PEOPLE'S NEWS

News Digest of the People's Movement

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ALL OUT ON THE 24th!

The People's Movement will be supporting this protest. Please turn up to swell our ranks. We will assemble outside Barry's Hotel, Gardiner Row (off Parnell Square, East), at 12:45 p.m. Placards will be available, and People's Movement flags will be carried.

The general secretary of Mandate, John Douglas, said in a statement that "the austerity policies, as predicted, are having a devastating impact on the Irish domestic economy, which has shrunk by more than 25 per cent in the last three years. Tens of thousands of workers in the domestic services sectors, such as retail, have paid the price for these policies with their jobs, their income, and their homes.

"To continue with these policies is madness and risks turning the domestic economy into an economic wasteland. More tax increases on low to average-paid workers and more spending cuts will only make things worse. The unemployment and immigration problem in Ireland is at a crisis level. The Government need to invest in a stimulus package in the domestic economy, remove the unsustainable banking debt from the state books, and effectively and finally deal with personal debt, particularly mortgage indebtedness. Only then will we see growth in consumer confidence and job creation."

Raymond Crotty Lecture, 2012

Crotty v. An Taoiseach (1986) was a landmark decision of the Supreme Court, which found that Ireland could not ratify the Single European Act unless the Constitution was first changed to permit its ratification. The case established that significant changes to EU treaties required an amendment to the Constitution—always done by means of a referendum—before they could be ratified by the government.

Now, more than twenty-five years later, Thomas Pringle TD—a patron of the People's Movement—has challenged the ratification of the European Stability Mechanism in the Supreme Court. Though this case has received very little publicity here, its importance was underlined by the media scrum surrounding the hearing at the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg, which considered three questions referred to it by the Irish Supreme Court on foot of the challenge.

This meeting is an opportunity to hear at first hand an outline of the arguments and the importance of this historic case from the man himself.

"The ESM treaty?
But we've already voted on it!"

Speaker: Thomas Pringle TD

Pearse Centre (27 Pearse Street, Dublin), Thursday 22 November, at 7:30 p.m.

Chairperson: Séamas Ó Tuathail SC (counsel for Raymond Crotty in the Crotty case).

Supreme Court exposes government's attempt to defy McKenna judgement

Mark McCrystal has won his Supreme Court challenge to the government's spending of €1.1 million of public money on an information campaign for the children's referendum. Throughout the case, he said, his concern was that the government was spending public money on a one-sided information campaign when it was prohibited from doing so under the McKenna judgement.

The Supreme Court, comprising the chief justice, Mrs Justice Susan Denham, sitting with Mr Justice John Murray, Mr Justice Adrian Hardiman, Mr Justice Niall Fennelly, and Mr Justice Dónal O'Donnell, unanimously granted McCrystal's appeal against the High Court's rejection of his challenge.

If the government had succeeded we would be inundated during future referendums with false information and spin, paid for by the voters. It is a disgrace that an ordinary citizen must risk their livelihood (in the event that costs are not awarded) in order to uphold the law of the land.

It is even more serious that the government claims that the material was vetted by the attorney-general, the highest law officer in the country. But somebody must be blamed; and it is instructive that this same attorney-general advised, in the face of government resistance, that a referendum be held on the Austerity Treaty.

One thing is sure: any information emanating from official sources in any future referendum will be treated as suspect by the electorate.

The McKenna judgement was delivered by the Supreme Court in 1995 following a challenge brought by Patricia McKenna, a member of the People's Movement. She had sought an injunction restraining the government from using public funds to promote a Yes vote in the referendum to remove the prohibition of divorce from the Constitution.

The Supreme Court found in her favour, by four to one. In his judgement the then chief justice, Mr Justice Liam Hamilton, said that once the bill containing the proposal to amend the Constitution had been submitted for the decision of the people, the people were entitled to reach their decision in "a free and democratic manner," as provided for in articles 46 and 47 of the Constitution. "The use by the government of public funds to fund a campaign designed to influence the voters in favour of a Yes vote is an interference with the democratic process and the constitutional process," he said.

We all owe Patricia McKenna, Mark McCrystal, Raymond Crotty, Thomas Pringle, Anthony Coughlan and others a debt of gratitude for risking so much in defence of democracy in the face of government connivance.

EU becoming "marginal" in the world!

EU countries must share military resources or become "marginal" powers on the world stage, the chairman of the European Union Military Committee, Hakan Syren, has said.

