



LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

No 8

Autumn 1992

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Cover photo: Cissy Cahalan, front row middle, and members of the Drapers Assistants' Association.

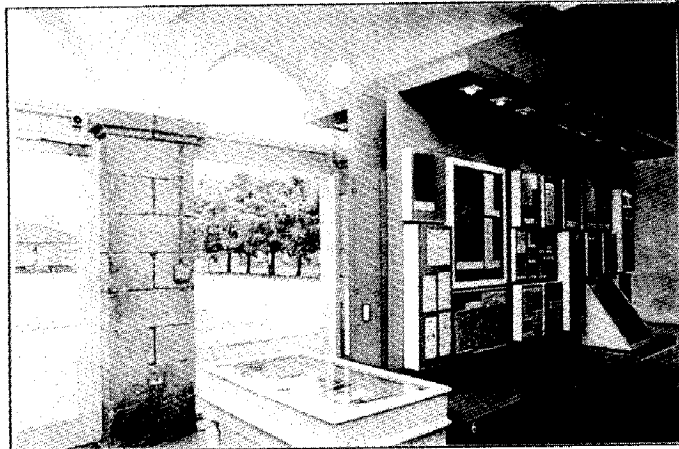
Annual Conference 1992

The politics and struggles of the 1920s in Ireland come under scrutiny at the Irish Labour History Society annual conference in October this year.

The changes in state power during this decade, when the Stormont and Free State parliaments began, led to wide ranging changes in the balances of power within Ireland, spurred local initiatives, demanded adaption and modification within the status quo. Little remained untouched by these changes including new directions for the labour movement, its unions, political parties and its culture.

This happened against a background of a unique period of world history, in which imperial powers, colonies and new European states emerged from the first world war to confront political tensions and turmoil, characterised by the new soviet power of Russia.

The one day conference, Saturday 10 October, will look in detail at some of the domestic episodes of the 1920s, and the political and popular culture of the decade.



A view of the Labour History Museum Exhibition.

Museum feature

The most recent issue of *Customs Journal*, official magazine of the customs and excise group of the Public Service Executive Union, has a three page feature on the Irish Labour History Museum.

In the article, titled 'Archive of Blood, Sweat and Tears', Seamus McGowan has describes the exhibits in the ground floor display, and interviews ILHS secretary Charles Callan on the development of the museum by the society. The journal

carries colour photographs of the Beggars Bush building housing the museum and a selection of the trade union membership certificates illustrated in the exhibits.

Fighting forgetting

THE COVER, as well as inside, the last issue of *Labour History News* (No 7, 1991) carried a photograph of a group of men who travelled to Ireland to take part in the commemoration and unveiling of a memorial to the Irishmen who died in the civil war of Spain.

Among the group, all veterans of the International Brigade, was Francois Mazou, from Pau, who sent an appeal on behalf of the survivors anxious to pay tribute to those who died fighting on the republican side within Spain itself.

Francois Mazou, who is writing his memoirs, was only 20 years old when he took part in the battle of Jarama, fought at the gates of Madrid. Today, Francois Mazou says, he is "fighting forgetting . . . fighting the battle of memory".

His correspondence tells how in the village of Marata de Taruna, 5,000 of the republican dead were buried during the battle of Jarama in February 1937. Today nothing remains of their graves, and some bones have turned up in a section of the land given over to a rub-

bish tip. Francois Mazou is calling for an official memorial to be built within the new cemetery which has been built over part of the common grave, and where he has erected his own stone plaque to their memory.

The ethical grounds of the request do not admit of the slightest challenge. regional authority would do itself honour by taking steps to confer official status on the site. It would be easy for it to organise an area capable of holding thousands of visitors and to erect an imposing memorial, which would be the first officially set up in honour of the defeated.

He is not alone in this campaign, which has been joined by other republican civil war veterans both inside and outside Spain, to keep alive the memory of the sacrifices made by their generation to save Spanish democracy. This includes efforts to win pensions for former republican soldiers and an official acknowledgement of the International Brigades through a form of honorary citizenship.

Working lives

Trade union women from throughout Ireland came to a jointly hosted meeting of the ILHS and SIPTU's women's committee, on 18 July 1991. The evening recalled women in the trade union movement through personal memories, family histories, working lives and song.

Those who contributed to the evening were Mai O'Brien, then SIPTU's women officer who gave the audience of trade unionists a picture of women officials like Rosie Hackett of the ITGWU, Roisin Byrne a retired member of the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers' Union recalled working and organising in the sewing factories and her family inheritance of trade unionism.

Sylvia Meehan of the Employment Equality Agency talked of her working life as a trade union activist and member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' women's committee, which commemorated its 30 anniversary in 1991. Theresa Moriarty of the ILHS committee sketched a history of industrial work and women's health and Marie Mulholland from the National Union of Public Employees spoke about her union's history project on women's health and rounded off the meeting with the song from the 1945 strike of laundry workers learnt from Mai Clifford, who had sung it for a labour history audience in 1984.

Galway Labour History Group

... besides their
ordinary domestic
duties...



Women workers, 1850-1950

Atlanta Hotel, Galway
27-28 March 1992

Galway weekend

The Irish Labour History Society kept up its innovative programme of activities in Galway, with the fourth annual Mary Murray weekend conference on 27-28 March 1992.

This year the Galway branch conference explored the history of women at work, engagingly entitled, *Beside their ordinary domestic duties*.

The weekend covered the theme with informative papers on Women and work in Ireland by Mary Daly, Women in the home, 1850-1950 by Caitriona Clear, Women and trade unionism in Ireland by Mary Jones.

A local study expanded the picture with a talk on Women work and trade unionism in Connacht, 1890-1914 by John Cunningham. Mary Clancy gave the final talk of the weekend on Irishwomen 1922-1937, When our own men are in power, we shall have equal rights.

The weekend theme attracted large audiences, and the event was given good pre publicity in the local newspapers. The Galway annual conference commemorates the history of women in its title, Mary Murray weekend, which is named after the Galway woman arrested for attacking scab labour brought into the city to break the strike in 1913.

Admission to the lectures is free. The evening socials have a small charge. This year, in tune with weekend programme, the entertainment was the songs and music of working women.

Nation state debate

Last autumn a conference on Socialism, nationalism and the nation state attracted a smaller turnout than for previous annual conferences.

The speakers included Brian Faloon on national and sub-national instability in Europe, Anthony Coughlan on Socialism and the national question today, and Helena Sheehan on nationalism and socialism – the new scenario. Tony Browne spoke on the international dimension of European integration and the future of the USSR.

More historical accounts of the theme were given by Bob Purdie on William Walker – the Scottish perspective, John Cunningham on Labour and Irish nationalism and the 1919 Mayday celebrations, John Horne gave an overview of the conference theme which from 1890 to the 1950s and Joe Deasy spoke on Connolly and nationalism. The same evening a further discussion was held at the Teachers' Club, led by contributions from Emmet O'Connor and Emmet Stagg TD.

Paddy Bergin

A meeting in memory of the Irish Labour History Society honorary president, Paddy Bergin was held in October, 1991.

The evening was attended by many of his friends who paid tribute to his life and legacy. Ruairi Quinn TD chaired the evening of speakers, film, poems and readings from Joe Deasy, Seamus Pattison TD, and Emmet Bergin.

Connolly column banner

The banner of the Connolly column of the International Brigade which pays honour to the men who died from Ireland in the Spanish Civil War now hangs in the main meeting hall of the Irish Labour History Museum in Beggars' Bush, Dublin.

It was presented to the museum in November, 1991, by Michael O'Riordan and the surviving members of the Column before an audience of invited guests, among whom were those who had themselves fought in Spain, or were close relatives of those who did, including many whose names appear on the banner, and anti-fascists campaigners of those years.

Peter O'Connor read from his war diaries and Manus O'Riordan sang the moving and inspirational songs from that war. The evening was chaired by ILHS president, Francis Devine.



Peter O'Connor, Eilis Ryan, Michael O'Riordan and Bob Doyle
at the presentation of the banner.

Captain Jack White in Donegal

CAPTAIN Jack White, the Boer War hero who helped found the Irish Citizen Army, had a varied career, both in left wing politics and personally. One brief episode was as labour candidate for Donegal.

In the June 1922 general election labour had not fought the constituency. But for the 1923 elections, local labour decided early in the year to contest.

White was seen as being on labour's left wing. He would have been known personally to some in the area because, in the summer of 1914 he had drilled Irish Volunteers in Derry City, Inishowen and Tyrone.

The sympathies of the meeting in Raphoe that adopted him are clear. He was invited to stand 'as a candidate in the interests of the Workers' Republic'.

Within two weeks of this a Tirconaill Workers' Council was set up at a meeting in Letterkenny. It took the more revolutionary name, Workers' Council, rather than Trade Council. Six union branches were represented on the platform, one being a National Union of Railwaymen branch that included Strabane, Co Tyrone.

After the meeting, 'a large number of the workers of Letterkenny enrolled and formed a branch' of the Labour League set up that evening.

Within a week a public meeting for White was organised in Letterkenny. He called for 'a combination of the farmer and the labourer to change the system at the root, and introduce communal ownership'. But 'without the help of the Churches in remoulding human nature to believe and apply Christianity, what he sought could not be achieved'.

While personally a dedicated socialist, White the man was erratic in the extreme. After about a week, he resigned as the candidate. Writing to the *Derry Journal*, he described himself as a Christian Communist, declared he was 'not prepared to

go forward as the representative of any class or party, but only of a principle. . . . the voluntary change to communal ownership of the land' and 'the gradual withering of the poisoned branches of standing armies, prisons and the workhouse system'.

Dismissively, he found 'that my invitation to contest Tirconaill in the workers' interest issued only from a small group with no claim to represent the district as a whole'. Proclaiming his refusal to take the oath which was required to sit in the Dail, he still appealed for co-operation from the churches in implementing communism.

Only two weeks from the election a convention in Ballybofey, 'attended by representatives of organised workers from every part of the county', chose Denis Houston as candidate. Though a Donegal man, he had been away for years. He was an ITGWU official, but this union was weak in the county. White's opinion of Donegal labour was proved wrong.

Houston was judged unlucky not to get a seat, surviving till the twelfth count. One of the republicans elected was Peadar O'Donnell. Some of his election appeals had a strong labour tinge. 'Vote for the man who has devoted his life to lifting the working class out of the mire of slavery'. Four years later Archie Cassidy took a seat for Labour.

This was no fluke. Donegal shared in the working class militancy and organisation of those years. In 1915 one of the first (if not the first) union branches in the country that organised farm labourers was set up by the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (NAUL) in Newtowncunningham, between Derry and Letterkenny.

There were a large number of farm labourers in the commercial farming area, roughly the triangle of Derry-Letterkenny-Strabane. In 1917-19 they fought a series of strikes, led by the NAUL. *The Voice of Labour*, the newspaper of the ITGWU,

paid them tribute. ' . . . but for the harvest strike in Derry, Donegal and Tyrone we question if we would have a minimum wage fixed for Irish agricultural workers today'.

