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Thomas Neilan Crean

**THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN KERRY AND LIMERICK,
1914-21**

by

Thomas Neilan Crean

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Being a thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by the University of Dublin in the Department of Modern History.
October 1995

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN KERRY AND LIMERICK
1914-21

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Being a thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
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October 1992

SUMMARY

This thesis is an investigation of the economic and political role of the labour movement in County Kerry and Limerick during the years 1914-1921. It examines the social conditions, especially with regard to the agricultural sector, and the role of the labour movement in the development of the labour movement in the county. It also examines the role of the labour movement in the development of the labour movement in the county.

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Thomas Neilan Crean
Thomas Neilan Crean

SUMMARY

This thesis is an investigation of the economic and political role of the labour movement in Counties Kerry and Limerick during the years 1914-21. Topics discussed include: 1) economic and social condition, especially wage and price movements; 2) industrial relations, including disputes and conciliation mechanisms; 3) trade union organisation; 4) labour's intervention on social and political issues, including its relationship to the British state; the competing wings of Irish nationalism; as well as the Catholic hierarchy; 5) the rural labour movement. The Limerick sections also include a discussion of the role of women in the local labour movement. The most important source used is local newspapers. Other primary sources include trade union and official records, the latter comprising both records of the British administration as well as local authority minutes.

The two counties chosen, while economically part of a broader southwestern entity, allow one to study the activities of the labour movement in several different "micro-economies", thus revealing a number of striking contrasts. In particular, the Limerick City labour movement, better organised from an earlier date, was dominated by craft unions of "skilled" workers whose representatives entrenched themselves as a type of "labour establishment". This establishment, characterised by a conservative worldview and a particularly close relationship with the local Catholic hierarchy, maintained control of the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council even after the arrival of the radical Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1917 and the latter's massive expansion among the city's "unskilled" workforce, both male and female. By contrast with Limerick City, the lack of an entrenched craft union "aristocracy" in Tralee facilitated the ITGWU's earlier breakthrough in 1915-16 when it led the town's labour movement into a de facto alliance with local republicans.

Rural workers in County Limerick operated in a more "developed" economic situation than their Kerry counterparts, with a large layer of strong farmers sitting atop a polarised social order. Rural organisation in Limerick was extensive

in 1914 and was heavily integrated with the Redmondite political machine. The ITGWU established a firmer base among farm and creamery workers in the county during 1917-21 than in Kerry where demands focused more on land redistribution. Sabotage became an established part of rural labour conflict in both counties after 1918 but the most socially explosive episode was the agitation for an "extra acre" in North Kerry during 1919-20.

Despite these contrasts both counties conformed to the national pattern of wage militancy beginning in the latter half of the First World War in response to the ravages of inflation and resulting in an exponential growth in strike activity. Overall, local wage data seems to accord with the thesis that, since the mid-19th century, Irish wages, particularly for unskilled males, have "converged" with those in Britain. It must be noted, however, that wage rates in the two islands appeared to diverge during the First World War before a sharp convergence occurred in 1919-20. By 1921, in the context of deflation, many groups achieved significant, if temporary increases, in real wages despite widespread unemployment.

The political experience of the local labour movement also conformed to broad national political patterns. A generally close relationship with constitutional nationalist politicians gave way after the Easter Rising to a political axis with the republican movement. This was reflected in the municipal and rural elections of 1920 and the subsequent work of the newly-elected Sinn Féin/Labour local authorities. It would be false, however, to present this alliance simply in terms of the "subordination" of labour's aims to those of militant nationalism as this would cancel the radicalisation which permeated large sections of the labour movement during 1918-21, expressed in the flourishing of local labour journalism and "soviets". Rather, labour activists sought to use the alliance to achieve at least part of their ends and hoped that their movement would become a key player in the "Gaelic State".

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- AST - Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses
 ASTL - Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
 BoG - Board of Guardians
 CWS - Co-operative Wholesale Society
 DATU - Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland
 DC - District Council
 DLS - Dock Labourers' Society
 DTC - Dublin Trades Council
 FLC - Federated Labour Council
 GSWR - Great Southern and Western Railway
 IADMU - Irish Automobile Drivers' and Mechanics' Union
 IAWU - Irish Asylum Workers' Union
 IBOA - Irish Bank Officials' Association
 ICA - Irish Citizen Army
 ICWU - Irish Clerical Workers' Union
 IDAA - Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association
 IEEU - Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding and Foundry Trade Union
 IFFU - Irish Farmers' Union
 ILLA - Irish Land and Labour Association
 ILPI - Independent Labour Party of Ireland
 ILPTUC - Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress
 INALU - Irish National Agricultural Labourers' Union
 INL - Irish Neutrality League
 INTO - Irish National Teachers' Organisation
 INV - Irish National Volunteers
 IPP - Irish Parliamentary Party
 IRA - Irish Republican Army
 ITGWU - Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
 ITCU - Irish Trade Union Congress
 ITUCLP - Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party
 IV - Irish Volunteers
 IWW - Industrial Workers of the World (USA)
 KTLCC - Killarney Trades and Labour Council
 KWC - Killarney Workers' Council
 LCAA - Limerick Clerks and Assistants' Association
 LCWA - Limerick Commercial Workers' Association
 LGB - Local Government Board

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. Abbreviations used in text

- AEU - Amalgamated Engineering Union
AOH (BoE) - Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin)
AOH (IAA) - Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish-American Alliance)
ASCJ - Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
ASE - Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASLEF - Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
ASRS - Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
AST - Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses
ASTI - Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
BoG - Board of Guardians
CWS - Co-operative Wholesale Society
DATII - Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland
DC - District Councillor
DLS - Dock Labourers' Society
DTC - Dublin Trades Council
FLC - Federated Labour Council
GSRW - Great Southern and Western Railway
IADMU - Irish Automobile Drivers' and Mechanics' Union
IAWU - Irish Asylum Workers' Union
IBOA - Irish Bank Officials' Association
ICA - Irish Citizen Army
ICWU - Irish Clerical Workers' Union
IDAA - Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association
IEU - Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding and Foundry Trade Union
IFU - Irish Farmers' Union
ILLA - Irish Land and Labour Association
ILP/I - Independent Labour Party of Ireland
ILPTUC - Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress
INALU - Irish National Agricultural Labourers' Union
INL - Irish Neutrality League
INTO - Irish National Teachers' Organisation
INV - Irish National Volunteers
IPP - Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA - Irish Republican Army
ITGWU - Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
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KTLC - Killarney Trades and Labour Council
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LCAA - Limerick Clerks and Assistants' Association
LCWA - Limerick Commercial Workers' Association
LGB - Local Government Board

LUTLC - Limerick United Trades and Labour Council
MP - Member of Parliament
NUDL - National Union of Dock Labourers
NUR - National Union of Railwaymen
RCA - Railway Clerks' Association
RDC - Rural District Council
RIC - Royal Irish Constabulary
SLA - (Kerry) Stewards' and Labourers' Association
SPI - Socialist Party of Ireland
TA - Typographical Association
TLA - (Co. Limerick) Trades and Labour Association
TTL - Town Tenants League
TTLC - Tralee Trades and Labour Council
TUC - Trades Union Congress (Britain)
TWC - Tralee Workers' Council
UDC - Urban District Council
UIL - United Irish League

B. Abbreviations used in footnotes only

BD - Bottom Dog
CO - Colonial Office
DA - Draper's Assistant
IF - Irish Farmer
IG - Inspector General, RIC
ILHS - Irish Labour History Society
IW - Irish Worker
KCI - Kerry County Inspector, RIC
KM - Kerryman
KS - Kerry Sentinel
KWR - Kerry Weekly Reporter
LCI - Limerick County Inspector, RIC
LL - Limerick Leader
MN - Munster News (and Limerick and Clare Advocate)
NLI - National Library of Ireland
PP - Parliamentary Papers
PROL - Public Record Office London
UCD - University College Dublin
VoL - Voice of Labour
WoL - Watchword of Labour
WR - Workers Republic

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Those who have helped me to complete this thesis are too numerous to list here. I wish, however, to particularly thank my supervisor, David Fitzgerald, for all his help and especially for his patience. Frankie Devine and Jim Keeney have given invaluable assistance at every stage. I also wish to thank John Hume, John Keenan of Harvard University, Eamon O'Connor, Hugh Geraghty, Maria O'Sullivan, Don Droney and Michael O'Regan, who sadly recently passed away, for their much appreciated encouragement. Numerous personal friends have also helped in various ways but I wish to especially thank Brian Donovan and Nicola Saratt. Finally, but by no means least, I wish to thank my family without whom I would never have made it to this point, especially my parents, John and Marylouise; my sister Sarah; my aunt, Joan; my Uncle Tom O'Connor; and my Uncle Tom Crean, who did not live to see the thesis completed. The original inspiration for this thesis came from my grandmother, Nora (O'Leary) Crean, as well as my great-uncles, Jim, Jack and Mickey, all of whom lived through the years 1914-21 in County Kerry and participated in the making of the events discussed in the following pages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first of all thank the Department of Modern History at Trinity College for awarding me the Cluff Memorial Studentship in 1988 and again in 1989, as well as the Trinity Trust for giving me three travel grants during the period of my study.