He issued the warning after chairing a meeting of EU military commanders in Brussels. "We have shrinking budgets, and we have changing responsibilities," he said. "It was shown in the Libya conflict . . . The centre of gravity is moving from our continent to the Far East, and we must come up with a long-term response to make sure we are not marginalised."

The EU Military Committee is a group of officials under the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton, and the Political and Security Committee of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy Group. Member-states, including Ireland, are represented in the PSC at ambassador level and meet twice a week, with extra meetings as required.

The EUMC gives military advice to the PSC and the high representative. It also oversees the EU Military Staff. The Military Committee comprises the chiefs of defence of the EU member-states, including Ireland, which are normally represented by their permanent military representatives in Brussels.

A similar Military Committee exists within NATO, and those countries that are members of both the EU and NATO have in most cases chosen to use the same person as permanent military representative to both organisations. Of course we are kept in the dark about this by Mr Gilmore.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy Group will meet in Dublin Castle from 24 to 26 March next. We are planning a conference, with a broad range of peace, political and other groups.

Syren's remarks echo President Barack Obama's statement last year that the end of the "Cold War" and the rise of China mark the beginning of a "Pacific century." They also come after a former US secretary of state for defence, Robert Gates, said last year that EU countries could not have toppled the Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi—"a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country"—without American help.

For his part, Syren said that "pooling and sharing"—an EU agreement on military resources—has to be "taken to the next level" in 2013 as a response. He noted that the pooling pact has spawned fifteen projects over the past two-and-a-half years. He identified joint EU war schools, joint equipment maintenance and military manoeuvres as future areas for co-operation.

He also referred to joint EU operations in Somalia and Uganda as a "success." But he remarked that a new operation in Mali will have to be tailor-made, rather than using Somalia as a model. EU member-states are planning to send two hundred or so military experts to Mali and another two hundred soldiers to keep them safe. The EU force will try to get Mali's own army in shape for attacking Tuareg tribes in the north of the country. The EU fears that the Tuareg-controlled territory of Azawad is becoming a base for Islamist extremists, on the model of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile the *Irish Times* reports that EU leaders have described the crisis in Mali as an "immediate threat" to Europe and have threatened to impose sanctions on the armed militia there. It was the first time that EU leaders had pronounced collectively on the developing crisis, which broke out in March when soldiers toppled the president.

"This situation poses an immediate threat to the Sahel region as well as to the west and north Africa and to Europe," the twenty-seven EU leaders said in a statement.

Isn't it time that Gilmore told us what "immediate threat" Tuareg tribesmen posed to Ireland—considering that we supported this position—or indeed to any EU country?

The intervention came as regional leaders were meeting in Mali's capital, Bamako, to discuss whether the Tuareg should be dislodged by military intervention or by a more gradual political approach. Meanwhile France, which has strategic interests in its former colony—one of the poorest countries in the world—plans to move drones there from Afghanistan by the end of the year. France is also reported to have special forces in the region around Mali, and to have contracted out surveillance of Mali to a private company. Angela Merkel has said that Germany would take part in a European mission to train and provide logistical support for Malian forces.

The ECB, the EU, and gender balance

The European Parliament has called on ministers to withdraw the nomination of Yves Mersch for the Executive Board of the European Central Bank, insisting that a female candidate should be considered instead for the post. As can be seen from the photograph of the board, the gender balance is rather skewed!

Despite having the support of the centre-right European People's Party, the EU Parliament's largest political group, Mersch was narrowly rejected, by 325 votes to 300, with 49 abstentions. The centre-left, Liberal and Green groups led the vote against him. Members said that their negative opinion on Mersch was solely because of gender balance.

However, EU member-states could yet appoint Mersch by written procedure, despite the EU Parliament's "negative opinion," a protocol in which governments send their agreement to Brussels in writing instead of holding a debate.

But Spain at the last minute withheld its assent to the use of the written format, meaning that EU leaders are likely to tackle the thorny subject at a summit meeting on 22 November instead.

This potential clash, which demonstrates the weakness of the EU Parliament, which cannot initiate any legislation—that's the prerogative of the unelected Commission—was emphasised by the spokesperson of the Green group, Sven Giegold, who said: "Mersch's candidacy lacks democratic legitimacy; proceeding to appoint him to the ECB's executive board, in spite of the Parliament vote, would create two different levels of legitimacy."

With fourteen years of experience as governor of Luxembourg's Central Bank, Mersch is the bloc's longest-serving central bank head. He is also regarded as a monetary policy hawk, opposing such proposals as joint-liability eurobonds that would communitise sovereign debt, as well as the ECB becoming a lender of last resort.

