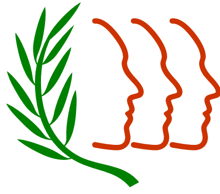

PEOPLE'S NEWS

News Digest of the People's Movement

www.people.ie | post@people.ie

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Where's your mandate, Mr Bruton?

Richard Bruton and thirteen other EU trade and foreign affairs ministers signed a letter to the commissioner for trade, Cecilia Malmström, and the president of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, last week in which they insisted that the EU Council of Ministers give the Commission a clear mandate to push for ISDS (Investor-state dispute settlement)—the private corporate "courts" envisaged under the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership—and that he and the Commission continue to push hard for its inclusion.

One has to ask where Bruton got the mandate to place the Irish people and Irish state in a position where they could potentially be sued for hundreds of millions by business corporations in secret private courts that do not operate under any defined system of jurisprudence.

The following is the essential paragraph ("investor protection" is code for ISDS):

One of the issues that has attracted criticism is investment protection. The Commission is currently analysing the results of a public consultation on this issue and we look forward to the Commission's response. The consultation was an important step in ensuring that we strike the correct balance to ensure that governments retain their full freedom to regulate, but not in a way that discriminates against foreign firms … The Council mandate is clear in its inclusion of investor protection mechanisms in the TTIP negotiations; we need to work together on how best to do so.

The provision of the Treaty of Lisbon that came into effect on 1 November provides for a blocking minority (to block a proposal they don't approve of) composed of at least four member-states representing more than 35 per cent of the EU population. So, will they block a TTIP deal if it doesn't have ISDS?

This letter may also be the reason why Malmström felt confident enough to threaten resigning as commissioner for trade if ISDS was not included in TTIP, in the face of Juncker's opposition. Juncker said that "I will not accept that the jurisdiction of [national] courts be limited by special regimes" for investor-state dispute settlement.

Barry Finnegan, a researcher with ATTAC, said that,

in the absence of a list of clearly identified problems with the Irish and European justice system, only one conclusion can be drawn from the TTIP negotiators' desire for a private international "court" for foreign investors which would allow them to bypass Irish and European courts: namely to avoid the jurisprudence and constitutional rights accompanying the application of justice in democratic societies.

So, did the Government know that Bruton wrote this letter, insisting on these private arbitration panels, which allow corporations to bypass the courts and sue states directly? And is the inclusion of ISDS in TTIP official

Government policy?

These are questions we need answers to, as a senior minister in the coalition seems prepared to place corporations on a par with sovereign states—including our own. But not quite on a par: under ISDS provisions, corporations can sue states, but states cannot sue corporations.

The EU Commission released the two-year-old TTIP negotiating mandate recently, because the EU ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, was suing the Commission for a lack of transparency on TTIP. But in relation to that mandate to negotiate the TTIP and the letter this week, Richard Bruton never asked Dáil Éireann, or the people of Ireland, whether they should put ISDS into the Commission's mandate; he never told the Dáil, or citizens, that he had done so until the Commission released the negotiating mandate (under legal pressure); and he never asked the Dáil, or citizens, whether he should write such a letter to Juncker and Malmström insisting on ISDS.

Answers please, Messrs Bruton and Kenny (not forgetting Ms Burton).

