



Howlin: cuts will end if we strike €1bn savings deal

THE Government will not seek any further concessions from public sector workers if savings of €1 billion can be found in the latest round of Croke Park talks.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin said if an agreement is reached with public sector unions then this would be the last round of concessions being sought.

"What we are trying to negotiate with the public sector unions, and the deal we have, is that we will have a public sector agreement that brings us to the end of 2016," he said.

"There will be no further asks of public sector servants, unless some calamity happens outside our control," he told RTE's *The Week in Politics*.

"But this is the framework with which people can plan."

IMPACT's Bernard Harbour said talks have been difficult so far but it is crucial that the Government sticks to any agreement reached with unions.

John Redmond of the General Secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, which had pulled out of Croke Park talks, said they will not be changing their position.

Meanwhile, a war of words has erupted among leaders of the Left after Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) leader David Begg was criticised by Socialist Party TD Joe Higgins for not opposing the property tax.

The Dublin TD accused ICTU leaders of "empty posturing" after leading tens of thousands of people in protests over Ireland's debt burden.

"The property tax will be the biggest austerity measure of all, and if fully implemented along with water charges will see bills approaching €1,000 in a few short years," he said.

"ICTU's manoeuvring is to deflect criticism and pressure away from the Government's, and in particular Labour's, imposition of savage austerity measures."

Mr Begg had told RTE's *This Week* radio show that the tax was "a democratic decision of parliament, and it is not our business to interfere with that".

Marches in Dublin, Cork, Gal-

way, Sligo, Limerick and Waterford drew big crowds, with ICTU estimating that over 110,000 took part in the week-end demonstrations. Gardai put the figure at 50,000.

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Performance protesters at the start of the ICTU bank debt protest march at Christchurch, Dublin. Above left, protesters listen to speakers at a similar demonstration at Spanish Arch in Galway city. CAROLINE QUINN/PHILIP CLOHERTY