EU diplomats have suggested that member-states are likely to ignore the parliament's position and to press on with the appointment regardless, as they would be extremely reluctant to create a precedent of the parliament turning its consultative powers into a *de facto* veto. After all, "parliament has a consultative role, and it was consulted!"

Of course there has been the customary silence from the Irish government, which was prepared to follow the written procedure. It shows the extent of the guff we have become accustomed to hearing as background music at successive referendums, when successful middle-class women are paraded to tell us that we must vote Yes—irrespective of the other issues in the particular treaty—because the EU is so good for women.

Denmark ready to veto EU budget unless it gets a rebate

The Danish prime minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, has said she will block talks on the 2014–2020 EU budget unless she is offered a rebate of 1 billion crowns (€134 million). The Danish government has already included the anticipated rebate in its tax reform plans for 2013, and the package would lack coherence without it, she said.

"We are going to get our rebate, and if we don't get our rebate then we will have to use the veto. It's very, very simple," she told the Danish parliamentary committee on European affairs.

Denmark is one of the biggest net contributors to the EU budget in proportion to the country's relative small size. In 2011 it gave €2.12 billion to the EU's coffers. Other EU member-states with big net contributions, such as Britain, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Austria, already get rebates in the form of lump-sum payments or reduced VAT call rates. In practice, Denmark argues that it funds such reimbursements.

EU fraud cover-up?

The director-general of OLAF, the EU's anti-fraud agency, Giovanni Kessler, has been roundly condemned by one of his own colleagues. He is accused by Johan Denolf, chairperson of OLAF's supervisory committee, of refusing to grant access to the files of cases under investigation. Denolf also said that the committee, whose job is to monitor the effectiveness of OLAF's investigations, lacked sufficient resources to carry out its mandate.

The damning attack comes in the wake of the recent furore over a former EU commissioner, John Dalli, who quit after a confidential OLAF report appeared to link him to attempts to alter EU legislation.

The report, which has not yet been made public, dealt with allegations that an acquaintance requested a large payment for Dalli from a Swedish firm in order to change legislation banning the sale and export of snus, a smokeless tobacco product, in most of the EU.

Denolf, who was only recently appointed chairperson of the supervisory board, said: “From the very start, the committee has had problems accessing, as is its right, case files.” The director-general of OLAF denied access to some files, citing data protection rules, which he he has no right to do.

EU spending not signed off for the eighteenth year in a row

The EU’s Court of Auditors has published its annual report on the discharge of the EU budget, concluding that the total error rate within the 2011 budget was 3.9 per cent, up from 3.7 per cent in 2010. Altogether, controls on 86 per cent of EU spending were deemed to be only partially effective.

The auditors’ report is not binding on the European Parliament, the institution that signs off the EU’s accounts each year.

And a spokesperson for the EU Commission has said that a 5½ per cent tax on officials’ salaries—called a “solidarity levy”—will expire in January unless there is a comprehensive budget deal that also renews the levy. Officials plan to go on strike on 8 November to protest against the a proposed cut in wages.

Demonstration against the EU Nobel Peace Prize

The Norwegian peace movement has for many years conducted a torchlight tribute demonstration when the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo. It has dropped the tribute this year after the Nobel Committee gave the peace prize to the EU.

Instead the Norwegian Peace Movement, along with No to the EU, the Danish People’s Movement and others are arranging a demonstration in Oslo on Sunday 9 December against the scandalous award. The People’s Movement / Gluaiseacht an Phobail plans to be there.

Reform of common fisheries policy postponed again

The vote of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee on the new proposed common fisheries policy basic resolution has been postponed again. The “basic regulation” is the cornerstone of reform of the fisheries policy. The proposal deals with such issues as limits for fishing quotas and a ban on discards.

More than 2,500 amendments have been tabled to the EU Commission’s reform document by members of the European Parliament. Now Fisheries Committee co-ordinators from the various parliament groupings are going to meet on 18 December to try to thrash out a common position, but so far no date has been announced for a plenary vote of the EU Parliament. Meanwhile the deadline of 1 January gets nearer. Also up for review as part of the current reform is the external dimension of the CFP.

A recent report by the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter, condemned one aspect of that policy. The report found that “ocean grabbing” or aggressive industrial fishing by foreign fleets is a threat to food security in developing countries, and that governments should do more to promote local small-scale fisheries.