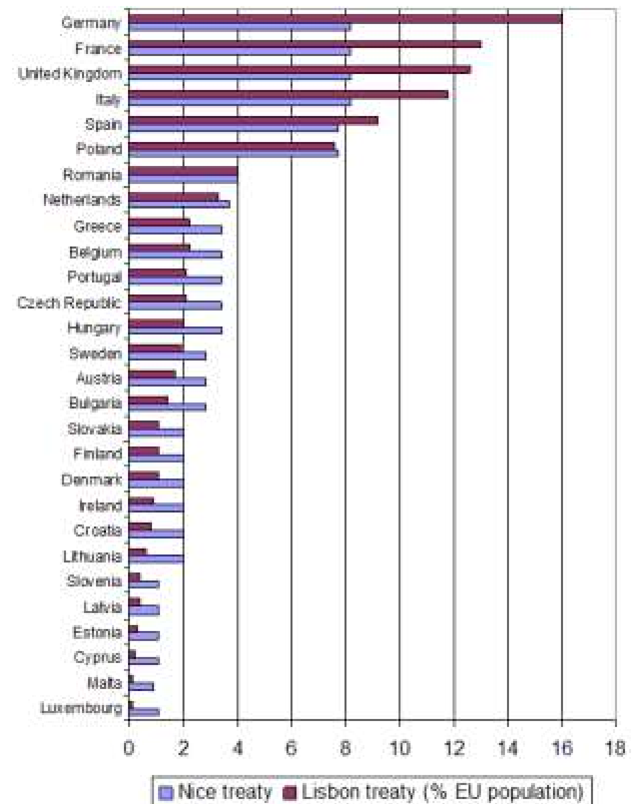
Who exactly do you represent?

• The letter is available at: http://blogs.ft.com/brusselsblog/files/2014/10/ISDSLetter.pdf

Ireland's voting weight in EU law-making reduced by 150 per cent

Since Saturday last (1 November), under the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, Ireland's voting weight in EU law-making has been reduced by 150 per cent, and Ireland has lost its full-time member of the EU Commission.

From now on a "qualified majority" will be at least 55 per cent of the members of the European Council, comprising at least 15 of the 28 members and representing member-states that comprise at least 65 per cent of the total population of the EU. A "blocking minority" must include at least four Council members, constituting more than 35 per cent of the EU's population, failing which the qualified majority will be deemed to be attained.



Up till now Ireland had 2 per cent of the weighted votes; now it has 0.8 per cent, while Germany, for example, has 16 per cent. In effect, our relative power has been reduced to about a third of its previous level.

This "double majority" rule will make EU laws much easier to pass, provided the bigger states with large populations agree with them. Significantly, the bigger states will also find it easier to assemble a blocking minority. France and Germany between them have nearly 33 per cent of the total members. So Germany, Poland and any one of a range of countries, including France, Italy, and Britain, could easily assemble a blocking minority to prevent the enactment of measures they disagree with.

As the union is enlarged, each individual state must have less influence in the whole. But what has happened with the Lisbon Treaty is a totally disproportionate increase in the weight of the big states, and a corresponding diminution of influence for the small ones.

Some 45 per cent of the power to make EU laws is now held by the four largest states—Germany, France, Britain, and Italy—with the result that the influence of smaller states, such as Ireland, is negligible.

One of the big selling points of the re-run referendum on the Lisbon Treaty was that Ireland would keep its commissioner. It did; but from 1 November it is without a voting or participating commissioner for a third of the time, and we will find ourselves bound by EU laws—superior to national law—proposed by a Commission in which no Irish person participates in making decisions.

ILO study finds that TTIP would have significant negative effects

Official studies of TTIP are not clear about the possible outcome for employment and income distribution, but a recent study by Jeronim Capaldo, an econometrics and data specialist with the International Labour Organisation, finds that that the main existing studies of TTIP rely on inadequate economic models (of the CGE type).

Following this lead, in a working paper for Tufts University, Boston, Capaldo analysed TTIP with a different model—the UN Global Policy Model—and found dramatically different results.

Here is a summary of the outcome for the European Union:

