
Material

Democratic Left

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Submission by Pat Rabbitte, Minister for Commerce, Science and Technology to the Democratic Left Annual Delegate Conference, 10th. May, 1996

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10th May 1996

To Delegates
Democratic Left Conference

Dear Delegate

The attached broad outline of work that is my responsibility at this Department has been prepared in response to suggestions from some branches and members.

For obvious reasons it is not a complete list and does not touch at all on involvement in general Government policy on issues like long-term unemployment and so forth.

I hope it is of some assistance.

Yours sincerely

Pat Rabbitte T.D.

Minister for Commerce, Science & Technology



DEPARTMENT OF
ENTERPRISE & EMPLOYMENT

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

LEGISLATION

Legislation put through the Oireachtas or being put through or in preparation by the Minister for Commerce, Science and Technology, Mr. Pat Rabbitte T.D. includes:

Consumer Credit Act, 1995

Already enacted (5th July 1995). The first major piece of consumer legislation enacted in Ireland for decades. Key features: a tight new licensing and supervisory regime for moneylenders, significant new rights for borrowers from mainstream banks and building societies. In addition financial institutions are now required to justify to the Director of Consumer Affairs the commercial basis for new Bank Charges or increases in existing charges as well as being required to accompany each such application with a substantial fee.

Casual Trading Act, 1995

Already enacted (18th July, 1995). Devolves regulatory and licensing authority for



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casual trading over to the local authorities, where it ought to have always resided. The occasion of the enactment of the legislation was used to ensure that Moore Street casual traders would not be victimised.

Trade Marks Act, 1996

Already enacted (February 1996). This Act forms part of a wide-ranging programme to update the law in the area of intellectual property.

Legal Metrology Bill

At Committee Stage. This is a Bill that will create a single national authority to administer weights and measures law. A much-needed piece of legislation, with its enactment Ireland will have a national weights and measures authority, equipped to the highest standard.

NSAI Bill

Concluded Second Stage. This Bill provides a firm statutory basis for the operation of quality standards - such as ISO 9000 - in Irish industry and commerce. The new NSAI will be an independent body with its own staff and Board. The Bill will also introduce the principle of worker directors into non-commercial semi-state bodies.

Credit Union Bill, 1996

Publication date June 1996. A major Bill that will enable the credit unions to significantly extend the range of services they are allowed to offer their members. The

legislation will provide increased competition for for-profit private banks and enhance the role of social banking in Ireland.

Takeover Panel Bill

Publication date June 1996. This Bill will create a framework for supervision of takeover bids for companies quoted on the Dublin Stock Exchange. It is part of a general legislative programme that provides for the regulation and supervision of the Dublin exchange in the wake of its separation from London.

Copyright Bill

In preparation. The first overhaul in thirty years of the core legislation governing intellectual property in Ireland. This Bill will also enact into domestic law a number of important EU Directives in this area.

Examinership (Amendment) Bill

In preparation. This Bill will make necessary reforms to the system of Examinership, which has proved an important mechanism to save jobs in businesses that find themselves in temporary financial trouble although they remain fundamentally sound.

EUROPEAN PRESIDENCY

- From July 1st -

A main emphasis currently is the preparatory work for the EU Presidency. Pat Rabbitte will be President of two Councils of Ministers, the **Research Council** and the **Consumer Council**.

Research Council

The Research Council is responsible for developing EU policy in the areas of science, technology and innovation. It currently administers a total research budget of more than ECU 1,200m. This budget, known as the **Fourth Framework**

Programme is for the period 1994 to 1999 and significantly benefits research, science and innovation in Ireland. During the Irish Presidency the fourth framework will be subjected to a mid-term review and negotiations will also commence on the fifth framework, the European STI budget

for the year 2000 and beyond. In addition, the Minister as President will be responsible for bringing the recent and important **EU Green Paper** on Innovation to the stage of a White Paper.

Consumer Council

The Consumer Council is responsible for the development of a common EU consumer policy. At present the Council is developing policy in the important area of consumers' **access to justice**. The Presidency will have responsibility to advance this dossier to

the point where a final decision can be taken.