In April and May, 1919, a big farm strike was crushed, with flying pickets of labourers being confronted by armed gangs of farmers. It is said that some labourers were forced to work at gunpoint. Four pickets were shot and wounded at Newtowncunningham.

With the farmworkers' organisation smashed, the asylum workers and, to a lesser extent, the railwaymen became the backbone of the movement in the area.

It was the asylum workers who took the initiative in having the Workers' Council set up. The red flag, symbol of revolution was not absent from the area. In the April 1922 strike against militarism the organised workers of Letterkenny paraded the Main Street behind it.

There was political as well as trade union awareness among these workers. John Doherty, secretary of the asylum workers' union, was elected to Letterkenny UDC in 1920. Two Labour rural councillors were also elected - William Breslin, a prominent leader in the farm strikes, for the Letterkenny area and another for the Raphoe area of Strabane No 2 Rural Council.

Though Donegal may now be seen as a conservative area, it was not always so.

Anton McCabe

Sources: Reports of the 1923 election campaign come from the *Derry Journal*, 6 June 1923, 20 June 1923, 25 June 1923, 2 July 1923, 17 August 1923 and 24 August 1923, respectively. The tribute to the harvest strikers of the north west is from the *Voice of Labour*, 26 January 1918.

Forged in Fire

Tom Geraghty, a Dublin firefighter, looks at the history of the Fire Brigade Union, told by a new book published this year.

THE CONDITIONS of employment for firefighters of 100 years ago were very different from the working conditions we enjoy today. In spite of the burlesque figures cut by famous chief fire officers Eyre Massey Shaw, Braidwood and Aylmer Firebrace, life for the firemen and their

families was savage, harsh and penal. In those days firemen lived the greater part of their lives in the fire stations, they raised their families there and only knew the population outside through their working lives. Such a group of employees could not have been easy to organise into trade

unions, yet in the 1890s, this closed society of workers became the focus of the union 'agitator'.

These ex-seamen, in spite of their penal conditions of employment, could not have been easily wooed into trade unionism. Then as now, they considered themselves as a special category of people who could only be won into a special type of trade union. *Forged in Fire* tells the story of this rather unique trade union organisation which started amongst London firemen, spread slowly, and against major opposition, into the provinces and finally achieved almost closed shop status throughout the British and Northern Ireland fire service.

The history is a retelling of the normal trade union battles fought to improve the pay and conditions of the firefighters but it is also the story of the struggle for a dignified life for the wives and families who were forced to live on the fire stations under the harsh discipline and penal oppression that applied to the firemen. *Forged in Fire* is also the story of the major role played by the union in changing the antiquated victorian fire service into one of the finest fire and emergency services in the world. It is a role of public service for which the Fire Brigades' Union has never got its share of the credit.

In recent years students of politics or labour history, have had opportunity to study and understand the nature and development of that most important of labour institutions, the trade unions. Most of this available literature has been written by academics. Although these often sympathetic studies have done much to challenge the glorious histories of kings and queens, or the glorifying stories of the growth of trade and industry which ignored the brutal conditions endured by workers' families to produce this wealth, few have been the actual writings of those who were directly involved in the movement at the coal face. *Forged in Fire*, flawed and all as it is against the criterion that history is what happened, not what certain people thought happened, it is a welcome new approach to compiling a trade union history. It is truly a warts and all history that reveals the sharp differences and deep seated arguments which characterised the relationship between the union leadership and the activists at branch and conference level. Many of these differences are outlined in the personal memories written



An exhausted firefighter at the King's Cross Underground tragedy, 1987.

by those directly involved and published without editorial comment in the book.

The first recorded moves towards trade union organisation in the fire service were in the 1890s, the decade of massive growth in industrial unionism. Fire stations were referred to as 'ships on land' because only ex-seamen were employed in them, and the station regimen was similar to that on board a ship at sea. James Bradley, later to become the first secretary of the firemen's union, was to state that, "wives were as much under the discipline as their husbands. If you take a woman into a London fire station it is practically condemning her to penal servitude".

Firemen then worked a 24 hour day for 14 days, except when sick, with only the fifteenth day off duty. Scattered and isolated workforces as they were, tied to continuous working, station housing and schooled in service codes of drill or discipline, they welcomed the union 'agitator' who would speak up for them. Political discussion was avoided because it could result in conflict or ill feeling which would disrupt the close knit station community and also because over zealous officers would make it a disciplinary matter. Yet these isolated groups became unionised. It is believed that the strong bond of mutual reliance which characterises the firemen's job was the powerful element in forging the special kind of trade union which developed throughout the British fire service.

Early industrial organisation was undertaken by the Municipal Employees' Association. They made very little headway at first, so much so that in 1905 they were still pressing for extra two-room accommodation for married men. The claim was rejected the following year - 1906, the year of the bedrock legislation for trade unions, the Trades Dispute Act. In a major move to stamp out trade union organisation the Fire Brigades' Committee drafted a regulation which required, on threat of dismissal, that any complaint from the firemen must come through the chief fire officer. It was a position which applied in the Dublin fire service up to the late 1920s, and a position which some chief fire officers tried to reimpose in recent years.

In spite of these penal regulations the National Union of Corporation Workers, who had replaced the Municipal Employees' Association, could claim 1,100 out of 1,300 London firemen in 1913. It was a time when the firemen were pursuing that longed for goal of parity with the London metropolitan police. The commencement of the first world war put the pay claim on hold, but throughout the war years the union pressed for a proper channel of communication to process claims between firemen and their employers. 1918 saw not alone the end of the war but the national revolt of the seamen against their badly paid conditions and the strike of the metropolitan police.

The firemen in the midst of this general unrest achieved the right of full trade union organisation. It led the following year to the firemen's branch withdrawing from the National Union of Corporation Workers and constituting themselves into the Firemen's Trade Union.

The FBU has stood in the fore front of the struggle against nuclear weapons

By 1920 the new union was organised in 35 brigades in spite of the competition for membership from four other organisations. A campaign was mounted to get all firemen onto a common national pay rate comparable to that paid to the police. In this battle they were opposed by Herbert Morrison, the labour leader of the London County Council, himself the son of a policeman. Morrison was to continue throughout his career to oppose concessions of pay parity with the police for the fire service. During the second world war he was home secretary when the Fire Brigades Union was pressing for the firemen's charter, which sought a minimum wage of four pounds a week, full pay when sick or injured, a 72 hour week on a two platoon system, promotion on merit, a just disciplinary code and full union recognition. He opposed these demands and was involved in trying to set up a house union to undermine the FBU.

Women were recruited into the fire service during the second world war, but were paid lower rates of pay than the men, even when doing similar jobs. This was opposed by the Fire Brigades' Union but Mr Morrison in his opposition to this just claim showed firefighters that there was very little difference between Tory and Labour leaders when they were in office and dealing with the fire service. The truth of that belief was hammered home to the firefighters 25 years later when, in 1977, they were driven into their one and only national fire service strike by a Labour government. The TUC general council had exempted the firemen from involvement in the 1926 general strike.

The war years transformed both the fire service and the FBU. In 1939 a young

ex-seaman and sub officer from the London fire brigade became general secretary of the union. John Horner lifted the organisation out of its blinkered past and placed it in the forefront of the labour movement. Membership expanded during the war and the decision taken by Horner, against massive opposition from the executive committee and full time members, to recruit the wartime auxiliaries into the union, expanded the membership from 3,500 in 1939 to 66,500 by 1942. The Cinderella of the trade union movement was transformed into a major organisation. The union supported the decision to nationalise the fire service, the one good deed Morrison was to perform. The war had finally allowed a home secretary to lift the fire service out of the parish pump politics which had maintained a service with no agreed standards on manning, no central control, no central supervision or training, and equipment at a level that had not changed in over 20 years. In spite of our 'emergency' we did not put the fire service under central control, so even though we are reaching the last years of the century, we still have a parish pump driven fire service with all the deficiencies that so characterised the British fire service prior to the war.

The FBU had a very significant Communist Party influence on its executive committee during and after the second world war. This influence may have played no small part in placing the FBU to the left of the labour movement. The union campaigned for equal pay for work of equal value, for the continued employment of women in the service after the war, supported the Indian League, the Greek partisans, the Beveridge plan on social security, and affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party. The non-political firefighters had come full circle from the days when politics and political discussion was taboo on the fire stations.

John Horner had been in Coventry when it was blitzed by German bombers. In 1947 he visited Dresden and Berlin. He was to state soon after these visits, "I have never been to Hiroshima but since Coventry, the world has sunk deep into barbarism". From then to this day the FBU has stood in the forefront of the struggle for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Horner led his union delegates onto the streets in the first demonstration by a union against the atom bomb. The FBU was the first union to raise the question of nuclear disarmament at a Labour Party conference and two years later, in 1960 John Horner, on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union, seconded Frank Cousins' (general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union) historic motion which committed the Labour Party, in spite of the opposition of its leader Hugh Gaitskell, to a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The latter part of the book deals with the traumatic national strike of 1977. The background to the lead-up to this dramatic confrontation between the firefighters and the Labour government backed by the TUC, is covered in great detail and should be read by all those trade union leaders who, in leading from the front, lose contact with the members. I was a fraternal delegate to the 1977 delegate conference of the FBU. It was the last conference of Enoch Humphries, who had held the post of president since 1964. He had opposed the incomes policy of the TUC in spite of the fact that the general secretary, Terry Parry was a member of that council and had supported the policy. By a majority of one the executive had endorsed the policy in 1976 and Humphries had refused to give his presidential address to the 1976 annual conference because of the position taken by the executive.

Humphries' welcome to conference for the Labour home secretary, Merlyn Rees, was less than fraternal. It contrasted with the warmth and hospitality shown to Mrs Allende, the widow of the assassinated president of Chile. But nothing showed the mood of the delegates more than the silence in the hall from the delegates who had remained during and after the home secretary's address. It contrasted vividly with the standing ovation given to Mrs Allende's speech, even when delivered through an interpreter. It did not take much longer for the inevitable to happen. At the recall conference of the union in the autumn of 1977 the unthinkable became a reality, the delegates rejected motion after motion of the national executive committee and finally carried their own decision to take the firefighters out on a national strike.

The strike was bitter fought, with the TUC rejecting the union plea for support. The FBU set the labour party trade unions on the road to nuclear disarmament. With what followed for the trade union-Labour

Party relationship the year after the firemen's betrayal paved the way for the Thatcher years and the current Labour party despair at ever gaining power again through the ballot box. The betrayal of the just claim of the firefighters' of '77 has left a bitter legacy in the trade union movement. It was to be repeated again and again afterwards with other unions, with dreadful consequences for the whole labour movement. In hindsight it could be said that the national strike of the British firefighters in 1977 was the forerunner to the industrial confrontation of the winter of discontent that set the ground for the Thatcher years. If so, then the background to that strike should be read as lesson to all future hopefuls for a Labour government.

Forged in Fire, edited by Victor Bailey, published by Lawrence & Wishart, (no price available)

Exit the Plough and the Stars

It's a flag that should only be used when we're buildin' th' barricades to fight for a Workers' Republic.

