2012, 428] outlined that "the more cuts in wages were presented as part of the national interest, the more likely they were to succeed."

1.6 Scope and limitations of this study

The scope of this study attempts to make a contribution to our understanding of how organised labour is addressed by news organisations in Ireland; an important aspect of our democracy and how trade unions in the public sector responded to an economic crisis where pay cuts and / or job losses were a mechanism to reduce public expenditure when currency devaluation was no longer an option for government. News values and normalised journalistic practice are examined in terms of news production and the political economy of Irish national broadsheet newspapers. This study seeks to examine beyond the framing analysis to test what news values most informed the media coverage of the economic collapse (negativity) and to ask how those same news values fed into the conflict frame used to construct the narrative throughout the crash. A quantitative content analysis is performed of the Irish broadsheet media following the publication of the Special Group [McCarthy / Bord Snip Nua] Report through to the implementation of the government's budgetary response.

Throughout this study I have attempted to rectify any limitations; especially with sampling of media text for inclusion in a content analysis. Initially the intention was to utilise the LexisNexis database; but for a number of reasons it became apparent that the database did not include a substantial proportion of texts that had appeared in the Irish broadsheet newspapers at that time. This was particularly labour intensive but adjudged to be worth the extra time and effort.

There is also a reflection by trade unionists on learning that was derived from such a tumultuous period of modern Irish history in the conflict between capital and labour.

A similar approach was taken with regard to interviews; a wider spectrum to include senior politicians and all general secretaries would have added a fuller dimension, as would interviews with commentariat economists and general media commentators. Unfortunately, in the light of Brian Cowen's sudden ill health, and the prior death of Brian Lenihan, this was not pursued. Tom Geraghty, the former general secretary of the Public Service Executive Union was precluded because of his contemporary role as Deputy Chairman of the Labour Court.

The decision not to include news sources from the data coding may be construed as a limitation as it prevents an analysis of news framing; however, it is argued that the power of trade union sources to influence news content rested with news values, the power to frame the news had remained with sources in the political and economic elite selected by the journalist. Thus, an analysis of news values and expressed sentiment or 'tone' is an appropriate means to examine the dynamics of the power struggle between strategic actors to influence public opinion. Cawley, Berry, Rafter previously examined the role and distribution of news sources and to simply replicate their findings would not add significantly to the research – whereas the emphasis of this study was to provide a tone / news values analysis following the news sources / news framing of the debate had been established.

1.7 Organisation of thesis

The remainder of this thesis falls broadly into four parts.

The first part begins with an outline to the backstory and context of how the [public sector] trade unions in Ireland came to be part of a corporatist structure of social partnership [Chapter 2] in the late 1980s and through a series of national agreements that encouraged wage restraint and industrial peace in exchange for influence upon public policy; in many cases reaching decisions that would normally have been taken by Cabinet. Critics from the political elite suggested that such an arrangement gave too much power to unelected bodies; while critics within the trade union movement viewed the process as facilitating the implementation of neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatisation and marginalisation of trade unions. Social partnership was ongoing at the time of the financial crash of 2008 but failed to deliver a negotiated agreement on fiscal correction at the end of 2009. The context and narrative to this economic crash in Ireland is examined in Chapter 3; giving perspectives to each of the political actors and political and economic conditions in which they were communicating and how this was reported in the media. Chapter 4 examines the trade union relationship

with the media with a particular emphasis on the Liberal Model of media in Ireland [Hallin and Mancini 2004]; including an appraisal of news values in the production of economic and industrial news and the relationship to the political economy of the media and the theoretical perspectives of news production; and the news value of 'negativity' in economic reporting. This chapter [4] also includes a literature review of the media research of the economic crash in both Britain and Ireland.

The second section of this thesis deals in detail with the focus of this research; with a detailed methodology [Chapter 5] of the construction of a thematic content analysis with a particular emphasis on the rationale towards news values and sentiment analysis. The content analysis is focussed on the key period from September to December 2009 that was contextualised in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 includes an outline of the methodology towards the semi-structured interviews of key participants within this intensive period and the overall journey from the unfolding economic crisis to the arrival of the Troika in 2010. The detailed findings of the content analysis of six national broadsheet newspapers are detailed throughout chapter 6; many are expressed in graphs and charts as well as descriptive text and analysis. This uses both deductive and inductive methods to inform the extent of coverage and detail the sentiment of editorials and opinions – as well as news reporting.

The third section of this thesis [Chapters 7 / 8 / 9] aims to synthesise the discussion and analysis of the extensive semi-structured interviews and the main points arising from this oral testimony. Chapter 7 examines the trade unions' initial response to the economic crisis, the movement's strategic goals and their implementation. Chapter 8 focusses on the various proposals to reduce public spending without implementing a pay cut; the collapse of trade union – government talks in December 2009; and the trade union movement's response to the collapse of social partnership. Chapter 9 concerns the testimony of the actors in relation to the role of internal communication within the trade union movement; the media framing of the economic crisis; perceptions of media hostility towards the public sector; and finally how the trade union movement sought to protect its members from, and counter, media hostility.

The fourth and final section [Chapter 10] discusses the complex outcome of this research and aims to draw conclusions to the significance of this research and place its findings into the context of enhancing understanding the relationship between trade unions, the media and government throughout seismic change in Irish economic fortunes. The findings as evidenced by this research include that the trade unions were woefully unprepared in terms

of communications and evidence-sourced analysis for the economic crash; how the nature of trade union activity changed due to social partnership and how this undermined the movement at the critical time. The lessons learned are discussed, both by the author and through personal interviews with those influencing the future of trade union communications.

Chapter 2: TRADE UNIONS & SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

As the Republic of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom until independence was achieved in 1922, the histories of the trade union movements are interlinked, and even today some unions remain amalgamated across both jurisdictions. This is in spite of the Trade Union Act of 1941, which provided for state regulation of trade unions. It required trade unions to register, acquire a negotiating licence, and to deposit a sum proportionate to membership with the High Court. Indeed Part III of the Act, later found to be unconstitutional, stated that only Irish-based unions would be given negotiation rights by the minister for industry and commerce. Today several trade unions, such as Unite and the National Union of Journalists [NUJ], represent workers in both states and others, such as the ASLEF, represented railway workers in Britain and Ireland until 1969 [Ogle 2003, 34].

In attempting to tease out any correlation between British and Irish unions' influence on public policy and the economy, there are certain parallels. The raft of legislation to limit industrial power in Thatcherite Britain appears to be mirrored by the introduction by Fianna Fáil of the Industrial Relations [1990] Act; but there it diverges. The response in the 1980s by both governments differs in that the British unions were effectively relegated to observers while the Irish unions were invited to become 'social partners' alongside government, senior civil servants, employers' representatives and elements of civil society – later to include a plethora of non-governmental agencies representative of sectional interests.

2.1 Changing economic fortunes

There is a view that Irish trade unions were fearful of the unions' marginalisation that had been seen in Britain as neoliberalism gained pace [Roche 2009, 195] and in Ireland this was reflected in the new electoral strength represented by the rise of the Progressive Democrats [Hastings, Sheehan & Yeates 2007, 8-13]. The recurring question is whether the trade unions would benefit from being inside the tent or shouting from the sidelines as market-driven ideology and globalisation of capital were in ascendancy. As D'Art and Turner suggested [2011, 159]:

> "Social partnership in Ireland appeared to coexist with standard neoliberal policies such as cutting taxes, social spending, eliminating barriers to free trade, reducing regulation of labour and financial markets, and privatising state companies…unions supposedly gained a measure of influence over public policy in areas of critical concern to their constituents such as employment, social welfare and taxation."

The debate throughout the academic literature is whether the series of national agreements between the social partners were causal factors in economic growth or whether any perceived successful outcome from the social partnership process was merely a result of changing economic fortunes in an Ireland that had been economically repressed by its isolationist policies – i.e. Ireland was catching up with other Western democracies through direct foreign investment, especially from American corporations taking advantage of an available, young educated workforce, at the edge of Europe that was increasingly non-unionised and espoused low corporate taxation policies. While it appears that Irish independence may have absolved the state of the British class structure, it retained a similar political and economic system. Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman [2014, 27] point out that "in contrast to Britain, nationalism overrode class politics" with the two leading political parties being to the right of the political spectrum; while also noting that a series of 'social partnership' agreements since 1987 "marked a very different path from that taken in Britain". Munck [1999, 97] asserts that Irish industrial relations are marked by 'political bargaining' rather than 'free' collective bargaining.

McCarthy [1980] outlined the early years of Irish trade unionism as a tale of two cities; Belfast and Dublin – with the British unions dominating until the emergence of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1909. Even then the Irish Trade Unions Congress [ITUC] ran in parallel with its British counterpart until the 1930s when Congress divided to create a separate Labour Party in Britain. Two separate Congresses were formed in 1945 and remained split until they reunited to form the ICTU in 1959. From 1960 onwards the Irish trade union movement began to confront the social and economic problems as Ireland headed towards an open economy – and Northern Ireland slowly turned towards internal violence and the 'Troubles'.

Anderson [1981, 113] noted that that the two systems of industrial relations in Ireland were distinct but 'related intimately', however, with the introduction of the Labour Court in 1946 the Irish state began to move away from the British model where the shop steward had greater influence and towards centralised bargaining where the trade union's full time officials play

a crucial role. Under such centralisation – with full-time officials in head offices controlling the negotiations and communications – trade unions open themselves to criticism from within, and also in the media for being opaque and undemocratic. Craig [2002, 118] outlined how this effect can be mitigated: "if negotiations are subject to regular outside scrutiny and a regular mandate from a representative body, as well as final approval by all the members after a real debate, the dangers of bureaucratisation can be lessened."

The relationship between trade unions and the media is ripe for constant examination. This is a key determinate in a powerful tripartite relationship that will be examined in later chapters. The media often deride trade unions, and focus often falls on personalities rather than policies, and union leaders are often derided for their antipathy towards the media, and as impeding progressive change. But J.J. Lee argued that there were intellectuals within the movement that had been damaged by internal union feuds and splits that inhibited such ability from realisation of its full potential. Lee [1980, 12] contended the "The quality of thinking of many trade union leaders was more impressive than that of many employers, civil servants and politicians" in Ireland between the end of the second world war and the onset of the 1960s. But he also notes [21] that "it was easier for outstanding individuals to make their mark in most spheres other than trade unionism. Probably no other sectors of Irish society, not even the universities, were so fragmented, so racked by personal and institutional jealousies, as the trade unions."

2.2 Influencing policy and pay

O'Donnell and Thomas [1999, 117] outlined how attempts were made in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s to establish a "form of corporatism or vocationalism" that failed to influence the politically powerful and how "the opening of the economy and the emergence of growth in the 1960s was accompanied by the development of a distinct tripartism in aspects of Irish public policy. Representatives of trade unions and businesses were appointed to the wide range of public bodies established." Charles McCarthy [1980, 32] observed that while "governments are as a rule uneasy about trade unions . . . In the post war years in this country [Ireland], the various governments were at the least benign, and at times much more than that, offering in certain areas of economic development a degree of partnership". In particular, he noted that this occurred "in particular during the period when Sean Lemass was taoiseach" [1959-1966] .

"He was prepared to offer the trade union movement an integral part in the development of much of the thinking that lay behind the government's economic and social programme . . .

to respond positively to the idea of a planned development of incomes through national pay agreements or similar understandings." Lemass had indeed sought to centralise collective bargaining permanently; aligning pay bargaining and agreements to coincide with the pursuit of the government's economic priorities [Roche 2009, 188].

But the 1960s were not dispute free: in 1961 members of the Garda Síochána (police force) attended a meeting at Dublin's Macushla Ballroom that later was termed a 'revolt' because they had ignored orders not to attend. The argument put forward then, and recurring, is that there should be a value placed on the security of employment tenure. Sweeney [1980, 125] noted that the argument was that "people in secure public employment should settle for something less than those in less sheltered employment in free enterprise? Something less? The counter argument is how much less?"

> "And it is there that public sector pay policy has played a crucial role . . . In the sixties, as official inquiries have established, the main preoccupation of the State bodies seemed to be not mainly with settling particular disputes but with avoiding the setting of pay headlines which would trigger new cycles of leapfrog claims elsewhere in the public service."

It is perhaps pertinent to note that such 'leapfrogging' of subsequent public sector pay claims remained problematic [Regan 2012, 119] and was often addressed by the adjustments of certain 'allowances' to specific professions, teachers, prison officers, defence forces and gardai [Report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body 2002, 61] that obfuscated direct comparison - or relativities - of pay scales between worker groups; a recurring tactic of subsequent governments that the Benchmarking initiative of the early 2000s tried to override but resulted in inter-union tensions and friction in the economic crisis during 2008-2010.

McCarthy [1980, 36] observed that in 1970 there occurred an attempt to create "an integrated, institutionally-supported prices and incomes policy. This would have been a high point in trade union-government joint economic planning." Anderson [1981, 115] noted that the Irish government in 1970 "unilaterally announced, without prior notice and with immediate effect" statutory control of incomes and limited pay rises – but not on rents, prices or fees; this Bill was later withdrawn, but only after the Irish Congress of Trade Unions had ratified a rapidly concluded National Wage Agreement. Thus, Anderson insisted, "since 1970, the freedom to negotiate wages for their members had been withdrawn from trade unions in the Republic of Ireland." Such wage agreements became an informal 'national law' and because

such agreements required much of ICTU's resources the workers' aspirations for better health, education, transport, safety at work and pensions were effectively ignored. Similarly, Aidan Kelly [1980, 76] declared that "the State does not only act as employer, but since the 1970s has acted as conduit for centralised negotiations and national wage agreements as part of economic policy and financial planning; but to a certain extent this has subsequently been curtailed in all but the public sector."

As the 1970s progressed, according to Roche [1998, 184] the "working parties, involving public servants and union and employer representatives, became a feature of public policy-making." He [1998, 188] refers to the 1970s' experiment in social partnership and noted that any effective neo-corporatism relies on the pre-condition of a high level of consensus between the parties on how to tackle economic problems and a centralised system of employer organisations and trade unions. Thus Congress had little power to sanction affiliates and had to rely on moral persuasion rather than the threat of expulsion. But, as Fogarty observed [1980, 146] "rising expectations are creating new problems in the relationship between members and officials . . . members expect to have more of a voice in union affairs and to do more of the industrial relations themselves . . . in members' insistence on a direct voice in approving agreements." Nonetheless, as recalled by Pat Sweeney, then industrial editor of RTÉ [1980, 121] "strikes account for only a few percentage points of the national labour force in any year and it is true that most of Ireland's industrial relations is conducted amicably, well out of sight of the media. Similarly, Kelly [1980,76] noted that "compared with other countries, there are no overtly anti-union media in Ireland. The media have particularly expounded the 'moderate' union position during the national pay agreement era."

Throughout the economic recession of the 1980s any wage gains were neutered in terms of disposable income by income tax policy – and public sector workers were falling behind in pay relativity. The decade was characterised by large scale demonstrations and growing protests against a backdrop of rising inflation and an escalating tax burden. Roche [1998, 198] noted that "embargoes on recruitment, early retirement schemes and career break schemes, imposed to cut public spending by reducing public service numbers, led to increased workloads and declining morale." Union leaders feared what happened in Britain under Thatcher could occur in Ireland. By the time of the 1987 election, Fianna Fáil noted the friction between the government and public sector trade unions over the fiscal crisis; the need to reign-in government spending and the need for austerity measures. Following the 1987 election new taoiseach Charles Haughey appointed Bertie Ahern as Minister for Labour – whose 'fingerprints are all over social partnership' [Roche 2009, 199]; this government

sought to address a destabilised economy through a brokered consensus between unions and employers [Donaghey and Teague 2007, 20]; "To have walked away from a social partnership agreement would have opened both employers and unions to the accusation that they were putting narrow sectional interests before national needs. Unions would have been particularly vulnerable in this situation." Ahern went on to become minister for finance and subsequently taoiseach from 1997 to 2008, presiding over the Benchmarking process and economic policy leading up to the economic crisis.

2.3 Social partnership in Ireland (1987–2009)

Larragy [2002, 9] defined social partnership as "a set of institutions through which pay bargaining is organised, in conjunction with a range of macro-economic policies, management of the state finances, broad guidelines on income and other taxes, on growth of public expenditure on education, health and social services." Healy and Reynolds [2002, 46] noted that the process is "dependent on a shared understanding [and] characterised by a problem-solving approach designed to produce consensus." The consensus and shared understanding are more a result of the problem-solving approach than preconditions. Social partnership thus empowered other actors to shape policy that would ordinarily be decided by Cabinet; while it also takes pay bargaining into the government sphere and away from purely market forces. But cuts in public services were advanced ahead of the Programme for National Recovery in 1987, and there existed the implied threat that if partnership was not the adopted approach then the neoliberal policies so effective in Britain and the US to limit trade union influence were threatened [Roche 2007, 397]. Formal three-year partnership agreements were deployed in Ireland continuously from 1987 through to 2009 – only being abandoned by government following the economic crisis of 2008. Most of these agreements involved wage constraints to be accepted by the unions in exchange for traded against preserved social protection payments and formal commitments on government social and welfare policy.

There are views that the Irish social partnership process effectively curtailed the industrial power of trade unions while utilising trade union influence on their membership to avoid industrial action. As noted by Culpepper and Regan [2014, 11–12] "mobilising democratic consent across the public and private sectors while helping to solve the problem of wage restraint provided the carrot that led Fianna Fáil to incorporate trade unions into public policymaking. Industrial relations conflict, inflation and the loss of competitiveness associated with free-for-all wage bargaining compelled the Fianna Fáil government to centralise collective bargaining." Among the negative results for rank-and-file members of

trade unions is the limitation placed on local bargaining and the removal of the strike option. Denny [2012, 5] noted that "social partnership deals are characterised by a ban on strikes and work stoppages over pay, no pay settlements above a set ceiling, long cooling off periods following any rejection of pay offers and decisions by a Labour Court to be mandatory and not subject to employee ballots." For Roche [1998, 148] "the spheres of politics and industrial relations overlap: collective bargaining over pay and conditions becomes directly tied to government decision-making, especially in the areas of economic and social policy." He also noted [1998, 182] that "from around the mid-1970s, the terms 'social partnership' and the 'social partners' were increasingly used to describe the new process of centralised negotiations between the leaders of unions and employer federations and senior civil servants and government ministers." As Fianna Fáil was determined to avoid confrontation with the public service unions "a three-year agreement [*Programme for National Recovery*] on pay and economic and social policy measures, was concluded in 1987 [and] was judged a major success by unions, employers and the state" [Roche, 1998, 200–03].

In a study of why such agreements generally evolved in financial crises Hassel [2003, 715] observed that "tripartite wage agreements were seen and used by the government as instruments to remedy these problems and reconcile trade union participation in policy-making within a more restrictive economic environment." Writing of the 'mountain' of Ireland's debt that stood at 129% of GNP in 1986 (it was rising because of increased unemployment and worsened by government's deflationary policy defending the value of the currency) Craig [2002, 31] noted that:

> "The State was in a severe crisis and had one of the highest debt ratios in the industrialised world. A massive propaganda campaign was launched to encourage everyone to believe it was their fault and was because they had lived beyond their means. A climate of national crisis, in which it was possible the IMF would be brought in to run the country, was promoted in order to get those least to blame to shoulder the cost."

Opinions differ on what social partnership entailed. Denny [2012, 5] found that:

> "In the Irish Republic the labour movement has been involved in some form of 'social partnership' since the late 1980s. The main thrust of these agreements is based upon artificially repressing wages, in order to increase profitability and economic competitiveness, which, the theory goes, increases private investment and job creation. As a result Irish unions have accepted very low wage increases amid dramatic increases

in house prices fuelled by speculators, business people and professionals flush with profits and undeclared incomes."

However, Peter Cassells, general secretary of the ICTU in the 1990s, noted [1995, 175] that social partnership did "broaden the debate on economic policy, from the narrow confines of deregulation and cutting wage costs to the wider and interlinked issues of growth, competitiveness, innovation and positive flexibility." He [1995, 177] advocated social partnership as capable of influencing the national economy and wider European development. It appeared as if there was a belief that such an approach was innovative in creating the 'Tiger' economy that could be adapted and adopted internationally:

"The social partners have a key role to play in adapting the European model to the challenges it now faces. Structures, mechanisms and resources must be in place to enable the social partners to effectively contribute to the development and future direction of European economic, social and industrial relations policies. This should be underpinned by the development of social partnership at national level and social partnership at company level."

McNamara et al [1994, 57] were similarly inclined, noting that "Congress and the unions seek to influence policy in favour of a better deal for the less well-off . . . Nowadays the right of the movement to put forward views on a wide range of issues is accepted by government, and the trade unions are seen as one of the 'social partners'." They also observed [1994, 44] that "a vital part of the job of the trade union movement has been to press the government to spend more money on vital services such as health and education, and to fight for a decent income for the worse-off sections of society". Also, Brendan MacPartlin [1998, 78] justified the strategic approach by the trade unions to engage in social partnership by noting that:

"The weakening of trade union power in the 1980s and the challenging conditions of a globalised and deregulated market called for a new strategy from trade unions . . . after a period of marginalisation and crisis entered on a strategy of social partnership with government and other interest groups. It moved from an adversarial stance on industrial relations to a co-operative one."

O'Donnell and Thomas [1999, 122] further asserted that the form of social partnership adopted in Ireland involved a "combination of consultation, negotiation and bargaining [heavily dependent on a] shared understanding of the key mechanisms and relationships in

any given policy area' and was characterised by a "problem-solving approach" to provide consensus and address "joint problems". This in effect meant that the three-yearly national agreements made the trade unions complicit in government policy-making. As they note [1999, 125] "this emerging type of "neo-corporatist" governance extends beyond the negotiation of multi-annual agreements, as the social partners have been effectively co-opted into the public policy-making domain."

MacPartlin [1998, 80] suggested that wage increases were sacrificed in exchange for greater influence on public policies across a range of social issues including taxation, employment, healthcare and education and that "this type of exchange has continued for the period of social partnership when the trade union movement has come to understand itself as an integral part of Irish society and intends to influence changes in that society." O'Donnell and Thomas [1999] could not establish a relationship between the early forms of tripartism that had prevailed in the forties through to the sixties and the social partnership approach that was established in 1987 and continued through until 2008. They [1999, 118] asserted that "employers, trade unions, farmers and civil servants analysed policy issues and negotiated economic and social governance" and quoted [126] a senior civil servant as saying "the social partners are now a more powerful influence in the policy process, to the extent that some politicians feel that trade unionists, for example, have more power than backbenchers." But they conclude [138] that "there is a complex relationship between social partnership and government policy. The impact of partnership on policy is variable and contingent." Because of this random nature of the relationship, the authors suggested it was 'best to focus on developing partnership itself'. A contrary view is posed by Allen [2000, 104] that while "the ICTU's status has never been higher in official circles and it is consulted on almost every aspect of government policy, yet the growth of its influence is in inverse proportion to the share that workers gain from the national economy." He added, [2000, 114] that "the union leaders took on board the acute problems that Irish capitalism faced and accordingly forced moderation on their members."

There also existed a view that trade unions were already in decline, and that the rise of the social pact in Ireland actually prolonged the movement through a new access to influence public policy. MacPartlin [1998, 98] argued that:

> "Participation in social partnership appears to have had the effect of constraining the unions to make the choice for restructuring to the extent that is has been able to project a ten-year strategy of social and economic programmes . . . Trade unionism appears to have entered a new phase of strategy in its commitment to social partnership. Its ability to reform its own structures would suggest that, rather than going into decline as an anachronism, it will continue to play a role as the guarantor of fairness in the relationship between labour and capital."

Healy and Reynolds [2002] considered the situation after five successive three-year national agreements and judged the socioeconomic situation to be significantly different from 1987; but how much this was due purely to social partnership remains unclear. They noted that economic growth might have occurred regardless of such agreements, or indeed that the social partnership undermined democracy but the corollary was that the social partners were able to take the hard political decisions that the political class were not prepared to make. They [2002, 41] concluded that "social partnership has been a major development in governance over the period since 1987. The basis of social partnership has been a process of shared reflection, analysis and policy development followed by negotiations within mutually understood frameworks . . . This has produced a substantial network of policy design, monitoring and evaluation involving both government and social partners." Similarly, O'Hara [2002, 122] noted that that social partnership "involving corporate forms and governance and the growth of civil society, has impacted upon policy and practice in a number of ways . . . more complex, involving partnerships between statutory and voluntary bodies, state agencies and private interests, local activists and local representatives." However, Teague and Donaghey [2015, 419] concluded that during the 1990s working groups involving government officials, trade unions, employers and civic groups largely failed to develop new policies on a range of economic and social issues and social partnership played a largely 'marginal role' after 2000 onwards – when financialisation drove the Irish economy.

By the early 2000s, trade unions and business interest were more vocal about the merits or otherwise of social partnership. Writing in 2002 [97], David Begg, then general secretary of the ICTU, opined that "the partnership model has worked well and should be continued if possible. At the same time this opinion has to be qualified by the recognition that, while economic progress is a requisite to social progress, it is not a guarantor of it." He [2002, 104] saw the potential for trade union influence on social progress into the future and noted that if social partnership were to have "a real meaning for us it must facilitate the organisation of workers in trade unions so that their right to a decent standard of living can be vindicated.

In short, the imperative to organise has assumed an importance superior to any other at this point in our history." Begg [2002, 109] also stated the social partnership process was not necessarily as described by those who felt it was an integrated corporatist approach. He noted that he "would desist from describing the process as 'partnership'. It overstates what is involved. There are, for example, enduring differences between capital and labour but they are differences which do not have to be resolved in conflict. The process might more accurately be described perhaps as 'A social compact made in pursuit of the common good'."

However, Brian Geoghegan [2002, 91] a director of the private sector employers' group IBEC observed that:

> "Business has never been convinced that social partnership worked well in the public service . . . The pity is that the process, if linked to a really energetic reform of the organisation of public services, could transform service delivery, conditions and morale . . . The prospect of another inflationary, leap-frogging series of public service settlements flowing from the benchmarking process gives scant confidence to the private sector about the partnership process."[1]

As Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' economy expanded the social partnership process came under more and more pressure. Larragy [2002, 19] noted that as the Irish economy expanded rapidly this "created scope for government to introduce tax policies that owed more to an ideology of neo-liberalism than either corporatism or pluralist social partnership". The market was thus reaffirming its influence on public policy. And, just as social partnership grew out of economic crisis - another was the cause of its collapse. In 2008–09, amid the growing economic calamity that engulfed Ireland, social partnership was effectively abandoned by the Irish government [see Chapter 8]. This led to much soul-searching as to what the social partnership process had delivered for or taken away from the trade union movement.

2.4 Neoliberal policies and union marginalisation

Critics of social partnership have argued that the trade unions' influence on government policy was negligible. Teague and Donahey [2015, 431] concluded that social partnership should not be mourned as it was not employee-friendly and failed to ensure trade union influence on policymaking though they asserted that it did, in the 1990s, stabilise economic

[1] The Public Service Benchmarking Body was established under the terms of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness on 19 July 2000. The Body was mandated to report on how "pay for jobs in the public service should be determined with reference to pay rates for similar types of employment in the private sector".

conditions and preside over a period of sustained growth. D'Art and Turner [2011, 168] have asserted that partnership must now seem a failure from a union perspective as neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatisation and union marginalisation were implemented – and indeed the partnership process failed to deliver a negotiated solution to the fiscal deficit at the end of 2009. The Communist Party of Ireland [2011, 8] accused the trade union movement of promoting a neoliberal agenda through social partnership and national agreements - and failing to offer an alternative. It declared that "social partnership agreements were primarily concerned with economic efficiency and increasing productivity, while social issues were a secondary situation."

Having been effectively been dumped by the government in 2009, the trade union movement, having been a key player in social partnership over twenty years, was paralysed. Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman [2014, 106–07] contended that those unions whose ideological assumptions focus on the conflicting interests of workers and employers may be expected to resist workplace restructuring ['militant opposition']; those with an orientation towards social partnership may be expected to adopt an integrative, problem-solving approach ['cooperative engagement'].[2] But they noted [2014, 116] that the trade union choice was far from clear-cut. Wage restraint was a strategic choice by trade unions taken on the premise that their members would derive greater benefit from sustained employment security than short-term pay increases. Such a strategic option choice is more attractive to those unions orientated away from adversarial positions and towards an ideology of 'social partnership' – but this made unions co-responsible for unpopular economic policies. Where a strategy of militant opposition might be regarded as high-risk for scant reward, unions hoped to retain some influence over policies – rather than to be 'shouting from the sidelines' they could endorse agreed policies. Looking at the Irish trade union after the economic crash Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman [2014, 122] concluded that "Irish trade unions became locked into the social partnership system . . . 'the only game in town'."

2.5 The effects of social partnership on union power

After the economic crisis, Culpepper and Regan [2014] explained, social pacts had ceased to be of interest to the Irish government as they no longer needed unions to mobilise consent – and the power of the unions to disrupt or inconvenience were now extremely limited. In post-crash negotiations the unions were negotiating industrial peace in order to

[2] They also outlined that 'militant engagement' was a possible outcome as was 'moderate opposition' but such positions were difficult for unions to reconcile internally and would generally result in policy inconsistency.

protect jobs and constrain pay cuts. The 'carrot' of the problem-solving approach that had served Ireland from 1987 to 2008 was no longer able to 'seduce policymakers'. Teague and Donaghey [2009, 55] outlined that Irish social partnership had survived for twenty years defying industrial relations theory and literature (and in the absence of a "labour-friendly government") because of a "spectacular period of economic and employment growth"; emphasising that the persistence with social partnership was because it could deliver said growth. They suggested that weak coalition governments required social partnership in order to progress social and economic policies, and to ensure that trade union acquiescence to wage moderation did not jeopardise foreign direct investment that was seen to be driving growth and maintaining competitiveness. Indeed, Allen [2010, 28] identified a key pattern of social partnership with the rise of foreign direct investment to drive economic growth – that most of the companies were now American-owned and operated a policy of non-unionisation. This further polarised the public-private sector divide with union density evermore concentrated in the public sector; laying the basis for a later "employer-led ideological assault that sought to create a division between public and private sector workers".

Hassel [2003, 708] observed that that mutually beneficial strategic interaction often involved strong trade unions interacting with left-wing governments and offering wage restraint only where the government offered high public spending and economic growth. He [2003 p715] further noted that that the underlying reasons for trade union involvement in social pacts was to attempt to retrieve an element of power and influence over social and economic developments: "political exchanges were based on the conversion of industrial into political power, in which trade unions could trade wage restraint for a wide variety of concessions from government . . . thereby wielding extensive power over public policy." If there is evidence that the Irish trade union movement did indeed influence public policy, economic development and redistribution, it was not found by D'Art and Turner [2011, 159] who held that "social partnership in Ireland appeared to coexist with standard neoliberal policies such as cutting taxes, social spending, eliminating barriers to free trade, reducing regulation of labour and financial markets, and privatising state companies." Some critics on the left of the spectrum suggest that social partnership was simply a cover for delivering consent to free market policies [O'Riain 2014, 187].

Is social partnership to be interpreted as a strategic failure of trade union thinking? van Dyk [2009, 86] commented that the trade union movement in Ireland accepted the social partnership model "perhaps as insurance against suffering the fate of the marginalised British trade unions [and] began to present themselves retrospectively as foresighted architects of

the Celtic Tiger". This idea is supported by Roche [2007, 397] who stated that "in Ireland's closest neighbour, the UK, trade unions and the wider labour movement had been marginalised under the neoliberal policies of successive Conservative governments. Union leaders in Ireland were resolved to avoid a similar fate." While the UK under Thatcherism underwent privatisation and deregulation that amounted to a cultural, economic and political revolution, Irish trade unions contributed to the industrial peace and wage restraint that was at the core of a political exchange between unions, employers and the State [O'Riain 2014, 182-208] that saw tensions in the process itself emerge between 2000 and 2003; he stated [2014, 186] "Public sector workers sought increases to 'keep pace' with rising wages elsewhere in the economy, these efforts including a teachers' and nurses' strike in 1999." It is argued that the corporatism of the 1990s particularly favoured the public sector. Regan [2012, 145] echoed that the accelerated wage increases for the public sector outstripped workers in the private sector throughout the 2000s

Social partnership was ended abruptly by the crisis when the government's strategy to reduce the public sector financial deficit was centred on a policy of public sector pay cuts that it hoped would spread throughout the private sector. Allen [2010, 23] asserted that such a policy represented a defeat for the trade union movement that had considered itself to be a partner in governance and policy-making and led to a crisis of strategy that had its roots in the partnership process. It also raised the question that this itself represented a major disconnect between grassroots union membership and the leaders. Indeed, Doherty [2007, 5] also contended that "Irish social partnership, however, with its high-level political exchange between union elites, employers and government, may be viewed as having negative effects on the union-member relationship . . . local union activity may dwindle or, at least, be less visible to members."

The subsequent result of post-crash government – trade union talks, the Croke Park Agreement of 2010 was described by Hardiman and Regan [2013, 12] as "breaking significantly with the Irish industrial relations tradition developed in the 1990s and 2000s of comprehensive and competitiveness-orientated social partnership agreements aimed at employment growth." And as outlined by Teague and Donahey [2015, 430] employers' representative group IBEC "formally withdrew in January 2010 from the machinery of social partnership". Thereafter the trade union movement "found it increasingly difficult to influence events and efforts at mobilising opposition to the government's austerity programme in the form of a general public sector strike also came to nothing as ICTU was obliged to call off a proposed day of action due to lukewarm support of individual unions".

Referring to how the Irish government excluded the trade unions from negotiating economic adjustment Culpepper and Regan [2014] attributed this to the trade union movement's "declining legitimacy"; it having lost "the capacity either to threaten governments with the stick of protest or to seduce policymakers with the carrot of problem-solving". They also noted that [2014, 14]:

> "During 2009–2011 public opinion turned even further against trade unions when it emerged that many union leaders were earning CEO-type salaries. This was followed by accusations of corruption in the Irish vocational and training agency and 'misplaced' internal SIPTU training funds. Internal feuds began to open up between public-sector unions representing high earners and those representing the 24/7 'Frontline Alliance' [healthcare and defence workers]. During two anti-austerity protests in 2009 the leadership of the ICTU and SIPTU were booed off stage."

While noting that [2014 p20] "union economic and political power – the ability to cripple production or to call mass demonstrations in a capital that shake the government – has always been part of the arsenal of labour negotiation" the economic crash and the ending of social partnership left the Irish trade union movement with little or no strategy.

Identified as 'the paradox of partnership', D'Art and Turner [2011, 157] outlined that a number of positive outcomes were expected but failed to materialise including an increase in trade union density, ease of recognition and employer support; but trade union density in the private sector more than halved; with union density in the public sector almost four times as great as that in the private sector [2011, 163].

Trade union numbers increased in line with economic activity – but trade union numbers did not grow in correlation to the employment figures. Density in the employed labour force reached 60% in the 1980s but entered a 'precipitous' decline after 1995 [D'Art, O'Sullivan, Turner 2013, 17] falling to 33% by 2011; while the number of workers in trade unions grew by 30,000 between 1980 and 2007. These figures originated from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey; similar figures are represented in Allen [2010, 27] where trade union membership in Ireland grew from 485,000 in 1985 to 551,700 in 2007 – while employment density dropped from 61% to 32%. Worryingly for the trade unions Allen concluded that this density had dropped sharply in manual workers, those aged 20-24 and those living in the traditional stronghold of Dublin.

Walsh and Strobl [2009, 118] documented "a steep decline in union density in recent years', in concluding remarks referred to a 'diminishing share of workers':

> "The decline in membership in Ireland is given another dimension since we have adopted the partnership process as a central plank for negotiating jointly on wages, labour market policy and working conditions between the social partners in recent times. Workers are represented in these negotiations by unions who are becoming increasingly unrepresentative."

Entering social partnership could be construed as a defensive measure against regulation and marginalisation. If that was the strategic objective, Donaghey and Teague [2007, 19] argued that the Irish trade unions "faired relatively well compared to unions in other Anglo-Saxon economies" having influence on economic and social policy and a veto over proposals towards the labour market. They argued [2007, 39] that while there were more union members than any other time in Ireland's history, "union density levels have fallen more less ever since the signing of the first national social agreement in 1987" because of structural change where employment growth was concentrated in economic sectors 'not receptive to unions recruitment' rather than as a result of social partnership. Indeed Donaghey and Teague [2007, 40] concluded that:

> "Unions, by participating in social partnership arrangements, have contributed enormously to the turnaround in the Irish economy over the last two decades…Social partnership may have its deficiencies, but it is hard to envisage an alternative that makes the prospects for trade unions any brighter. That is why unions see it as the only game in town."

2.6 The contribution to Ireland's economic growth

The trade unions involvement in Social Partnership in Ireland pre-empted and coincided with a sustained period of economic growth, both in terms of the 'Celtic Tiger' years and then the growth period of 2002-2007 fuelled on cheap credit and a booming construction sector; but there is no consensus as to whether this was causal and there is consternation between observers whether economic growth benefitted all sectors of society. Barry [2009, 9] concluded that social partnership remained as the most controversial factor regularly cited as contributing to Ireland's improved economic performance over two decades.

Critics within the Labour movement view the trade union involvement as complicity with the neoliberal policies of 'light-touch regulation', low corporate tax rate and incentives for the non-unionised private sector and foreign multinationals it attracted; while centralising trade union influence and removing the option of industrial action. Supporters within the Labour movement view the approach of Social Partnership to have provided direct influence upon government policy that would otherwise have been absent throughout the period. Wherever the balance of this argument lies became largely speculative once the economic crash took hold; because the trade unions' previous perceived ability to mobilise consent among the population was neutralised by a division between the private and public sectors – and the political power of any strike action by public sector unions relied on their capacity to mobilise members in large enough numbers and to influence public opinion in support of their cause. The ICTU's general secretary David Begg, cited in O'Brien [2010, 13] appeared ambivalent towards the impact of social partnership in delivering the strategic aims of the trade union movement; "I wouldn't have collapsed social partnership myself, but we can live without it," he said:

> "Partnership was better at solving problems than changing society. If we had that much influence, we wouldn't have the enduring level of inequality we have. It did manage - through sustained economic expansion - to help end emigration. That was its great achievement."

> "It amuses me when I read this stuff about the kind of power we had, but as for domestic social policy, it's hard to point to any great achievement. Partnership gave us access, but not a lot of influence."

This appears in contrast to a statement to this study made by Peter McLoone, general secretary of IMPACT and chairperson of the PSC of ICTU during the economic crisis. McLoone [2019] stated:

> "Social partnership was again a phrase that was used to describe something that was very robust and very strong; and gave us a seat at the negotiating table – where the value of engaging with us would have been recognised and there was delivery in that. That was lost, and until that is restored in some form then there will be a problem."

While Daryl D'Art, cited in O'Connor [2015, 15] reflected upon the trade union movement:

> "Under partnership arrangements in every single country in Europe, unions have flourished…except in Ireland…We are the only country where unions have declined under partnership. It was a serious failure on the part of the unions not to consolidate the movement and achieve union recognition across the board when they were in the ideal position to do it. That was a big mistake."

In conclusion, while social partnership may or may not have delivered the strategic goals of the Irish trade union movement, it had made considerable gains in public sector pay. The public sector unions had, by-and large, voted to accept successive pay agreements and while some had been regarded as wage restraint, by the early 2000s the benchmarking process had attempted to level public sector pay with private sector earnings. There was a perception that social partnership was increasingly an institution serving narrow interests of the public sector workers where union density remained high; this appeared to be validated by the trade union leader Joe O'Toole of the Irish National Teachers Organisation [INTO] who infamously remarked that 'benchmarking was as reliable as an ATM machine'. Regan [2012, 145] found that the public sector unions agreed wage increases for productivity and reform that was not delivered, and managers 'lacked the expertise to implement change'. Stephen Collins, [*Sunday Tribune*, 8 December 2002, 13] wrote:

> "Whatever about anybody else, the 2003 budget was a good one for public servants. The payment of the first phase of benchmarking was the biggest single item of government expenditure announced by McCreevy last Wednesday. A total of €565m has been set aside for the payment of 25% of the benchmarking award, which will be backdated to December of last year."

Donaghey and Teague [2007, 37] suggested that public sector workers were able to secure the level of pay increases unachievable in the absence of social partnership – that had "virtually no moderating effect on wages in the public sector." Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman [2014, 122] interviewed several union leaders, one who referred to social partnership as a 'lay route to influence', while another unnamed is quoted as saying "we were happy to sit back and negotiate tripartite three-year agreements which gave pay increases and other benefits in terms of legislation and tax concessions, but we didn't actually build our own organizational capacity."

Social Partnership had its genesis with Fianna Fail's Sean Lemass seeking to centralise collective bargaining permanently, and this was advanced while Charles Haughey and Bertie Ahern were taoisigh. Apart from governmental taxation policy, collective bargaining is most instrumental in delivering wealth distribution in a deregulated capitalist economy and 'agent of social progress' [D'Art, O'Sullivan & Turner 2013, ix]. Summing up in the summer of 2009, Roche [2009, 204] suggested that only time would tell as to whether Brian Cowen [who succeeded Ahern in 2008] would preside over a 'redirection and reconfiguration' of social partnership in the economic crisis – or over its demise.

> "The Department of Finance has concluded that the dominance of the social partnership process did enormous damage to our financial system. This is something I intend to fix." **Brian Lenihan, Minister for Finance, December 2010 [cited in Culpepper and Regan 2014, 1]**

Chapter 3: THE CONTEXT TO THE CRASH

Ireland's economy boomed in the years of the 'Celtic Tiger' between 1994 and 2000 [Power 2009, 35] based on a growth in exports fuelled by foreign direct investment; with many US financial services, information technology and pharmaceutical companies attracted by the low corporation tax rates and characterised by 'light-touch regulation', generous grants, an educated English-speaking workforce and position in the EU. As O'Toole [2009, 22] posited, "consumption would replace production". From 2002, the Irish economy entered a second boom driven by construction and cheap credit – as Ireland benefitted from joining the eurozone. Between 1988 and 2007 real GDP grew at an average 6% [Mercille 2015, 17].

In 2007, according to Bank of Ireland Private Banking, Ireland was among the richest nations of the developed world [O'Toole 2010, 111] but after the Irish government decided to guarantee the liabilities of the Irish banks on the night of 29 September 2008 the state began a slide into freefall. Ireland's economy crashed and throughout subsequent years unemployment rose sharply and the state was ultimately "forced to accept a humiliating 'bail-out' from the EU and IMF" [Finn 2011, 5] on 21 November 2010. Thus began a period of austerity. Throughout the period of crisis and turmoil from 2008 to 2010 there was unrelenting public debate on how to respond to the seismic hole in the public finances. The Irish media was crucial to this public discourse [Rafter 2014, 598] by interpreting and explaining the ramifications and actions open to government. Political communication was multi-faceted, contentious, often angry, and sometimes inflammatory. Economic forecasters had either failed to foresee the economic shock or had been ignored as 'doom-mongers'. Popular perceptions on the state of the economy are to an extent driven by news organisations and the main theme was that the Irish economy was heading for a 'soft landing'. But as Dukes [2009, 59] points out, "in the US, the UK and Ireland . . . regulators failed to take action even when it had become clear that a 'soft landing' after the property boom had become increasingly unlikely." Irish politicians blamed the banks, while banks blamed the financial regulators – who blamed the auctioneers. The rest of the world had sensed that something was wrong with the Irish banks long before the financial regulators became acutely aware of it. Many foreign investors were selling off their shares a full fourteen months before the Irish banking guarantee [Murphy 2009] and a share slide began in August 2007 with investors citing fears about Irish banks exposure to big commercial property. This was the month before the run began on Northern Rock bank in the UK.

3.1 The beginning of the crash

On 10 January 2008 the Benchmarking II report was published suggesting pay rises for public servants. But even before the Benchmarking body issued its report, public sector trade unions were suggesting that the much-maligned Benchmarking pay process was coming to its end. The members of the Irish police force, the Garda Síochána, had warned that they would "no longer tolerate" their exclusion from talks on national pay agreements. And nurses' leader Liam Doran described the report as "unacceptable" when nurses had been consistently told by the government, social partners and the National Implementation Body during their last dispute "that benchmarking was the only game in town" [Sunday Business Post, 13 January 2008].

Nurses had abandoned a strike the year previously having been promised a 'sympathetic hearing' by the Benchmarking body – but the body recommended no pay rises for the vast majority of nurses. In addition ICTU general secretary David Begg criticised the "secretive manner in which the pay and perks" of top private sector bosses were decided. Simultaneously the European Central Bank [ECB] issued a warning that it would raise interest rates to prevent inflation and advocated wage restraint across the eurozone.

On 25 January 2008 the minister for finance Brian Cowen said he did not believe the current turmoil in world stock markets would have a bad effect on the Irish economy. Three days later Peter McLoone of IMPACT warned that its members could vote against the next national pay deal unless it delivered significant pay increases and allowed for a fundamental review of the benchmarking system for determining pay rises for public servants. Both positions assumed business as usual, while on 31 January economist Jim Power called for an end to the system of social partnership and declared that "the social partners have become very fat and complacent in the past few years and have become way too cosy with each other . . . The social partnership model has allowed our cost base to get out of control in recent years" [*Breaking News* 1 February].

On 15 February 2008 the social partners entered plenary session towards pay talks chaired by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU] told the government that it no longer supported the policy of wage restraint in exchange for tax cuts. ICTU's David Begg said that one of the central principles of the national pay deals – whereby trade unions accepted only modest wage increases while government increased workers' take-home pay by cutting taxes – was no longer acceptable to the trade union movement. Instead

ICTU pressed for above-inflation pay increases while employers and government stressed the need to maintain wage restraint to improve Ireland's competitiveness. Tom Parlon of the Construction Industry Federation [CIF] sought to impose a 12-month pay freeze on all current workers; while demanding a 30% cut in entry rates for construction workers.

The following month – March 2008 – the 'St Patrick's Day Massacre' occurred when stock market turbulence caused share prices to fall. On 2 April 2008 Bertie Ahern announced he was stepping down as Taoiseach – Ahern, as minister for labour in 1987, had been instrumental in bringing social partners together. Both ICTU and employers feared that this development could undermine the possibility of an eighth consecutive national pay agreement. New figures had showed inflation hitting 5% in March 2008, which was likely to impact on the new pay talks. The narrative of the outgoing Taoiseach was that there would be a 'soft landing' for the Irish economy. This salient phrase was primarily an attempt to explain and interpret how an overheated property market or 'bubble' would come to a gradual end after a sustained period of rapid price increases.

On 17 April 2008 delegates at an ICTU special delegate conference voted unanimously in favour of entering new pay talks, while Tom Parlon from the CIF "slams economy doom-sayers" (at the same time that he had been calling for wage restraint and reduced pay for new entrants to the construction industry). A leading economist, Alan Ahearne of NUI Galway, said that Ireland was in recession after suffering four deep shocks in the previous twelve month and declared that action was needed to ensure that the recession would not be a "major one". The so-called 'credit crunch' worsened as incoming Taoiseach Brian Cowen declared that union demands on pay were "just not feasible, given the slowdown in the economy." But, in a rebuttal of the so-called 'doom-sayers', Cowen hung tightly to the muted plaudits of previous week's OECD report (despite it making several stinging criticisms about the state of the economy) and noted that "it is not all doom and gloom and those that wish to portray it as such do harm to us all." [*Sunday Independent*, 17 April 2008]. The new national pay talks began on 24 April 2008, and four days later Cowen announced that reform of the public sector was imperative to adopt a 'citizen-centred approach'; while in the private sector, computer manufacturer Dell announced severe job cuts in Limerick.

By this time, news media were beginning to focus on the national pay talks – some in a very negative fashion. In an editorial [30 April 2008], *The Herald* declared that:

> "Not alone is public sector pay costing private sector workers an absolute fortune, public sector workers are much better paid than those whose taxes fund their pampered existence. Not alone do these higher public sector wages push up prices directly through increased charges for public services and higher taxes, they also contribute indirectly to higher prices by helping to push up wages and prices in other sectors of the economy, most notably services, which aren't as exposed as manufacturing to international competition. These are the issues which the social partners need to be discussing, not excessive wage increases for already overpaid public sector employees."

On 4 May 2008, the *Sunday Business Post* called for a 'pay freeze' in the public sector, while the following month, economist Colm McCarthy [SBP, 22 June 2008] wrote that:

"The biggest potential for economy is in public service pay and pensions, where the recent report of the benchmarking committee concluded that there was no case for public service pay increases, by reference to private sector pay, except in a tiny minority of cases. It is clear that the empirical studies showed that many public servants are now overpaid, although the details were excised from the published report. In these circumstances, the case for a public service pay freeze is clear. It would provide a valuable input into the upcoming pay talks if the suppressed information from the benchmarking report were released publicly (or leaked)."

In another editorial, *The Herald* [24 June 2008] declared that "the first thing the Government should do is to tell the public sector trade unions to take a running jump into the Liffey. No more pay increases". It continued:

> "Instead Lenihan [minister for finance] must insist on meaningful public sector reform so that taxpayers get value for the fortune that is already being spent on our pampered bureaucrats. The Government should also sack a large number of the 360,000 public sector workers, many of whom are entirely surplus to requirements. If this causes the trade unions to walk out of the national pay talks in a huff then so much the better."

The public sector trade unions rejected the notion of a pay freeze – while the government defended its conduct in the pay talks by saying it was fully engaging and not stalling progress. In July 2008 an Oireachtas committee heard from Richie Boucher of Bank of Ireland that the bank was confident it had sufficient funds to cover any downturn in commercial property values or any debts accruing.

The national pay talks adjourned at 4.00am on 2 August as the 1 August deadline passed without an agreement being reached. Public sector workers remained set to receive a pay increase of 2.5% in September 2008 under the previous national wage agreement *Sustaining Progress*. This was the first time in two decades that no national pay agreement was in place between the social partners and on 11 August the minister for finance Brian Lenihan observed that in light of the stall in the economy "whether it is cuts, or moderation, or something else being given up, we need to see that. It has to be demonstrable, and as I say, any deal that is reached in the national interest has to be one that involves shared responsibility across the board" [*Irish Independent*, 12 August]. On 29 August, Davy Stockbrokers called for the pay talks to be "scrapped" and a "squeeze" to be placed on public pay rises so as to facilitate tax cuts to improve Ireland's "competitiveness". Employers' groups IBEC and ISME welcomed the government announcement of 2 September that the budget was being brought forward by two months to 14 October.

The government reviewed the economic and fiscal situation on the basis of growing international banking problems. A government statement outlined that after an unprecedented period of economic growth where Ireland caught up and surpassed many European nations, it was now facing an unprecedented set of "unfavourable international factors". These included "turbulence in global financial markets, faltering economic growth in the major economies, exchange rate shifts and the sharp rise in commodity prices". Such conditions had placed the Irish economy under considerable pressure: domestically the construction sector was acknowledged to be contracting and the ramification was that such stalled economic growth and rising costs were eroding Ireland's competitiveness set against other EU countries. The slowdown resulted in a rapid deterioration in both public finances and consumer confidence. In response, IBEC proposed a pay pause for a minimum of one year in the public sector and six months in the private sector. Business leaders called for pay restraint as 'soaring jobless figures' were released in early September 2008. Ahead of resumed national pay talks, IBEC observed that there was no room for pay increases, while trade unionists stated that pay rises were necessary to keep pace with inflation. On 7 September the minister for defence Willie O'Dea, writing in the *Sunday Independent* declared that "the Government has taken the lead – this is the time for all of us to work together in the national interest." It was not specified as to whose national interest this referred to.

Pay talks recommenced at Government Buildings on 8 September with IBEC warning that economic difficulties left "no room for wage increases" in the public sector but with unions insisting that their members needed to be compensated for cost of living increases. A week

later, on 15 September, US bank Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy and the failure of such a long-standing financial institution sent a shockwave around the world. News organisations covered crying employees leaving their place of work with boxes of personal possessions. Two days later, on 17 September the pay talks concluded with a new social partnership deal that included a 6% pay-rise for both public and private sector workers over a 21–month period with an extra 0.5% wage increase for the lower paid. The public sector was to implement an eleven–month pause on these increases, with a three–month pay pause across the private sector. Both politicians and unions believed they had achieved the best deal in the economic climate. Taoiseach Brian Cowen said the deal would give "confidence and stability" in the challenging period ahead while David Begg of ICTU said the deal, while restrained on behalf of the unions, was 1% better than was being offered by employers when the last round of talks had collapsed six weeks before. While IBEC noted there were many positives in the new deal, the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and Irish Hotels Federation were fearful about their members' ability to pay the increases. Tom Parlon of the CIF argued that paying an extra 6% on top of high existing rates of pay could be "the straw which breaks the camel's back" for some employers.

Internationally, while the US government announced plans to spend almost one trillion dollars to quarantine debts in the American banking system, share prices continued to slide. The Irish financial regulator did not appear to be concerned: Patrick Neary appeared on RTÉ *Prime Time* in September 2008 to reassure the Irish public that there would not be a run on the Irish banks. It was amid such developments that trade unions voted to accept or reject the new pay deal. The country's second largest union UNITE, with 60,000 members, decided to recommend a 'no' vote to members regarding the pay deal, suggesting it is effectively a pay cut that failed to address mandatory union recognition and improved pensions. The CPSU also advocated a 'no' vote, while IMPACT and MANDATE advised their members to accept the new deal. Reviewing the situation, RTÉ industrial and employment correspondent Ingrid Miley [Interview 2013] insisted that "it did not need an economist, or a genius, to see that 6% over 21 months was utterly unaffordable in a country that was on the verge of bankruptcy." On 28 September ICTU announced a special delegate conference (to be held on 17 November) to consider whether to accept the new proposed pay deal. The following day shares in Anglo Irish Bank fell 46%; Irish Life and Permanent lost around a third of their value; and shares in Bank of Ireland and AIB fell 15% and 17% respectively. The government issued the state guarantee on the Irish banking sector on 29 September. Irish banks that had previously promoted private enterprise and market-led regulation had now successfully sought and been granted state intervention. As the relevant legislation passed

through the Dáil, Taoiseach Brian Cowen urged TDs to act in the 'national interest' and declared that "there are times when you can score points but this is not that occasion." [Dáil Debates, 30 September 2008]

3.2 The banking guarantee

Taoiseach Brian Cowen made the decision to offer a blanket guarantee on all bank deposits and liabilities of Irish-owned banks for a two-year period. No bank would be allowed to fail – and none would be taken into state ownership. Members of the Cabinet ratified the decision in early morning telephone conversations on 30 September 2008. The government was in effect underwriting Ireland's banking system and other EU countries complained and feared that money would be diverted to the Irish banks on an unprecedented scale. It should be noted that this initially appeared to be a canny decision to make. The minister for finance Brian Lenihan boasted that his plan would become "the cheapest bailout in the world so far". But hindsight suggests otherwise: Cooper [2009, 320] concluded that "it appears that the politicians thought they were dealing with an Irish liquidity crisis caused by international events. In reality there was an added dimension . . . a major insolvency crisis at the banks caused by their excessive and often careless lending". In short, the banks' assets were massively overvalued. Indeed, a 2012 survey undertaken by the IMF and cited in Mercille [2015, 48] reviewed 147 banking crises between 1970 and 2011 and concluded that Ireland in 2008 had "the costliest banking crisis in advanced economies since the Great Depression". By November 2008 the value of Irish banking shares had collapsed from €55bn on 20 May 2007, some 18 months earlier, to just €4bn [Murphy 2009, 53].

This was a crisis on an unimaginable scale. It was unprecedented for all the key actors. Ó Riain [2014, 236] stated that "many of the elements of Ireland's crisis had been flagged by a variety of observers [who] were pilloried by both the media and leading politicians. Nonetheless when the crash came . . . the severity of the banking crisis and the extent of its reach . . . came as a shock to almost all observers and policy elites." Cooper [2009, 321] further asserted that the Central Bank governor and Financial Regulator did not present the true picture of the capital problem "in the belief that they were serving the national interest by not undermining public or international confidence in Ireland any further." While the price of Irish bank shares rallied after the government's guarantee alleviated some of the concerns about financial liquidity, O'Toole [2010, 8] asserted that "the idea that such institutions could be rescued cheaply was at best delusional, at worst a deliberate attempt to hide the scale of the crisis from the public". The Budget for 2009 was published early (as announced) on 14

October – and included a 1% levy on all gross incomes under €100,100 and a 2% levy on all earnings above that threshold. SIPTU warned that this move could undermine the recently concluded pay agreement. ICTU general secretary David Begg said unions were strongly opposed to the Government's plans to introduce a 1% levy on all income, including that of low-paid workers. He described the measure as "politically and morally wrong" [*The Irish Times*, 16 October 2008].

Introducing the budget, finance minister Brian Lenihan declared that "this budget serves no vested interest; it is no less than a call to patriotic action." However, media reports of how Irish society responded to this call for patriotic social cohesion showed various groups battling for diminishing resources [Cawley 2012]. On 14 November SIPTU, IMPACT, TEEU, IBOA, MANDATE, NUJ, CPSU and INO announced that their members were in favour of the pay deal. This meant that all the country's main unions apart from UNITE backed the deal and ensured the ICTU special delegate conference on 17 November would give backing to the agreement. As expected, public sector union IMPACT voted 91% in favour. IMPACT general secretary Peter McLoone said the agreement was capable of bringing an element of stability to an otherwise uncertain period and called on the social partners – Government, employers and unions – to meet soon after the ratification of the deal. However, the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) unanimously rejected the national wage agreement and called on its workers to accept a 10% pay cut. CIF spokesperson Tom Parlon said at the time that the draft pay deal, which would require its members to give their staff 6% pay increases over twenty-one months, ignored the reality of where the Irish economy and the construction industry were.