The report said that emerging countries should tighten the rules for access to their waters by an industrial fleet that is rapidly growing and includes vessels from the European Union, China, Russia, the United States, and Japan. “Ocean-grabbing is taking place,” de Schutter said. “It’s like land-grabbing, just less discussed and less visible.”

He called on governments to rethink the models of fisheries that they support, stating that small-scale fishers actually catch more fish per gallon of fuel than industrial fleets, and discard fewer fish. “Industrial fishing in far-flung waters may seem like the economic option, but only because fleets are able to pocket major subsidies while externalising the costs of over-fishing and resource degradation. Future generations will pay the price when the oceans run dry.”

The crucial challenge, de Schutter said, is to ensure coexistence between industrial fishing and the rights of small-scale fishers and coastal communities.

The EU’s industrial fishing fleet is active all over the globe, both within the scope of the EU’s fisheries agreements with other countries and within the framework of private agreements.

Troika proposes further write-down for Greece

Greece’s lenders are suggesting a further write-down of the country’s debt, with taxpayers to feel the blow for the first time.

The troika is pressing for Greece to receive more debt relief as it faces a deepening financial crisis. As part of Greece’s second bail-out, agreed earlier this year, private investors, such as banks, agreed to write off more than half the face value of their Greek bonds. This time, public-sector bondholders, such as member-states holding Greek debt, are being asked to chip in.

In a great escape, the ECB—also a public-sector bondholder, with about €40 billion in Greek debt—would not be involved, as accepting a loss on its bonds would constitute a form of state financing, which is illegal for the euro-zone bank. The IMF would also not be part of a debt relief deal.

Greece should also get an extra two years to bring its budget into order, with the delayed deadline to cost a further €30 billion, according to EU Commission estimates. In return for any debt relief, Greece would have to carry out a further 150 reforms, including making hiring and firing rules more flexible and changing the minimum wage.

Greece needs a positive assessment from the troika in order to receive the next tranche (€31½ billion) of bail-out money.

Germany, which lends most to Greece and faces a general election next year, has already rejected the debt “haircut” idea. “That is a discussion which has little to do with the reality in the member states of the euro zone,” the minister of finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, said, weighing in heavily on the side of even public-sector bondholders.

And the projections in the draft Greek budget for 2013 submitted to the Greek parliament this week show that Greece’s public debt will reach 189 per cent of GDP next year (with the EU-IMF target set at 167 per cent) and 192 per cent of GDP in 2014.

Merkel calls for euro-zone countries to surrender crucial powers

Angela Merkel has called for the surrender to the EU of important national powers over taxation and spending policies by the seventeen countries in the euro zone within the next three years in order to rescue and shore up the euro.

In a speech to the EU parliament in Brussels she voiced absolute determination to stand by the euro and to strengthen the EU through greater integration of policy-making. But her commitment came with a price tag: a major centralisation in Brussels of sovereign national powers in sensitive areas of fiscal, budgetary and economic policies.

"Stronger economic policy co-ordination will also perhaps be needed in areas that affect the core of national sovereignty" she said. "I'm thinking of sensitive policy areas such as labour market and tax policy. We need solutions creating a sensible balance between the necessary new intervention rights at the European level and the scope for action of the member-states and their parliaments. The European institutions must be strengthened to allow them to correct mistakes and breaches of the rules effectively."

She also said that the EU treaties might need to be reopened and renegotiated to establish the stiffer euro-zone regime. Many countries, led by France and including Ireland, also oppose opening the treaties, as that could trigger referendums in several countries.

Meanwhile, speaking in Norway, the former British secretary of state for defence Liam Fox warned that "hardship and a sense of injustice are the mother and father of extremism, and we must be careful—very careful—to ensure that as the euro zone's wealthiest push for ever closer union to secure their own interests, it does not push others into a place their people do not want to be."

A flying visit from Schäuble

Germany's finance minister paid a brief visit to Dublin last week but declined to comment on the issue of the Anglo-Irish Bank promissory notes. "It is a matter between the Irish government and the European Central Bank," he said. "It is not a good idea to make a comment on this matter."

A German political source said: "On the promissory notes it's difficult to say anything in public, as, officially speaking, this is European Central Bank territory." Another official said: "A promissory note deal wouldn't change the actual amount of debt but would turn it into a forty-year mortgage." Germany's support for retooling the Anglo debt is in contrast to its rejection of a buy-up of Irish bank debt by the ESM bail-out fund.