The Covey, Act 1 *The Plough and the Stars*

OTHER THAN for ceremonial occasions, the 'Plough' has all but disappeared as a symbol of the broad political labour movement. It is no longer the preferred symbol of the Labour Party or the Workers Party. It was not adopted by the new Democratic Left party.

This uniquely Irish flag of labour with its rich symbolism, and later variations based on it, has an interesting past. The flag first appeared at an Irish Citizen Army (ICA) meeting in April, 1914. Sean O'Casey, then secretary of the ICA, is the source of much of what we know of its early history. In *Drums under the Window* (1945) he recounts that it was James Larkin who first suggested that the ICA should have its own banner. Who originally suggested the symbol of the plough is unknown.

It was reputed to have been AE (George Russell) but he 'declined the honour' when questioned about it by O'Casey in 1921. O'Casey also states that it was made by the Dun Emer Guild. The design of the flag was executed by a Belfast artist, William H Megahy, who worked at the Metropolitan School of Art and later in Galway. Megahy does not appear to have been a member of the ICA. O'Casey had Megahy's original design and deposited it with the National Museum in 1954.

The Plough from its earliest days has many peculiar aspects to its history. At its unveiling Constance Markiewicz showed little interest and remarked that it had 'little republican significance'. With Larkin's departure to the USA in October, 1914, James Connolly assumed the leadership of the ICA. Was the Plough then regarded as the flag of the ICA?

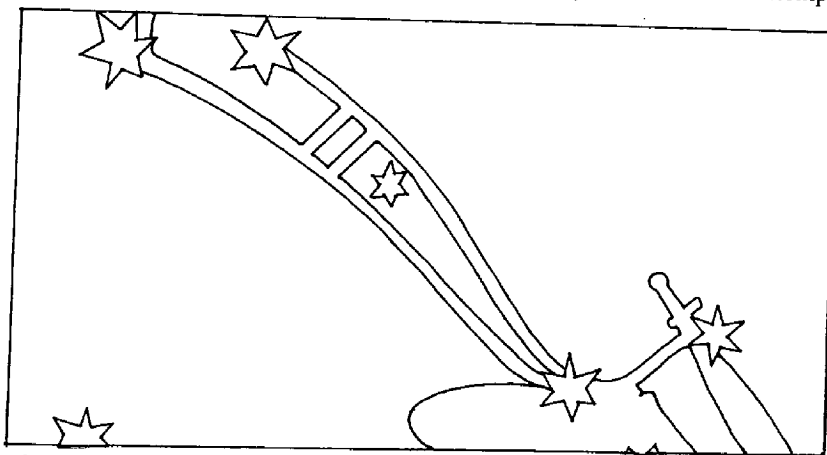
A well known photograph of the ICA on parade outside Croydon House shows it with another flag, both furled, on either

side of the ICA bugler, William Oman. Both seem to have equal prominence and both have flagstuffs terminated with the 'red hand' of 1913. Was there significance in the fact that, in the immediate period leading up to the Easter rising and during it, the Plough was not flown over the GPO, over Liberty Hall, nor over any of the principle strongholds occupied by the ICA?

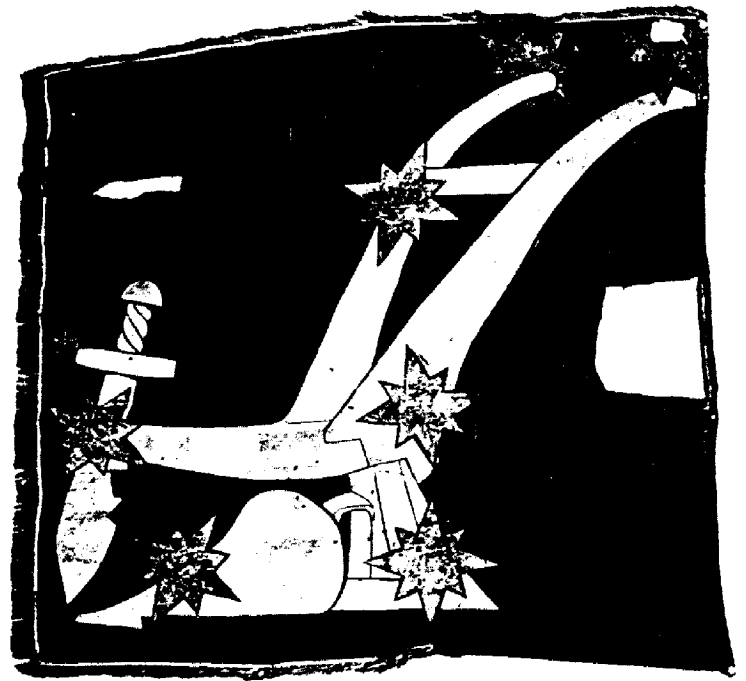
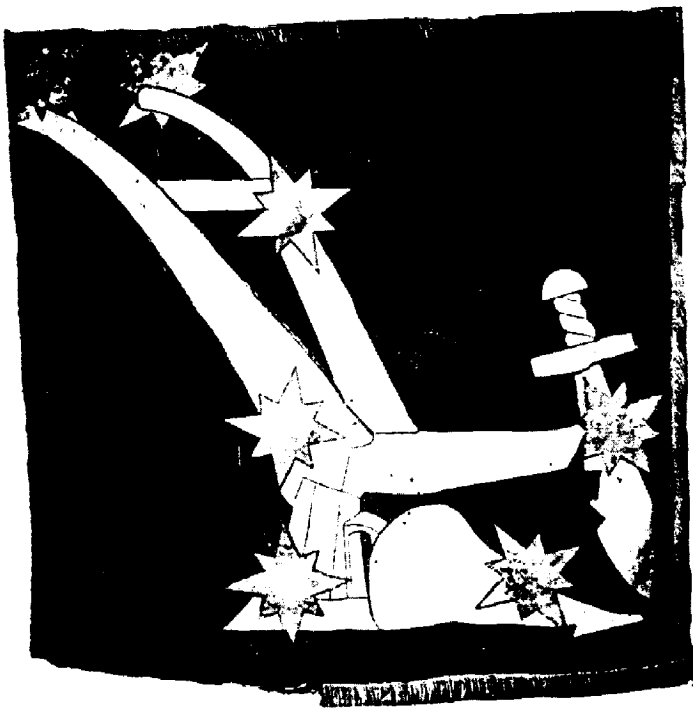
The Plough first appeared on Tuesday of Easter week. It was flown over the Imperial Hotel (now Clerys Store) when a group who had been occupying buildings in Westmoreland Street were withdrawn to the Imperial, across the road from the GPO. By Thursday the Imperial was destroyed by fire. The Plough, on the parapet of the building, survived the inferno. A young cavalry officer, Lieutenant TA Williams, assisted by an Inspector Barrett of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, risked climbing the building on the Saturday evening after the surrender to take it as a souvenir. Williams presented the flag to the National Museum in 1955.

The flag's fortunes during Easter week and later are told by GA Hayes-McCoy in his *History of Irish Flags* (1979). The Plough, almost square in shape, featured a stylised agricultural plough in yellow on a green field, with the stars painted in silver. The flag was bordered by a gilt fringe. The Plough in its original form is well known since a reproduction of the design appeared in *Fifty years of Liberty Hall* (1959). However, that was not always the case. In all O'Casey's descriptions of the flag he refers to it having been blue. His recollection was, no doubt, influenced by the coloured original design he had in his possession, which was blue.

In the early 1930s when an attempt was



Sketch based on Megahy's original design in the National Museum of Ireland.



The original flag, both sides. (National Museum)

being made to reconstruct the Plough, veterans of the ICA were consulted, and some remembered it as having been green. The eventual consensus was that it was blue. The flag that then became familiar as the 'Plough' was one with a blue field with the stars of the constellation only, featured in white. It differed in other respects also. The stars of the original were eight-pointed, whereas in the reconstructed version they were five-pointed. The agricultural plough also disappeared, forming no part of the new flag. This version is still to be seen at labour gatherings both of a political and trade union character.

The symbolism of the Plough has been much speculated upon. As a symbol of labour it was an inspired choice. However, given that the ICA and indeed the labour movement itself at the time was a predominately urban phenomenon, the choice of a plough was hardly representative of the then movement. The Irish working class was predominantly rural and was not organised successfully on a mass basis until after 1917.

The significance of the constellation of the Plough (ursa major) which, since the middle ages was the key to navigation and consequently exploration, transport and trade must also have been a considered and recognised element of the design. The elements of the design and colours combined to incorporate at least four symbols. The green, white (silver on the flag) and yellow were regarded (pre - 1920s) as the national colours by many; the agricultural plough as a symbol of work; the constellation as the never-failing aid

to direction, and (if it is not too fanciful) a heavenly objective.

Yet another, fifth symbol is present. If intentional it was arguably the most appropriate for the labour movement - whilst concurrently probably the least appropriate, given the means by which the ICA chose to achieve their objectives. In the original the colter (the iron cutter) is a notched sword. The sword is also present in Megahy's original design. Surely this must be the sword of Isias (Chapter 2:4), 'and they shall turn their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles'. This biblical illusion could not have been lost on O'Casey. Yet significantly he makes no reference to it. Also given the anti-war stance of the international socialist movement prior to the first world war, its significance cannot have been lost on the leadership of the Irish left also.

The authenticity of the original flag when it reappeared in the mid-1950s was ques-

tioned. However it is accepted as being the authentic Plough having satisfied the tests of the time. Its delapidated condition prompted one ICA veteran to comment, 'That faded old thing couldn't be our flag, our flag was beautiful'.

Off and on since 1914 the Plough has been used by various groups, both political and trade union. It was, most appropriately, the symbol of the Federation of Rural Workers, with the stars shown over a ploughed field. It is still used today, to give but two examples, by the Marine, Port and General Workers Union where it is featured over the celtic knot of Brendan the Navigator and by the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, where it is featured over one of the burning castles of the city's coat of arms. In both cases with white/silver stars on blue.

As a symbol of labour it will live on. Would that we could look forward to its re-use and a time when all swords and their modern equivalents be turned into ploughshares.

Those of us who have marched behind the Plough and hitched our wagon to the stars will remember the Brennans of the labour movement, 'swankin' it at th' head of the Citizen Army carryin' th' flag of the Plough and the Stars', (Clitheroe: Act 1 *The Plough and the Stars*)

Charles Callan

Readers and ILHS members with badges, billheads and other memorabilia featuring the Plough are urged to deposit them with the Labour History Museum.



1934 version

Cultural capital

A poorly attended conference on 9 November provided a day of challenging opinions and contributions from cultural workers on the theme, Cultural capital – cultural labour.

Robert Ballagh opened in the morning on public access to the visual arts. The Workers' Music Co-op (John McDonnell, Paul O'Brien and Noel Stanley) spoke on and performed workers' songs, closing with the song tribute to the Dunne's anti-apartheid strikers written by the late Ewan McColl. Joe Deasy of the ILHS committee traced the intriguing personal and political bonds between Sean O'Casey, Jim Larkin and G Bernard Shaw. David Kavanagh of the Irish Film Institute talked about film and television work in Ireland – culture or industry? He described the power of film images to reflect or distort the society these seek to represent.