On 27 November 2008 the Irish government announced in a statement (Transforming Public Services) that the minister for finance Brian Lenihan was establishing a Special Group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes. This became widely referred to as 'An Bord Snip Nua', and was to report to the minister by the end of June 2009. This group, headed by Colm McCarthy from the School of Economics, University College Dublin was supported by a secretariat provided by the department of finance.[3] The Special Group [2009] invited each of the government departments to submit an evaluation paper to outline the public money they received and to outline any impacts on public service of any possible reductions in numbers and expenditure. Its terms of reference were limited to the making of recommendations for "reducing or discontinuing expenditure programmes", "greater efficiency", "rationalising and streamlining delivery" and the "reallocation of staffing or

[3] A previous expenditure review group, nicknamed 'An Bord Snip' had existed in the 1980s.

expenditure resources". After a suggestion in December 2008 that the government might row back on the recently concluded pay deal taoiseach Brian Cowen reassured trade unions that this was not the case. Employers' group IBEC called on the taoiseach to bring forward the June deadline for the Special Group's report. The minister for finance Brian Lenihan told the Dáil that the economy was expected to contract 'between 3 and 4 percent' in 2009 and this necessitated a new recovery plan that included new tax breaks for multinationals, enhanced grants and incentives for innovation, and a new fund to support research and development. Taoiseach Brian Cowen urged the social partners to back the proposed national recovery plan while ICTU urged the government not to award public contracts to social partners that had not ratified the new pay deal. For its part the ESRI argued that pay cuts for workers in the public sector should "at least be considered". Noting that it wanted to "cut billions off public spending" the government asked trade unions, employers, farmers' groups and other social partners to submit their recommendations as to how this might be achieved [*The Irish Times*, 17 December 2008]. Critics of social partnership pointed out that the government continued to discuss solutions with the social partners before presenting them with a *fait accompli* [*Irish Examiner*, 23 January 2009].

3.3 Expenditure cuts and 'An Bord Snip Nua'

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the above, 2009 was to be another year of unprecedented events. End-of-year exchequer returns published on 5 January showed Ireland had a shortfall of €8.1bn. Briefing of the social partners rapidly followed: IBEC was briefed on 8 January and ICTU on 9 January. IBEC immediately called for a 20% reduction in public sector jobs while IMPACT's general secretary Peter McLoone said public service pay cuts would likely trigger a downward recessionary spiral by driving down wages in the private sector also, thus sucking demand out of the economy. This proved to be the opening salvo of discussions on public expenditure cutbacks that culminated in the government introducing a 'pension levy' for public sector workers in February 2009. Responding to reports that the minister for finance intended to implement public sector pay cuts, union leaders warned the Government that they could not solve the economic crisis at the expense of workers. SIPTU president Jack O'Connor said all sectors of society had to play their part in resolving the crisis. However, he said there would be huge resistance if the Government tried to impose pay cuts on workers. Peter McLoone of IMPACT said nobody in the trade union movement wanted to turn their back on the problem, but that he had no mandate to discuss pay cuts. Referring to the crisis, the *Sunday Tribune* [11 January 2009] noted that:

> "Cowen is also likely to demand changes to lucrative public sector pensions – which now cost €2bn a year – particularly the system whereby pay increases given to state employees are automatically passed on to the pensions of retired public servants . . . One possible compromise solution that may be more palatable to the unions is the option of a four-day week for workers, other than gardaí, medical staff and teachers."

A chorus of unions warned of strikes and legal challenges if any such cuts were unilaterally imposed without consultation. Following a government briefing of the social partners, PSEU general secretary Dan Murphy said the IMF normally proscribed job losses without compensation for those dismissed – and imposed pay cuts on everyone else. However, as the story went around the globe, it caused panic on the markets as traders concluded Ireland's economy was worse condition than feared [*Daily Mail*, 15 January 2009]. Taoiseach Brian Cowen emphatically denied that the IMF was ever mentioned in government briefings, telling journalists that everyone had a different way of expressing themselves – and soon RTÉ was redacting the story from its website. The Irish Nurses Organisation [INO] threatened legal action against pay cuts – and passed a motion not to engage in talks designed to reduce pay. Presenting the ICTU proposals to tackle the exchequer deficit, general secretary David Begg said unions were open to discussions with the government and the other social partners on how to constrain growth in public sector pay and pension costs including "conditions for deferral of pay increases, restrictions in overtime working, incentivised career breaks, flexible working hours and other innovative measures". The red-line issue for the unions was "a reduction in basic pay." A circular to all SIPTU members warned of strikes and civil disruption if the government imposed pay cuts and SIPTU leaders called for problems in the public finances to be addressed over a five to seven-year timeframe, with the better-off contributing through a "proper progressive tax system". Writing in the *Sunday Independent* [18 January 2009], columnist Brendan O'Connor declared that "It turns out that asking the public sector to share some of the economic pain we're all feeling right now is 'scapegoating' them, 'demonising' them, and is asking them to bear all the burden of balancing the books". The same edition discussed the nationalisation of Anglo Irish Bank and a 3.5% pay-rise for ESB workers.

Talks with social partners began on 23 January after two days of Cabinet discussions on making savings of €2bn. Setting the tone from the trade union movement's perspective, the head of the country's largest union Jack O'Connor of SIPTU declared that the public sector debate was a minor part of the overall issue and that "this quick-fix solution is being promoted by the same people who created the problem by making a quick buck over the last few

years." In the talks it quickly emerged that the Cabinet preferred to introduce a 'substantial pension levy' rather than pay cuts, as public sector pensions were regarded as more attractive than in the private sector. While some ministers were reported to favour a straight public sector pay cut, a levy was seen as more politically palatable for trade unions than a cut to pay as it would not affect the final pension entitlements of staff, or raise problems for the entitlements of existing retirees whose pensions were linked to current salaries. However, the public sector trade unions viewed the pension levy as a back-door pay cut, since it was deducted at source from state employees' pay. Nonetheless, the government argued that the levy had a measure of equality, as the pension benefits and guarantees enjoyed by state employees were in excess of their private sector counterparts. Employers' body IBEC said that its studies showed public servants enjoyed a premium of 15% in their pension over a private sector worker who had a pension. For its part, ICTU argued that all sections of the economy should be involved in national recovery and suggested a broadening of the tax base including measures such as the introduction of a new 48% tax band, a new property tax on second or 'trophy' homes, curbs on executive pay and restrictions on tax breaks, which they believed predominantly benefited the wealthy [*The Irish Times*, 27 January 2009]. These proposals prompted a strong editorial reaction from the *Sunday Independent* which declared that "David Begg and Jack O'Connor, the two most prominent trade union leaders, have dominated the negotiations to such an extent that they are now the real makers of policy in this government":

> "Their skill should be admired – it is no small feat for a lobby group to take control of a government's thought process – but it is unquestionably destructive. They will now demand that taxes rise to pay for the public sector wages the government is too timid to cut, and those tax hikes will be directed at the people who already pay the vast majority of taxes in this country. Do not be fooled by the semantics: when trade union leaders talk of broadening the tax base, they mean that they want it narrowed even more. A true broadening of the tax base would see many of the almost 40 per cent of workers who pay no tax brought back into the net. Instead of that, however, they want a property tax and an effective 50% top rate of tax. There is a strong case for some tax reform – tax shelters and allowances should be scrapped and only re-instated where real economic benefit is demonstrated and a minimum tax should be introduced to prevent some people avoiding all tax liabilities – but not for punitive increases, or for arbitrary taxes on non-productive assets . . . The O'Connors and Beggs of this world, however, are interested in retribution and redistribution, not wealth creation and growth. They want to punish success, ring-fence the public sector and drag us all back to the failures of the past. O'Connor, in

particular, bleats about the failures of 'neo-liberal' economics, but does not seem to have noticed the failures of communism and socialism."
[*Sunday Independent*, 1 February 2009]

On 3 February 2009 the national pension reserve fund was used to recapitalise the banks. Talks on a new economic recovery pact collapsed when the government announced the introduction of a pension levy in the public sector and further announced that pay rises due later in the year would not be paid. Participants in the talks were stunned into stony silence as they were handed the news as a *fait accompli*. Cooper [2009, 371] remarked "this wasn't the way things were done in the marriage. This was a move to end it." This unilateral action effectively ended this period of social partnership as trade unions began to formulate their response. Liam Doran, general secretary of the INO asserted that the union's members would not accept the pension levy and the government would have to think again while INTO general secretary John Carr observed that an opportunity to achieve fairness and equity in Irish society had been lost. However, Labour Party leader Eamon Gilmore warned unions that strikes were not the way forward: "this . . . is not a time for industrial relations tactics which may have worked for you in the past but which now will only further alienate a wider public who are worried about the security of their own jobs and businesses." [*The Irish Times, Irish Examiner*, 10 February 2009] A poll in *The Irish Times* on 14 February revealed that a small majority of voters was against the government's imposition of the pension levy under the FEMPI Act signed into law on 27 February 2009.

On 24 February ICTU decided to hold a national strike on 30 March, because employers, including the government, were not abiding by the National Wage Agreement. After a two-hour meeting, ICTU's executive council said it had hoped that its ten-point plan [*A Better, Fairer Way*] on tackling the economic problems could be the basis for a three-year agreement to take the country through the crisis. That plan envisaged a variety of actions, including a renegotiation of the public service pension levy, a new pension protection system in the private sector, greater mortgage protection for those who lose their jobs and a broadening of the tax base. While employers' group IBEC called for the government to engage with the main opposition parties and the social partners, to agree on a national recovery plan for the economy, the country's largest public sector union IMPACT announced that it intended to serve preliminary notice of industrial action on Government departments, local authorities and health service management

On 3 March 2009 the government announced tax rises and more spending cuts would follow in a mini-Budget. Opposition parties and social partners were allowed a major input into

an emergency mini-Budget planned for early April. But trade unions and employers both observed that they were no closer to re-engagement with the government following informal talks and a briefing on the state's finances. Secondary and primary teachers (INTO, ASTI and the TUI) voted substantially in favour of industrial action in protest against the government's handling of the economic crisis and the public service pension levy but decided not to strike before ICTU's day of action on 30 March. However, a week before the national strike was to take place IBEC wrote to ICTU calling for the cancellation of planned industrial action – with an offer of renewed talks on social partnership. Members of IMPACT narrowly failed to approve participation in national strike planned for 30 March. Under IMPACT's rules, a two-thirds majority in a ballot was required to sanction industrial action, but only 65% of those balloted approved industrial action. A spokesperson for IMPACT said that the vote did not necessarily mean that IMPACT members would not take part in the planned strike. But the union's head of communications Bernard Harbor [2019] later noted that the ballot result was "devastating to officials and national activists in the union. If you cannot convince the other side that you can mobilise your members – then your power is reduced . . . It was a huge message to us; and it was a huge message to government that we could not deliver". For its part, *The Irish Times* [24 March] described the proposed one-day national strike as "national sabotage". Ultimately the strike was deferred on the grounds that ICTU had been invited to a new round of talks with government.

At a press conference the following week taoiseach Brian Cowen warned that living standards would fall by 10% in the following two years; taxes were to rise, public spending would be cut and reforms were to be introduced within the financial and economic systems. It would not, he pointed out "be a pretty or a painless exercise". The following day he ruled out any 'climbdown' on the pension levy [*The Irish Times*, 31 March 2009]. The new round of social partnership talks on a national recovery plan were suspended on 7 April until the planned emergency mini-budget was announced the following day as the unions were keen to see the extent of all tax increases and spending cuts before discussing any deal.

Delivering the mini-budget, the minister for finance announced cuts of €3.25bn in 2009, another €4.75bn in 2010 and another €4.6bn in 2011, and mooted plans to tax child benefit, introduce a property tax, and cut social welfare. Reacting to these announcements, the *Irish Examiner* [9 April] noted that there was "no mention of cutting expenditure, or eliminating the waste within a bloated public sector costing us €20bn or so per annum. No mention of eliminating some or any of the 601 or so quangos which have completed their remit, or which have passed their sell-by date". The social partnership talks were due to resume on 22

April, with SIPTU warning that it would engage in a sustained industrial campaign if there no agreement on a new national recovery programme was reached by 1 May. On 4 May the talks deadline passed without agreement and union leaders announced that the talks were as good as dead and they had nothing further to contribute. For its part, the employers' body IBEC contended that the government was moving in the right direction with its proposals for a social partnership agreement on economic recovery but the pace was too slow, and the funding was insufficient. In June 2009, the IMF published a damning report on state of Irish economy which criticised the pace of the government's response to the crisis [*The Irish Times*, 26 June].

The imminent report of the Special Group [An Bord Snip Nua] in July 2009 also caused tensions. IMPACT's Peter McLoone authored a circular that warned IMPACT members of an emerging threat to pay, pensions and job security and informing them that a campaign of resistance may be required against the threat of unilateral changes to existing terms and conditions. The circular was reported in *The Irish Times* – and included a reference to protecting 'core pay'. An editorial in the *Sunday Business Post* of 12 July speculated on the contents of Report of the Special Group:

> The Bord Snip Nua report – put together by economist Colm McCarthy, long regarded as an ultra-hawk on public spending – will put flesh on the bones of the goal of cutting spending, outlining specific spending programmes that should be cut. This will be uncomfortable for ministers and it could be incendiary among the public and the public sector unions. This week, the government will begin considering whether to publish the report.

The report, published on 16 July 2009, recommended a cut to 17,000 public sector posts. As senior trade union leaders pointed out, unlike a private sector company that decides to shed staff because of falling demand, the Government was planning to cut personnel at a time when demands for some of its services such as social welfare and health were increasing. SIPTU's Jack O'Connor noted that it ignored the proposals of social partners. Under the headline 'Social partners face bitter break-up', the *Sunday Business Post* [26 July] reported that "trade union leaders are using more hostile tactics to ensure their voices are heard by government as the social partnership process threatens to fall apart. It is a new approach for the unions who, for years, have measured their words and done the hard talking behind closed doors". It noted that Jack O'Connor had bluntly called on taoiseach Brian Cowen "to either 'rein in' the finance minister and the 'hawks' in the Department of Finance or

else call a general election" and by "invoking a general election, O'Connor is more openly aligning the country's largest union with the Labour Party and the forces of opposition". The same week the *Sunday Independent* [26 July] published a survey that showed "85% support for cuts in public service staff [and a] groundswell of opinion" against raising taxes. This may be a reflection of the fact that private sector pay was being reduced, most especially in journalism and media-related outlets where revenue, especially that from property advertising, had collapsed. As recalled by industry correspondent of *The Irish Times* Martin Wall [2013], "coming into 2009 you were starting to see job losses in the private sector, one of the fascinating backdrops in the media was that pay cuts were the norm." In the final week of a relatively quiet August, IMPACT spokesman Bernard Harbor observed that the government had refused to give guarantees that they would not cut core pay and *The Irish Times* reported that unions representing staff who work around-the-clock were to hold talks on a common approach to oppose any Government cuts to out-of-hours premium payments and allowances [*The Irish Times*, 26 August 2009].

3.4 The 24/7 Frontline Alliance

At an ICTU meeting of 16 September unions voted to begin a sustained campaign of opposition to pay cuts, job losses, reduced public services and 'aggressive tactics' pursued by some employers. Around the same time, Health Service Executive chief executive Brendan Drumm signalled that he would be seeking government support to cut his €1billion bill for non-core pay in the health service. Cuts in variable pay are problematic politically, as these fall disproportionately on particular groups, such as gardaí, nurses and prison officers, who provide round-the-clock services, rather than on those civil servants who tend to work regular hours. Ahead of the recall of the Dáil, on 8 September, four trade unions and three organisations representing frontline public servants announced the formation of the 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance to campaign against any cuts in pay or allowances. In dealing with pay in the public sector, industrial relations practitioners tend to differentiate between core pay (or basic salary) and variable pay (which comprises the plethora of allowances, premium rates and overtime payments that can boost basic earnings). The 24/7 Alliance represented workers whose take-home pay included a significant proportion based on allowances and premium payments (up to 30% of their wages). The following day Colm McCarthy, chair of the Special Group on public service numbers and expenditure programmes rejected the notion of a group of workers setting up as frontline staff to oppose his report by declaring "this country is bust. The government is not short of compassion, it's short of money. We're borrowing €400m a week, a big component of that is the public service payroll".

The 24/7 Frontline Alliance organised a series of meetings around the country, including Sligo

(28 September); Cork (30 September); Kilkenny (12 October); and Dublin (13 October). All the meetings were well attended, however prior to the Cork meeting the minister for defence Willie O'Dea instructed PDFORRA to leave the 24/7 Alliance. The soldiers were told their actions were illegal and PDFORRA general secretary Gerry Rooney did not attend the meeting, where an empty chair was left at the top table.[4] At the SIPTU annual conference held in Tralee on 5 October representatives of the 24/7 Alliance met with the general secretary of ICTU David Begg and SIPTU and ICTU president Jack O'Connor to outline the concerns of members regarding the McCarthy report, especially cuts in allowances and premium rates its members received for working outside regular hours. After the meeting the deputy secretary general of the Irish Nurses Organisation, David Hughes, said ICTU would not distinguish between core pay, basic salary and variable pay (allowances and premium rates) [*The Irish Times*, 8 October 2009].

While the government attempted to restart talks between social partners in response to a report published by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) on a response to the financial crisis, trade unions across the public sector prepared for a National Day of Action on 6 November. In response the government warned of the IMF taking the state's 'hard-won sovereignty' if cuts to the public service bill were not made [*Irish Independent*, 19 October 2009]. On 20 October the government briefed employers and trade unions about its plans for the December 2009 Budget and to explore whether a new social partnership deal could be negotiated. ICTU president Jack O'Connor observed that trade unions were at "diametric variance" with the government's policy of a "short sharp correction" for the public finances. Public service trade union leaders said they would strike if there were any pay or job cuts for members [*Irish Examiner*, 22 October 2009].

Talks between public sector unions and government officials on proposals to cut the public sector pay bill by €1.3 billion began on 31 October – amid media hostility. In the *Sunday Independent* [1 November] under the headline 'Why oh why didn't I go for the civil service', columnist Carol Hunt wrote: "Damn, if only I'd listened to the Mammy I'd know the joys of public-sector employment first-hand and I wouldn't be sitting here snuffling and moaning about private/public warfare, HSE sick days and fantasy island union officials". Journalist Jody Corcoran took it a step further under the headline 'Public servants aren't cut out to be shiny happy people' when he asked "when is the last time you met a happy teacher, or a happy garda or even a happy nurse? I feel they do not exist. I believe that they are,

[4] Strict conditions on any industrial action PDFORRA could take to represent its members were laid down in legislation enacted in 1990 when the association was established.

actually, averse to the joy of living". A similar tone infused an editorial in *The Irish Times* [2 November] when it observed that "public servants, in spite of their anger and militancy at this time, are a privileged group":

> Successive, independent studies have identified those advantages. Even the most obtuse must now acknowledge their remuneration levels are well ahead of the private sector. It would be desperately unfair if impoverished welfare recipients had their benefits reduced while service suppliers remained unaffected. The group styling itself Frontline Alliance, including nurses, gardaí, prison officers and firefighters, has been particularly militant. Everybody appreciates the value of their work. But they are public servants. And if there is no money available to pay them, or if borrowing that money causes further damage to society, they have a responsibility to consider the public good.

The 24/7 Frontline Alliance booked advertising on 100 buses in Ireland's major cities for two weeks commencing 4 November and joined ICTU's National Day of Action on 6 November 2009. The 'day of protest' was not a national strike with members instead being urged to take the day off work to attend. The day of action formed part of an overall campaign aimed at promoting ICTU's alternative to the government plans to reduce spending by €4 billion in the upcoming budget. ICTU proposed a 10-point plan, which involved higher taxes for the wealthy and spreading economic adjustments over a longer period. The trade union movement allocated around €1 million to promote its 'fairer alternative programme' for national recovery. With it being unlikely that the government would take on board ICTU's blueprint, a national strike was set for 24 November, while ICTU continued its advocacy campaign with town hall meetings around the country. In a subsequent edition of the *Sunday Tribune* [8 November 2009] journalist Michael Clifford noted that there existed a "suspicion is that the Alliance is being used to bare the unions' teeth to [Brian] Lenihan".

On 11 November 5,000 members of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance marched through Dublin as pay talks between government and ICTU got underway. Those workers who could wear their uniforms did so (gardaí wore specially produced baseball caps or tabards) and vintage emergency vehicles and the POA's marching band gave visual and audio impact for the assembled media. Jack O'Connor, president of ICTU addressed the rally alongside Des Kavanagh [PNA] and Eugene Dennehy [POA]. On 20 November the GRA announced that its members would not be issuing penalty points or fixed charged notices to drivers during the day of action. In a statement the GRA noted that it had advised its members that they were not obliged to carry out a number of usual functions during the public sector

strike. This included issuing notices to motorists for speeding, failure to wear a seatbelt, driving while holding a mobile phone, or dangerous overtaking. A spokesman for the GRA said the action would be within the law because the issuing of fixed penalty notices was discretionary. In an editorial in its edition before the national strike the *Sunday Independent* ['No good can come of strike', 22 November 2009] declared the strike as "a folly, a visceral but outdated response to a very modern crisis." On 24 November 250,000 health, education and civil service workers went on strike for one day: schools closed, and 'Christmas Day' levels of cover were provided in the hospitals. Many other services were simply unavailable. Reporting on the one day strike on 25 November, the national newspapers were universally dismissive of the action:

> The tills were ringing north of the border as southern shoppers, including droves of striking public servants, used the national day of action to migrate in search of a bargain. When they finally managed to extricate themselves from the massive traffic jam on the motorway, shopping centre car parks in Newry were filled with southern registration plates. [I*rish Independent*]

> At a time when social solidarity and a sense of personal responsibility are needed as never before, employees in the most protected sector of the economy have behaved selfishly. A one-day strike by a quarter of a million State workers and the threat of more to come has damaged our international reputation and made the task of economic recovery even more difficult. When all the rhetoric and special pleading by trade union leaders is stripped away, what is left is the unattractive face of mé féinism. [*The Irish Times*]

In a similar vein, the *Irish Examiner* editorial declared that the day of action became the day of cheap beer. The trade unions responded by rejecting the 'day off' claims as "mischievous". Most schools and universities were closed – so many parents were at home with children rather than shopping in Northern Ireland. The strike day was followed by one of Ireland's largest protest marches, organised by ICTU, when over 100,000 people marched in protest 'for a Better Way' on Saturday 27 November.

3.5 The collapse of talks

Bilateral pay talks between government and public sector trade unions resumed on 30 November. Both sides tried to find a compromise to avert a second strike planned for 3 December. Union representatives tried to convince government officials to accept an

alternative to an across-the-board 6.85% pay cut worth €1.3bn. Instead, the unions proposed that public servants could take compulsory 'unpaid leave' for up to twelve days a year to make the savings. Stumbling blocks lay in the health and education sectors where services in hospitals and schools would be massively affected if workers were compelled to take the extra leave. The second ICTU national strike planned for 3 December was cancelled as the trade unions believed the pay talks were progressing well. Explaining the unpaid leave offer David Hughes of the INO argued that:

> "The measure under discussion is the equivalent of mass lay-offs in the private sector. The only differences are that public sector workers will not receive any social welfare payments as a result and they will continue to work in key sectors on the basis that they will be remunerated for that essential work at a future date. Of course IBEC and a chorus of economic commentators are only too happy to support a plan to sabotage this proposal and push for wholesale pay cuts, which can then be applied across the private sector as well. The same sources repeatedly tell us that everybody in the private sector has already had cuts. But is this true? Three surveys, two by employer bodies and one by the CSO Earnings and Labour Costs Quarterly Report suggest not. In fact, the surveys conclude that about one quarter of employers, at most, had cut pay rates. The CSO Report recorded that 'Average hourly earnings in the industrial sector rose by 4.2% in Quarter 2 2009'. So how are public servants being treated more favourably?" [24/7 Frontline Alliance, Press Release, 3 December]

As union leaders returned to government buildings for what proved to be more than twenty hours of talks, they were conscious of the raging opposition to the unpaid leave proposals among Fianna Fáil (government) backbenchers. They had also long been of the view that the department of finance was hostile to the plan and preferred a straightforward pay cut. Pressure and tension to reach a deal were high as evidenced by an *Irish Independent* [4 December] editorial declared that:

> The belief of a prominent union leader [Liam Doran] that everybody not directly involved in the talks behind closed doors in Government Buildings should 'keep their mouths shut' again indicates some in the trade union movement believe they are in command. To come out with these comments after Fianna Fail backbenchers quite rightly raised concerns about the shape and substance of the deal emerging from the so-called pay talks displays a lack of respect for democracy.

Public sector pay talks collapsed in dramatic circumstances that very day (4 December), after an earlier suggestion by the trade union movement (in a television interview – RTÉ *SixOne* 1 December) that the government had agreed to the trade unions' proposal that workers would each take twelve days of unpaid leave – effectively a 'lay off' – to make the required savings from the government finances. The *Irish Independent* responded with the headline *Cowen caves in to unions* (2 December). It had been reported that government officials and trade unions negotiators were close to reaching an overall agreement on radical change in the public sector including savings of €1.3bn. ICTU's public services committee observed that proposed unpaid leave deal rejected by the government would have delivered new value-for-money and waste-elimination programmes; procedures for redeploying surplus teachers; multidisciplinary working and reporting arrangements in the health sector; and changes to civil service opening and closing times and attendance arrangements [*The Irish Times*, 5 December 2009]. Following the collapse of the talks, relations deteriorated: unions warned of a "campaign of resistance" if public service pay was cut in the looming budget and when the GRA announced a ballot of members in relation to industrial action the minister for justice Dermot Ahern stated that the government would take legal action against gardaí if they went on strike. While GRA general secretary PJ Stone said his organisation had little option but to take what he termed as an "honest and up front" approach to opposing pay cuts, the opposition spokesperson on justice, Fine Gael's Charlie Flanagan, described the GRA's action as "unprecedented show of defiance" to a sitting government [*Irish Examiner*, 8 December 2009].

The long-awaited budget was announced by Brian Lenihan on 9 December and brought with it cuts of more than €1billion in public service pay, a reduction of €760 million in social welfare, a reduction of just under €1billion on day-to-day spending and the same amount on capital projects. From 1 January 2010 public servants would suffer a cut of 5% on the first €30,000 of salary, 7.5% on the next €40,000 and 10% on the next €55,000. Social welfare recipients faced an average reduction of 4.1% with those under 25 years of age facing more substantial cuts. There was no significant change to the tax regime. The cuts to public service pay were across the board – and did not specifically target premium pay and allowances [*Irish Independent*, 10 December 2010]. With premium pay and allowances having been spared cuts in the Budget, there was no longer a need for the grouping and so a final meeting of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance steering committee was held on 15 December 2009.[5] On 23 December IBEC officially withdrew from the pay terms of the national agreement that had been agreed

[5] The 24/7 Frontline Alliance met again in October 2012 to begin a campaign against 'Croke Park 2'.

in September 2008.[6] Social partnership appeared to be over and 2009 ended with trade unions planning widespread industrial action.

On 25 January 2010 public sector unions stepped up their work-to-rule industrial action with members of the public experiencing minor inconveniences across a range of services. Workers refused to answer telephone calls and other services closed their doors during lunch breaks. Kieran Mulvey, chief executive of the Labour Relations Commission [LRC] offered to assist in getting the government and trade unions back talking. Mulvey said he had "a statutory responsibility to intervene to bring the parties together to attempt to prevent a war of attrition" [*Sunday Business Post*, 31 January 2010]. Further escalation of protest action by public servants was discussed by ICTU, which demanded that the pay cuts imposed on public service workers be reversed. Frontline workers belonging to IMPACT and the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) favoured a series of rolling work stoppages in the health sector.[7]

The trade union movement and the government began new public pay talks at the LRC on 12 March 2010. Other social partners were not involved. The resumption of talks averted major industrial action planned for that week and created some uncertainty about a planned 48-hour hospital strike in April. A provisional deadline of two weeks was set for completion of the negotiations talks. While government sources categorically ruled out any restoration of the public sector pay cuts, public service unions sought the reversal of the pay cuts in return for reforms of work practices and greater efficiencies in the public sector. An agreement was reached on 30 March on public sector pay and widespread reform of the public service. Under the agreement, which would come to be known as the Croke Park Agreement, the government gave a commitment that there would be no further cuts in public sector pay until at least 2014 and unions agreed to implement extensive reforms in work practices and conditions of employment throughout the entire public service. However, the deal, which had to be presented to union members in ballots, did not contain specific guarantees on reversing pay cuts that were put in place in the previous December's budget. The main elements of the Croke Park Agreement included:

---

[6] IBEC's national council decided in November it would withdraw from the 2008 deal if no agreement could be reached with the trade union movement by mid-December on an alternative arrangement that was appropriate for the economic and commercial environment of 2010.

[7] The INO changed its name to the INMO on 1 January 2010.

- No pay cuts until at least 2014
- No change in the arrangements for indexation of pensions for public service pensioners and serving public servants at least until 2014
- Significant cost-saving across the public service
- Review of extent of savings generated to be held in spring 2011 to determine if scope exists for any reimbursement of pay cuts; substantial reduction in public service numbers in year ahead
- No compulsory redundancies but flexible redeployment arrangements necessary
- Unified public service labour market to be created
- Merit-based promotion
- Promotion and incremental progression based on performance
- Industrial peace clause

Although some trade unions – such as the CPSU, IFUT, UNITE, the INMO, the ASTI and the TUI – rejected the agreement in ballots of their members, on 11 June the Croke Park deal on public sector pay and reform was effectively secured after IMPACT, the largest public sector union, and SIPTU, the largest trade union, both voted to accept the deal.[8] Members of ICTU's Public Services Committee formally ratified the pay and reform agreement on 15 June. The final result was 1,899 delegate votes in favour with 986 votes against – a margin of almost two to one. The deal guaranteed no compulsory redundancies or further pay cuts over four years for around 300,000 public servants in return for cooperation with an extensive transformation and efficiency drive. It also provided for progressive reimbursement of pay cuts starting with those earning below €35,000 a year from savings made from the reform programme. The government established an implementation body to ensure that the proposals were given full effect.[9]

On 21 November 2010 taoiseach Brian Cowen announced on live television that the government had formally requested financial assistance from the European Union and on 28 November the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the Irish state agreed to a €85billion rescue deal, heralding three years of budgetary supervision from the EU and the IMF, before the state exited the 'bailout' in 2013.

[8] Other unions / staff associations that accepted the deal included the INTO and the AGSI.
[9] The second largest teachers' union, the TUI decided not to endorse the Croke Park deal on pay and reform on 21 June. The Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) had voted against the deal and decided not to move into line with the adoption of it by the trade union movement overall. By so doing the union broke with a tradition for dissenting unions to follow a subsequent majority decision.

Chapter 4: TRADE UNIONS & THE MEDIA

4.1 Conflicting ideals

There is a rich body of work in the twentieth century – much of it focusing on Britain – of how workers' groups struggled to 'get their message out' through state-owned or privately-owned media organisations. Such work into the trade union/media relationship is summed up by Lloyd [2004, 98] who noted "The media has been held, especially in the left, as being unfair to leftist parties, Labour governments, trades unions." It is well documented in a century of academic literature that the normalisation of journalistic practice and the business model of the political economy of the media prevent left-wing collectives and workers' groups receiving a 'fair' portrayal [Glasgow University Media Group 1980; Beharrell and Philo 1978; Mercille 2015].

Ireland witnessed one of its most bitter industrial disputes in 1913 – and one that had direct links with the media. The establishment of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union [ITGWU] by James Larkin in 1909 and its successful tactics of boycotts and sympathetic strikes radicalised Irish trade unionism. It also upset newspaper proprietors. In 1911 the Irish Newspaper Society was among numerous employer bodies that wrote to Prime Minster Herbert Asquith expressing concerns on picketing, which was described as 'a form of tyranny', and the amalgamation of trade unions, which was described as 'a conspiracy against individual freedom, industrial peace, and national well-being'. In April 1913 at a public meeting to discuss the progress of a dockers' strike, the president of the Trades Council, Thomas McPartlin declared that the council "considered that the Press of Dublin had dealt with merely one side of the question, and that side the side of the employers" [O'Brien 2017, 25-27]. In autumn 1913 the showdown between the ITGWU and the Dublin Employers Association erupted, with the latter body headed by William Martin Murphy, proprietor of Independent Newspapers. Murphy himself took to the pages of his *Irish Independent* to describe how Larkin 'had the imprudence to endeavour to bring pressure on the composing staff of the Independent papers . . . [but] it was rather too much for these men to be asked to associate with scum like Larkin and his followers'.

Yeates [2013, 582] outlined in retrospect how Murphy had purged the IGTWU members at the *Irish Independent* ensuring his own 'commercial empire' was free of 'Larkinite contamination'. In a similar vein, *The Irish Times* accused the ITGWU of 'exercising an abominable tyranny over the working classes of the city' [O'Brien 2017, 25-27]. As

a result, Larkin had little time for the Dublin press. Writing shortly after the end of the Lockout, Larkin castigated the Dublin press for its coverage of the 1913 general strike [Keogh 1982, 224]:

> "We wonder if the press of Dublin have a shred of decency left. If so, there is still a suitable bed left for the repose of their dirty foul carcasses. We refer to the residual tanks of the Pigeon House sewerage works. Surely for their carnival of lying during the lock-out they deserve eternal rest. What mendacious, brazen-faced monsters they are."

Trade unionists valiantly attempted to circumvent the established 'bourgeoise' media through direct media ownership. In the UK during the General Strike of 1926, Ernest Bevin's General Council published a special newspaper, the *British Worker*. In 1928 the *Daily Herald* ran into financial difficulty in competition with the big popular press such as the *Express* and *Daily Mail* - so in 1929 Bevin secured a new publisher who agreed to expand the paper while maintaining its editorial position and in 1933 was the first daily newspaper to regularly reach a circulation of two million [Pelling 1976, 189]. The response from the movement was poor - but from commerce came support. The new *Daily Herald* circulation rose from 300,000 to one million and Stephens [1981, 77] stated, "in 1933 had the singular distinction of being the first daily newspaper in the world to reach a daily circulation of 2 million."

The British Labour movement was launched in the early twentieth century and gained 23% of the vote in the 1922 general election, without the support of a single national daily newspaper [Curran 1988, 31]. Curran [ibid, 35] noted, "The operation of the free market had raised the cost of press ownership beyond the readily available resources of the working class". In 1987, the British trade union movement once again attempted to exert control of its message and launched its own Sunday newspaper *News on Sunday* because they 'could not get their message out' [McNair 2006, 119-120]. It failed spectacularly because it failed to attract sufficient advertising and readership, perhaps because its news values, while arguably worthwhile, were out of step with its audience. Griffiths [1978, 61] found the commercial defence was that "newspapers frequently claim they present their news in accordance with ideas of what the reader wants."

Neoliberalism reduced the newsworthiness of trade unions and the media adapted accordingly. According to Manning [2001, 176] "With the rise of neoliberal governments in Britain, the United States and parts of Europe during the 1980s, and the ensuing marginalisation of unions, the importance of labour and industrial coverage declined in the eyes of news

editors. Unions were no longer at the heart of the political process. Accordingly, the number of specialist correspondents working the labour beat declined."

An adversarial approach to journalistic inquiry became commonplace – and often antagonistic – but there is no update of this research to fully test whether antagonism is equally distributed towards powerful regular news sources and the less-powerful counter-definers. This study attempts to gain an authentic insight into the perception of this style of media production from the modern trade union leader and also from the media professionals in an Irish context. Sweeney [1980, 127] argued that many unions see such an adversarial position as the natural order in an unequal society while others feel cast into this adversarial role because the industrial relations process is seen as essentially negative by management.

If we can accept that industrial news has been replaced by economic news [Winston 2002], then the reporting of industrial relations may also have to be re-examined in this light. The Glasgow University Media Group [1982, 31] concluded; "Journalists claim in their defence that they play 'devil's advocate' in interviews; that it is their role to present the opposition case, and that this provides lively television. Our study showed that they simply did not do this. They do not typically attack management using the arguments of shop stewards." Overall, trade unionists felt they got a 'raw deal' from the media [Griffiths 1978, 70].

For more than a century, newspapers have told us what is going on in the world – and they set the agenda for what is regarded as news. They have the power to frame the debate through the values and practices within their media organisations. Trade unionists in Ireland and the UK remained hostile or indifferent to the media, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s [Ó Ceallaigh 1981, TUC 1979]. Jones [1986, 205] noted that a sea-change began to happen among British trade unions towards the media and began to develop communication strategies:

> "During the early 1980s there was a major reassessment of traditional trade union responses to advertising and public relations. After three or four million union members had voted for a Conservative government in both the 1979 and 1983 elections, the movement recognised its inadequacy in conveying information to the membership and in winning the support of the public."

Management could still exploit the slow take-up of modern marketing and communication techniques. The failure of the wider union movement to keep abreast of the advances that

employers had made in improving direct communications with employees had not been lost on management [Jones 1986, 49].

Arthur Scargill the miners' union leader who led the coal dispute in Britain between 1984-5 made a calculated decision to attack the news media in key speeches; and the resultant applause was taken as proof that union members and the public were particularly concerned by, and opposed to, news values and judgements of the print and broadcast media. Jones [1986, 94] reported "He had no alternative but to criticise all reporters in the same breath, for he remained convinced that journalists were like piranha fish: if need be they would eat each other to get to the juiciest story."

By 1993 asserted Jones [1995, 128] the "largest unions had all gone to considerable lengths to improve their image. Most had established highly professional departments to handle their campaigns and communications. As the use of strike action declined, so the unions became more sophisticated in their attempts to exploit the news media in order to put over the case against the employers and promote the need for improved workers' rights." But still disharmony within the movement was still causing difficulty, Marsh [1992, 34] reflected "At the same time there were, and still are, many divisions within the union movement which affected its strategy and weakened its influence."

In the absence of political and industrial power, communication strategy is one area still within the sphere of influence for trade unions. Manning [2001, 183] asserted;

> "Trade unions around the world are turning to news media work as a strategy to be employed during harsh times in which global forces are undermining the collective strength of organised labour within particular nations, and neoliberal governments appear determined to administer the *coup de grâce*."

Entman and Steinman [2008, 7] emphasised the changing boundaries in the communications field – and that political communication is now in every subfield "at the end of a decade that sorely tested optimistic projections about the liberating and democratizing potential of social movements, of information and communication technologies, and of rationality, individual and collective."

The trade union movement has often been found wanting when faced with economic crisis – failing to understand the economic problem, or moreover, failing to reframe them in a way that gains traction with the media or public opinion. ICEM [1996, 67] advised:

> "The trade union movement should be coming forward with the alternative view of an enterprise community where people who have invested their work in a firm have at least the same rights as people who have invested their money, a community of stakeholders rather than stockbrokers. Certainly the unions must spend time and effort on finding positive labour alternatives for economic and social development."

Not an easy task, as this study posits. As Hall [1978, 64] summed up:

> "Even regularly accessed definers, like official trade-union spokesmen, must respond in terms pre-established by the primary definers and the privileged definitions, and have a better chance of securing a hearing and influencing the process precisely if they cast their case within the limits of that consensus."

4.2 The Irish media system

McMenamin et al [2012, 168] outlined that "media scholars often bemoan the lack of standardised cross-national comparisons". Hallin and Mancini [2004] posed the idea that the news media was not created and neither does it operate in a vacuum, but must be examined with an understanding of the "nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society, among other elements of social structure" [ibid, 8]. This reinforces the concept that the media is a social construct operating within the political economic structure whence it was created and owned; impacting upon its output that may be opaque to both its producers and its audience. Hallin and Mancini's work builds upon *Four Theories of the Press* outlined by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm [1956] who attempted to ascertain why the media appeared to serve different purposes in different countries. With a subtitle of 'The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press should Be and Do' it was a collection of essays analysing the historical development and core traits of each model – and this influenced media and communication theory for several decades.

Hallin and Mancini [2004, 2] posit that such comparative analysis "sensitizes us to variation and similarity" and draws our attention to aspects of national media that we may take for granted, while Merrill and Nerone [2002, 133] described it as "an easily discussed typology of press-government relationships that was absent at the time in a simplified and memorable form." Hallin and Mancini [2004, 10] suggest that the four theories are on limited use in understanding Western European media in that it combined the libertarian model "relatively

unregulated commercial and party press and the tradition of advocacy journalism'; the social responsibility model "public broadcasting, right-of-reply laws, press subsidies, press councils" and authoritarian "Gaullist state broadcasting, British Official Secrets Act… periods of real dictatorship".

Hallin and Mancini [2004] identified three major variations of media development; the Polarized Pluralist, Democratic Corporatist and Liberal models: They posed that the Liberal Model is prevalent across the Britain, the USA and Ireland; the Democratic Corporatist Model across Scandinavia, Germany and Austria; and the Polarized Pluralist Model across the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe; Italy, Spain and France.

The Liberal Model is characterised by a relative dominance of free market mechanisms and a commercialised media; the Democratic Corporatist Model by a long-standing coexistence of commercial media and news organisations tied to social and political groups, with an active but limited role of the state; and the Polarized Pluralist Model by integration of the media into party politics, weaker commercial development and an imposing role of the state. Broadly speaking, Hallin and Mancini see the increasing commercialisation of media across each of the models and attempted to illustrate the degree to how each individual state's media system fitted these patterns. They also found considerable variation between nations that were grouped together for discussion; including the British, American and Irish media systems within the Liberal Model.

Hallin and Mancini [2004] argue that commercialised newspapers evolved from political connections but are less likely to empha¬sise politics than their predecessors. They examined political and economic variables including development and structure of media markets, political parallelism and professionalisation to suggest three distinct journalistic cultures and media systems; suggesting the Liberal Model is marked by deregulated media markets, a developed professional journalistic culture and minimal state interference in the form of self-regulation and ownership. O'Regan [2010, 447] argued that the Irish news model tends to "avoid explicit party-partisan positions". O'Regan also suggests this is closest to the Anglo-American model based on the 'professionalism' of journalists. Hallin and Mancini [2004, 76] stated, "In the Liberal countries, the media are closer to the world of business and further from the world of politics." By implication the Liberal Model media have evolved faster and further from state control and more directed by market forces.

Bruggeman et al [2014] revisited Comparing Media Systems and, using aggregated data from the same sample of Western countries, found that Ireland was characterised by "high

reach of the press, low degrees of political parallelism, a highly professionalised journalism, and a weak role of the state [ibid, 1042] consistent with the 'North Atlantic or Liberal model' that comprises Britain, the USA and Canada. The small correlation of political parallelism reinforces the view that the media in Ireland is not structured around political parties; the weak role of the state suggesting low regulation of ownership, broadcasting and press subsidies. However, Greenslade [2018] argued that, "There is an uncomfortable cosiness about the relationship between the main political parties in Ireland and the major journalistic outlets. At the same time, there is a growing concern about the Irish media's parlous state of economic health. Together, these quite separate forces amount to an existential crisis for Irish journalism." McChesney [2016, 130] examined the political economy model of why newspaper journalism is failing in many countries, noting that the model has been over-reliant on advertising that has now switched to online and singling out *The Guardian* in the UK as a not-for-profit trust using non-media related investments to subsidise its journalism.

The political economy tradition addresses the nature of the relationship between media and society in terms of ownership and monetisation; and how government policy influences media content and behaviour; particularly in liberal, capitalist economies where commercial media is dominant. The political economy approach suggests that the structure of a media organisation accounts for its relationship to society; and individual journalists are 'socialised' into normative behaviours – contained within the 'news values' that the organisation has adopted. Blumler and Gurevitch [1995] outlined how these factors can be made visible through comparative analysis – "making the invisible visible".

Nerone [2013] described how the dominant form of journalism establishment and evolution derives from the relationships and practices of daily newspapers and wire services from the late 19th century. He [2013, 447] describes journalism as a "belief system that defines the appropriate practices and values of news professionals, news media, and news systems" whose news culture was developed at the "intersection of politics and the marketplace" [ibid, 449] and whose norms made sense "in situations in which industrialised news media providers sold news to middling class audiences in political systems in which relatively centrist parties competed for voter support" [ibid, 452]. McChesney [2016, 128] makes the point that journalism needs to be aware that powerful interests also lie in the private sector; a media system that pays particular attention to those with power in the private sector "where the real story is if you want to know how a society works or how to get things done. You need news media/journalism that covers a broad range of issues, not just the issues people in power want to talk about."
When the State and the private economy share the same interests, the State becomes a

corporation, and places decisions based upon efficiency above and beyond addressing moral and ethical issues and takes on a more administrative role. It is arguable that Ireland came close to becoming a technocracy in 2009, based on economic expertise at the expense of democracy; especially with the influence of economists towards the bank guarantee. Allen [2012, 429] suggested that consensus between the state and academics "is presented as a technical solution that transcends politics…There are simply no other realistic solutions and so 'there is no alternative'." Habermas' [1989, 181-235] concern is that technocracy denies the role of government legitimised by a functioning public sphere – and 'refeudalises' power. Manning [2001, 5] note that "The refeudalisation of the public sphere describes the process whereby communication and the exchange of ideas grows increasingly dependent upon a new group of sponsors and patrons…In other words, capitalism replaces monarchs, church and feudal lords, with advertising, public relations and the commercial sponsorship of mass communications."

As the political economic model of media organisations Herman and Chomsky [2003] proposed the propaganda model Herman and Chomsky (2003: xi) (rewrite foregoing for clarity) discuss the 'manufacture of consent' and in a 'propaganda model' put forward their view that "the media serve, and propagandise on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them."

This propaganda model proposes five filters as the direct unseen mechanism by which journalistic practice is funnelled towards supporting the private interests of the dominant elite, namely consumerism and private wealth, while still performing the optical 'watchdog' function. The filters effect the communication of messages from government and private interests to the public, while marginalising any dissenting views.

Five filters

(1) Media ownership is limited to those that can afford it – and are run for profit.

(2) Advertisers. Without advertising many media organisations cease to exist.

(3) Sourcing mass media news. The media are reliant on information and news releases; most notable are government and business corporations.

(4) Flak and enforcers. Complaints, threats or other negative responses to media statements can mitigate content and angle of news.

(5) Anticommunism can be used against anyone who threatens property interests or proposes collective policies; fragmenting the leftwing movements and serving as a political control mechanism. In Ireland and the UK this is better understood as 'anti-collectivism'.

If any of the five filters is in operation with regard to workers' groups or trade unionists it could prove prohibitive to 'getting the message out'. If more than one of the filters, or all five, are simultaneously applied, this conveniently explains why traditionally it has proved difficult for such groups to politically communicate with public opinion. Critics of such a model often point to the rise of the Internet as undermining the filters and others dismiss the theoretical position as nothing more than a conspiracy theory [Klæhn 2002].

Beckett [1978, 48] noted that the two major pressures on editors are "the pressure to please his proprietor, and the pressure not to offend big business from which the newspaper's lifeblood, its advertising revenue, comes." Manning [2001, 162] outlines that 'flak' or 'enforcers' does not just keep in check those with a left-wing outlook. BBC programme *That's Life* and its successor *Watchdog* proved to be such a nuisance that ten of the largest British companies coordinated a joint campaign to persuade the governors to limit the programme's coverage of complaints about products or services.

Schudson & Waisbord [2003] argued that macroinstitutional approaches imply that structural conditions account for news content, while microinstitutional approaches underline the power of journalistic convention and social pressures on individual journalists. They insisted that both of these approaches, aligned with the cultural approach where individual journalists can link to "prevailing (and conservative) myths, archetypes, and narratives" [ibid, 350], are not mutually exclusive. They concluded [2003, 362] "None of the three perspectives by itself can account for what we might want to know about how journalism works."

In terms of the media outlets whose content is examined in this thesis all the newspapers are private commercial entities. At the time of the economic crisis of 2008 the *Irish Examiner* and the *Sunday Business Post* were owned by Thomas Crosbie Holdings; Independent News and Media [INM] owned the *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Independent* and *Sunday Tribune*. Of the newspapers in this current research, only *The Irish Times* operates under the business model of a Trust – similar to *The Guardian* – the articles of which stipulate that its news coverage should be free from 'personal or of party political, commercial, religions or sectional control' with news being 'as accurate and as comprehensive as practicable' and comment and opinion being 'informed and responsible'.

Greenslade [2004] outlined that the central issue is ownership. Most national press is under the control of private proprietors who support free markets and deregulation while remaining opposed to organised labour. Mercille [2015, 22] stated that the "Irish media are intertwined

with governmental and corporate world of which they are integral parts. Therefore it is to be expected that news organisations will convey viewpoints that largely reflect such interests, as the contrary would amount to undermining their own position and even existence as we know it."

4.3 Theoretical considerations – news framing

Newspapers tell us what is going on in the world – and they set the agenda for what is regarded as news. They have the power to frame the debate through the values and practices within their media organisations. Beckett [1978, 36] noted that "Newspapers, then, have one great power: the power to decide what the issues are. But they have another great power: the power of news presentation…not only unanimity of purpose about the news value of the event: there was also the snap value-judgement."

Media ownership, the business model of advertising to subsidise news production and the data-rich government departments and large institutions have arguably influence news values, journalistic practice and news framing – with salient language influencing the public perception and opinion. Media ownership is undoubtedly a significant factor in the construction and portrayal of trade union issues, and at the heart of trade union - media relations. This does not necessarily manifest itself as direct opposition; that might prove a counter-productive strategy. Instead, Trades Union Congress [1979, 5] suggested:

> "The editorial policy of the vast majority of the press, if not hostile to trade unions as such, is certainly opposed to the ideals of the trade union movement…Most editors and journalists are not deliberately instructed to disseminate a particular view of the trade union and Labour movement. However, past - and recent - experience has shown that stories which support the editorial policy are likely to be given greater prominence than those contrary to the paper's policy."

The academic literature of media studies in the twentieth century offered three key theoretical perspectives – News Framing; News Values; Propaganda Model – but there is also a need to update these theories [Entman and Steinman 2008] following a period of significant change in the last decades both on journalistic practice, resources and the expansion of news dissemination and the rise of the internet. Each of these theoretical models originated in a pre-internet era where the news cycle was at a less frenetic pace and when the Northcliffe model of newspaper production had not yet significantly declined.

It is also noted that there is considerable overlap and shared assumptions between these theoretical models. Neoliberal theory espouses that the market drives the media and that supply and demand is the key factor in what content makes news values this argument stresses that journalists produce the news that sells. But this belies a political economy of the media where ownership is limited to the very wealthy and powerful in our societies, reducing citizens to consumers.

It is argued that both news framing and news values are subsets within journalistic practice; which itself is subjected to filtration through a political economic model and journalistic practice is socialised within a media organisation and subservient to owners, advertisers and dominant news sources – government and powerful business interests who control the information and data and can afford public relations consultants.

News framing has its roots in psychological research. Tversky and Kahneman [1981] emphasised the importance of role or perspective in decision making, a phenomenon known as 'framing'. They established from their research that apparent minor changes in how a problem is presented could change how a possible solution is perceived. Entman [2004, 27] wrote, "In a classic experiment, Kahneman and Tversky described a hypothetical public health crisis and proposed remedies. The solution framed in terms of lives saved was far more popular than the one framed in terms of deaths avoided, even though the remedies were substantively identical." The scientific study within psychology for the role of emotion – or 'intuition' determining this continues.

Westen [2007, 94] explained how people understand new situations in terms of something familiar; "As the linguist George Lakoff has made clear, the metaphors used in political discourse set the way voters 'frame' issues and play a powerful role in shaping their feelings."

As Lakoff stated [2014, xiii] stated "Frames are ideas, not slogans. Reframing is more a matter of accessing what we and like-minded others already believe unconsciously, making it conscious, and repeating it till it enters normal public discourse." News framing is essentially presenting new information in terms of familiar ideas or metaphors, something Entman [2004, 25] defined as "The verb 'to frame' [or 'framing'] refers to the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality."

The construction of an interpretation of a novel situation relies on preconception – and can only be realised if such ideas have been reinforced within each individual's perception over

a period of time. Lakoff [2014, 33] "Effective reframing is the changing of millions of brains to be prepared to recognise a reality…the reality is that certain ideas have to be ingrained in us - developed over time consistently and precisely enough to create and accurate frame for our understanding."

Westen [2007, 262] argued that Lakoff is equally concerned with the idea of framing the issues to elicit the right emotional connotations and also with the notion of inadvertently accepting another party's framing of any issue. For example, the earlier mentioned neoliberal view of Margaret Thatcher was that the public service was a 'burden' on the taxpayer – rather than an 'investment' in civil society.

The most influential research conducted by the Glasgow University Media Group in the 1970s. Philo, Beharrell and Hewitt [1978, 5] found 'news bias' revolved around discussions of 'fair coverage' based on emotive language but noted that this discussion missed "the essential dimension of the control that media producers exercise over the explanation of social life and of what actions in society produce what effects."

The work of Daniel Kahneman, for example, has presented his findings of more than thirty years' experimental social psychology research under the successful brand of 'behavioural economics' for which he won a Nobel Prize. Increasingly the role of emotion in human decision-making is influenced by framing and subconscious emotion. Feldwick [2015, 128] wrote:

> "The discourse is no longer about the dark, frightening Freudian unconscious, something that we might feel ashamed of admitting to; but what Timothy Walton calls the 'adaptive unconscious', a universal and inescapable part of everyday life and decision making. Antonio Damasio has explored in a series of books his rather complex but compelling hypotheses about how all decision making is intimately related to emotions and feelings, so that in a sense there is no such thing as a purely 'rational' decision."

Robert Entman made significant progress and is widely cited in framing analysis. Cawley [2012, 604] draws on Entman's 1993 definition as "making perceived reality more salient through a communicative text by promoting a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation." Entman [2004, 1] illustrates this most effectively by the example of President George Bush's State of the Union speech in 2002 – after 9/11 – where "he invoked *evil* five times and *war* twelve times". Bush had defined a problem in simple emotional terms, and according to Entman, had excluded other

understandings of the twin towers attack and by repeating these terms had framed the attack to his own interpretation.

This repetition of key phrases gives memorable intrinsic meaning to audiences. Cawley [2012, 604] cautioned that the "influence of frames on the public's understanding of an issue cannot be guaranteed."

The Glasgow University Media Group argued that news was a cultural product using interpretive frameworks based on assumptions of societal problems and solutions. This overlaps with the theoretical position of journalistic practice [often described as news values] – because it is the journalist who makes the decision on what is newsworthy. An example of framing cited by Philo, Beharrell and Hewitt [1978, 7] was that much of the television news coverage of the industrial problems at British car manufacturer Leyland were explained in terms of the workforce – ignoring obsolete machinery and the underfunding of private investment. Such an analysis concludes that 'news framing' blamed the problems of a failing economy on the workforce.

Beharrell, Philo and Hewitt [1978, 8] put news framing central to bias; attaching 'blame' for the strike and the damage to production or to the customer:

> "News coverage is organised around such themes but no similar causal chain exists for other explanations of industrial crisis…There is no critical account, let alone routine referencing, of problems such as the export of private capital, or the movement of capital away from productive industry into various forms of profiteering such as speculation in land or commodities."

A similar situation was outlined by Ogle [2003, 112] who stated that the Irish media explicitly ignored safety concerns outlined in an independent safety report on Irish railways, because a separate report by the Labour Court/Labour Relations Commission contained no mention of safety in the executive summary. "It is no wonder that many ILDA members still feel a deep hurt and sense of having been betrayed at the hands of the media and public."

Such oversimplification and ignoring of context in often complex industrial relations can be a result of incomplete news frames or a simple lack of effort by an individual journalist to uncover all of the prevalent influences. McNamara et al [1994, 114] argued "Coverage of disputes is sensational and the media can oversimplify what may often be very complicated

situations" while Griffiths [1978, 65] explained "Items in news bulletins do not encourage alternative explanations of the cause and solution of economic problems."

Beharrell, Philo and Hewitt [1978, 21-22] concluded:

> "It is a measure of the pervasiveness of dominant explanations and politics of the news… at its most damaging amounts to laying the blame for the problems of an economy based on private interest at the door of the workforce."

The establishment that framing exists does not guarantee that the audience will receive the salience in the way it is transmitted within a text, but it remains a compelling argument for any perception of 'bias' – especially within the narrow space of the relationship between media and trade unions. But can trade unions utilise framing to influence public opinion? Writing of the ambulance dispute in Britain in 1989, Manning [2001, 157] argued "trade unions organising ambulance drivers…involved in a protracted dispute were represented in some newspapers as 'angels with blue flashing lights' and 'mercy men' rather than 'militant' trade unionists".

Manning [2001,180] summarised:

> "In short, if accommodative news media strategies were to prove successful for unions anywhere, it should be in circumstances such as these. The great danger the unions faced was that journalists would return to the news frames which dominated the reporting of British industrial relations during the 1970s, particularly the images of 'militant' public sector workers taking action to paralyse services and 'hold the public to ransom'."

The rise of neoliberal policies and legislation to limit the power of trade unions, coupled with the demise of British industry has perhaps insulated the theoretical positions formulated in the 1970's from the current era; where the proliferation of media outlets and increase in talk radio has shifted the paradigm. Hall, Massey and Rustin [2013, 8] outlined that three decades of neoliberal capitalism since 1980 has precipitated an economic crisis and "mainstream political debate does not recognise the depth of the crisis".

The media are reliant on sources; and government information services or major corporations often control these. Jones [1995, 22] writing about the 1984-85 coal dispute; "While the pit

strike had shown that there was no way the Thatcher government could either restrict or deny trade unions access to television and radio during a damaging industrial dispute, there were ways of lessening the impact of their message." Ministers refused to engage in studio debates and insisted on having the last word if they were to appear on live debates [ibid, 23]:

> "Their aim was to marginalise the union voice…I was constantly reminded of the effectiveness of this tactic. Union leaders would tell me how invitations to participate in live debates with ministers and other government spokesmen had been withdrawn at the last moment without adequate explanation. Later on the same evening they would see the relevant minister being interviewed live, on his own, without any opportunity for the union to reply."

Programme editors who interviewed union leaders without a right of reply being granted to government ministers were vulnerable to having their impartiality questioned and the programme accused of being unbalanced - and consequently biased.