Meanwhile in Vienna the governor of the Austrian Central Bank, Ewald Nowotny, accepted that the voting weights on the ECB's Governing Council. of which he is a member, were "problematic" for countries such as Germany and that "there should be a correlation between liability for risk and voting weight."

Wonder what Patrick Honohan thinks of that?

Greek workers protest against a new round of austerity cuts

The walk-out called by Greece's two biggest unions is the third major strike in two months against a package of spending cuts and reforms that the government of Antónis Samarás is trying to push through the Greek parliament.

The package—which includes slashing pensions by as much as a quarter for some people and scrapping holiday bonuses—is to ensure that its troika lenders release more than €31 billion in loans, much of it aimed at shoring up banks. So, what's new?

The government has implored Greeks to endure the cuts and insists they will be the last round of pain! But few are impressed in a country where more than a quarter of the population are unemployed, while poverty and suicide levels soar.

Transport was severely disrupted throughout the country as trains, buses and the subway came to a halt. Many flights were cancelled, ships remained tied up at ports, and taxi-drivers stayed off the streets. Schools, banks and local government offices were shut, while hospitals worked on emergency staffing.

Greece has gone through several rounds of austerity, which has shrunk its economy by a fifth, while the country's public debt is expected to be a whopping 189 per cent of GDP next year.

The story of "a special case"—so far
Lest we forget!

At the end of July, following a meeting of the EU Council, Enda Kenny claimed a "seismic" deal as Angela Merkel broke the link between sovereign and banking debt. This was accompanied by a promise that the Euro Group would "examine the situation of the Irish financial sector with a view to further improving the sustainability of the well-performing adjustment programme" that we are so enthusiastic about.

RTE bought it—but nothing new in that: "Taoiseach hails overnight deal on debt burden," while Kenny himself told us there was now a deal on bank debt, because Spain and Ireland were "similar cases."

Of course there was a complete absence of detail; but Patrick Honohan, a member of the ECB board, claimed that the decision had pushed forward the process of breaking the vicious circle of high interest rates on government bonds in Europe.

This is the same Patrick Honohan who piled the pressure on Brian Lenihan on the eve of the bail-out, when he said on "Morning Ireland" that "the ECB would not send large teams if they didn't believe first of all that they could agree to a package—that there is a programme that is fully acceptable to them that could be designed, and that it is likely to be acceptable to the Irish government and the Irish people"!

Three months later, at the end of September, the finance ministers of Germany, Finland and the Netherlands stated very clearly that the ESM should not be allowed to use any of its €500 billion to pay for previous bail-outs. And this was hammered home by the German finance minister's warning that "legacy assets should be under the responsibility of national authorities."

Following the summit meeting on 19 October, Kenny claimed that his EU colleagues had agreed that their decision of June still stood. There had been "good, solid progress," and the government was "continuing to work with our colleagues to improve the understanding of the sustainability of debt that we agreed in June." But things were "complex and sensitive," and he was "not going to go into the detail of them here." Nevertheless "our destination is . . . very clear."

But soon afterwards, unfortunately, Angela Merkel, responding to questions about Spain, said No to any use of the new EU bail-out fund for legacy banking debt, and we were back where we started!

Two days later, however, all seemed rosy again. Following a watery statement from Germany, our hero secured the ear of Angela for half an hour, after which a statement, allegedly drafted by the Irish side, said that Ireland was to be considered a "special case" in the forthcoming negotiations over the role of the new bail-out fund.

The "unique" circumstances surrounding Ireland's banking crisis would also be taken into account by euro-zone finance ministers, once they began detailed negotiations on how the ESM will work . . . sometime in 2013.

"A special case" emerged as a sort of mantra at a meeting between Kenny and François Hollande the following day; but dark clouds were on the horizon.

In the end there's nothing complicated about this alleged deal. Either the "recapitalisation" of the Irish banks is now covered by EU policy—as the "recapitalisation" of the Spanish banks is—or it's not.

The present state of play!

Back in Germany, the member of the Social Democratic Party who hopes to oust Angela Merkel next year, Peer Steinbrück, dealt a serious blow to the whole charade when he announced in Berlin earlier this month—alongside the visiting Tánaiste, Éamon Gilmore—that he agreed with Merkel's opposition to using European bail-out funds to reduce Ireland's legacy bank debt.

He then went one step further by criticising Ireland's corporate tax rate. "I'm in favour that we reach a tax harmonisation, which doesn't mean we have to have the same corporate rates but that we have a corridor," he said, a line he took as federal minister of finance until 2009. "It cannot be the case that the gap is as wide as it is. If Germany is making available its creditworthiness to others, we expect others to improve their own revenue base."