- TTIP would lead to *losses in terms of net exports* after a decade, compared with the baseline. Northern European economies would suffer the largest losses (2.07 per cent of GDP), followed by France (1.9 per cent), Germany (1.14 per cent), and Britain (0.95 per cent).
- TTIP would lead to *net losses in terms of GDP.* Consistent with the figures for net exports, northern European economies would suffer the largest reduction in GDP (–0.5 per cent), followed by France (–0.48 per cent) and Germany (–0.29 per cent).
- TTIP would lead to *a loss of labour income.* France would be the worst hit, with a loss of €5,500 per worker, followed by northern European countries (–€4,800), Britain (–€4,200), and Germany (–€3,400).
- TTIP would lead to *job losses.* The report calculates that approximately 600,000 jobs would be lost in the EU. Northern European countries would be most affected (–223,000 jobs), followed by Germany (–134,000), France (–130,000), and southern European countries (–90,000).
- TTIP would lead to a *reduction of the labour share* (the share of total income accruing to workers), reinforcing a trend that has contributed to the present stagnation. The reverse side of this projected decrease is an increase in the share of profits and rents, indicating that there would be a proportionate transfer of income from labour to capital. The largest transfers would take place in Britain (7 per cent of GDP transferred from labour to profit income), France (8 per cent), and Germany and northern Europe (4 per cent).
- TTIP would lead to *a loss of government revenue.* The surplus of indirect taxes (such as sales taxes or value-added taxes) over subsidies would decrease in all EU countries, with France suffering the largest loss (0.64 per cent of GDP). Government deficits would also increase as a proportion of GDP in every EU country, pushing public finances closer to, or beyond, the Maastricht Treaty limits.

- TTIP would lead to *higher financial instability* and an accumulation of imbalances. With export revenue, wage share and government revenue decreasing, demand would have to be sustained by profits and investment. But with flagging growth in consumption, profits cannot be expected to come from growing sales. A more realistic assumption is that profits and investment (mostly in financial assets) would be sustained by growing asset prices. The potential for the macro-economic instability of this growth strategy is well known after the recent financial crisis.

These results point to a general conclusion: seeking a higher trade volume is not a sustainable growth strategy for the EU. In the present context of austerity, high unemployment, and low growth, increasing the pressure on labour incomes would further harm economic activity. On the contrary, any viable strategy for rekindling economic growth in Europe would have to build on a strong policy effort in support of labour incomes.

Unfortunately, Capaldo did not deal separately with Ireland.

■ The full paper can be found at: http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/policy_research/TTIP_simulations.html

People's Movement press conference and demonstration

The People's Movement held a press conference and picket in the last week of October to publicise the fact that, from Saturday 1 November, Germany's relative voting weight in making EU laws is doubled, from its previous 8 per cent to 16 per cent, the six largest EU states have increased their combined share of votes in the Council of Ministers from 49 per cent to over 70 per cent, while the combined voting share of the twenty-two smallest states falls from 51 per cent to less than 30 per cent. Ireland's voting weight falls from its previous 2 per cent to 0.8 per cent.

Angela Merkel arrives at Dáil Éireann with the news.

It's hard to imagine having a say of any sort on the vital issues that affect our everyday lives. When Ireland joined the EEC we were assured that we were joining a community of equals; but all consideration of fair play has been thrown to the winds as the few big countries seek to dominate the rest of the EU.

Thomas Pringle TD at the press conference. Cllr Brendan Young and Patricia McKenna also spoke.

On 30 October, Kevin McCorry of the People's Movement spoke to a meeting of about forty political activists in Wexford on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). The consensus of the meeting was that, rather than representing a much-needed boost to people's living standards, both agreements are a threat to democracy and a charter for deregulation that would lead to the emasculation of hard-won rights and standards and massive job losses. And all this in the interests of transnational corporations.

Further meetings are to be held with a view to building a campaign in the county.

Children badly hit by EU austerity

UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) has just published the most comprehensive study of the effects of the financial crisis on children in OECD countries.

The report, *Children of the Recession,* shows that in the last five years Irish families with children have lost the equivalent of ten years of income progress. Out of the 41 OECD countries Ireland is ranked 37th on relative increases in child poverty. In real terms, there are 130,000 more poor children in Ireland than there were five years ago—mainly as a result of policies imposed by the EU and International Monetary Fund, which are to continue under the EU policy of permanent austerity.

It's no surprise, then, that Greece records the biggest relative increase in child poverty since 2008, followed by Latvia, Croatia, and Ireland. Greece has the highest level of child poverty, at 41 per cent (up from 23 per cent in 2008). Latvia and Spain also have child poverty rates above 36 per cent—all countries subjected to austerity schemes.

The report clearly demonstrates that policy choices, and not just prevailing economic circumstances, contribute to child poverty throughout the OECD.