Secondly, I wish to thank the following institutions and organisations for allowing me to examine the archival and other material in their custody: the National Library of Ireland; the National Archives, Dublin; the Berkeley Library at Trinity College; the Irish Labour History Society; the University College, Dublin, Archives; the Public Record Office London; the Tralee Urban District Council; the Kerry County Council Library; the Limerick Archive; the Limerick Public Library; the Limerick Museum; the Limerick County Council. I also wish to thank the staff of these institutions for all their help and assistance.

Those who have helped me on the long journey towards completing my thesis are far too numerous to list here. I do wish, however, to particularly thank my supervisor, David Fitzpatrick, for all his help and especially for his patience. Francis Devine and Jim Kemmy have given invaluable assistance at every stage. I also wish to thank John Horne, John Kelliher of Harvard University, Emmet O'Connor, Hugh Geraghty, Maria O'Sullivan, Dan Bradley and Michael O'Regan, who sadly recently passed away, for their much-appreciated encouragement. Numerous personal friends have also helped in various ways but I wish to especially thank Brian Donovan and Nicola Sarratt. Finally, but by no means least, I wish to thank my family without whom I would never have made it to this point, especially my parents, John and Marylouise; my sister Sarah; my aunt Joan; my Uncle Tom O'Connor; and my Uncle Tom Crean, who did not live to see the thesis completed. The original inspiration for this thesis came from my grandmother, Nora (O'Leary) Crean, as well as my great-uncles, Jim, Jack and Mickey, all of whom lived through the years 1914-21 in County Kerry and participated in the making of the events discussed in the following pages.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an investigation of the economic and political role of the labour movement in Kerry and Limerick during the years 1914-21. The first chapter outlines the economic processes and social conditions affecting workers in the southwest of Ireland on the eve of the First World War. Chapter 2 outlines the development of the national and regional labour movement before the war; takes a snapshot view of the movement in the two counties in 1914; and concludes by looking at the experience of two particular trade unions. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on 1914-18 and 1919-21 respectively. This corresponds roughly to the two main phases of Irish political development during the 1914-21 period, namely the First World War and the War of Independence leading to the signing of the Treaty between Britain and Dáil Éireann at the end of 1921. Each of these two chapters is divided into three main sections. These include a national overview of economic and political developments in the labour movement followed by sections on developments in Limerick and Kerry. Each county section for the two periods is further divided into subsections focusing on: 1) economic and social conditions, especially wage and price movements; 2) industrial relations, including extensive discussion of disputes and conciliation mechanisms; 3) trade union organisation; 4) labour's intervention on social and political issues, including its relationship to the British state; the competing wings of Irish nationalism; as well as the Catholic hierarchy; 5) the rural labour movement. The Limerick sections also include a discussion of the role of women in the local labour movement.

The single most important group of primary sources used in the thesis is local newspapers. Extensive use is also made of national trade union journals. Official material, the second major group of primary sources, can be divided into four main categories, namely official reports contained in the UK Parliamentary Papers; journals published by British government departments; internal police reports; and local authority minutes. Union records constitute the third group of sources. These include the records of the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council; the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union; and the Limerick bakers' society. Other primary sources include memoirs and trade directories.

The use of several terms in the thesis needs to be defined. The terms "labour" and "labour movement" refer specifically to the trade

union movement, in both its "economic" and "political" aspects. Labour is only capitalised when referring to the movement's participation in electoral contests as an independent force or when discussing the role of Labour representatives, elected on a Labour platform, in local government. The terms "workers" and "working class" refer to those in paid employment and unpaid homework generally. The economic and social conditions facing workers need to be carefully considered in order to discuss the role of the labour movement but there is no assumption that the trade unions necessarily spoke for the "class as a whole".

The other term which must be defined is "regional economy". It is not being suggested that Kerry and Limerick form a distinct economic unit. The two counties may be seen as part of a broader southwestern entity, with its major conurbation in Limerick City. The city's economic hinterland at the time included County Limerick, parts of Counties Clare and Tipperary and North and East Kerry. Economic links also existed with South and West Kerry, but South Kerry in particular was probably just as oriented to Cork City as to Limerick. But, of course, in economic terms, Ireland as a whole may be seen in this period as a "region" of the British Isles economy. It is perhaps more useful to consider the two counties as encompassing an overlapping set of "micro-economies". At the first level, there was the economy of Limerick City; at a second level that of Tralee, Kerry's main town and qualitatively larger than any of the other small towns in the two counties; the other towns with a population of over 2,000 (Killarney, Listowel, and Newcastle West) constitute a third "micro-economy". County Limerick and North and East Kerry form a distinct rural unit characterised by a strong dairy sector. Further differentiation can be made between East and West Limerick. Finally, South and West Kerry, with a greater degree of subsistence farming than the other rural region, forms a fifth "micro-economy".

It may be asked why two counties were chosen instead of one or three. On one level, counties are arbitrary administrative units but they also happen to be the most convenient analytic unit for local studies. The focus of local newspapers, for example, was largely county-centred. The two counties chosen, while contiguous and having close economic and political ties, also allow one to study the activity of the labour movement in several different micro-economies. If only Kerry had been studied, this would have excluded the distinct experience of labour in Limerick City, while a study of Limerick alone

would have excluded the intermediate urban level represented by Tralee as well as the rural contrast with South and West Kerry.

Until relatively recently, Irish labour historians necessarily focused on writing the biography of important figures; charting the development of major unions; and trying to delineate labour's role in national events. Emmet O'Connor's book on the labour movement in Waterford, published in 1989, marked a shift towards trying to understand how labour interacted with other social forces at a local level. This thesis follows that line of investigation. Local and regional history can usefully supplement and correct generalisations made in national studies, especially those which focus on metropolitan developments. However, they can also lead to new distortions if it is assumed that the national pattern must follow that seen in any one locality. Only when several more such studies are completed and compared with each other as well as with previous national studies will a more comprehensive balance sheet on labour's role in historical development be possible.

CHAPTER 1

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF KERRY AND LIMERICK IN 1914

On the eve of the First World War, Ireland was a country which by all accounts had undergone a major transformation since the end of the Great Famine. The population decline, begun in such a dramatic fashion by starvation and malnutrition continued due to very high levels of emigration. This process, however, facilitated the full emergence of a Catholic "strong" farmer class which supported and in turn received support from an ascendant Catholic hierarchy which shared their values and aspirations. The farmers gnawed away at the remaining power of the Protestant landlord class; withheld rent in the 1880s; secured control of local government; and were finally implicitly recognised as the legitimate owners of the land by Parliament in a series of legislative measures, culminating in the Wyndham Act of 1903. Meanwhile, in southern towns, a class of Catholic merchants and small manufacturers was also consolidating economic and political gains. However, they did not seem to be displacing established Protestant firms. Growth in the urban economy was based on servicing the agricultural sector and processing agricultural goods for export. Otherwise, there was only a limited industrial recovery in southern Ireland after the decline experienced in the early decades of the century. Only in the northeast did industrial capitalism flourish, based primarily on exports of linen and ships.

Irish workers, whose conditions could hardly have been much worse in the mid-nineteenth century, experienced a significant improvement in their standard of living during the subsequent decades. Nevertheless, in 1914, Dublin still had some of the worst slums in Europe and independent observers were at a loss to explain how Belfast working class families could afford to feed their children. But workers had not remained passive and, especially after the foundation of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) in 1909, unskilled labourers—hitherto largely ignored by the craft-dominated trade unions—evinced a greater willingness to struggle for economic betterment.

1.1 THE RURAL ECONOMY

Kerry and Limerick are adjacent maritime counties in the southwest of Ireland. A comparison of basic data reveals that while Kerry was somewhat more populous in 1911 (159,691 inhabitants as opposed to 143,069 for Limerick),¹ it is significantly larger in area (1,161,752/663,959 acres). Limerick had a population density of 137.9 people per square mile, while in Kerry the density was only 88 per square mile. This divergence can be explained by the far higher proportion of mountainous and, hence, more marginal land in Kerry (30.5%/5.3%).² On the other hand, the Listowel Poor Law Union, with its fertile lowlands, had a population density of 115.2, comparable to the figure of 109.3 for the Kilmallock Union, situated in the heart of Limerick's "Golden Vale". While both counties were almost entirely Catholic (95.3% in Limerick; 97.2% in Kerry), Limerick City, with its 38,518 inhabitants was only 90.5% Catholic.³

The southwest was overwhelmingly rural in 1911. Only 30.7% of the population in Limerick and 16.7% in Kerry lived in towns with over a thousand inhabitants. Table 1.1 lists these towns with those in Limerick underlined. While all three large Kerry towns were substantial enough to be officially described as "urban districts", Limerick did not have a single town in that category and only two towns in the 1,000-2,000 bracket compared to Kerry's five. But in the urban economy of the southwest as a whole, Limerick City was clearly predominant with its hinterland extending into parts of Clare and Tipperary as well. Kerry and Limerick's other large towns were markets for the produce of the countryside, with Tralee, like Limerick City, playing a further role in the processing of agricultural goods and as a port in bringing in goods needed by the rural population. Hence, the urban component of the regional economy was largely an extension of agriculture.

Whereas L. M. Cullen maintains that, "A rise in emigration and a falling population would have been inevitable even if the Great Famine had not occurred," there is still a body of opinion which argues for the catalytic role of this catastrophe in Irish economic history.⁴

¹ Census of Ireland, 1911: Munster.

² "Agricultural statistics of Ireland, with detailed report for the year 1914," Parliamentary Papers (PP), 1916, v. 32.

³ Census, 1911.