Books

Irish Labour History Society members who have published books in the last twelve months include:

Sean Beecher, *The Dissenting Voice: Protestant Democracy in Ulster – Plantation to Partition*, (Blackstaff Press).

Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1888: Development or Decline?* (Cork University Press).

Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class, 1905-1923*, (Pluto Press) and *Harold Wilson* (Pluto Press).

Tom Morrissey, *A Man called Hughes*, (Veritas) and *The Social Teachings of James Connolly*, (Veritas).

National Union of Public Employees, Women's Committee, *Women's Voices: an oral history of Northern Irish women's health, 1900-1990*, (Attic Press). (From the ILHS annual report, 1992)



Irish Citizen Army

A Dublin reader, Brendan Devereaux, has asked for help to identify a photograph of the Citizen Army. On the centre two pages is a photograph he has from among his family records. He knows his grandfather and great aunt are in it.

Patrick Devereaux, who was held after the 1916 rising in Wakefield prison, is seated third from the left of the picture, to the immediate left of the piper. Patrick Devereaux's sister, Mollie Allen, nee Devereaux, from Lower Gardiner Street, who was in the College of Surgeons during the rising, is the second from the door on the right of the photograph.

Brendan Devereaux has been trying to find out when the picture was taken. But so far expert opinion has failed to provide any answer, as this photograph is new to them. It is obviously after 1916, (the large crack to the right of the door is damage to the photograph, not the building). But Brendan believes it may be before the end of 1917, as repairs to Liberty Hall had begun before the end of the year.

If you recognise any one in the picture or can help out with the date or the occasion on which it was taken, please contact the Irish Labour History Museum, Beggars Bush, Haddington Road Dublin 4, tel: 681071.

see over





Cissy Cahalan

a tribute Brid Smith

IN MARCH, 1936 Cissy Cahalan wrote in the *Distributive Worker*, the official journal of her union, to the memory of the union's founder, Michael O'Lehane.

My first meeting with Michael O'Lehane was at the Rotunda where a vast gathering of citizens assembled to express their sympathy for the two girls who were burned to death in a drapery establishment in Camden Street and to demand the abolition of the living-in system which was responsible for the loss of these young girls who were sleeping on the premises in a remote part of the building and perished before help could reach them.

The year was 1906. Cissy Cahalan worked in a trade that was ravaged by the living-in scourge. The murder of the shop assistants referred to, 'who were trapped like rats in cage, doors locked against them and burned to death', enraged and inspired Cissy who herself was employed as a draper's assistant in Arnotts of Henry Street. She was born in Tipperary in 1876, the daughter of a school teacher. Her parents named her Mary Josephine, but her pet name was Cissy and to her close friends she was simply known as 'Cahalan'.

She was apprenticed to the drapery trade as a young woman and from its inception was deeply involved in the Irish Drapery Assistants' Association. Until her dismissal from Arnotts in 1932 she worked tirelessly and selflessly to build and strengthen the union of shopworkers in Ireland. She moved through revolutionary times and a study of her life is in itself a study of a significant phase in the history of the Irish working class. She made a magnificent contribution to that history, a contribution that has largely been ignored and forgotten.

The *Drapers' Assistant*, the first official journal of any union in Ireland was founded

and edited by Michael O'Lehane in 1903 and the journal splendidly records the history of the union. Cissy recalls how proud O'Lehane was of the journal.

I saw him hold up the first number with joy and pride. It reminded me of a man with his first born child and so I think he regarded it, for his whole life was centred in his work.

She herself contributed extensively to the journal and through its pages raised and highlighted countless issues affecting the working class in general and the shop workers in particular. The main struggles for shop workers in the early years of Cissy's trade union involvement were the living in system, long hours instant dismissals, the apprenticeship system, low wages and equal pay. The living in system was a particularly nasty and oppressive one. Staff were forced as a condition of employment to live over their workplace in accommodation provided by management. Conditions were invariably over crowded, damp and dangerous. Young men and women lived under the constant discipline of their employers. At night time they were often locked into their dormitories and it was this dangerous and enforced confinement which led to the deaths by burning of young shop assistants in Limerick, Dundalk and Camden Street.

The system of apprenticeship was widely exploited by the employers. Parents of young men and women, in particular from rural Ireland, paid a small fee for their son or daughter to be apprenticed into the trade. That son or daughter went off to work for a pittance of a wage and lived in the squalor and oppression of the living in system. Often the employer dispensed with their labour by dismissal once the apprenticeship was served.

Again the pages of the *Drapers' Assistant* recorded this exploitation vividly, and did so in order to inspire its victims to organise

and fight back. An accurate description of what was demanded by the employer of a draper's assistant at that time was, 'they have to be eternally young, infernally civil, have the polish of a cabinet minister and dress like a duke on the wages of a dustman'.

Cissy joined the Irish Women's Franchise League around 1908 and became closely involved in the suffrage movement. Francis Sheehy Skeffington very much influenced and encouraged her. She wrote of how he, 'told you or rather advised you to do a thing, you might hesitate but you always tried to do it...he did not fail to criticise but was always helpful and constructive'.

She set about organising women not just through the suffrage movement but through the ranks of her trade union. Public rallies were held for women shop workers and supported by women such as Louie Bennett and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. She formed a ladies' committee of the Dublin branch of the Irish Drapers Assistants' Association for the purpose of holding seminars and educational and to encourage women to become involved in the branch. She actively campaigned for the right of women to vote and its seems this activity cost Cissy her job. Marie Tregay (wife of Tom Johnson) refers in her notes to Cissy Cahalan having lost her job at Arnotts because of suffrage activities and Arnotts own records show dates for her employment from 1906-1916 and later again from 1917 onwards.

Cissy wrote extensively and courageously in the *Drapers' Assistant* on issues affecting women. Her views on marriage, for example, were very radical for her time.

The marriage trade by its very nature, is an isolated trade permitting of practically no organisation or common action among the workers; consequently the marriage trained woman enters commercial or industrial life with no

tradition or organisation or common action behind her.

Women should be shown their place and part in the evolution of the working world from a state of slavery to that of freedom – freedom to live and work and profit by the wealth of the state which they help to produce . . . Women are waking up to their real position in the labour market. They are breaking away from old and forming new traditions.

What is interesting about her writings in the *Drapers' Assistant* is not just the very radical ideas which she espoused on marriage and women but also the level of debate she aroused from so writing. The pages of the journal are often full with 'Replies to Miss Cahalan', particularly on issues relating to women and equality. By 1913 women formed over one third of the union's membership and yet had no representation at branch or other committee level so Cissy's provocative writings were indeed courageous, given the times in which she lived.

As early as 1913 Cissy provoked debate in the union on the question of a change of name for the organisation. This was suggested not for the sake of a name change but, as she so aptly put it, to advance 'the immense power of the solidarity of labour.'

The root principle of a trade union is not that of piling up capital but of improving the conditions of employment and lifting the worker to a higher plane and a higher state of existence.

The argument against a change of name for the union which would embrace all shop workers and not alone drapery assistants was basically one of trade snobbery. Cissy sustained the debate through the pages of the journal arguing that,

If you admit the seller of the Parisian creations, how can you deny admission to the seller of pepper and salt, and if you do on what grounds do you base your refusal.

It was not until 1921, during her presidency of the union, that the Irish Drapers Assistants' Association changed its name to the Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks.

The first world war ravaged Europe's working class and again Cissy used the journal to condemn the recruitment of workers as cannon fodder. She called instead for recruits to the union,

We must not neglect for a day the army whose idea is not death and destruction but life and construction and neither stay nor stop our call for volunteers and recruits . . . I would appeal for volunteers for our army, not that of carnage and destruction but one of human benefit and moral welfare – one of whose watchword is not dis-union and disruption but 'Unity and Self-Reliance'.

She used the jargon of the war mongers to advocate the advance of the working class.

Members have shown through their organisation that they have a respect and value for themselves and entitled to a fair share of the wealth they help to produce. Here is a defence of territory, the only territory workers possess – their labour.

She championed equal pay for women

She was passionately opposed to the war and frequently sold the *Irish Citizen* on the streets of Dublin. While many who previously sold the paper refused to do so because of its anti-war stance, Cissy became more determined and committed. She was a regular contributor to the *Irish Citizen* and supported its position on the war. Some of her fellow trade unionists opposed Cissy's views on the war, like a regular contributor to the union journal who wrote under the name 'Westerner', and who contended,

I assert that this great war, like many a domestic blight, is but a chastisement of an avenging and angry God on a corrupt and anti-Christian people.

In reply Cissy wrote, 'It seems to me very like blasphemy to attribute the crimes, horrors, bloodshed and all the unspeakable infamy of war to God . . . We are still told by some who are themselves in possession of a fair proportion of the world's goods that poverty was good for the soul and war was the will of God. We know that poverty and all its attendant miseries to be the result of starvation wages, the bitter fruit of capitalism'

The war, however, created another problem for the union, or at least exacerbated an already existing one, that of the issue of equal pay for equal work. Cissy was an ardent feminist and one who, in many ways, championed the cause of equal pay for women. The question of equal pay had always been on the agenda for the women's movement but had not been seriously taken up by the trade union movement as it existed then. Within the ranks of the Drapers Assistants' Association it was a thorny issue. The flood of young working class men into the British Army created what one union member saw as 'the menacing problem of our surplus women'.

It was not the case that, 'two million more women than men on these islands by early 1917' was itself a threat to workers, but the question was essentially one of the cost of labour. There was now an opening for women on the labour market

as there was never before. The employers, of course, used it as an opportunity to undercut wages. Because women had been paid traditionally less than men for the same work, employers could now recruit female workers and spend less on wages for the same job done. The effect of this was that men organised in the unions were opposed to what they saw as women taking men's jobs. Cissy argued that the problem should not be tackled by opposing women in employment but by organising them, once they became employed. She pointed out that a woman,

had no tradition behind her . . . she enters the labour market with the quiet hope of leaving it on marriage. When she did wish to become organised most of the men's unions refused to admit her.

But always she looked to the trade union movement as a means to further the cause of women, thereby furthering the cause of labour.

Equal pay for equal work will go a good way towards settling the problem of cheap labour . . . It is neither the heroes nor the superwomen that will settle the wages question, but all the brains of all the women workers, together with all the brains of the men workers, that will find the solution.

Essentially what Cissy Cahalan was arguing on the issue of equal pay in 1916 was to become a broader argument in the women's movement later in Ireland. In her work on the Irish women's suffrage movement, Rosemary Cullen Owens cites Cissy Cahalan as 'one of the few examples of working class involvement with the suffrage movement who defended the concept of mixed trade unions'.

Cissy Cahalan argued with Louie Bennett, founder of the Irish Women Workers' Union, 'that the division of the sexes into separate unions might prove an effective weapon for bosses at times of dispute', and that, 'if women in the industrial world want a place in the labour movement, they must seek it shoulder to shoulder with the men, and not in any separate organisation, apart and isolated'.