Steinbrück gave his backing to the official German line that the ESM bail-out fund could only consider recapitalising banks once a Europe-wide banking regulator was in place—and then only for new problems arising under its jurisdiction. "The ESM is not responsible for legacy assets," he insisted.

Steinbrück's position was reinforced by the head of the CDU's Bundestag budgetary committee, Norbert Barthle, who told RTE the following day that a recapitalisation of banks might be possible but would require a new programme, with new conditions—for which read a second bail-out loan for Ireland. but it will be called something else. Ominously, he said ESM assistance would not apply to Irish legacy assets but to new cases in "a new programme with a perspective for the future."

So far it seemed that Mr Gilmore's visit had done a lot more harm than good; and things were to deteriorate further!

The German Green Party followed up with a statement that further EU assistance to Ireland should be blocked "as long as it continues its tax dumping." Kenny's visit to Berlin prompted political demands for an Irish gesture in exchange for additional assistance. "As long as Ireland pursues tax dumping there can be no money and no guarantees for the Irish banking sector," said the Green leader in the Bundestag, Jürgen Trittin, who has ambitions to be Germany's next minister of finance.

Politicians from all parts of Germany's political spectrum see a link between banks lured to Ireland with the promise of low tax and their later collapse. "If anything it is Ireland's tax dumping and lax bank regulation that damages other member-states in a massive way," said Trittin.

A new SPD-Green coalition next September could thus see a hardening of attitudes to Ireland in the months before its planned return to the markets.

The deputy leader of the CDU in the Bundestag, Michael Meister, chimed in, saying there was also "an interest in Germany that decisions on locating companies are not just made on a basis of taxes. There are many companies that, purely for tax reasons, find Ireland attractive, which leads to a difficult competition situation in the European Union."

The Social Democratic Party's budgetary spokesperson, Carsten Schneider, said his party was opposed to any further European assistance involving direct bank recapitalisations by the ESM bail-out fund. "European taxpayers have already carried the burden for the financial industry and cannot accept further burdens," he said. Party officials added that "all further assistance will bring back onto the table the issue of corporate tax."

DIE LINKE.

Only the opposition party Die Linke sounded a "discordant" note when its deputy leader in the Bundestag, Sahra Wagenknecht, sensibly urged Ireland to adopt a more daring debt solution. "Some of the debt arising from the bank rescue should be declared illegitimate . . . and a haircut imposed Europe-wide," she said. But Kenny didn't hear.

So what is the most likely outcome of this saga? With debt at an unsustainable 107 per cent of GDP this year, and the other figures stacking up—external debt 1,239 per cent of GDP, gross external debt €2.2 trillion, external debt per capita €400,000—we emerge as the most indebted country in the world relative to GDP. The case for renouncing the bank debt is obvious to all but the government.

Of course our credibility in international markets would take a knock, and the troika would not be pleased. There would be very hard times; but where there's money to be made, the lenders would return. Undoubtedly our competitive position in international markets would improve, and would improve further should we leave the euro simultaneously.

But we can't even have a national debate on options, as the government seeks to distance us from other countries in a similar pickle. We are different—as the few figures above show—but not in the way that Kenny seeks to project.

A second "bail-out loan" later next year, called some fancy name and with new conditions attached, and perhaps an extension of the time we will be given to pay back all this money, inflicting austerity on the next generation in earnest—that will be about the "best" our home-grown holder of the Golden Victoria award for willing compliance might achieve.

A new euro?

From 2013 the European Central Bank will gradually replace euro notes with new banknotes that have improved safety features. Counterfeit notes are in circulation all over Europe and are being used every day by innocent citizens as well as criminals.

Germany's federal criminal police office announced that the total value of counterfeit currency confiscated by the police in 2011 was €6½ million.

From the ECB's point of view, a new cycle of banknotes is introduced once counterfeiters are practised enough and able to produce "clean work." When this happens, existing notes are overhauled and altered.

Hundreds of thousands more jobs to go

About 730,000 more people will lose their jobs in the EU before the economic crisis starts to ease off, the European Commission has said.

The outlook is based on a prediction that the unemployment rate will go from 10.6 per cent today to 10.9 per cent next year, before dropping to 10.7 per cent in 2014.

The rate will climb to 26.6 per cent in Spain and 24 per cent in Greece next year, with double-digit levels in eleven other member states.