⁴ L. M. Cullen, An Economic History of Ireland since 1660 (London, 1972), p. 134. The view that the Famine did cause a fundamental break in Irish economic

The partial clearing of the land by small and medium-sized farmers has not already been mentioned, for the full programme of a rising small farmer class. The members of this class whose plots lay in the hill country, married late and received the previous generations' 12-acre plots.

While the total number of holdings declined dramatically between 1845 and 1901, the number of holdings above 15 acres in size grew slightly. Over the next fifty years, only the number of holdings over 30 acres continued to increase in absolute terms, albeit slowly. This process was accelerated by another—driven by the

Table 1.1 - Population of towns with over 1,000 inhabitants in Kerry and Limerick, 1911.

<u>Limerick City</u>	38,518
Tralee	10,300
Killarney	5,796
Listowel	3,409
<u>Newcastle West</u>	2,585
Caherciveen	1,896
Dingle	1,884
<u>Rathkeale</u>	1,705
Castleisland	1,333
<u>Kilmallock</u>	1,101
Killorglin	1,087
Kenmare	1,034

Source: Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory, 1914, p. 1214; p. 1191.

under pasture is that it allows for a more realistic economic comparison between different areas since mountain land will be overwhelmingly marginal. Graph 1.1 shows how Kerry and Limerick compared with other Munster counties and Ireland as a whole in 1914.

A further aspect of the post-famine shift to pasture in the context of the full emergence of the tenant-farmer, 30+ acre class was the division of labour within the livestock industry. Mutton came to play a significant role in dairying. Cullen describes the increasing self-confidence of the new great farmers:

At the same time, much of the dairy farming in Munster had been collected by dairymen who had come from the north-west, by the end of the nineteenth century the lands were better managed. It seems likely that the so-

development is defended in Kevin O'Rourke, "Did the Great Irish Famine Matter?," reprinted in Cormac O'Grada (ed.), The Economic Development of Ireland since 1870, volume 1 (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 3-24.

The partial clearing of the land by death and emigration allowed, as has already been mentioned, for the full emergence of a strong tenant farmer class. The members of this class whose roots lay in the 18th century, married late and avoided the ruinous subdivision of their plots.

While the total number of holdings declined dramatically between 1845 and 1851, the number of holdings above 15 acres in size grew slightly. Over the next fifty years, only the number of holdings over 30 acres continued to increase in absolute terms, albeit slowly. This process was paralleled by another—dictated by the international market—as prices favoured pasture over tillage. In 1851, 8.5% of Kerry's land and 19.8% of Limerick's were devoted to tillage (corn, green crops, including flax and rape) while 43.0% and 63.9% respectively were devoted to pasture (grass, meadow and clover). By 1875, Kerry's pasture had increased to 62.6% of its total land, Limerick's to 79.5%, compared to the national average of 60.8%.⁵ In 1914, 77.5% of Kerry and 87.7% of Limerick were pasture, and 5.3% and 4.8% respectively were tillage. As opposed to 1851 and 1875, however, the 1914 Agricultural Statistics allow us to distinguish between grazed mountain land and all other categories. The advantage of removing grazed mountain land from the total land under pasture is that it allows for a more realistic economic comparison between different areas since mountain land will be overwhelmingly marginal. Graph 1.1 shows how Kerry and Limerick compared with other Munster counties and Ireland as a whole in 1914.

A further aspect of the post-Famine shift to pasture in the context of the full emergence of the tenant-farmer, 30+ acre class was the division of labour within the livestock industry. Munster came to play a significant role in dairying. Cullen describes the increasing self-confidence of the dairy sector farmers:

At one time much of the dairy farming in Munster had been conducted by dairymen who had rented cattle from a middleman; by the end of the nineteenth century the herds were farmer-managed. It seems likely that the re-

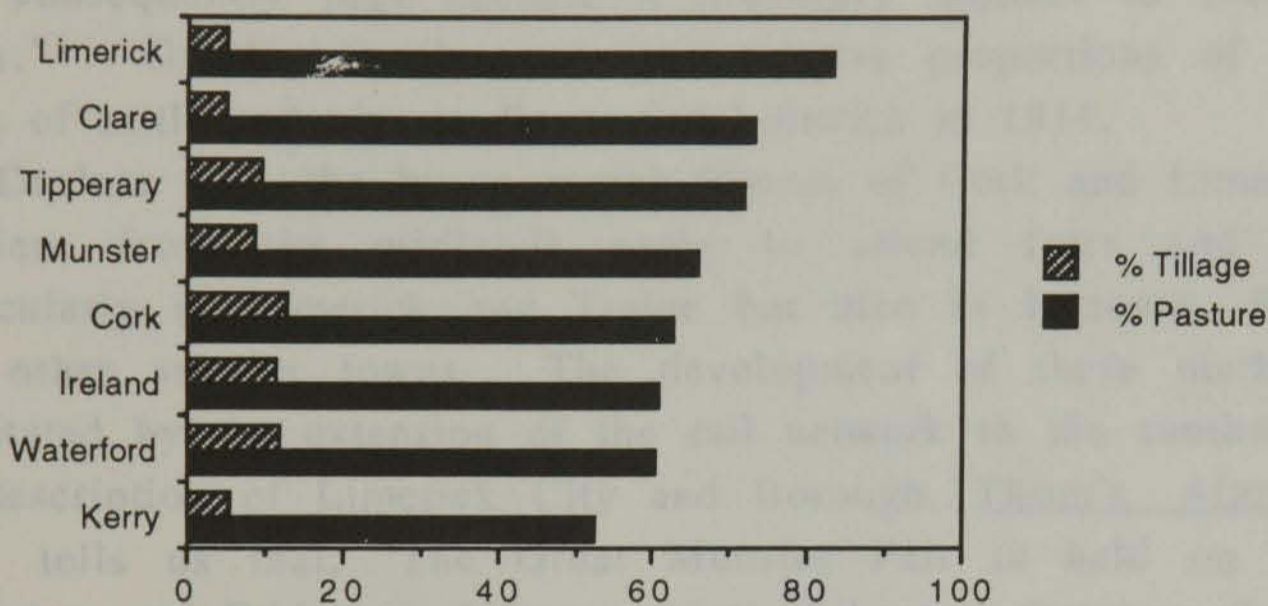
⁵ "Agricultural statistics, 1851," PP 1852-3, vol. xciii; "Agricultural statistics, 1875," PP 1876, vol. xxviii.

organisation of the dairying industry between the 1850s and 1870s.

By 1914, milk cows represented 45.0% and 41.2% of all cattle in Kerry and Limerick respectively. This was significantly higher than the national mean of 18.7%. Since keeping cows as milk means they need to eat regularly, Kerry and Limerick also had high numbers of cattle under one-year old (28.1% and 27.1% of the county total compared to the national mean of 22.9%).¹ Large numbers of young cattle were also bought by inland graziers. The growth of dairying

Graph 1.1

Pasture/tillage, Munster & Ireland, 1914



Pasture - Grass, hay (exc. grazed mountain land) Tillage - Corn & green crops, inc.

Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 3.

last Friday of every month, corn, butter, potatoes, hay, and other county produce, daily." The Trade markets were held on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the Livestock market every Friday. O'Connell estimates that in 1850 a total of 238 fairs were held in Limerick, of which 175 were held in towns or villages. By 1900, the total number of fairs had dropped to 183 of which only 7 were now held outside towns and villages. Significantly, the number of towns and villages holding fairs had dropped from 42 to 15, thus reflecting an increasing centralisation of the rural economy.²

¹ O'Connell, p. 139.

² "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 3.

³ James Mc Carthy, *Development and Change in South Kerry* (M.L.S. Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1982), p. 105.

⁴ *Times*, 1914, pp. 1226-1227.

⁵ James J. O'Connell, *European Landmarks, Past and Present: A Historical Geography of Urban Development in Europe* (ed. Eric Hobsbawm, Methuen & Co., London, 1971), p. 124.

organisation of the dairying industry...occurred between the 1850s and 1870s.⁶

By 1914, milch cows represented 42.0% and 41.8% of all cattle in Kerry and Limerick respectively. This was significantly higher than the national mean of 30.7%. Since keeping cows in milk means they need to calf regularly, Kerry and Limerick also had high numbers of cattle under one-year old (30.3% and 27.8% of the county totals compared to the national mean of 22.5%).⁷ Large numbers of young cattle were then bought by midland graziers. The growth of dairying also helped to spur the bacon curing industry since, "One of the best ways to utilise the waste products of the dairy was in pig-feeding, and consequently pigs became a necessary adjunct to every dairy farm."⁸ Graph 1.2 illustrates the relative proportions of different types of cattle and pigs in Kerry and Limerick in 1914.

Dealers from the bacon curing houses of Cork and Limerick and graziers from the midlands came to attend fairs and markets particularly in Limerick and Tralee but also in Listowel, Rathkeale and other smaller towns. The development of these markets was facilitated by the extension of the rail network to the southwest. In its description of Limerick City and Borough, Thom's Almanac for 1914 tells us that, "The Great Munster Fair is held on the last Thursday and Friday in January, April, July and October; Cattle and Pig Markets on 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month; new cattle fair last Friday of every month; corn, butter, potatoes, hay, and other county produce, daily." The Tralee markets were held on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; the Listowel market every Friday.⁹ O'Connor estimates that in 1850 a total of 238 fairs were held in Limerick, of which 175 were held in towns or villages. By 1900, the total number of fairs had dropped to 182 of which only 7 were now held outside towns and villages. Significantly, the number of towns and villages hosting fairs had dropped from 42 to 25, thus reflecting an increasing centralisation of the rural economy.¹⁰

⁶ Cullen, p. 139.