The events of the Easter rising 1916 took many Dublin workers by surprise. The annual delegate conference of the Irish Drapers Assistants' Association was taking place in the Mansion House in Dublin. The May-June 1916 journal recounts,

Some time between 12.15 and 12.30 a late delegate came in and said to his neighbour that the volunteers were out and that the Post Office was taken. Needless to say, most were more or less incredulous, some laughed. A few minutes later a pressman came in and whispered that a number of people were shot nearby, the proceedings continued meantime; but henceforth the reporters seemed to have no concern for what was taking place in the Oak Room (Mansion House).

A very large number of members of the union were out of employment as a result of the destruction of Dublin's city centre during the rising. Cissy, who had previously worked in Arnotts, but who, in 1916 had lost her job there as a result of suffrage activities, was now employed in Rowses' of North Earl Street. These premises were destroyed during the rising and Cissy was once again out of work. The union regularly paid her for articles contributed to the journal and the executive committee of the union consistently wrote to her regarding what efforts she had made to secure employment since the loss of her job at Rowses. It appears that the employment she secured was back in Arnotts, early in 1917. Why Arnotts re-engaged her is not clear but she worked there until 1932, and, in all, completed 25 years service with the company.

Apart from her full-time job in Arnotts, where she was an active shop steward, her writings for the journal, her involvement in the suffrage and anti-conscription movements, Cissy was active in generating funds for strikers, such as the Munster Warehouse strike in Tralee, which lasted for three years and was one of the most significant battles waged by the union against the living in system. The Dublin ladies' committee of the IDAA raised £3 towards the strike fund (a sizeable sum in its day) - the proceeds of a dance.

She performed a play, written and produced by union members, called *Charity*. The play presented a theme of working class Dublin in 'those large tenements where everything is chaotic and where life is a hell...the character of the people who inhabit these huge death traps of the kindly heart, the wild enthusiasm, the deep devotion, the pardonable pride and the resentment of charity, as we know it, that these walls contain'. In this play she acted with 'an ease and grace that would do credit to the most experienced artists'.

In April 1918, Cissy was elected by the union delegates to serve on the executive committee of the organisation. Along with Ms Sands of Belfast, both were the first women to serve on that body.

In December of that year between 400 and 450 workers employed in Arnotts, Henry Street, went on strike to fight for an increase of one third of their salaries. They won a 30% increase after a week long strike and Cissy was one of the key leaders of that dispute.

Her weight on the executive committee of the union was felt on many issues. The union claimed for a minimum wage containing the principle of one scale only (in other words, equal pay) after much internal debate in May 1919. Cissy insisted that they put into practice what they preached when she stormed out of an executive committee meeting in July 1920. The meeting was discussing a wage increase for the union's own staff and the proposal was to increase

the men's wages by 10 shillings and the women by five shillings. Cissy advocated that, in this case at least, the practice of equal pay should apply. Later she was instrumental in averting a threatened strike by the staff on the pay issue and helped secure an equal increase in pay for all concerned.

The union was experiencing some difficulty organising in and around Belfast at that time. Following the general election of 1918 which returned a Sinn Fein majority for Ireland, there erupted in Belfast and its environs, 'a mad orgy of sectarianism and political oppression', as described in the *Drapers' Assistant*. Some held the opinion within the union that Belfast was a drain on the organisation, 'a hopeless city'. The argument ran that in the 'Big Houses' in Belfast the worst wages were being paid and employers in Dublin and other places would point out that they were paying 20% more than the employers were paying in Belfast.

Cissy's response to this argument was to ask the Belfast organiser, Mr Cassidy, 'to bring back with him to Belfast the statement that they recognised no difference between Belfast, Cork and Dublin, that they (the union) were out for the betterment of their class wherever they were'.

Two years later a delegate to the union's conference would suggest that the union part company with Belfast and waste no money in trying to improve conditions there. Again Cissy defended the workers of Belfast. 'When the war fever has left their blood the people of Belfast would stand in with the rest of Ireland in the fight for the working class'.

Michael O'Lehane died in March 1920 at the age of 46. His death deeply affected Cissy, and it was her suggestion to the executive, following his death, that the building which the union rented (known then as Cavendish House), be purchased by the union to his memory and that a hall be built at the back, paid for by a separate members' fund, and that this hall be named after the late general secretary. The building was bought for £2,000. The hall was not completed until 1957 and the building renamed O'Lehane House in 1984.

At the annual delegate conference in 1921 Cissy was elected president of the union, the first, and so far the only woman to hold that position in that particular union. For the next three years she would preside over an executive committee which met weekly and achieved much progress in the face of difficult odds. The union was successful during this period in achieving the establishment of a minimum wage and the complete abolition of the living in system. The difficult times included the sacking of a general secretary, Mr Gilloway and a Dublin organiser, Mr Lamb.

Cissy came into conflict with her own executive on the issue of the postal workers' strike in September 1922. She demanded that the union issue their own members

with a directive not to deliver company letters during the dispute as this was viewed as 'scabbing'. After some heated debate a majority voted against this course of action and Cissy Cahalan threatened to resign as president of the union. It proved to be more than a threat when she did not attend the next executive meeting. Subsequently, an executive member from Cork, Mr Aherne, met Cissy and convinced her to withdraw her resignation. All correspondence relating to the matter was destroyed and the only record of it which remains is contained in the minutes of the meetings.

Perhaps her most controversial act as president of the Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks (the name change took place in 1921) was her resignation from the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. She had been elected to this body in 1922. At its annual meeting in August 1923 the executive of the ILP-TUC adopted a motion which strongly condemned 'internment without trial and the imprisonment of thousands of citizens' as 'unjust, tyrannical and detrimental to the true interests of the country'. That was in August 1923 and by October 1923, 'the ultimate weapon of prisoners was resorted to when four hundred and twenty four men went on hunger strike in Mountjoy Jail'.

Details of the disagreements that Cissy had with the governing body of the ILP-TUC are not recorded in their annual report but the thirteenth annual report of that body does record, 'She resigned her seat by letter dated 31 October 1923, alleging as a reason the inaction of the national committee in respect of the hunger strike of prisoners'.

The *Distributive Worker* (the union's journal changed its title along with the union's name change) carried her letter of resignation in December 1923 at her request.

Dear Mr Johnson,
Owing to the inaction of the ILP towards the hunger strikers I am forced to resign my membership of that body. I feel very strongly that a Labour Party, which exists for the maintenance of rights and liberties of the people, should use every ounce of effort at its command to hasten the release of the prisoners both here and in the North, who are making so brave a fight for freedom against such heavy odds.

I am yours fraternally
Miss C Cahalan

Indeed she must have felt strongly on this issue, because Cissy's commitment to the cause of labour was most definite. The other area where she had major disagreement with the Labour Party was on the question of entering elections. She felt that entering elections would have a bad effect on the industrial activities of the trade unions. In the *Distributive Worker*, October 1921, she addressed the issue to her own members.

The time is fast approaching when Irish Labour must nail its colours to the mast. Will Labour in Ireland become a kind of left wing of a bourgeois middle class assembly or will it abandon the political arena and rely upon industrial action as a surer means of securing and maintaining the rights of the working class . . . We have seen some evidence recently of the temper of the rank and file. The miners at Arigna, the creamery workers at Knocklong and Bruree, the Cork Harbour Board employees and last but not least, the steel workers of Drogheda having given practical illustrations of their method of securing reforms.

However, her resignation from that body on the question of the hunger strikers seems to have been the parting of the ways between Cissy and the Labour Party.

At the following year's annual delegate conference in 1924, Cissy was defeated in a contest for president of the union by Henry Batt. She continued as an active shop steward in Arnotts until 1932. She was frequently a delegate to annual conference and was active on the central council of the Dublin branch in 1925-26.

At four o'clock in the afternoon of 10 November 1932, Cissy Cahalan was summoned to the office of the managing director of Arnotts, Mr Nesbitt, who addressed her, 'The Board have had you under consideration and they have decided that you are to retire. They propose to give you three months' salary.'

No other reason was proffered for her dismissal. Her work record was impeccable but she had reached the state of being over the desired age for Arnotts employees and, although Arnotts were at pains to deny it, there is evidence which suggests that the company were weeding out any workers with over 25 years service. Her dismissal, along with a colleague, was the third occasion in 12 or 18 months that the union challenged the *bona fide* of certain dismissals from Arnotts.

It seems management at Arnotts had been developing the theme 'too old at 40', but the other dismissals had not been contested by the union. On 22 November 1932 over three hundred members of the union employed at Arnotts ceased work to resist the dismissal of their two colleagues, both of whom had 25 years service with the company and were popular and well respected trade unionists. This was the biggest strike Dublin had seen for years and it was to last two weeks.

Perhaps the final irony for Cissy Cahalan, who had been a pioneer in the trade union movement all her life, was that her dismissal became an instrument which secured for others, that which had been denied her. The settlement of the strike included the establishment of a pension scheme in the company. She was not reinstated, but was paid nine months' salary and Arnotts made a commitment not to dismiss workers arbitrarily. The strike arrested the progress of a policy

of unfair dismissal for those whose hair was beginning to go grey.

Her friends in the trade union movement organised a committee to mark their appreciation of her work. She was honoured at a reception in the Gresham Hotel a year after her dismissal, and presented with a substantial cheque. In a fine tribute to her in the *Distributive Worker*, April 1933, the journal recalls:

During the late struggles of the Labour, Feminist and Republican movements, she (a friend of James Connolly and Francis Sheehy Skeffington) took her place among the foremost and each movement received from her its tribute of sacrifice and service . . . It is largely due to the qualities of fearless leadership that she has had her personal life sacrificed, for hers is the usual fate of pioneers. Like most pioneers she has made sacrifice after sacrifice without counting the cost. She has been victimised and misrepresented.

Shortly after her dismissal from Arnotts, Cissy married John Wesley Burns, a well-known pacifist. He was a chemist by profession and came from Co Down. In his younger years he was a close friend of Francis Sheehy Skeffington. Both had lived in the same area as youngsters. He made his mark as a champion of the suffrage cause when in 1914 in St Anne's cathedral in Belfast, during service, he shouted up the names of Edith Baker and Dorothy Evans, two suffragettes who had then been imprisoned in Belfast for suffrage activity. John Burns was forcibly removed from the church for this protest and caused enough of a stir at the time to be remembered for this act in the writings of Marie Johnson and Andree Sheehy Skeffington. The latter remembers 'Cahalan' as 'a serious woman who spoke only when she had something worth while saying'. She and her husband were regular visitors to the homes of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Mrs Cruise O'Brien on Leinster Road, Rathmines.

They formed part of a group of socialists, feminists and Labour Party supporters who met regularly on Sundays to discuss the political issues of the 'thirties over cups of tea. They called themselves 'the Pilgrims'. They often went for regular hikes in the Dublin mountains. Conor Cruise O'Brien remembers 'Cahalan' as a visitor to his mother's house. He, too, recalls 'a serious woman, kind and gentle'.

In June 1936 John Wesley Burns died. Marie Johnson recalls his death and describes Cissy's subsequent life as 'chequered'. It has been difficult to trace events in her life after her husband's death as if, once alone, she paled into insignificance.