Although audience figures and readerships have fragmented, the established media in Ireland remains at the core of the news agenda and framing of discourse. The theoretical position may soon need a radical overhaul or systematic updating, but in the large course they appear to remain as the most relevant framework to examine the political communication and industrial relations of the public sector pay dispute of 2009-2010.

Entman [2007, 163] updated aspects of theory surrounding 'framing bias' and proposed to abandon distortion bias applied to news that distorts or falsifies reality; instead concentrating on two 'major meanings' – that of content bias [news that favours one side in a political conflict] and decision-making bias [of journalists who allegedly produce biased content]. This latter suggests that the focus be shifted from the news organisation onto the individual journalist.

As a result of this update, Entman [2007, 164] defines framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation." This is contradictory to Griffiths' earlier [1978, 70] position;

> "It would be wrong to suggest that deliberate bias on the part of the individual journalist is the cause of the problem. The context in which a journalist operates and the hectic way

in which what constitutes the 'news' is decided, militate against the most balanced and coherent way of presenting things that go on in the world."

While it remains convincing that framing influences the agendas of what people think about, that decision bias be located with the individual news worker rather than the institution employing that worker has yet to be fully considered, Entman's [2007, 166] justification is:

"it seems pointless either to deny or denounce the existence of these decision-making biases. All information-processing persons and organisations employ what neutrally might be called heuristics [learning or discovering for oneself]. This is the only way they can cope with bounded rationality and information overload."

If this framing of decision-bias can be placed at the individual journalist level, it should perhaps become evident in the reverse of expectations within the media; and will highlight a fissure between the framing model and political economy model. If a significant number of journalists show decision-bias counter to their organisation's editorial line, it would certainly suggest the revised framing model has more gravitas than the political economic model. In reality, does this happen? Or if journalists' decision-bias contravenes the news editors' news values are they simply asked to resubmit their reports? An alternative position is that any individual decision bias is made when certain journalistic procedures involve pre-framing the story and then finding actors to fulfil the script. Hall [1979, 88] suggested that one could map the hidden ideology of the media organisation by "noting the characteristic arguments advanced against groups".

Cawley [2012] examined the news framing [content analysis] and sourcing [cluster analysis] and found that this was predominantly framed as a divide [conflict] between the private and public sector over a sustained time period. Cawley [personal interview 25 June 2013] said:

"…economists were prominent as sources right throughout the timescale of my study from 2008-2010 and they would have been one of the primary definers of the debate about the relative positions of the public and private sector – one of the ways which economists would have become more prominent was off the back of the Bord Snip Nua, Colm McCarthy's profile might have been enhanced as a news source within that."

These economists were more likely to espouse market-driven solutions to particular aspects of the economic crisis; pay, numbers and working conditions were framed within a market

logic – termed as 'private sector efficiency'. Cawley's research suggested the news media tended to pitch public sector workers – private sector workers into a position of contestation; with typical headlines suggesting that public servants were paid more; without the context of what roles they were doing.

In terms of analysing the framing inherent in media coverage of the crisis, media academic Anthony Cawley observed that the framing of the debate in terms of private sector and public sector sharpened as the economy continued to deteriorate, and certain news media held up the Special Group Report as a call to action; the suggestion being that as it had been pointed out by an economist that these areas of public sector spending needed to be cut, they also needed to be reformed immediately. As Cawley noted [interview, 2013]:

> "Very often, the arguments for reform were predicated on introducing private sector efficiency into the public sector on cost reduction, on restructuring different departments and different agencies, on merging the functions of different state agencies to try to reduce numbers and increase efficiency. One could make the argument, that many of the arguments being argued for in the news media for this reform reflected the neo-liberal underpinnings of the Celtic Tiger economy. This contradiction of a Celtic Tiger economy that had a certain model of development that was perceived to be very successful for a while, until 2008, many commentators were highlighting the difficulties of light-touch regulation, the highly globalised nature of the Irish economy – these different characteristics of neo-liberalism, the emphasis on the market is the best mechanism to regulate economic and social life."

There was, Cawley concluded, "a contradiction between criticising institutions for following that market logic – but on the other hand calling for a similar logic to be the base of reform of the public sector. That would have been the key thing that stood out in terms of calls for reform: this uncritical reflection that if it is more market based or mimicking free market – then it will be a more cost-effective and efficient public sector."

In a content analysis of sources in national morning radio, Rafter [2014, 602] found an "elite-centred coverage" leaning towards the business world; the implication being that the interpretation of the economic crisis was framed by these sources and further strong evidence for 'interpretive or contextualised journalism' that not determined by ownership type; but "overwhelmingly reflected through official sources" [2014, 606]. Berry [2013, 253] analysed source access and formed similar conclusions raising "key questions regarding impartiality

and balance in public sector broadcasting". Official sources in these studies dominated the debate – and as Berry [2016, 848] reinforced Cawley's [2012, 613] finding that such reporting "tended to amplify frames that favoured a broadly neoliberal response to the economic crisis; a reduced public sector and a smaller state". Mercille [2015] outlined how such framing dominated the discussion to the exclusion of alternatives.

This current study utilised content analysis to examine specific proposals put forward in broadsheet newspapers for how the austerity measures were to be implemented – but moreover a sentiment analysis to examine the overall tone of reported news and opinion. Damstra [2019] examined the effect of negative tone and the level of uncertainty in economic news coverage and its impact; van Dalen et al [2015] suggested that during economic recession the media amplify the negative and make the economic developments more visible – and reporting with an overly negative tone and as Mercille suggested [2015, 129] "opinion pieces and editorials, by their very nature, usually present a clear point of view."

4.4 Theoretical considerations - news values

Neoliberal theory espouses the market drives the media – and that supply and demand is the key factor in what content makes news values. This argument stresses that journalists produce the news that sells. But this belies a political economy of the media where ownership is limited to the very wealthy and powerful in our societies, reducing citizens to consumers.

"What is news?" This question continues to exercise the minds of journalists and academics alike [Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 261]. News values have been explicitly taught to journalism students to help them ascertain what makes a story newsworthy; while many journalists agree that news is fresh, unpublished, unusual and generally interesting [Randall 2000, 23] it is the latter "that causes all the arguments every day in newsrooms around the world". He continued:

> "there is no escaping subjectivity in judging news stories. It pervades the whole process of journalism and no reporter or news editor, try as they might professionally to suppress their own prejudices, will ever be able to do so completely…although unavoidable…is an ever-present danger, especially when journalists try to pass off their own personal prejudices as objectivity."

As the Glasgow Media Group [2010, 2] summarised:

> "news is never simply a series of facts or a simple mirror of external reality. Rather it is a cultural product and the accounts and descriptions of the world which it gives are produced from within specific interpretative frameworks. By this we mean that its accounts are formulated from within limited assumptions as to the nature of the social and industrial world. These assumptions are guided by beliefs about what the problems of our society are and how those problems might and should be solved. These beliefs give order and form to news accounts—they determine what information is to be included and what excluded. They are at the heart of what is to be declared as 'newsworthy' and are implicit in the normal practices of journalists."

Parks [2019, 784] asserted that although key news values have been fundamentally stable since the early 1900s the way they are applied to reporting depends on the sociocultural context of the era. "The key implication is that news values are neither natural nor inevitable, but within journalists' power to change."

News values are also used by public relations practitioners attempting to gain media coverage of their events [Harcup and O'Neill 2017, 1470]. The media are often presenting events outside the direct experience of many within society, and as these events are 'new' or 'unexpected', the media are tasked with making them comprehensible [Hall 1978, 56].

Hall [1978a, 181] said; "'News values are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it." Gans [2003a] described how news values are changing; the decision process to what makes the news as news corporations become ever more desperate to recruit an audience. News executives directing journalists – and journalists becoming further reliant on reliable sources are increasingly reporting senior elite sources who are credible to fill their pages. He cites that government agencies are the most dependable suppliers with the power and resources to create events that become stories. Gans [2003a] "In their dependence on top-down news, journalists often become unintentional publicists for the government."

Galtung and Ruge [1965] are often credited as the first to address 'newsworthiness' with their theoretical classification of 'news values'; asking how 'events' become 'news'? [1965, 65]. When determining whether or not something is newsworthy, the selection process by journalists has been described as "probably as important or perhaps sometimes more

important than what 'really happens'" [Westerhahl and Johansson 1994, 71]. Mencher [2003, 68] cites eight 'values' that are measures of 'newsworthiness' as a guide for journalistic practice. Parks [2019, 784] reflected key news values as timeliness, proximity, prominence, unusualness, conflict, human interest, and impact.

- Timeliness
- Impact [consequence]
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Conflict
- Unusual [rarity]
- Currency [what the population is talking about – or human interest]

Mencher adds:

- Necessity [investigative]

While Mencher's term 'necessity' refers to the kind of investigative journalism of the Watergate kind; with newsrooms diminished resources this has diminished, replaced with the 'necessity' to fill content between advertisements as the Northcliffe business model declines in favour of 'free' digital news. Journalists are now increasingly reliant on public relations [Lewis Williams and Franklin 2008; Davies 2009]. What happens to all other rolling news items – the emphasis goes from the initial news content to a sophisticated blend of opinion and editorial; usually referred to under the combined term of op-ed [Brighton and Foy 2007, 28].

Ó Ceallaigh [1981, 139] argued that the first stage of news production was to make a value judgement about what is important, and often it is a subjective judgement as to what is 'newsworthy'. First a value judgement is made based on the 'news values' of a media organisation according to its journalistic practice. Secondly, each story is 'framed' so as to make it understandable to the audience – and these concepts can be understood as part of the wider political economy, within which the trade union and Labour movement is frequently at odds.

It has been increasingly suggested that public relations professionals and news agencies are shaping news content [Lewis, Williams and Franklin 2008] as journalistic practices are rapidly evolving as productivity pressures are placed on journalists by reduction in staff numbers and expanding output. Lewis et al [2008a] found that journalists in the UK produce

three times as much copy as they did 20 years before and that over one third of broadcast stories and nearly two-thirds of print articles in the national media are heavily dependent upon pre-packaged news. Barnes and Cawley [2009] found that Irish media displayed a weak filtering of institutional frames, and a press release arriving in a newsroom would often lead directly to a reprint or broadcast within the news.

Such new values will give an indication of the value judgements made within journalism to decide if a story is worthy of reporting often based on its degree of novelty; but as Hall [1978, 86-87] held, news production has its own structure, definitions and meanings - commonly referred to as news values - and those items that are dramatic or conflict with our sense of the ordinary have greater news salience with journalists.

To focus on the impact of stories removes the context to a greater or lesser extent. Lloyd [2004, 112] cited former Director-General of the BBC John Birt whose "belief that BBC journalists had a tendency to prefer the dramatic to the analytical, action pictures to coherence, disjointed commentary to coherent narrative."

Hall [1978, 57] insisted on a "crucial distinction between primary and secondary definers of social events. Primary definers are the 'regular and reliable information sources' that a political economic model relies upon as the third filter. Hall defines the media as secondary definers because they merely reproduce the definitions – and subsequent framing – of the ruling ideology.

The socialisation of journalists into the media organisations they work for becomes the significant factor, the 'unseen hand' influencing the framing of news. Beckett [1978, 44] stated, "The question to ask journalists is not: when did you news desk instruct you to give a story a misleading slant? It is: how often have you given news stories a misleading slant because you are a good enough professional to know what your news desk wanted?"

Journalistic practice stems from journalists socialised into the institutionalised work practices of the media organisation [Louw 2010, 58] and Lloyd [2004, 81] opined: "The most powerful context is often that provided by the news organisation for which the journalist works; in this sense, context is the network of assumptions, political beliefs and moral positions which the organisation holds." Griffiths [1978, 63] argued "There is a consensus amongst the media, about what is important [for example public spending – there should be less]".

In the growing dispute between train drivers and Iarnród Éireann in 2000, Ogle [2003, 144] saw 'on balance' much of the coverage by the press as fair and accurate at various stages, but "as the summer of 2000 progressed and ILDA turned into the story of the summer, that situation would change, and in some – perhaps many – cases, I encountered hostility and bias at hands of journalists."

In industrial relations reporting this commonly focuses attention on the perceived victims of any industrial action rather than the background to any dispute; the queues outside of a passport office, stranded commuters or empty shelves in a supermarket.

The media focus on those most affected by trade union action was clearly demonstrated during the Irish Locomotive Drivers' Association dispute in 2000 [Ogle 2003, 175]; "the morning news shows were giving maximum coverage to the disruption. I sat in the car park at Athlone station and switched on RTÉ's *Morning Ireland*, just in time to hear comments about the disruption the *strike* was having" despite members being 'locked out' of their workplaces by management.

While the news values posited by Hall [1978] may not have changed, journalistic practice has. A journalist will still have the need to select what is newsworthy and what angle or line to take – but with the production pressures mounting it is pragmatic to seize upon ready-made stories especially those that reflect the news values of the media organisation. In the majority of cases, it would be prudent within reducing time constraints to repackage official authorised statements as journalism. Manning [2001, 155] considered such a journalistic practice in the age of celebrities and reduced context within news items as "an approach which emphasises the immediacy of events and 'individualises' industrial disputes in terms of personalities and the drama of conflict is more likely to strike a chord with correspondents."

Personalised attacked on Brendan Ogle became commonplace, and would fill several pages in newspapers during the summer of 2000 [Ogle 2003, 188-190]. Ogle [2003, 223] "My favourite journalist of all, Gene Kerrigan – again a man with whom I had never spoken or had any dealings with – wrote a piece in the *Sunday Independent* that slated his colleagues for the 'demonisation of Brendan Ogle', which he described as a 'media scandal' itself." Ogle was a spokesman representing his members' grievances, a legitimate position for any political actor, but as Ogle [2003, 211] wrote of the *Evening Herald*'s coverage "the tactic was clear: Break Ogle and you break ILDA."

Hall recognises a dual role for the trade union spokesperson – as an established primary definer on industrial relations issues to the point where public opinion expects the voice of the union to be represented. Trade unions often posit a counter-definition of the situation. Hall [1979, 64]:

> "Many emergent counter-definers, however, have no access to the defining process at all. Even regularly accessed definers, like official trade-union spokesmen, must respond in terms pre-established by the primary definers and the privileged definitions, and have a better chance of securing a hearing and influencing the process precisely if they cast their case within the limits of that consensus."

Hall offered a Marxist perspective to the production and dissemination of news relating to industrial conflict. While government officials are primary definers of any issue within the news, the trade unionist or protester is often portrayed as a counter-definer. Hall [1979, 88] commented on how television news deals with these issues and actors – "the interviewers are noticeably sharper, touchier, defending their flanks against any predisposition to softness".

Manning [2001, 171-172] noted that:

> "When the concept of 'primary definition' was first formulated by Stuart Hall and his colleagues in the mid-1970s, the strength of the British trade union movement and the proximity of its leadership to government persuaded the authors to include the trade union elites as 'primary definers'…so marginal are trade unions to the formal political process in Britain today and so infrequently are industrial relations featured in news coverage compared to two decades earlier, that some might suggest a discussion of their potential as news sources is hardly warranted."

It will be examined later how effective the Irish public sector trade unions were in counter-definition to the likening of the Irish economy to a household budget, somewhat illiterate in economic theory, but prevalent in news framing following the economic crisis in 2008. Perhaps it is more poignantly observed by Beharrell, Philo and Hewitt's [1978, 15] seminal studies that found news was produced from a 'limited view'; "its content is organised in such a way that coherence and order is only given to one set of explanations and policies".

Such [hidden] news values will have an overriding impact on both the selection of stories to be covered [agenda setting] and the framing [how it is covered]. McCombs and Shaw

[1972] expand on how the media set the public opinion agenda in choosing and displaying news; greater coverage equals greater public concern. Sometimes the editorial position of newspapers confounds expectations, as Greenslade [2004, 286] explained:

> "In January 1972, Britain's 280,000 coal miners called a national strike for the first time since 1926 after rejecting an 8 per cent pay offer…The popular press including traditional Tory-supporting papers such as the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*, was overwhelmingly supportive to the miners."

Consistency is not guaranteed with any of the tabloid newspapers over short-term issues, laying out a smokescreen for editors who wish to refute bias against a particular class or section of society. The suggestion is that certain ideas may resonate with the public at any given time and newspaper proprietors do not wish to alienate their readerships. Greenslade [2004, 287] noted "*The Sun* said the miners were 'a special case…because of the exceptional demands of their dirty, dangerous job."

The *Daily Mail* recognised the widespread public support for the miners 'and rightly so'. It did not last when an election was called in 1974. Jones [1995, 173] reported;

> "[Rupert] Murdoch had used the same tactic while supporting the Thatcher government in demolishing the power of the trade unions in the early 1980s, when as a sop to public opinion his papers occasionally made over the odd comment column to a union leader: these were token gestures and made no difference to the commercial strategy of News International or to Murdoch's determination to smash the restrictive practices of the print workers. In fact, for a time, he lulled the print union leaders into thinking that he would not carry out his threat to switch production of his papers to a new plant in Wapping."

Furthermore, the confidence with which newsrooms can evaluate public opinion is questionable. Greenslade [2004, 288-9] talked of the 'great imponderables' - the confidence with which newspapers deliver the message that the public is 'for' or 'against' anything. But was the press reflecting genuine public sympathy or did it create it? Westen [2007, 29] argued, "The problem, according to most accounts, is that public opinion largely reflects efforts at manipulation by special interests and political elites, often filtered through a media that only sometimes serves as the 'Fourth Estate' envisioned by the founders."

The government declared a state of emergency and a three-day week for business and industry in 1974. Despite power cuts the newspapers did not deviate from their pro-miners' stance, but when a general election was called by prime minister Edward Heath for 28 February 1974 it generated headlines such as "Who governs Britain?" the Tory press rallied behind the government – with *The Guardian* casting NUM president Joe Gormley as the 'prisoner of a militant executive'.

In his polemic *Flat Earth News* on changing journalistic practices and structures since the 1990s, Davies [2009] argued that falsehood, distortion and propaganda are now endemic throughout the world. He concluded [2009, 128] that, "the years of Reagan and Thatcher demolished counter culture and replaced it with a new consensus…in 2006, Fleet Street papers had almost ceased to refer to the structure of their own society, a subject which generated the most powerful debate of the 20th Century."

News values are often in conflict with the values of the political actors they are reporting upon. Griffiths [1978, 62] posited, "Most trade unionists do not 'like' going on strike, nor do they 'like' being on the dole, but the prominence given these activities through news values presents them almost as if they did." McNamara et al [1994, 115] divulged:

> "Strike action is very much a last resort, taken reluctantly after much consideration. An opposite impression is often given by the media…Many unions publish their own newsletters for their members outlining in full their current problems, and it can be very revealing to compare reports in a union newsletter with those in a national newspaper."

When Stuart Hall was researching news values of the British media, the Cold War was still at its height, and yet the increasing neoliberalism and the fall of the Berlin Wall effectively sidelined the debate on political economy and heralded capitalism's great triumph – it is no longer questioned; the debate of the wider context is not a value within the news. Anyone who remembers the 1970s and 1980s in Britain remembers a time of bleak industrial unrest and overarching fear of nuclear war that would destroy the fabric and fittings of society. For more than a century, newspapers have told us what is going on in the world – and they set the agenda for what is regarded as news. They have the power to frame the debate through the values and practices within their media organisations. Television and radio followed in this pattern as they technologically and culturally evolved throughout the 20th Century – and more recently the invention of the internet and digital communications has further augmented the dissemination of ideas.

The power of newspapers was unprecedented on such a mass scale; defining what events were newsworthy and interpreting these for the readers. Beckett [1978 p36] noted that "Newspapers, then, have one great power: the power to decide what the issues are. But they have another great power: the power of news presentation…not only unanimity of purpose about the news value of the event: there was also the snap value-judgement."

4.5 Economic news and negativity

Economic news shapes public opinion, often beyond real economic trends with Damstra [2019, 5205], finding that "the way journalists cover the economy is an important predictor of public opinion". Damstra also examined the effect of negative tone and the level of uncertainty in economic news coverage and its impact. A longitudinal study of consumer confidence data, economic indicators and content analysis in a study by van Dalen, Vreese and Albæk [2017] showed that uncertainty in economic news decreases consumer confidence, lowers public expectation and increases pessimism. Such uncertainty may be a news value of itself; and economic indicators often require analysis to understand their significant in signalling either the improvement or the deterioration of the economy.

Soroka, Fournier and Nir [2019] studied data from 17 countries across six continents and found cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news; finding that this cannot be easily explained in terms of journalistic practice, but more likely that negativity in news is a product of human tendency to negative news content. Kahneman and Tversky [1979] showed that people had a natural aversion to risk, and their perception of the risks were disproportionate. Such avoidance issues may explain why individuals are more drawn to negative news – but in terms of normative news values of journalistic practice, it is suggested that this may have become a closed cycle; journalism's news values meeting public interest. Keene at al [2017] examined negativity bias, political ideology, and preferences for political news – finding evidence to suggest that an individual's negativity bias predicted a tendency for conservative ideology.

Prospect theory, advanced by Kahneman and Tversky [1979] has suggested that people attach greater weighting to avoidance of loss disproportional [asymmetric] to making gains – hence people are more reactive to negative news. The public are reliant on the media for economic news; otherwise it remains largely opaque. Damstra and Boukes [2018, 1] showed that "the public is presented a version of economic reality that is skewed to the negative, which strongly affects people's economic expectations but not evaluations." With

the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008, such economic news became dominant for several years in Ireland until late 2010 when the troika 'bailout' was implemented. Damstra and Boukes demonstrated that the public's expectations for the future are predominantly influenced as a result of negative economic news reports shown to be disproportionately provided by journalists. Journalists reporting of economic news is 'asymmetric' – as are the audience's interests. Hester and Gibson [2003] found that economic news was framed as negative more often than as positive and this may have serious consequences for the future performance of the economy. They also found support for "a second level agenda-setting function…Increased unfavourable news coverage of the economy was related to lowered evaluations of future economic performance" [ibid, 85]. Their overall findings suggest that economic news coverage appeared to reflect economic conditions primarily when the news was negative – and this had an effect on public opinion. When the media overemphasise the negative, the public view the economy more negatively.

Goidel and Langley [1995, 313] found overall that the media tend to follow negative economic conditions more closely than positive economic conditions; and that news coverage appears to be strongly related to 'aggregate public evaluations of the economy'. They also found that "the media exercise plenty of latitude in deciding what economic news is important [ibid, 323]. Similarly, Mutz [1992] and van Dalen [2015] suggest that economic news is 'monitored' at the macro level by members of the public who like to keep informed, and journalism is likened to 'surveillance' of the economic conditions with van Dalen [2015, 891] suggesting "monitorial citizens keep an eye on their environment and look for cues about important developments that require their attention." The media are an important source of information in this construct.

It is argued that Irish journalists failed in this 'watchdog' role when they failed to identify and report Ireland's housing bubble before 2008 [Mercille 2015, 35; Brady 2010]. This is supported by cognitive psychologists Kahneman and Tversky [1979] who demonstrated that negative outcomes received disproportionately more attention than positive; a fundamental skewing of human decision-making.

Such negativity bias is often described as a part of the media's 'watchdog' role of holding government to account so naturally the media is skewed towards reporting failures of economic policy rather than heralding successful interventions. Negativity is also one of the core news values as outlined by Galtung and Ruge [1965]; bad news has been identified as more 'newsworthy' as such outcomes are more readily agreed and unambiguous; and often

unexpected [Harcup and O'Neill 2001, Glasgow University Media Group 1980]. During economic recession the media amplify the negative and make the economic developments more visible – and reporting with an overly negative tone [van Dalen et al 2015, 901]. When economic news moves from the dedicated business pages to the front pages is a visible cue to the reader that the economy requires their attention – suggesting where their focus should be attuned.

Mercille [2015, 32-44] outlined how Irish media failed to predict the collapse [or 'bursting'] of the housing bubble and instead "relied on so-called 'experts' from the financial or real estate industry to describe the market, which thus received invariably upbeat analysis" [ibid, 38]. Irish journalists continued to draw upon those same financial experts reporting after the economic collapse [Fahy, O'Brien and Poti 2010, 18]. Once the housing market collapsed it could not be ignored and gained increased coverage. Furthermore, following the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the impending collapse of Irish banks, the Irish media "endorsed the blanket guarantee with no hesitation" [ibid, 59]. Those same media organisations also announced that the guarantee was also the 'cheapest in the world' compared with other countries; according to minister for finance Brian Lenihan.

Manning [2012, 212] argued that the failure of financial journalism to alert us to the impending financial collapse confounded the notion that journalism was an efficient system of monitoring the economic environment; "mainstream news values which guide story selection make it difficult for financial journalists to persuade their news organisations, including news agencies, to select stories which involve high levels of complexity and appear to lack a 'personality' around which to hang information." The crisis within the financial sector of 2008-2010 was catapulted into the centre of public debate – with a relevance to a much broader public than usually follows economic news.

Soroka [2006] found a growing body of work that suggested that responses to positive and negative information are asymmetric – and it is the negative information that has the greatest impact on individuals' attitudes; hence more influential on public opinion. Soroka [2006, 381] determined that; "Public responses to negative economic information are much greater than are public responses to positive economic information. The same trend is evident in mass media content, and this content serves to enhance the asymmetry in public responsiveness." Soroka concluded that such phenomena have relevance to "agenda setting, issue priming, government popularity, and the link between public preferences and policy [2006, 382]." With more than a hint of caution, Berry [2019, 95] stated, "The question of

media influence remains a thorny and controversial issue because of the methodological difficulties in establishing impact."

4.6 Media research of the economic crash in Britain and Ireland

In order to explain how we can measure any direct influence of negative economic news, Berry [2019, 13] outlined the work of Philo et al [2015] on the 'circuit of communication' model where the components are "public and private institutions which supply information to the media; the media themselves; stratified audience groups; and decision makers in a wide range of political, regulatory and corporate spheres". Berry suggested [2019, 14] that a group of government advisers, private sector consultants and lobbyists – as well as members from 'think tanks' – work within this model to 'short circuit' connections and work to build their own interests in government policy often cutting out the public and the media to influence key government decisions. With an increased market for financial news following widespread financial deregulation in the 1990s, journalism 'rarely asked critical questions about the growth of finance and tended to restrict its watchdog role to individual cases' of corporate wrongdoing; and Berry [2019, 15 (citing Philo 1995: 413)] noting that "'experts' from merchant banks and finance houses were consulted for their apparently neutral opinions on the latest trade or financial news."

Manning [2013] reported the 'manipulative power of financial public relations' and observed that investigative journalism is increasingly difficult with reduced media resources. Journalism and sources has been explained in terms of 'information exchange'. Manning [2013, 180-181] argued that while news values and editorial decision making will take the analysis only so far, an understanding of the power relationship is required for a deeper understanding; the effectiveness of a financial journalist is measured by an information flow from sources that can "foster a dependency which allocates power in the relationship to sources rather than journalists" [181]. This period, the decade or so leading up to the financial crisis, also saw a cultural shift "whilst downgrading alternative perspectives from organised labour".

Berry [2019, 31] utilised 'thematic analysis' based on the assumption that "in a contested area there will be competing ways of explaining events or issues. These explanations are linked to particular interests which seek to explain the world in ways that justify their own position". The methodology combined thematic analysis of news bulletins with audience studies and interviews with journalists. Building upon the model of the 'circuit of communication' from the production of news to its reception by audiences; such a study included both the news

framing of the explanation of events and issues – and also the sources used [only those quoted in direct speech]. A sample of newspapers from 2009 generated by a Nexis search was sifted to remove Irish editions and then analysed to identify: who or what was responsible for the crisis; what caused the crisis [background information]; the sources featured in news accounts; evaluations of the bank bailouts; criticisms of the bailouts; alternatives to the bailouts; long-term reforms to the sector [foreground information].

The areas of interest in this study were [a] who was responsible for the crisis and failure of the banks [b] who were the sources framing the parameters of the debate [c] what was the range of debate on the bailouts and possible sectoral reforms across both newspapers and broadcast media.

Observations pertinent to this study were that *The Telegraph* had a tendency to 'blame the public' with the conservative idea of not 'living within your means' [ibid, 39] and that of the sampled newspaper articles 'half were opinion, half had no sources' [ibid 44]. Examining the relationship between journalists and sources the study found that the broadsheets cited a wider selection of actors than the tabloids, unsurprisingly, that official and institutional sources featured highly and that the types of sources largely represented the political orientation of the newspaper – "*The Guardian* sourced more left of centre organisations such as trade unions, the Tax Justice Network and New Economics Foundation" [ibid 46]. It is an interesting point to note that the option of fully nationalising the banks was influenced by "overwhelming negative reporting of the option in the press and on television news" and that this was picked up within the audience studies through focus groups.

Berry [2019, 145-150] reported that there was "relatively little discussion of the dangers of austerity measures" in the first seven months of 2009; the rightwing press prominently featured calls to cut public spending including staff numbers, pay and pensions in the public service – similar to the what had happened in the private sector. There was the exception of *The Guardian* that opposed austerity measures. Trade union leaders were briefly reported stating that spending cuts were not a means out of recession. However, Berry [2019, 150] stated:

> "Overall there was a high level of consensus across the British press that austerity measures were unavoidable, little discussion of the potential downsides and relatively little space given over to alternatives."

Berry [2019, 152] reported:

> "Trade unions who represented one of the most consistent voices against austerity and early deficit reduction were featured in all newspapers but at a low level."

Discussion of the banking crisis was eclipsed by fears related to the growing deficit in public finances; and the press constructed a narrative that the deficit was a major economic threat that warranted immediate and deep cuts to the welfare state. Berry [2019, 203] stated: "The media helped establish key elements of audience belief…cuts to public spending were unavoidable… Most people saw the economy as analogous to a household budget where rising debt indicated that there had been a sustained period of overspending." As Allen and O'Boyle [2013, 31] remarked:

> "This cliched metaphor was originally used by Margaret Thatcher to justify her attack on the welfare state but her homely image does not stand the test of logic. A society is not like a household because there are different social classes within it…in society the money saved in welfare cuts or lost wages is never returned."

Berry [2019, 204-211] commented that the media used salient terminology such as 'waste' in a 'bloated' public sector; with their 'gold-plated' and 'gilt-edged' pensions – in a sector that was both 'wasteful' and 'parasitic'. The Tories were using classic 'divide and rule' tactics that promoted resentment among private sector employees towards public sector employees. Such findings echoed those of Cawley [2012] in the Irish response to the economic crisis; especially in terms of salient language as a framing device.

Berry [2019, 263-264] noted the absence of the trade union voice "almost completely excluded on the banking crisis or the debates around austerity". The trade unions struggled to find an answer. Journalists interviewed suggested that this was possibly due to the disappearance of the labour beats that only a handful of 'troublesome journalists' reported on trade union perspectives – and that the trade unions simply weren't proactive. The singular voices from the left were ignored as they didn't have 'strength in numbers' – the implication being that they were unrepresentative. As an example, when Arthur Scargill suggested that banks should be permanently nationalised he was "unlikely to have been seen as a particularly credible source" [Berry 2019, 79].

Berry concludes [2019, 266] that the British media had a preference for 'small government' and an 'ideological preference for free markets' – but [267] that "grand totalising theories

of news production can only take you so far" referring to the Propaganda Model proposed by Herman and Chomsky [2003]. Berry [2019] looked at all three elements of the 'circuit of communication'; production, content and audience reception; using content analysis [inductive] methods, interviews with journalists and interviews / focus groups with various audience demographics. Among Berry's conclusions was the insight [ibid 276]:

> "The right of centre press also attacked what it described as the 'bloated' and 'parasitic' public sector and attempted to drive a wedge between private and public employees by arguing that state sector workers were 'featherbedded' and provided with 'lavish pensions'.
>
> "These narratives did not suddenly appear in 2009. Instead their resonance and power derived from the fact that they had been used in thousands of newspaper articles in the years leading up to 2009."

Cawley's study involved a content and cluster analysis of the mid-market and quality Irish newspapers from July 2008 to June 2010 giving total coverage of the time scale of this current study. Cawley's selected methodology was to 'draw out the dominant and recurring frames' and to 'identify the key institutional sources' in the framing contests over a two-year period. In the multiple framing contest, he found they were "still confined to a routine group of institutional sources and accommodated relatively few alternative perspectives." [Cawley 2012, 607]. While the dominant frame was of division between the public and private sectors with the public sector tending "to be positioned as an ongoing drain on the country's ability to recover [Cawley 2012, 608].

Cawley [2012, 613] found the economic crisis "placed considerable strain on the political-economic position of institutional actors in Ireland, and on a news-model trying to interpret and define the crisis for the public." He also reported a strong construction in a model of conflict between the public sector and private sector in the framing of debate; frames that 'broadly favoured' a neoliberal response to the crisis.

He also found [2012, 613] that a thread running through government discourse in 2008 was a call to respond to the crisis in the 'national interest'. He outlined that sectional groups who routinely acted as media sources were now pitted against each other as the economic crisis unfolded. While this regularly included employers' groups versus trade unions – there was a distinct conflict framing between the public sector and the private sector. Cawley [2012,

611] pertinently found a cluster of predominant framing of the public sector as either "a cost, burden or, most often, a bill to be paid by the State or the taxpayer (though rarely by citizens)" adding evidence to the oft-cited neoliberal maxim that the private sector was efficient and productive and paying for the public sector. Such findings remain consistent with the 1970s' research and bring back Griffiths [1978] assertion of newspapers' consensus for less public spending; and as Cawley found, newspapers regularly cited the need for reform of the State's inefficiency towards the unquestioned market efficiencies. Those very same newspapers had commercially benefitted from large property sections during the housing bubble 2001 to 2007. Cawley [2012, 613] concluded:

> "Division, opposition and competing economic and social interests endured as a key framing mechanism, weakening perceptions of social cohesion and common interests", and furthered this, "the sample tended to amplify frames that favoured a broadly neoliberal response to the economic crisis: a reduced public sector, and a smaller State applying tighter regulation to a larger private economic space."

Rafter [2014] focussed on the 'experts' chosen as the sources to shape the public discourse in Irish national morning [breakfast] radio news at the start of the financial crisis; finding "elite-orientated coverage with official sources having strongest access in the 3-month period after the announcement of the controversial bank guarantee" [ibid 598]. Broadly, these elite sources were predominantly from the business community with 'strong evidence' of journalists interpreting events; adding their opinion, analyses and speculation to the facts, and such a 'narrow range of voices' limiting alternative perspectives. Rafter [2014] coded the radio guests by their 'main group professional identification; finding journalists, politicians and those directly linked to the world of business provided the bulk of coverage, while trade unions had limited access [3%].

Rafter [2014, 606] concluded that the programme decision makers had selected sources 'overwhelmingly' through the views of official sources; business journalists, pro-guarantee politicians, city and business groups dominating the airwaves. Using a similar source analysis across six weeks of radio coverage, Berry [2013] found that the British situation on sources reflected the elite status shown in Ireland; with listeners "offered a prescribed range of debate on the UK government's bank rescue plan and possible reforms to the financial sector" [253] and pertinent to this current study, Berry [2013, 258] found "organised labour is almost completely absent from the [BBC] *Today* programme with only a single appearance from one union leader [0.4%]". Through source and thematic analysis Berry found a "narrowness

of opinion was common" [Berry 2013, 267] and that despite vested interests, "City sources are treated as impartial experts".

Following on from the financial crisis, the news narrative moved on to possible solutions to reduce the financial deficit. Using another source and thematic content analysis Berry [2016] indicated that political and financial elites dominated discussion with a limited range of opinion towards deficit reduction. Once again, austerity policies dominated coverage. Berry [2016, 851] found that the causes of the deficit had "almost vanished from coverage by 2009" and focussed on the immediacy. Furthermore [ibid, 856] that "on some occasions, journalists directly endorsed the need for spending cuts" whilst "on other occasions, journalists worked within a consensus, shared by their sources, that cuts to public spending were the inevitable solution to the rise in the deficit." Berry [2016, 857] concluded that "journalists also did not put it to government ministers that there were alternatives to public spending cuts and question why these were not being considered" and that [859] "deficit reduction policies which threaten the interests of capital, such as action on tax avoidance or the introduction of wealth, property or transaction taxes, are excluded from coverage."

Mercille [2015, 25] argued that Ireland in the 'Celtic tiger' years had been bound up with neoliberal ideas. He noted that "Irish people had been left somewhat unaware of economic alternatives" and the alternatives that were available to the Irish government were reported unfavourably [ibid, 90-91]. Mercille [2015, 99] cited Nobel prizewinning economist Joseph Stiglitz who asked "Why should Irish taxpayers have to give up health and education to make good on a loan from a private bank when the previous government failed to do an adequate job on regulation?" Mercille asserted that while there is an assumption that mass media shape public opinion, "its precise influence is difficult to determine" [2015, 26] – but he noted that debates were of a 'tactical nature' – how to implement a policy rather than questioning the strategic plan – and "when government officials are unable to push through austerity measures they are criticised for being 'weak', 'indecisive' and 'unable to deliver'".

Mercille [2015] performed a content analysis on the media's stance on austerity using a Nexis search of opinion articles and editorials of *The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Business Post* and *Sunday Times* over a five-year period between 2008 and 2013. Mercille suggested [2015, 129] "opinion pieces and editorials, by their very nature, usually present a clear point of view." Of 929 identified items Mercille found 58% in favour of fiscal consolidation, 11% against it, and 31% neutral.

Reviewing his results, Mercille [2015, 111] concluded that "The media have thus fully accepted the principle of austerity, and debate has revolved around how best to implement it" and that "The media have strongly supported austerity since 2008, ignoring or dismissing alternative strategies for recovery" [2015, 121]. He similarly finds [2015, 127] that "Since 2008, the media have strongly endorsed austerity and accompanying structural reforms…The aversion to any form of opposition to austerity is explicit, just like the desire to reduce trade unions' influence and the quality of work conditions." Indeed, he found [2015, 131] that "The media often advise the government on how best to implement austerity, giving up any pretence of keeping governmental power in check. One main figure in this respect is Stephen Collins, *The Irish Times*' political editor, who is often indistinguishable from a government public relations agent." Even leaving the euro was an alternative that was not robustly debated with "Many of the commentators strongly opposed to Ireland leaving the euro are the same individuals who never could identify the housing bubble when it was growing, who strongly agreed with using taxpayers' money to save the banks, and who have enthusiastically supported austerity and government cutbacks that affect the poor disproportionately" [Mercille 2015, 152]. In concluding, Mercille [2015, 178-180] found that "The Irish mass media landscape extends from the centre to the right, but no news organisation could be described as progressive, left or even centre-left in orientation. Ireland is thus at the conservative end of the spectrum in its media coverage of the crisis in Europe, although the spectrum does not appear to be very broad." Discussing American, British and Irish media throughout, perhaps utilising the Liberal Model, Mercille [2015, 180] concluded that "In order to create news organisations that do act like real watchdogs and challenge power, the political economic structure of the existing media landscape should be altered…as long as the news organisations are dominated by corporations driven by the bottom line, there can be little hope to transform them."

4.7 The current study – news values / negativity

This study seeks to examine beyond the framing analysis to test what news values most informed the media coverage of the economic collapse (negativity) and to ask how those same news values fed into the conflict frame used to construct the narrative throughout the crash. A quantitative content analysis is performed of the Irish broadsheet media following the publication of the Special Group [McCarthy / Bord Snip Nua] Report through to the implementation of the government's budgetary response.

The news value of 'negativity' was the core value that most informed media framing of the crash; the frame of 'conflict' as established by Cawley [2012]. This in itself is perhaps unsurprising as reporting of economic news is predominately negative, while Damstra and Boukes [2018] indicate that economic crashes are *always* negative. Other research [Berry 2013, Rafter 2014, Mercille 2015, Berry 2016, Berry 2019] indicated that elite sources had great access to shape the narrative of the economic crisis, and had increasingly suggested that there was no credible alternative to austerity in the public sector and welfare state. Once the news frame had been established as negative, with conflict between the private and public sector workers, the newspapers tended to focus upon the evaluation of proposed tactical means to implement austerity rather than question the strategy.

In Ireland the 'negativity' news value extended beyond the economic crisis and resultant fiscal deficit to the subsequent 'blame game' – where public sector pay and the intransigence of the public sector trade union movement was somehow responsible for the country's growing debt – and this concentration on the foreground issue had failed to address that the same small group of politicians had guaranteed the banks, and had been supported my media commentary. Allen [2009, 134] asserted; "One of the most amazing features of the crash has been the way some members of the media have turned the anger onto public sector workers." But why did this happen? As found in the content analysis, the decontexualised coverage of the crash (focusing on immediacy and with little background context to crash) requires an understandable narrative of 'someone to blame'; this blame was attached to the 'out-of-touch' trade union movement; and through extensive interviews it became increasingly apparent that the trade union movement had difficulty gaining media traction to its side of the story; as it was unprepared, lacking credible sourced economic expertise to counter the neoliberal framing of the economic news.

The discussion suggests that the decontextualised coverage of the financial crisis in Ireland is based both on the ideological bias of media organisations espousing simple market solutions where context is perhaps too complicated and outside of the news frequency; and also a function of modern media – where immediacy is king. Where the public service workers did gain some empathetic media response, this too was often with a news value of negativity – the impact pay cuts would have on individuals who had already 'paid their share' or were perhaps in a household where a partner was a private sector worker who had lost their job – or on the negative impact this would have on service availability for the citizen.

There is the recurring argument that the media are hostile to the trade union movement and therefore the question arises as to why the trade unionists provide content to be negatively critiqued and sometimes openly derided; while engagement fuelled the discourse around the perceived public-private sector divide the trade unionists could not absent themselves – members paid their subscriptions and expected to be defended in the media. It is often a hopeless task; and trade unionists went on, knowingly, to be 'beaten up'; the public message is addressed towards the membership rather than the wider public. There are multiple audiences to be addressed simultaneously through one medium and that is an impossible task even for the most skilled communicators – it becomes a gladiatorial situation of damage limitation. Chomsky's Propaganda Model appears to be a good fit to trade union media strategies; where media ownership, advertisers and institutional / government mass media sources are predominantly in private or state ownership and adversarial to the trade union movement. And of course, 'anticommunism' is a filter on both sides of the Atlantic. These discourses are agenda-setting. Seaton [Curran and Seaton 2000, 270] summarised this as "the media may not persuade the public directly: nevertheless they affect what people know, and what they think is important." But when the trade unions cannot compete with the immediate real-time communications afforded by mass media outlets they have no option but to reactively engage otherwise the memberships begin to question where the union is and why are they absent from the stage? And this problem is further complicated by inter-union competition for any emerging opportunity for visibility in the mass media. It was not uncommon for trade union leaders to strategically leave important meetings at key times to outflank their rivals and avail of the camera crews and reporters waiting outside. This added an extra layer of opportunity for tactical error in exchange for visibility and amplification. In many occurrences there is a trade-off between internal and external communications – and the resources of the mass media are harnessed for internal communications even if this means a poorer dialogue in external communications. It was key to the collapse of social partnership that the trade unions were restricted to use the terminology of 'unpaid leave' directly addressing their membership when the alternative salience of 'lay off' to describe the same event may have appeased their political opponents and the general public. The trade union movement has learned to strategically utilise the mass media for its own ends through news values as secondary definers, but the cost involved can be measured in ever-reducing public and political support.

It is also worth noting that the content of internal communications within the union structure were also significant in the news media. A letter of dissatisfaction between the 24/7 Frontline Alliance and the PSC of the ICTU was leaked to the media – and fuelled rumours of a growing

fracture within the trade union movement. Inter-union rivalry in a competitive field for recruiting members has often proved a weak point in solidarity. But internal communications could also be assumed to leak – and so often did not contain strategic goals or tactical plans – merely rhetorical observations and an apprisal of developments. Calls to action and hints at future tactical responses may have deliberately issued so that the government side were never truly aware of the likelihood of protest action and strikes.

Is there a panacea to the propaganda model of news production that would allow the trade union movement to receive fair, accurate, impartial, unbiased coverage of its values and actions? If there is, they are yet to find it. There are many within the unions who regard the media as 'the enemy' and would prefer a strategy on non-engagement that is simply not possible in a mediatised world without quickly becoming judged irrelevant. This study attempts to examine how the Irish trade union movement engaged with the media throughout the crisis – recorded in semi-structured interviews and analysed in terms of the quality print media's sentiment towards these endeavours.

Chapter 5: METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study attempts to understand how the political communication of Irish public sector trade unions influenced public policy during the economic crisis of 2008-2010. The financial crisis incubated for several years in Ireland, but from the bank guarantee of 29 September 2008 it unfolded into a fiscal deficit that was addressed throughout 2009 by the imposition of a 'pension levy' and subsequent pay cuts, and a negotiated public sector agreement in June 2010. For the public sector trade unions it was an unprecedented period in their history with implications and repercussions that this study attempts to examine.

SUB QUESTIONS

- How did the Irish public sector trade unions respond to the economic crisis?
- Did neoliberal economists frame the debate on solving the financial deficit?
- Were the Irish media hostile to public sector workers?
- What did the trade unions learn from the economic crisis?

5.1 Research design

Rafter [2014, 602] demonstrated that the trade union voice in Ireland had been largely absent in interpreting and explaining the banking crisis at the end of 2008 and found 'elite-orientated coverage' on radio news coverage. Berry [2012] found a similar situation in the UK. By the summer of 2009 the public sector trade unions were placed centre stage in Ireland's tactical response to the fiscal deficit arising from the economic crisis – and throughout 2009 came under sustained media scrutiny. Prior to this the Irish media failed to warn of the impending property market and banking collapse in 2008. Some journalists admitted to failure in their 'normative duties' [Brady 2010; Fahy, O'Brien and Poti, 2010], and had accepted the neoliberal attitudes adopted by corporate and government sectors [Mercille, 2014, 282].

The goal of this study is to examine the public sector trade unions' response to the 2008-2010 financial crisis in Ireland using a mixed-methods approach, and the effectiveness of their political communication to influence public policy. The findings outline the most detailed set of interviews carried out to date with those at the forefront of dealing with the economic crash of 2008. Each of three chapters counterpoints the views of four distinct groups of actors – trade union officials, communication specialists, specialist journalists

and government advisors – all of whom recount their interpretations of the events that engulfed the state from 2008 onward.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach which provides some advantages; Teddlie and Tashakkori outline that quantitative methods can be closely linked with research and theory verification, whereas qualitative approaches are more associated with exploratory research and theory generation [2003, 14]. Mixed methods facilitates the 'triangulation element' [Olsen 2004] which can assist to improve the accuracy of analysis by providing "several perspectives on the same phenomenon" [Jensen 2002, 272].

To augment the qualitative research, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of six national newspaper titles was conducted using the timeframe from 6 September to 13 December 2009; a period of 99 days based around the lead up to and aftermath of Budget 2009 when a unilateral pay cut was imposed across all public sector employees. September 2009 is taken as the starting point because the Dáil (Irish parliament) returned after its summer recess on 16 September 2009. The parliament had not had a sitting since the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes [McCarthy Report] had published the two volumes of its report on 16 July 2009.

The content analysis was based on newspapers because, despite the proliferation of other new media entities, newspapers (including their digital platforms) continue to play a dominant role in setting the news agenda in Ireland. As Rafter [2014] notes, print media regularly set the agenda for the national broadcaster's morning news radio programme *Morning Ireland* – the most listed to radio programme in the country. That is not to downplay the importance of broadcast news media but to analyse broadcast media retrospectively would require recordings of sample programmes or news bulletins. This was not possible in the context of this study as the longevity and level of access required would be prohibitively expensive and intrusive. In addition, it is uncertain what archives exist in some of the commercial radio stations and the difficulties have been outlined in Berry [2013] and Rafter [2014], where radio broadcasts were downloaded from the national broadcasters' websites [BBC and RTÉ respectively] and through access to a commercial broadcaster's 'internal logs' [Rafter 2014, 601]. Television and radio were important and immediate in political communication throughout the economic crisis; but in terms of agenda-setting the national broadsheets in Ireland remained influential. A survey of Irish adults by Kantar Media [2019] found 927,000 people read a newspaper at least four times per week, with 24% of adults labelled 'heavy' newspaper readers and 27% accessing Irish newsbrands

online at least four times per week. The survey findings also suggested that such readers remained both informed and influential.

The newspapers' agenda-setting properties are succinctly encapsulated by Bernard Cohen [1963, 13] who opined that newspapers "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." Nonetheless, in an attempt to ensure that the perspective of television news was included in the research, an extensive interview with the national broadcaster's long-serving industrial correspondent was carried out.

5.2 Interviews

An interview is the most prominent tool used in qualitative research to explore participants' perceptions, meanings and definitions of the topic being researched [Cohen, Manion and Morrisson, 2011]. A properly constructed interview allows the participant to articulate their views in greater depth [Jones, 1985]. According to Deacon et al [2007, 68] generating richer data to the study "interviewees articulate their thoughts and opinions in their own terms rather than in relation to preordained response structures, which means there is more opportunity to explore complex and sensitive social and personal issues". The author outlined the desired achievements and the planned process to each of the participant interviewees; and one advantage of face-to-face interviews in the field of politics is that the researcher can be assured that it is actually the interviewee who responds – this cannot be said for email interviews, online surveys or printed questionnaires. Furthermore, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author for both accuracy and authenticity; while this process was laborious and time consuming.

> "Less structured questioning makes the greatest demands of the interviewer, requiring good listening skills, self-confidence, empathy and good humour."
> **Deacon et al [2007, 69]**

Semi-structured interview methods were used that permitted the author to guide the interview with a series of pre-defined questions but allowed flexibility within the interview process as the interviewees were senior participants in national debates and potential conflicts; but questions were also refined and developed as the interviews progressed and new issues of potential relevance were divulged and explored. Through triangulation between interviewees a more detailed picture of events was sometimes illuminated; increasing knowledge and

understanding of the dynamics. These too could be correlated with details from Chapter 3 [Context to the crisis] and Chapter 6 [Content analysis of newspaper content]; Cresswell [2009, 191] refers to the 'triangulation of data sources' to build a 'coherent justification for themes'. He claims that if several sources of data converge, this can add validity to the study.

Questions were constructed and thoughtfully posed and delivered in a way that were not leading and allowed the participants to express their opinions. Interviews are not only modes of collating data they are social and interpersonal encounters [Jones, 1985], therefore it was imperative to establish an appropriate atmosphere to ensure the participant could feel secure to talk freely. Most interviews were conducted in the interviewee's office, home or a hotel lobby; creating a comfortable environment allowed the author to probe on remarks made by the participant gaining rich, specific and relevant answers [Kvale, 1996]. Each interview was transcribed to ensure no data was lost; and these transcripts were shared with the interviewee.

It is widely acknowledged that interviews are a special form of interactional conversation, though the technical literature demands this is kept in check [Holstein and Gubriem 1997, 113] to avoid bias or misdirection. The author was a participant in the campaign of political communication during the period 2009-2017, as a member of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance committee and publicity and public relations [P&PR] sub-committee and as Director of Strategy and Communications for the Garda Representative Association [GRA]; so it was important to insulate any influence from the study by not introducing any personal notes or documentation that was unavailable within the public arena. The author was conscious to minimise interviewer' bias; while utilising 'insider knowledge' to ask probing questions that may have gone unaddressed.

This insulation was also achieved by utilising semi-structured transcribed interviews of six key participants in the 24/7 Alliance, and to contrast their views with that of five media professionals who were deemed to have a particularly important knowledge of the unfolding industrial relations events. The biographies of each interviewee are included in Appendix 3. These biographies were generated by asking each interviewee to outline a short biography of their careers to date, during the interview process as a 'warm up' ahead of the subsequent questions.

This research built upon a masters' thesis at Dublin City University in 2013; where the author investigated the campaign by the 24/7 Frontline Alliance to protect premium pay during the 2009-2010 public sector pay dispute entitled; CORE PAY: From Bord Snip Nua to Croke Park.

The interviewees were asked questions on specified events and actions at which several were often simultaneously present, but fulfilling different roles or representing different publics. The overlap, to a degree, is mapped out in their responses. Not all were present at the same events or actions; but all had a degree of interaction with each other throughout the time period. Some of the trade union leaders would have met regularly, hosted press conferences or took centre stage at rallies – these same leaders were interviewed and observed by the specialist journalists and advised by the communication specialists. Within the analysis, a correlation and corroboration offered to their varying views of the same subjects and events.

Initially in 2013 a list of interviewees was drawn up which included the leaders of six participating trade unions/staff associations which constituted the 24/7 Frontline Alliance for the time period. It should also be noted that PDFORRA was initially part of the 24/7 Alliance but was forced to withdraw when instructed to do so by the Department of Defence on 30th September 2009; general secretary [Gerry Rooney] was not interviewed regarding the campaign, as they withdrew at an early stage. In late 2018 another list was prepared of the trade union leaders from the Public Services Committee of ICTU; and the ICTU leadership. The two largest unions, who have a sizeable proportion of votes within the PSC of the ICTU were SIPTU and IMPACT. IMPACT merged with the PSEU and CPSU on 1 January 2018 to become Fórsa.

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted and each interviewee agreed to be audio-recorded [Martin Wall of *The Irish Times* was interviewed twice; both in 2013 and 2019]. From these recordings the author made an accurate transcript that was emailed to each interviewee for authenticity – and afford them the opportunity to make any amendments they wished to make to their recollections. The initial email request for interview is attached as Appendix 4.

Two pilot interviews were conducted as a semi-structured interview, with both the 'architect' of the 24/7 Alliance and the public relations/press officer of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as an opportunity to refine and structure the subsequent questions for both the 24/7 Frontline Alliance leadership – and also a slightly refined series of questions for the media professionals. The pilot study was exploratory, so less structured than subsequent interviews, as outlined by Silverman [2005, 110].

The methodology selected was on the basis of attaining authentic insights from those key actors in the events, so a qualitative research design was selected that 'sacrificed scope for detail' [Silverman 2005, 9]. This method attempts to isolate and examine the actor's

perspective through a detailed interview that offers them the opportunity to fully establish their own perspective of events.

This borrowed certain attributes from the model Silverman refers to as the *emotionalist model* that "Reflects a strong tradition in qualitative research which prioritises the study of perceptions, meanings and emotions" [Silverman 2005, 10]. For this to be successful it requires intimate contact with the key actors whose biographies are closely identified with the subject under scrutiny.

The focus of this research is not on what the particular actors did *per se* – but their perception of the events they were closely involved with, and their opinion of the outcome and importance of various events within this campaign of political communication. It should also illuminate the political actor's motivations as well as facilitating a comparison between the trade union leader's views and those of the media professionals and government advisors.

Silverman [2006, 118] refines this kind of interviewing; "The primary issue is to generate data which gives an authentic insight into people's experiences." The audio recording of data in this face-to-face comfortable environment was designed to facilitate this; and to elicit considered testimony – or as Silverman [2006, 123] puts it "authentic accounts of subjective experience."

But in this study that is not all – these interviews are recalling specific knowledge of facts as well as perceptions. They have witness testimony to events they were participant in – and offer expert insight to often-hidden aspects of events; they are expert witnesses who offer both interpretation of events and insights to their actions in those events.

Audio-recording is more efficient than note taking, and the interviewees were all comfortable with the concept. Deacon et al [1999, 287] frees the interviewer of the "burden of having to make hasty decisions about the relative value and worth of what is said." Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' offices wherever possible, or a location convenient to the interviewee as it was regarded as a privilege to be given such access to the key players in the events on a face-to-face, open-ended basis. Silverman [2005, 125] outlined difficulties in some studies "when we are studying an organisation, we are dependent on the whims of gatekeepers"; a difficulty that was not encountered in this study. Where interviewees requested questions in advance by email this was facilitated.

The aim of this study was to collect data of authentic recollection of events in recent memory, not to surprise or confront any interviewees. The questions were carefully considered to elicit the maximum usable data efficiently from a 20-minute interview. From the resultant interviews, most overran this time schedule that had been suggested in the invitation email. Only one of the interviews was conducted by telephone because the circumstances at the time made this unavoidable.

The resultant texts from the transcripts were analysed to identify the relevant concepts and categories of data that have some common element or property [Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 27] and in this study, this served as a means to summarise data and make comparisons with others. To facilitate this approach, interviewees were questioned on similar aspects of the events, and the wording of the question was tailored to their specific role and expertise during 2008-2010 [Mason 2002, 65] and sometimes beyond to add context and the ongoing nature of the trade unions' response to the economic crisis.

Coffey and Atkinson [1996, 109] argue that it is the writing up of research that makes us "think about the meanings and understandings, voices, and experiences present in our data. As such, writing actually deepens our level of analytic endeavour. Analytical ideas are developed and tried out in the process of writing and representing."

This methodology required substantial investment of resources including time and effort [Mason 2002, 82] to planning, conducting and analysis. A productive interview is simultaneously intellectually exhilarating and exhausting.

5.3 Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained on a written basis prior to recording interviews. Interviewees were informed of the nature of the research and that they would be given access to the transcript before publication [Deacon et al 1999, 74]. Where amendments were requested, they were facilitated. These were, in the main, extremely minimal to the data content. Not all interviewees responded; they were only asked to do so if they required data amendments. Several responded with good wishes.

All interviewees are 'seasoned' professionals and public figures versed and experienced to giving interviews and providing comment and analysis on a regular basis. The research group are well-known public figures tasked with communicating their organisations' goals

to a wider audience, are well acquainted with speaking to the media or, in the case of journalists reporting on events publicly. Consent was sought on the basis that the resultant data would be included as part of the PhD programme in the School of Communications at Dublin City University.

A researcher must abide by the ethical principles and practices of right and wrong, good and bad, when considering the purposes, contents, methods, reporting and outcomes of their study [Cohen, Manion and Morrisson, 2011]. This ensures that the rights of the participants are respected [Howe and Moses, 1999]. DCU Ethics Committee has ethically approved this research, acknowledging that all participants are voluntary and may withdraw at any point. However, to demonstrate the creditability of the author as a trustworthy, competent researcher it was important to establish a personal ethical position to the participants with respect to the proposed research. The aims of the research, the design, methods and procedures were identified; and gaining of participants' trust.

Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

5.4 Pilot interviews & questions

The pilot interviews revealed several avenues for further exploration and formed the backbone of the interview structure. Kavanagh [Interview 2013] believed the media took a "very hostile attitude towards public servants" (particularly the *Sunday Independent*) as part of a 'tactically astute' ploy to divert the public attention from the banking crisis and other business challenges.

Kavanagh [Interview 2013] said: "In the early days it was easier to try to divert attention onto those awful public servants who were breaking the country – than the real cause of the problems: that were the banks and the speculators." Yeates [2013] echoed this and also surmised that many within the media were in negative equity, and believed themselves to be in the private sector, and this was framing their thinking – and still is; giving them the impression of "cosseted public servants".

Yeates [Interview 2013] outlined that once Shane Ross, business editor of the *Sunday Independent* and other similar commentators had 'softened up' the public then economists proliferated throughout the media. "Economics was suddenly sexy, and everyone wanted to

talk to economists – and economists kept saying we can't afford this anymore and it has to go…They came from a rarefied atmosphere, yet what they said was taken as 'God-speak' because nobody else had a clue what was happening."

The pilot interviews suggested a sense of a hostile media and economist framing of the debate, so these questions were included into the wider study. along with a more general question on whether the 24/7 Frontline Alliance were a 'new force on the political landscape' following Yeates' [Interview 2013] agreement that his role was akin to 'launching a new brand' into the political mix. In an effort to tease out what power lay behind such a new affiliation, both leaders and media professionals were asked whether an alliance of the frontline emergency service workers – including police officers and the army – was reflected in 'fear or foreboding' both in the media and wider public opinion? This facilitated a variety of responses on the nature of the power, or influence, of such an alliance; 'fear' and 'foreboding' were used as emotive terms that might trigger a strong response or rebuttal.

In the pilot interviews it was suggested that there were possibly three types of media commentariat; the economist commentator, the general reporter or presenter, and thirdly the specialist industrial relations correspondents.

Interviewees were asked to name the 'significant milestones' on the unfolding events between the publication of the McCarthy Report and the Croke Park Agreement. As a question to address the nature of the relationship between the 24/7 Alliance and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU] interviewees were asked whether the meeting of the two groups in Tralee [7 October 2009] was a 'tipping point' in the definition of 'core pay'. This yielded a variety of answers not all directly related to the meeting but illustrated views of the 'inter-union' relationship.

Trade unionists and communication specialists were asked how important they thought communication with their own members was, as the need to communicate different messages to different publics is a common feature of trade unions – where the message to the wider public is not necessarily the same as that to members. This is discussed in greater detail. Internal communication during this period was in transition between printed circulars and email. While email had been in widespread usage; many trade unions and staff associations had not yet harvested the email addresses of members to any substantive degree to ensure that messaging was universally received; so in many instances communication with members lacked the immediacy of contemporary communication channels. This too was explored further.

Interviews conducted in 2019 were often with trade union leaders who had changed roles or retired in the interim. This provided a different perspective; and perhaps an opportunity to reflect upon a traumatic time with the benefit/limitations of hindsight. Memories do tend to fade; but also periods of reflection often provide more coherent understanding; but memory is 'inherently reconstructive' [Maruyama and Ryan 2014, 22] in that we do not passively store information but organise it selectively. Several interviewees privately communicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and to have their opinion and knowledge recorded. In the quantitative content analysis of this study, it became apparent that the trade unionist interviewees were often the focus of attention within the sample recorded.

Bertrand and Hughes [2005, 197] point out "media texts exist before the research that seeks to understand them"; and suggest that while both quantitative and qualitative methods can be applied to discern content and meaning these methods interact with each other – but they identify a difference in that the quantitative methods "separate the gathering of data from its analysis". Additional qualitative methods such as interviews can also be conducted in parallel with content analysis to enhance the discussion; when both types of analysis are used in this way it is termed 'mixed methods research'. Creswell [2009, 3] suggests that in mixed method studies one research type tends to be dominant over the other – with the mixed method being "in the middle of the continuum". The difference in the analyses are usually framed in terms of numbers and closed questions for quantitative analysis – and using words and open-ended questions for qualitative research.

To summarise, the study comprises two elements:

- Interviews with trade union/staff association officials [n = 13]; communication specialist [n = 3]; specialist journalists [n = 5]; government advisors [n = 3]; economist [n = 1]; media academic [n = 1]
- A quantitative content analysis of news stories in Irish broadsheet newspapers related to the socioeconomic interests of the public sector worker [n = 1,016].

5.5 Content analysis of newspapers

Media and public relations professionals acknowledge that content is king; and whenever they wish to move their analysis beyond mere opinion, then it must be quantified to create a meaningful index of measurement. Content analysis can do this; it might be as simple as measuring the number of items or words in a newspaper – but it provides measurement of the visible content. What it cannot do is predict the effect of such content on the reader.

Content analysis is a useful tool for investigating a case study using empirical, objective methods within a postpositivist ideology; which Creswell [2009, 6] outlines as a 'deterministic' philosophy where the linear "causes probably determine outcomes" is often the basis for experimental design. In the general context of content analysis, under such a philosophy it is treated as a scientific method, the accepted approach to researching a theory or hypothesis, the investigator collects data to support or refute the theory and draws conclusions and inferences. Postpositivist ideology has dominated scientific [quantitative] models of research throughout the 20th century in both natural and social sciences.

Content analysis is particularly appropriate to case studies that are contained within a period of time or a particular event to explore the process or event on a cumulative basis; revealing underlying patterns or trends in the data that can be applied to the particular starting hypothesis. Content analysis is one of the most common research methodologies used in media and communication studies [Berger 2000, 173], and while it is primarily to systematically analyse the content of a text; this is done within predetermined categories so different researchers looking at the same issue within the defined methodology will be able to reach similar findings – that there is inter-coder reliability and that the research study is replicable; a key feature of the postpositivist philosophy. Content analysis contains both quantitative and qualitative data. Primary data recorded using the deductive method was date of publication, type of item, page number, newspaper, author [wherever named] and word count of the article. An inductive method was utilised to ascertain the context within each item, the main focus, the economic solution – and importantly the 'tone' of the article towards the socioeconomic interests [pay and conditions] of the public sector workers.

As a research tool, content analysis is based on the assumption that the material being analysed and quantified reflects the behaviour and values of those journalists who create the material [Berger 1998, 23]. Content analysis is an appropriate method to use to study the output of journalists; Kolmer argues that it is impossible to assess their work without reference to the final product [2008, 117] and that the published media content enables researchers to consider the social, political and economic framework of media production.

Herman and Chomsky [Achbar, Wintonick and Chomsky 2002] sought to investigate the quantitative aspects of coverage given to genocide in the 1970s for how the media portrayed 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims through measurement of column inches in the *New York Times*. Such studies can often reveal 'hidden' aspects of a text difficult to ascertain within any individual edition of a newspaper, but become apparent when analysed cumulatively.

Patterns of coverage facilitated in these studies could then be used to inform their theories of the political economy of the mass media.

This conception of a continuum between quantitative and qualitative methods is helpful; the nature of media and communication is that there is both content and context to be considered in any meaningful analysis that will incrementally increase knowledge of human interaction; though Krippendorff [2004, 16] questions the validity of the differentiation between qualitative and quantitative methods, claiming that all content is qualitative even when "certain characteristics are converted into numbers".

Where content analysis stands or falls is on the classification and operational definitions that should clearly explain the measurement used and how it is used to explain or understand a particular concept. If not completed in sufficient detail and clarity it can undermine a study; and if other researchers and scholars do not accept the definitions then they are likely to reject the findings of the study.

Berger [2000, 175] outlines that an operational definition forces the researcher to fully explain the measurement of an event in terms of understanding and interpreting the concept; most importantly that categories must be mutually exclusive and that this concept cannot be so ambiguous as to be applied to different behaviours.

Once the basic units have been established they must remain consistent across all of the material texts to be studied. Quantifying the manifest content in a text is rarely disputed, and usually involves frequency or physical measurements of space. A simple word count for newspaper articles is clearly defined – and as such would yield great inter-coder reliability as they are absolute units that can be applied – but the content they are measuring has to be clearly defined.

There is a degree of subjectivity in the creation of categories; such is the nature of latent content that gives 'meaning' to the text. The context of categories requires clearly defined grading in definitions that can give inter-coder reliability; these definitions are paramount and can be mitigated with inter-coder reliability in a pilot study before the full research process in implemented. The 'operational definitions' of these measurements are implemented through a defined coding system.

Six newspapers were selected on the basis of primary Irish corporate and editorial management origins [Cawley 2012, 605] with a national circulation and agenda-setting

coverage of political and socioeconomic issues. The research sample included three daily and three Sunday titles: *Irish Examiner*, *Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Sunday Business Post*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Sunday Independent*.

The criteria for sample inclusion was that the item must discuss the economic and social interests for those workers whose primary employment was with the State. Such items referred to pay, security of employment, role within society in the context of the unfolding economic crisis - and fiscal deficit. The author identified suitable articles through searching page-by-page through the digital or microfiche storage; recording date, page number, item type [news, editorial, opinion, etc] newspaper and headline before the detailed coding and word count. In the second phase each article was checked against the Lexis/Nexis database to establish word count. If the article could not be found after extensive searching, this too was recorded and the word count was estimated by the conventional measurement technique of measurement of column centimetres multiplied by word density per centimetre. Data was entered directly onto a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet for later analysis.

Where items were discovered on the digitised Irish Newspaper Archive or microfiche at the National Library of Ireland and were not found on the Lexis/Nexis database, this was consistent with Deacon et al [2007, 22] who found inconsistencies and omissions on text-only databases and concluded:

> "However, it is vital to appreciate that a price is paid when media analyses depend heavily, or exclusively, on digital text. The evidence under analysis is proxy data and a lot of important evidence is lost in translation. For this reason, we should still aspire to analyse media content in its original form wherever possible, and where this is not possible, avoid casting necessity as a virtue."

5.6 Identification of newspaper items

Establishing the parameters such as the medium [newspaper] and the content type [industrial relations news] is relatively straightforward and manifest - compared with the latent or hidden categories for measurement. Bertrand and Hughes [2005, 199] argue that the more concrete the categories, the easier the definition and to identify the coding accurately; the more subjective the judgement the more the categories become blurred. They acknowledge that the researcher is forced to compromise – making the best judgement in the circumstances of an imperfect world.

Berger [2000, 182] warns that if sampling is not representative then the findings will not be convincing while Bertrand and Hughes [2005, 198] argue that if the sampling techniques are adequate, then it "should be possible to generalize from the results."

Accessing and collating items via digital version, microfiche or database. A cursory pilot study of the Lexis/Nexis database was initiated by searching for key terms such as 'public sector pay', 'core pay', 'public sector trade unions' – and compared given the timeline of 1 September to 30 September 2009. The list was then checked against issues of the *Irish Examiner* on the Irish Newspaper Archive. It soon became apparent that relevant articles were being missed because of variations of language not matching with the search terms; for example if the newspaper used the term 'pay bill' or 'pay scales' it would not match with 'public sector pay'. Furthermore, some items featuring on the Irish Newspaper Archive could not be found on LexisNexis so it was decided to utilise the digital pdf versions of the newspaper rather than the database. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

5.7 Timeframe

Once sampling had been discounted for reasons above, it was decided that upon a period coinciding with the return of Dáil Eireann after the summer recess [this was amended to Sunday 6 September as speculation began in the Sunday newspapers ahead of the parliamentary return] until the Budget published on 9 December – and the reaction up to and including Sunday, 13 December 2009. This was a total of 99 days and 297 newspaper editions. This period was selected as a substantial prelude of political communication ahead of a public policy [spending] announcement.

Once articles had been selected and input into MS Excel, a pilot study of *Irish Examiner* articles was conducted to produce a non-standard coding sheet. This was utilised throughout.

5.8 Coding items

Each item was coded for context [whether the item related how the financial deficit had originated], the author was recorded, what institution was the focus of the item, what tactical solution was examined and the tone of the item [sentiment analysis or *opinion mining*] based upon key terminology determined in the pilot study. Sentiment analysis is the task of identifying positive and negative views, opinions, evaluations and emotions from texts. Li and Hovy [2017] stated:

> "The task is commonly defined as identifying the words or phrases in a given fragment of text in which the reader understands that the author expresses some person's positive, negative, or perhaps neutral attitude toward a topic."

Articles were categorised as 'positive', 'negative', 'neutral' or 'positive/negative' depending on the tone of the item in terms of its terminology and the phrasing of the story relative to the socioeconomic interests of the public and civil servants; employees of the government. Tone is often expressed as sentiment; a view or opinion that can be detected and coded as the narrative device attempting to influence the thinking of the reader, bearing in mind headlines are critical in this process and not necessarily the work of the author, but of an editor at a later stage. Tone is attributed to the overall attitude (in terms of terminology and phrasing) of the item towards its subject. This includes the reportage of opinions expressed by the subject of the piece towards the public service. If the item tone was sympathetic or empathetic to public servants and the public service it was coded as positive; if its tone was adversarial or critical it was coded as negative; if the item's tone was neither sympathetic nor adversarial it would be coded as neutral; and if its tone was both sympathetic and adversarial it was coded as positive/negative. The specific categories are defined as follows:

Positive tone: When terms commend the role of public service to society as worth investment by citizens, imply recognition by society in general, or are indicative of attempts to move the resolve the situation 'essential', 'unfair', 'commitment', 'injustice'. These terms are also present if the tone of the piece suggests support for, or some merit in, the arguments or solutions put forward by public servants' groups or individuals – or if negative towards adversarial politicians, employers or commentators including 'smear', 'vilify' or 'betrayed'.

Negative tone: Terms that are derogatory towards trade unions or public servants, imply a lack of recognition by society in general, or are indicative of attempts to block or hinder progress e.g. 'self-interest', 'militant', 'bloated' 'guilt-edged'. These include terms that belittle or trivialise – such as 'so-called', 'out-of-touch'. These terms are also present if the 'tone' of the piece suggests antagonism for the arguments or solutions put forward by public servants' groups or individuals – or again if positive towards employers' groups, commentators or economists who are negative towards the public sector.

Neutral tone: Where either the trade unions or public servants concerned are quoted with no favourable or unfavourable term or comment applied to it, or where their point of view is mediated without positive or negative comment. In terms of trade unions, a 'neutral' report is almost a 'win' in itself, as most media commentary has generally been ill disposed.

Positive/Negative tone: When individuals or groups are referred to with both positive and negative references – but are not termed 'neutral' as if these terms cancelled each other out.

5.9 Analysis and limitations of data

Data was analysed using Microsoft Office Excel pivot tables and charts, to summarise incidence rates. Bertrand and Hughes [2005, 200] summarise the difficulties of content analysis in a postpositivist tradition:

> "Scientific experiment usually involves counting of discrete entities, or uses quantification to divide continuums [weight, height, etc]. Media analysis is not dealing with quantifiable entities so, even if the categories have been well defined, measuring them is never easy… There are specific problems of establishing units of measurement in different media."

Disparate text will be involved in the majority of case studies; even when the parameters are clearly defined. When analysing newspaper coverage of political communication, if number of items/word count are the units of measurement, the position on the page or headline size carries an intrinsic weight – but cannot be compared. How does a page one photograph compare with detailed opinion or correspondence? How does coverage on the best-selling populist *Sunday Independent* compare with a serious report the *Sunday Business Post* with fewer, but potentially more influential, readers? These problems may have solutions, but are often arbitrarily arrived at through experimentation, trial-and-error, and are time consuming.

The influence of trade unions and representative groups in previous research suggests trade unions have been marginalised in mainstream news content [Rafter 2014; Lewis et al. 2008; Manning 2001; Philo 1990]. Wheatley [2018] found "a significant level of media attention granted to such groups, in particular through PR, in line with predictions about their ability to garner coverage through media-friendly, "accommodative" approaches (Manning 2001)".

The mixed-method approach used in this study provides multiple perspectives to examine how the Irish public sector trade unions responded to the economic crisis of 2008-2010 and triangulated with a content analysis of Irish national broadsheet newspapers' coverage of the socioeconomic interests of public servants after Special Group [2009] had quantified potential cost savings in the public service expenditure – including pay and pension entitlements. Furthermore, the content analysis coding paired with the interviews provides triangulation towards any findings.

The first deductive phase of content analysis established the data related to the publication including date, item type [news or opinion], word count, headline, page number and author details. Then an inductive, non-standard content analysis coding investigated sentiment expressed as a key indicator, as well as the editorial focus of the item and the framed tactical response to reduce the deficit. Despite the qualitative aspects of the mixed-methods approach and to insulate against the researcher as participant a systematic approach was taken during the coding process which is quantified.

The interviews allow the participants the opportunity to articulate their experiences. The content analysis is used to complement the interviews, and with 27 subjects interviewed including most of the significant figures of the trade union movement, these findings are robust and generalisable. Interviewees were participants across the spectrum of government advisors and officials, key industrial relations journalists reporting - including two working for two key daily broadsheets included in the content analysis – the leaders of the ICTU and PSC as well as those of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as well as the media advisors to the largest two unions and Frontline Alliance.

Four chapters present the results and analysis. It is evident that the two-pronged approach reveals both an intra-union conflict and tension that is scrutinised by a media largely hostile to a Labour movement and a debate framed, shaped - and limited – either directly by neoliberal economists or indirectly by the prevailing dominant ideology of neoliberalism.

Chapter 6: MEDIA COVERAGE [CONTENT ANALYSIS]

6.1 From Bord Snip to Budget: Content analysis of media coverage

This chapter presents the results of a content analysis of all national broadsheet newspapers published within the state between September and December 2009. September 2009 is taken as the starting point because the Dáil [Irish parliament] returned after its summer recess on 16 September 2009. The parliament had not had a sitting since the Special Group on public service numbers [McCarthy Report] had published the two volumes of its report on 16 July 2009. In the interim the influential MacGill Summer School of 2009 presented "over 40 leading Irish thinkers" including economists, politicians, journalists, executives from business and charity sectors from 19 to 24 July 2009. It included two trade union voices – David Begg who observed that "competitiveness is a meaningless concept" and Peter McLoone who suggested that "unions must have a key role in transformation". The event prompted many headlines and articles including from Colm McCarthy who outlined 'Two options - Raise taxes or cut spending' and who stated in his conclusion "That means cuts in current and capital spending and may also mean further tax measures and it means we must look at all spending" [Mulholland and Bradley 2009, 161]. The content analysis sample ran through to the Budget 2010 announced on 9 December 2009 when the Minister for Finance unilaterally cut public service pay. The subsequent days were included in the sample to analyse any reaction up to and including Sunday, 13 December 2009. Additionally, this time period encompasses the political activation of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance [formed at the end of August 2009] and its high-profile campaign to protect premium pay and allowances attributable to those working unsocial hours, weekends and public holidays.[10]

For the sample, all national broadsheet newspapers published within the state between September and December 2009 were selected for analysis. All were Irish owned and managed, with editorial content and control situated in Ireland; and all had national circulation with their primary focus being on political, economic and social issues. The six titles are:

[10] Premium rates for overtime in the public sector had been established in 1972, and allowances had been awarded through various public sector pay deals, often to obfuscate direct comparison of pay scales between professions.

- Irish Examiner
- Irish Independent
- The Irish Times
- Sunday Business Post [SBP]
- Sunday Independent
- Sunday Tribune

The sample was harvested through a labour intensive page-by-page search through Adobe Portable Document format [.pdf] versions on the digital newspaper database Irish Newspaper Archive (*Irish Examiner*; *Irish Independent*; *Sunday Independent*); Irish Times Digital Archive (*The Irish Times*) and through the National Library of Ireland for the *Sunday Business Post* and *Sunday Tribune* (both on microfilm).

Each article was cross-referenced with Lexis/Nexis UK database for word count. A total of 155 of the 1016 items [15%] did not appear on this database, suggesting a discrepancy between different editions of the relevant newspaper. Each item that was not found on Lexis/Nexis was subsequently carefully searched by publication, date and basic search terms, commonly 'pay' 'public' or any proper noun contained in the article found in the page-based version. This intensive search often revealed differing headlines and edited versions of the articles published in the online version (now hosted on the digital archive). It was concluded that a page by page examination appeared more thorough than a word search, so this was continued over the course of the research. Two Sunday newspapers are not yet available online in a page-by-page format [SBP and *Sunday Tribune*] so these were searched on microfilm at the National Library of Ireland.

6.2 Circulation figures for relevant titles (Jul-Dec 2009)[11]

Irish Independent	149,906	[84 issues recorded]
The Irish Times	106,926	[84 issues recorded]
Irish Examiner	49,096	[84 issues recorded]
Sunday Independent	268,140	[15 issues recorded]
Sunday Tribune	65,727	[15 issues recorded]
Sunday Business Post	52,271	[15 issues recorded]

If any articles were written in the Irish language they were necessarily discounted, as the author is neither fluent nor knowledgeable to recognise content – but very few articles in any newspaper were published in Irish. The criterion for inclusion was whether the item mentioned the economic and social interests of public servants, including those in the Civil Service, whose primary employment was in the service of the State. The sample included any article that referred to public sector pay, reform, public servant conditions of employment or cuts to the public service overall where pay or employment levels were considered. Furthermore, any article that related to any of the public sector trade unions or representative bodies [police officers and permanent defence forces] or their elected leaders and appointed officials were also included in the sample. Any article where these were mentioned or referred to – either their economic or social interests, salaries, pensions, employment terms and conditions in the context of Ireland's economic crisis from 2008 onwards – were included in the sample. The public sector included all workers whose primary employer was the State – civil servants, university lecturers, hospital consultants, public servants, police officers, nurses, teachers, prison officers, soldiers etc.

The research drew on the techniques of content (deductive) analysis to quantify the coverage and cluster (inductive) analysis to draw out the dominant and recurring themes with the coverage as follows:

[10] http://www.ilevel.ie/print/irish-morning-newspaper-circulation-2009/

6.3 The deductive method

The deductive method was utilised to establish:

1) Total number of articles & number of articles per newspaper [see 6.5]

2) Total word count & average word count per day (September – December 2009) [see 6.6]

3) Number of articles per editorial classification (article type) [see 6.7]

4) Core subject of item (defined as the person or entity on which the article is focused) [see 6.8]

Articles were coded on an Excel spreadsheet as:

• Front Page	Dominant headline of page 1
• News	Article reporting development
• News Feature	Extended coverage of context and developments
• News Digest	Short announcement article, often without byline
• Profile	Focus on particular individual usually in the news
• Business	Story specifically in business section of newspaper
• Analysis	Interpretation and opinion by newspaper's journalist
• Opinion	Op-ed: interpretation and opinion from external source
• Letter	Public reaction in public sphere
• Letters	Where more than one letter is contained under headline
• Editorial	Unattributed opinion of news organisation

In reviewing the sample, one inconsistency became apparent: articles in the *Sunday Business Post* often titled 'News Feature' were more consistent with 'Analysis' in the *Sunday Independent* with the same contributors over time. For the sake of consistency all such articles were included in the 'Analysis' category.

6.4 The inductive method

The inductive method was used to determine non-standard coding measures such as:

5) whether the item provided background/contextual information or focused on the immediacy of events [see 6.9]

6) the tone of the item towards the public sector workers or services with tone being defined as positive, negative, neutral or positive/negative (see below for definitions) [see 6.10]

7) the tone of all content towards public sector workers or services by core item focus [see 6.11]

8) quantifying the economic solutions proposed so as to determine which, if any, proposed solutions were amplified by the media outlets under examination. [see 6.12]

Non-standard coding measures were determined by conducting a pilot study of the *Irish Examiner* content. Given that a significant number of researchers [Cawley, 2012; Berry 2012; Rafter, 2014; Berry, 2016] have established that trade union representatives were, in Ireland and Britain, very significantly under-represented in shaping media discourse on the 2008 economic crisis, this study focuses not on replicating these findings in terms of identifying or quantifying primary definers, but on conducting a sentiment analysis of press coverage of the crisis in an attempt to establish the relationship between news values, media coverage and the economic crash.

Part 1: CONTENT [DEDUCTIVE] ANALYSIS

6.5 Total number of articles / Number of articles per newspaper

A total of 1016 items were recorded in the six national newspapers between 6 September 2009 and 13 December 2009. This time period covered a total of 297 newspapers:

15 weeks of Sunday titles	[15 days x 3 titles = 45 newspapers]
14 weeks of dailies (Mon. to Sat.)	[84 days x 3 titles = 252 newspapers]

Given the crisis, the vast majority of content focused on one subject: public sector pay and working practices to reduce the 'big ticket' item of government expenditure in a time of fiscal deficit.

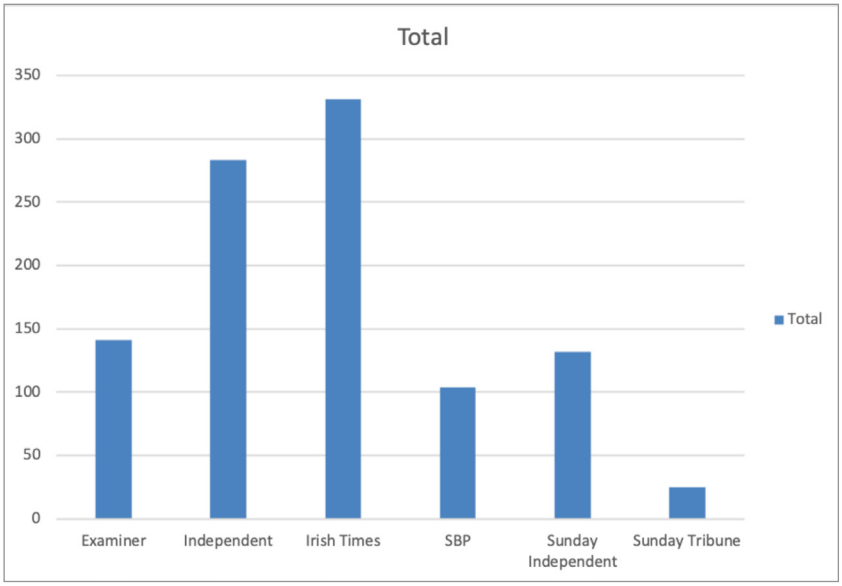

Figure 1: The number of items published by each newspaper in the timeframe sampled 6 September 2009 through to 13 December 2009. The sample included 84 editions of each of the daily newspapers and 15 of each of the Sunday newspapers.

The overall number of items published by *The Irish Times* exceeded both the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Examiner*; and also surpassed the *Sunday Independent* – unsurprising given that for every four editions of the Sundays, there were 24 editions of the dailies. However, on an average word count per issue basis, *The Irish Times* came third (1844) – behind both the *Sunday Independent* (7768) and the *Sunday Business Post* (5796). While *The Irish Times* cumulatively had the greater number of words per week, the 'Sunday effect' [critical and in-depth analysis of the week's events] would resonate with critical readerships [especially when cognisance is taken of the relative circulations of the time].

6.6 Total Word Count & Average word count per day (Sept. – Dec. 2009)

The total word count across the 99 days / 297 newspapers in this study amounted to over half a million – 576,036 or a daily average of 5,818. Peaks far exceeded this average on any given Sunday as the Sunday newspapers ramped up coverage with analysis, opinion and editorial content. Totals word counts exceeded 20,000 on 8 November, 15 November and 6 December and exceeded 15,000 on 4 October, 11 October, 1 November, 22 November, 25 November, 29 November. All of these were Sundays with the exception of 25 November which was a Wednesday that followed the public sector strike of 24 November 2009.

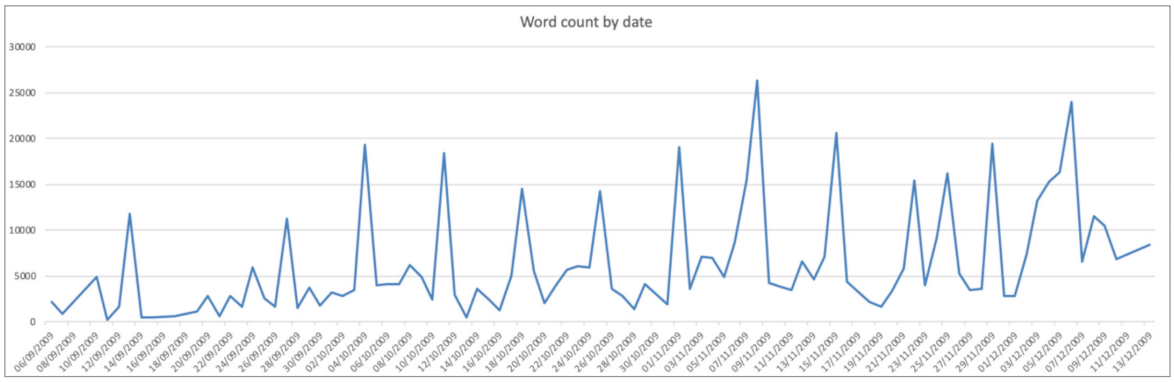

Figure 2: The number of words by date, 6 September to 13 December 2009.

Average word count per issue:

Irish Examiner	703
Irish Independent	1324
The Irish Times	2172
SBP	5796
Sunday Independent	7768
Sunday Tribune	1316

Throughout the period of analysis, *The Irish Times* consistently provided the most coverage each month in terms of word count, with the *Sunday Independent* second, then the *Irish Independent*. The latter two had significant circulation advantages ahead of *The Irish Times*. Daily newspapers focussed primarily on news; whereas Sundays broadly favoured journalists and commentators offering analysis and opinion. News, including front page, in the daily newspapers accounted for 34.4% of the total word count coded, while analysis in the Sunday papers accounted for 22.3% of the word count across the sample.

6.7 Number of articles per editorial classification (article type)

Each item was classified to its editorial type – Front Page, News, News Feature, News Digest, Profile, Business, Analysis, Opinion; Letter; Letters; Editorial (as outlined above). Figure 3 shows that the *Sunday Independent* topped the 'analysis' category with 63 articles across the 15 editions, followed by the *Sunday Business Post* with 44 – whereby regular contributors added their opinion to analyse the situation beyond objective reporting of facts/ events. Within the 84 editions of both *The Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, the former had slightly more analysis items than the *Irish Independent*; 24 compared with 19. The dailies often used specialist political, economic or industry correspondents for analysis; contrastingly the Sundays tended to rely on regular columnists to offer their interpretation on the week's particular developments. Only one analysis in the *Sunday Independent* [15 November 2009 p40] was coded positive; by regular commentator Gene Kerrigan.

The *Irish Independent* had twice as many editorials on the subject as their daily rivals [25 to 12 for the *Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Times*], with the *Sunday Business Post* outstripping the *Sunday Independent* [13 to 10]. Nonetheless, of the 15 Sundays in the sample, it was clear that both the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Business Post* focused their collective agenda towards the economic issue.

Just over than half of all items measured were either 'news', 'front page', 'news brief' or elongated 'news features' accounting for 562 [55%] of the recorded 1016 total items. In terms of frontpage lead, *The Irish Times* produced 22 editions [22%] but it was the *Sunday Business Post* (proportionally) that focused its main messaging on its front pages with 8 out of its 15 editions [53%] leading with public sector pay-related headlines. *The Irish Times* gave most space to its readership in letters and with external authors providing opinion pieces; but only marginally over other titles.

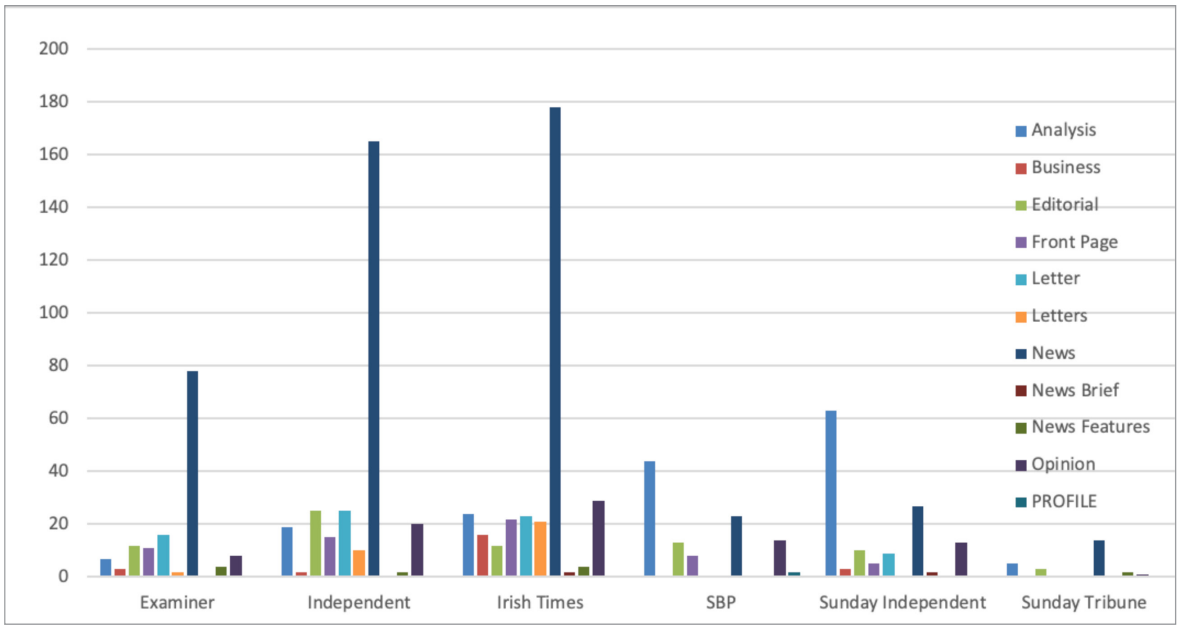

Figure 3: The breakdown of editorial category [items] for each newspaper.

Combined (i.e. all news categories) news stories accounted for 41% of coded newspaper output in terms of item number; while analysis and opinion accounted for 43%. Editorials accounted for 5.6%, letters 5.2%, and business stories 2.5%.

Typically, the dailies ran with headlines and news items based on statements by accredited institutional sources or reports commissioned by the State or from institutional sources – for example 'State workers could be made redundant – report' (*The Irish Times*, 17 October 2009, p6); 'Public sector pay will be cut in Budget, warns Cowen' (*Irish Independent*, 21 October 2009 p12); and 'ICTU to hold mass rallies to protest over budget' (*The Irish Times*, 22 October 2009, p6).

While the trade unions attempted to offer alternative perspectives – for example, including a longer time frame for corrective measures to enable economic growth to alleviate the worst effects of austerity on the general population – these did not gain traction outside of five news stories, two analyses and three opinion pieces – and one business section. Two of three opinion pieces – incidentally the only ones seeing some positivity in the proposal – were both authored by ICTU's general secretary David Begg and one was published in the *Irish Independent* on the day of the actual Budget; a timeframe too short to be influential. The third opinion piece – 'ICTU's plan for recovery will be economic nimbyism at its worst' – was authored by George Garvey and included salient phrases such as 'lack of reality' and 'crock of leprechaun's gold'. It was published in the Irish Independent on 3 November 2009, on the same page as the voice of the newspaper, the editorial, which was urging 'Badly

needed: a dose of reality'. The same edition also featured an analysis piece by Lise Hand under the headline 'The Grim Twins pipe up with a little recession reggae' featuring the idea that David Begg and Jack O'Connor were the 'grim twins' [neat beards, spectacles and serious faces] and that their policy ideas would be in the 'season of protest' and declaring that 'this document is the last throw of the pre-Budget dice'. As a blunt instrument, the Sunday newspapers can be seen to offer more explanation of the possible responses of public policy; most often prescriptive. Headlines in the *Sunday Independent* included 'Reduce public service pay and make them adopt new practices'; 'Greedy groups' stranglehold on State must be broken' (referring to the trade unions in the public sector); and 'Unions have completely lost touch with reality'. To personalise the effect of such headlines the articles were augmented with further analyses including 'The spurious self-pity of the public sector' and 'Public servants aren't cut out to be shiny happy people'.

6.8 Core subject of item

Core subject of item (defined as the person or entity on which the article is focused)

For each of the 1016 items, the core subject of the item was identified and coded. In the majority of cases the core subject was identifiable from the headline or first paragraph. Measured in terms of word count, trade unions featured most in terms of being the core focus of the corpus of articles (44%) followed by politicians (23%), economists (10%), public servants (7.8%), Department of Finance (6.2%), and employers (3.1%). This is a most surprising result when it is borne in mind that all previous studies of the economic crash [Cawley, 2012; Berry 2012; Rafter, 2014; Berry, 2016] have established that trade union representatives were, in Ireland and Britain, very significantly under-represented in shaping media discourse on the 2008 economic crisis. In the vast majority of cases in the pilot of this study it became clear that trade unionists were acting as secondary sources / definers in their attempts to mitigate the scale and implementation of public sector wage cuts, any possible job losses, reforms, and general austerity measures that would impact upon the integrity of the services provided by the public sector. Given that trade unions featured so much in the coverage of the Irish crash it is pertinent to ask, given their well-established position as non-primary definers, how they were portrayed in the print media during the period under consideration?

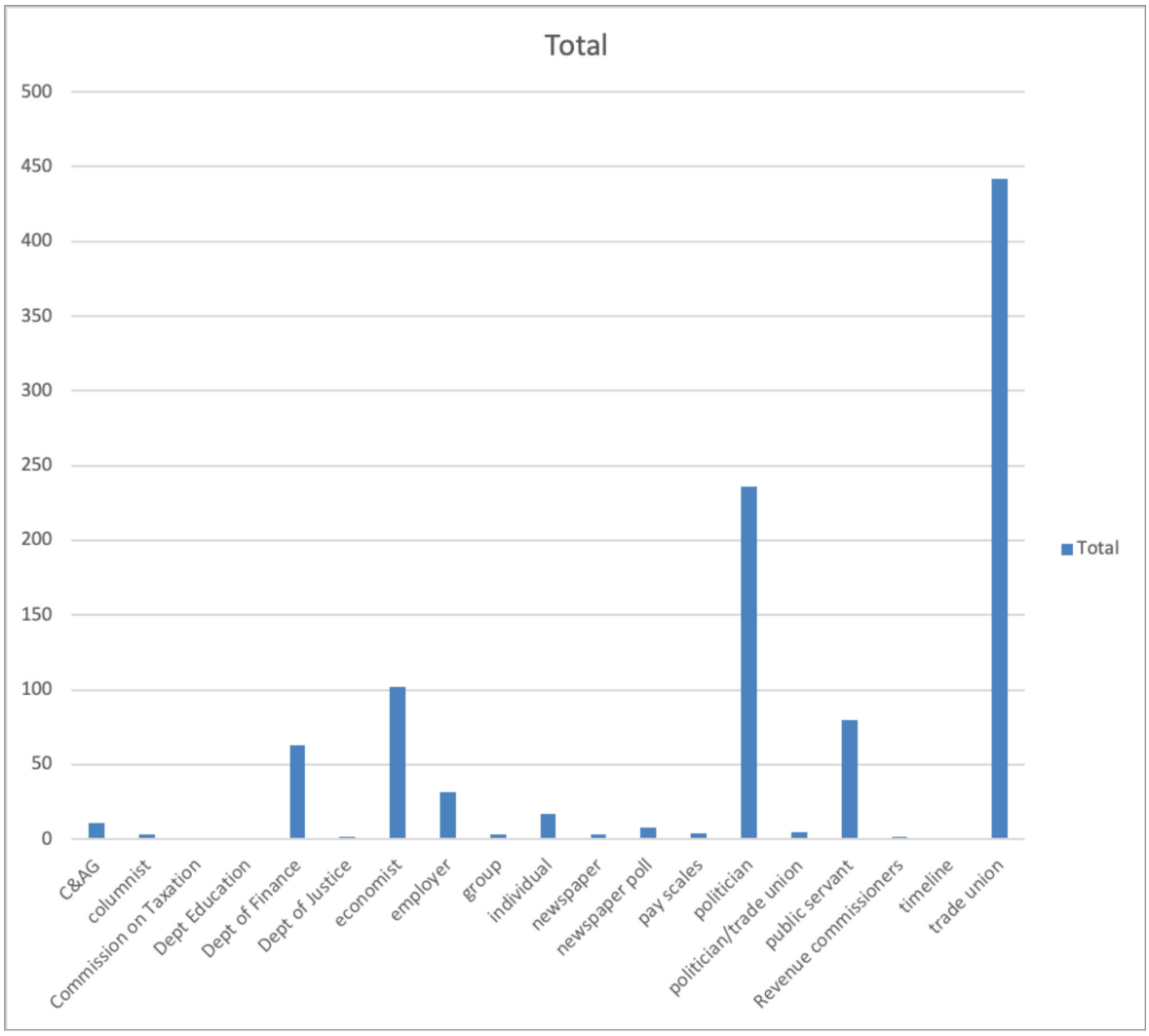

Figure 4: Core subject of items.

Part 2: CLUSTER (INDUCTIVE) ANALYSIS

6.9 Background / contextual information within items

Whether the item provided background/contextual information or focused on the immediacy of events

Within the spreadsheet each item was coded as providing background/contextual information or as focusing on the immediacy of events. Items defined as providing background/contextual information were characterized by factual outlines / discussion of the collapse of Ireland's housing 'bubble', the international financial crisis and the decision by a small number of Irish politicians to guarantee creditors of the six Irish bank guarantee – or indeed the context of the global crisis. Conversely, items defined as focusing on the immediacy of events – foreground – were characterized by discussion of the implications and tactical solutions for resolving the financial deficit of the Irish government. A minority of items were coded as both wherever the item referred to the contextual information as well as the immediate problem to be solved. Where there was no contextual information to how the deficit had been produced and why the government need to borrow so heavily, the content regularly suggested, by implication, that the public servants' pay and conditions had created the problem having risen some 20% above comparable professions in the private sector, and with gilt-edged pension provisions that the country could no longer afford.

Having populated the content analysis spreadsheet it was abundantly clear that from September 2009 onward there was little or no discussion in the broadsheet newspapers of the historical context / background to the crisis. In terms of resolving the economic crisis spending cuts were prioritized over tax increases. There was considerable debate about austerity – but the focus was on how to implement it rather than wider contextual / background issues. The media outlets examined in this study were ready to accept the socialization of private debt and focus on what was portrayed as a truculent public sector. The focus was on an immediate economic solution to the shortfall in exchequer returns and proposed expenditure deficit and there was little or no debate that touched on moral or legal issues, social impact or potential strategies for deficit reduction other than those described in immediate economic terms.

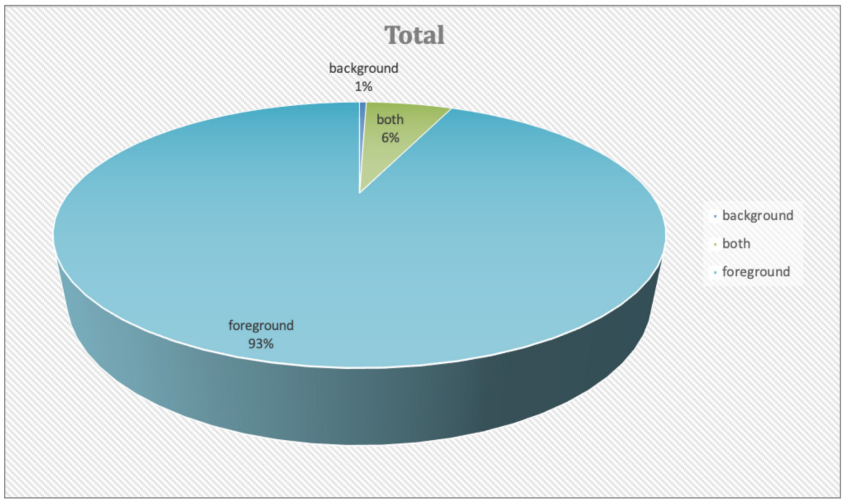

Figure 5: Coding of items for foreground or background information; 93% of items concentrated on foreground; background 1% and context of both background and foreground 6%.

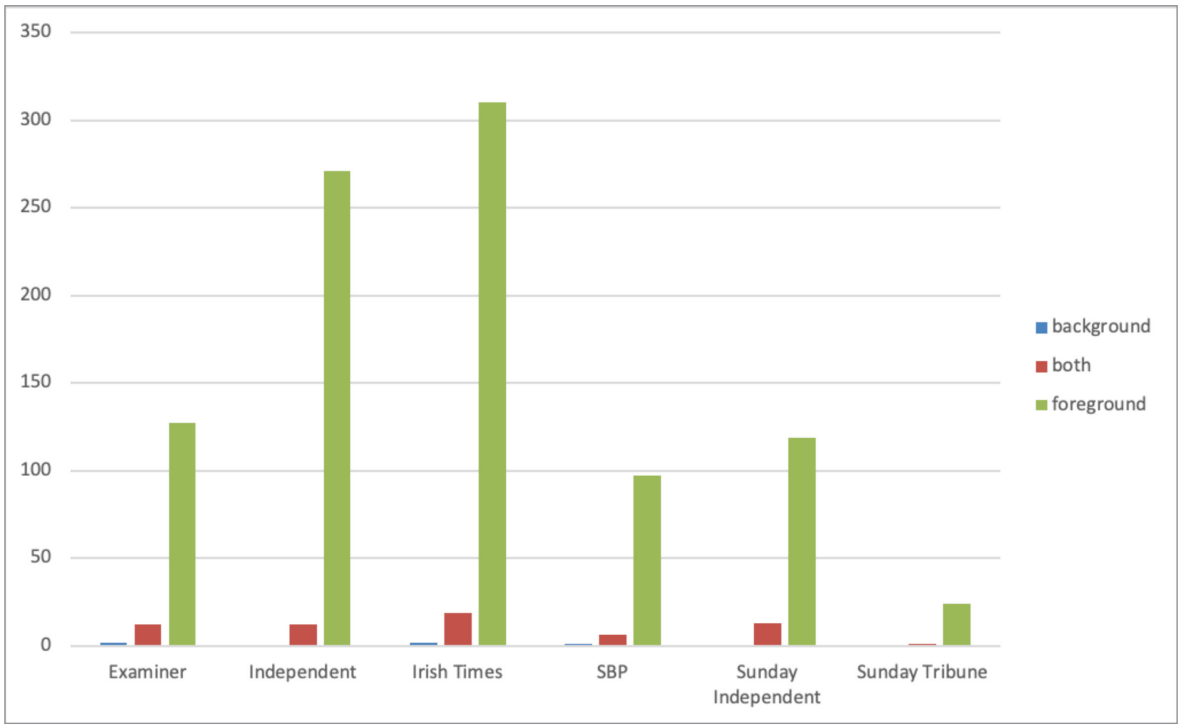

Figure 6: How the issues were covered in terms of contextual information provided by each newspaper.

In privileging foreground rather than background information and adopting a narrative of immediacy, the newspapers in the sample were not questioning whether austerity was the correct policy; they were wholly behind it. The only question was how to implement it – and they were not short on suggestions. For example, an editorial in the *Sunday Business Post* of 13 September 2009 was explicit:

> "Can any government tackle a mindset where the wealthy argue that entitlements like child benefit - which has increased massively in recent years - cannot be interfered with, or where public sector unions insist that the private sector must continue to fund their gilt-edged pensions?"
>
> "When we are having these debates, we need to consider the alternatives. If we don't cut back on general entitlements such as child benefit, are we instead to slash welfare rates for the poorest? If we don't cut public pay and pensions, do we accept that job numbers will have to be cut drastically?"
>
> "Those who oppose each cut are not being honest. There is simply no easy way out."

In terms of background / contextual information, within the sample there is little or no mention that the politicians wishing to implement such cuts were the small group that had provided the banks with a blanket guarantee and shielded Anglo Irish Bank from the laws of market competition. Anglo Irish Bank was not a systemic bank. There was little or no consideration of other tactical proposals to implement austerity through a different means; there was no consideration of various structures of debt default, leaving the eurozone, stimulus packages to avoid austerity altogether – or a myriad of economic variances that could reject the imposition of austerity.

For example, an editorial in *The Irish Times* of 2 November 2009 accepted the previous headlines that public sector pay had raced ahead of the private sector [Cawley 2012] despite the flaws in directly comparing the two sectors [comparable jobs were not always identifiable] – and the focus was primarily on those higher earners such as hospital consultants, civil engineers and university professors whose remuneration reflects their academic and professional qualifications but do not generally find comparators in the private sector:

> "Falling living standards hurt. But public servants, in spite of their anger and militancy at this time, are a privileged group. Successive, independent studies have identified those advantages. Even the most obtuse must now acknowledge their remuneration levels are well ahead of the private sector. It would be desperately unfair if impoverished welfare recipients had their benefits reduced while service suppliers remained unaffected."

> "The group styling itself Frontline Alliance, including nurses, gardai, prison officers and firefighters, has been particularly militant. Everybody appreciates the value of their work. But they are public servants. And if there is no money available to pay them, or if borrowing that money causes further damage to society, they have a responsibility to consider the public good."

> "Former public servant and economist Dr T K Whitaker identified this social obligation and concluded that shorter working hours or pay cuts are preferable to job losses. That, unfortunately, is the choice facing us. At a time when ICTU is urging the Government to make funds available to protect private sector jobs, it seems incongruous that public service unions should behave in this fashion."

Overall, the nature of the coverage during the most fraught period of the Irish crash was such as to constrain debate to simple economic solutions of austerity versus the likelihood of industrial conflict with the public service. The trade union movement was therefore limited to discussing solutions in terms of primary 'household' economics. The crisis was portrayed as a foreground issue of government finances; the government had accepted that it could not borrow unless they convinced the Troika they reduce spending and avoid default.

Such a small number of references to background issues – five in three months – two were in letters from individuals. Thus the dominant view was simple; the country had run out of money and could no longer afford the public sector in terms of pay, pensions or resourcing. In terms of context / background there was no discussion of bank bailouts or the government's decision – supported by many across the political spectrum for the bank guarantee of September 2008. Neither was there mention of the need to maintain demand for consumer spending from public servants, or the collapse of the housing bubble that had been central to government economic policy since the demise of the Celtic tiger. There was, however, mention of the public sector trade unions' role in Social Partnership that had resulted in consistent pay increases during that period with recurring mention of 'benchmarking' that had been redefined as a pejorative term.

Towards the end of 2009 it had become commonplace that the crisis had been caused by the global financial crisis; indeed, the foreground causes of the deficit accounted for 92% of the word count. Such figures suggest the Report of the Special Group [2009] was 'the only game in town' as the public sphere debated the solution to the fiscal problem. Thus austerity policies dominated the debate indicating that political and economic elites were propagating a limited range of potential solutions to reduce the government's rising debt. Predominantly this was in terms of pay cuts, job losses and reform; in this case generally referring to the introduction of 'private sector efficiency'.

6.10 Tone – positive, negative or neutral

The tone of the item towards the public sector workers or services with tone being defined as positive, negative, neutral or positive/negative (see below for definitions)

Articles were categorised as 'positive', 'negative', 'neutral' or 'positive/negative' depending on the tone of the item in terms of its terminology and the phrasing of the story relative to the socioeconomic interests of the public and civil servants; employees of the government. Tone is often expressed as sentiment; a view or opinion that can be detected and coded as the narrative device attempting to influence the thinking of the reader, bearing in mind headlines are critical in this process and not necessarily the work of the author, but of an editor at a later stage. Tone is attributed to the overall attitude (in terms of terminology and phrasing) of the item towards its subject. This includes the reportage of opinions expressed by the subject of the piece towards the public service. If the item tone was sympathetic or empathetic to public servants and the public service it was coded as positive; if its tone was adversarial or critical it was coded as negative; if the item's tone was neither sympathetic nor adversarial it would be coded as neutral; and if its tone was both sympathetic and adversarial it was coded as positive/negative. The specific categories are defined as follows:

> **Positive tone:** When terms commend the role of public service to society as worth investment by citizens, imply recognition by society in general, or are indicative of attempts to move the resolve the situation 'essential', 'unfair', 'commitment', 'injustice'. These terms are also present if the tone of the piece suggests support for, or some merit in, the arguments or solutions put forward by public servants' groups or individuals – or if negative towards adversarial politicians, employers or commentators including 'smear', 'vilify' or 'betrayed'.

Negative tone: Terms that are derogatory towards trade unions or public servants, imply a lack of recognition by society in general, or are indicative of attempts to block or hinder progress e.g. 'self-interest', 'militant', 'bloated' 'guilt-edged'. These include terms that belittle or trivialise – such as 'so-called', 'out-of-touch'. These terms are also present if the 'tone' of the piece suggests antagonism for the arguments or solutions put forward by public servants' groups or individuals – or again if positive towards employers' groups, commentators or economists who are negative towards the public sector.

Neutral tone: Where either the trade unions or public servants concerned are quoted with no favourable or unfavourable term or comment applied to it, or where their point of view is mediated without positive or negative comment. In terms of trade unions, a 'neutral' report is almost a 'win' in itself, as most media commentary has generally been ill disposed.

Positive/Negative tone: When individuals or groups are referred to with both positive and negative references – but are not termed 'neutral' as if these terms cancelled each other out.

While tone was the predominant measure of a newspaper's overarching attitude in this study newspapers are, of course, internally complex so no one single tone is consistently expressed throughout a newspaper's discourse over time, but taken together there is a cumulative effect to tone with Table 7 (below) showing a dominance of negative tone compared with positive tone. Both the *Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Times* were coded as having more neutral tone that negative – but both newspapers displayed significant 'negative' compared with 'positive'.

Tone by Newspaper

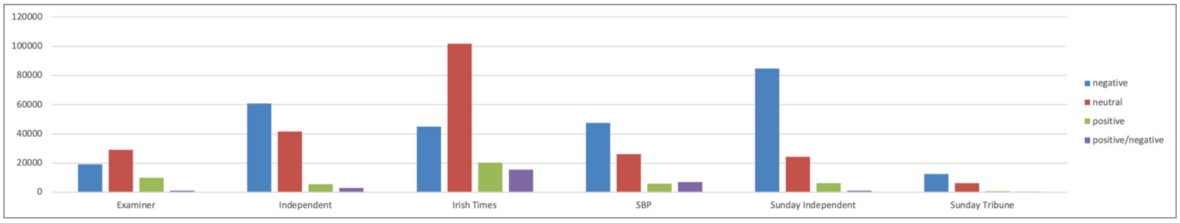

Figure 7: The total word count for each newspaper broken down by tone coded in each item. Only The Irish Times and Irish Examiner showed more neutral than negative.

News Items

In none of the news items examined did journalists interrogate politicians on alternatives to public spending cuts; it had seemingly been previously established that no other action was available because the government could not borrow on the bond markets, the Eurozone would only lend money if the Irish government cut spending, and neither devaluing currency or engaging in fiscal easing [printing more money] was permissible due to the state's adoption of the euro; and exiting the eurozone was not considered. It appeared that public spending cuts were inevitable. Within the frame of the economic problem and fiscal solution this is significant.

Tone towards the socioeconomic welfare of the public sector workers across all media coverage in the sample were classified as 52.7% negative, 36.5% neutral, 5.8% positive and 5% positive/negative.

In analysis or 'interpretive journalism', the limited range of voices in opinion pieces and predominant negative tone in editorials suggested that alternative views were limited to the letters page; where 'positive' or 'positive/negative' tone overshadowed 'negative' or 'neutral' (see Figure 8).

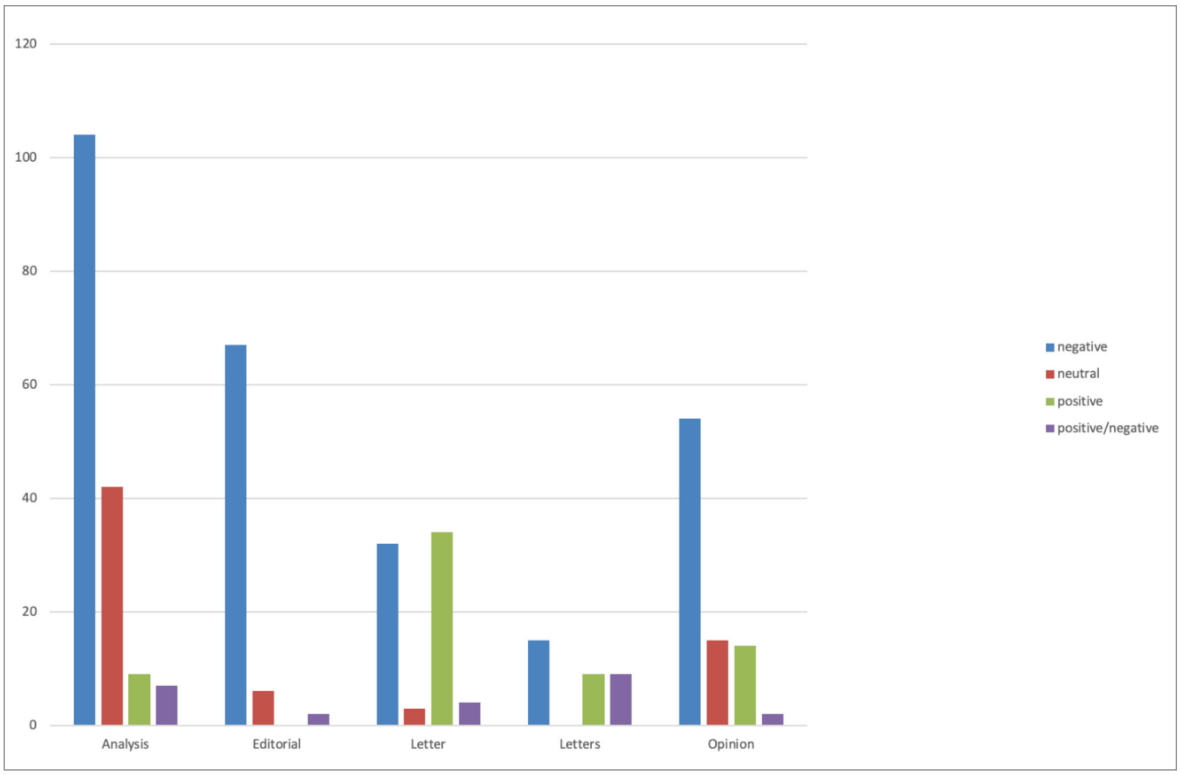

Figure 8: Tone of newspaper content (Sept. – Dec. 2009). Positive tone is dominant in individual letters but largely absent or a definite minority in analysis, opinion and especially editorial pieces.