⁷ "Agricultural statistics, 1914", Table 15.

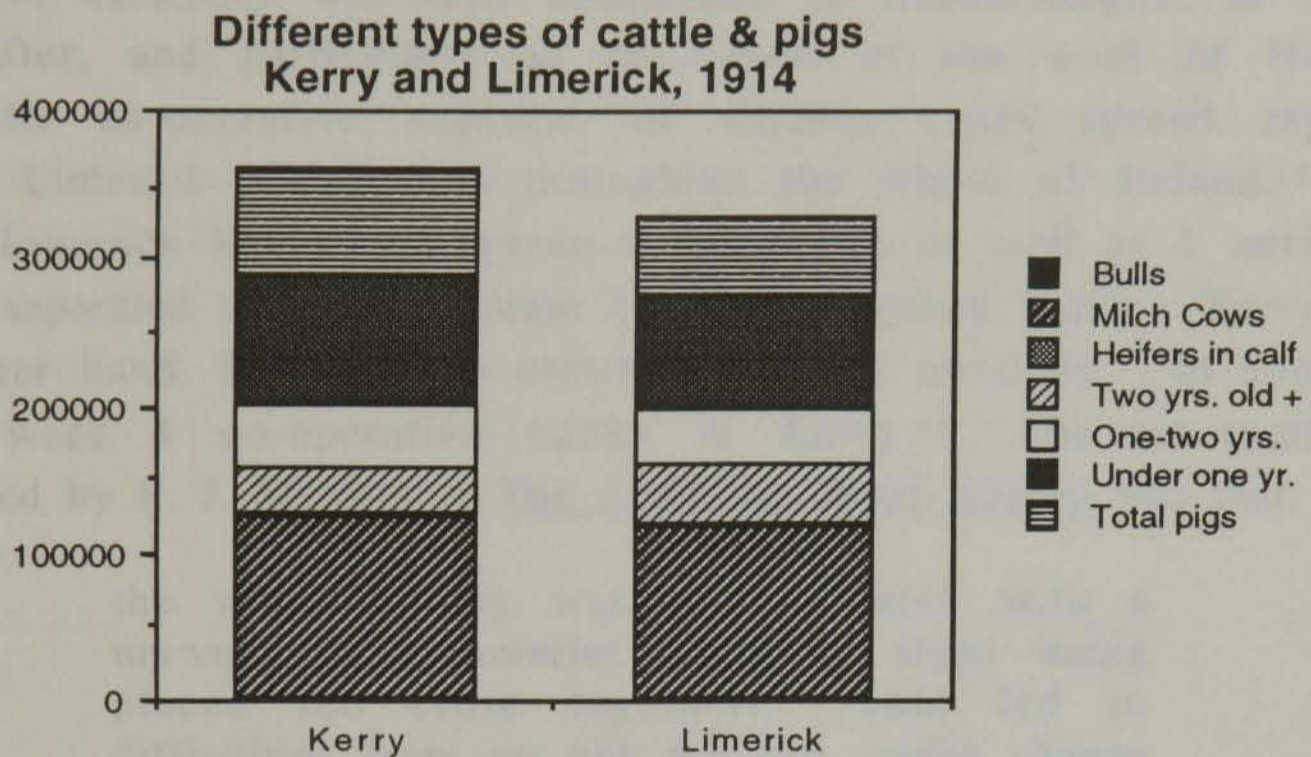
⁸ Jacinta Mc Cullagh, Economic and Social Change in North Kerry (MLitt thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1982), p. 198.

⁹ Thom's, 1914, pp. 1320-1344.

¹⁰ Patrick J. O'Connor, Exploring Limerick's Past: An Historical Geography of Urban Development in County and City (Newcastle West, Co. Limerick, 1987), p. 124.

If increasing demand, coming largely from the English market) combined with higher prices and cheaper transport made dairy farming a highly profitable field, then the advent of mechanized tractors and the co-operative movement helped greatly to increase efficiency and the quality of the finished product. In 1906, at the International Dairy Show in Dublin, Irish agriculturalists won their first opportunity to showcase the advantage of a highly mechanized dairy enterprise. A few years later, in 1910, the first County Kerry Fairbank County Agricultural Show was held in Tralee. The first one

Graph 1.2



Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 15.

The process of rural change in Irish agriculture in a short time had a differential impact on sub-regions within the rural economy. James McLaughlin in his book on *Economic and Social Change in North Kerry, 1825-1914* documents how variations in the physical environment meant a lack of uniform responses to market pressures. For example, in the Dingle rural district, with a high percentage of marginal land, the Crofters' and Tenants' (1906) struggle, trying to secure their rights against the landowners, was successful. Increasing numbers were employed in the 1880s and 90s not only as fishermen, especially in the lucrative herring industry, but in the

14 W. J. Magner, "Social History," in *New Ireland: A History 1800-1914* (London: Constable, 1958-1961) (Tipperary: Stationer for the Irish Folklore Commission, 1964), pp. 150-1.

15 William P. Coyne (ed.), *Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural Change* (Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, 1902), p. 120.

16 Magner, p. 151.

If increasing demand (coming largely from the English market) combined with higher prices and cheaper transport made dairy farming a highly profitable field, then the advent of mechanised creameries and the co-operative movement helped greatly to increase efficiency and the quality of the finished product. In 1879, at the International Dairy Show in Dublin, Irish agriculturalists had their first opportunity to observe the workings of a Laval steam-powered cream separator. A few years later, in 1884, the first County Limerick creamery was opened in the village of Hospital. The first co-operative creamery was then established at Dromcollogher in 1889. Thereafter, and particularly as the result of the work of Horace Plunkett, co-operative ventures of various types spread rapidly across Limerick and indeed throughout the whole of Ireland.¹¹ By 1902, Limerick had 17 co-operative creameries as well as 1 auxiliary which separated milk from cream but did not churn butter. Kerry, on the other hand, had 8 co-op creameries and 1 auxiliary. In addition there were 4 co-operative banks in Kerry.¹² The net result as described by P. J. Meghen in The Limerick Rural Survey was that:

the whole county was soon covered with a network of creameries some of them being placed too close together. This led to difficulties later on but the big social change which really came from this development was the transfer of buttermaking from the farms to the creamery.¹³

The processes that were at work in Irish agriculture as a whole had a differential impact on sub-regions within the Kerry/Limerick economy. Jacinta McCullagh in her thesis on Economic and Social Change in North Kerry, 1850-1914 documents how variations in the physical environment meant a lack of uniform responses to market pressures. For example, in the Dingle rural district, with a far higher percentage of marginal land than the Castleisland-Tralee-Listowel triangle, fishing supplemented meagre farming and labouring income. Increasing numbers were employed in the 1880s and '90s not only as fishermen, especially in the lucrative mackerel industry, but in the

¹¹ P. J. Meghen, "Social History," in Rev. Jeremiah Newman (ed.), The Limerick Rural Survey, 1958-1964 (Tipperary: Muintir Na Tire Rural Publications, 1964), pp. 150-1.

¹² William P. Coyne (ed.), Ireland: industrial and agricultural (Dublin: Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, 1901), p. 220.

¹³ Meghen, p. 151.

fish-curing plants as well. By the end of the 1890s, fully 11% of the male population in the Dingle district were fishermen.¹⁴

As has already been noted, the proportion of mountainous land in Kerry was over six times that of its easterly neighbour. But within Kerry itself there was a wide variation, as can be seen from Table 1.2, with the highest proportions of mountainous land to be found in the Caherciveen, Dingle and Kenmare Poor Law Unions. These unions encompassed the Dingle Peninsula, most of Iveragh and Kerry's portion of the Beare Peninsula. The significance of these figures lies in the poorer quality of mountain land and land at the base of mountains, as opposed to the rich lowlands between Castleisland and Listowel and in Limerick's "Golden Vale". The Mullaghareirk Mountains in southwest Limerick account for the mountain land in the Newcastle Union.

To what extent did differences in geography lead to differences in the social hierarchy of particular districts? Were the stereotypical "strong" farmers as prominent in more mountainous areas? One can partially answer these questions by looking at the size and value of land holdings.