There is some record of her involvement in the Women's Social and Progressive League, set up in 1937 to campaign for reforms of the 1937 constitution in relation

to women. Cissy addressed a meeting of this group in the Gresham Hotel in 1945.

Her writings reappear in the union journal for a short time after her husband's death. Perhaps this was a source of income to her. She wrote mainly on subjects like her memories of Michael O'Lehane and Francis Sheehy Skeffington, but her writings lacked the passion that characterised her earlier political involvement.

During the mid-'forties she worked as an assistant secretary to St Ultan's hospital in Charlemont Street, Dublin. This hospital was founded by Kathleen Lynn to care for the poor, sick children of Dublin. (It is now a private clinic.) The annual report of St Ultan's hospital recalls how Cissy 'stood bravely in the gap during the illness of Miss Ffrench-Mullen (at that time secretary to the hospital) and kept things going until help came'.

Cissy Cahalan Burns died in the Richmond hospital in Dublin on 27 August 1948, at the age of 72. No national newspaper made mention of her or wrote her obituary. The only known obituary is carried in the *Distributive Worker* of September 1948, and concludes,

It would be correct to state that she was one of the most prominent and energetic of all the women members of the union and its success is due in no small measure to her unselfish and unsparing work.

She is buried along with her husband in an unmarked grave in Glasnevin cemetery. But more than any headstone could, her own writings mark her presence here, and what she fought for so hard has yet to be achieved. The working class she so passionately believed in still faces, at the end of the century, the same exploitation by capitalism as it did during the early part of the century when Cissy first began organising in the Drapers Assistants' Association. Her words should inspire workers in struggle for a better future.

When labour does fight, let it be for the substance and not the shadow of industrial freedom – the ownership and control of the whole product of labour, the emancipation of the working masses, the abolition of capitalism – the cause for which Connolly died – A Workers' Republic.

Sources: *The Drapers' Assistant*, 1906-21; *The Distributive Worker*, 1921-36; *The Irish Citizen*, October 1914; IDAA/IUDWC

executive committee minutes, 1916-22; Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times*; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*; William O'Brien Collection, NLI; Andree Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff*.

Further reading: Dermot Keogh, Michael O'Lehane and the organisation of the Linen Drapers' Assistants, *Saothar* 3, 1977.

Belt On, Belton!



Paddy was a schemer,
Paddy was a sweep,
Paddy built a housing scheme-
Built it on the cheap.

Paddy got a housing grant,
Got it from Sean T.,
But Paddy must pay Union Rates-
Princely 1/3.

“A bob an hour,” says Paddy,
“A bob an hour” says he,
“You wouldn’t be a Christian,
If I gave you 1/3.”

“Stick it” says O’Duffy,
“Stick it, Pat,” says he,
“Anti-Christian Bolshy stuff-
“Paying 1/3.”

“I’m a Christian man,” says Paddy,
“I’m a Christian man,” says he,
“And I would’t damn my soul in Hell,
“Paying 1/3.”

“Stick it,” says Boss Murphy,
“Stick it, Pat,” says he,
“The Independent’s at your back,
“A hero you will be.”

“Belt on, Belton,
“For Christianity,
“For he could’t be a Christian
“If you paid him 1/3.”

ballad

FARMER, builder, speculator and publican, Paddy Belton had financial fingers in many pies. His political life was equally eclectic. He had been a member of the IRB, surfaced briefly in Fianna Fail before joining the Centre Party, then merging into Fine Gael, splitting to form the National Corporate Party with Eoin O’Duffy, losing his Dail seat as an independent in 1937, regaining it as a Fine Gaeler in 1938 and finally losing it as an independent. He was best known as the leader of the Irish Christian Front which raised £44,000 towards Franco’s civil war efforts in 1930s Spain.

The pervasive and hysterical anti-communism of the 1930s made it very difficult to oppose Belton’s extreme right wing politics. Such efforts would have been immediately branded as communism, a doctrine which the mainstream of political and trade union labour was eager to distance itself from. That did not mean Belton was other than unpopular in labour circles and, when suitable opportunities arose, he was attacked. This ballad sarcastically queries the depth of Belton’s christianity in his dealings with employees.

The issue dealt with in the song emerged in 1936, but the ballad itself, which is a printed handbill in the William O’Brien collection, probably dates from the following year when the wages paid by Belton became a minor cause celebre.

On 7 April 1936, ITGWU branch secretary P Moran wrote to Belton complaining that labourers’ wages on the modestly named Belton Park development in Donneycarney, on Dublin’s northside, were a mere shilling a day, comparing poorly with the trade union rate of 1s 3d. He further pointed out, that as a recipient of a government grant for the project, Belton was obliged to pay the full rate. After complaints to the local government minister, Sean T O’Kelly, and further exchanges of letters, during which Belton claimed that he could get men for as little as eight pence – and complained that he was being undercut by competitors because the Dublin trades’ union council was doing so little to standardise wages in the city – the claim was eventually conceded on 21 May.

Over the next months the ITGWU sought, unsuccessfully, to get back money. The following February Judge Davitt ruled strongly in a separate, but similar case, that criminal charges should be brought against a contractor. He suggested that labourers were being defrauded and that it was the duty of the minister to satisfy himself that trade union standards were

in operation before a grant could be paid. The Belton saga was then reopened and reported extensively and enthusiastically in the left wing press. In the *Connolly Column* Michael O'Riordan cites a ballad from the *Irish Democrat*, one stanza of which refers to the same subject in similar terms.

They said you were building
A new Christian state;
But the workers, the Bolshies!
Asked trade union rates
Fifteen pence an hour
For a labourer's job
Would endanger his soul
So you gave him a bob.

Labour News, the organ of the Labour Party ran the issue prominently over several weeks, sometimes demanding that the money due be paid, and sometimes that the grant be reclaimed by the government. Belton, meanwhile, was having other problems. He had a dispute over Irish Christian Front money with his erstwhile comrade, Eoin O'Duffy, who had led the a brigade of Irishmen to help Franco in Spain. His clerical allies deserted him when no satisfactory accounts were produced and he was prevailed upon to relinquish the leadership of a disintegrating Irish Christian Front.

Sources: William O'Brien Collection, NLI; *Labour News* 1937, 1937; *Irish Press* March 1937; Michael O'Riordan, *Connolly Column* (Dublin 1979), Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin 1970)

John F. Cunningham

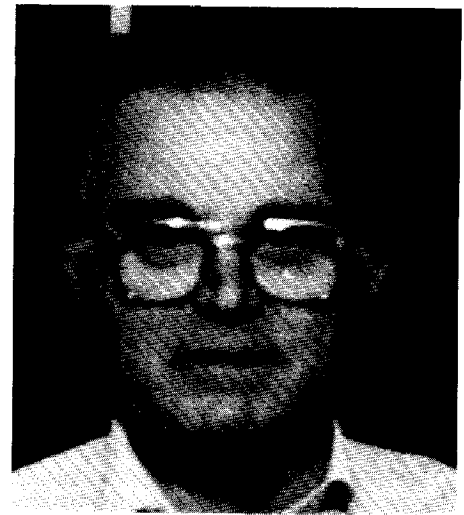
Memories of Mattie O'Neill

WHEN I first joined the Education and Training Department of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1974, 'fresh off the boat' from Leeds as it were, I was fortunate to have the late Mattie O'Neill as a colleague. I spent most of my first year travelling the country with Mattie on the Five Day Basic Shop Stewards' Course. It was a wondrous journey of discovery of O'Neill's 'hidden Ireland'. He paved my path with stories and macaronic lessons in topography. We had, literally, hairy rides down mountainsides and brambled boreens to rediscover 'Tintown'; comrades from the 1940s, quietly masquerading as respectable butchers, small farmers, County Council 'scavengers', all manner of disguises. They came alive in Mattie's presence and I sat at the edge of many a company taking in the songs, the reminiscences, the secrets. I developed a great love for Mattie.

Born in Eblana Villas, off Pearse Street, 'The Diamond' Mattie – who always lived in Crumlin when I knew him – was the epitome of the 'Dub', yet uniquely at ease with rural Ireland in a manner that endeared him to country based ITGWU Shop Stewards and prevented him leaving the likes of Nenagh or Mallow unelated. Such inebriation was not the product of drink – for Matt stuck to red lemonade on our trips – but a joyous response to the stories and songs his entry to the company generated. Billy Fitzpatrick and 'Nelson Teddy' Morgan will grieve over his loss and recognise that unique week in their lives when the book of *The Student Prince* was interlaced in the Ormond Hotel with Mattie's stiff-arm renditions of *The Lark in the Clear Air* and *An Bonnán Buí*.

Mattie O'Neill joined Fianna Éireann in the 1930s, inevitably so given his father's Vice-Presidency of Sinn Féin and the general republican milieu of working class Dublin at the time. Comrades included his lifelong friend Brendan Behan and Michael Mullen, later to be ITGWU General Secretary and opponent in sparring sessions in the Liberty Hall lifts as Mattie sought a response to some cause or another. Along with his brother Christy, Mattie was interned in the Curragh in the 1940s and occupied an Irish speaking compound, falling under the spell of Mairtín Ó Cadháin. One of Mattie's proudest, unsung achievements was his translation of Ó Cadháin's difficult classic *Cré na Cille*. He wrote and spoke about Ó Cadháin, his neglected writings and ideals, taking exception to the occasional political figures that discovered the apparent convenience of an Ó Cadháin outing.

He married Áine Ní Allmhuráin, a native of the Joyce country, north Connemara. They had eight children and he grieved for her terribly after her premature death.



Language and music were part of their family life. Mattie rolled Irish around his tongue as a connoisseur might savour a delicate wine. He repeated new expressions, declaimed verse on any or indeed no provocation and marvelled as listener to others nuances, accents and mannerisms. I watched him mouth the fresh phrases of Darach Ó Cathain, the sean-nós singer, and Darach's brown face falling on this astounding Dubliner, his reward an instant belt of *Captaen Ó Máille*, their fingers intertwined and their two heads aglow with delight. Mattie represented the ITGWU on the boards of Gaeltarra Éireann and Udarás na Gaeltachta, displaying an insight into the subtleties of gaeltacht politics, straddling the tensions of Ring and Donegal, Meath and Kerry, spearing employers who dressed exploitation as culture and nagging the Union Head Office for action for the few lost sight of from the heights of the mighty.

Indeed, no better man than Mattie O'Neill to remind anyone of a true perspective. As a busworker he was on the ITGWU National Executive Council in the 1950s, a time of slow rapprochement between the Congress of Irish Unions and the Irish Trades Union Congress, before commencing a career as a full-time official, taking over the celebrated Dublin No. 4 Branch, Hotels and Catering. Here he pioneered the concept of redundancy payments in a settlement of a dispute in Palm Grove. He loved the monthly sessions of the ITGWU Dublin District Council where his wit spiked an enemy but also oiled many troubled and otherwise divisive waters. He was a stalwart at Connolly Commemorations and cherished the Union when it was, he felt, closer to its members, more rooted in their values and, while less 'professional', warmer and more cohesive. He had doubts of the modern era but did not dwell on the

past. He could argue a case convincingly and impressed all with an intense intellect when a question was targetted for the full O'Neill treatment.