With the vast majority of news items recording a neutral tone [see Figure 8 above] one has to reserve caution in that we have already established that the vast majority of all items had been framed in terms of foreground issues addressing the economic deficit of the State; this neutral tone is perhaps most poignant in that it is 'not negative'. Public sector employees and trade unions would possibly regard this as a 'win'. With 41% of word count across the sample being coded as news, this is significant. While the 'news' content of the sample cannot be concluded to be hostile, [perhaps a concession that it is not], in terms of analysis and opinion, the trade unions could not break out of the dominant austerity news narrative to suggest alternative solutions that were received with any level of credibility. Each of the newspapers' content may not have directed the readers on 'what to think' on any issue – but framing suggests it influences the reader on 'what to think about' [Cohen 1963 cited in McCombs and Shaw 1972]. While news content was neutral (reflecting journalistic norms of objectivity), in analysis and opinion content the narrative remained confined to pay cuts, job losses and reform pitted against the potential for industrial unrest and the loss of key services across society – stimulus packages were seldom mentioned while the potential for the government to borrow or issue bonds had been discounted by the EU.

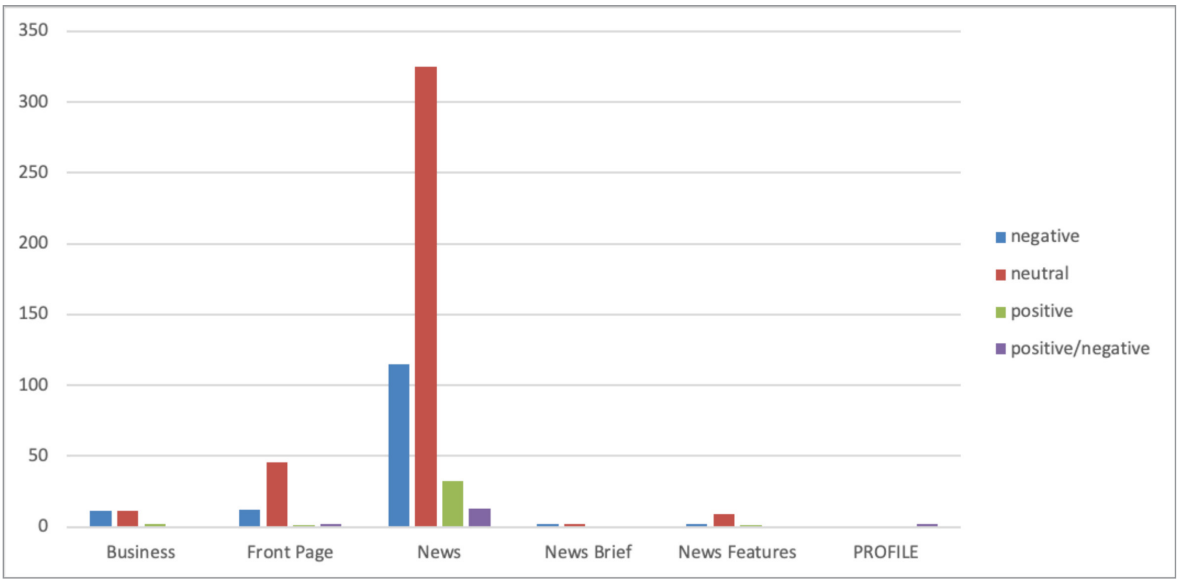

Figure 9: Tone of news items across all newspapers tells a different story to the analysis and opinion pages in Figure 8 (Above). The majority of news items are coded as neutral.

Editorial Comment

Newspaper editorials – or 'leaders' – typically reflect what the publishers or senior editorial staff identify as issues important for its readers to know the newspaper's opinion on. Public sector socioeconomic and welfare issues merged with political and economic issues generated 75 editorials in the given timeframe; 67 were coded as negative, 6 neutral and 2 positive/ negative. None were exclusively supportive or sympathetic to the plight of public sector workers increasingly threatened with pay cuts, jobs losses and outsourcing of services.

The *Irish Independent* represented one third of editorials coded (25), all negative. The *Sunday Business Post* had 13 editorials in the15 editions; only one was coded neutral and 12 negative. *The Irish Times* and *Sunday Tribune* were the newspapers to have an element of positive tone each in one editorial.

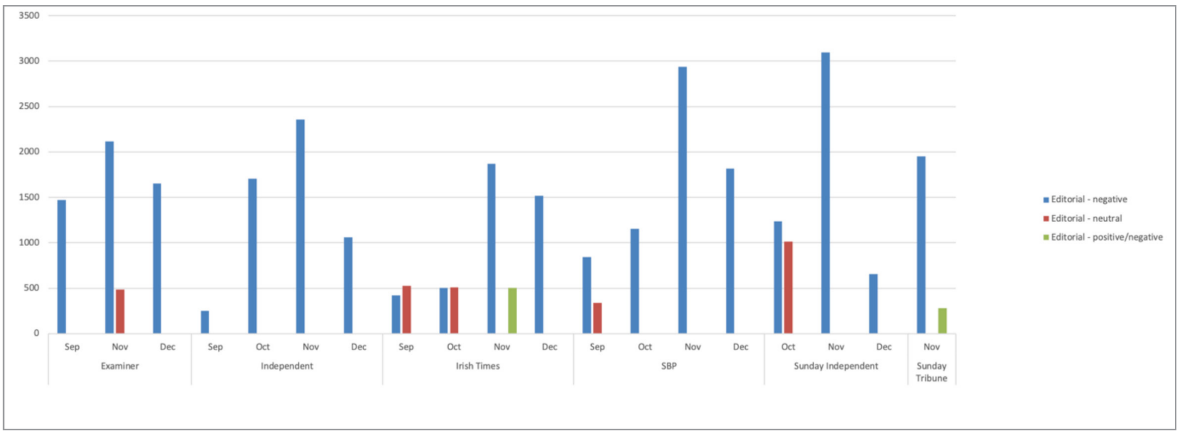

Figure 10: Newspaper voice – the tone of editorials was predominantly against the socioeconomic interests of the public sector employee as measured in word count.

It is revealing that of 75 newspaper editorials none offered outright support for the public sector worker; newspaper editorials are generally acknowledged to have a significant influence in generating and shaping public opinion. Many of the texts constructed a world view based on presupposed 'commonsense' rhetoric, invoked an ill-defined notion of national interest [whose national interest?], evaluated a moral judgement or simply considered market-driven explanations without examination of the political economic context. The cumulative effects of such consistent coverage are not insignificant in the decontextualization of the causes and effects of the bank guarantee and financial bailouts, and also contribute towards the argument propagating consensual solutions – in this case the concept of a negotiated pay cut and reform mechanism thus avoiding the threat of industrial action. Within the sample, typical editorial headings included 'Begin the cuts in the public sector' (SBP, 13 Sept 2009); 'Unions must wake up to economic reality' (SBP, 20 Sept 2009); 'A winter of strikes would destroy us all' (Irish Examiner, 28 Sept 2009); 'Unions must not win this battle' (Sunday Independent 1 Nov 2009); 'Strikes will solve nothing' (The Irish Times, 2 Nov 2009); 'Day of action becomes day of cheap beer' (Irish Examiner, 25 Nov 2009); and as the Budget day loomed 'Way is clear to make real cuts' (Irish Independent, 5 Dec 2009).

Opinion & Analysis

The media's role in democratic societies includes to inform, educate and to provide a platform for a political discourse that is open and subject to public scrutiny. Journalism's notions of objectivity have been lauded as protecting the role of journalist as information providers and educators, but through editorials and opinion pages they are unshackled from objectivity – and through letters pages theoretically provide a space for citizens to add their voice to meaningful debate. This platform facilitates the formation of public opinion. Analysis is written in newspapers by specialist correspondents or those journalists with a specialist

knowledge, helping the reader to make sense of a current situation, but adds the journalist's assessment and opinion layered on to facts. It is interpretation. An opinion piece is often by an expert or an external columnist with some subject-matter expertise or experience as an op-ed piece [so called because it is opinion-editorial that is located opposite or alongside to the editorial of the newspaper]. These are informed articles to educate and inform the reader on the complexities, origins and possible outcomes – usually including the context of the particular issue. The production and reception of debate in newspapers, particularly broadsheet newspapers, is examined by Wahl-Jorgensen [2004], whose studies on UK and Danish papers found that opinion pages remained "a forum for the well-educated, privileged and articulate few" [Wahl-Jorgensen 2004, p590], despite opinion pages being one of the few places in a newspaper assigned for public debate.

A similar situation to the newspaper editorials was found with analysis and opinion/op-ed articles across the newspapers sampled. With 247 items totaled, 158 were negative, 57 neutral, 23 positive and 9 positive/negative. In terms of word count this was 64% negative, 23% neutral, 9% positive and 4% positive/negative. This is found in contrast to the letters published; from 106 items published, 47 were negative, 43 positive, 13 positive/negative and 3 neutral. In terms of word count this translated as 37% positive, 36% negative, 26% positive/negative and 1% neutral.

%	negative	neutral	positive	pos/neg	Total
Analysis	35.5	13.5	2.6	2.3	53.9
Editorial	9.2	0.9		0.3	10.4
Letter	2.0	0.1	2.4	0.5	5.0
Letters	1.5		1.2	2.0	4.7
Opinion	15.9	4.6	4.4	1.1	26.0
Grand Total	64.1	19.1	10.6	6.2	100

Table 1: Percentage word count for editorial category coded for tone.

In terms of word count, the total for analysis content across the sample totaled 167,769 with the leading contributors being *Sunday Independent* [70,968], *Sunday Business Post* [52,009], *The Irish Times* [21,423] and *Irish Independent* [14,116]. In terms of tone, this content, in terms of word count, was categorized as 66% negative, 25% neutral, 5% positive and 4% positive/negative.

The *Sunday Independent* accounted for 42% of analysis written during the period, with 82% of that output being coded as 'negative' with only 13% coded as 'neutral'. The corresponding figures for the *Sunday Business Post* were 54% and 34% respectively. A typical example of the analysis published by the *Sunday Independent* was that written by Jody Corcoran under the headline 'Public servants aren't cut out to be shiny happy people' in an analysis piece with the *Sunday Independent* of 1 November 2009:

> "At one level, the problem is the juggernaut scale of the public sector: more than 300,000 people working to outdated custom and practice, which has made it unfit for purpose. But, at its core, the real problem is the type of person working in the public sector."
>
> "To make matters worse, they do not seem to have, within themselves, the ability to utilise a form of happiness. They believe it is for others to do that for them. They are, in short, inherently dysfunctional people."

Word count for opinion [or op-ed] pieces written largely by external commentators, but sometimes by retained journalists given the opportunity to offer their opinion, accounted for 81,123 words with the content, in terms of word count, being categorized as 61% negative, 18% neutral, 17% positive and 4% positive/negative.

In this instance, the daily titles led the field with *The Irish Times* recording 28,365 words or 35% of opinion totals; the *Irish Independent* followed with 16,821 words or 21% of the total. For *The Irish Times* 47% of that output was coded as 'negative' with 25% as 'neutral', 20% as 'positive' and 7% as 'positive/negative'. The *Irish Independent* showed corresponding figures of 76%; 4%, 8% and 1% respectively. While the *Sunday Independent* accounted for 16% of op-ed word count across the titles – none were coded as positive or positive/negative.

From 85 opinion pieces in total there were 14 coded as positive, 4 of which were authored by trade unionists who were members of the ICTU's Public Services Committee. It is significant that Ireland's best-selling national newspaper in the agenda-setting Sunday market accounted for 42% of analysis by in-house journalists and published 16% of opinion pieces from external commentators in 15 editions amounting to 84,341 words. Of all this content just 5% were coded 'positive' or 'positive/negative'.

6.11 Newspaper tone towards public sector

The tone of all content towards public sector workers or services by core item focus

The general outline of a media obsession with trade unions and the adoption of a predominantly negative stance towards the public sector in these articles is shown in Figure 11 (below). Whereas politicians featured in more articles that carried a neutral tone, there was a high level of negative too; the order was only narrowly reversed when the trade union was the primary focus. The tone towards the public sector was predominantly negative when an economist was the focus. The scale by which trade unions and politicians are represented in the news media could be a reflection of the number of scheduled press conferences and doorstep opportunities afforded to the media. Any formal negotiations between the Social Partners would generate daily media interest in terms of any number of news values; and this accelerated as the economic future of Ireland had been framed in terms of the outcome of public expenditure; particularly the 'pay bill'. It is common for journalists, especially the industry and employment specialists to regularly attend the employing government department briefings and trade union reactions to developments. While the trade unions that represented public sector workers would be releasing their own information, the Public Services Committee of ICTU would also be prominent.

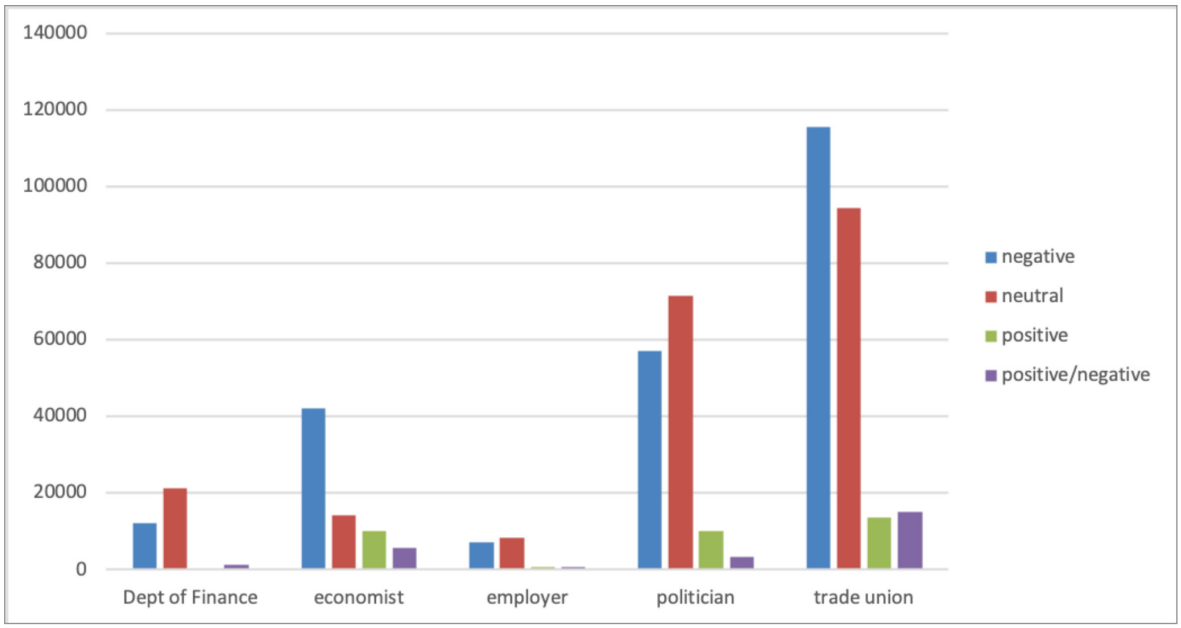

Figure 11: Tone of all content towards public sector workers or services by core item focus measured in word count.

6.12 Quantifying the economic solutions

Quantifying the economic solutions proposed so as to determine which, if any, proposed solutions were amplified by the media outlets under examination.

This sample of all 1016 items was subject to a thematic cluster analysis. The pilot analysis of issues of the *Irish Examiner* indicated that there was little [or no] opportunity for framing of the debate in terms other than finding an austerity solution to narrowing Ireland's fiscal deficit. The purpose of a cluster analysis is to identify competing policy proposals and means of explaining issues to the readership. The purpose was to identify which of these explanations were dominant in news accounts – and by their absence which possible solutions were being effectively ignored.

From the initial pilot study of the *Irish Examiner* it became clear that the majority of economic solutions had been framed in terms of a household budget – and that it was a simple balance between cutting expenditure or raising taxes. The latter appeared to have been ruled out as it would stifle economic growth. The vast majority of items were presentations of technical solutions to the economic deficit as espoused by learned experts.

Pay cuts dominated the discourse; how to implement them was the discussion. Items were coded according to the dominant item[s]. The code sheet was developed to include items such as 'protest' and 'strike' to cover the possibilities, probabilities or explicit references of industrial action by unions – the newspapers did not propose these as economic solutions but as consequences of projected austerity measures. In many instances it became apparent that 'pay cuts' were coupled with other actions or reactions for discussion; pay cuts/reform, pay cuts/pension cuts, pay cuts/job cuts. Similarly pay cuts/protest and pay cuts/strike.

Surprisingly, 'job cuts' were not explicitly referenced to the degree that might have been expected to reduce the 'pay bill'; other alternative measures such as 'bank reform', 'longer time frame' and financial 'stimulus' were included – as was 'pay scales', the latter where only discussion of current public sector pay was coded. Alternative options were not discussed – such as 'default on loans', 'leave the eurozone' or 'bank creditors to absorb some losses' – or even the nationalization of banks with strict conditions attached including executive pay and appointments.

Alternative ideas presented by the trade union movement failed to gain serious coverage or discussion – most were dismissed or lampooned. The was no opportunity to reframe the debate. As is evident from the interviews, this can be explained in terms of the trade unions and political Left apprising that within the national media they had no room for manoevre, and were attempting an orderly withdrawal to strategic positions where they believed they could effectively communicate to the public and mobilise their memberships to engage in industrial action.

This evidence suggested that the debate towards the economic solution was constrained in a number of pre-determined categories and pay cuts for public sector workers was predominate; in many instances the trade unions were afforded only a defensive role; suggesting not whether or not pay cuts were appropriate, but inevitable, and the trade unions were merely fighting a rearguard action to influence the mechanism. During the period of this sample that was bookended by the publication of the Report of the Special Group and the Budget, the 24/7 Frontline Alliance emerged as a special interest group to protect premium pay and allowance while the Public Services Committee of ICTU were committed to protecting 'core pay'; and both groupings used the media to shape the meaning of this phrase.

The media framed the crisis in the terms of these competing claims between government and the public sector; given the competing perspectives of the trade union movement and government – but government is largely taken to represent the 'taxpayer' – and the reason for the deficit in government finances was caused by the government's decision to issue the bank guarantee is absent from the debate. In many 'analysis' sections journalists are directly endorsing pay cuts as both necessary and inevitable.

Of the 1016 items examined 673 were predominantly framed in terms of pay cuts [657] or pay scales [16] – some 66% of articles. There is no suggestion of a 'blurred outcome'; in a framing contest there is a clear winner: The Report of Special Group provided the context and the framework for journalistic coverage and accommodated few other alternative perspectives on possible solutions or economic models. The public sector was positioned as a liability limiting economic recovery [Cawley 2012, p608]. In this predominant framing the public sector was portrayed as a 'pay bill', cost or burden to be 'carried'. Often the subtext of articles suggested reform which was often interpreted as 'private sector efficiency' loosely disguising cost cutting and austerity while espousing market-driven solutions. The public sector stereotype of inefficient, union-protected and possessing infallible job security was played out within newspaper coverage of the crisis.

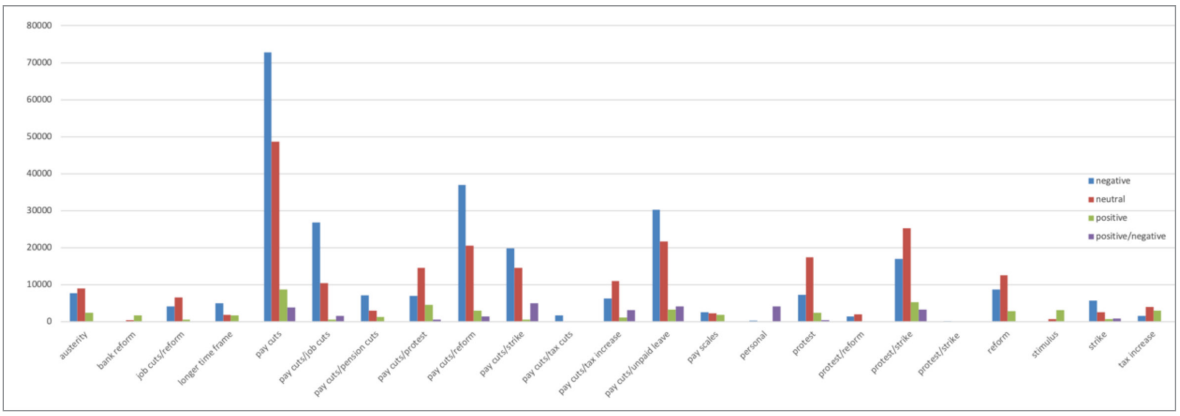

Figure 12: Word count devoted to tactical solutions to address the fiscal deficit; pay cuts dominated – while some items considered the possibility of protests and impacts of strike action.

At the most basic level from the total word count of 576,036, there were 395,745 coded where 'pay cuts' for the public sector were under discussion (69%). Where pay cuts were not overtly referred to, the remaining 180,291 words (31%) divided as protest/strike (28%), protest (15.3%), reform (13.4%), austerity (10.5%) and job cuts/reform (6.2%). Bank reform featured as (1.2%), and as suggested by the trade union movement an extended time frame for fiscal correction (4.9%) or stimulus package (2.1%). For these two key elements that featured in ICTU's **There is a Better, Fairer Way** campaign the word count amounted to 12,382 words – a mere 2.1% of the total. Included in these totals were the suggestions of a longer time frame: ITCU's David Begg wrote an opinion piece for *The Irish Times* – 'Government policy risks severe deflationary shock' – which was immediately countered by George Garvey writing for the *Irish Independent* (3 November 2009) – 'ICTU's plan for recovery will be economic nimbyism at its worst':

> "David Begg had the opportunity to seize the initiative in the economic debate. Instead her retreated back into the comfort zone of protecting the interests of his largely public sector membership."

With so little media coverage of the demands for a stimulus package rather than austerity measures Stephen Collins in *The Irish Times* (27 November 2009) observed that the trade union movement had offered 'an each-way bet' by offering pay cuts incrementally over time so as not to deal the economy another negative blow. This was based on a statement by ICTU's Jack O'Connor – under the headline 'Union leader says pay rose too much in boom' – and David Begg's article. Collins observed that Begg had stated that the development of a national emergency plan on jobs was the only sustainable way to tackle the economic crisis and drive recovery:

> "Mr Begg challenged the Government to apply the same vigour and ingenuity to job creation as it had to saving banks and cutting spending. He said the unemployment figure of over 400,000 was the root of the current fiscal crisis and that by tackling the jobs issue the Government would lay the foundations for recovery."
>
> "Mr Begg proposed that three key initiatives be adopted immediately to improve employment prospects; the introduction of a short-term working programme based on successful models operating in countries like Germany; the establishment of a national recovery bond targeted at filling gaps in public infrastructure; and a single body to maximise job creation in the area of green enterprise."

These were not strategic level alternatives to be discussed in the public sphere. The newspapers in the sample had already accepted the economic framing and were merely reproducing debate towards finding a tactical solution to the implementation of austerity measures.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Irish broadsheet newspapers set the parameters for debate of Ireland's fiscal deficit following the banking collapse, and predominantly favoured austerity measures, particularly in the pay of public sector workers. Discussion of alternative economic and political measures was largely absent and reflected the lack of context given to news and opinion in the pages of the newspapers. Only the letters page offered a positive output for defenders of public service. One could be forgiven for thinking that the root of the fiscal deficit had been a result of an expanded and unduly remunerated public service.

The economic crisis and the resultant fiscal deficit in Ireland placed great strain on the political actors. The leading government figures had attempted to directly confront the crisis with a bank guarantee in September 2008 that had backfired spectacularly once the loan books of those banks became apparent and the construction sector collapsed. Quite simply, expenditure outstripped revenue and government borrowing was becoming unsustainable. The government commissioned Special Group led by UCD economist Colm McCarthy to report upon and quantify government spending in the public sector. This Report was published in the summer; while the influential MacGill Summer School focussed on how Ireland was going to solve this complex problem. It became quite apparent that the government were focussing on making expenditure cuts – and public sector pay and pensions were the 'big ticket' item alongside welfare.

From September 2009 until the Budget was finalised on 9 December there was considerable media attention paid to how Ireland Inc. was going to make savings of around €4 billion per annum. During the timeframe of this sample study, the Irish-owned broadsheet newspapers published 1,016 items in 297 newspapers; totalling 576,036 or a daily average of 5,818. Peaks for word count far exceeded this average as the Sunday newspapers ramped up coverage with analysis, opinion and editorial content.

The news items were predominantly neutral in tone, and 586 [58%] of the 1,016 items were classified as news, front page, news feature, business or news digest. The analysis, editorial, opinion and profile pages recorded 324 items [32%] that were negative in their contribution to the public sphere; while 106 items of letter/letters [10%] were the only items where a positive tone was the majority.

In the timeframe of the sample study, the *Sunday Independent* was dominant in terms of circulation figures selling more than four times that of its nearest Sunday rival. In the daily newspaper market, the *Irish Independent* outsold both *The Irish Times* and *Irish Examiner*; the sales of which combined were similar to the daily sales of the Irish Independent. As such Independent News and Media were a dominant force; the *Sunday Independent* particularly because of the agenda-setting nature of Sunday titles; with more in-depth analysis compared with the dailies. Broadly, the dailies produce more news items whereas the Sundays are skewed towards analysis and opinion. Pertinently, the leading titles produced predominantly negative tone towards the public sector.

In newspaper editorials and op-ed columns, the tone was negative; leading to a limited public sphere of pre-selected parameters. There was no room for discussion of alternative economic systems or the protection of the financial sector from market capitalism, permitted was a narrow range of economic measures to implement. Only the ‘dailies’ produced the majority of news stories with a neutral tone; but overall coverage and news items lacked context of the crisis, and almost exclusively the stories were framed in terms of how austerity measures were to be implemented, rather than questioning whether austerity was the correct economic response to a situation unprecedented in the living memory of those involved.

The vast majority of discussion related to pay cuts for the public sector workers, both in news and opinion. The reported trade union response to potential pay cuts was limited to the protest and industrial action that they might take to protect their members’ socioeconomic interests; and the different approaches within the trade union movement to how austerity

measures might be distributed across the public service. Any alternatives put forward by the trade union movement were largely ignored or subjected to ridicule. Those advancing austerity were given the opportunity to shape and influence public attitudes.

This research does not inform us to how the media organisations decided upon this viewpoint; but it does indicate that the public sector trade unions were largely told to 'get real' that the country was broke and could not afford to pay the 'gilt-edged' salaries and 'perks' that they were refusing to hand up. The focus was on the public sector trade unions; who were derided for attempting to protect the sectional interests of their members. This research should alert editorial decision-makers to the cumulative consequences of their choices – while reaffirming what trade unionists have long understood; "The media has been held, especially in the left, as being unfair to leftist parties, Labour governments, trades unions." [Lloyd 2004, 98].

Chapter 7: INTERVIEW 1: RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

This chapter is the first of three that outline the findings from the most detailed set of interviews carried out to date with those at the forefront of dealing with the economic crash of 2008. Each of the three chapters counterpoints the views of four distinct groups of actors – trade union officials, communication specialists, specialist journalists and government advisors – all of whom recount their interpretations of the events that engulfed the state from 2008 onward. This chapter outlines the testimony of these actors in relation to (1) their immediate response to the crash; (2) the perceived conflict between the public and private sectors; (3) the trade union movement's focus on protecting core pay; and (4) the emergence of the 24/7 Alliance.

There were those that claimed to see a crisis coming from a distance, as 2008 progressed though the 'St Patrick's Day massacre' when the shares of Anglo-Irish Bank lost value, and this was reinforced with the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and ultimately the controversial bank guarantee at the end of September. When the government established the Special Group [Bord Snip Nua] to seek possible savings in the public service in November 2008, it was setting in motion that pay cuts, lowered staffing levels and reduced services were the strategic government response to address the deficit. The signals from the EU and European Central Bank indicated that an austerity programme was required to get public spending under control. A previous government may have considered a humiliating currency devaluation – but that was no longer an option since the adoption of the single European currency. Early in 2009 the civil service began to brief the trade unions and staff associations on the financial deficit the government was facing – trade unionists remarked on the 'conditioning' process that this signalled. Economists had framed the debate.

To latterly attempt to promote the anti-austerity argument as secondary definers, the trade union leaders were not economists and they were uncertain and unsure. They could not go head-to-head and debate the intricacies of Keynesian economics with Colm McCarthy or Jim Power. They had little or no citable academic research that would prove credible to a hostile media who had accepted and amplified the frames. The trade unionist interviewees recognised this shortfall – and established the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI] in 2010 as a direct response. Other researchers have established the public sector / private sector divide propagated in much of the media in 2008 and 2009 before these news organisations turned their attention to austerity measures in the public service. Several interviewees reference this constructed divide, including some who pointed out that many news organisations

had reduced salaries of journalists who were so convinced this was normalised across the economy – inevitably there was some element of surprise when the CSO figures were published suggesting otherwise. But the collapse of the construction industry had provided the ultimate pay cuts across the sector – wholesale job losses. The trade unions launched their campaign and tried to collectively voice the *There is a Better, Fairer Way* agenda - and it patently flopped. No media organisation accepted these economic arguments as valid and it was simply trounced in the media as sectional interests seeking to spare their members from sharing the pain. Towards the end of 2009 when the ICTU had refined and expanded economic suggestions to spare the worst of austerity [*There is Still a Better, Fairer Way*], the Irish media responded with headlines such as "*ICTU's plan for recovery will be economic nimbyism at its worst*" [*Irish Independent* 3 November 2009, 16].

Trade unionists and their specialist communication advisers largely agreed that they had seen what had happened in Greece with all-out strikes and trade unionists clashing with police. They saw little solace in such action. As long as the integrity of public service employment was not denigrated by compulsory redundancies – the strategic aim was to defend whatever pay and conditions could be negotiated – always retaining the prospect of industrial action as an incentive against unilaterally imposed measures. As Patricia King [SIPTU] suggests, barricades and burning cars were possible outcomes; there were protests and demonstrations but the trade union movement decided such a route would lead to job losses – the key indicator of failure. Manning [2001, 179] described a successful accommodative approach to news media strategies. The ambulance dispute of 1989 operated an overtime ban to demonstrate that the British government had reneged on a promise not to rely on overtime – and avert 'the damaging symbolism of strike action. The three unions effectively divided the labour, leaving the National Union of Public Employees [NUPE] taking responsibility for all journalists' enquiries. By having a resourced media team ready to accommodate and exploit the "exchange relationships that exist between union personnel and journalists to achieve more effective coverage of the agendas they seek to communicate" said that the British trade unions had "in other words, the industrial strategy of the unions was subordinated to the communication strategy".

There is evidence throughout these three interview chapters to suggest this is what happened in Ireland because there was:

1. No appetite for all-out strike when members' loss of earnings would exceed any new levy.
2. There was little or no confidence they could prevail with an all-out strike.
3. Many members were in deep personal debt that had to be serviced.
4. Several interviewees ruled out a 'Trotskyite' approach and feared it would hand control of the unions to the militant left.

7.1 The immediate response to the economic crash

There is no clearly defined response from the trade union interviewees as to the actual timing of when the public sector trade union movement accepted that the economy was heading for a crash. Not unlike the *Road Runner* cartoon, the Irish economy was hanging over the precipice and defying gravity for several months before the collective psyche of political actors drew the conclusion that the peddled 'soft landing' was no longer an option. The trade unions were taken by surprise by both the scale and speed of the economic crash; unsurprising as many economists and politicians had failed to read the economic warnings correctly. However, Peter McLoone, chair of ICTU's influential Public Services Committee [PSC] claimed to have understood the gravity of the situation before the government began to communicate the possible impact of an economic crash. He recalls, sitting in his office on a Saturday afternoon a few months before the crisis, receiving a telephone call from Dan Murphy [secretary of the PSC] who told him that he going to send on some information – downloaded figures on the income and expenditure of the State. Having read the figures McLoone told Murphy, "this is crazy, this is not sustainable." The following Monday they rang senior civil servants to ask if they could meet informally. At the meeting, McLoone recalled: "We said that there was no point us negotiating pay increases as part of a general pay round that are applicable in the public service – because it's not sustainable – maybe we should have an agreement where these increases do not take effect for at least 12 months?" The conversation was a "very off-the-record" informal conversation. According to McLoone the [unnamed] civil servants agreed, but also informed the trade unionists that deferred pay increases would be insufficient to balance the accounts.

For her part Patricia King, vice president of SIPTU during the crisis, recalled when it became very clear that the government was going to take significant steps in adjusting the public finances: "One of the first hits they made was on public service pay." This was via a universally imposed pay cut – termed a pension levy. According to King there were "robust

debates within the union fraternity about how this was going to be handled. There was a shock element to it, because people had not expected this, but there was also an element of 'how do we handle this?' Everybody was balloted for industrial action –all the usual things we would do when an employer acts in such a negative way". As this was ongoing, King recalled, "we fairly simultaneously explored with government officials the possibility of handling what was obviously becoming a massive crisis, whether we liked it or not. Who we blamed for it – banks or all that stuff – was part of a conversation but not a real conversation from our practical point of view; that's how we started to develop the agenda that effectively turned out to be the Croke Park Agreement." King noted that she was acutely aware that the pension levy was "a start"; government action was not going to stop at taking a pension contribution from public and civil servants. Her thinking at the time was how to diminish the impact of it "and how to stop the worst effects of it and, on top of that, how do you negotiate and try to keep a lid on some of the stuff? That was effectively our modus operandi."

However, for John Carr, general secretary of the INTO, the banking issue loomed large. He noted that Anglo Irish Bank was still reporting huge profits in 2008 but "when the first tremors of the financial shock arrived in 2008 – it took us some time to realise what was happening. In March 2008 the stock market had collapsed – there was the St Patrick's Day Massacre when Anglo shares dropped by 15%." But he also observed that despite this crash in the stock market, it had "barely registered" its effect on workers during the early part of 2008. They were not yet feeling the full effects of the economic crisis. He noted that "the notion that banks might shut down, and the government would prop them up with a guarantee wasn't brokered until 29 September 2008. Half a million people were leaving Ireland in early 2009 and yet the Fianna Fáil government were telling people that their plan was working." He saw a 'fierce contrast' between the first and second halves of 2009. What began as a "challenging year with opportunities" ended in a climate of uncertainty and uncharted territory for society: "We began the year 2008 looking for the first phase of *Towards 2016* to be paid. We ended the year with the budget that attacked education in particular."

Among communication specialists, Bernard Harbor, head of communications at IMPACT, noted that he had never experienced anything like the crash before: "Reflecting upon the time, firstly, it was traumatic. You don't think about this at the time – nor discuss afterwards; people in the union had to deal with situations that they had never dealt with before, or after a period of fifteen years or so where they had been repeatedly delivering, and suddenly their role was to tell members that this had come to a horrible end. For the actors involved,

and probably those on the official side, it was a horrible time for people personally; to deal with a situation that was professionally unique. This is perhaps my second point – we were dealing with an unprecedented situation." Similarly, Frank Connolly, head of communications at SIPTU, noted that the union was watching not only what was going on in Ireland, but across Europe:

> "Nobody could avoid watching as the public service in Greece was decimated with lay-offs of up to 100,000 workers. People here, who saw what was coming down the tracks, recognised that unless we could come up with some sort of arrangement or agreement with government as the employer in the public service, and with private sector employers, we could see equal devastation in this economy."

The question was whether trade unions would be able to maintain resistance in the face of a government that was deciding to apply sweeping measures across the public services and would use that opportunity to achieve some of the things (such as outsourcing of sections of the public service) that it would not have been able to achieve if it had entered into an agreement. Connolly observed that "the Bord Snip report was hugely influential in that respect; a recipe for destroying public services and public service jobs by closing or privatising huge sectors of public utilities, public industry and semi-state bodies. Those public jobs were important, and well-paid public jobs would be gone – and that was part of the objective. The trade unions response was an attempted defensive strategy; to try to maintain jobs and living conditions as best as possible, as well as employment, state utilities and investment."

Industrial relation specialist journalists, Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times*, noted that in the immediate wake of the crash the "fundamental bottom-line" for the trade unions was the opposition to compulsory redundancies; "and in that regard they succeeded'. He noted that while some 200,000 people lost their jobs in the private sector; not one person in the public service was made involuntary redundant. However, this came at a price:

> "The deals that the public service unions were prepared to do in relation to concession bargaining, longer working hours and revised pension arrangements, in relation to pay cuts and lower staffing levels – all of that they were prepared to accept – but their bottom-line of no compulsory redundancies was upheld. To that degree it succeeded."

> He later added: "Public servants were hit three times with pay cuts and a diminution of their conditions of employment; they had less-favourable pensions, less-favourable working hours, they had less-favourable holidays, all of those were put in place."

Similarly, Anne-Marie Walsh, industry correspondent of the *Irish Independent*, expressed the belief that, in terms of a response to the economic crisis, the public service unions "fought a good battle", even if new entrants to the public service were treated differently:

> "They will say they took so much pain – but they seemed to come out of it pretty well considering what happened. The pay cut was a big sacrifice, the pension levy, they were significant. Nobody lost their jobs, which was a huge deal . . . It's complicated because the existing members were very well protected . . . those coming in the door did take a hit, there's no doubt about it, there was an extra 10% pay cut for them and the new pension. But the existing members still had their pay-parity pensions; even the 2013 scheme that was introduced is a defined benefit scheme, which is a rarity now in the private sector."

Brian Sheehan, editor of *Industrial Relations News*, concurred, noting that unions "did a very good job". While he believed that the attempted deal involving unpaid annual leave proposal was "politically impossible" given that the government implemented subsequent pay cuts in the budget and through FEMPI, the way the unions managed that was strategically "very intelligent" while facing the need to engage in low-level industrial action or strikes that members "might not necessarily support". He noted that:

> "We forget how this crisis felt; even now. Pay cuts, where another member of the family had lost a job in the private sector – real fear for the future. I would think the majority were happy to have their jobs. We forget how low inflation was; if you were an established earner with an established mortgage you were not necessarily going to be hit – you were going to manage."

Distinguishing between 'activist anger' and 'membership anger', Sheehan recalled that he did not get the sense of a significant membership anger despite the large activist anger in the early days of the crisis – it was not feeding through; though he acknowledged that "it did eventually of course". Commenting on trade union strategy, Sheehan noted:

> "There were no compulsory redundancies; and the fact that they strategised towards a period where they worked towards pay recovery worked quite well. They could have engaged with strikes, general strikes or whatever, but it's very difficult to actually do that in Ireland, you can't have a national strike – they did have one day after the pension levy . . . what do you achieve? I think they managed it very well."

Of the overall trade union response to the crisis, Sheehan asserted that "you will obviously find people in the trade union movement who completely disagree with the strategy. On the militant section . . . but anyone in the moderate centre-left…[ends]"

A similar view pertained amongst government advisors. Oonagh Buckley, principal officer at the Department of Finance, believed the trade union response was "very effective". She concurred with Peter McLoone in that the trade unions probably identified the crisis "earlier than we did" and that if one "worked through the steps of how bad the public finances were going to be, a consequence of that was potentially that the government was going to have no choice but to introduce mandatory compulsory redundancies for public servants – and they identified that as something they did not want to happen". She noted that "from an earlier stage than particularly those officials in the Department of Finance, who were struggling with whether the decline really was as intensive as it appeared, they lit upon an approach and stuck to it – this was the trade union leadership, Peter McLoone et al." While we have established that from early 2009 the Department of Finance officials were briefing trade union groups on the declining public finances resulting from the collapse of the construction industry Buckley had only become involved in industrial relations in October 2009, and remembered being impressed that the trade unions had worked through where this was going to end. She noted that:

> "Obviously that was because many unions had members in the private sector, and were therefore seeing what was happening in the private sector – and what could happen in the public sector. A large part of how it all played out was them saying; 'We can swallow reductions in pay and short-term working, what we do not want is wide-scale job losses within the Irish public services'."

> "I have always been impressed by, and consistently praised, the leadership of the trade unions; the vast majority were very pragmatic and very much took a pragmatic approach."

Similarly, Richard Moore, government advisor at the department of justice, noted that "initially the government were slow to acknowledge that they were in serious trouble. At the time I don't think they even knew what was happening. The language of that time was 'soft landing'; obviously that's not what happened . . . it was probably the narrative of the outgoing taoiseach Bertie Ahern, but he was now gone. Brian Cowen as the outgoing minister for finance should have – and probably did – know more. But they kept the messaging going." However, Cathy Herbert, advisor at the department of finance offered a contrary view, and opined that as the crisis was moving very quickly and those in government had to react in real time, the unions understood the implications slightly behind this curve:

> "It's not surprising that the unions would not have been aware because there was a lot of sensitivity about it, until it was made public. It took them a while to understand the scale of the crisis. Subsequently I came to understand that they had their membership to protect, if we didn't have any more to give then they were 'out of the game'. I don't think they came up with any solutions – I understand now that behind the scenes they may have played a significant part, actually, in that the protests were fairly muted. They were managing their membership as time went on – but initially they had no idea of the scale of the crisis."

While the government had awarded a pay increase under Social Partnership in August 2008 that had to be taken back and as Herbert recalled that came "as a big shock to everybody":

> "As a group of people who had been so integrated into the government decision-making process, where they were consulted on many things through Social Partnership, they had nothing to offer when things fell apart. I understand now, having talked with people who were involved with public sector unions at that time, that they did have a job to do managing their people. They had to worry about their own future – they had their own people to satisfy. I understand that they did more than appeared at the time. In the middle of a crisis they looked like they had no part to play. Notwithstanding they had been very involved in the decision-making process for the previous decade or more."

7.2 The perceived conflict between public and private sectors

Discussed elsewhere in the thesis is the media focus on the news value of conflict to portray the economic crisis in terms of a perceived split between the private and public sectors. Job losses in the private sector were driven primarily by the collapse of the construction

industry; and as Ireland is a small economy, most communities were directly impacted at the micro level. Public servants were perceived as protected from the worst effects of the crisis, because of job security, but public sector pensions and other employment benefits were included as the debate on public and private sector experience of the crisis expanded. A key question is whether the public–private framing of the crash was an orchestrated strategy to deflect attention away from ineffective banking regulation and political oversight. For his part, Blair Horan, general secretary of the CPSU, doubted that this was a deliberate strategy of government. His assessment, based on meetings and talking to government officials, whom unions met more frequently that government ministers, was largely that the framing was a media construct:

> "The *Sunday Independent* would have driven this relentlessly and deliberately in terms of a public–private divide. The government could usefully piggyback on the benefits – of course they did. But I don't think they deliberately set out to do this; they weren't the drivers. They rode the wave. Among the Civil Service there would have been an awareness not to stoke societal divisions; but that is not to say they wouldn't use something that was to their benefit."

Horan was in no doubt that overall public servants are paid more than the private sector; and there are two factors in that. In the public sector the number of higher grades is greater and paid higher by the virtue of the roles, whether engineers, doctors or academic professors. There are few doctors solely in the private sector, and no serious academics. As he noted, the public service "can always be presented as higher earners. It's not a fair comparison; it is nuanced. The proportion of highly qualified people is always going to be greater in the public sector". Shay Cody, deputy general secretary of IMPACT, also believed that the public–private framing was a media construct: "Sometimes the value of a public service job is only appreciated at a time of crisis. As soon as the crisis abated the value of that disappears. There was a severe public–private 'battle' very often engineered by a populist media." While recognising that this battle existed and had permeated into unionised workplaces, Cody recalled a particular report from an official in a craft union attending a retirement function in a factory that had many members in the private sector. There was a television on and when a government announcement of a pay cut for public servants was broadcast the workers cheered. This, to Cody, demonstrated that "the demonization had been so ingrained that it was a popular move in a unionised factory in the private sector." Regarding the narrative that public servants earned more than those in the private sector, Cody noted that the private sector is not unitary – but a multiplicity of private sectors. He pointed out that public servants

earn more than people in retail, but less than people in finance or information technology. The public sector is a spectrum from hospital consultants to soldiers with associated pay scales and while "public servants had more job security; we managed to prevent any permanent public servants losing their job against their wishes. In the private sector, hundreds of thousands lost their jobs."

For his part, David Begg, general secretary of ICTU, attested that there was no real conflict between the private and public sectors, and that different things happened in different parts of the economy:

> "Clearly construction collapsed, there were some 290,000 people working in construction and it went down to about 80,000 in rapid order. Nothing was going to stop that. The multinational sector really didn't change hugely, other manufacturing in the private sector tended to adjust in jobs rather than in wages. There might have been overtime reductions but not wage cuts. The public sector on the other hand, preserved jobs and cut wages and pensions."

There existed however, some tensions between the public and the private sectors "with the private sector assuming – around the time of Benchmarking – that the public sector had done very well . . .[though] nothing significant in my view, nothing inhibiting us in Congress, there was no breakaway or anything like it."

John Carr, general secretary of the INTO, concurred with this viewpoint that within ICTU continual efforts were made to ensure solidarity between private and public sector unions. Carr too acknowledged that there were 'tensions' at particular times, but the goal for the trade union movement was to keep the private and public sectors united:

> "Probably SIPTU had the biggest problem with that at that time because they had a public and a private sector within. With the media and the campaigns saying public servants were overpaid and had huge pensions while the brunt of the workforce who were losing their jobs were in the private sector and emigrating."

Indeed, Jack O'Connor, president of SIPTU / ICTU, claimed that many journalists saw this issue as simply about saving Ireland, but alluded to "various forces acting in the interests of capital" when the battle for resources followed a collapse of the economy:

> "There was a very deliberate campaign from the end of February of 2009 to divide workers along public-private lines."

> "I viewed it for what it was; a deliberate, calculated, coordinated strategy to divide working people and to pit private sector workers against people who worked in the public service. It was also the way to attack the trade union movement. Due to failures within the trade union movement itself that long pre-dated this development, trade union influence in terms of the level of organisation and capacity was mostly concentrated in the public service. It was about pitting worker against worker; but it was also a sophisticated assault on trade unionism itself."

For Liam Doran of INMO, the public–private divide existed within "the political maelstrom"; as a live force to drive down wages generally. As a leading voice in the 24/7 Frontline Alliance whose primary concerns were the protection of premium payments for unsocial hours, he noted that "The easiest way to drive down wages, without necessarily making us a third-world type economy, is to drive down the 'non-core' parts of wages; by not topping-up wages through paying extra for working nights or weekends. That private sector influence is massive."

When such powerful forces as the national media are influencing public debate, it is an understatement to suggest that the communication departments of public sector trade unions would be challenged, especially as few individuals had experienced an economic crisis on this scale. Bernard Harbor, head of communications at IMPACT admitted that the trade unions "didn't do ourselves any favours":

> "At the outset we behaved as this was happening to us without any context. As you can expect, we were under huge pressure from our members – and we reacted as if this was an attack on the public service in isolation and nothing else was happening. It enabled the public–private divide to really gain a grip and it became possible to suggest that the public sector unions were living in a different world. That crude comparison resonated when public servants were getting pay cuts, while those in private sector employment were losing their jobs – and possibly their homes…we failed to position what was happening to us in a broader context of what was happening to everyone else. It helped the public–private divide happen."

For his part, Frank Connolly, head of communications at SIPTU, argued that this situation was not unique to Ireland, with employers and sections of the establishment responsible for the collapse – property developers, bankers, estate agents, and solicitors – clearly revoking their role and refusing to accept culpability:

> "The idea that people on the minimum wage should take the first hit is outrageous – but that's the way the system works. The system works by changing the narrative though a media that did not need to be influenced very much; the right-wing media is controlled by very wealthy people who started to pour blame on workers."

To illustrate this point, Connolly commented upon numerous radio talk airing complaints that the private sector saw pay and pensions diminish while those in the public sector were comfortable with "gold-plated" pensions:

> "There are people in the public service with 'Rolls Royce' pensions, but they happen to be very, very senior who happen to be the ones who design these programmes of austerity. Those who were designing the austerity and writing the policies and speeches for the ministers for finance and also public expenditure were also the ones with the 'gold-plated' pensions. That of course includes the politicians who implement these policies."

Specialist journalists viewed things differently, however, with Ingrid Miley, RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent commenting that within Social Partnership talks there had often been a "schism" between the public and private sector unions that was always "dampened down" before it could be articulated in any way that might have led to a formal split within Congress. What was new to the public sphere leading up to the budget of autumn 2009 was, for the first time, another group (the 24/7 Frontline Alliance) advocating for the retention of premium pay and allowances. This differentiation caused a problem for the Trade Union Congress: as Miley noted, "The frontline versus the office workers (or nine-to-fivers) was articulated to the point of fissure or fraction."

Indeed, Brian Sheehan, editor of *Industrial Relations News*, recalled "screaming headlines" of private-sector pay cuts "across-the-board"; although according to survey figures published by IBEC in late 2009 the proportion of companies cutting pay was only 14%. Sheehan noted that "we had quite low figures because there were a lot of untracked small businesses and there were pay cuts in small firms, but certainly in the multinational sector there were no

pay cuts. Pay was frozen or people were 'let go' – that was the pay cut. They were made redundant, that's how they operate." Similarly Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times* noted that:

> "Pay cuts were not the majority in the private sector. Most private sector firms froze pay – but only a minority of private sector firms reduced pay. The problem was that every media organization cut pay. The issue was that this became the general narrative within the media that pay cuts were the norm. There was probably an element of 'while we are having pay cuts everyone should share our pain. The economic data never backed up the narrative that pay cuts were the norm across the economy – they weren't. That is the CSO figures. There was a lot of economic argument that the CSO data was flawed – maybe it was – but the CSO figures, the only figures you can actually go on, indicated at the time that pay cuts were not the norm. Pay cuts were the minority of cases. Everyone in the media had a pay cut and job losses were there."

For government advisors, such as Cathy Herbert at the department of finance the public sector was always regarded as a "sheltered-enough environment", where ultimately there were no redundancies. She noted that although the public servants did pay a contribution towards their pension, the pay cuts have since been restored; but there were public sector recruitment freezes that made life pretty difficult for everyone: "there is no doubt that public services were reduced, or were impacted by it [the crash], and they are only recovering; damage was done."

7.3 The focus on protecting 'core pay'

Following the report of Special Group [McCarthy Report] the trade union movement responded with Peter McLoone, the chairman of the Public Services Committee of ICTU, stating firmly that they would protect "core pay". This term became immediately controversial as those groups in receipt of allowances and premium payments feared that these would be negotiated downwards as government pushed for concessions. This fear led to the formation of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance the *raison d'être* of which was to protect these forms of payment that were in addition to the published pay scales. SIPTU was both a major player within ICTU as the largest single voting-block in the PSC, but was also a strong voice within the 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance, where it had many members in nursing, fire brigades and ambulance crews. The leadership of ICTU met with a delegation from the 24/7 Frontline Alliance at the SIPTU conference in Tralee on 7 October 2009 and

issued a joint statement. ICTU acknowledged the depth of feeling among 'frontline' workers. The meeting agreed on the critical importance of mounting a unified campaign across all sections of the workforce and those depending on public services to resist the imposition of the entire burden of economic adjustment on working people and the less well-off. The president and general secretary of ICTU committed to keeping the Alliance fully apprised of all developments through affiliated unions in the 24/7 Frontline Alliance and committed to ensure that the issues raised by the Alliance would remain "high on the agenda" in any talks with the government and other social partners.

As recalled by Padraig Yeates, former journalist and media advisor to the 24/7 Alliance, Congress saw legitimacy to the argument of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance and immediately understood the difference between premium pay and overtime on the one hand, and core pay on the other:

> ". . . the 24/7 Alliance did succeed in convincing a lot of people that they had a case that was different from, and better than, your average public servant. When you think of public servants, you really think of civil servants or local government officials sitting at a desk working nine-to-five working flexitime with childcare and whatever else is going."

He later added:

> "That was important because the public should not see the Alliance as being an alternative to, or an enemy of ICTU. That Tralee meeting was crucial, because it kept everybody together. It also suited SIPTU in general, because if you kept the premium payments as core pay it did not lose you the capacity to say 'they kept something so we should keep something'."

As Ingrid Miley stated earlier, if the differences between the office workers and 'frontline' staff were discussed to fissure or fraction, it is important to identify what ICTU, particularly the PSC, understood by the term 'core pay' and how they intended to protect it. For Peter McLoone, general secretary of IMPACT, core pay was "very definitely the basic pay scales":

> "We would not enter into any arrangement or agreement with government that would allow the basic pay hours as they then were to be reduced. The pay scales themselves, when you look at the benefits, for example, of weekend premiums, overtime rates and

allowances – we may have had in our heads – a willingness to be flexible if government wanted to reduce expenditure by temporarily offering less for the add-ons or the extras. That was easy said but not done, because if you look at something like weekend payments, the vast bulk of the recipients were nurses."

For Blair Horan, general secretary of CPSU, the "tensions were always there" in relation to what 'core pay' meant:

"The tensions were always there. Peter, like myself, represented grades that did not receive allowances. There was always the view within the PSC to protect the core pay rates to the greatest possible extent to minimise salary reductions. But there were those who earned shift allowances and others, such as the teachers' education allowance, that they argued was their core pay too. It was a reflection of the tensions within the Public Services Committee. Core pay was based around the pay scales. Allowances were different to overtime, because overtime is not guaranteed. People understand that overtime is not going to be available during a crisis."

As Shay Cody, deputy general secretary of IMPACT, noted: "if you are changing overtime rates and certain shift allowances, then a lot of allowances were in the system in that area":

"Peter's approach was 'we are in a kind of a war'; 'we are retreating' and we should 'retreat with the essentials intact'. What are the essentials? Core pay is an essential; if core pay is reduced it impacts upon everything else. The Frontline Alliance was refusing to have any interference in their premium arrangements. The inevitable consequence of that is that 'core pay' would be the frontline target. For some, core pay was only the start of their income; for others it was the entirety of their income. It reflected different bases of membership."

As David Begg viewed it, the trade union movement "protected core pay: the pay scales":

"Within the public sector there were certain tensions between the frontline troops and the rest, but the reality of that is based on the belief that the frontline people feel they can do an awful lot better – and they can, as evidenced by the recent nurses' action and the gardaí before them. Throughout the crisis there were no austerity measures imposed on the Fire Service; it was never said, but it never happened either. Those core frontline people are in a moderately strong position, but they could overplay their hand."

As Jack O'Connor, president of SIPTU and ICTU, observed, "core pay is as much as you could make it out to be". For him core pay consisted of "basic pay, obviously it was pensions, but then I would argue that it was regular recurring payments that were part of your conditions of employment. Perhaps not all of the allowances, but a great many of them." For his part, John Carr, general secretary of INTO, core pay included all pay and allowances: "we were adamant at all times that our core pay was our basic salary plus the allowances". He stated:

> "These allowances were always an integral part of core pay."

It was Des Kavanagh, secretary of the PNA, who instigated the formation of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance and he served as its chairman during its 2009–2010 campaign. He recalled how "Peter McLoone appeared at the gates of Government Buildings saying how it was so important to protect 'core pay':

> "When I heard the words 'core pay' the alarm bells went off with me…No one was prepared to give me any guarantees that when Peter McLoone addressed core pay, that it included premiums and allowances. So I became extremely alarmed."

There had been speculation about premium pay following the publication of the McCarthy Report in both media and political comment – and Kavanagh observed that trade union officials from Congress were speaking with growing regularity about protecting 'core pay'. Kavanagh was thus 'absolutely sure' that other aspects of pay, including premiums and allowances, were acceptable targets as outlined by *Bord Snip*. The 24/7 Frontline Alliance organised groups from each constituency to meet with TDs in their clinics around the country, and Kavanagh noted that:

> "One of those meetings was particularly significant; with Brian Lenihan who at the time was minister for finance. He told our delegation that Cabinet have never considered nor proposed to cut premium pay, it had come to them from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions."

> "Without being totally paranoid, I looked at this in terms of some of the unions either representing staff who work a totally five day week with no exposure to weekends or night duty or have membership the vast majority of who would be five-day week people; therefore if a cut was to emerge which was impacting upon premium pay – it certainly wasn't going to impact on those unions in any significant way."

For Kavanagh there appeared to be a presumption that its members were all on "pretty good basic pay" and that the premiums were dispensable 'extras' but since premium pay existed since 1972 for member it constituted "part of our core pay; in the lives of our members and their families, their lives are influenced not by their basic pay but by their pay package."

Following a meeting in Tralee where the general secretary and president of ICTU accepted that the 24/7 Frontline Alliance had an argument in respect of their allowances and would support their position in further negotiations at government level, Joseph Dirwan, general secretary of AGSI recalled that "the successful outcome to this meeting was, for the first time, the central committee of ICTU accepted that allowances were now part of core pay. Up to then, they had given assurances in the public domain and in the media that what they perceived to be core pay was protected, then allowances could be addressed." However, Liam Doran, general secretary of INMO, described Peter McLoone, chair of the PSC as also the general secretary of a union that had a ballot paper that said "core pay will be protected". Speaking of the Tralee meeting with Congress, Doran asserted that "to get that public pronouncement was a tipping point in so far as it was an admission that they [ICTU] weren't going to get away with cutting premium pay and leaving the 24/7 Alliance people out to dry without there being serious hassle that would then come back to haunt them. A pragmatic decision was made: We had better give them the protection and try to find another way to solve the problem."