In eighteen countries surveyed, child poverty has decreased. Poland, for example, reduced child poverty by 30 per cent between 2008 and 2012, while in Ireland it increased by 10½ per cent during the same period.

The report shows that 16 per cent of young people in Ireland (aged between fifteen and twenty-four) are not in education, employment, or training, a higher figure than in many other OECD countries. This is an effective measure of social exclusion, identifying those who have not made a successful transition from school to work.

Ireland is among the youngest nations in Europe, with 25 per cent of our population being under eighteen.

Six years into the economic crisis, the effect on children and families is evident. It may be years before many households get back to pre-crisis levels of well-being and income.

■ The report can be seen at:
www.unicef.org/media/media_76447.html

That letter!

The European Central Bank will decide next week when it will release a letter from the president of the ECB, Jean-Claude Trichet, to the former minister for finance Brian Lenihan on the eve of the Irish bail-out.

The ECB had confirmed that it will set the date for the release of the letter on 6 November. On 26 August the ECB board reiterated its policy of withholding the letter but gave an undertaking to review the situation on the conclusion of the continuing bank-stress tests.

Lenihan had said that the ECB had threatened him, both verbally and in correspondence, about what would happen if he refused a bail-out.

The EU ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, welcomed the fact that the ECB seemed to be in the process of reviewing its refusal to give access to the letter. "Following an inspection of the letter," she said, "I concluded that the ECB had been right to refuse access to the document at the time of the request for access. However, as more than three years have passed since the letter was sent, I proposed that the ECB now disclose [it]."

Hundreds of thousands sign up to stop TTIP

On Saturday 11 October thousands of people throughout Europe protested against the EU's plan to conclude the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada.

The citizens' alliance "Stop TTIP" organised the Europe-wide action day.

Over the weekend of 11/12 October alone more than 200,000 people signed the unofficial "Stop TTIP" petition. The citizens' alliance had decided to do this even though the EU Commission had rejected the registration of the initiative in September 2014. Launched on 7 October, the petition has so far (29 October 2014) collected a total of 750,000 signatures.

■ You can sign the petition at the TTIP Information Network's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/TTIPInformationNetwork

Are we on the road to fiscal union?

The €300 billion investment plan proposed by the president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, is laying the ground for a fiscal union, although no-one yet dares call it that.

Andor László, EU commissioner for employment, social affairs, and inclusion, said: "This effort to create an investment programme is an attempt to bring in elements of a fiscal union without calling it a fiscal union." In an interview with *EU Observer,* Andor said that EU politicians should be honest and admit that only a system of transfers from Brussels to member-states would enable the euro zone to survive.

Juncker's idea of using €300 billion to kick-start the EU's economy has generated a lot of headlines, though it remains unclear where the money would come from. "If we are honest we will say publicly that this money either has to be printed or transferred," Andor said, as "repainting" money will not save the EU from stagnation. "It is not only the number and the source of this €300 billion that needs to be clarified but also what kind of investment needs to be done, and where exactly."

Referring to Germany, which has come in for increasing criticism for maintaining a high budget surplus but not spending, Andor said: "By boosting investment at home, Germany would do a big favour for itself but also to the rest of the community at the same time."

But he noted that even this would not be enough if the European Central Bank, "whenever it wants to function as a central bank, immediately finds itself under fire and the subject of various legal attacks," with relations between the German government and the ECB reportedly at their lowest point over policies the bank has adopted to try to boost growth and raise inflation.

Andor suggests that if Germany does not change its policies, and the ECB is hindered from taking measures to prevent deflation, the EU may enter a Japanese-style long-term period of low growth.

But while Japan survived its decade of low growth and is "not in bad shape," this was the result of several factors that do not apply to the euro zone—including almost full employment, being a more homogeneous society, and being a fiscal union. "Europe is a lot more fragile. So Europe would not endure a ten-year stagnation or deflation as Japan did."

Andor says the question of fiscal union can continue to be "ducked," but "the system will continue to function in a very sub-optimal way." At one point, he stated, countries such as Greece (which has lost a quarter of its GDP

since the crisis began) will begin to ask themselves why they are putting up with growth that is lower than the United States or Japan simply because they are in an "imperfect monetary union."