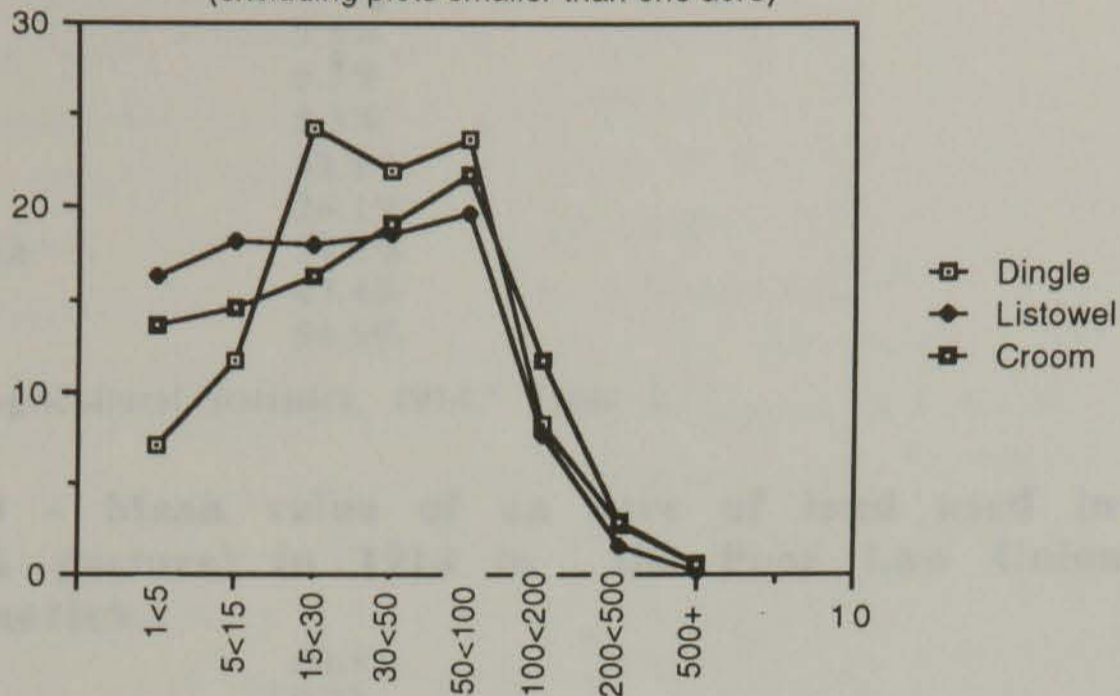
Holdings can be compared by looking at the proportions that fall into different categories (i.e. less than one acre, 1-5 acres, etc.). Graphs 1.3 and 1.4 look at this distribution in three "typical" Poor Law Unions: Dingle in mountainous West Kerry; Listowel which is mostly in Kerry's prosperous northeast and extends slightly into County Limerick; and Croom right in the middle of the Golden Vale. Graph 1.3 excludes plots smaller than one acre while Graph 1.4 includes them. What these graphs reveal is that the "developed" regions have a different pattern of distribution from the "backward" mountainous areas. For one thing, there are far more holdings of under one acre in Listowel and Croom. This is probably explained by the far larger concentrations in these areas of agricultural labourers who generally held small plots which supplemented their earnings. But excluding these plots which, though indicative in themselves of the complexity of the economy of the Listowel/Croom Unions, do not necessarily indicate anything about the *farmers*, we see that the proportions in categories over 30 acres are not so radically different.

¹⁴ Mc Cullagh, pp. 56-7.

Graph 1.3

Distribution of holdings in several Poor Law Unions

(excluding plots smaller than one acre)

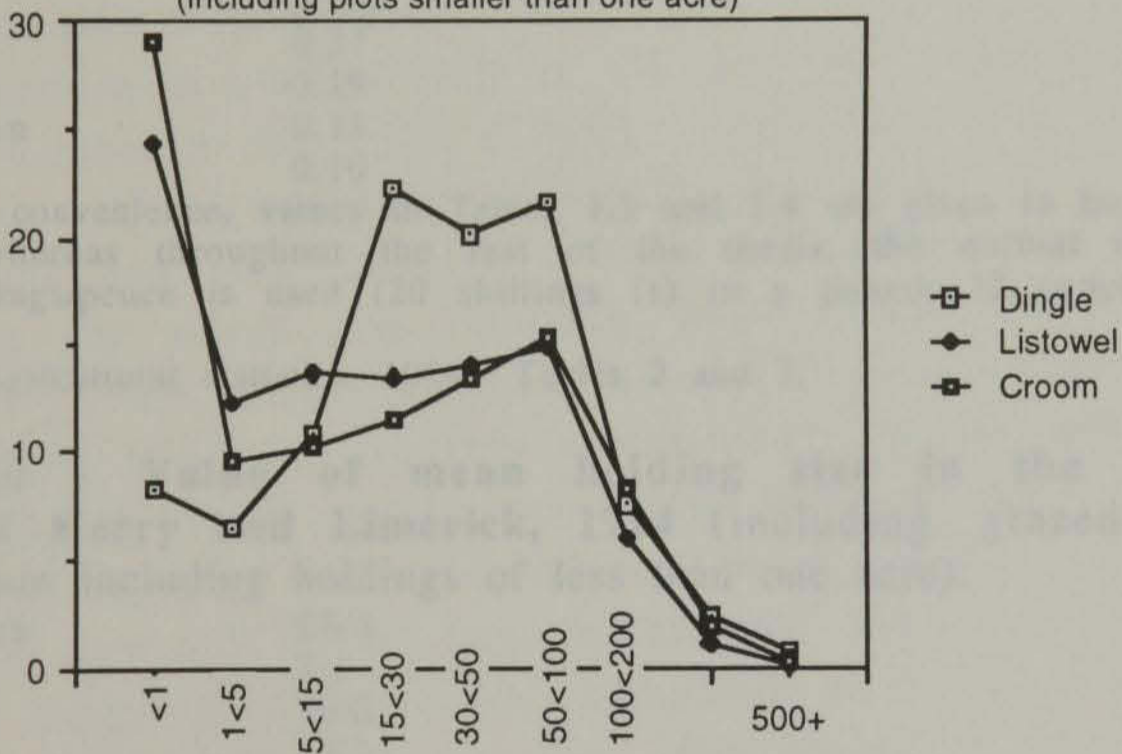


Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 2.

Graph 1.4

Distribution of holdings in several Poor Law Unions

(including plots smaller than one acre)



Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 2.

Table 1.2 - Mountain land as a proportion of total land in several Poor Law Unions, 1914 (Limerick unions underlined).

<u>Rathkeale</u>	0.5%
<u>Croom</u>	1.7%
<u>Limerick</u>	4.3%
Listowel	5.8%
<u>Kilmallock</u>	6.3%
<u>Newcastle</u>	8.3%
Tralee	18.8%
Killarney	26.1%
Caherciveen	37.6%
Dingle	43.4%
Kenmare	54.9%

Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Table 2.

Table 1.3 - Mean value of an acre of land used in agriculture (tillage & pasture) in 1914 in the Poor Law Unions of Kerry and Limerick.

Kilmallock	£0.85
Croom	0.72
Limerick	0.69
Rathkeale	0.64
Newcastle	0.41
Tralee	0.35
Listowel	0.34
Killarney	0.27
Dingle	0.19
Caherciveen	0.11
Kenmare	0.10

Note: For convenience, values in Tables 1.3 and 1.4 are given in hundredths of a pound whereas throughout the rest of the thesis, the normal division of pounds/shillings/pence is used (20 shillings (s) in a pound; 12 pence (d) in a shilling).

Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914," Tables 2 and 7.

Table 1.4 - Value of mean holding size in the Poor Law Unions of Kerry and Limerick, 1914 (including grazed mountain land and not including holdings of less than one acre).

Caherciveen	£6.1
Kenmare	8.1
Dingle	10.0
Listowel	13.3
Killarney	13.4
Tralee	16.7
Newcastle	18.3
Limerick	31.0
Rathkeale	31.3
Croom	39.2
Kilmallock	45.6

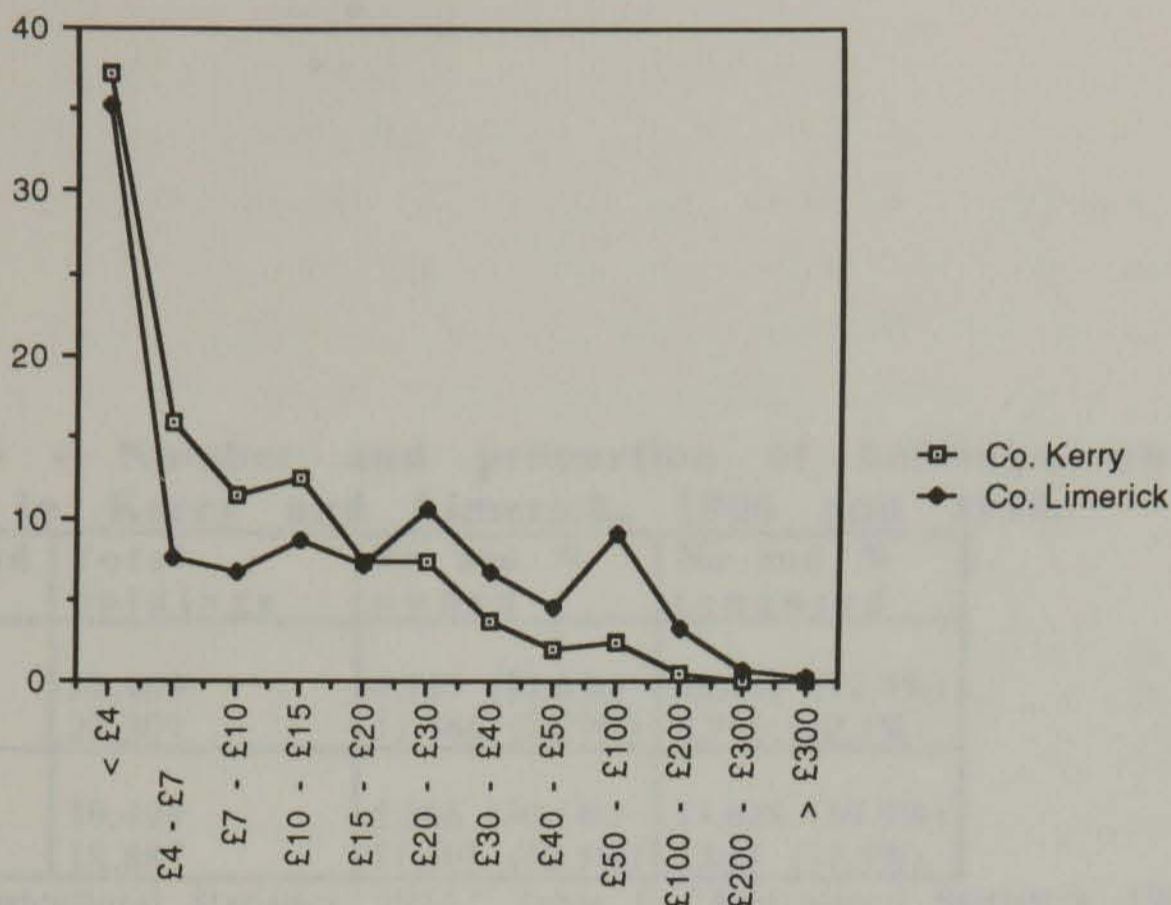
Source: "Agricultural statistics, 1914,"., Tables 3, 5, and M.