John Clinton, general secretary of POA, noted that SIPTU was a large, strong trade union with significant influence within the PSC and "when they gave that commitment it made the exercise all the more worthwhile in that it appeared there wasn't going to be an attitude that someone else would be paying the bill; or that it would be sided unfairly towards one group of workers –this was a very important event at that time." Similarly, PJ Stone, general secretary of the GRA observed that when the 24/7 delegation "met with the general secretary and president of Congress and were given an absolute assurance that they would not walk away from the concept of allowances being part of core pay – that had a significant effect." As the SIPTU representative on the 24/7 Frontline Alliance, Louise O'Reilly noted that the "assurance was always there":

> "We always understood that. It was never explicitly stated by the officers of the PSC, but we always understood that was where it was going to be anyway. There was a perception by some of the people in the 24/7 Alliance that we needed to force the hand of the PSC…premium pay was a big issue, it was for SIPTU too because our members get

premium pay; even those on low wages rely more on premium payments to bring up their wages. We would not have been able to take anything back that was a diminution of the premiums and be able to sell it to our members."

She later added: "There was a thought that somehow the PSC was at variance with the 24/7 Alliance. To be frank, I think that was down to personalities. The objectives were never different."

For those looking at the issue from outside, it was the system that was at fault. For Ingrid Miley, industry and employment correspondent of RTÉ, the notion of premium pay seemed outdated and was "based on the time when everyone went to Mass and the country shut down". She noted that some of the allowances were "really stupid" and should never have been given but once someone has it – it becomes incredibly difficult to take it away, though she noted this system was not the fault of the workers, "It wasn't the frontline worker's fault that this system emanated – they found themselves with salaries that weren't salaries! That wasn't their fault." Miley stated:

"I don't think anyone could blame them for feeling angry when those payments came under attack; but equally if the country is bust you can see where the government is coming from. It is legitimate to fight for your pay. Were they going to win and keep everything? I don't think that was going to be on the cards. It was a big difficulty for the government to establish parity of pain.

She added: "From 2009 the issue was, what is core pay? We began to have the antennae raised with any mention of pay. When Liam Doran was asked 'what is core pay?' He said, 'it's everything; premiums, overtime, the lot.' Asked what he was prepared to give, he said 'not a red cent'. If you work extra hours for core pay – has your rate decreased? If you got that assurance from Congress, and they even entertained you, already you had legitimacy. There was a legitimate grievance there – if so much of your wages is made up of these ancillary payments it was always going to be an issue."

For Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times*, ICTU's move was "a change of tack by the trade union movement…I don't think the trade union movement ever spelled out clearly to their members what that actually meant." Anne-Marie Walsh, industry correspondent of the *Irish Independent* opined that core pay was "mainly basic pay but I'm sure the unions would see it as anything that made up pay. I remember there was a debate

around at the time; particularly around those most affected by overtime rates of course. There was also a huge debate around what was pensionable; if it was pensionable there was more of a sense of core pay". Brian Sheehan, editor of *Industrial Relations News*, opined that just before the putative deal of 4 December 2009 the potential agreement around unpaid leave brought the two sides together and ended that potential split:

> "We have seen that kind of schism or divergence before and since in various manifestations. That fault line has always run through certain union relationships; it can take the form of anti-Social Partnership, it can take the form of not being part of a central core of consensus, of operating from outside where the core deal is protected by the majority there are differing ways of looking at that, you can take the behaviour of one or two particular unions and track that behaviour over 30 years and see similarities."

However, Colman Higgins, assistant editor of *Industrial Relations News*, recalled that "during the crisis, premium payments were affected in the private sector; anecdotally we heard of shift premiums being reduced. The public sector has to look to that – because ultimately the public sector is dependent on revenue from the private sector. There is some legitimacy in the argument put forward by the public sector unions but there are arguments against as well. It's not an all-or-nothing situation". Higgins stated:

> "I remember at the time there was a fear the premium pay would be cut leaving the nine-to-five workers untouched. I don't think that would ever have been a runner, really, management would have realized that would be unfair and this time as premium payments have been cut on a temporary basis; there was a consciousness that nine-to-five workers had to be seen to be making their contribution. There seemed to be a fear into December 2009 that premium payments would be hit. I don't know if they needed more than this commitment, because I wasn't directly involved. It was very much an inter-union issue that could have split the PSC; and the PSC would not want that split. That's the last thing they wanted."

As an adviser to the minister for justice and equality, Richard Moore was well-placed to evaluate how the allowances and premium payments made to gardai and prison officers were implemented:

> "In the department of justice they would have resisted any attempt to go after allowances, because these were effectively a way of paying the guards more than other civil servants.

Everyone knows that Garda allowances developed over the years as rent allowance, uniform allowance, boot allowance – to pay them extra to what the civil servants were getting. These allowances were not on the pay scales. Over the years many people asked; why there were so many allowances for the guards? It was a simple and efficient method for ministers for justice, and civil servants, to keep the guards onside. It gave them more money that was not linked to the civil service pay scales. Kept separate – it did not have a knock-on effect with the rest of the civil service. It was – and is – a well-known mechanism. The public do not necessarily understand this issue, but it is a necessary way of doing things. You have to have flexibility if you are dealing with different sections. In terms of allowances, the department of justice officials and the minister would have been very careful to preserve as much as they could, because the garda associations can be very strong – as we know from our time with the 'blue flu' and beyond. When they revolt, they can be very strong. At the end, the situation was handled with an overall pay cut – they didn't want to pick anyone off."

"The argument in government at the time would be not to pick off individual groups of workers – it's easier to cut pay across-the-board."

Pertinently, Oonagh Buckley of the department of finance noted that what the 24/7 Frontline Alliance was unaware of was that the department of finance did not actually have data on 'non-core' pay. While government may refuse to provide employees with such data it would retain a strategic advantage if they failed to inform them that they simply didn't have it. As Buckley recalled:

"The real data issue was that we didn't actually know how much we were spending on allowances and overtime; the data wasn't available. The department of finance didn't have the data to say if we drop all allowances by 50% we will save €1.2 billion – we didn't know! How could we know? We were more secure going the comprehensive pay cut route. Both the pension levy and pay cut was based on an actuarial table prepared by the department's actuary. We knew broadly speaking that so many people were being paid so much, an assumption that turned out to be correct. I am sure the dialogue within the trade union movement was difficult; we were very conscious of the 24/7 Alliance getting going. Perhaps they didn't pay enough attention to what was the capacity on the other side to implement, within the timeframe available, the reduction that was needed. We had a much better visibility on that by 2013. I don't know whether the trade unions understood this: A lot of people don't like telling the department of finance where

they are spending their money. It has been addressed now, but at that time it could be extremely difficult to get accurate data, accurately reported to you. We did consider cutting allowances in the nature of pay – but we didn't know how much that would actually save."

Similarly, Cathy Herbert was asked if there was a hint of a split between the public services committee of Congress and the 24/7 Frontline Alliance; the latter were particularly concerned with the protection of 'core pay' – and feared it exposed allowances and premium payments for unsocial hours' payments. Did this influence her thinking? She replied, "No – I'm sure it was an issue for the department of finance officials dealing with it. They would have known those issues; to us the whole thing was off the chart."

In a similar question, Colman Higgins of *Industrial Relations News* noted that while the 24/7 Alliance:

"had some influence but I don't think it was the crucial influence in terms of protecting premium pay and allowances – the crucial influence was the need of the PSC at the time to maintain public sector unity and the importance placed, at the time, on that. Government wasn't particularly fussed whether it cut premium pay or basic pay – it just wanted the savings. The agenda was to save money. By the time it came to Croke Park it seemed to be whatever the unions were prepared to do to maintain some sort of stability – 'we'll work with that'…I don't think they had an ideological agenda."

7.4 The emergence of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as a political actor

The 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance emerged as a pressure group to protect premium pay and allowances but others in the trade union movement viewed it as possibly 'elitist' or were envious that overtime and allowances were available to them. Furthermore, there was an element that saw it as establishing a rival organisation to ICTU and as such could be perceived as a potential split in the public sector trade union movement. Once the Alliance emerged in September 2009, at that time including members of the Permanent Defence Forces represented by PDFORRA, there was the distinct possibility that the emergency services of the Irish State might withdraw their labour; an unthinkable situation given that the Defence Forces can potentially fill in for all other professions – public order, firefighting and prison control – with the exception of nurses' technical medical skills.

From his point of view, Peter McLoone, general secretary of IMPACT, viewed the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as emerging because those in receipt of "add-on" allowances "felt that they needed to exist to present their presence in a very public way. What it did though was leave a lot of the backroom staff, the administrative staff, of the support staff who SIPTU represented with the sense that 'when push came to shove' their interests would be less important than the people in the frontline." In the context of the crash, McLoone noted that "we did not have the luxury of allowing that split to bother us too much; we were just aware of it. In a position like that you depend very much upon your ability to build up relationships with colleagues in other unions that are based on both trust and integrity". The 24/7 Alliance emerged because its members "sensed that reducing weekend premiums from double time or time-and-a-half on Saturdays to a lower level was a much softer touch for government that wouldn't have any implication for those who worked nine to five on Monday to Friday." Blair Horan, general secretary of CPSU, similarly observed that the Alliance emerged as a response to the tensions to make a distinction between salary and allowances:

> "The argument was that this was integral to what people's mortgage was based on. It was an inevitable defensive alliance to what could have become a mantra to just protect salary scales and forsake allowances. The teachers also had various different allowances that invariably grew up over the years as a response to particular situations that arise – done on an exceptional basis. The 24/7 Alliance prevented allowances being up for grabs – that wouldn't have been fair."

However, Shay Cody, deputy general secretary of IMPACT, asserted that the 24/7 Alliance was driven by people who weren't in Congress (for example the Psychiatric Nurses Association and the gardai). He also noted that the POA "are very loyal members of Congress; they felt they had been inveigled into something that had very dangerous implications." This inter-union tension was also highlighted by David Begg, general secretary of ICTU who noted that "the nurses were probably the most vocal force within the 24/7 Alliance; they never broke with the mainstream under Liam Doran. They kept very close and it never got out of hand. The gardaí are different because they have an association but they are not affiliated to Congress." For Jack O'Connor, president of SIPTU, the 24/7 Alliance was "a problem on the periphery; that was noise in the background". In terms of whether the 24/7 Alliance was viewed as a potentially splitting force within the trade union movement or actually highlighted the role of the public service, O'Connor asserted that he "never really thought about it to the degree that I could answer that question. I was approaching it from an entirely different place." In relation to the same point, Patricia King, then vice president of SIPTU

argued that there are as many answers as there are people; there would have been those who saw the 24/7 Alliance as having a "hierarchy of merit" but pointed out that as officials, it was best not to get involved judgementally in these things. However, for John Carr, general secretary of ICTU, "there was a feeling at the time that the people on the inner circle of ICTU, particularly in the public service, who weren't particularly disposed to premium payments, and particularly that the gardai weren't even members of ICTU. That viewpoint had emerged".

Speaking of the formation of the 24/7 Alliance, Des Kavanagh, general secretary of PNA, noted that "what helped a lot in the campaign was that because we were coming from different trade unions with different backgrounds, the executive committee came with different experiences. When we sat down to work out our campaign, there was diversity to the thinking – and that diversity was enriching of the campaign":

> "Whether it was posters on the buses or highlighting the marches or the campaign, the campaign was very striking. Its richness was the diversity of interests that were coming together – for the first time – I don't think the gardaí had been involved in any campaign involving other non-garda groups. The POA were involved with Congress but never outside it with the PNA or GRA. We have traditionally worked alone; perhaps with the INMO, but this was the first time we were involved with a broader group. That diversity enriched the whole campaign."

For Joseph Dirwan, general secretary of AGSI, momentum flowed from the 24/7 Alliance into the political field: "I know from government ministers subsequently that they became aware of who, for the first time, were frontline public servants – emergency workers; gardaí, nurses, firemen, from that point of view it did feed in politically."

While the potency of Alliance could be viewed as being a well-crafted perception that may never have been matched by physical action, Liam Doran [INO/INMO] still recalled that it "played a very good, strong hand and a very clever hand":

> "The demonstration down O'Connell Street was perfect – it was poetry in motion; the uniform frontline saying 'we have had enough leave our allowances alone'. There is no doubt about it, the imagery, the perception, the political sensitivity towards the uniformed frontliners coming together 'to give me a bit of grief' was very influential. It worked – despite all the ructions that happened down here in meetings – the job was

done well. While our members might not ever realise it, without it double-time on a Sunday wouldn't exist. Full stop. "

"But fear or foreboding are not necessarily the words I would use for the imagery created by the 24/7 Alliance in either the political elite or the general public."

Similarly, John Clinton, general secretary of POA, contended that the first benefit to be seen by the 24/7 Alliance was that it gave a different perspective on the public service. He held that there had been a perception that the public service "operated eight-to-five from Monday to Friday [with everyone] on reasonable pay, good holidays, huge pensions, Rolls-Royce terms and conditions of employment":

"The 24/7 Alliance said hold on a minute – we also have this other set of workers that are stuck in A&Es, ambulances and police cars, working in prisons, 365 days a year on a 24 hour roster. It was very good in that context to get that message out there. As a fully-fledged trade union and a member of the PSC, we never saw there being a threat from the 24/7 Alliance to what we were trying to do at the table of the PSC because we were still in there on behalf of prison officers, trying to protect the pay of prison officers as best we could."

"Another good thing about the 24/7 Alliance was that during the December talks in Government Buildings, Peter McLoone the then chairperson of the PSC commented that there was flooding in the midlands; he saw the people out working on the Saturday and Sunday putting out the sandbags, and the emergency service workers helping people whose homes and businesses had flooded. He started to show a slight differential between core pay."

For his part, PJ Stone, general secretary of the GRA, noted that the 24/7 Alliance "certainly had the required effect in terms of government thinking. Nobody saw this coming in respect of the Garda Síochána, an entity governed by Discipline Regulations, joining up with trade unionists. At the time it sent shockwaves". For Louise O'Reilly of SIPTU, "uniform people are very visible, and it was a very effective lobby…It brought in groups that traditionally we would not have had much dealing with, like the gardaí and defence forces, that was the big deal . . . this brought in new groups and might have made the establishment sit up."

From a media perspective, Ingrid Miley, RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent, asserted that there existed more empathy with the emergency services than with the administrative worker:

> "That is frequently unfair; they do a job that has to be done. Take the passport office – all they did was work-to-rule but suddenly there was chaos. Something new did happen though. It was very good from the point of view of the emergency services [as a working title for the 24/7 Alliance] but it was a negative for the trade union movement as a whole, because it created a fissure in the traditional monolith of public service unions. The one voice that gave them strength fragmented; though not on the first campaign, because Croke Park happened before the fissure could become a fracture."

According to Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times*, the 24/7 Alliance emerged as a reaction to a story in that paper that suggested, "based on a briefing by very senior people within the trade union movement", that if the government moved to cut pay – then core pay should be protected but non-core pay could be "up for grabs". This, according to Wall, set the 'cat among the pigeons' because the arguments among the groups that rely on non-core pay – the gardaí, the nurses, prison officers – believed that the stage was being set by union leaders that represented people who didn't rely on non-core pay – to surrender other people's earnings:

> "On foot of that was the first public manifestation of divisions within the trade union movement on strategy where it was going, then you saw the first emergence of the 24/7 Alliance in that regard. Certainly they were a new force, I think they were a fairly loose alliance . . . of people who shared the same interests at that particular time."

For her part, Anne-Marie Walsh, industry correspondent of the *Irish Independent* viewed the Alliance as "factions within the trade union movement . . . it was a splinter, a division within the union movement; everybody looking after their own interests." However, Colman Higgins, assistant editor of *Industrial Relations News*, viewed the Alliance as a new force in the industrial relations landscape that had some political effect:

> "The novel element was certain types of workers across different sectors within the public service were joined together having identified a common interest, which is premium payments for 24/7 working patterns rather than the traditional approach within the public service, which was to focus on what was happening in your own sector. The most

influential force within the public service, and throughout this period and afterwards, was ICTU and the PSC. It certainly did not rival the PSC in terms of influence. It ended up being a temporary phenomenon . . . It wasn't huge; but it certainly was an important force, but one can exaggerate its importance as well."

In terms of the Alliance influencing the news agenda, media academic Dr Anthony Cawley observed that the predominant news sources did not alter dramatically, the main sources still tended to be economists, government officials and the trade union hierarchy. If members of the Alliance or ordinary trade union members were quoted at all it was in the context of a protest somewhere rather than in the context of higher level national policy discourse or national negotiations. In his research Cawley did not see the Alliance as new framers of debate because the main debates around public sector protections, employment numbers, employment conditions, salaries, still tended to be framed at higher level trade union level versus government versus industry representative. As Cawley noted in an interview, "the 24/7 Alliance would not have broken through to that higher-level institutional discourse that was the most important framing of that debate by the news media of public sector and private sector."

7.5 Summing up – collective response

The interviews suggest that the trade union movement had identified the looming economic crisis before government – whose 'soft landing' message had been relayed across all departments. The trade union movement had correctly identified that this was not sustainable; but also had no solutions to propagate; instead mustering a defensive strategy to prevent widespread job losses and the outsourcing of sectors within the public service that could be privatised. But the trade unions had no solutions to offer despite being at the heart of Social Partnership for several decades; the collective knowledge of alternative economics had not been accrued. Cathy Herbert was at the centre of strategic decision-making at the Department Finance; she identified that the unions had been quickly relegated to tactical decisions of industrial relations.

Interviewees were in general agreement that the public-private sector conflict was cultivated; but opinions are divided along partisan lines on whether it was a deliberate government strategy, an ideological media construct or a result of news values. Miley alone suggested that the divide between the sectors was genuine and long-standing within the trade union movement and was "dampened down" during the Partnership process. There is no doubt

that the divide was real and damaging for a wrong-footed trade union movement; while the government could benefit from such circumstances retrospectively, to stoke such detrimental social division would have been a high risk strategy in a national crisis. Privately owned media has promoted special interests rather than public services for most of their history, and the economic crisis provided an unrivalled opportunity to capitalise on this narrative.

Only now has it become apparent that the department of finance could not calculate how much would be saved by cutting premium pay and allowances versus cutting core pay across the board. The trade union movement could only assume that this would not prevent them legislating towards this regardless; allowances and premium pay were easily portrayed as 'perks' by a truculent media. There existed an initial wobble within the trade union movement when the initial objective to protect 'core pay' (not premium, unsocial hours' pay and sector-specific allowances) was vocalised leading to the formation of the 24/7 Alliance in the autumn of 2009. The Alliance opposed pay cuts in all forms; but especially the concept of unsocial hours' premiums and allowances within a grade that had been hard won in past pay negotiations. Ultimately this was resolved in a unilaterally imposed pay cut across the board for all public servants and copper-fastened in subsequent reforms of working practices and conditions in the national Croke Park agreement of 2010.

Whether the trade union movement was split by the private-public divide, and again within the public sector following the establishment of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance again sparked partisan views. Whether the assurances from ICTU to protect premium pay and allowances healed a potential rift – or whether the 24/7 Frontline Alliance refocussed public opinion on the essential aspects of public service in a functioning society divided opinion among interviewees. While this chapter outlined the initial response of the public sector trade unions to the unfolding economic crisis the subsequent chapters reveal how the unions attempted to implement their strategic and tactical plans to protect their members' interests directly through a diminishing social partnership and indirectly through political communication to mobilise support and win over public opinion.

Chapter 8: INTERVIEW 2: THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

This chapter is the second of three that outline the findings from the most detailed set of interviews carried out to date with those at the forefront of dealing with the economic crash of 2008. As with the previous chapter it counterpoints the views of four distinct groups of actors – trade union officials, communication specialists, specialist journalists and government advisors – all of whom recount their interpretations of the events that engulfed the state from 2008 onward. This chapter outlines the testimony of these actors in relation to (1) the various proposals to reduce public spending without implementing a pay cut; (2) the collapse of trade union – government talks in December 2009; and (3) the trade union movement's response to the collapse of social partnership.

8.1 Proposals to reduce public spending without implementing a pay cut

Prior to the collapse of trade union / government talks in December 2009, both sides had proposed numerous mechanisms to reduce public spending, without recourse to a pay cut. The trade unions advocated for a raft of measures to avoid a pay cut – including a wealth tax and a proposal to spread the economic measures over a longer time period so that economic growth may make them unnecessary. As outlined by Peter McLoone of IMPACT, many public servants earn less than €40,000 per year. Initially the trade unions attempted to cushion people in this cohort of earners. However, the level of reduction required was too expansive and the unions realised reductions had to be spread lower and differently [if they were to avoid redundancies]. As recalled by McLoone, "the strategy was to try to avoid people who provide public services to have to deal with reductions in their income, certainly in the basic salaries, but the scale of the problem was so big at that stage that we eventually got to a point where we had tried various devices to see if we could come up with a consensus; an agreement that we could go to ballot."

As the unions had agreed that job losses were a 'red line' issue, pay cuts or tax increases appeared to be the only options available to the government. For this part, David Begg of ICTU argued that a longer timescale for reforms might make it more palatable for all:

> "We knew the public finances had to be corrected but the trade union view was the need to take a longer time to do it; to allow economic growth to do some of the heavy lifting, so we don't want to front-load it. On the other hand, the government-side analysis, supported by the troika, was that a 'short, sharp shock' was needed – if

dragged out too long the people would get upset. That wasn't the correct analysis, quite frankly. If you read Ashoka Mody and others who have written about it since, it was a really bad mistake."

Similarly, Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU noted that the unions "had argued for a different strategic approach, which would have stretched out the adjustment over a longer time period so that economic growth could do some of the heavy lifting; the second thing was a fairer distribution of the burden – between the better-off and the less-well-off. When that was utterly rejected it was inevitable that pay cuts and welfare cuts were the only logical corollary." For her part, Patricia King of SIPTU, asserted that the unions "never accepted pay cuts as inevitable. We had political decisions presumably developed on policy developers' advice. We never accepted that should have happened; we kept the industrial umbrella up at all times, but we also knew the value of trying to negotiate and curb the worst elements of the neoliberal agenda to do this." This is supported by John Carr of the INTO who recalled that, "initially we thought we could enter into a solidarity pact with the government. In our discussions at the end of 2008, we were demanding a social-solidarity-type pact, and that all workers were protected in that package. Initially, pay cuts did not seem inevitable. We were resisting – we were prepared to look at pay cuts as long as they were fair and equitable across the board."

However, from the perspective of industry and employment correspondents, pay cuts seemed inevitable from the start. Martin Wall of *The Irish Times* recalled a conversation with a senior government advisor shortly after the state joined the euro, in which the advisor noted that now the state could no longer devalue its currency, 'internal devaluation', which was explained as pay cuts for the public service, would be the key government mechanism for dealing with economic crises. As Wall put it:

"In 2008, the last social partnership agreement was made just after Lehman's [Brothers] collapsed; six weeks later they were talking about cuts. Everybody knew there would be more. Once discretionary spending is gone; what is left is compulsory redundancies . . . you could close schools and hospitals but neither of those was going to happen. Therefore you are left with pay, once all the other options have been eliminated pay was always on the table. Tax hikes for the wealthy were proposed but I don't think that was a political reality. Public sector pay was too large an amount."

For her part, Anne-Marie Walsh of the *Irish Independent* sensed that pay cuts were inevitable:

> "In the public sector I felt there was no other option. I believed the government was bankrupt at that stage and like any other employer who is bankrupt you have to take drastic measures."

However, Brian Sheehan of *Industrial Relations News* did not see pay cuts as inevitable:

> "because the pension levy had been introduced early in 2009. It had been readjusted to benefit the lower-paid. Certainly trade unionists' idea was to prevent pay cuts. Reform and other changes would prevent pay cuts at all cost – if pay cuts were on the agenda then social partnership was over…The aim, fairly quickly, was to keep social partnership and achieve the savings within that context, while at the same time pay cuts were a 'red line' issue."

From a government advisory position, the ways to reduce public spending came thick and fast. As Oonagh Buckley of the department of finance noted, "the four things that were introduced in the spring of 2009; the pension levy, career break, ISER (incentivised scheme for early retirement) and recruitment moratorium were radical in their own right; they weren't radical enough because they didn't do the job". When Buckley moved to the pay and pension section of the department it became "clear that we were doing quite savage things to people":

> "The government spends its money on poor and vulnerable people; people who are old, sick or disabled. When the government has to stop spending money, those are the people who get hurt. Many years later when the Cabinet memos were sought after the ten-year rule, they were sent to me for review, one of them was a memorandum asking all government departments how we were going to get to reduce the pay bill. There was a very radical list of things that we would do; and we did every one of them except compulsory mandatory redundancies. It was the only thing we did not do. We did everything else; we cut sick pay, annual leave, and numbers: a hugely long list of radical measures."

As Buckley recalled, compulsory redundancies were an "absolute red line" for the trade unions:

"If people had 'tenure', we never went there. This was one of the things the unions couldn't allow. However people did lose their jobs. We weren't renewing fixed-term contracts. The commentators lit on that – 'it's so unfair when loads of other people are losing their jobs, that public servants don't lose their jobs'. It amazed me that people wanted public servants to lose their jobs. They never really examined how we were going to run the public service without the public servants."

8.2 The collapse of pay talks in December 2009

Most of the interviewees viewed 4 December 2009 as the pivotal day for union influence on public policy. On that day pay talks between government and the trade union movement collapsed and for many this signalled the end of social partnership as it had been loosely defined since 1987. Consensus was not universal, but the collapse of the talks led to a unilaterally imposed pay cut that was not negotiated. As a seminal moment in Irish public sector industrial relations it is not disputed though the reasons for it are. Many interviewees believed it was a direct result of a specific media interview; however, others point to this broadcast interview as being merely a catalyst for what was inevitable.

For his part, Peter McLoone of IMPACT, mourned the loss of social partnership, because it had given the trade union movement "a seat at the negotiating table – where the value of engaging with us would have been recognised. That was lost, and until that is restored in some form then there will be a problem". The loss of social partnership has, McLoone concluded, left a void:

"We are stuck right now outside the tent. I don't think it suits government as the people who are ultimately responsible for the organisation and delivery of public services; it doesn't really work for them in my experience and it's not working for the unions either. Because that's what creates the common 'meeting of minds'; unions who are interested in pay and conditions and unions who represent public servants should also be interested in public services and to work with government for the public good."

For his part, Blair Horan of the CPSU, noted that "the unpaid leave scenario at the end of 2009 failed because Brian Lenihan would not accept it. Traditionally, in social partnership or public sector pay talks, it was the department of the Taoiseach that had a big influence regardless that the department of finance held the purse strings. The department of the taoiseach could usually force things, but Lenihan wasn't allowing this; probably because

of his personality and moreover, the scale of the crisis. Lenihan reasserted control. The deal broke down." However, Shay Cody of IMPACT, observed that in the period under review, all the talks were unsuccessful. Throughout 2008 into 2009 several attempts were made to negotiate cost savings on an agreement basis; which gave rise at the end of 2009 to the idea of twelve unpaid days by which, as Cody noted:

> "Workers would be laid off – very much the model in the private sector in a downturn. There would be a compulsory shutdown or short working as a way of taking money out of the system. This became ridiculed as 'The 12 days of Christmas'. There was an internal coup in Fianna Fáil, and our reading was that [Taoiseach] Brian Cowen was heading in this direction but Brian Lenihan was probably reflecting the 'that's too easy' view and in effect overturned those negotiations at Cabinet. The unions were told there was no deal. The government then universally legislated for the pension levy and subsequently to cut pay, roughly by 7% each."

David Begg of ICTU affirmed that once the social partnership model had collapsed there was no longer a role for the leadership of ICTU in terms of collective bargaining. the Public Services Committee operates under the ICTU banner but has its own officers separate from the general secretary and president.

> "We were still headline news, but in reality once the crisis hit the government folded very quickly and panicked. There was an effort made to save the social partnership model that involved the public sector unions engaging in negotiation – but to the shock of all who participated in it on both sides it simply collapsed because the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party weren't having any of it; having been 'dumped on' by the media, Cowen was on his last legs, he didn't have the authority to carry them with him. Despite the fact that we all thought we had a deal, which unfortunately was misrepresented in the media. It was presented in the media that the country was going to 'hell in a handcart' and 'these people want more leave'. They never conveyed that the leave was unpaid and that this was a money-saving measure."

In terms of terminology, the term 'unpaid leave' was preferred to 'twelve-day lay-off' because as Begg explained "lay-off has a certain social connotation to it; a little like people who have worked all their lives don't like going on the dole; a lay-off is what happens on building sites, not to senior government professionals. I don't think it would have been good from that point of view". But, as Begg asserted, this distinction seemed to have been used against the trade union movement:

In fairness the unions would have had a reasonable expectation that this would have been fairly represented. I'm not naming names, but some of the people who were putting out this line should have known better, because they were professional journalists working in the area. It didn't happen; there was a parliamentary meeting where there was an in-house rebellion, probably against Cowen – much to the shock of all the officials who had pretty much done the deal – and on our side as well.

Begg noted that that after the collapse of social partnership talks on 4 December 2009 the Croke Park deal was "actually the reincarnation of the deal that collapsed" – only six months later; when things had started to calm down a little bit. As Begg put it:

"In that sense, it would have been hard to imagine that once the parameters of the deal had been largely established that it would simply be let go, because anyone looking at it would have thought to keep a sense of balance and order about this. If you have worked out, more or less, what would settle something you wouldn't want to abandon it altogether. The collateral damage of the collapse of the first talks was actually the social partnership agreement. It was completely gone at this stage. What happened in the second round was simply collective bargaining for the public service. In all fairness social partnership probably wouldn't have survived because there were quite differing perspectives from the trade union side and the government side on what the economy needed at that time. The government in 2009 had begun to embrace the austerity measures that were exacerbated by the Troika when they arrived in 2010; that was a completely different analysis than the one held by trade unions."

For his part, Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU, felt at the time that the collapse represented the last remnant of any kind of social dialogue:

"As it happened, a limited degree of it was resurrected in what became the Croke Park Agreement…I don't know where the idea of the twelve days off came from…You can see the rationale for it – not to cut pay, everybody got twelve days unpaid leave. It was a lay-off. If the economy improved productivity could be negotiated over the ensuing year. In terms of the alternatives that were available to us it was a far better option than pay cuts. We understood that it wasn't just about cutting public service pay – it was really about setting the base on which to launch a major assault on pay in the private sector. That's what it was really about. That was why it was so vigorously opposed in the media and by Fianna Fáil backbenchers; a campaign directed by the then minister for

finance Brian Lenihan against taoiseach Brian Cowen…Brian Lenihan was preoccupied with preserving the economic sovereignty of the country."

For John Carr of the INTO, the twelve days unpaid leave would not have worked as "even within ICTU it was regarded as a pay cut by another means". He said:

"We tried to get a deal, but once it was imposed that was it. We had to react to the imposition; at the time it was 'shock' 'horror' that the government didn't wait and try to get agreement."

From a communication perspective, Bernard Harbor, head of communications at IMPACT, observed that "the hysteria against public servants by the commentariat – and journalists more generally – peaked and then it abated. This coincided with the failed pay talks where we thought we had averted the second round of pay cuts through unpaid leave. I was advised to use the term 'laid off', but the judgement was that we could not do that because of the internal audience":

"It's a fact of life that these things have to go through ballots as well – the use of such terminology in front of the cameras agreeing to a 'lay off' may well not have been appreciated. We are talking to different audiences simultaneously, the public and our own membership. The '12 days' was catastrophic in terms of PR in the end; the phrase was brilliantly wound up by Mark Fielding of ISME as *The 12 Days of Christmas*. The story quickly became political rather than purely industrial relations."

Frank Connolly, head of communications at SIPTU concurred:

"It was a political disaster for the trade union movement, an economic disaster for workers – and it was a PR disaster for the trade union movement because of the way it was handled; they should have waited until the deal was tied down before anyone went out on the airwaves promoting it. It was promoted in a way that was badly handled because it was promoted – and concentrated on – days off for some peculiar reason rather than the punishments [or lay-offs] they were getting."

Similarly, Brian Sheehan of *Industrial Relations News* argued that for the twelve days proposal to be "presented as a serious proposal it should have been fronted by government and the unions together . . . [along with] a collective and stage-managed response to the

media in a series of briefings of 'what we are doing'. Even then it probably wouldn't have worked – but without that it had no chance. It was hopeless."

From a media point of view, Ingrid Miley, RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent noted that "some trade unionists came out too early declaring victory in our time. The backbench TDs, particularly from Fianna Fáil started asking 'are you joking? We are shedding jobs'." As recalled by Miley:

> "The backbenchers came under pressure; and that week there was a battle between the department of An Taoiseach who wanted peace at any cost and the department of finance who questioned this. Lenihan prevailed, because Moody's downrated us – at that point Finance came into the ascendancy and by friday it [the agreement] had broken down. That week, the social partnership/department of finance axis was in play. They weren't going to wear the usual massaged situation that was a feature of the Bertie [Ahern] era. It couldn't be done, the country was in peril; we were a year away from the IMF having to come and bail us out."

Equally, Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times* recalled that it was the inability of the trade union movement to use the terms 'lay-offs' that caused most tension:

> "In hindsight, if they had been prepared to use that language it might have been different – in terms of backbenchers – in essence people would be removed from the payroll for twelve days over a number of years. They were 'lay offs', but the unions wouldn't use this language and as a result there was backbench anger. The teachers did not help by going on Pat Kenny's radio show [*Today with Pat Kenny*] and indicating that those days couldn't be in the school holidays and would have to be in the school term. That didn't help either. Backbench TDs said they wouldn't vote for the budget if this followed; but ultimately it was deeply opposed by people within the department of finance. The department of the taoiseach was proposing it; the department of finance were opposed to it. As journalists walking down Merrion Street, you could actually get two versions of diametrically opposed government policy depending on which end of the street you were standing on. The government ultimately rejected those proposals from the union side and the second pay cut was implemented. If the unions' objective was to avoid pay cuts – then it wasn't successful; if the objective was to avoid compulsory redundancies – then it was."

To Wall's mind the department of the taoiseach wanted to deal with the crisis through social partnership but department of finance had another view: "we now know from Cabinet papers released that the department of finance were seeking compulsory redundancies. The cultures of the departments were different". Similar to Miley, Wall observed that much of the tension sprang from premature trade union pronouncements:

> "In many ways the unions were their own authors of this. We were right in the middle of negotiations and there were huge divisions within government."

> "While negotiations were going on a senior union representative went on *RTÉ SixOne News* on the Tuesday night and said they were going to do this, the following morning the *Irish Independent* had a story that Brian Cowen 'caved in to the unions'. That was based primarily on the interview by the public service unions on the *SixOne News*. I am not saying they over-egged the pudding because I don't know what state the negotiations were in at that point, as they can ebb and flow. The indication was that the government were prepared to do a deal."

Wall is considered in greater depth in this section because of his detailed analysis of the events of 1 December 2009 through to the collapse of the pay talks on 4 December that left many trade unionists ashen faced, and began the scramble for media access to outline their respective cases to key audiences – especially uncertain memberships who then faced unilateral pay cuts untampered by shorter working. Instead of 'lay offs' public servants now faced diminished wages for hours worked. As Wall recalled:

> "There had also been a Cabinet meeting on the tuesday morning, Brian Lenihan had left the meeting and gone to Brussels in the afternoon, and was in Brussels when the SixOne interview happened and in the aftermath people very close to the minister were, in essence, scrambling around to see if things had changed since they had left the Cabinet meeting. In that interview the indication given by the public service unions was that they were on the brink of a deal. Whether they were or weren't, I don't know, but they claimed they were. That sparked concern in the department of finance, and the headline in the Irish Independent the following day prompted the backlash from people on the backbenches of Fianna Fáil who were unhappy about the concept in the first place."

As Wall recalled this, backlash focused political minds:

> "It would have been a huge issue as to whether they could get the budget through the following week; the unions were back in the following day and I recall getting a phone call from someone saying, 'this is all off.' When they left Government Buildings later that day, some of the senior trade unionists appeared absolutely stunned. One person looked like they had been slapped. Traumatised. They had 25 years of deals being done, and there had never been a stage where they were just told 'no'. The whole purpose of social partnership is that nobody ever lost everything. There was no softening of the blow. That was it. Whether they had over-egged the pudding or whether government policy had changed in the interim – where you talk about the media's role in it; that cannot be divorced from the *SixOne* interview."

Anne-Marie Walsh, industry correspondent of the *Irish Independent* concurred:

> "We knew there was disquiet over it. It had been agreed to – well that's what the unions were led to believe, and I don't doubt what they were saying, I have no reason to doubt what they were saying. Then it was pulled from under them. They were shocked. They came out and you were seeing people who are not used to being shocked – from my time in this game I know that things tend to be well flagged and choreographed: I saw some individuals who the wind had been taken out of their sails – I'd never seen them shocked before to that extent. People like Peter McLoone, Tom Geraghty, walking out of Government Buildings.

"We had word at that stage; you know the way we hear things before they are officially announced, but it was very tight. It was a case of they had been in Government Buildings, I had been following them all ashen-faced over to Tom Geraghty's office in the PSEU, going into a small room upstairs, there was a silence – there were political correspondents as well as industrial relations correspondents – we were then told 'it's gone'. 'It's not happening, there's going to be a pay cut'. I remember being shocked even though we had got a hint at that stage; there had been whisperings. The rug was pulled from under them and there was going to be a pay cut."

For his part, Brian Sheehan, editor of *Industrial Relations News* declared that "social partnership did die on 4 December 2009; there's no question . . . what came afterwards wasn't as different, and was shaped and influenced by the social partnership structures. How the public service agreements were managed on both sides were very similar to how the partnership agreements were managed on the public sector side. When they were threatened the wagons would circle, and the system would react to deal with problems".

From the perspective of government advisors Oonagh Buckley of the department of finance observed that trade union – government relations "became very bad over the '12 days of Christmas' talks, the failure of those talks was a real blow because we came very close to an agreement, but the government decided that they couldn't proceed with that. Even then, there were enough relationships built up over many years of social partnership, people knew each other and knew the position the other side was in – there was enough of a relationship to restore it and get back into Croke Park". As Buckley noted:

> "We were so close to a deal but we didn't have all the money on the table, we didn't yet have all the money that we needed. Even the short-term working proposal to form the basis of the vast majority of the savings wasn't enough – yet. We had another €0.25 billion to make up; we thought we might have to get that through a pay cut to senior staff. But we never actually got to talk about that. We didn't get to that point because the government collectively decided that they didn't believe there was enough in the deal to give enough certainty for budgetary policy."

> "Had the minister for finance been strongly in favour he could have got it through. There was this mistaken impression that teachers were going to get additional holidays. In reality what we were going to do was make everybody take two days unpaid leave between Christmas and New Year, every year for five years. A two-day 'lay off' effectively each year."

However, Buckley observed that the term "lay off' was never used as "from the perspective of the trade unions it was difficult to do."

> "It was framed extremely badly – and there were two really unfortunate incidents; where the leader of the nurses' union said something really aggravating in an interview and Bernard Harbor came out to try and fix that situation and said something that went down extremely badly with the backbenchers. I remember Brian Lenihan was in Brussels at the time and was upset with this news. It kind of came apart. The problem was the different sets of audiences for the messaging; the unions were trying to message their own members because they had ballots to get through, and missing the point that the government had to deliver this very difficult message back to their own members to get the Budget across the line."

Cathy Herbert, advisor at the department of finance noted that finance minister Brian Lenihan had not been involved in social partnership at any stage, and he hadn't been invested in that process. Typically, decisions made at social partnership would have been relayed back by civil servants – as a *fait accompli*. But, as Herbert noted:

> "How could you sell a deal like that to the rest of the country? It was very important that we kept people together – that was a significant achievement of the Irish people. They stayed together and they bore this huge level of austerity without social unrest. It was important that there was a parity of suffering. There is a feeling that the public sector is more protected than the private sector, you get that still. It was important for everyone to understand that everybody was giving up something. The idea of the unpaid leave wasn't going to cut it.
>
> "I think people would have been appalled if that had been accepted. I think there would have been a lot of criticism. It was the department of the taoiseach that wanted it. They were in control of it, and then the department of finance took back a lot of control after social partnership."

On whether a premature trade union announcement on RTÉ *SixOne News* that a deal had been done caused concern in government circles, Herbert confirmed that Brian Lenihan was in Brussels at the time and that he telephoned Martin Wall [industry correspondent of *The Irish Times*] "to ask what had happened." While the following day's headlines – particularly that of the *Irish Independent* [*Cowen caves in on pay cuts*] caused anger within government, according to Herbert "Our big concern was firstly the unaffordability; and secondly how could you keep the country together? Of course internationally it would have been a big thing."

8.3 The trade union response to the collapse of social partnership

The withdrawal of labour or services is the ultimate industrial power of trade unions; and the threat is often enough to convince the employers to modify imposed measures or influence negotiations. This implicit threat had been present throughout the crisis, but there was only one day of actual mass strike in the public sector, further days were postponed awaiting the outcome of the pay talks. While an all-out general strike might have been expected, many individual workers had been party to the borrowing of 'cheap' money in the boom years and many younger workers had large mortgages on properties in negative equity. Wide scale industrial action may only have created further debt and possible job losses. All

these considerations weighed heavily on trade union leaders as they regrouped following the collapse of talks in December 2009. As recalled by Peter McLoone:

> "Following the collapse of the talks we had stoppages, one-day protests, but I'm not sure that our membership were satisfied to go on indefinitely with stoppages with no sense of where this was going to lead to. You had the options, as in Greece, where there was rioting – but you would have handed control of your union to people who were extreme, who were militants. This is a relatively small country. Meeting people who had worked in factories or been in businesses closed down. There was a need for people who worked in the public services to be sensitive to some extent to the ills of others.

Speaking about the different trade union responses he said: "The strategies that people employed from time to time are designed to do the maximum damage on the public with the minimum damage to themselves; that's fine in a one-off situation. The question you ask yourself is: is that sustainable?

> "You have to have a sense that services are there to serve the public. Although you have an awful lot of ammunition, theoretically anyway, you always have to balance that against the fact that you are trying to encourage the public to be supportive of public service provision."

Similar thoughts exercised the mind of Blair Horan of the CPSU when it was decided to undertake industrial action within the passport office:

> "We started a work-to-rule in the passport office. I'm sure this mortified some of my colleagues. If you are in a dispute, you use the best weapon you have…In essence, we picked the one area where we could have the most impact…I knew we were going to get pilloried, but was prepared to stick with it. It ultimately affected people who had forgotten to renew their passports. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs; not to be callous about it."

In terms of strategy, Shay Cody of IMPACT, noted the importance of 'guerrilla war' tactics:

> "There was a view that a fragmented trade union movement was never going to be able to wage a successful war – yes there was some value in individual disputes. The CPSU action in the passport office was one of these. One particularly effective dispute was

refusing to make financial data available in the health system. It wasn't a front-page issue, but was beginning to grind to a halt one of the most sensitive areas for government. This was a government in a crisis and one of the things they needed to know was their expenditure lines – especially in health which is huge and often out of control: Refusing to make that available got them into a vulnerable spot."

However, as Cody noted, such moves were more 'scare tactics' tactic than an outright withdrawal of labour:

"We all knew there was going to be a restoration of having to provide financial data to government, but it got us into a situation where they couldn't continue to impose unilaterally because we could hurt them back. Members were mobilised in key areas; with a view to create a negotiation – as opposed to stopping it happening. We began to put a lot more resources into bringing them (workers) together; training – and just communicating the message; we are in retreat but this army wants to find a piece of high ground that we can defend, and when circumstances change we will seek to claw back some of the things that we lost. Such military terminology could not be written down, but we used it in all of our verbal communications. We could not have it in the media that 'senior union official uses military terminology.' We recognised lines we could not hold; but recognised ones that we could seek to hold."

Most strategic terminology has its origins in the language of warfare and military. Trade unions often use it but, as noted earlier, are reluctant to use it in a public sphere. But within the interviews conducted for this thesis, the terminology was frequent in its use. As David Begg of ICTU put it, "the public service view was that they were in a situation where, please forgive the military metaphor, the enemy were coming at them in waves and they were standing with their backs to the swamp; the only thing they could do was to dig a trench and defend as much as they could until circumstances allowed for a counter-attack."

While many on the Left, had long advocated public ownership of banks and the collapse of neoliberalism, the economic crash did not present much room for manoeuvre – quite the opposite. As Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU, put it:

"Certainly by the summer of 2009, those of us in the leadership of SIPTU had come to the conclusion that it wasn't about the collapse of neoliberalism, which is what Lehman's represented, and replacing it with a more egalitarian system. I had come to

realise globally the Right had got their act together, and that it was now about a rear-guard strategy – about building what fortifications you could and organising behind them, to hold as much ground as you could, in the hope that if capitalism got another bit of time that we would be able to retake that ground. It was about an orderly retreat versus a rout."

In O'Connor's view there existed "a combination of very powerful forces against us. People on the Right in the establishment understood that. They wanted to succeed in ensuring that we didn't do that – and they used the people on the ultra-Left very effectively, who targeted us and described us as 'quislings' – and played into their hands." Despite this, O'Connor asserted that the trade union movement "ended up with three fortifications":

"The first one was the protocol in the private sector, which wasn't at all controversial; it was basically that the terms of the agreement that had been concluded in the Autumn of 2008 wouldn't really be pursued – but equally we wouldn't have the outright assault on wages and that collective bargaining agreements would be respected. That wasn't at all controversial; private sector workers had a very keen understanding. They were experiencing the reality of it in job losses, what they saw in their factories. "The second one ultimately became the Croke Park Agreement in the public service – and the subsequent agreements. The third one was preventing Fine Gael from forming a government on their own. That meant sacrificing the Labour Party. The Labour Party was not in any ideological state to go into that government. Even a socialist party well-equipped ideologically would have lost whole swathes of its support in such an administration."

For her part, Patricia King of SIPTU, recalled "having shocking arguments with the most senior public official we dealt with in relation to the retention of jobs. His answer was 'we are going to cut jobs' and I said 'you will never cut a job – the day you make somebody compulsory redundant is the day the trade union movement will take everybody out'.

King said:

"The option was always out there to start burning cars and stuff like that – there were big demos – and we did have public demonstrations of our disdain for what the political system was now going to bring upon people. But simultaneously we now had a pragmatic forum, where we said, "can we curtail some of this?" That's really what happened.

She subsequently added:

> "They were going after the lowest paid, the most vulnerable, they wanted to take them out and outsource them with what they would describe as 'lower labour costs'. They wanted to sack them; our union at the time represented most of them. There were other professional groups that may have regarded themselves as more secure but my job in there was to make certain that if you touch one of them and their jobs – we'll show you what the movement can do. We won that – and they backed off. They retained the jobs, but there was a price for that."

For John Carr of the INTO, pragmatism was the order of the day:

> "Initially members reacted strongly to the cutbacks as trade unions normally do… Within the union itself you would have had a strong reaction and a lot of pressure to fight to the bitter end. The other side of the argument was that the country was in bad shape and if we don't do something the whole economy is going to collapse and we could all be worse off. It was trying to find a balance between accepting a deal that would hopefully rectify itself after a number of years – and build that into the deal – or keep fighting and the economy might collapse and everyone would suffer as a result."

However, for Liam Doran of the INMO, the trade unions were not as blunt in protecting public sector workers as they might have been:

> "A watershed for the trade union movement was the eviction from Government Buildings when the twelve days unpaid leave was rejected. Some of my colleagues would view this as the nadir of their working lives. I was more philosophical – I never felt the wider trade union leadership saw the height of the wall put in front of us: the Bord Snip Report, media negativity, the public finances – which were legitimately problematic. We couldn't guarantee we could solve this by 'jaw-jaw' ¬– there might have to be a bit of 'war-war'. I don't think they ever got this. I think public servants in this country were subject to an absolute five years of total negative imagery and I don't think the public service unions have done half enough to be unapologetically thick-necked in saying 'bullology'! Stop apologizing for representing people who have jobs for life."

In terms of a threat to the government, Padraig Yeates of the 24/7 Alliance noted that a pivotal movement occurred when PDFORRA was ordered by the government not to attend the Alliance conference and the officers obeyed that order by not attending the conference:

> "That was the one that scared people a bit. They (military personnel) weren't allowed to strike or affiliate with Congress, and they were looking at ways around this, like the GRA and AGSI, through Europe. The idea that the army might not be available – because even if the gardaí go on strike the army can pick up the tab and keep order. They were barred from attending conferences. That was a key moment. Once PDFORRA decided not to take on the government, it was reassuring [for the government]."

From a media perspective, Ingrid Miley, RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent, drew a distinction between the recession of the 1970s and the 2008 economic crash in terms of the likelihood of prolonged industrial action:

> "If you look at the rhetoric of strikes in the 1970s, what's different about now? Debt. In the 1970s and 1980s the banks were responsible and kept people constrained within levels of debt they could afford; they weren't in mortgages they couldn't afford. They could afford a month, maybe, without making a repayment or having income coming in because of a dispute. But now? With banks poised to repossess and credit cards maximized; the private debt overhang in every house in Ireland made it highly unlikely that people were going to strike."

As Miley noted, in 2008 there was the realisation that union members had other options to indicate displeasure at government policy:

> "You can wreak more havoc now without losing your pay. A 'go slow' – as in the passport office. During this time, the meat plants slowed production because the veterinary officers were slow to stamp the meat. Did it create a sense of foreboding? Yes, when people you had never heard articulating anger or the threat of industrial action – like the gardaí – it was highly unusual if not unprecedented. The threat of industrial action was not about going on strike, it was about how the tactics could be used cleverly and retain the income coming in. The overhang of debt was going to decide the [industrial] strategy for a lot of public servants."

There was also the danger of public opinion turning quickly against those who engaged in industrial action. Within three days of the government announcement of a unilateral pay cut, the GRA announced that it would ballot members on industrial action up to and including the withdrawal of labour. But, as Colman Higgins of *Industrial Relations News*, observed:

> "There was an awareness there as well that for emergency workers their importance to society is a double-edged sword: They are obviously needed – and if they go on strike it causes a big problem. Because they are so necessary it limits their options in terms of industrial action because they usually have to provide some sort of emergency service – or in the case of gardaí or soldiers they are prohibited from taking strike action. It's not like a factory going on strike because all that happens is you lose money, if the buses go on strike people can't get to work: It could be a matter of life and death, because they are so important it makes strike action more difficult. People were aware of that in the background. . . . Ultimately you are up against that problem if you are an emergency service union and you have to be careful in how far you go in industrial action; apart from the moral argument you could turn the public against you very quickly."

8.4 Saving capitalism

In immediate wake of crash, the trade union movement's imperative was to avoid a pay cut especially to those staff earning less than €40,000 per year and the trade unions desperately tried to gain traction for a wealth tax and to reduce the government deficit over a longer time frame; but when these failed, the protection of jobs took over the unions' focus of resources. The government could not save enough on the pay bill without pay cuts. As events played out over time there were a number of extraordinary measures taken by the Department of Finance; pay was cut, sickness pay and annual leave entitlements were reduced, the numbers working in the public sector were reduced by incentivised retirements and a moratorium on recruitment. The mantra became "doing more with less". For the unions, the pay cuts ended social partnership; but they had prevented compulsory mandatory redundancies across the sector. That achievement cannot be underestimated.

It can be argued that it was in communication that brought down Social Partnership in the final stages of discussions ahead of the Budget. Liam Doran, of both the PSC and 24/7 Frontline Alliance was a pivotal figure who publicly suggested that Fianna Fáil backbenchers should 'shut up' while talks were in progress. Teachers' leader Sheila Nunan suggested on radio that any unpaid annual leave days would have to be taken in term time; further incensing nervous

government TDs. To some it appeared as if trying to fix these perceived problems, IMPACT's Bernard Harbor appeared live on *SixOne News* to suggest a deal had been arrived at whereby public servants would take 12 Days' unpaid leave [this still would leave the exchequer short of €250 million] – which was effectively a 'lay off' – but the union movement was trying to talk to two audiences simultaneously and opted to speak directly to their membership in terms of 'unpaid leave' rather than to public representatives and the population in terms of 'lay offs'. It is disputed that the wrong option was taken – and the difference between internal and external communication language unravelled social partnership. Furthermore, if such a deal had any chance of survival, it should have been presented jointly by all parties to the talks.

It is perhaps significant that David Begg, de facto leader of ICTU, suggested that the journalists understood the different audiences but failed to make any clear demarcation in the conclusive reports. There was a determination of department of finance to reassert control over the social partnership process from the department of an taoiseach succeeded; aided by a backbench revolt once these TDs realised it was a deal they could not sell to their constituents.

Once talks had broken down, the trade union movement could only revisit their source of ultimate power – the withdrawal of labour. But here they soon recognised the limits of industrial action in a debt ridden society – other tactics – working to rule, go-slows and the withdrawal of selective rather than unilateral services was more effective in messaging to government. The trade union movement recognised the limits of reform of capitalist system that the crash presented; having long sought the nationalisation of banks, it had arrived at precisely the wrong time – the picture of default was the collapse of public services. In order to save Ireland, the trade unions also had to save capitalism.

Chapter 9: INTERVIEW 3: COMMUNICATING THE CRISIS

This chapter is the third of three that outline the findings from the most detailed set of interviews carried out to date with those at the forefront of dealing with the economic crash of 2008. As with the previous chapters it counterpoints the views of four distinct groups of actors – trade union officials, communication specialists, specialist journalists and government advisors – all of whom recount their interpretations of the events that engulfed the state from 2008 onward. This chapter outlines the testimony of these actors in relation to (1) the role that internal communication played within the trade union movement; (2) economists and media framing of the economic crisis; (3) perceptions of media hostility towards the public sector; (4) how the trade union movement sought to protect its members from and counter media hostility.

9.1 Internal communication within the trade union movement

Internal communication within any organisation is core to its collective functioning. Trade union membership is not a direct relationship as the trade union officials are indirectly paid by membership subscription but are accountable electorally. Since the beginning of the trade union movement most internal communications were not necessarily communicated remotely – the unionised workplace concentrated members in geographic locations where meetings with elected representatives or shop stewards were immediate. Whether to assuage fear or harness anger, to mobilise and inform, the ability of each trade union to effectively utilise internal communication with their membership was key during the crisis. Social media was still in its infancy and not yet regarded as a platform for collective communication. But while email was long established by 2008, not all trade unions had databases of members' email addresses and some still relied on relatively expensive print and postage that could not fulfil the urgent nature of a fast-moving debate. In a fast moving crisis this left the trade union movement scrabbling to communicate quickly and effectively with their memberships. As recalled by Peter McLoone of IMPACT, "in hindsight that was a big struggle for us" because as the crash unfolded the general meeting became the default communication option. But times had changed and while "for a long number of years people had an interest, the willingness and the time to attend general meetings, this was diminishing". As IMPACT sought to develop other communication channels – such as an email database, McLoone concluded that "to develop that as a tool in the middle of a crisis begs the question should we not have been investing a lot more in this?"

Blair Horan of the CPSU noted that traditional communication mechanisms – such as meetings and printed circulars – were supplemented by a bi-monthly in-house magazine and weekly circulars. But general meetings were still crucial. For Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU, noted that internal communications "were very important – and unfortunately very inadequate. To make it worse we compounded the problem with a decision that we took for the best of reasons." Sometime previously, SIPTU had decided to close down its old branch structure to facilitate industrial cohesion and to use the savings made to invest in re-organising – a move that, as O'Connor conceded, fuelled divisions in SIPTU:

> "It was 2010 before we were ready to go. There was no culture of organising, as we had not invested in the enormous resources necessary to shift opinion. We were dismantling our branch structure in the depths of the crisis. It became perceived as a retrenchment, that we were abandoning the members to save ourselves. That aggravated our already stretched communication lines. SIPTU was perceived as the 'establishment union', the Trotskyite Left within the union campaigned to effect a rejection of 'the establishment'. It played right into the hands of the enemy – because there was a parallel narrative articulated particularly by Shane Ross and others in the 'gutter' press – and they even used the same phraseology to totally different ends. They had enormous capacity to communicate to our members that was way beyond our means."

O'Connor also noted that the nature of trade union activism had changed because of social partnership:

> "We didn't have anything like enough people on the ground, at the level of activist, because over the preceding twenty-two years the great majority of people who had come into activity, and even those who remained, were steeped in the culture of social partnership; which was quite supportive, quite facilitative, tolerant – where we were organised. Suddenly all the infrastructure was withdrawn and we didn't have many people who had organised in the world when it was different; not anything like enough to make a difference."

It was this lacuna that, in O'Connor's view hampered internal trade union communication – not the absence of email. As he noted, "to this day, email is not an effective communications tool at all. People simply don't read them." For Liam Doran of the INMO, internal communication revolved around "relevance and visibility: we wrap communication around that - it's everything. You cannot take it for granted. We can never assume the people we

represent know half as much as we think they know about what we are trying to fight on their behalf. That's not to insult them; that's because they are busy doing their own things." For PJ Stone of the GRA, it was the content of the communication rather than the communication infrastructure or mechanisms that presented challenges because "sometimes it is not easy to set out specifically to the membership what direction we can go or take – because a lot of work undertaken on behalf of the Association has to be done behind the scenes and it is an extremely difficult job to get information out to the general membership by way of circular that sets out every nuance in what we are trying to achieve."

From a communication specialist point of view Bernard Harbor, head of communications at IMPACT, noted that membership engagement with electronic media had started when websites were introduced. Having established a website in 1999 and later developed e-bulletins "there was significant take-up and viewing rate". He said, "Engagement fluctuates, but that it rises when there are developments of real interest or concern to members: An industrial dispute, a new deal or ballot and – of course – pay cuts and other crisis measures that we experienced in 2009-2010." To Harbor, "immediate real-time communication allows a union to move more quickly. If it takes any longer, people start asking 'what is the union doing?' or 'I haven't heard anything from the union'. Unions are full of people with strong opinions." For Frank Connolly, head of communications at SIPTU, revamping the union's internal communication structure during the crisis was a significant and urgent undertaking:

> "I argued when I came in was that the most important job was maintaining internal communications, improving our databases with members; increasing our databases significantly – we went up from around 17,000 emails for a union with 200,000 members – though we lost up to 50,000 members during that period – but our means of communication was very limited for those that we did have. It was like fighting a war – and it was a war – without an air force. The others had all the air force they needed, including massive media control. People were getting used to receiving emails, but we had to completely revamp our contact lists for members; we had to renew them. People were just assuming that we had contact with our members or that you could just put out a press release. You could put out regular letters and press releases but you had to make sure that they were getting to your members."