The question is likely to become louder as more and more countries—including core ones, such as Austria and the Netherlands—suffer a downturn.

Ming hits the ground running

Luke "Ming" Flanagan, newly elected member of the EU Parliament, has written to all his fellow-members leaving them in no doubt that he believes that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the proposed Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) pose great dangers to hard-won social protections and regulatory standards.

He reminded them that the EU Commission is seeking the "least trade restrictive measures," and that the TTIP is a "living agreement" (with continuing negotiations, therefore not confined to what they can agree at the outset), so the race to the bottom will take place after ratification. "This is why the Commission can pretend that it is not selling out our values and standards."

He warned that the Trade in Services Agreement, negotiated in parallel, is an even bigger threat for public services. This is a proposed agreement between twenty-three parties, including the EU and the United States.

The secrecy surrounding the negotiations was broken by Wikileaks in June, when a classified draft of part of the document was released. The cover page of the negotiating documents obtained by Wikileaks says they will be declassified "five years from entry into force of the TISA agreement or, if no agreement enters into force, five years from the close of the negotiations."

Flanagan concluded his letter with a call to action. "Money stands in the way of regulation and we have to stand in its way to prevent our regulatory regimes from being eroded away."

"We'll pay the extra €157 million," says Kenny

The revision of the EU budget contributions sparked a bitter row at a summit meeting in Brussels as Britain was hit with an additional bill of €2 billion. But Enda Kenny said the situation is "fragile" in many countries, and there were quite a number of references to smaller member-states, including Ireland. He said that the "difficult time with sacrifices people have made" were discussed—which is not much consolation to those whose sacrifice is to increase!

The question of Ireland paying more into the EU budget was indicated in the 2015 budget, which showed that our contribution would be €150 million higher than expected. The increase is a result of a number of factors, including upward revisions to Ireland's gross national income for previous years.

Kenny said the Government will pay the additional bill. "We have always abided by the rules," he said.

But the British prime minister, David Cameron, is having none of it, saying that Britain will refuse to pay a "completely unacceptable" bill of €2 billion to the EU. He hit

out at the bill and spoke of his anger at the "appalling" way Britain had been treated by the EU Commission. He said that "it certainly doesn't help" the chances of Britain remaining in the EU after an in-or-out referendum due to be held in 2017.

A rebate was negotiated by Margaret Thatcher in 1984 (in somewhat different circumstances), and even as late as 2004 Ireland was making a 2 per cent contribution to fund it. Don't be surprised if Cameron and the British public are mollified and we have to stump up again in the interests of European unity.

Characteristically, Michael Noonan said that Ireland would not be disputing the extra pay-out, or even questioning the calculations, as the Dutch did.

Ireland paid €1.73 billion towards the EU budget last year. It is estimated that this year's contribution is €1.74 billion, rising to €1.8 billion next year, an increase of about €65 million, or 3¾ per cent.

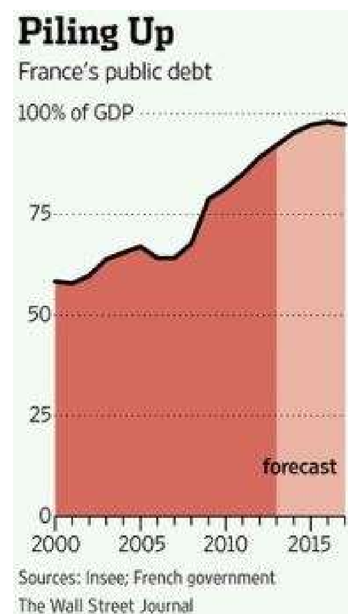
Is France beginning to back down?

Both France and Italy have outlined extra measures to cut their budget deficits as they back away from a confrontation with the EU Commission.

The French minister of finance, Michel Sapin, has announced new savings worth €3.6 billion, which would come from "lower interest expenses as a result of falling interest rates throughout the summer, or a reduction in future contributions to the European Union Budget announced by the EU budget commissioner," all of which suggests further problems down the road.