A more revealing comparison is based on looking at the mean valuation of an acre of cultivated land in 1914. The Agricultural Statistics distinguished between the valuation of "houses and other hereditaments" and "land" as such. Assuming that valuable land was used exclusively for agricultural purposes, one can estimate the mean value of an acre of agricultural land as is done in Table 1.3. This pattern matches almost exactly with Table 1.2. But the socio-economic significance of this wide divergence in value is better gauged if one multiplies these figures by the mean holding sizes, including grazed mountain land. This produces the values given in Table 1.4. With even the wealthiest Kerry Union (Tralee) having its mean holding worth less than the poorest Limerick Union (Newcastle) and just over a third of the wealthiest (Kilmallock), one must conclude that the rural economy of County Limerick was substantially more prosperous than that of "The Kingdom". Indeed, the value of a mean holding in 1914 in Limerick was £31.2 while in Kerry it was £11.9. By comparison, the value of the mean Munster holding was £24.4 and of the mean Irish holding was £19.3.

This pattern is also evident in the data on valuation from the General Report of the 1911 Census which gives the number of holdings in several valuation categories and cross-tabulates these with acreage and other indices. Graph 1.5 shows the percentage distribution for Kerry and Limerick while Graph 1.6 shows the distribution in the three Poor Law Unions of Caherciveen, Listowel and Rathkeale which are roughly representative of the two counties. The data for the Poor Law Unions reveals rather dramatic differences between sub-regions, with Caherciveen having almost no holdings worth more than £30. There are, for example, only 8 holdings in the £50-£100 range in Caherciveen, compared with 122 and 186 in Listowel and Rathkeale respectively. The immediate conclusion one draws from this data is that the upper crust of the agricultural community was far narrower in West Kerry whereas there was a much broader layer of "substantial" farmers sitting atop the social hierarchy in Limerick's Golden Vale.

Graph 1.5 - Distribution of holdings by valuation category in Kerry and Limerick, 1914.

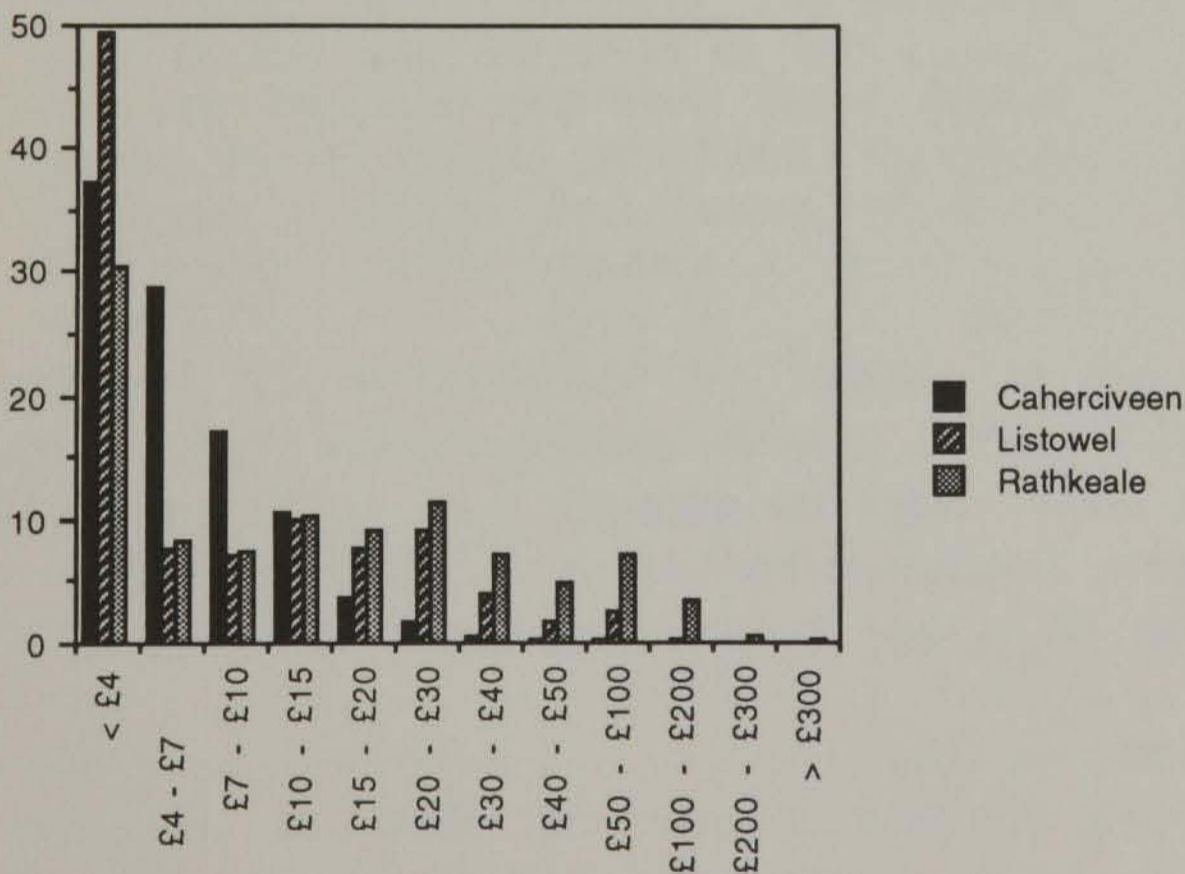
% of total holdings



Source: Census, 1911, General Report, Table 150.

Graph 1.6 - Distribution of holdings by valuation category in several Poor Law Unions, 1914.

% of total holdings



Source: Census, 1911, General Report, Table 150.

In the decade preceding World War I, these strong farmers, as well as many smaller farmers, changed their status from occupiers to owners via British legislation. Table 1.5 shows how the proportions of holdings which were owned or tenanted were changed between 1906 and 1914. This represented a major revolution although one which excluded farm labourers and many small farmers. These groups sought the division of the remaining land held by landlords among themselves. But the realization that this would not be enough to satisfy the vast hunger of "unemployed" holders led to calls for redistribution of the larger farms and lands owned by ex-tenants.

Table 1.5 - Number and proportion of holdings, owned and tenanted, in Kerry and Limerick, 1906 and 1914.

County and year	Total holdings	No and % owned	No and % tenanted
Kerry:			
1906	22,160	6,117 (27.6%)	16,043 (72.4%)
1914	22,307	17,366 (77.9%)	4,941 (22.1%)
Limerick			
1906	19,494	5,866 (30.1%)	13,628 (69.9%)
1914	18,887	11,803 (62.5%)	7,084 (37.5%)

Source: "Agricultural Statistics, 1914," Table 1; "Agricultural Statistics, 1906," PP 1908, v. 121, Table 1.

specific account.

Distillery, breweries, flourmills, saw mills, clothing factory for military contingents, a tannery, and condensed milk factory, and margarine factory, a petrol and gas works of 500 tons, and a floating dock, where vessels of 7,000 tons can be docked, a graving dock, where vessels of 2,500 tons can be repaired at a cost of £20,000.¹⁷

This picture can be supplemented by looking at the Irish Manufacturers Directory for 1914, edited by Kevin J. Kenny and Macdonald's Irish Directory and Gazetteer for 1914. While Kenny's provides a rough and ready guide to non-agricultural production, Macdonald's covers the whole of Ireland as well as the retail and service sectors.

The number of firms listed in Kenny's with an address in Limerick was 244, of which 107 were in Limerick City itself. Substantial more general companies for the hundreds of highly

¹⁷ Of course, not all products were exported.

¹⁸ Kenny's, 1914, p. 122.

In the decade preceding World War I, these strong farmers, as well as many smaller farmers, changed their status from occupiers to owners via British legislation. Table 1.5 shows how the proportions of holdings which were owned or tenanted were reversed between 1906 and 1914. This represented a social revolution although one which excluded farm labourers and many small farmers. These groups sought the division of the remaining land held by landlords among themselves. But the realisation that this would not be enough to satisfy the land hunger of "uneconomic" holders led to calls for redistribution of the larger farms now legally owned by ex-tenants, especially those held by graziers.¹⁵ The call for land to be given to "people, not bullocks" was to resonate through the political discourse of the following years.

