



## Unions sceptical over Shatter's force strength assurances

by Cormac O'Keefe

Middle-ranking gardai are "convinced" the Government wants to cut force numbers "well below" the 13,000 minimum set by Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan.

The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors expressed bafflement at public statements by Justice Minister Alan Shatter yesterday when he rejected reports that garda numbers would be axed by up to 1,400 this year following a substantial cut in funding to the force.

Such a cut would bring the strength of the force from its current level of 13,400 to 12,000. Garda numbers stood at 14,500 at the beginning of 2011, but have been cut as part of the troika agreement.

"We are convinced the Government wants to

see numbers well below 13,000," said AGSI general secretary John Redmond.

"We have a direct line to management and we've been given information that he [Mr Shatter] wants to reduce numbers to 12,000."

Mr Redmond said he did not understand the comments Mr Shatter made on RTE radio, in which he said there was no possibility of any such cut, and that natural retirements would bring the force "closer to 13,000" by year end.

"This is being lost in translation, quite clearly," said Mr Redmond.

"We have a professional police officer with over 40 years of experience in a Garda organisation quite clearly receiving the message somewhere that he's

expected to reduce garda numbers by 1,400 and the minister's saying that's not going to happen this year. Something, somewhere, is wrong.

"I'm surprised the commissioner would come out and say this. I've never heard him speak in these terms before or senior management hold their hands up and say 'if you go beyond this red line we are in serious bother with regard to providing a professional police service'. We are in a serious position here and it needs to be clarified as soon as possible."

Mr Redmond said the EU average was one police officer per 314 people, and that 13,000 gardai would represent one garda per 368 people.

John Parker of the Garda

Representative Association said they wanted to know if the commissioner had sufficient resources to effectively police Ireland and whether he had sufficient funds to pay them.

"Garda numbers will continue to fall until long after recruitment commences — because it takes considerable time to professionally train gardai," said Mr Parker.

"Should these budget cuts reduce the number of gardai further, it is our view that the public safety has already been compromised; and we are gravely concerned that our members have already been endangered."

"The members of An Garda Síochána, at the moment, feel as if they're in some sort of a perverse laboratory experiment to see where is that straw that breaks the camel's back."



John Redmond, left, questioned Alan Shatter's claim that there would be no cuts to the number of gardai in 2013.



## Shatter denies cut in Garda numbers

CONOR LALLY and GENEVIEVE CARBERY

Minister for Justice Alan Shatter has said there is "no reality or possibility" that Garda numbers will be cut by between 1,000 and 1,500 by the end of the year.

Mr Shatter said retirements this year would reach between 350 and 400, which would bring Garda numbers down close to 13,000.

Plans were currently being considered to offer an incentivised career break to serving gardai, which would involve members being paid up to €30,000 to take a career break of three years.

However, the take-up of that scheme was not expected to be significant and he did not believe it would "run into hundreds".

And, while plans were also under way for gardai to be seconded into the Department of Social Protection and Revenue to help with investigations, he believed these schemes would result in the transfer of a mere 20 or 30 members.

He believed retirements, added to secondments and career breaks, would see Garda numbers fall no lower than 13,000 by the end of the year.

### Budget estimates

Mr Shatter was responding to reports that the force was to be reduced to 12,000 this year because of cuts to funds available to pay salaries. He said the budget for 2013 had been clearly set out in the estimates published last month, adding that nothing had changed since then.

He denied suggestions the Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan and his senior officers had been "ambushed" by the budget reductions.

The Garda budget for salaries, wages and allowances for 2013 is €956.4 million,

down 4 per cent on 2012. This is half the reduction of 8 per cent between 2011 and last year. Of this year's cut of €42.8 million, €26 million relates to salaries.

Some 470 gardai retired last year and there was no recruitment, a factor that lowers salary payments for 2013. Mr Shatter said savings of a further €10 million were being sought in the current year from allowances.

### 'Short-sighted'

Despite the denials that numbers were to be significantly reduced, Garda representative bodies have reacted strongly to the idea of cutting the force any further.

Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors general secretary John Redmond was "absolutely dismayed" that the Government would cut the Garda budget.

The 25 serious crime gangs in the State "must be absolutely delighted" with the "short-sighted" development, he said.

Garda Representative Association president John Parker said payroll cuts were the "extra straw that breaks the camel's back".



# Garda chiefs adamant they face cash crisis despite Shatter's pay pledge

**Tom Brady**  
Security Editor

**SENIOR garda officers are adamant that they face a financial crisis this year unless almost 1,500 gardai are removed from the payroll.**

They are pressing ahead with talks to find alternative ways to encourage gardai to leave the force – at least temporarily – despite claims by Justice Minister Alan Shatter that there is no possibility of gardai not being properly paid.

The minister was commenting on the disclosure in the *Irish Independent* yesterday that senior garda management had warned him they would not be able to provide a full policing service if he pressed ahead with plans to slash the strength of the force by the end of the year.

After studying the payroll budget set out in the 2013 estimates, garda financial officers have advised Commissioner Martin Callinan that there is only enough money to pay a force of around 12,000 members.

Garda management had been working on the basis that a bottom-line figure of 13,000 had been agreed under the national recovery plan and that this would be met by December through normal retirements.

But they became aware of what Mr Shatter described as “greater efficiencies” when they examined their financial allocation last month and outlined their concerns in a letter to him.

Mr Shatter has now dismissed their fears, saying: “There is no possibility of us losing 1,000 or 1,500 guards. There’s no possibility of gardai not being properly paid.”

However, senior gardai continue to engage in discussions with officials from the departments of Justice, Public Expenditure and Social Protection to discuss a range of proposals, including a three-year career break with a €30,000 taxable lump sum

offered to those who accept, and the secondment of scores of personnel to agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners and Social Protection to help them tackle fraud.

If these were successful, they would

significantly reduce the garda payroll but would dramatically reduce the numbers available for policing work.

Fianna Fail’s former defence and junior justice minister, Willie O’Dea warned last night that the cuts would undo all of the garda achievements of recent years in curbing gangland violence in cities such as Limerick and thwarting the efforts of dissident republicans bent on murder.

He said the cuts were being foisted upon the gardai in an underhand and dishonest way and were an open invitation from Mr Shatter to potential gangland kingpins to take over where their predecessors had “left off”.

## Budgets

The general secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, John Redmond, told the minister that losing 11pc of the workforce would be a backward step.

He said the disappearance of ‘yellow jackets’ on the ground would bring public confidence to an all-time low and that the cost to the Exchequer of increased serious crime would be more than the anticipated savings of €35m.

John Parker, president of the rank and file Garda Representative Association, called for the setting up of an independent police authority to ensure that politicians could not dictate arbitrary reductions in policing resources.

In response to criticisms of the failure to launch a recruitment campaign, since it takes two years to complete the programme, Mr Shatter said recruits could be taken on from next year and sent into a fast-tracked training programme lasting one year.