Mattie's interest in history saw him act as Founding Secretary of the Irish Labour History Society (ILHS). As his established apprentice, I took his place at the Society's first AGM in 1974. He remained a Society member, wrote articles and sketches of labour movement personalities – many drawn from the ranks of his 'illustrious obscure' – and was published widely. He was working on a history of the hotels branch. He had much unwritten material and always promised more. He read the oration at Behan's grave in 1964 and spoke at the unveiling of the Dublin Corporation commemorative plaque. He remained a loyal friend of Kathleen Behan and took her out on what sounded like wonderful jaunts from her final nursing home. He acted as consultant on various Behan film projects, made here and in America.

Mattie loved literature and, better again, discussing it with fellow writers. At his funeral, his friend Francis Stuart spoke and Lorcan O Treasaigh gave a moving oration. Despite this 'highbrow' circle, you could just as easily find Mattie at Shelbourne Park with the late Tommy White, swopping a yarn, begrudging the bookies and complaining, half heartedly, about whatever didn't take their fancy. Mattie inhabited various, self contained circles that overlapped the impoverished with the opulent, the ordinary with the bizarre, the urban working man with the rural gael. Driving to his funeral with the Howth poet and republican, Pearse McLoughlin, carrying with us the best wishes of the unavoidably absent ex-Curragh companion, another Howth man, Séamus Ó Ricéard, I saw in Pearse's mixture of despair and delight the essence of one's contact with Mattie O'Neill. I thought back to my early 'apprenticeship' to his journeyman. His crafts were words and people. They are arts of neglect in a world of monochrome conversation, profit and pressure. In minding Mattie's memory – usually through stories of his escapades and company – we should not allow his legacy be diminished. It is a legacy of fundamental goodwill, of valuing life for its immediacy, of opposing callous advantage and championing the underdog.

To his children – Matt, Rory, Máire, Áine, Nuala, Bríd, Úna, and Aoife – we extend our deepest sympathy on the loss of a loving father. To all that knew him, his passing leaves a gap in our lives. The Irish labour movement has lost a remarkable and genuine figure. The Society has lost another of its founders, one for whom culture and the working class were a personal embodiment and a life long passion.

Francis Devine

THOMAS JOHNSON

1872-1963

Labour Leader

CONNOLLY, LARKIN, O'Brien and Johnson were the most dominant figures of Irish Labour in the first three decades of this century. Johnson's outstanding role has not received the recognition it deserves.

He was born in Liverpool in 1872, but not of immediate Irish stock. He referred to himself as 'Liverpool English'. During the bitter years of the 'twenties his English extraction was venomously attacked by some republicans who resented his role following the acceptance of the treaty.

He became the first labour leader of a parliamentary Labour Party in 1922 when Labour won 21.3 per cent of the votes cast – the highest it ever achieved. In that 1922 election seventeen of its eighteen candidates were elected.

Before becoming Labour leader he had a long record of uninterrupted and selfless activity in the trade union, co-operative and political movement. The record was characterised with much that was controversial but also with much intellectual and socialist integrity.

Johnson left school at an early age and after a succession of jobs he arrived in Ireland at Kinsale in 1892 as a commercial traveller in animal foodstuffs. Here he met his wife, Marie Ann Tregay whom he married in 1898. She was the daughter of a Cornish radical. It was to be a long and close comradesly relationship both being socialist activists. She was also an ardent feminist. They both lived to ripe old ages.

They settled in Belfast in 1902 and he joined the National Union of Shop Assistants and Clerks. He collaborated with Jim Larkin in the great Belfast Strike of 1907 and joined the strike committee. He had already met Larkin in Liverpool in the 1890s when they were both members of the Independent Labour Party. On Larkin's arrival in Belfast he sought temporary lodgings with Johnson. Despite

bitter rows with Larkin in the 'twenties Johnson was always lavish in his praise of Larkin's role in Belfast in 1907.

He lived in Belfast until 1918 when he moved to Dublin. This move was occasioned by him being sacked from his employment because of his active

role in the anti-conscription campaign of that year. While in Belfast he quickly achieved leadership status in the trade unions and was elected to the executive of the Irish Trade Union Congress.

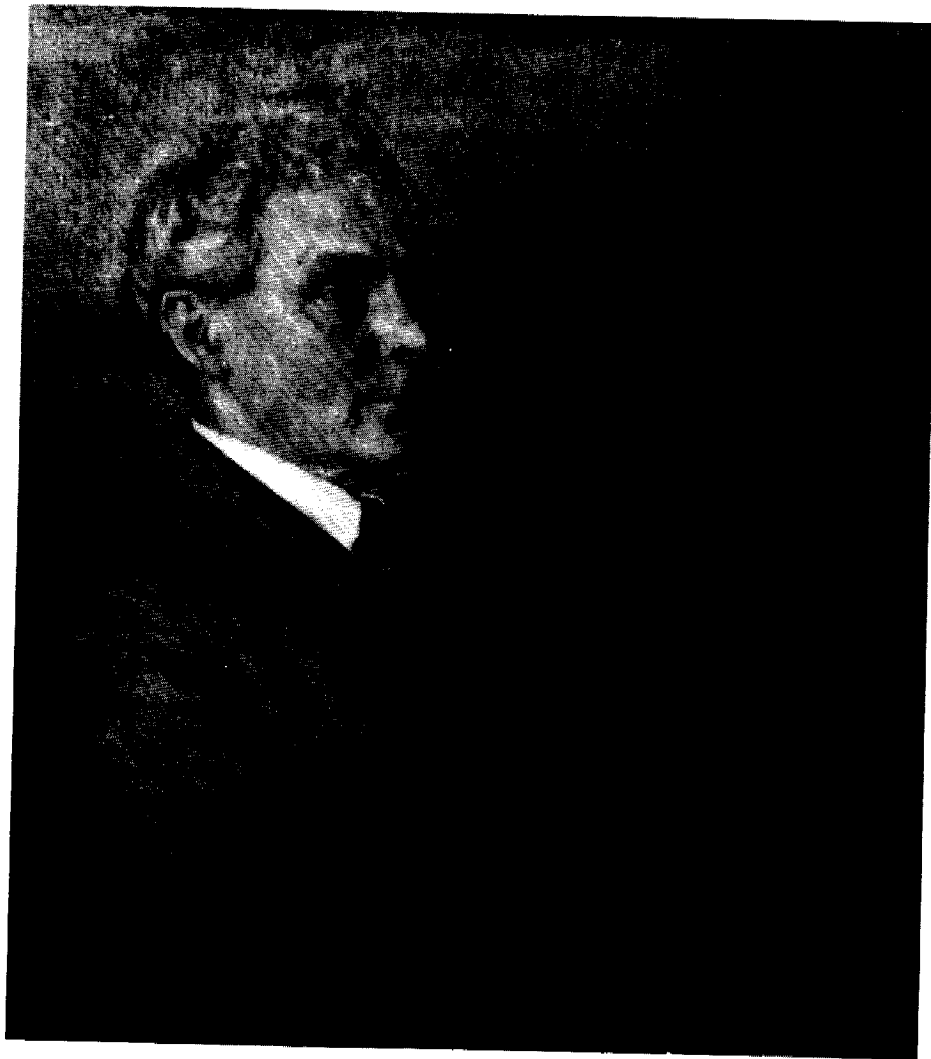
He supported the founding resolution of the Labour Party in 1912 when he was already a member of the Socialist Party of Ireland. He opposed however the affiliation of socialist groups to the Labour Party, arguing that such groups should be exclusively educational and propagandist. He came to Dublin during the 1913 lockout. He wrote a valuable analytical record of the lockout for Larkin's *Irish Worker*. He toured parts of England campaigning for the Dublin workers.

The two events which first revealed Johnson's controversial perceptions were the 1914 Great War and the 1916 insurrection. He made no secret of his support for the Allies during the first world war. He strongly opposed the outbreak but once it began he supported the Allies. He stressed he was as strongly opposed to the ruling classes of Britain as ever, but he believed that Britain and France were more advanced in democracy than Germany and a victory for the latter would be a retrograde step for Europe.

This was in sharp contrast to the position of Connolly and the 1916 insurrectionists who had sought German aid in their revolt against Britain. Johnson obviously did not agree with the insurrection, but in a personal diary he set down objectively the causes and the motivation of the participants. A remarkable capacity for objective analysis seemed to have been a constant feature of Johnson's character. Like or dislike his conclusions, this aspect of his approach must command respect.

In July 1916 he was president of the Trade Union Congress and in that role it was necessary for him to make a statement on the insurrection and the world war. His statement has stimulated much comment ever since. It went partly as follows:

This is not a place to enter into a discussion as to the rights and wrongs, the wisdom or the folly of the revolt...As



Thomas Johnson painted by Celia Harrison

a trade union movement we are of varied minds on matters of historical and political development.

He asked the delegates to stand for a minute to honour the memory of Connolly, O'Carroll and Macken whom he said, 'had participated in the rising purely with a passion for freedom and a hatred of oppression'. But he also asked that those who died in the Great War be also remembered. They also died for 'what they believed to be liberty, democracy and love of country'. He followed with a personal declaration for Britain and France.

The cause of democracy, the defence of such liberties as the common peoples of the western nations had won was bound up with the success of France and Britain. I had held to that opinion with some enthusiasm and despite the efforts of our government to prove that the governing methods of all ruling classes are much alike I hold the same position still for France is still a republic - more firmly established.

This submission was accepted without objection. The silence among nationalist

delegates may have been activated by a desire to protect the still existing trade union liberties and a fear of endangering the release of trade unionists still in prison following the rising. Louie Bennett's verdict on the 1916 Congress under Johnson was, 'a wonderful success and quite the most inspiring Congress I have attended'.

Johnson, probably more than any other leader, personified the agonising dilemma of the nationalist-unionist divide among Irish workers. Few seemed to be as acutely conscious of this terrible crux or as persistently motivated by a desire to preserve or not damage the links that bound a divided working class.

From 1918 until 1928 Johnson was in the thick of most national issues. As stated above, he was sacked because of his leading role against conscription. His reply to his employer shows clearly Johnson's commitment to the demand for Irish self determination despite his stance during the war. He was the main author of the Democratic Programme which sought to give a social dimension to the first Dail. Its socialist content was well whittled down before eventual presentation but it was 'too socialistic' for some.

With Cathal O'Shannon he represented Irish labour at the Socialist International at Berne in 1919. It was probably the first international event at which Ireland was officially recognised as a national entity. Surprisingly, Ireland took a leftist position on one of the main issues - an attitude to the recently established Soviet government. Johnson argued that there may be other forms of democracy besides that which prevailed in the west.

During the 'twenties he was involved in the internecine labour travail. He was the target of very vitriolic attacks by the Larkins. In later times there was reconciliation especially with Jim Larkin junior in contrast with the Larkin-O'Brien feud. Nothing in Johnson's career however attracted more virulent hostility than his policies connected with the 1921 treaty. While the Labour Party was non-committal during the treaty debates he was known to favour acceptance. When the Dail approved the treaty labour accepted the decision but also proposed a national plebiscite; the proposal was rejected.