Similar to Jack O'Connor, Connolly believed that the changed nature of trade unionism had created an unseen communication gap between leadership and membership in that the traditional method of a branch member collecting union dues from each member was no

longer feasible in large organisations. Thus Connolly set about revamping SIPTU's newspaper *Liberty* which was published eight times a year and which had a print-run of 40,000, and an estimated readership of 150,000. Connolly also established the newspaper as an online publication that was emailed to all members. And similar to PJ Stone, Connolly believed that sensitivities that arise in negotiations can sometimes hamper trade union communication with members, most especially when media outlets are looking for a story. As John Carr of the INTO noted, "all the time, communications with our members was vital. Our members weren't having it easy, they were getting the outside onslaught on the public service – and it was affecting them, so we had to counteract that by ensuring that we were in there in the negotiations and that we were fighting to ensure there were no cutbacks in pensions, to ensure there was no reduction in expenditure in education – all of which were nigh-near impossible – but we were at all times in there fighting to ensure they were protected".

But communicating this to members was to prove extremely difficult. Shay Cody of IMPACT recalls 2013 as the period where internal communications became 'really important' leading up to the 'particularly difficult' negotiations of the Haddington Road Agreement:

> "We had to make sure members understood the purpose of Croke Park – cooperating with the downsizing of the public service. We had to explain that constantly. Even more difficult to say was that we had hoped Croke Park was the end of the bad things, but we were being told in briefings that there is likely to be another bad thing happening."

And of course, all of this occurred in the glare of mainstream media coverage. As viewed by Martin Wall of *The Irish Times*: unions "certainly did not prepare the ground for pay cuts. Going into talks, the unions did not tell their members or prepare them as to what it would actually mean. I think the unions were actually in shock as to what was coming down the line towards them; I don't think they had internalised it fully. Certainly the members on the ground were not prepared". But, in Wall's view, this was not necessarily all the fault of the unions as the government was also communicating mixed messages:

> "The problem on the government side was there wasn't a single voice; there were different voices from within government. There was no 'official' government position, there were people jockeying for position. It was probably natural in a way; they were using the media to deal with that. We saw that subsequently with the arrival of the Troika, there were people not telling the whole story as to what the situation was . "

Wall added: "After 25 years of Social Partnership it had created issues of linguistic ambiguity. People not being clear about what [the crisis] was – there is a reason for that in disputes; not rubbing the other side's nose in it. Nobody loses everything in industrial relations. The problem was this was too big an issue for the kind of language that was there. The choices were so stark. You have to tell people what you are going to do; and they weren't prepared to do that. People were talking in riddles, talking in nuances in the old way of doing it . . . This was probably the biggest threat facing the State since its foundation. It did not have the money to run the State, and had no way of getting it."

9.2 Economists and media framing of the economic crisis

The government's primary defining move during the crisis was to commission the Special Group to report on the savings that could be made in the public sector – also known as the McCarthy Report after its chairman, the UCD economist Colm McCarthy. The report became somewhat jocularly termed as 'Bord Snip Nua'. While the report did not recommend specifically where cuts to public expenditure should be made, it presented spending data from each government department, to which government cuts would inevitably be applied. Thus it set the political and media agenda to which the trade union movement had to respond.

In the view of Peter McLoone from IMPACT, every opportunity was used to promote the agenda that public sector pay was too high and trade union influence was "too great" and noted that "hard-right economists" regularly advocate spending less on public services yet are silent when the availability or quality of services is debated: "They only surface when we are talking about the spend." For Shay Cody of IMPACT, neoliberal economics "wasn't just framing the debate. In the background there was a media narrative that completely crowded out the view of public service unions and public servants: it was as if it was a public service crisis rather than a banking crisis. Stockbroker economists who were owned by the very banks that had led to the crisis were articulating public service pay cuts." Similarly, David Begg of the ICTU, believed that neoliberal economists played a defining role and that as a corollary of the Benchmarking process there was a build-up of hostility in the media to public servants. While, in Begg's view, this media hostility was not new "it's just that it kind of went on steroids when the crisis happened":

"This [neoliberal economics] tended to represent the crisis as a crisis of the public finances. This was not the case – at the time Ireland's debt ratio to GDP was 25%; one of the lowest in Europe. It was a straightforward banking/property crisis. It became a

> crisis of the public finances when the tax base collapsed due to the construction-related property crash…a crisis compounded by increases in social welfare bill and the decrease in revenues from income tax as unemployment rose from 4.5% to 15% in short order."

In an attempt to counter the neoliberal economic analysis, in 2010 the ICTU established, as Begg said, "the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI] and populated it with high-grade economists to offer a counter-narrative to what was happening. That turned out to be very successful in challenging the pure austerity neoliberal assessment of the situation."

Referring to how understanding economics was the central learning point of the crisis, Padraig Yeates, former journalist and media advisor to the 24/7 Alliance recalled a remark by Colm McCarthy on RTÉ's *The Frontline* when he said 'anger is not a policy'. According to Yeates, at the beginning of the crisis "apart from being very angry most of us didn't have a policy". For his part, Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU concluded that Ireland and Europe was engulfed in an entirely neoliberal response to a crisis created by neoliberalism; and all the solutions being offered were in terms of market forces. In spring 2009 ICTU produced the ten-point plan, *There is a better, fairer way*, in an attempt to articulate an alternative to a one-sided austerity, neoliberal strategy. As O'Connor recalled:

> "The response was ideologically based on the application of classical economics; that was the thinking in Ireland and in Europe. I know from my engagement with the people at the top of the political system here, during that time, that they were at pains to be seen to be compliant with this neoliberal – or 'ordoliberal' response. There was an attempt to interpret 'what the master wants' as well as just following a script."

In his interactions with government officials, O'Connor found them preoccupied with the threat of default:

> "Every time you encountered them they were talking about the spreads in the bond markets. Bond yields were going up all the time. If the spread over the German ten-year bond went up too high then Ireland couldn't borrow at sustainable rates – and would be faced with the prospect of default. One of the great mistakes made by everybody in positions of influence at that time was that there was no effort to explain to people what default would have meant…I didn't know in the Spring of 2009 what default would have meant. But I educated myself. Quite literally it would have meant going to bed some night in 2009 and waking up in the Middle Ages."

For her part, Patricia King of SIPTU saw nothing new in the neoliberal economic arguments being advanced though she acknowledged that "it was much wider than that. This was real 'we haven't got the money' stuff. This was way past some political ideology; it was much deeper . . . the bigger picture was 'we are running out of money to run the State'. We knew that." For John Carr of the INTO, economists were definitely framing the debate and maintained, from a public service point of view, that the debate was being driven through an anti-public service media campaign:

> "…even to the extent that you would think that it was the public service that caused the crash rather than those who were guilty. From a trade union point of view, there was a concerted effort against the public service driven by economists who were being reported in the media – but we also thought at the time that there was a media campaign against the public service."

In a similar vein, Des Kavanagh of the PNA suggested that the focus on the public service was a clever ploy by sections of the private sector economy:

> "That was tactically astute to divert attention away from other things that were going on in business. Let's face it, no one really expected that banking was going to get as bad as it got. In the early days it was easier to try to divert attention onto those awful public servants who were breaking the country than the real cause of the problems that were the banks and the speculators."

For Joseph Dirwan of the AGSI, the McCarthy Report was an attempt by the media and economists to 'soften up' and 'condition' public servants to pay cuts and noted that the report lacked context: "it looked as if McCarthy just drew down – and was supplied with – these allowances without ever going into the background of where they came from or what part they played into the famous argument that we now know in relation to 'pay' and 'core pay'." Liam Doran of the INMO contended that following the banking collapse, a number of sectors of Irish society combined quite quickly for reasons of mutual interest to capitalise upon the situation with regard to the public sector:

> "It was halcyon days for those people…They now had a strong, sound, robust financial argument to say public service is too large, overpaid, has to be contracted, and the private sector can fill the gaps that emerge. It was quickly capitalised upon by the media, by economists and by employers – both public and private…in the context of negative finances and the pressure that flowed on the public service and public servants."

John Clinton of the POA observed that "everything then was about the cost of running the country; it wasn't how we got there; the cure to the economy being to take money from the pockets of public servants…Colm McCarthy said the government hadn't run out of compassion – they had run out of money. Economists are mainly wealthy. I don't know whether they actually understand what a small cut means to a person who earns a small amount of money. You never heard them calling for the introduction of a wealth tax." For his part, PJ Stone of the GRA believed that economists "aided and abetted by the media" were playing a major role in adjusting people's minds to the concept that something had to be done about certain allowances and pay in the public service with the result that public sector employees "became an easy target. Economists can be steered in a direction if they are given a certain amount of the facts. We felt this was the way discussion and agenda was being brokered." This view was echoed by Louise O'Reilly of SIPTU, who noted that "economists who had an agenda to assist the government to cut back on the public service pushed this. The government had over-promised and recruited into the public service, until they realized or believed they couldn't afford it.

She subsequently added: "Fianna Fail needed a reason to turn on the public service – and the Colm McCarthy report was it."

From a communication perspective, Frank Connolly, head of communications at SIPTU, referred to the minister for finance Brian Lenihan who spoke at the Magill Summer School in Donegal in 2009: "in one speech he almost single-handedly laid the blame on workers, trade unionists and particularly the public service. In the course of that speech he also renounced, and suggested a cut to, the minimum wage." From that moment on, according to Connolly, it became clear to the leadership of the trade union movement that the narrative emanating from the government was that Irish workers were to blame the crisis. For Padraig Yeates of the 24/7 frontline Alliance, the fact that many younger to middle-aged media professionals had bought property in the boom years and were suddenly in negative equity was key. This, Yeates, held, framed their thinking, they worked in the private sector, were fighting debt and viewed the public servants as "cosseted". Economics, Yeates believed, "was suddenly sexy, and everyone wanted to talk to economists". But, as Yeates pointed out, most of the economists commenting on the crisis worked for banks or third-level institutions, so personally didn't have financial problems, certainly not on the scale of other people unless they had invested or had debt. Coming from what Yeates described as "a rarefied atmosphere", what they said was "taken as 'God-speak' because nobody else had a clue what was happening". And this, Yeates, contended, put trade unionists on the back foot:

> "That was a big factor for trade unionists who were outside of their comfort zone. They were used to talking about the minutiae of their own areas and they knew it inside out, they could fight a battle with management, industrial correspondents or presenters about why their members should be paid more money or why some new practice was objectionable or threatening the patients or so on. Again, they were not in the same comfort zone when it came to debating why they should be paid the money when we can no longer afford it. That was a different debate. A wider debate. Economists became so popular, that the specialist commentator melded in with the broad popular one because everyone was being asked to write columns or be on TV or radio almost non-stop. It changed the situation."

From the point of those reporting on the crash, there was less certainly about who was framing the debate. For Ingrid Miley of RTÉ, the debate was "framed by inescapable economic realities. There was no money, we had to underpin our banks and then we had the Bord Snip agenda. Whether you say it was economists or the economy; whether the economist was leftwing or rightwing – there was a big economic problem." For Martin Wall of *The Irish Times* the debate was largely driven by economists. He noted that the narrative from 2008 into 2009 was that government revenue was going off the cliff, and there was an argument that while the government had cut back in its discretionary spending, the issue of pay, given that it was 30% of the total government expenditure, would have to be on the table:

> "Some people will also argue that if you go back even further to the creation of the euro, where the government surrendered the changing of interest rates, or the ability to change interest rates; that competitive devaluations were the only way that you could deal with that. I remember speaking to people at the department of finance five years before that, if there was a big shock, a big economic contraction, that competitive devaluation would mean pay cuts. People in the department of finance said 'if that happens we are in real trouble'."

Wall noted that while pay cuts were certainly in the background, by 2009 "the narrative was being generated by economists, and to a degree it was also being generated by some elements of the media. There are some elements of the media who have never had a liking for public servants or public services, so those two interests were coming together." For Anne-Marie Walsh of the *Irish Independent*, it was politicians rather than economists who framed the debate; indeed she noted that "with hindsight it's easy to see who got it really badly wrong. Most of the economists had got it wrong. Very senior figures criticised our

paper for predicting a 'soft landing' – including Robert Watt who was one of the government powerbrokers." For this part, Brian Sheehan of *Industrial Relations News* noted that "it was clear that the State's tax revenue and its commitments were not matching up. Something had to be done" That said he noted that "very few economists would have had sympathy or understanding for social partnership anyway":

> "The McCarthy report had aspects that suggested the closure of so-called QUANGOS, which I have mixed feelings about. It did give away some of his lack of understanding of industrial relations when he suggested the National Implementation Body goes – not realising that it didn't really exist; it was a virtual body with no offices and was a voluntary system, usefully resolving disputes that were particularly difficult high-profile disputes…I think there was a general fervour at the time to close all of these bodies that were costing us a lot of money – it became hysterical."

Colman Higgins, assistant editor of *Industrial Relations News* noted that in his view, economists, unions and government were all trying to frame the debate, but since the "the crisis was economic in origin" it was "understandable given the state of shock society was in [that] people turned to economists to explain what is going on." He also noted that "around this time there was the phenomenon of 'celebrity economists', people were turning to economists."

From a government advisor point of view Oonagh Buckley noted that while economists helped frame the debate, that the senior leadership in the department of finance was economist-heavy, so it, as a department, would have viewed things in a similar fashion:

> "There was a lot of attention to the idea of straightforward pay cuts; one third of public spending is pay and another third is social welfare that acts as an automatic stabiliser to the economy in the context of recession – you are not cutting that! As all economists know; wages are 'sticky'. Those who were suggesting a pay cut were not those who had to deliver it. A reduction in the public service pay bill had to ensure that public services could still be delivered; so there was quite a lot of tension in the Department in 2009 between the 'public spending people' and the 'public service and industrial relations people'."

There existed, Buckley observed, there are two very different groups of people in the department of finance:

> "There are those who deal with 'spending' and those who deal with 'people'. There is not a lot of movement between these groups. Those in pay and industrial relations were perceived as involved in the 'dark arts'. I recall significant internal conversations between the top echelons on both sides; one saying things had to be cut whilst the other pointing out the problems of widespread industrial action. The trade unions proved the point through their activities – and widespread industrial unrest being very problematic in terms of delivering public services. Strikes and work-to-rule demonstrated that the public service is built on public servants."

In terms of government messaging, Cathy Herbert of the department of finance observed that while the government may not have "always communicated very well", finance minister Brian Lenihan was key in explaining the crisis to the public:

> "You needed to explain to people what was happening. Brian Lenihan did a lot of that, and it helped greatly. People listened as they wanted to know – they were angry – but what could you do about it? When we were writing the Programme for Recovery we asked what has gone wrong? Why has it gone wrong? Take ownership of that! We did that in Budget speeches; and we said what we proposed to do and how we believed it would fix it. Brian Lenihan was a really good communicator; and he told all those civil servants and advisers who were writing the programme to make it readable so that people could understand. He also believed that in some circles there was a tendency to keep things quiet – and I remember him saying 'We have to talk to the people, and we also have to talk to our colleagues in the EU, and share our difficulties.' There had been a lot of caginess about that. As a politician he wasn't cagey. That was the lesson; just talking and telling people – and being straight up with them."

9.3 Perceptions of media hostility towards the public service

As the primary news item for all national media, reporting the causes of, consequences of and solutions to the economic crash dominated the news agenda throughout the time period under consideration. For Peter McLoone of IMPACT, media hostility was a constant feature of his career in the trade union movement; in particular he noted a presence of commentators hostile to the public service whose language tended to 'have a go at' the bureaucracy in the civil service or the bureaucracy in local authorities or the health service:

"It ignored totally the bulk of people who are employed to deliver public services; nurses, teachers, gardai, a multitude of health professional grades and the administrative staff who became a soft target. That commentary was always there, there was never any sense that it was an honest discourse with the public. At one stage in public discussions you would have to remind people when on the radio or TV, over 70% of people who worked in the public services were actually paid less that €50,000 per year; perhaps 55% were on less than €30,000 per year. The commentary was skewed…the vast bulk of high earners were consultants or judges or people essential to the services that had to be delivered."

Blair Horan, asked directly if he felt the media were hostile to the public service workers, he replied:

"The short answer is 'yes' – because if you go back to the Benchmarking Report [2008] just before the crisis, it recommended very little for public sector workers. The only beneficiaries were the higher paid.

He added: "Because all of these increases were concentrated into this one report, the presentation of public servants being cosseted, and doing better, was easier to present by virtue of the catch-up increases in one report.

"The media and neoliberal economists took advantage of that; there is no doubt because of the Benchmarking structure that preceded the crisis allowed the public-private divide to be presented in this way."

For Shay Cody of IMPACT, "the year 2009 was absolutely the pits; it was if public servants alone were the cause of the crisis":

"Part of the media here is very populist. One week they can be railing against public expenditure – and the next week railing against the number of people on trolleys in hospitals. The only way to fix that is to have more hospital wards, and that requires more public expenditure. It is not as if there is disciplined consistent German or American-type ideology – it's a very populist media with an instinctive anti-public service bias in most of them, especially Independent News & Media."

While David Begg of the ICTU simply "didn't expect anything different", Jack O'Connor noted that:

> "The campaign in the public media at least equalled the campaign against the UK Trade Union Movement during the Thatcher years, if not worse. It was savage, it was brutal, it was coordinated and it transcended all media outlets including, regrettably, the National Broadcaster. In their eyes it was about 'saving' Ireland. That is what I would have expected. I had no illusions. Where I was surprised was at the degree of the inadequacy of the Labour movement to respond to it; and those inadequacies have still not been addressed."

O'Connor noted that there existed "there is a tendency to fail to distinguish between the roles of various forces acting in the interests of capital in this kind of a conflict":

> "In a situation unprecedented in our experience there are all sorts of forces at work. The assumption that it was coordinated is too simple. This is about the playing out of the ideological, which some people describe as a 'cultural', understanding of the world. A great many people in journalistic circles saw it as being about 'saving' Ireland. Simply, 'saving' Ireland. Those of us opposing this were seen as 'jeopardising' Ireland."

> "Some of the editors understood the consequences of default. Would I have wanted default? Under no circumstances. The challenge facing socialists in Europe in that period was to save capitalism. The alternative is what we have now in Latin America: Fascism – which is feudalism by another name."

Patrick King of SIPTU concurred on the presence of media hostility, noting that:

> "The media took the view that public servants were too well-paid, deserved the hit they got and – by the way – the trade unions were too strong. There was nothing new in that for us, we knew that was going to be the way of the media . . . It was very painful for people when it was at a particular pitch . . . My own judgement is that people who you never expect to do it to you pilloried us as trade union leaders; colleagues – as you walked up the street. It was one of the most appalling times; spitting at people, shouting abuse at people."

For John Carr of the INTO, the media was "totally hostile":

> "Unions were being blamed for [pay] increases in Benchmarking and increases in *Towards 2016* – when unions were expected to take cuts because they had a big increase in Benchmarking; and there was a big attack on Benchmarking that had been launched in 2002 and carried on throughout 2003, 2004 and 2005 – 'the public service were earning too much' and 'the problem we have in this country is the public service, and we have to cut public expenditure' – and salary is the main part of public expenditure."

As he saw it, "the public service that was being attacked because they were the ones the media wanted to be hit eventually." In the recollection of Des Kavanagh of the PNA noted that "in the early days it was easier to try to divert attention onto those awful public servants who were breaking the country than the real cause of the problems that were the banks and the speculators." Providing a more detailed breakdown of media hostility, Kavanagh described three distinct groups:

> (1) The economists working in the media as economic commentators who were very anti-public service and anti-public service benefits.
>
> (2) The more light-hearted commentators or less-weighty commentators who took that line. They were more dangerous because they didn't have the knowledge but certainly had the popularity and they were leading out every week; it was continuous. It was continuous on TV and radio as well. They were very often making comments that were completely wrong or ill founded, and even when corrected, it was a populist type of line.
>
> (3) There were a very small number of journalists who gave balanced reporting. It was a very small number.

Joseph Dirwan of the AGSI asserted that "some of the programmes – particularly the live programmes used it to work against gardaí, and to build up some degree of hostility towards gardaí from the point of view of their earnings without being in possession of all of the facts." In Liam Doran's (INMO) eyes it was "unforgivable in what they engaged in. It happened so readily and easily that perhaps it was there already". Indeed, Doran noted that "through the 2000s, the way benchmarking was portrayed, if I am honest – that was the first nail in the coffin towards public servants. It gave the ammunition to those who would attack". For Doran the speed and the intensity of the media coverage was unprecedented:

"The speed at which the division in society emerged – the public service versus everybody else – and the imagery that was created 'sure, but you have a job', 'you have a job for life', 'so what is your whinge?' The ease by which that spectre was created by those who we now were earning multiples of those who they were casting aspersions against was both amazing and very sad. They were pushing an open door; they had access to the media. They had very influential positions."

Doran added: "They were given absolute free rein. The fed off each other; with Pat Kenny interviewing Rightwing economists. I have done interviews with him where increments were looked upon as an act of the devil – the ease with which they did it would probably make an argument to suggest it was just beneath the surface anyway, among the general population, and they were pushing an open door; you have to factor that into your analysis of it."

"I cannot believe how rabid a section of society became against the public service. Modern society is terribly suspect and prone to becoming addicted to 'one line perceptions'. When you see [named former civil servant] retiring on a large pension, the image is created that 'they are all retiring on these large pensions and pay outs'. Then it's very difficult to dispel that perception – it's easily made and reinforced by phrases like 'gold-plated' or Independent headlines such as 'Public servant walks away with massive cash haul'. That becomes etched in people's minds; it's a mixture of clever deployment of those who wanted to manipulate the willing media, and the concentration span of the public is quite minimal these days – they just hear a one-liner and that one-liner becomes the truth. When you put the two together – they had the perfect storm."

Not mincing his words, PJ Stone of the GRA declared that "Journalists, by their nature, are extremely lazy people and once they get an easy story it can be pursued without them having to do any great research. Debate and airtime already in the public arena was massaged and twisted and set out in such a way as if somebody was discovering something for the first time." Recalling her personal experience, Louise O'Reilly of SPITU recalled that, by November 2009, it was "an us and them' situation – it had become that by then. That was in November, but had started in the summer. There was universal agreement that everyone hated the public sector unions by then . . . There was a degree of personal animosity. You were the enemy. The anti-public sector mood was as high as it had been – it peaked."

Addressing the issue of media hostility from a communication practitioner perspective, Bernard Harbor, head of communications at IMPACT, observed that "the public sector is always portrayed as wasteful and unproductive, staffed by 'greedy' public servants". But, Harbor noted, by autumn 2009:

> ". . . it got to a point where this was extraordinary relentless – and sapping to the organisation – and I'm sure it was across the public service. The more that pay cuts were implemented upon the public servants the more hysterical the media became. I'd never experienced anything like it and I have been in union and politics professionally for a long time."
>
> Wall added: "The hysteria against public servants by the commentariat – and journalists more generally – peaked and then it abated. This coincided with the failed pay talks where we thought we had averted the second round of pay cuts through unpaid leave."

However, amongst the media industrial correspondents, there was less agreement about there being hostility towards the public sector. RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent, Ingrid Miley, noted that "there may have been hostility, but one person's hostility is someone else's pragmatism." Noting that "the only big-ticket item in public expenditure that can be looked at in a block was public sector pay" Miley concluded that "at a time when the economy was helter-skeltering downwards it seemed odd to see pay rises being paid." However, Martin Wall, industry correspondent of *The Irish Times* expressed the view that, "by and large", hostility existed "within certain papers". In Wall's opinion, the roots of that hostility lay in the Benchmarking process:

> "People argued that benchmarking was a bit of a scam – that the pay was given but the change wasn't delivered. The options that the unions put on the table as an alternative to pay cuts was a massive implementation of change and reform in lieu of pay cuts; the argument of a lot of economists and newspaper critics was 'we have already paid for this change'; as part of benchmarking in 2002 and was never really delivered. That was the backdrop against the hostility."

In Wall's view, the fact the media organisation cut pay and jobs may have influence coverage:

> "Coming into 2009 you were starting to see job losses in the private sector, one of the fascinating backdrops in the media was that pay cuts were the norm . . . Pay cuts were not

> the majority in the private sector. Most private sector firms froze pay but only a minority of private sector firms reduced pay. The problem was that every media organization cut pay. The issue was that this became the general narrative within the media that pay cuts were the norm. There was probably an element of 'while we are having pay cuts everyone should share our pain'.
>
> Wall concluded: "Everyone in the media had a pay cut and job losses were there. It is against this background that the public service issue had to be looked at."

For her part, Anne-Marie Walsh, industry correspondent of the *Irish Independent*, recalled the reporting during the period "wasn't easy, there were moments when it was so frosty; it also meant that I wouldn't get things in other situations...People don't see the *Irish Independent* as being pro-union.". In Walsh's view, "unions do sometimes get an easy ride; there is such a small set of people covering this. It's natural that people want to control the situation; anything that poses a question to people that makes life difficult for them they are not going to be happy about. I like to think of it as being objective; questioning things rather than taking a spin on it." Recalling two specific stories that may have angered trade union movement, Walsh mentioned the occasion of the one-day stoppage in 2009 when media outlets reported that many teachers were driving across the border to Newry to purchase alcohol for the forthcoming Christmas season. According to Walsh, "it was embarrassing at a press launch that day; I remember it being put to Peter McLoone and he didn't seem aware of it...it was put to them that this huge queue was building up on the way to Newry." On another occasion, the *Independent* did a story on the trade union proposal for unpaid leave in lieu of a pay cut:

> "What I did there was go to the HSE and asked them, "What does this translate into? How many hours would you lose?" They gave me shocking statistics, unbelievable statistics about how much would be lost and the value of that just exposed what was going on. It wasn't something we were saying just because we didn't like it. This was what was going to have to be taken out of services – it was a huge hit."

For his part, Colman Higgins, assistant editor of *Industrial Relations News*, noted that while "a lot of economists were hostile . . . you can't generalize that they were all hostile." As he saw it, "with economists there is that reflex action with public spending that might date back to the 1980s. It became a natural target for a lot of people and the extent of the vitriol against the public service would have been, probably, over the top." Indeed, in Higgins' view, "there

wasn't just a media consensus that action was needed but there was a bit of directing public anger towards them [public servants]". And in directing that anger, an easily understood narrative was needed;

> "The economic crisis had its original causes in banking and finance that were complex; the overspending in the public service was more easily understood explanation and it was an easier media sell to readers and listeners – you don't have to understand anything about banking or economics to understand that X is being paid more money than you are, and maybe we should cut back X's pay.
>
> Later adding: "It's easier to take action on public spending, because a lot of the other problems like the burst property bubble or bank debt is like broken eggs or spilled milk; there's nothing you can do about it really. The public service was focused on, by the media, as something you can actually do something on."

Higgins noted that "most of the vitriol came from the *Sunday Independent* – but some of that has to be taken 'with a pinch of salt'; some of it was 'vitriol-on-tap', really for entertainment purposes to an extent." But Higgins also observed that the trade union movement reacted "somewhat defensively to the onslaught – and have tended to write it off as ideological response without any merit". The best response, in Higgins' view to ideology "is pragmatism – rather than hitting it with the opposing ideology."

The negative media narrative and discourse also impacted on government, with Oonagh Buckley of the Department of Finance asserting that "We were under huge pressure. There was pejorative stuff in the media about civil and public servants – very negative – the editorial line in the *Independent* was particularly shocking." But sometimes, Buckley recalled, the trade union movement did not do itself any favours: "There was a huge media blow associated with that one-day strike when large queues developed at the border with people shopping for cheap alcohol before Christmas. It was very negative. It created a bad image."

9.4 Protecting trade union members from, and countering, media hostility

In the period under consideration, trade unionists felt they did not get a fair hearing in the media and with unending debate on public sector pay dominating news media, the trade unions could arguably be forgiven for non-engagement with a situation they could not win.

However, membership organisations, particularly trade unions, have a role in promoting the interests of their members even if, at times, this might, strategically, this may have been both unwise and counterproductive. For Peter McLoone of IMPACT, trade union leaders were "always under that pressure because it was seen as part of the job":

> "You were the public face. If there were any articles in newspapers, commentary on television or radio that was hostile to the public service, you were expected to have visibility and to always win the argument and to always reflect what the ordinary member felt in response to this . . . That was part of the package we promised people when they joined the union; not only will we improve your circumstances through better pay, better conditions and more benefits – we will defend you. When you offer this as part of the package you will be held to account."

For Jack O'Connor of SIPTU / ICTU, the same interpretation applied:

> "The increasingly dominant perception of the union – not just in SIPTU and not just in Ireland – was that it was something you paid into that had a responsibility to look after you. When it couldn't do that, there was enormous disillusionment. There were obviously people who had different perceptions; but it had become the dominant perception, not by any means unique to Ireland."

During the crisis, O'Connor knew that "on certain media shows [he was] going on to be beaten up":

> "Did I think the members expected that? I did, and I do, but I'm not as sure as I was then. Some people who have been very effective and successful in the trade union movement have had a strategy of not going on the media. The late Paddy Cardiff – general secretary of the Workers' Union of Ireland [WUI] and probably one of the best trade union leaders the country ever had – had a policy of not dealing with the media at all. He regarded them as 'the enemy'. If he wanted to communicate with the members he did so through circulars, but that was pre-email, pre-social media and with only one television station in the country."

Only once did O'Connor feel that he 'experienced what it was to be like in the winner's corner" when he became the public face of the Croke Park Agreement in April/May of 2010:

> "Pat Kenny chaired a panel on RTÉ's *Frontline*. I had been eviscerated on it on 9 November 2009; absolutely destroyed. Towards the end of April or early May 2010, along with Sheila Nunan, I was defending this horrendous agreement against Jimmy Kelly of Unite. Suddenly we were coming to the end and Pat Kenny turned to me and said, 'last word to you Jack O'Connor'. I nearly choked, because I had never been given the last word, ever! I managed to stumble out something. I nearly choked, I had switched off . . . It was over. I remember driving home that evening, when it struck me that is what it is like when you are on their side: because the establishment wanted that agreement to go through at that time. That's what it's like when you are on their side. That's the only time I was ever in that situation."

For her part, Patricia King of SIPTU, felt that the trade unions did not have the resources to do the job required of them in the early part of economic crisis:

> "Overall, we probably didn't stand up for ourselves in terms of the commentariat, the neoliberals. We probably allowed them to dance all over us in the beginning of this. In coming to terms with what our strategy should be, we didn't really have the resource to go out and counter them. We did find it then, here in Congress, with the setting up of the Nevin Institute [NERI] and having an answer, but there was a time lag in that. It probably allowed the certainly more right-wing view to go un-countered – unopposed – for some time. That allowed a narrative to take hold. Had we been able to counter it earlier it may not have taken hold. It wouldn't have done such damage."

Also, King believed that the speed and scale of the unfolding crisis and media hostility disproportionally disadvantaged the trade union movement, which had a more difficult and complex message to deliver:

> "Trade unions are not the richest outfits in the world, in a lot of cases, therefore you have to think very carefully on how you spend your resources. Because we had never experienced this before it took a little time to get it in the system. I think we were lucky with the leadership in Congress at the time – very good economically and well-respected. The leadership around the unions was regarded as strong. . . . It was tough, but there was the shock element, never having done it before – from both sides – and I regarded it as another industrial dispute and we needed a strategy to see how could we win it at the end."

For John Carr of the INTO, there was an imperative, regardless of members' expectations, to engage with the media:

> "The members didn't have to expect – we reacted all the time within the media. I was looking at our central executive report from that time, and there were press releases going out on an almost-daily basis. We had a prolific press officer at the time [Peter Mullan] and we responded to anything of a negative nature; mainly to make sure that we had our members onside and that our members were seeing that we were trying to protect our members from the criticism and unfair media treatment we were getting at the time."

For PJ Stone of the GRA, the formation of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance resulted in "a complex and sophisticated media campaign underpinned by the mobilisation of members"; a point reinforced by Louise O'Reilly of SIPTU who noted that the Alliance allowed the public to identify and recognise public sector workers – those who "respond to stolen handbags or missing children" and allowed the trade union movement to disrupt the narrative of public servants as "a faceless government official sitting around doing nothing." Indeed, this 'human interest' strategy proved effective as outlined by Padraig Yeates of the 24/7 Alliance:

> "Union leaders were agreeable, they could see the sense of it, of them taking a back seat. You could come out and have a big press conference or go into armed combat on the TV or radio, but the message you were putting out was of the ordinary nurse or ordinary garda and the problems they faced. That was the best way of countering it, because the facts were then incontrovertible."

However, one of the difficulties with this approach is that it can put 'ordinary' workers in extraordinary situations that not everyone is comfortable or confident about – especially in a hostile environment – a point acknowledged by Yeates:

> "It was very intrusive, and it was very hard to get people. It's one thing to say Nurse A is earning X amount but her outgoings are Y amount because herself and her husband who is a garda bought a house at the peak of the boom and they now have two kids – but turning Nurse A into Ann Jones who is now living in this house is a big problem. The fewer you have – the bigger the challenge for them personally, because everyone focuses on them. Come budget time you always get news desks ringing up looking for people to be case studies. That's basically what we did,

and it worked. Also, the other thing that worked was the conferences around the country. The turnout was huge and the membership was tremendous, the reaction of people was terrific. They came in huge numbers, not just in Dublin but everywhere. The regional correspondents and the local media came to those meetings. You get massive coverage provincially and again you had the big speeches but you also had the contributions from the floor and you had the journalists able to interview people there and then. It's much easier in that atmosphere for a nurse or a garda or prison officer to talk about their experiences than it would be making an arrangement to call out and see them, with a camera. All of that worked."

For Peter McLoone of IMPACT, garnering public support for public services was crucial, but maintaining that support depended on the public's experience in using public services:

"Members have always got to understand that relationship with the public. No matter how well I would present on television or radio, it's not so open-ended that the public will forgive everything. That's not in my experience the way that it works. If people, in polls, continue to support public service provision they only do that when their experience is a positive one – and where they have certainty that if they go looking for something they will be able to access it and their experience of it will be good."

For Liam Doran of the INMO, such public support could be most easily recruited in terms of platforming public sector workers that the public could recognise and identify with. This was particularly true of the uniformed workers of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance:

"To the general public's mind it was – and I mean this in a complimentary way – it was a very ordinary, easily understood message: These people are out there working tonight, keeping me safe in my bed, the nurse is in the A&E, the garda is getting spat at – I can see them at work. Sure, they might get a quiet hour or two, but they shouldn't be kicked around. There are plenty of well-paid public servants, politicians and bankers who should be kicked around. That was the public perception that was willingly and easily absorbed. Politically, we did rock a boat. It was an Alliance they [government] had not dealt with before, it wasn't traditional, it wasn't the corporate public service unions throwing a shape."

The non-traditional nature of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance was, in Doran's view was recognised by government:

> "It was unpredictable . . . Politically we couldn't be ignored because (a) we might hurt them if we did something and (b) the political elite were aware that public sympathy was with the uniform. For two reasons they [government] couldn't kick them; one you can't trust them and two, the public don't want me to kick them anyway. It worked; whether it's fear or foreboding – or whether it's a coming together of those ripples in the sea, I don't know. Undoubtedly it rang a bell that created a ring of protection that would not have been there without the 24/7 Alliance. The only thing the political system asks is 'what do the public think?' The public 'got' the 24/7 Alliance quite easily; they weren't put off by them; they didn't view them as another vested interest group. There was empathy there, and once the political system sensed there was this empathy, they were more hesitant to kick them."

As PJ Stone of the GRA recalled, the 24/7 Frontline Alliance meetings were supplemented by "a very successful poster campaign and we set out the dangers that we faced on a daily basis, particularly for the gardaí. It resonated with the public, and public support was very forthcoming at that time. We got a very good message out in a PR sense". Similarly, as recalled by Padraig Yeates of the Alliance, "the bus adverts were very important; the heartbeat logo was a great idea and people immediately knew what it was – it emphasised that this was at the heart of society and if we wanted to have a good society we couldn't allow it to stop. There was a subliminal message there."

From a media practitioner's perspective the 24/7 Frontline Alliance was manna from heaven in terms of content. As recalled by RTÉ's industry and employment correspondent, Ingrid Miley, the ability of trade union leaders to deliver comment that resonated with public concern about the availability of the emergency service was media gold:

> "What the 24/7 Alliance had that was extremely important, was Liam Doran. Liam is such an articulate speaker who is very media-savvy. As a journalist, you know if you stop Liam Doran for a clip, you will get an absolutely broadcast-able clip. He articulated the concerns of the emergency services – the 24/7 Alliance – with clarity, depth and passion. We had never seen the gardaí in this space. It was about the spokespeople articulating the message…That is so important in today's media age – even if you are a newspaper you are putting up soundbites on your website."

Overall however, the lack of primary definers within the trade union movement hindered the defence of the public service memberships. As observed by Frank Connolly, head of communications of SIPTU, the trade union movement "realised we had no authentic voice that the media or establishment would accept as equal to the rightwing economists such as IBEC or the Fiscal Council – and some of the university people. They had a free run at this during the recession and all you heard was the voices of the neoliberal economists. That's one of the reasons why NERI was established and it has turned out to be quite an effective and accepted voice because it is based on factual political and economic analysis."

9.5 Finding their voice

Internal communications within trade unions proved largely ineffective and unwieldy in their structure; but inadequate in content and context. The sensitivities in negotiations prevent and hamper internal communication with members – primarily is a fear of committing anything into writing that can be leaked to the media or the official side. In the past, such communication was by word-of-mouth at branch meetings; in an era before social media, recording devices and connectivity. Media control is likened to air cover in warfare – absolutely essential for survival – and it hindered at best the unions' communication. At worst, it was annihilation. The Sunday Independent could communicate more effectively with trade union members than the unions themselves.

Those across the trade union movement felt the Irish media organisations were totally hostile to the public sector, especially the Sunday Independent and those of all sides in the debate recognised and accepted there was at the very least an element of truth in this. ICTU leaders described such ever-present hostility as 'on steroids' during the unfolding crisis; described by one journalist as 'vitriol-on-tap'.

External communications were similarly hampered by news framing; the trade union movement universally held the view that economists had framed the terms of debate; and the unions simply did not have the research-based understanding and analysis to be credible sources for the media; and were relegated to secondary definers trying to counter the dominant narrative. Journalists (by and large) did not recognise union sources as framing the news narrative. Those in the trade union movement who were 'put out' on the media to represent the interests of members soon found that they were fodder to be 'beaten up' in the hostile environment of talk shows – or personally lampooned in lengthy analysis and have their sincere views derided in newspaper editorials.

The trade union movement recognised that it was ill-equipped to deal with the crisis in terms of credible expert engagement to counter the narrative of established economists. One of the positives for the trade unions was that this institutional vulnerability lead to the foundation of the NERI – to give analytical credibility to the movement and a progressive economic 'think tank' to rival those of the neoliberals.

Other positives arose from this epic battle for public opinion. It also became apparent that the government did not speak with one voice throughout; and both the Taoiseach and minister for finance were jockeying for position to frame the tactical response as to where €4billion in savings could be made – through either a negotiated settlement or through a unilaterally imposed budget. The rise of the 24/7 Frontline Alliance was a bonus in winning public support through identification and recognition of the uniformed workers as essential to life in Ireland – caring for the injured, finding lost children, putting out house fires, protecting the public. It disrupted the narrative of public servants being idle bureaucrats.

Chapter 10: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

10.1 The trade union response

It may initially appear from this research that the trade union movement was woefully unprepared for the scale and speed of the financial crisis both in terms of economic analysis and communication strategy; both internally with their respective memberships and externally with the media. So too were government, the media and the Irish people. The ICTU had passed a motion at its biennial delegate conference in July 2009, calling for a Commission to be established to review trade union organisation in Ireland, including structures and procedures, "with the objective of optimising effectiveness through co-ordination of resources in the best interests of working people and their families." The Commission was established in April 2010. Some critics within the trade union movement went further; and even accused the leadership of inaction and the Report of the Commission on the Irish Trade Union Movement was pejoratively termed 'a call to circling the wagons' by one activist at its launch [*Irish Independent* 6 July 2011, 13]. But this is an incomplete analysis. With hindsight the proposed strategy [*There is a better, fairer way*] of the ICTU was for a much longer timeframe to correct the fiscal deficit; not taken particularly seriously by the Irish media and not provided with space during the broadsheet newspapers' agenda-setting of September to December 2009. The government took the same view as the troika, and the media followed; that reducing the deficit required immediate and decisive austerity measures through drastic reductions in government spending. Some years later a former German finance ministry official, Christian Kastrop, stated that Ireland was "hit with unnecessarily harsh austerity measures" [*The Irish Times*, 26 November 2019, 15] and Professor Ashoka Mody, the economist who was head of the IMF's mission to Ireland as part of the troika, stated that the Irish government had failed to get a 'debt write-down', [*Sunday Business Post*, 22 February 2015]:

> "In an interview with Newstalk, Ashoka Mody accused the government of being too soft in talks with the troika. The former IMF chief of mission to Ireland said the newly minted Fine Gael/Labour coalition missed an opportunity to get a debt write-down of unguaranteed senior bondholders after the 2011 election."

Mercille [2015, 97] noted that "It is interesting that even Ashoka Mody, until recently a member of the IMF responsible for designing Ireland's financial rescue programme, has departed clearly from the predominant position in the Irish media. He has opposed austerity

and argued in favour of the default option, which he now says is 'economically efficient', 'fair', and 'politically sensible'." Once the longer time frame for fiscal correction had been rejected; trade union leaders became aware that pay cuts were the 'natural corollary' but continued engaging with government in order to 'curb the worst elements of the neoliberal agenda'. Across the trade union movement it was a defensive action to protect as many jobs as possible – in which it was largely successful – and to influence social partnership talks to how any pay reductions were to be implemented; through a proposed 'lay off' / unpaid leave scenario in December 2009 that ultimately failed, but such talks laid the foundation for a later agreement [Croke Park] in 2010. To stay in negotiations to minimise the worst outcomes could, understandably, be construed by a critical membership as complicity.

While several commentators including journalists and government advisors praised the trade union leaders for their awareness of the crisis, their pragmatism and their strategic response it is also clear from within the trade union movement that they were unprepared strategically and in resources to effectively combat the economic narrative driven by neoliberal economists – many of whom worked for financial institutions who had engaged in reckless lending domestically and internationally and whose organisations had forged a housing bubble lending to both property developers and consumers. The trade union movement was ill-equipped without a sourced economic analysis to negate the austerity narrative propagated across the media; individual spokespeople were routinely defending their members on the basis of imposed hardship not of their own making – rather than macroeconomic arguments. The news framing had been achieved through the conflict between the 'efficient' private sector versus the 'wasteful', 'bloated' and 'greedy' public sector. It is arguable, and was suggested by Liam Doran, that the propagation of such a division was part of strategic plan within the 'political maelstrom' to drive down all workers' wages. As Allen [2009, 140] asserted, "The attacks on the public sector have, therefore, become code for wage 'corrections' throughout the economy."

This study examined the news values of 'negativity'; common to economic news reporting and more generally. The content analysis of newspapers also revealed a predominantly negative sentiment or 'tone' towards public sector workers and trade unions, and to the public sector generally. This was not surprising given the Liberal Model of newspaper ownership in Ireland; and newspapers' previous coverage of the wider trade union issues and those of worker collectives generally. Overall, the conditions for economic recovery were generally framed within a strategy of austerity; cutting government spending in terms of pay, pensions and welfare specifically, and more generally in reduced spending

on health and education. The trade union movement was limited to the role of counter-definer once these parameters had been established, decontextualised from the background / causation issues so that the debate was primarily tactical discussions around the method of implementation of austerity measures.

The trade union movement's stated response through the PSC of the ICTU was to protect 'core pay'. Interviews with the ICTU leaders suggested / confirmed that this involved the protection of the basic pay scales that set the income for the majority of public servants who were not in receipt of unsocial hours' payments, overtime or the allowances that many 24/7 workers - and also teachers - received. There was a perceived split within the trade union movement that had the potential to divide the movement. Some interviewees were of the view that the division had happened [despite the rhetoric of Congress that 'core pay' would include premium payments and allowances]. Some within the ICTU viewed the 24/7 Frontline Alliance of union and staff associations as a 'distraction' or as a 'defensive' action. There was considerable debate as to whether the protestation of such uniformed professions highlighted the vital emergency responsibilities of the public services – or as an elite within the public service protecting their premium arrangement. It is argued that the defence of such conditions of service was justified in that they had been fought for over many decades; and if lost would perhaps never be regained. It was also pointed out in one interview that the department of finance did not actually have the data available on the cost to the state of these premium payments and allowances in 2009; information that may have been valuable to the 24/7 Frontline Alliance at that time. Regardless, it could have still formed a basis of a pay cut however 'uncosted' the benefits were. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest [FEMPI] legislation that enacted pay cuts for public servants has been slowly unwound in subsequent national agreements, restoring pay the levels attained before the economic crisis; albeit a decade later.

Despite the rhetoric of the time, strikes and stoppages were few and any inconvenience to the Irish public was minimal. This response had initially followed the view, within the trade union movement, that a fragmented trade union movement was not going to be able to sustain a campaign of strikes and industrial action, but there was merit for a number of localised actions and working-to-rule to force negotiations with the government. This continued after the collapse of social partnership and up until the negotiation of the Croke Park agreement. A series of subsequent public service agreements also created a framework for pay restoration in exchange for industrial peace and were by-and-large maintained to date; public services were transformed including reductions of sick leave entitlements and longer working hours

agreed during the Haddington Road Agreement [2013]. As a corollary of this agreement, the terms and conditions for new entrants were radically altered, including retirement age, pension calculations and basic pay scales and increments. These have been the source of industrial unrest including the proposed Garda strikes in November 2016 and the nurses and midwives strikes of 2019. Those in the teaching profession have also campaigned for an end to 'two-tier pay' for those recruited since the agreement and their longer-serving colleagues. It has been a fragile peace. Overall, to paraphrase Jack O'Connor, the trade union response was an orderly withdrawal rather than a rout. Political fallout was the sacrifice of the Labour Party to a coalition with Fine Gael – with Labour being able to curb the worst of the neoliberal ideology of the major government party but costing itself electoral at the 2016 election; losing much of its core base votes.

10.2 The collapse of social partnership

Most interviewees concluded that the social partnership arrangements since 1987 ended with the collapse of the pay talks on 4 December 2009. Most trade unionists had seen the positives of social partnership; having high-level access to policy-makers on a range of social and economic issues – especially taxation. Some lamented this loss of influence and were pragmatic about options – choosing between economic collapse where everyone would be worse off, or attempting to contain the worst aspects and retaining some influence in future pay restoration. Others were more defiant in their rhetoric and outlook and on the surface appeared more 'militant' – seeing the collapse of pay talks and social partnership as a career low point. Negotiating pay cuts was never going to be easy for a trade union movement steeped in social partnership and a period of unprecedented economic growth despite masking an overheating economy. Pointedly, one senior journalist opined it was the nature of this economic growth that had ultimately undermined trade union power. The availability of cheap credit meant that most workers had large levels of personal debt; while they may struggle to service this with extensive imposed pay cuts it was perceived as preferable to a long period of industrial action with reliance on strike pay. There was no guarantee such methods would be successful; and failure could lead to an existential crisis.

The nature of trade union activism had transformed during the era of social partnership. The vast majority of recruited trade unionists were steeped in a supportive, cooperative and tolerant system with its own distinct infrastructure to address conflicts and issues as and when they arose. This was quickly eroded and the trade unions were without the structure of branch organisation that they had historically relied upon. The shop stewards and shop meetings

of the 1970s had largely gone; and so had the two-way communication and engagement with members. By 2009 most contact was one-way from emails and printed circulars that were not as effective or influential; and with the added peril that they could be 'leaked' at inconvenient times. It is difficult in negotiations or strategic industrial disruption to explain clear objectives, in writing, to members without alerting the opposition. Such communication with members was difficult for the unions to saturate – and they were up against government and other external commentators and influencers who could reach the same membership more efficiently through national media; particularly highlighting the levels of readership attained by the Sunday Independent. Social partnership had, in most probability, reached its end in terms of a divergence of views on the economy – the government were embracing austerity and the trade unions were ideologically opposed to it. One of the downsides of such an arrangement had been the perception by the media of the implementation of such exercises as Benchmarking – that fuelled hostility towards the public sector in the lead up to the financial crisis and the key pressure points in 2008-2010.

10.3 The Lessons learned

Principally the need was identified for credible analysis to inform future campaigns in terms of communication and encouraging public support for the public sector; this was articulated by Jack O'Connor as a left-wing thinktank to support the ICTU in social and economic analysis. The Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI] was established in 2010; as an independently operated body funded by the trade union movement. The ICTU also initiated a Commission on the Irish Trade Union Movement 'A Call to Action' that reported to the ICTU's biennial delegate conference 4-6 July 2011: Its headline responses included fewer unions through amalgamation in certain sectors and reorganisation along sectoral lines, such as by education and health, with an acknowledgement that there were too many unions operating in the same space creating duplications. It was suggested that the four teaching unions should amalgamate as teachers and university lecturers into one body. At the time of writing, the only merger has been the creation of Fórsa; a merger of IMPACT, CPSU and PSEU.

Unsurprisingly, given the scale of the economic collapse, there remains much soul searching within the trade union movement in relation to whether the movement should have anticipated it sooner and acted sooner to alleviate its worst effects. As recalled by Peter McLoone of IMPACT:

"What we probably should have understood was the existence and the depth of the crisis much earlier. It emerged, and you can't avoid in a leadership role the responsibility to be tuned in to what's going on in your economy when you are in negotiations.

"In hindsight that's something we should have been aware of earlier. I think we bought the 'soft landing'. When you go back to the economists – we were very alert to the people who were critical of the public service. We had a good response to all of that; we were able to go toe-to-toe with them. Maybe in hindsight we weren't sufficiently tuned in to economists who weren't running an anti- or pro- public service – but who were just asking if there was anybody listening? Is there anybody looking at the sub-prime market in the US or the stuff that was going on in Anglo-Irish Bank? This was countered by politicians and other economists saying that it would be a 'soft landing'. We bought into that, with hindsight we should have done our own analysis. It was interesting that years later Jack O'Connor insisted on getting the Nevin Institute [NERI] set up so that you would have people within the Congress whose job it is to give you the facts.

"There's the staff now to be very much in tune with what is happening in the economy; linked to that is the importance of ensuring that your membership are in tune with those circumstances. The understanding of what is happening in the economy has to be communicated."

In addition, McLoone believed that the trade union movement needs to prioritise its objectives and re-establish trust in union-government dialogue:

"The second thing is having some sense of priorities, because an economy like this is never going to be able to solve all problems in one go. We have to have some sense that if there is investment needed or required then where are we as a union going to encourage government to do that – and give the assurance of certainty that won't lead to other things – and this is something was lost in the 'twelve days' – is that we had a good social dialogue / negotiation in place and we are now on the margins."

For Blair Horan of the CPSU, the lessons of the crisis have still not been learned and that re-establishing social partnership is the best way forward:

"In the recent nurses' dispute [2019], in terms of pay restoration within the public service framework, the nurses have gone off and done their own thing. That is incompatible with

social partnership. Social partnership is probably still the best approach; what killed it was the view that Benchmarking had got out of hand, even though Benchmarking was far better than what it had replaced – the discrete issues method was more out-of-hand but not as noticeable. Benchmarking helped to kill social partnership – wrongly."

In terms of re-establishing social partnership, Horan noted that "government will insist that any agreement or social partnership will not allow individual union action. In that sense I don't think the lessons have been learned. People think they can resume business as normal – when it isn't 'business as normal'. Even after the deal of Croke Park, the euro-crisis hit in 2011. The currency could have collapsed."

For Shay Cody of IMPACT, one of the key learnings was that "was there are too many unions."

"In truth, one assistant secretary on the government side decided negotiations. We had 26 or 27 entities that believed that they were entirely independent republics that could have entirely separate internal decision-making processes, not just about negotiations but also about their responses. We are never going to have one public service union, there are too many professions involved, but one of the things that emerged is we need a dominant union… One of the things that flowed from this was the creation of Fórsa [now the largest public sector union in the state following an amalgamation in 2018 of IMPACT, the CPSU and the PSEU]."

Another key development, according to Cody was the creation of the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI]. Described by Cody as "a credible source", he noted that its staff members "are quasi-independent – though funded by the trade union movement" and that it has created "an alternative voice over a period of time." In a similar vein, David Begg of ICTU noted that the Nevin Institute will be able to provide the trade union movement with counter-narrative analysis in the future. However, other – agreed upon – initiatives have failed to materialise. In particular, many of the recommendations of the Commission on the Irish Trade Union Movement, the final report of which was adopted in 2013, have not materialised. As recalled by Jack O'Connor of ICTU, the commission's report:

". . . envisaged a more centralised Congress in which all the unions who wished to remain independent could still remain independent, and a concentration of resources that would have enabled the development of a much bigger Nevin Institute. The plan was a bigger, much better resourced Nevin Institute, a real intellectual force to be contended

with; a workers' college to promulgate an alternative interpretation of the world, and a kind of a people's press – a newspaper/online – but none of it ever happened. There is an old story of chimpanzees relaxing in the sun, it rained and they were all drenched and miserable. And they all swore that when it gets dry again they'll build a house . . . but when it got dry again they just lay in the sun. That's what's happened to us in the trade union movement."

To O'Connor, the lack of change in the trade union movement was more than disheartening:

"If I was back in 2007 and could look ahead to the end of 2014 and see all of the things done to working people – and all our inadequacies – and that I would still end up in 2019 and nothing had been done of note to fix the deficiencies; I wouldn't have stayed. I would have gone to do something else.

"I don't know if anything was learned, frankly. I'd have to think for a long time to identify something that was learned institutionally. Individuals have learned it. The absence of any learning is reflected in the decision to bin the recommendations of the Commission on the Irish Trade Union Movement. The really big lesson is that you cannot build successful trade unionism except in the context of the Larkinite model – of organising everybody. It doesn't necessarily have to be one big union. Everybody has to be organised. The movement has to concentrate its resources and do everything necessary to do that, and towards a clear ideological, social democratic, collectivist, egalitarian critique of the world. Unless you do that, we are just waiting to be picked off."

For John Carr of the INTO, the restoration of some form of social partnership is a priority:

"One of the criticisms levelled against the trade unions was that they were engaged in national agreements. I believe strongly in social partnership; it delivered for trade unions but also for the country. Unfortunately, subsequent to the crisis with the imposition of the cuts, social partnership effectively has collapsed – and that's the biggest minus from the trade union point of view – that their influence is not as strong as it was, that their influence is only in relation to salary, that they don't have a broader input into the wider economy, which they had as part of social partnership. The lessons from the crash is that they need to restore some form of social partnership; that the unions should have a greater say in the wider economy rather than dealing with wages only."

The loss of social partnership meant that the trade union movement is now "confined to Croke Park type agreements – that narrow salary agreement" and is thus "losing influence on the broader sphere." For Carr, "the trade union movement has been effectively sidelined from an economic point of view. They reach agreement on wages and pensions but they don't have any other involvement in the wider economy."

Journalist Martin Wall reflected on the successes of the public sector trade unions and the lessons; in the context that most people join unions to improve their terms and conditions, "but these were hugely exceptional circumstances where the entire viability of the State was at stake.

> "Unions are businesses; they won't like that being said about them. They have to be run on a financially sustainable manner. The fear was perhaps that people would begin to drift away from the unions; the public service unions. But the overall lesson is probably to be honest, open and clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it; and there are things we cannot do. Compulsory redundancy would have been forever and it would have set a precedent that would have been used into the future; rather than being the last option it could have become the first option – you can see why they would have to draw the line. In terms of drawing the line at compulsory redundancy they succeeded, and that was obviously a strategic decision; but it came at a very high cost. Whether the members were really informed at the thinking behind that is open to question."

Patricia King held that the trade union strategy was good; and the trade union strategy held. King stated:

> "There would be people who had their pay cut, who would probably still be very sore about that - we are on a path of restoration, we are not quite there yet but we are nearly there – might not agree with that. The piece about holding onto people's jobs is irrefutable; you can't say it didn't happen.
>
> "I can tell you, as one of the people in the room, the job we had to hold that was really, really difficult because they had all these people, economic advisors – whether they were commentators in newspapers – telling them that if this was a private company they would be cutting the payroll costs; we'd be cutting the cloth to the measure – what are you doing holding on to all them?"

The impact of the political communication throughout 2008-2010 resonated into later years and has the potential energy to resurface at the next fiscal deficit for the state. At the time of writing the Covid-19 pandemic is ravaging economies across the world and governments are borrowing their way through. The economic crisis of 2008-2010 undoubtedly change the perceptions and the realities of public service in Ireland. Oonagh Buckley reflected on what lessons were learned for government:

> "The communications became more sophisticated as we went on. The economists and commentariat immediately decried Croke Park and it never recovered from that. There was a constant challenge to the figures that we were saving . . . By 2013 we knew that the brand was broken – it was important to repackage how we presented the revised pay deal [HRA] in a way that made it really clear that; there was a perception after Social Partnership that very little had changed in the public service yet in the three years of Croke Park more had changed in the public service than in the 90 years of the State's existence. For example we halved sick-leave pay by agreement . . . In the greater scheme of things it was very difficult to push back on the negative narrative around public service – from the major media organs and the anti-pay bill narrative from others."

10.4 Guiding trade union economic communication

The single-most learning from the economic crisis was swiftly addressed with the establishment of the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI]. It offers the trade union and labour movements optimism that neoliberal economists will not be the only voice in the next economic crisis; to frame the issues and proffer economic alternatives to austerity.