The Irish Presidency has also decided on an initiative of its own. This is to develop an EU policy on **the consumer and the information society**. As part of the programme for development of EU consumer policy in this

area a major conference will be held in Dublin in early September. This will be used as a sounding board for the Presidency initiative policy paper, which will be brought to the November meeting of the Council for consideration.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

The Minister is preparing a total revamp of national policy in the area of Science Technology and Innovation which will go to Government before the summer recess. Last year Minister Rabbitte published the **Report of the Science Technology Innovation and Advisory Council (STIAC)** the most comprehensive review of our STI capability to date. The critical importance of our STI policy lies in the key role the national system of innovation has in building a more internationally competitive indigenous industrial base. It has long been recognised that Ireland has a weak national system of innovation and that this is a key factor in the relatively weak performance of indigenous industry both on the home market and in export markets.

STI Policy is also one of the more developed areas of European Union policy and domestic S&T policy benefits greatly from transfers of resources from the rest of the Community to Ireland. These transfers have enabled the State to create a system of advanced research organisations, the Programmes in Advanced Technologies (PATs), and to significantly increase funding for basic research in the nation's universities and RTCs.

S&T Budget Increase

At the request of Minister Rabbitte, the Government this year approved a £4m (or 20%) increase in the S & T budget, as part of its commitment to implement the recommendations of the STIAC Report.

Dublin Science and Technology Park

The Minister secured Government approval

for the establishment of a Science and Technology Industrial park at the CityWest campus at the Naas Road. The plan envisages a three-way partnership between the State, the Dublin Universities and private developers. The Minister is awaiting the Universities' response to a detailed framework proposal put simultaneously to the Universities and the Developer.

Government on Internet

The Minister brought a memorandum to Government proposing that it should develop its own site on the Internet's Worldwide Web. The Government accepted the proposal and the Irish official web site will be commissioned next week.

COMMERCE

The main preoccupations in the Commerce Division are legislative - see legislative programme above - although there are some individual issues that ought to be mentioned. Commerce Division is currently completing a major investigation into **insurance costs** in Ireland, including the cost of **motor insurance**. This investigation, carried out by independent consultants, should settle once and for all the controversies over insurance costs. The recommendations will be acted upon quickly, by means of legislation if necessary. On the question of company law reform, Minister Rabbitte published the Report of the **Company Law Review Group** in 1995.

Clonmannon

The decision of the Minister to seek the appointment of an official liquidator to the Clonmannon Village for Senior Citizens made new law. This was the first time that the relevant "Public Interest" section of the Companies Act was used. The Minister's application was granted by the High Court. This is a major advance in the company law area, which establishes the right of the Minister to intervene in the affairs of a private company where the public interest demands it.

IMRO

In recent weeks IMRO has attempted unilaterally and unreasonably to extract royalties for public performance from primary schools in relation to their use for recreational and fund-raising purposes of recorded music. As Minister responsible for the administration of intellectual property law, Pat Rabbitte met with IMRO representatives and secured their agreement to accepting a token payment centrally which would protect

the copyright without penalising schools.

Companies Registration Office

Again provision has been made to relocate this office to more suitable premises, upgrade its technological capacity and establish a user's council. The new headquarters will also house the offices of the Registrar for Friendly Societies and will therefore create a one-stop facility for the corporate regulatory authorities.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

The terms of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 will be implemented with effect from May 13th of this year. The time period between enactment and implementation has been used to enable the Credit Institutions and others prepare for the most far reaching consumer law ever enacted in the State. It has also been used to update and strengthen the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs who has this weekend taken possession of new Headquarters at Harcourt Road. The Minister has also in train a programme of **Regional Offices**, the first of which will be opened in Cork.

Specific consumer issues that have arisen and on which Pat Rabbitte has taken initiatives include the **BSE scare** and the pricing of imported **magazines**. The Minister has also instructed the drafting of an Advertising Order to require full information on **ticket booking charges** to be available to consumers.

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