The changes will have little effect on the total deficit level but will bring France closer to achieving a balanced budget in structural terms when adjusted to the economic cycle, a central demand of the Commission. Sapin said that 0.5 per cent of output would be trimmed from France's structural deficit in 2015—still short of the 0.8 per cent cut requested by the Commission.

In 2013 France was given a two-year extension by the Commission to bring its deficit in line by 2015, but it abandoned the target earlier this year because of sluggish economic performance and a rejection of austerity policies by the government. The country recorded no growth in the first six months of 2014, and its economy is forecast to grow by a mere 0.4 per cent over the whole of 2014.



Sapin presented a budget in September that includes spending cuts worth €50 billion over the next three years, together with cuts in payroll taxes worth €40 billion for businesses.

Meanwhile Italy promised to reduce its structural deficit by 0.3 per cent. Under the EU's economic governance regime, all eighteen countries in the euro zone must submit their draft budget to the Commission. It will decide whether any country is in "serious breach" of its budget rules and submit a formal opinion to each government in November. Failure to keep within the deficit limits can result in a fine of up to 0.2 per cent of GDP.

Amid all the guff about economic recovery …

it's becoming harder for the Government to

find the saving necessary to meet the provisions of the Austerity Treaty (or Fiscal Treaty).

It is relying on economic growth and inflation to boost GDP by 2.8 per cent next year. A year ago it assumed that growth in 2014 would be 3.8 per cent; a year before that it was expected to be 4.3 per cent; and a year before that it was 6.3 per cent. If the past pattern of downward revision is repeated next year, all bets are off.

The Department of Health is expected to generate savings of €666 million. This is an enormous 5 per cent of that department's total spending, with medical inflation and an ever-older population continually pushing spending up, not down. One year ago Enda Kenny spoke of "a completely dysfunctional" system as he lamented a budget overrun of €374 million in the Department of Health. Now the same system is expected to save 5 per cent of total spending? Hardly!

The coalition has steadfastly ignored the requirement of the Austerity Treaty that, having got the government deficit down to 3 per cent of GDP in 2015—and the coalition is determined to do that—we will then be obliged to get our "structural deficit" down to 0.5 per cent of GDP. Using government estimates of GDP for 2015, this would suggest that an additional reduction of €4.4 billion will be required as a result.

It would seem that more austerity budgets are likely—but let's leave that until after the election.

More price increases, thanks to the EU

Irish consumers face "significantly higher" prices for electricity, thanks to efforts by the EU to create a single market for power, according to a study of the sector in Ireland by the Economic and Social Research Institute.

John Fitzgerald, in a paper for the ESRI, said that Ireland should further delay entering the single electricity market and instead renegotiate with the EU for "a more appropriate model."

A pooled market would result in rules requiring expensive integration between Ireland and the rest of Europe, the paper said. Ireland only runs interconnectors to Northern Ireland and Britain, but the ESRI said this integrated market would have to be redesigned for the single electricity market, spawning unnecessary costs for consumers. It also said the creation of a single market would require huge investment throughout Europe to connect the continent's various electricity grids, and that Irish consumers would have to bear a portion of those costs.

"There is a risk [that] the new regime could result in significantly higher prices for consumers," the paper said. "This would … have serious consequences for Irish competitiveness and living standards." Ireland already has a derogation from EU electricity integration rules until 2016, but the institute believes it should seek a further delay.

And what will happen to the school buses?

The EU Commission has concluded that the school transport scheme is not compatible with EU rules. The scheme was set up long before EU competition rules came into force; and even though the subsidies will not have to be repaid, it will have to change if Ireland is to remain in compliance with EU competition policy. The Commission carried out the investigation following complaints from private bus operators.

Inevitably, if we don't stand up for ourselves another valuable social service will fall victim to EU competition policy. It is another example of how we no longer value society but continually give priority to the economy—to our long-term detriment.