1.2 THE URBAN ECONOMY

We have already described certain general features of the urban economy of the two counties, including the role of the towns as markets for agricultural produce, the importance of the railways and the added roles of Tralee and Limerick City in food processing and as ports. Thom's Almanac's description of Limerick City gives a more specific account:

...Distillery, tanneries, foundries, flour and saw mills, clothing factory for military, constabulary, & c., creamery, and condensed milk factory, also margarine factory; a patent slip for vessels of 500 tons, and a floating dock, where vessels of 7,000 tons can discharge; a graving dock, where vessels of 2,500 tons can be repaired at a cost of £20,000.¹⁶

This picture can be supplemented by looking at the Irish Manufacturers' Directory and Year Book edited by Kevin J. Kenny and Macdonald's Irish Directory and Gazeteer for 1914. While Kenny's provides a rough and ready guide to non-agricultural production, Macdonald's covers even the smallest firms as well as the retail and service sectors.

The number of firms listed in Kenny's with an address in Limerick was 114, of which 100 were in Limerick City itself. Substituting more general categories for the hundreds of highly

¹⁵ Of course, not all graziers were ex-tenants.

¹⁶ Thom's, 1914, p. 1320.

Table 1.6 - Breakdown by industry of manufacturers in the City of Limerick, 1914.

I. Paper, printing, stationery & allied trades	5
II. Machinery, engineering and metal trades	15
III. Church related	2
IV. Textiles, clothing & apparel of which: a) Boots and shoes (retail) - 7	25
V. Food and drink trade of which: a) Bacon & ham curers - 2 b) Butter/creameries - 2	19
VI. Wood-working trades	15
VII. House furnishings (not of wood)	2
VIII. Construction supplies	5
IX. Tobacco and allied trades	6
X. Goods for use in agriculture	6
XI. Quarries	2
XII. Miscellaneous	14

(this is a total of 116 listings, with 16 firms listed under more than one heading)

Source: Kevin J. Kenny (ed.), Irish Manufacturers' Directory and Year Book, 1914.

specific headings used in the directory generates a rough breakdown for Limerick City, given in Table 1.6. The range of firms in Limerick City is noteworthy. There were two firms of coachbuilders, four firms making saddles and harnesses, four cooperages and two tanneries. According to The Irish Year Book for 1910, also published by Kenny, Limerick, along with Cork, was a centre for sole-leather manufacture and Limerick was also involved in tanning harness leather.¹⁷ However, the relatively large number of firms in the categories of "machinery, engineering and metal trades" and "timber trade (including wooden furniture)" are deceptive because these were overwhelmingly very small operations. Two sectors predominated, namely the "food and drink trade" and "textiles, clothing & apparel" and again, though the second included more establishments, the first was almost certainly larger in terms of value produced.

A key Limerick City firm was Shaw, W. J. & Sons, Ltd. who owned the Garryowen Bacon Factory. The firm was founded in 1831 by William John Shaw whose family came from County Down. Within a few years, the growth of bacon curing in Limerick had begun as Paddy Lysaght recounts:

About the middle of the last century, for some reason now difficult to fathom, Limerick bacon and especially Limerick hams, became well-known for their excellent flavour throughout the English-speaking world. It is on record that Glasgow curers in an effort to produce hams equal in excellence to those of Limerick, imported Limerick workmen who were supposed to know all about the way in which the meat was turned out at home. Apparently, they did not bring secrets with them for their efforts were unsuccessful.¹⁸

Lysaght quotes Stratten's Commercial Directory for Limerick of 1892 to the effect that 400-500 pigs were slaughtered daily at Shaw's, a total of around 150,000 per annum. By 1914, ten thousand pigs were being slaughtered in the city every week.¹⁹ Shaw's doubtless controlled most of this trade. Limerick was, according to Coyne, "The largest curing centre in Ireland, the annual turnover there being

¹⁷ The Irish Year Book, 1910 (compiled by the National Council and published by Kevin J. Kenny), pp. 227-8.

¹⁸ Paddy Lysaght, "Limerick's Bacon Factories," Old Limerick Journal, No. 15 (n.d.), p. 10.

¹⁹ Thom's, 1914, p. 1320.

about equal to that of Cork and Waterford together."²⁰ Besides bacon curing, Shaw's were listed as producing a whole range of processed foods, including pickles, lard, sausages, potted meats and fish, tinned meats and fish, pressed beef, preserved fruit, sauce and soups.

Another important firm in the food and drink trade was J. N. Russell & Sons, owners of the largest mills in Ireland outside of Dublin with 19 sets of rollers for wheat and 15 pairs of stone for maize. Russell's, by using up-to-date technology, was able to withstand competition from imported flour between 1881 and 1901.²¹ That the city's flour-milling industry was still flourishing in 1914 is indicated by Thom's Almanac which declared that it supplied most of Ireland's southwest and northwest regions. And, of course, there was Cleeves Bros. who employed several hundred making condensed milk and caramel at their Lansdowne complex. They also owned a chain of creameries and auxiliaries across Limerick, Tipperary and Cork.

In the "textile, clothing and apparel" sector, a key firm was the Limerick Clothing Factory, Ltd. which had secured the national contract for uniforms for the General Post Office, Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), railway and tramway staffs. McDonald's also lists several convents and religious institutions where young women were educated and employed, particularly in lace work and shirt-making. In Kerry, similar operations were carried on at the Presentation Convents in Tralee, Dingle and Castleisland.

Kenny's lists only 14 manufacturers in County Limerick (i.e. outside the city), of which nine are creameries and two come under the textiles, clothing and apparel heading. MacDonald's, on the other hand, lists fully 124 firms in the latter category including 61 drapers, 16 shoe and boot makers, 15 tailors, 15 "warehouses" of various descriptions and 13 haberdashers, milliners and dressmakers. The diversity of the economy in the small towns is also indicated by establishments such as S. B. Walsh & Son of Sarsfield St. in Kilmallock whose services are described as "family grocers, ironmongers, seedsmen, coal and general merchants, clothiers, hosiers, boots, etc."

The description of Tralee in Thom's alludes to its role as a port and declares, "A brisk trade in grain, flour, bacon, and butter is carried on. The value of imports is £250,000 and exports £200,000."²² All observers have noted that the economy of the town at this time

²⁰ Coyne, p. 252.

²¹ Cullen, pp. 156-7.

²² Thom's, 1914, p. 1329.

Table 1.7 - Breakdown by industry of manufacturers in County Kerry, 1914.

I. Food and drink trade of which: a) Butter/Creameries - 7 b) Mineral Water - 8 c) Bacon and ham curers - 1	16
II. Textile, clothing, apparel, of which: a) Boots and shoes - 3 b) Homespuns - 5 c) Hosiery - 4 d) Lace - 8 e) Woolens - 7	23
III. Timber trades	1
IV. Machinery, engineering & metal trades	2
V. Tobacco & allied trades	1
VI. Quarries	2
VII. Boat builders	1

(this is a total of 46 listings, with one firm listed under more than one heading)
Source: Kevin J. Kenny (ed.), Irish Manufacturers' Directory and Year Book, 1914.

was dominated by the four "Merchant Princes": Donovan's, Kelliher's, Latchford's and McCowen's. These firms made their money by exporting Kerry's agricultural produce through Tralee and nearby Fenit and importing coal, maize and other goods from abroad. What does Kenny's directory tell us about the Kerry economy? Not surprisingly, the total of forty-five firms listed for all of Kerry is less than half the total for Limerick City alone though it amounts to three times the number listed for the rest of County Limerick.

The diversity present in the economy of Limerick City is clearly absent but the strength of the food and drink trade is similar. Actually its importance is probably underestimated because, in North Kerry alone, there were twelve cooperative creameries and several proprietary creameries by 1914.²³ Tralee had both the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and J. M. Slattery's bacon factories. The textile, clothing and apparel sector was also strong. Eadie, R. and Sons of Beaufort was probably the most important firm in this category. They made blankets, "flannels", "homespuns", rugs, shawls, "woolens" and yarns. Revington's Ballymullen Mills was also prominent in the production of woollen goods and Munster Warehouse was a large "drapery house". On the other hand, the convent workshops, alluded to earlier, concentrated on hosiery, lacework, shirts and "ladies' underclothing".

In spite of the wide range of goods and services which were available in village and town shops, the central role of Limerick City and, at a secondary level, of Tralee, Killarney and Listowel, is clearly reflected in the directories. A comparison of various categories in MacDonald's yields 312 firms and shops in Limerick City; 198 in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel; 195 in County Limerick outside the city; and 90 in Kerry outside the three main towns.²⁴

At the same time one must not lose sight of the way individual towns were shaped by market forces without reference to the regional metropolis. As McCullagh points out, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Killarney was, "one of the most commercially organised tourist resorts in Europe: T. Cook and Sons, originators of the European tourist and excursion system had an agency in the

²³ McCullagh, p. 10.