Dr Tom McDonnell worked at Think-tank for Action on Social Change [TASC] for four years before redeploying to NERI in 2014. He works on economic forecasting and policy research, independent of the trade unions but providing them with advice. McDonnell [interview, 19 February 2020][12] said, "NERI was formed because there was a lack of 'progressive voices' from the economics community; traditionally based on stockbroker houses. There was no alternative voice."

[12] Dr Tom McDonnell was interviewed by the author on 19 February 2020 after many trade union interviewees had mentioned the Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI] as a positive development for the trade union movement during this research.

> "The NERI because it was felt within the higher echelons of the trade union movement that there was an absence of a progressive economic perspective rooted in evidence that could support progressive trade unions in articulating their respective positions in the economic debate and with higher level civil servants."

Developments at the NERI will undoubtedly guide trade union communications into the future. To have citable sourced evidence provides political actors with the confidence to engage with economic theory in ways absent in the 2008-2010 crisis. Part of the perceived problem was the trade union movement had been part of Social Partnership perhaps contributing to a sense of complacency throughout Irish society. Internationally there was a growing consensus that economics had become dominated by this neoliberal frame. It was only when the crisis caused private debt held both within high institutions and at the personal level became described as a crisis caused by public sector wages, that the trade unions realised that they needed to have intellectual firepower behind them, which would look at the evidence and "give them the confidence to advance their positions in the media and elsewhere."

> "Partially it was a sense of complacency, it was felt that economics was for economists – a subject that had become very rooted in mathematics, was not something that non-specialists could comment upon with any kind of credibility. Because the Irish economy, from the early 1990s had been doing so well, economics and how economies grow was not a topic that needed to be addressed through necessity. If there is no necessity then generally things don't get done. It was only when the crisis happened, that people decided to look at what was happening here; what are the alternatives? That was both the timing and the absence of a body like NERI."

The primary focus of the Nevin Institute is understanding how the Irish economy works; providing forecasting, examining different aspects of the labour market - including wages and employment and increased precariousness of tenure. NERI's work doesn't end there. Other economic issues relevant to trade unions such as just transition in the context of climate change, collective bargaining and fiscal policy, taxation and spending are analysed and proposals are produced. NERI don't advocate or lobby on behalf of the trade unions, but respond when invited by the media to explain and reports are issued that often generate media coverage. The institute provides technical assistance to the trade union movement; providing the facts, perhaps examining whether the Department of Finance is being reasonable in terms of expansion of public spending in a particular year – but it's then the

political decision of the trade union leadership to decide the strategy to pursue. NERI exists to provide the economic firepower for others to utilise; to cite the NERI rather than for the institute itself to propagate and actively lobby. Sometimes NERI economists are invited into the Oireachtas; as expert witnesses on a particular part of the economy where they would outline the available options and explain the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action and allow the politicians to draw their own inferences.

In terms of planning for future strategic communication with the media there is a concerted effort to become more 'agile' and responsive to economic data as well as making proposals to insulate the economy, wherever possible, from crises and recession. These, by their nature, are often beyond State control.

McDonnell described NERI's relationship with the media as "certainly mixed" often gaining national radio exposure for quarterly economic reports. Press releases are likely to be taken up by four or five media organisations.

> "We do get called upon for our perspective or our explanation for a particular economic phenomena. It's improved in the last couple of years. There was a period when we knew there was no point trying to get an exposure from particular media organisations; possibly because of ownership issues that may have improved in recent years. It may have been that economics editors weren't sympathetic to a more progressive perspective or alternative view."

> "There is a certain conservatism that is there; they support particular positions. We would be a discordant voice that ruffled a cosy consensus and a particular world view. Sometimes it takes a while for that to percolate through; and it takes a while to get exposure. I have to say, our quarterlies are generally taken – whenever we do economic forecasts they will generally be on the news; which is remarkable in some ways due to how small we are – we are taken seriously in that sense. We are certainly always branded as left-leaning or left wing or trade union sponsored – whatever it might be. Other organisations would not get the equivalent."

Where perspectives collide between the media organisation and the institute "you don't get called upon". As discussed previously, the crisis was framed in terms of the analogy of a household budget, and nobody effectively provided an alternative argument to counter the ideology in the industrial and economic 'white heat' of 2009. These arguments swamped the

debate. More recently journalists and academics have quoted former German state ministers suggesting that the imposed austerity was unnecessary.

> "European Commission officials when you meet them in person will say the same. That they mishandled it. There was this idea of expansionary fiscal contraction: by increasing taxes and cutting public spending would increase confidence and that would grow the economy. This was without precedent."

> "The German's were and are the strongest political actors, and it was their policy of austerity, that this was a crisis of public spending debt. Ireland is able to recover much quicker than Greece because Ireland is an extremely open economy. Crushing the domestic economy has no effect on the multinationals; the Greek economy is closed, so if you crush the domestic economy there is no one to buy its goods and services. Context is everything. Austerity was really damaging for Ireland, but it was less damaging than it was for Greece. It was less inappropriate."

Ireland is a relatively small open economy, with the English language predominantly spoken, there has tended to be substantial migration both inwards and outwards; the unemployment rate has typically peaked at 15% instead of the 20% seen in other countries because of the 'safety valve' of emigration. Tom McDonnell concluded:

> "There was a sense of no alternatives – but there are alternatives and these were contested areas. The idea of the green jersey and just getting on with the programme is just nonsense; cutting €6billion from the economy – what does this do to a domestic town? You get a drain out of those places because there is less demand."

> "The German-led policies were extremely detrimental to the rest of the EU economy. That fed into the rise of populism, and probably fed into Brexit as well. It made Europe look incompetent; which it was. They followed the Ordoliberal model which is rules-based, and everyone must follow the rules. That's fine in a certain political and social culture but it doesn't work everywhere, and it's not appropriate everywhere. Sometimes it makes sense to run deficits, particularly if you have a weak infrastructure and you need to invest to catch up. You have to look at the long-term as well as the short-term. That wasn't done."

> "It's more complicated and there has to be a proper debate. There just wasn't a proper debate in Ireland."

10.5 A changed landscape

It is self-evident that through social partnership many of the attributes of the previous trade union movement had eroded; especially in terms of complacent communications both internal and external. The loss of effective internal communications was multiplied by an overreliance on the media organisations that retained a latent hostility towards workers' collectives that had not manifested itself as overtly during the 22-year-period of social partnership. The decline of trade union branch meetings that had been the mainstay of oral two-way engagement was lost; alienating many within the movement. With some 800,000 members on the island of Ireland there should be power in a union; if harnessed industrially and electorally, but diminished by a failure of communication on core issues impacted negatively on union influence and this was not lost on the elite – both among politicians and the media. As a result, public sector trade unions were subject to relentless negative commentary that divided the nation and opened the door to economically ineffective austerity measures that had a negative and cruel impact on many people's lives. These are not just lessons; but hard lessons.

The public sector trade unions in Ireland still enjoy an enviable membership density but have identified weakness in how they communicate with their memberships both through internal and external communications. External communications through Liberal Model media organisations will continue to be challenging; but they too have their own existential battles as the consumption of news is rapidly diversifying through new contemporary communication channels that are both powerful and dangerous as they continue to undergo refinement and radical realignment. While the trade unions can reflect upon their response to the economic collapse of 2008-2010, they need to take on board such learning urgently; another crisis is never far away and the leadership who learned the hard lessons have largely retired leaving the task to a new generation who will themselves be placed in novel situations to interpret and navigate. As politically marginal groups will they be able to navigate the exchange relationships with journalists to gain more effective communication of their agendas to define and frame future analyses of their campaigns? The invariant nature of trade unions is the conflict or communication deployed to rebalance the distribution of resources between labour and capital; and to find measurable success.

The Irish public sector trade unions prevented widespread compulsory redundancies but could not prevent pay cuts; though they mitigated these with an outlined process of pay restoration over a long period of time. Conditions of employment were altered; including

less sickness benefits, longer working hours and a transformation of the pension system. Premium pay and allowances were retained, and so were the principles of being paid more for working unsocial hours – many of these benefits have since been eradicated from an ever-more precarious private sector employment. The establishment and nurturing of NERI suggests that the identifiable weakness identified in the economic crisis has to some degree been addressed; but the restructuring of the trade union movement to service industrial sectors has remained elusive and may not provide the inoculation against any repeat of the powerful campaign of political communication waged against public servants and their respective trade unions during the worst of times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

Achbar, M., Wintonick, P. and Chomsky, N., 2002. *Manufacturing consent* S.l.: Zeitgeist Films.

Allen, K., 2000. *The Celtic tiger: the myth of social partnership in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Allen, K., 2009. *Ireland's economic crash: a radical agenda for change*. Raheny, Dublin: Liffey Press.

Allen, K., 2010. The trade unions: From partnership to crisis. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 18(2), pp.22-37.

Allen K., 2012. The model pupil who faked the test: Social policy in the Irish crisis. *Critical Social Policy*. 32(3):422-439.

Allen, K. and O'Boyle, B., 2013. *Austerity Ireland: the failure of Irish capitalism*. London: PlutoPress.

Anderson, B., 1981 *Centralised Bargaining or National Wage Agreements?* in Pollock, H.M., 1981. I*ndustrial relations in practice*. Dublin: O'Brien Press, pp.112-124. [p113]

Aronowitz, S., 2014. *The death and life of American labor: toward a new worker's movement*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

Azzellini, D., 2015. *An Alternative Labour History*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

Bardach, E., 2005. *A practical guide for policy analysis: the eightfold path to more effective problem solving*. 2nd ed. ed. Washington, D.C: CQ Press.

Barnes, C. and Cawley, A., 2009. Whose Development: Framing of Ireland's Aid Communities by Institutional Sources and the Media During and After the Celtic Tiger. *Irish Communications Review*. Volume 11. pp.21-36.

Barry, F., 2009. *Social Partnership, Competitiveness and Exit from Fiscal Crisi*s. Economic & Social Review. 40 (1) pp. 1-14.

Beaumont, P.B., 1992. *Public sector industrial relations*. London; New York: Routledge.

Beckett, F., 1978. *Press and Prejudice IN*: Beharrell, P. and Philo, G., (eds.) T*rade unions and the media*. London: Macmillan, pp.32-49.

Begg, D., 2002 'The End of the Beginning – A Perspective on the Future of Partnership' IN Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B. Conference of Religious of Ireland [CORI]. Justice Commission., *Choosing a fairer future: an agenda for social partnership after the Celtic tiger*. Dublin: CORI Justice Commission, pp.97-112.

Beharrell, P. and Philo, G., (eds.) 1978. *Trade unions and the media*. London: Macmillan.

Bekken, J., 2005. The invisible enemy: Representing labour in a corporate media order. *Javnost-the Public*, 12(1), pp.71-84.

Berger, A.A., 1998. *Media Research Techniques* 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Berger, A.A., 2000. *Media and communication research methods: an introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Berry, M., 2013. The today programme and the banking crisis. *Journalism*, 14(2), pp.253-270.

Berry, M., 2016. No alternative to austerity: How BBC broadcast news reported the deficit debate. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(6), pp.844-863.

Berry, M., 2019. T*he media, the public and the great financial crisis*. 1st ed. . ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bertrand, I. and Hughes, P., 2005. *Media research methods: audiences, institutions, texts*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bloomberg, W., Jr., Seidman, J. and Hoffmann, V., 1959. “Bureaucrats” and “idealists”. N*ew Republic*, 141(11), pp.10-15.

Blumler, J.G., 2001. The third age of political communication. *Journal of Public Affairs* (14723891), 1(3), pp.201-209.

Blumler, J.G., 2018. The crisis of public communication, 1995-2017. *Javnost-the Public*, 25(1), pp.83-92.

Blumler, J.G. & Gurevitch, M., 1995. Politicians and the Press: An Essay on Role Relations. IN Blumler, J.G. & Gurevitch, M., eds. *The Crisis in Public Communication*. London: Routledge, pp. 25–44.

Blumler, J.G. and Kavanagh, D., 1999. The third age of political communication: Influences and features. *Political Communication,* 16(3), pp.209-230.

Boukes, M. and Vliegenthart, R., 2020. A general pattern in the construction of economic newsworthiness? Analyzing news factors in popular, quality, regional, and financial newspapers. *Journalism*, 21(2), pp.279-300.

Boyer, R. and Drache, D., 1996. *States against markets: the limits of globalization*. London: Routledge.

Bradley, F., and Mulholland, J., 2009. Patrick MacGill Summer School (2009). *Ireland’s economic crisis: time to act*. Dublin: Carysfort Press.

Brady, C., 2010. *Did the Media Fail to Sound Alarm Bells Before the Financial Crisis? The Irish Times*, 6 March 2010, pp.15.

Brailsford, H.N., 1983. *The Levellers and the English Revolution*. Second ed. Nottingham: Spokesman.

Breen, J., and O'Brien, M., 2018. *The Sunday papers: a history of Ireland's weekly press.* Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Brennen, B., 2009. The future of journalism. *Journalism*, 10(3), pp.300-302.

Briggs, A. and Burke, P., 2009. *A social history of the media: from Gutenberg to the Internet*. 3rd ed. ed. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity.

Brighton, P. and Foy, D., 2007. *News values*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.

Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E. and Castro, L., 2014. Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), pp.1037-1065.

Calhoun, C.J., 1992. *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press.

Cassells, P., 1995. 'Competitiveness and Employment in Europe: A Trade Union Perspective' IN Gunnigle, P. and Roche, W.K. *New Challenges to Irish Industrial Relations*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with The Labour relations Commission, pp.175-178.

Cawley, A., 2012. Sharing the pain or shouldering the burden? *Journalism Studies*, 13(4), pp.600-615.

Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P., 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data: complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Cohen, L. Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2011. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th Ed. London: Routledge.

Cohen, S. and Young, J., 1978. *The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media*. Rev. ed. ed. London; Beverly Hills, Calif: Constable; Sage Publications.

Communist Party of Ireland., 2011. T*he challenge for trade unionism*. Dublin: Communist Party of Ireland

Cooper, M., 2009. *Who really runs Ireland?: the story of the elite who led Ireland from bust to boom ... and back again*. Dublin: Penguin Ireland.

Craig, J., 2002. *Prisoners of social partnership: a socialist analysis of social partnership in Ireland*. Belfast: Socialist Democracy Pub.

Creswell, J.W., 2002. *Educational Research: Planning Conducting ad Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. NJ: Merrill Prentice-Hall

Creswell, J.W., 2009. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.

Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H., 2006. The logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative research. *Social Science Information*, 45(4), 483–499. https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406069584

Culpepper, P. and Regan, A., 2014. Why don't governments need trade unions anymore? The death of social pacts in Ireland and Italy. *Socio-Economic Review*, (February), pp.1-23.

Curran, J. and Seaton, J., 1988. *Power without responsibility: the press and broadcasting in Britain*. 3rd ed. London ; New York: Routledge.

Curran, J., 2000. The liberal theory of press freedom IN Curran, J. and Seaton, J., 2000. *Power without responsibility: the press and broadcasting in Britain*. 5thd ed. London; New York: Routledge, pp287-301.

D'Art, D. and Turner, T., 2011. Irish trade unions under social partnership: A faustian bargain? *Industrial Relations Journal*, 42(2), pp.157-173.

D'Art, D., O'Sullivan, M., and Turner, T., 2013. *Are trade unions still relevant?*: *union recognition 100 years on*. Dublin: Orpen Press.

Damstra, A., 2019. Disentangling economic news effects: The impact of tone, uncertainty, and issue on public opinion. I*nternational Journal of Communication (19328036)*, 13pp.5205-5224.

Damstra, A., and Boukes, M., 2017. The economy, the news and the public: A longitudinal study of the impact of economic news on economic evaluations and expectations. *Conference Papers - International Communication Association*, pp.1-34.

Damstra, A., & Boukes, M., 2018., The Economy, the News, and the Public: A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Economic News on Economic Evaluations and Expectations. *Communication Research*.

Davies, N., 2008. *Flat Earth news: an award-winning reporter exposes falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media*. London: Vintage Books.

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., Murdock, G., 1999. *Researching communications: a practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. London: Arnold.

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., Murdock, G., 2007. *Researching communications: a practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder Education.

Denny, B., 2012. *The Contradictions of social partnership IN* Boyd, J., ed. Social Europe is a Con. London: Democrat Publications, pp.5-8.

Dimmick, J., Chen, Y. and Li, Z., 2004. Competition between the internet and traditional news media: The gratification-opportunities niche dimension. *Journal of Media Economics*, 17(1), pp.19-33.

Doherty, M., 2007. Corporatism or cop-out? The impact of social partnership on union-member relations. Working paper 07/01 Dublin City University. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2062254 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2062254

Doherty, M., 2011. It Must Have Been Love...But It's Over Now: The Crisis and Collapse of Social Partnership in Ireland, Transfer, *European Review of Labour and Research*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp.371-385.

Donaghey, J. and Teague, P., 2007. *The mixed fortunes of Irish unions: Living with the paradoxes of social partnership*. Journal of Labor Research, 28(1), pp.19-41.

Dorfman, G.A., 1983. *British Trade Unionism Against the Trades Union Congress*. University of Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press.

Dukes, A., 2009. Irish Banking – Problems and Reforms IN Bradley, F., and Mulholland, J., Patrick MacGill Summer School (2009). *Ireland's economic crisis: time to act*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, pp.57-62.

Entman, R.M., 2007. *Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. Journal of Communication*, 57(1), pp.163-173.

Entman, R.M. ,2004. *Projections of power: framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Entman, R. and Steinman, C., 2008. Tear down the walls: Re-envisioning communication theory and research. *Conference Papers -- National Communication Association*.

Evans, E.J., 1997. *Thatcher and Thatcherism*. London; New York: Routledge.

Fahy, D., O'Brien, M., and Poti, V., 2010. "From Boom to Bust: a Post-Celtic Tiger analysis of the Norms, Values and Roles of Irish Financial Journalists," Irish Communication Review: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Feldwick, P., 2015. *The Anatomy of Humbug: How to Think Differently About Advertising*. Leicester, United Kingdom: Matador.

Finn, D., 2011. Ireland on the Turn? Political and economic consequences of the crash *New Left Review*, Jan-Feb (67), pp.5-39.

Fishgold, M., 2008. Martin Fishgold replies. *New Labor Forum (Sage Publications Inc.)*, 17(3), pp.88-89.

Fogarty, M.P., 1980. Trade Unions and the Future IN Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, *Trade unions and changes in Irish society*. Dublin: Mercier Press, pp.142-152.

Foley, M., 2004. *Colonialism and journalism in Ireland*, Journalism Studies, 5:3, 373-385

Fraser, W.H., 1999. *A History of British Trade Unionism 1700-1998*. London: Macmillan Press.

Gaber, I., 2000. Government by spin: An analysis of the process. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22(4), pp.507.

Gaber, I., 2010. The crisis of public communication. *Times Higher Education*, (1946), pp.53.

Galtung, J., & Ruge, M.H., 1965. *The Structure of Foreign News The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers*. Journal of International Peace Research 1, pp. 64–91.

Galtung, J., & Ruge, M.H., 1978. *Structuring and selecting news IN Cohen, S. and Young, J. 1978. The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media*. Rev. ed. ed. London; Beverly Hills, Calif: Constable; Sage Publications.pp.62–72.

Gans, H.J., 2003. *Democracy and the news*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Gans, H.J., 2003a. Toward a new journalism. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49(31), pp. B16.

Gaynor, N., 2009. Deepening democracy within Ireland's social partnership. *Irish Political Studies*, 24(3), pp.303-319.

Geoghegan, B., 2002. Social Partnership: An Employers Perspective IN Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B. Conference of Religious of Ireland [CORI]. Justice Commission., *Choosing a fairer future: an agenda for social partnership after the Celtic tiger*. Dublin: CORI Justice Commission, pp.87-96.

Glasgow University Media Group, 1976. *Bad news*. London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul.

Glasgow University Media Group and Philo, G., 1982. *Really bad news*. London; New York: Writers and Readers.

Glasgow University Media Group, 2010. *Bad news. Volume 2, More bad news*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Glasgow University Media Group and Eldridge, J.E.T., 1993. *Getting the message: news, truth and power*. London; New York: Routledge.

Gordon, A. and Denny, B., 2012. *Social Europe is a con IN* Boyd, J., ed. Social Europe is a Con. London: Democrat Publications, pp.13-21.

Goidel, R. K., and Langley, R.E., 1995. "Media Coverage of the Economy and Aggregate Economic Evaluations: Uncovering Evidence of Indirect Media Effects." Political Research Quarterly 48:313–28.

Gottfried, E., 2008. 'TWU ON TV!' - the transport workers' union and television in the early 1950s and 1960s. *Film History*, 20(4), pp.508-512.

Gray, J., 2007. *Enlightenment's wake: politics and culture at the close of the modern age.* London: Routledge.

Gray, J., 2002. *False dawn: the delusions of global capitalism*. Rev. ed. ed. London: Granta.

Greenslade, R., 2004. *Press gang: how newspapers make profits from propaganda*. London: Pan.

Greenslade, R., 2018. *Irish media's cosy ties to politics and money require scrutiny*. The Guardian, 16 September 2018.

Griffiths, T., 1978. *The Production of Trade Union News IN*: Beharrell, P. and Philo, G., (eds.) Trade unions and the media. London: Macmillan, pp.60-72.

Gumbrell-McCormick, R. and Hyman, R., 2014. *Trade Unions in Western Europe*. second ed. UK: Oxford University Press.

Gunnigle, P. and Roche, W.K., 1995. *New Challenges to Irish Industrial Relations*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with The Labour relations Commission.

Habermas, J., 1989. *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. [London]: Polity Press.

Hall, S., 1978. A World At One With Itself IN: Cohen, S. and Young, J. (eds.) *The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media*. Rev. ed. London; Beverly Hills, Calif: Constable; Sage Publications. pp.85-94.

Hall, S., 1978a. The Determination of News Photographs IN: Cohen, S. and Young, J. (eds.) *The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media*. Rev. ed. London; Beverly Hills, Calif: Constable; Sage Publications. pp.176-190.

Hall, S., 1979. *Policing the crisis: mugging, the state, and law and order*. London: Macmillan.

Hall, S., Massey, D. and Rustin, M., 2013. After neoliberalism: Analysing the present. *Soundings (13626620)*, (53), pp.8-22.

Hallin, D. & Mancini, P., 2004. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Communication, Society and Politics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511790867

Hallin, D.C. and Mancini, P., 2017. Ten years after comparing media systems: What have we learned? *Political Communication*, 34(2), pp.155-171.

Harcup, T. & O'Neill, D., 2001 *What Is News? Galtung and Ruge revisited*. Journalism Studies, 2:2, 261-280

Harcup, T. and O'Neill, D., 2017. *WHAT IS NEWS? news values revisited (again)*. Journalism Studies, 18(12), pp.1470-1488.

Harcup, T., 2011. *Reporting the voices of the voiceless during the miners' strike: An early form of 'citizen journalism*'. Journal of Media Practice Volume 12 Number 1

Hardiman, N. and Regan, A., 2013. The politics of austerity in Ireland. *Intereconomics,* 48(1), pp.9-14.

Hassel, A., 2003., The politics of social pacts. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41(4), pp.707-726.

Hastings, T., Sheehan, B. and Yeates, P. , 2007. *Saving the future: how social partnership shaped Ireland's economic success*. Dublin: Blackhall Publishing.

Hayek, Friedrich A. von (Friedrich August von), 1960; 1990. *The constitution of liberty*. London: Routledge.

Hayek, Friedrich A. von (Friedrich August von), 1944. *The road to serfdom*. London: G. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B., 1999. *Social policy in Ireland: principles, practice and problems*. Dublin, Ireland: Oak Tree Press.

Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B., 2002. Conference of Religious of Ireland [CORI]. Justice Commission., *Choosing a fairer future: an agenda for social partnership after the Celtic tiger*. Dublin: CORI Justice Commission.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N., 2003. *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hester, J.B. and Gibson, R., 2003. The economy and second level agenda setting: A time-series analysis of economic news and public opinion about the economy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(1), pp.73-90.

Hill, C., 1991. *The World Turned Upside Down*. London: Penguin.

Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D., 1995. *Research and the Teacher*. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge.

Holleman, B., Felker, E., Kamoen, N. and Struiksma, M., 2018. Negativity and emotions: Valence framing effects in L1 and L2. Conference Papers -- I*nternational Communication Association*, pp.1-32.

Holstein, J.A. and Gubrium, J.F., 1997. Active Interviewing IN: Silverman, D. (ed.) *Qualitative Research Theory, Method and Practice*. First ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp.113-129.

Horgan, J., 2001. *Irish media: a critical history since 1922*. London; New York: Routledge.

Horgan, J., O'Connor, B., M.A. and Sheehan, H., 2007. *Mapping Irish media: critical explorations*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Howe, K. R. and Moses, M.S., 1999. Ethics in educational research. *Review of Research in Education*, 24(1), pp21-59

Hulden, V., 2012. Employer organizations' influence on the progressive-era press. *Journalism History*, 38(1), pp.43-54.

International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions., 1996. *Power and counterpower: the union response to global capital*. London; Chicago: Pluto Press in association with the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Worker's Unions (ICEM).

Jaffé, M.E. and Greifeneder, R., 2019. Less than I expected and oh so true? On the interplay between expectations and framing effects in judgments of truth. *Journal of Language & Social Psychology*, 38(5), pp.735-755.

Jensen, K.B., 2002. *The complemantarity of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in media and communication research*. In Jensen, K. 2002. A handbook of media and communication research: qualitative and quantitative methodologies. London: Routledge. pp. 254–272.

Jones, N., 1986. *Strikes and the media*. Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York, NY: B. Blackwell.

Jones, N., 1995. *Soundbites and spin doctors: how politicians manipulate the media - and vice versa*. London: Cassell.

Jones, N., 2001. *The control freaks: how new Labour gets its own way*. London: Politico's.

Jones S., 1985. Depth Interviewing IN Walker, R. (ed.) Applied Qualitative Research. Aldershot: England, pp. 45-55

Jonkman, J., Boukes, M. and Vliegenthart, R., 2020. When do media matter most? A study on the relationship between negative economic news and consumer confidence across the twenty-eight EU states. I*nternational Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(1), pp.76-95.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A., 1979. Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk. *Econometrica*, 47(2), 263-291. doi:10.2307/1914185.

Kalogeropoulos, A., 2018. Economic news and personal economic expectations. *Mass Communication & Society*, 21(2), pp.248-265.

Kantar Media., 2019. 'The Role of Newsbrands in the Digital Age' found at https://newsbrandsireland.ie/news-brands-advertising/ accessed on 3 June 2020.

Keating, K., Morrison, N., Corrigan, J., 2010. *Ireland's Credit Crunch*. London: Resistance Press.

Keene, J.R., Shoenberger, H., Berke, C.K. and Bolls, P.D., 2017. The biological roots of political extremism: Negativity bias, political ideology, and preferences for political news. *Politics & the Life Sciences*, 36(2), pp.37-48.

Kelly, A., 1980. White-collar Trade Unionism. IN Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, 1980. *Trade unions and changes in Irish society*. Dublin: Mercier Press, pp.65-81.

Kember, D. et al., 2001. *Reflective Teaching and Learning in the Health Professions*. Oxford: Blackwell Science

Keogh, D., 1982. *The rise of the Irish working class: the Dublin trade union movement and labour leadership, 1890-1914*. Belfast: Appletree Press.

Klaehn, J., 2002. A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky's `Propaganda Model'. *European Journal of Communication, 17(2)*, 147–182.

Koch, T., 1994. Rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 19: pp.976–986.

Kolmer, C., 2008. Methods of Journalism Research - Content Analysis. In M. Loffelholz & D. Weaver, eds. *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 117–130.

Krippendorff, K., 2004. *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, Ca ; London: Sage Pub.

Kvale, S., 1996. *Interviews*. London:Sage

Lakoff, G., 2014. *The All New Don't Think of an Elephant*. USA: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, S., 2015. Inequality as a danger to democracy: Reflections on Piketty's warning. P*olitical Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 130(3), pp.425-447.

Lamberson, P.J. and Soroka, S., 2018. A model of attentiveness to outlying news. *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association*, pp.1-20.

Larragy, J., 2002. T*hrough the Lens of Civil Society: A perspective on Social Partnership in Ireland* IN Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B. Conference of Religious of Ireland [CORI]. Justice Commission., *Choosing a fairer future: an agenda for social partnership after the Celtic tiger*. Dublin: CORI Justice Commission, pp.1-28.

Lee, J.J., 1980. *Worker and Society since 1945* IN Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, 1980. *Trade unions and changes in Irish society*. Dublin: Mercier Press, pp.11-25.

Lewis, J., Williams, A. and Franklin, B., 2008. A compromised fourth estate? *Journalism Studies*, 9(1), pp.1-20.

Lewis, J et al., 2008a. *The Quality and Independence of British Journalism*. Cardiff University

Li, J. and Hovy, E., 2017. *Reflections on Sentiment/Opinion Analysis*. IN Cambria E., Das D., Bandyopadhyay S., Feraco A. (eds) A Practical Guide to Sentiment Analysis. Socio-Affective Computing, vol 5. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55394-8_3

Lichtenstein, N., 2010. Misunderstanding the anti-union narrative. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 56(19), pp. B8-B10.

Lippmann, W., 2009. *Public opinion*. Milton Keynes: Lightning Source.

Lloyd, J., 2004. *What the media are doing to our politics*. London: Constable & Robinson.

Lloyd, J., 1997. John Lloyd. *New Statesman*, 126(4345), pp.8.

Long, S., 2008. T*he perverse organisation and its deadly sins*. London: Karnac.

Louw, P.E., 2010. *The media and political process*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

MacPartlin, B., 1998. 'The Development of Trade Union Organisation' IN Murphy, T.V., University College Dublin. Graduate School of Business. and Roche, W.K. 1997. *Irish industrial relations in practice*. Rev and updated 2nd ed. ed. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with the Graduate School of Business, University College Dublin.

Malone, R., 2007. Labor's voice needs to be heard. *St. Louis Journalism Review*, 37(300), pp.10-27.

Manning, P., 1999. *Categories of Knowledge and Information Flows: Reasons for the Decline of the British Labour and Industrial Correspondents' Group*. Media, Culture and Society, 21, 313–336

Manning, P., 2001. *News and news sources: a critical introduction*. London: Sage.

Manning, P., 2013. Financial journalism, news sources and the banking crisis. *Journalism,* 14(2), pp.173-189.

Marchi, R., 2012. With facebook, blogs, and fake news, teens reject journalistic "Objectivity". *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(3), pp.246-262.

Marsh, D., 1992. *The new politics of British trade unionism: union power and the Thatcher legacy*. London: Macmillan.

Maruyama, G., and Ryan, C.S., 2014. *Research methods in social relations*. Eighth edition. ed. Chichester, [England]: Wiley Blackwell.

Mason, P., 2008. *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the working class went global*. London: Random House.

Mason, J., 2002. *Qualitative researching*. 2nd ed. ed. London: SAGE.

McCarthy, C., 1980. *The Development of Irish Trade Unions* IN Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, Trade unions and changes in Irish society. Dublin: Mercier Press, pp.26-52.

McChesney, R.W., 2016. Journalism is dead! long live journalism?: Why democratic societies will need to subsidise future news production. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 13(3), pp.128-135.

McCombs, M.E. and Shaw, D.L., 1972. The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), pp.176-187.*

McIlroy, J., 1995. *Trade unions in Britain today*. 2nd ed. ed. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press.

McLuhan, M., 1997. *The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man*. Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press.

McMenamin, I., Flynn, R., O'Malley, E. and Rafter, K., 2012. Commercialism and election framing: A content analysis of twelve newspapers in the 2011 Irish general election. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), pp.167-187.

McNair, B., 2009. Journalism in the 21st century - evolution, not extinction. *Journalism*, 10(3), pp.347-349.

McNair, B., 2006. *An introduction to political communication*. 3rd ed. London; New York: Routledge.

McNamara, G., Turner, M., Irish Congress of Trade Unions., Williams, K. and West, D., 1994. *Understanding trade unions: yesterday & today*. 2nd ed., rev. & enl. ed. Dublin: Elo Publications in association with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Mencher, M., 2011. *Melvin Mencher's news reporting and writing*. 12th ed. ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Mercille, J., 2015. *The political economy and media coverage of the European economic crisis: the case of Ireland*. New York: Routledge.

Merrill, J.C. and Nerone, J.C., 2002. The four theories of the press four and a half decades later: A retrospective. J*ournalism Studies*, 3(1), pp.133-136.

Mickunas, A. and Pilotta, J.J., 1998. *Technocracy vs. democracy: issues in the politics of communication*. Cresskill, N.J: Hampton Press.

Miles, M. and Hubberman, A.M., 1984. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA:Sage.

Moody, K., 2012. Contextualising organised labour in expansion and crisis: The case of the US. *Historical Materialism*, 20(1), pp.3-30.

Moran, M., 1979. The conservative party and the trade unions since 1974. *Political Studies,* 27(1), pp.38-53.

Morley, D., 1973. *Industrial conflict and the mass media*. Birmingham, [Eng.]: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

Mukerji, P. and Albon, D., 2010. *Research Methods in Early Childhood: An Introductory Guide*. London:Sage.

Munck, R., 1999. Globalisation, Development and Labour Strategies: Ireland in Context. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 9(1), pp.97-114.

Murphy, T.V., Roche, W.K., 1997. *Irish industrial relations in practice*. Rev and updated 2nd ed. ed. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with the Graduate School of Business, University College Dublin.

Murphy, D., 2009. *The Rest of the World Knew Before We Did* IN Bradley, F., and Mulholland, J., 2009. Patrick MacGill Summer School (2009). Ireland's economic crisis: time to act. Dublin: Carysfort Press, pp.51-56

Mutz, Diana C., 1992. Source: American Journal of Political Science , May, 1992, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 483-508 Published by: Midwest Political Science Association

Negrine, R.M., 2007. *The professionalisation of political communication*. Bristol; Chicago: Intellect Books.

Negrine, R.M. and Stanyer, J., 2007. *The political communication reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Nerone, J., 2013. The historical roots of the normative model of journalism. *Journalism*, 14(4), pp.446-458.

Neuman, W.L., 2014. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* Seventh ed. Essex: Pearson

Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, 1980. *Trade unions and changes in Irish society*. Dublin: Mercier Press.

O'Beachaín, D., and O'Brien, M., 2014. *Political communication in the Republic of Ireland*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

O'Brien, C., 2010. *Searching for answers in wake of collapsed partnership. The Irish Times*, 25 January 2010, pp.13.

O'Brien, M., 2017. *The fourth estate: journalism in twentieth-century Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ó Ceallaigh, D., 1981. *Trade unions and the mass media IN* Pollock, H.M. Industrial relations in practice. Dublin: O'Brien Press, pp.137-147.

O'Connor, F., 2015. *Sunday Business Post*. 29 November 2015., pp.15-17.

O'Donnell, R. and Thomas, D., 1999. Partnership and Policy Making IN Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B., *Social policy in Ireland: principles, practice and problems*. Dublin, Ireland: Oak Tree Press, pp.117-146

Ogle, B., 2003. *Off the rails: the story of ILDA*. Dublin: Currach Press.

O'Hara, P., 2002. Social Partnership and Regional Development IN Healy, S., S.M.A. and Reynolds, B. Conference of Religious of Ireland [CORI]. Justice Commission., *Choosing a fairer future: an agenda for social partnership after the Celtic tiger*. Dublin: CORI Justice Commission, pp.113-137.

Olsen, W., 2004. 'Triangulation in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods Can Really Be Mixed', Developments in Sociology, [ed. M. Holborn] Ormskirk: Causeway Press, pp. 1–30.

O'Neill, D., 2007. From hunky heroes to dangerous dinosaurs. *Journalism Studies*, 8(5), pp.813-830.

O'Regan, M., 2010. *The Irish press and the Iraq War: Real world cues, news values and the political calibration effect*. International Communication Gazette, 72 [6], pp.443-464

O'Riain, S., 2014. *The rise and fall of Ireland's Celtic tiger: liberalism, boom and bust.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

O'Toole, F., 2009. *Ship of Fools*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

O'Toole, F., 2010. *Enough is Enough*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Papathanassopoulos, Negrine, Mancini and Holtz-Bacha., 2006. Political communication in the era of professionalisation. *Changing Media, Changing Europe*, 3, pp.9-25.

Parks, P., 2019. Textbook news values: Stable concepts, changing choices. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 96(3), pp.784-810.

Pelling, H., 1976. *A history of British trade unionism*. 3ed. London: Macmillan.

Philo, G., Beharrell, P. and Hewitt, J., 1978. One Dimensional News - Television and the Control of Explanation IN: Beharrell, P. and Philo, G., (eds.) *Trade unions and the media.* London: Macmillan, pp.1-22.

Pollock, H.M., 1981. *Industrial relations in practice*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.

Power, J., 2009. *Picking up the pieces: economic crisis and hope in Ireland*. Dublin: Blackhall.

Powell, J., 2010. *The New Machiavelli*. London: Random House.

Quinn, A., 2006. Research evidence and media bias: Reflections on a 1980s dispute. *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(3), pp.457-465.

Rafter, K., 2014. Voices in the crisis: The role of media elites in interpreting Ireland's banking collapse. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(5), pp.598-607.

Randall, D., 2000. *The universal journalist*. 2nd ed. ed. London; Sterling Va: Pluto Press.

Regan, A., 2012. *The Rise and Fall of Irish Social Partnership*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg.

Report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body. 2002. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Robertson, G., 2007. *The Putney Debates*. London: Verso.

Roche, W.K., 1998. Pay Determination, The State and the Politics of Industrial Relations IN Murphy, T.V., University College Dublin. Graduate School of Business. and Roche, W.K. 1998. *Irish industrial relations in practice*. Rev and updated 2nd ed. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with the Graduate School of Business, University College Dublin, pp.145-226.

Roche, W.K., 2007. Social partnership in Ireland and new social pacts. *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 46(3), pp.395-425.

Roche, W. K., 2009. 'Social Partnership: From Lemass to Cowen', Economic and Social Review, 40, 183–205.

Rorty, R., 1989. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Segev, E., 2016. From propaganda to alarm: International economic news about controlled and free press countries. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 16(1), pp.70-77.

Seldon, A. and Collings, D., 1999. *Britain under Thatcher*. Harlow: Longman.

Schudson, M., & Waisbord, S., 2003. Toward a Political Sociology of the News Media IN T. Janoski, R. Alford, A. Hicks, & M. Schwartz (Eds.), The Handbook of Political Sociology: States, Civil Societies, and Globalization, pp. 350-364. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511818059.019

Silverman, D., 1997. *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice: edited by David Silverman*. London: SAGE.

Silverman, D., 2005. *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. 2nd ed. ed. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D., 2006. *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction*. 3rd ed. ed. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.

Smith, B.A., 1999. Ethical and methodologic benefits of using a reflexive journal in hermeneutic–phenomenologic research. *Image — the Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 31:4, 359–363.

Soroka, S. N., 2006. Good news and bad news: Asymmetric responses to economic information. Journal of Politics, 68, 372-385. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00413.x

Soroka, S., Fournier, P. and Nir, L., 2019. Cross-national evidence of a negativity bias in psychophysiological reactions to news. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(38), pp.188-192.

Soroka, S., Fournier, P., Nir, L. and Hibbing, J., 2019. Psychophysiology in the study of political communication: An expository study of individual-level variation in negativity biases. *Political Communication*, 36(2), pp.288-302.

Special Group., 2009. *Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes*. Volume 1. Dublin: Stationery Office

Stake, R., 1994. Case Studies. N.K Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. pp. 236-247. London:Sage.

Stephens, M., 1981. *Ernest Bevin - Unskilled Labourer and World Statesman 1881-1951*. London: Transport and General Workers Union.

Svensson, H.M., Albæk, E., van Dalen, A. and de Vreese, C., 2017. Good news in bad news: How negativity enhances economic efficacy. *International Journal of Communication (19328036)*, 11, pp.1431-1447.

Sweeney, P. 1980. Industrial Relations: Realities IN Nevin, D. and Radio Telefís Éireann, *Trade unions and changes in Irish society*. Dublin: Mercier Press, pp.116-130.

Teague, P. and Donaghey, J., 2015. The life and death of Irish social partnership: Lessons for social pacts. *Business History*, 57(3), pp.418-437.

Teague, P. and Donaghey, J., 2009. Why has Irish social partnership survived? *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47(1), pp.55-78.

Teddlie, C. & Tashakkori, A., 2003. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications

Thatcher, M., 1993. *The Downing Street Years*. London: HarperCollins.

Trades Union Congress., 1979. *How to handle the media: a guide for trade unionists*. London: Trades Union Congress.

Tuckman, B.W., 1972. *Conducting Educational Research*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Turner, T., D'Art, D. and O'Sullivan, M., 2013., *Are Trade Unions Still Relevant*?
Co. Dublin, Ireland: Open Press.

Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D., 1981. The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. *Science*, (211), pp.453-458.

van Dalen, A., de Vreese, C. and Albæk, E., 2017. Economic news through the magnifying glass. *Journalism Studies*, 18(7), pp.890-909.

van Dalen, A., de Vreese, C. and Albæk, E., 2017. Mediated Uncertainty: The negative impact of uncertainty in economic news on consumer confidence, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 81, Issue 1, 1 March 2017, Pages 111–130, https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/poq/nfw039

van Dyk, S., 2009. From peripherality and conflict to consensus-based success? Applying a Foucauldian perspective on power and discourse to the Irish model of social partnership. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 17(1), pp.75-94.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K., 2004. Playground of the pundits or voice of the people? Comparing British and Danish opinion pages, *Journalism Studies*, 5:1, pp.59-70

Wallace, J., Gunnigle, P., McMahon, G., and O'Sullivan, M., 2013. *Industrial relations in Ireland*. 4th edition. ed. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Walsh, F. and Strobl, E. 2009. *Recent Trends in Trade Union Membership in Ireland*. Economic & Social Review. 40 (1), pp. 117-138.

Webb, S. and Webb, B.P., 1919. *The history of trade unionism, 1666-1920*. rev. ed. ed. Westminister. Eng.]: Printed by the authors for the Trade Unionists of the United Kingdom.

Westen, D., 2007. *The political brain: the role of emotion in deciding the fate of the nation*. New York: Public Affairs.

Westerhahl, J. and Johansson, F., 1994. *Foreign News: News Values and Ideologies*. European Journal of Communication 9: 71–89.

Wheatley, D., 2018. *Sourcing the story: journalistic practices and online news coverage of Irish healthcare policy*. PhD thesis, Dublin City University.

Williams, F., 1952. *Ernest Bevin, Portrait of a Great Englishman*. London: Hutchinson & Co Ltd.

Williams, G. and Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom., 2009. S*hafted: the media, the miner's strike & the aftermath*. London: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

Winston, B., 2002. Towards tabloidization? Glasgow revisited, 1975–2001. J*ournalism Studies*, 3(1), pp.5-20.

Yeates, P., 2013. *Lockout: Dublin 1913*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Yin, R., 2009. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th Ed. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage

APPENDIX 1 CONSENT FORM

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title

2020 Vision: How did the Irish Public Sector Trade Unions respond to the economic crisis and what can be learned in terms of political communication strategy?

Department: School of Communication, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

Researcher: Neil Ward, E: neil.ward9@mail.dcu.ie, Tel: 087 776 2146

Clarification of the purpose of the research

To understand how Irish public-sector trade unions responded to the economic crisis that ultimately led to unilateral pay cuts in the Budget of December 2009; and what are the implications for any future strategy of communication?

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

As a potential participant in this research study you may be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded. Your estimated time commitment should be no more than 60 minutes. You will be emailed a transcript of the interview, which you may edit accordingly.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	*Yes/No*
I understand the information provided	*Yes/No*
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	*Yes/No*
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	*Yes/No*
I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped	*Yes/No*

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point.

Confirmation of arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Interview data will be securely stored at DCU and is accessible only to the doctoral student. However, please note that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Confirmation of arrangements regarding retention/disposal of data

Interview data will be destroyed 24 months after PhD thesis submission.

Confirmations relating to any other relevant information as indicated in the PLS

I consent to the use of my data for future studies within the following parameters (provide detail):

Academic publication of thesis via book and/or academic journal articles.

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature:_____

Name in Block Capitals:_____

Witness:_____

Date:_____

APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHIES

Begg, D. **General Secretary** **ICTU**
David Begg was general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU] from 2001-2015; he was key actor in Irish Social Partnership and also a director of the Central Bank [1995–2010].

Buckley, O. **Principal Officer** **Department of Finance**
Oonagh Buckley joined the Department of Finance in June 2008 as the Irish State's fiscal world collapsed; she became part of the newly-formed Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2011 and remained there until her appointment to the Workplace Relations Commission in 2016. Oonagh Buckley was one of the key negotiators on the government side; and drafted the legislation from FEMPI 2 onwards.

Carr, J. **General Secretary** **INTO**
John Carr was General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation [INTO] from 2001 and a member of the General Purpose Committee of the ICTU, involved in most negotiations during and after the economic crisis. In 1989, Carr became the full-time assistant general secretary of the INTO, then its general treasurer in 1997. Under his leadership the union successfully encouraged the formation of structures to counter educational disadvantage including the National Council for Special Education, the DEIS initiative, the Teaching Council and the Statutory Committee on Educational Disadvantage.

Cawley, A. **Lecturer** **Liverpool Hope University**
Dr Anthony Cawley is a lecturer in media and communications at Liverpool Hope University; formerly working at the University of Limerick [UL]. Cawley's doctoral studies were conducted at Dublin City University [DCU]. His research interests are media industries, but particularly since 2008 he has a sustained research interest in how the Irish economic crisis has been reported through the news media; looking at various aspects including how the public and private sectors have been positioned within news discourse; and the framing of the public sector-private sector debate from 2008 to 2010 when the economy was going through great turmoil – including cuts in funding to services and public sector pay relative to the private sector.

Cody, S. **Deputy General Secretary** **IMPACT**
Shay Cody was Deputy General Secretary of IMPACT during 2008-2010; becoming General Secretary in 2010 and the chairperson of the PSC of ICTU – and subsequently Senior General Secretary of Fórsa with the amalgamation in January 2018. He retired in June 2019.

Clinton, J. **General Secretary** **POA**
John Clinton joined the Irish Prison Service in 1990 and worked in various roles in Wheatfield Prison, as both an officer in charge of a landing or as an assistant to welfare. He has been involved as a shop steward/branch officer in the Prison Officers Association [POA] since 1995, becoming branch secretary and executive member for the prison in 1997. He won the election for General Secretary in 2000 and has held that post since. He represented around 3,300 members in 2009.

Connolly, F. **Head of Communications** **SIPTU**

Frank Connolly has been Head of Communications for SIPTU since July 2009. Connolly is an investigative journalist who has written extensively on current affairs and politics in Ireland over the past 30 years. His journalism contributed to the establishment of two judicial tribunals into planning and police corruption. He has worked with numerous Irish media organisations over the years and has been a regular contributor on radio and television news and current affairs programmes. A graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, he has also lectured in journalism. His previous books include Tom Gilmartin: the Man who brought down a Taoiseach and NAMA-Land

Dirwan, J. **General Secretary** **AGSI**

Joseph Dirwan is now a retired detective sergeant who joined An Garda Síochána in 1972 and retired on 16th October 2012. Formerly General Secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors [AGSI] from 2006 to 2012, having been President of from 2000 to 2006. In the summer of 2009, he had been leader of the AGSI for three years, representing around 2,500 members of sergeant and inspector rank.

Doran, L. **General Secretary** **INMO**

Liam Doran was General Secretary of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation [INMO] that represented some 40,000 members in 2009/2010 [was the Irish Nurses Organisation [INO]]. Born in Kilkenny and educated in England, having always wanted to be a nurse, Doran qualified in mental handicap nursing, general nursing, psychiatric nursing before becoming student officer for the INO. He became General Secretary in 1998; and has been a member of the ICTU executive for 12 years, chairman of the health service staff panel representing 100,000 staff in the health service and a member of the Croke Park Implementation Body.

Harbor, B. **Head of Communications** **IMPACT**

Bernard Harbor FPRII is Head of Communications for the trade union Fórsa and formerly of IMPACT, a role he has held since 1995. Harbor highly experienced communications, PR and media relations manager, strategist and practitioner, experienced in industrial relations, political, and public service settings. He was Director of Communications and Media for President Michael D Higgins' 2018 re-election campaign, and was a special advisor to Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Alex White between 2014 and 2016.

Herbert, C. **Special Advisor** **Department of Finance**

Cathy Herbert was special adviser to Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan during the economic crisis; a role that involved advising on communications. She worked with him from 2006 when he was Minister for Children; moving with him until the election of 2011. Noel Whelan described Cathy Herbert as "Lenihan's closest political adviser in all his ministries…part of his core team within the Department of Finance".

Higgins, C. **Assistant Editor** **IRN**

Colman Higgins is a journalist with the respected and influential *Industrial Relations News* [IRN] since 1996, before which he worked for five years in general and specialist business publications. He holds a BA in Economics and History from UCC, an MA in Journalism from NUI Galway and an MPhil in Industrial Relations from UCD. He has been Assistant Editor of IRN since 2003.

Horan, B. **General Secretary** **CPSU**
Blair Horan became general secretary of the Civil and Public Service Union [CPSU] in 1997 and retired in 2012. He [nominally] worked for the ESB from 1971 to 1988, working full time as an activist for the union ATGWU [as it was, now UNITE]. From 1988 to 1992 he was assistant general secretary, and then deputy general secretary from 1992-7. It was a steady progression.

Kavanagh, D. **General Secretary** **PNA**
Des Kavanagh was General Secretary for the Psychiatric Nurses Association. He worked as a nurse for over 20 years. Postgraduate studies include a fellowship in psychiatric nursing in the College of Surgeons and worked in rehabilitation for five years. Since 1991 he worked in head office; having become chairman of the organisation in 1989. In 1991 he became acting general secretary and remained in the frontline of industrial relations and nursing – and as a full-time official for 26 years. He retired in 2017.

King, P. **Vice President** **SIPTU**
Patricia King was Vice President of SIPTU during the economic crisis of 2008-2010 and an officer of the PSC of ICTU. She was a member of the negotiating committee of ICTU that delivered the Croke Park Agreement. King was elected as general secretary of the ICTU in 2015 when David Begg stepped down, the first woman to hold the post. She had been considered the front-runner for the role.

McDonnell, T. **Director** **NERI**
Dr Tom McDonnell worked at the Think-tank for Action on Social Change [TASC] for four years; and moved to Nevin Economic Research Institute [NERI] in 2014. He works on economic forecasting and policy research, independent of the trade unions but providing them with advice. NERI is a research organisation which has a vision of the achievement of a better, fairer society. With offices in Dublin and Belfast.

McLoone, P. **General Secretary** **IMPACT**
Peter McLoone was General Secretary of IMPACT and chairperson of the PSC of ICTU during the economic crisis. He became General secretary of IMPACT in 1996. McLoone was a leading proponent of social partnership, and generally worked closely with governments during his tenure. McLoone served as president of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU] from 2005 until 2007, and later as chair of the ICTU's public services committee. In 2009, the Social Partnership agreements collapsed, and he retired from his trade union posts the following year. He joined the Labour Relations Commission, the Irish Times trust, and became a governor of the National College of Ireland.

Miley, I. **Industry and Employment Correspondent** **RTÉ**
Ingrid Miley graduated in French and German Language and Literature and holds a masters degree in French Translation and Linguistics. She started work in RTÉ as an assistant producer, moving into journalism as a researcher. In 1988, as a broadcast journalist she worked on *Today Tonight*, before *Marketplace* working with George Lee, Miriam O'Callaghan and Noel Curran [now Director General]. In 1997 Ingrid Miley transferred to the newsroom, she qualified as a barrister and then became Industry and Employment Correspondent in 2002.

Moore, R. **Special Advisor** **Department of Justice**
Richard Moore was the press officer and special advisor to Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern during the period from May 2008 through to 2011. He has also been news editor of *The Irish Press* and political advisor to Sean Gallagher in the presidential election of November 2011. Moore was a government media advisor from 1996 to 2011; and worked with the 24/7 Frontline Alliance as a press officer during 2013.

O'Connor, J. **President** **SIPTU / ICTU**
Jack O'Connor was elected as Vice President of SIPTU in 2000, and President in 2003 until 2017. He served as President of the ICTU from 2009-2011; throughout the fallout of the economic crisis. He retired from the trade union movement as General President of SIPTU in 2017 and is now Chairman of the Labour Party.

O'Reilly, L. **National Nursing Officer** **SIPTU**
Louise O'Reilly was the full-time National Nursing Officer for SIPTU in 2009. A graduate from UCD, she also holds an MSc Equality Studies and worked in administration in the university, before becoming a full-time trade union official in 2005. She is currently the Education Officer for SIPTU. In 2009, SIPTU represented around 9,000 nurses. She was elected as a Sinn Fein TD in 2016 for the Dublin Fingal constituency and is now a shadow health spokesperson.

Sheehan, B. **Editor** **Industrial Relations News**
Brian Sheehan has been editor of Industrial Relations News [IRN] since 1986; a periodical that began publishing in 1979. IRN is a weekly subscription magazine providing coverage of all industrial and employee relations issues in Ireland.

Stone, P.J. **General Secretary** **GRA**
PJ Stone joined a GRA executive in 1987 and was elected president of the Association in 1989, became Deputy General Secretary in 1993 and General Secretary in 1997. By 2009 there were 12,000 members of Garda rank in the association. PJ Stone retired from An Garda Siochana and the GRA in February 2016.

Wall, M. **Industry Correspondent** ***The Irish Times***
Martin Wall is the Industry Correspondent for The Irish Times and has been for the last fourteen years. Wall has been a journalist for nearly 30 years, working as News Editor of the Sunday Tribune after being Head of News for ten years at the Irish Medical Times. Most of his background is in industrial relations; pay and conditions have regularly featured in his career.

Walsh, A. **Industry Correspondent** ***Irish Independent***
Anne-Marie Walsh was appointed as Industry Correspondent for the Irish Independent around the time that the economic crisis of 2008 began to unfold.

Yeates, P. **Public Relations** **24/7 Alliance / SIPTU**
Padraig Yeates has spent most of his working life in journalism, the last 20 years of it in The Irish Times with the last seven years of those covering industry and employment – or industrial relations as it was. Having covered industrial relations for around 30 years, he took early retirement in 2002 to write, and some public relations work, mainly for unions, but not exclusively. He became a PR consultant for the 24/7 Alliance during 2009/2010. He is the author of 'Lockout' – a seminal history of the Labour movement in Ireland.

APPENDIX 3 INTERVIEWEE INVITATION

DD/MM/YYYY

Dear [INTERVIEWEE]

I am on the PhD Register of Dublin City University undertaking a doctoral thesis on political communication, the field in which I earned a first class masters' degree in 2013.

The aim of my PhD research is to establish what can be learned from the Irish trade unions' response to the unprecedented economic crisis of 2008, until the unilaterally imposed Budget measures of December 2009 and successive agreements since.

The research question is:

How did the Irish public-sector trade unions respond to the economic crisis, and what are the implications for their future communication strategy to influence public policy?

I have forensically examined and analysed the text content of Irish broadsheet media from 7 September to 10 December 2009; and have already interviewed a number of key spokespeople who acted during this period, as well as specialist journalists and media analysts. I intend to produce a robust conclusion and recommendations based on meticulously gathered evidence.

As you were a key stakeholder during this period, I would be delighted if you could afford me half an hour of your time over the coming weeks to record any of your insights or viewpoints on this traumatic economic shock.

Ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information – or to arrange a date and time.

Kind regards

Neil Ward
School of Communications
Dublin City University
e: neil.ward9@mail.dcu.ie
m: 087 776 2146

APPENDIX 4 PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Dublin City University

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Introduction to the Research Study

Research Title: 2020 Vision: How did the Irish Public Sector Trade Unions respond to the economic crisis and what can be learned in terms of political communication strategy?

Department: School of Communication, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

Researcher: Neil Ward, E: neil.ward9@mail.dcu.ie, Tel: 087 776 2146

Personal Data – GDPR Compliance

- Data Controller is Neil Ward, E: neil.ward9@mail.dcu.ie, Tel: 087 776 2146
- DCU Data Protection Officer – Mr. Martin Ward (data.protection@dcu.ie Ph: 7005118 / 7008257)
- Interview data will be processed solely for research purposes
- Categories of personal data concerned – Normal, Non-Sensitive Data
- Categories of recipients with whom data is shared – PhD Thesis Supervisor, Dr Mark O'Brien
- Retention period: 24 months after PhD Thesis submission
- Information on the rights of the data subject – Interviewee may review data post-interview for clarification purposes
- Information on rights to withdraw consent – Interviewee may withdraw consent at any time
- Where relevant, details of transfers to 3rd countries, and the basis for such transfers – Not Applicable

Details of what participant involvement in the Research Study will require

As a potential participant in this research study you may be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio recorded. Your estimated time commitment should be no more than 60 minutes. You will be emailed a transcript of the interview, which you may edit accordingly. Specifically, you will be asked for your opinion on the lead-up to and the context of the 2008 economic crisis; the Irish government response to same; the response of civic society to the bank guarantee and public service cuts; and the response of the Irish public sector trade unions – particularly the factors that affected the political communication strategies employed by government and trade union actors during the crisis.

Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study

This research study should not incur any risk on your behalf either in your professional or home life. All necessary access and permissions will be secured prior to your participation.

Any benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

It is hoped that the findings of this research through your participation will provide a better understanding of Irish political communication in industrial relations.

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Interview data will be securely stored at DCU and is accessible only to the doctoral student. However, please note that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. Specifically, *confidentiality of information provided cannot always be guaranteed by researchers and can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.*

Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

Interview data will be used within the doctoral thesis but may also be used within future academic publication of thesis via book and/or academic journal articles. Audio recordings will be destroyed 24 months after thesis submission.

Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

All involvement in this research study is voluntary and a participant may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study have been completed.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie