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Written answers

Thursday, 4 February 2010

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Social Insurance



Michael Kennedy (Dublin North, Fianna Fail)

Question 267: To ask the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the records that exist for payments of social welfare by Magdalene laundries in respect of deductions from wages paid to women working in these institutions; if she is satisfied that correct payments have been received by her Department for such workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5868/10]



Mary Hanafin (Minister, Department of Social and Family Affairs; Dún Laoghaire, Fianna Fail)

According to a search of the Department's records in the time available, there do not appear to be returns available in relation to any organisation or organisations, which may be collectively described as Magdalene Laundries. I am aware that the Deputy has notified the Department of a particular case and the matter is being investigated. I will be in touch with him as soon as possible.

In terms of the operation of the social insurance system, the Department holds contribution and claim history records for employed and self-employed contributors. Social insurance plays a key role in the provision of social protection in Ireland. As such, the contribution records established and maintained by the Department are used to determine eligibility for a range of benefits at certain specified times in a customer's life.

Since 1953, the Social Welfare Acts have defined the various types of employment that are insurable under the social insurance system while also providing for the management and operation of that system (known, since 1979, as Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI)). Clearly, the integrity of the system is dependent on timely and accurate returns being made to the Social Insurance Fund by employers, employees and the self employed – again as laid down in social welfare legislation. A statutory basis therefore exists for, inter alia, the remittance and recording of contributions, inspection of employer records and, where necessary, ensuring compliance in matters relating to social insurance contributions.

Records held by the Department for employees are on the basis of the person's Personal Public Services Number, formerly the Social Insurance or PRSI Number. Prior to 1979, social insurance contributions were recorded for each individual worker against this number; deductions were sent directly to the Department whereby employers purchased stamps for their employees and recorded them on cards. These cards were forwarded each year to the Department and the details recorded on each person's register sheet. Since 1979, contributions due to the Social Insurance Fund are collected in the main by the Revenue Commissioners together with income tax due. All employers must make tax/PRSI returns to the Revenue Commissioners which then compile the data and send it to the Department.

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