Transfer of wealth continues unabated

The number of dollar billionaires in the world has more than doubled, to 1,645, since the financial crisis of 2008, according to a report by Oxfam, which warns that inequality between rich and poor is spiralling out of control.

Incredibly, during the same period at least a million mothers died in childbirth because of a lack of basic health services, according to the report, entitled *Even It Up: Time to End Extreme Inequality.*

Despite the austerity affecting ordinary people in developed countries in the wake of the recession, and the grinding poverty affecting billions of others around the globe, the richest eighty-five billionaires saw their fortune increase by a total of approximately €190 billion over the past year alone—the equivalent of €500 million a day, or almost a third of a million pounds a minute. These people between them have access to wealth equal to that of half the world's population.

If the world's billionaires were taxed at a rate of only 1½ per cent on their wealth of over €780 billion it would raise more than €50 billion a year, the report says—enough to get every child into school and provide health services in all the world's poorest countries.

The chief executive of Oxfam, Mark Goldring, said: "Inequality is one of the defining problems of our age. In a world where hundreds of millions of people are living without access to clean drinking water and without enough food to feed their families, a small elite have more money than they could spend in several lifetimes."

Oxfam challenged governments to follow a seven-point plan to rein in inequality: by clamping down on tax-dodging; investing in universal free health care and education; introducing equal-pay legislation; agreeing a global goal to tackle inequality; introducing minimum wages and moving towards a living wage for all workers; shifting the burden of taxation from labour and consumption towards capital and wealth; and providing adequate safety nets for the poor, including a guaranteed minimum income.

■ www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2014-10-29/number-billionaires-doubles-financial-crisis-inequality-spirals

The Micula case: ISDS meets EU law

The Micula brothers own a Swedish company that had invested in Romania before the country's membership of the EU. The company took up business incentives offered by the Romanian government.

As it acceded to the EU, in order to comply with rules on state aid Romania discontinued its incentives scheme. Consequently, Romania was sued before an arbitration tribunal by the company under a bilateral investment treaty between Romania and Sweden, and was sentenced to pay compensation amounting to $250 million for not having respected its obligations under the investment agreement.

In 2014 the EU Directorate-General of Competition served an injunction on Romania, provisionally ordering the country not to pay this compensation, because it would be considered illegal state aid.

Let's recap: A state discontinues business incentives in order to bring its policies into line with EU legislation. A foreign company that was benefiting from such incentives may then claim

compensation for their discontinuation. From the taxpayers' viewpoint this is scandalous, because the Romanian taxpayer will have to subsidise (*a*) the original business incentive and (*b*) the sky-rocketing compensation.

The case has not yet been brought to a final decision, but it illustrates the risk of a member-state being successfully sued by a company under Investor-state dispute settlement for merely bringing its legislation or policies in line with EU legislation.

Where would this end? Could a member-state implementing a future EU directive requiring standardised information on food packaging be sued by a company for infringement of an intellectual property right? Could the company sue all the member-states in which it has subsidiaries, on the same grounds?

The Micula case is yet another example of why ISDS can be detrimental to the general interest while being beneficial to big corporations.

Finally … what's in it for us, the citizens?

The Irish subsidiaries of Apple Inc. are Apple Sales International and Apple Operations Europe, both based in Cork. In the four years to 2012, despite having sales totalling more than €130 billion, they have paid less than €10 million a year in Irish corporation tax.

An inquiry by the US Senate into Apple's tax affairs found that Apple Sales International's pre-tax profits in the three years from 2009 were $4 billion, $12.1 billion, and $22 billion, respectively.

However, the Government claims that the company's taxable profits in Ireland had been between €30 and €40 million for 2009 and 2010, between €50 and €60 million in 2011, and between €40 and €50 million in 2012.

Each year the company paid between €1 million and €10 million in Irish corporation tax. Ireland's arrangement with the companies involved their taxable profits attributable to Ireland being a percentage of their operational expenses. Apart from these profits, the companies were not resident anywhere for tax purposes.

So what about our 12½ per cent corporation tax? Even the recently cited actual payment of 2 per cent seems wildly wide of the mark.

So once again we must ask: whose interests does the Government represent?