It was a time also of stormy schisms in the international labour movement. Johnson favoured reform rather than revolution especially where Ireland was concerned. Within that context his record was excellent. His parliamentary performance was impressive. He consistently opposed draconian security measures and condemned the militarism of both sides of the civil war.

His socialism has been classified as derived from the Independent Labour Party of Britain. This is only partly true. He himself in his very late years recorded that his socialism was derived from many sources; the ILP, guild socialists, syndicalists, IWW, De Leon, Scottish SLP and then to 'crown it all . . . the impact of Connolly with his synthesis of socialist (marxist) doctrine and Irish nationalism'.

He was defeated at the 1927 September election and was subsequently elected to the senate where he served with distinction until 1936. During the disastrous splits of the 'forties he opposed the policies of the Transport Union leadership as typified by William O'Brien and for a short term acted as an interim secretary of the TUC.

He also expressed grave reservations about aspects of William Norton's leadership of the Labour Party and hoped Jim Larkin junior would aspire to the leadership. He was very disturbed by the domination of the party by the catholic ethos. He died in 1963 at the age of 91. His burial was secular with a graveside oration by Brendan Corish.

His policies were often very controversial but he was a person of socialist intellect and integrity, and a study of his career can only bring benefit to the modern labour movement.

Joe Deasy

For the Record

Eleanor Marx, visited Derry in November 1891 on behalf of the Gasworkers union. On 8 November she spoke at a large meeting in St Columb's Hall.

MR CHAIRMAN, the presence of so many women and men in the hall this evening is a very good indication of hope and encouragement for the female workers of Derry, whose cause I have come to speak of. The fact also, Mr Chairman, that yourself and members of the Derry and United Trades and Labour Council are present on the platform this evening, is an additional feature of encouragement to the female workers of this city.

I can tell you that in England the trades councils have not generally aided the female organisation movement, for the simple reason that they claimed to represent only skilled labour. In contrast to that position, I represent both skilled and unskilled labour. I believe that there is no unskilled labour: all labour is equally honorable.

However, today it is beginning to be understood that the cause of the unskilled is also the cause of the skilled worker: all must stand together in this great battle of labour. For it is a battle! It is the fight of the workers against the capitalists for their rights. This struggle is universal - the struggle of the workers for existence and of the capitalists to wring from them their last farthing!

Different forms of government made no change! What does it matter to the girls in that charming factory - the City Factory - whether they worked under a monarchy or republic? It might be told to those of you present tonight that agitators have come among you in order to stir up discontent. Well, I confess to being an agitator.

And as long as I live, I will continue to agitate against wrong. So long as there are men who are starving and women who are debasing themselves, and children who are crying for bread - so long will I go about stirring up discontent.

The one and only way in which workers can help themselves is by organisation and combination. Let us, in this city of Derry, apply the lesson of the success of combination as can be seen in the existence of this fine hall - I have been in many halls in Ireland as well as the United Kingdom and as I say, here and now, I have not been in a hall as fine as this one - a hall which has been built under the greatest difficulties.

The Royal Irish Society, which holds so much of the land of this city, land which it has no right to hold, (applause) did not want the people to have a hall of their own. They were quite willing to let you have a hall for temperance purposes,

but you the people have insisted that you should be free to discuss any question you liked.

A number of you had put your pence together. The building was raised. How was it raised? Suppose a dozen of you here tonight had wanted to raise a hall like the one in which we meet tonight, you know very well that you could not possibly have done it. How then, was it done? It was done by the mass of workers combining together to raise such a magnificent hall as this. What the one, or the dozen, or the hundred cannot do, the thousand can do. (Applause.)

Hence it is necessary for all of you to combine and organise. When I say this, I would like to point out some of the reasons for combination. First of all there are there are selfish people who have a certain share of right to come into your union. They join for the excusable but absolutely selfish reason for bettering themselves. Then there are men and women who will join because they want to gain benefits for the trade to which they belong. You have for instance, carpenters, engineers and shirtmakers, all of whom are perfectly right to try and get the best wages and the shortest hours they can.

But there is another motive for joining the union, a still higher and better feeling than either of these motives which I have mentioned, and this is the determination to help the entire position of wronged humanity. This is the highest and best feeling.

But let us assume for one moment, that these workers were fairly well paid and had good hours, yet if they possessed no union, one fine morning they could find their employers coming and saying to them, 'I am paying higher wages than my competitors (it did not matter whether these particular contributors were in existence at all) and therefore you must now take what is paid by my competitors!' And in answer supposing these workers said they were not willing to accept the low rate of pay then they would quickly hear the reply, 'There is the door; we will get somebody else to take your place'.

Therefore I argue the need for the great necessity of combination and organisation so that workers might, by these means, be made able to stand against the injustices everywhere done to them, especially when they were not strong enough to resist it. In comparison with other places, I

have found that Derry stands higher in regard to the treatment of workers than most of the towns I have been in, but even in Derry, perhaps things are not as such which would make it a Garden of Eden. (Applause) Compared with other towns the workers of Derry are doing fairly well.

Let me tell you this. A few days ago I visited the model village of Bessbrook, in Armagh, and what did I find there? I discovered that all the houses about, all the factories, all the machinery and so forth belonged to one firm. I thought that even the men and women belonged to that firm! I also discovered that the weavers there were earning seven shillings or eight shillings - not a week - seven or eight shillings a fortnight! Just think of this in what is called a model village - where there are no policemen, no public houses, no pawnbrokers, none of these sort of things, but where they have got misery, hard work and starvation.

I was pointed out a woman who could earn over 15s a week. How? How was this possible? By working in the factory as well as taking work home. That meant perhaps, working to midnight. I know that the mass of workers are not earning anything like this.

Messrs Tillie and Henderson, I have discovered from information given to me from all sides, pays wages from 3 shillings and 6d to 10 shillings per week, infamously low wages, on which no woman who has to keep herself, and possibly a child as well, could do so decently. (Applause) I am aware that there is a fine system in this factory which workers ought to combine against. They are fined 3d for being a few minutes late in the morning or at dinner time. They are also fined in this charming factory - I believe the City factory is much the same - for laughing and looking out of windows, in fact they are fined for everything; if the employers had their way they would fine us for breathing! Beside all this, there workers have to pay for things which are of no use to them, but are absolutely necessary to the carrying on of the work. (Applause)

Mr Hogg, a very appropriate name he has, (laughter) makes the women pay a penny a week for the steam they use in order to turn out the work. He and Messrs Tillie and Henderson also make the girls pay for everything that goes wrong with the machine. The girls in Mr Hogg's factory also have to pay for the thread they use. (Shame!) It is not the linen you are wearing out, but human creatures lives, as Hood wrote.

I had a few words with Mr Daniel Frew, in Messrs Sinclair's factory, this gentlemen watches the girls who attend union meetings and reports them. He informed me that if the girls in the factory joined the union he would break the back of the organisation. (Laughter) Mr Daniel Frew's position is very much like that of Mrs Partington in trying to sweep back the Atlantic. Mr Daniel Frew, with his

little broom of denunciation, would be powerless to sweep back the ocean that was advancing in the form of unionism. (Applause)

I hope that Mr Frew will see the error of his ways and join the union! I can assure him that if he enters the union there will be more rejoicing over this sinner who repented than over ninety and nine ordinary people. I am glad however be able to speak in very much more favourable terms about Arthur & Co and Welch Margetson factories. I am not saying that everything in these firms is exactly as it should be compared with the others, they were very much decent. (Hear! Hear!)

These firms didn't fine their workers for laughing or for looking out of the windows; and their late fines are about half of what they are in other houses. Nevertheless, the workers in these factories have been forced to combine to prevent the employers forcing down the wages to the average of the lowest paying firms in the town.

Can I, at this point, say that the differing religious and political views of the workers were being used by the employers to keep them disunited. The employers, no matter what their political or religious opinions, would join hands to crush the people for combining. I do not care what the religious opinions of Messers Arthur and Co or Hogg are, but no matter what their opinions, if it is a question of keeping down wages and lengthening hours these men will stand shoulder to shoulder and side by side. (Applause) The employers might fight one another now and then in the market, but when it comes to a question of lowering wages they will stand together and not care one little bit what their political differences are. (Applause).

Whether the workers are paid low wages by an Orangeman or by a Roman Catholic, they would starve either way. (Applause) Trade unionism recognised NO religion and NO party.

We ask the employed to sink your political and religious differences just as the employers did. The clergymen of all denominations constantly preach Christianity and at the one and the same time try to divide the people and not unite them. I appeal to all unorganised workers here this evening to join the Gasworkers and General Workers Union.

The weekly payments that our members make do not go towards an Orange institution or a Parnell, or anything like that; the money goes to the support of the cause of labour.

In conclusion can I make this appeal to the men in the audience? At the next election do not ask the candidate if he is a Roman Catholic or an Orangeman, a Home Ruler or a non-Home Ruler, but stand shoulder to shoulder and go to the candidate, no matter what political or religious side he belongs to, and ask him, was he going to give them shorter hours, better pay and better factory acts - omit all other questions. (Applause)

MOLLIE JONES

an appreciation

IT WAS with great sadness that I learned of the recent death of Mollie Jones, one of the veterans of the struggle to prevent the destruction of the Inchicore and Ballyfermot Co-operative Society during the early 'fifties.

The battle was lost; the hostile forces determined to wreck the co-op were too strong. This is not the place to dwell on the details of that unscrupulous campaign, but the staunch role of Mollie in defending the co-op must be recorded.

She was a member of the executive committee from almost the beginning and worked persistently and extremely hard to promote and extend our membership.

The campaign involved the pulpit, the press, the main political parties and, of course, included commercial interests. The co-op was attacked from the pulpit in the Inchicore and Ballyfermot churches and a picket was mounted against our shops. A McCarthyite witch-hunting atmosphere was generated allegedly because four committee members out of 12 were communists. Falsehoods multiplied.

In an effort to save the co-op the four communists resigned from the committee,

but the wreckers were not placated; the campaign was relentlessly carried on.

The people were promised a new co-op, 'a Christian co-op' as a replacement. When the destruction was complete the replacement co-op never materialised.

Mollie was not a very political person but she had a very independent mind and she believed strongly in the co-operative ideal. Throughout this furious campaign she never flinched. To the finish she defended the co-op.

She was a high spirited person with a great sense of humour who believed life was meant to be enjoyed. This aspect of her character showed itself in her active role in the Women's Co-operative Guild. She organised activities which included social as well as educational sessions with the women's guild attached to the Belfast Co-operative Society. There were exchanges between Dublin and Belfast.

I extend condolences to Tommy, her husband and her family on the occasion of this very sad bereavement. A sad farewell Mollie, may the sod lie gently upon you.

Joe Deasy

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at 32 Parnell Square.



Join the Irish Labour History Society

Information on the aims, activities and membership of
the Irish Labour History Society from
The Secretary
Irish Labour History Society
19 Raglan Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

Please send me information on membership

Name

Address

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Date: 1992

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