²⁴ As noted earlier, MacDonald's is a particularly comprehensive listing of business premises. In order to make the data more manageable, certain categories were excluded, including banks, merchants, exporters and importers, grocers, hotels, pubs and spirit dealers, chemists, engineers, butchers, bakers, victuallers and confectioners.

town." MacDonald's lists 25 hotels in the town. But Killarney was not the only tourist centre in Kerry:

By this time too, Ballybunion had become part of this increasingly commercialised tourist industry, being referred to as the 'Brighton of Ireland' in 1897, and a place not to be missed in 1903...[it] was promoted as lying on the route from Killarney to Kilkee, the latter which had become very popular in the early twentieth century.²⁵

The ports of Tralee and Limerick, along with the rail network built in the late 19th century, provided the sinews which made the urban economy of Counties Kerry and Limerick work. This was vital but at bottom the urban development proceeded directly from agricultural wealth which in turn was based on the high market prices for dairy produce, young cattle and pigs. The degree to which the urban economy depended on rural wealth is well captured in this description of Tralee's famous Rock Street at the end of the nineteenth century:

A tannery was located just above the market and next to that was Brogue Makers Lane where the tanned leather was fashioned into shoes. In fact a cow was almost fully processed from the bottom of Rock Street to the top where the hide came out as shoes. All we need to know is what happened to the horns and hoof.²⁶

This economic vitality and the strengthened position of the urban merchant/small capitalist class was evinced in various phenomena. The most visible signs were the bustling shops and the newly built public buildings, not to mention the proliferating newspapers. Expenditure by the Urban District Council (UDC) in Tralee in the year 1913-14 was £18,813 and even Listowel UDC spent £3,629. Limerick County Borough, on the other hand, spent £94,098 in 1914, a ratio of £2.5s to every inhabitant, somewhat higher than Tralee's £1.10s. The relative economic insignificance of Newcastle West and Rathkeale, even compared to Listowel, is reflected in their Town Commissioners' respective 1913-14 spending of £240 and £133.²⁷ Of course, all these

²⁵ McCullagh, p. 194.

²⁶ J. Sugrue, "Rock Street: A History" (n.d.).

²⁷ Thom's, 1916, pp. 767-8.

sums pale in comparison with the expenditure of the Kerry and Limerick County Councils. During the year ending on the 31st March 1914, they spent £140,168 and £149,920 respectively.²⁸ But the munificence of the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie was not restricted to sweeping the streets and, given the strength of the "Devotional Revolution", their prosperity was naturally also reflected in that of the Church. The most visible sign of this was the proliferation of new churches and chapels.

In 1914, the workers of Kerry and Limerick, as elsewhere in the south and west of Ireland, faced an array of Catholic tenant-farmers and merchant-capitalists, both Protestant and Catholic, who had entrenched themselves in positions of economic control. Any challenge to this control would be met by fierce resistance.

1.3 OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

The paid workforce of Kerry and Limerick, like the Irish paid workforce as a whole, was overwhelmingly male.²⁹ The proportion of females listed in the 1911 Census as "not producing" was twice that of males in both counties. Of the 9,509 females returned as having "specified occupations" in Kerry, 46.8% of these were in domestic service. In Limerick County (excluding the City and Borough), 53.2% of the 8,437 occupied females were similarly employed. These figures undoubtedly included many women working in farmers' homes.

Before the Famine a significant proportion of women in the West of Ireland as well as the North had been employed as outworkers in the textile industry. But in the latter half of the century, "Declining opportunities in domestic clothing and textiles were not compensated to any great extent by growing job opportunities in other areas."³⁰ Mechanisation of farm duties, such as butter churning, only tended to further remove women from remunerative activity. This meant a massive shift towards full-time unpaid homework. While this process was by no means simply voluntary, it is also true as Joanna Bourke points out that, "The household sector was crucial for the developing Irish economy. It was recognised that improved forms of

²⁸ Thom's, 1917, p. 670.

²⁹ In the City of Dublin, however, women formed a significantly larger part of the paid workforce. The proportions of males and females with a stated occupation were 69.0% and 45.1% respectively (Census of Ireland, 1911, General Report).

³⁰ M. E. Daly, "Women in the Irish workforce from pre-industrial to modern times," Saothar 7 (1981), p. 75.

housewifery were a major way of improving the labour force."³¹ To the extent employers were at all interested in women it was often as a source of cheap labour. This only reinforced the perception of male workers that women were a potential threat to their wage levels and even their jobs.

Besides gender, it is also necessary to consider the urban/rural divide. The occupational distribution in Limerick City in absolute numbers and as percentages of the total number of occupied males and females is shown in Table 1.8. It must be stressed, however, that these are only approximations. The 1911 census, on which this analysis was based, often does not clearly distinguish between "makers" and "dealers" (e.g. "rope, twine, cord; maker, dealer" and "shoe, boot; maker, dealer"). Since more "makers" than "dealers" were present in most trades, these ambiguous classifications were amalgamated with the most appropriate category of manual worker. This tends to particularly exaggerate the number of skilled manual workers.

A more general methodological issue is posed by the breakdown of manual workers into "skilled", "semi-skilled" and "unskilled". In trying to organise the hundreds of classifications in the census into useful occupational categories, the approach followed was that outlined by Routh.³² It should be obvious though that there is no strictly objective measure of skill. To a very large extent the distinction between skill levels reflects the social status of particular groups with the "unskilled" having the least status. The very term "unskilled" is pejorative and false to boot since no task could be performed without some skills being used. The perception of these distinctions was (and is) so entrenched, however, that it is absolutely necessary to use them in this analysis.

The most notable aspect of the resulting breakdown is the preponderance of manual workers who comprised 78.3% of occupied males and 74.6% of females. Among men, however, almost half of the manual workers and just over a third of the total workforce were skilled workers. Butchers (2.9% of the total male workforce); carpenters and joiners (2.7%); and "harbour, dock, wharf and lighthouse service" (2.3%) were particularly prominent among the

³¹ Joanna Bourke, "'The Health Caravan': Domestic Education and Female Labor in Rural Ireland, 1890-1914" *Eire Ireland* (winter 1989).

³² Guy Routh, Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906-1979 (London, 1965), pp. 222-5.

Table 1.8 - Occupational distribution in the City and Borough of Limerick, 1911.

Occupational Class, Males	Number	% of total
1 A. Higher professional	325	2.8
1 B. Lower professional	207	1.8
2 A. Employers and proprietors (inc. merchants and dealers)	1,046	9.0
2 B. Managers and administrators	152	1.3
3. Clerical workers	796	6.8
4. Foremen, inspectors, supervisors	2	0.0
Manual workers:		
5. Skilled	3,705	31.7
6. Semi-skilled	2,093	17.9
7. Unskilled	3,349	28.7
Totals	11,675	100.0

Females		
1 A. Higher professional	316	6.6
1 B. Lower professional	329	6.9
2 A. Employers and proprietors (inc. merchants and dealers)	443	9.2
2 B. Managers and administrators	6	0.1
3. Clerical workers	124	2.6
4. Foremen, inspectors, supervisors	0	0.0
Manual workers:		
5. Skilled	1,301	27.2
6. Semi-skilled	1,757	36.7
7. Unskilled	515	10.7
Totals	4,791	100.0

Source: Census of Ireland, 1911, Limerick.

Table 1.9 - Occupational distribution in Tralee and Counties Kerry and Limerick (excluding Limerick City), 1911.

	T/M	K/M	L/M	T/F	K/F	L/F
1A Higher professional	3.8	0.9	1.0	8.0	3.9	2.4
1B Lower professional	2.2	1.0	1.1	3.1	5.1	3.5
2A Employers	10.4	35.5	31.2	12.9	26.5	24.7
2B Managers	2.1	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2
3 Clerical	5.8	1.2	0.9	2.6	1.4	1.0
4 Foremen, etc.	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
5 Manual, skilled	31.5	10.1	9.9	18.6	10.1	8.8
6 Semi-skilled	16.1	47.2	53.7	53.2	52.2	58.6
7 Unskilled	28.1	3.4	1.5	1.5	0.6	0.8
Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Note: T/M - Tralee males; K/M - Kerry males; L/M - Limerick males; T/F - Tralee females; K/F - Kerry females; L/F - Limerick females.

Source: Census of Ireland, 1911, Kerry; Limerick.

skilled trades, accounting by themselves for almost a quarter of the total skilled workforce. The 917 soldiers and Non-Commissioned Officers stationed in Limerick (7.9% of the male total workforce) accounted for half of the semi-skilled workers while the bulk of unskilled workers (2,472 or 21.2% of the total) were listed under the heading of "general labourer". Two other sizeable groups of unskilled workers were those listed as "carman, carrier, carter, drayman" (3.2%) and "messenger, porter, watchman (neither railway nor government)" (2.7%).

The number of females listed in the "indefinite and non-productive class" (15,025), as in Kerry and Limerick as a whole, was over twice the number of males listed in this category (7,027). Even more dramatically, the proportion of women over the age of 20 with a specified occupation was only 32.6% as compared with 95.5% for men. But if participation in the paid labour force was low, the range of trades in which women were employed in Limerick City was far wider than that of their rural counterparts. Among manual workers, the semi-skilled occupations were over twice as prominent as they were among men while unskilled workers were a far smaller proportion of the total "occupied" female workforce. The importance of the textile and apparel sector in overall female and especially skilled female employment is reflected in the high proportion of milliners, dressmakers and staymakers (9.9%); shirtmakers and seamstresses (5.3%); and tailoresses (2.5%). The bulk of the semi-skilled workers were "domestic indoor servants" (1,369 or 28.6% of the total female workforce) while the largest group under category 2A were general shopkeepers and dealers (5.8% of the total).

Table 1.9 gives a percentage breakdown of occupational categories for both males and females in Tralee and Counties Kerry and Limerick (excluding Limerick City). The method used to produce these figures is the same as that used in Table 1.8. It is striking that the proportions of the male workforce in Tralee who were skilled manual workers (31.5%) is almost exactly that observed in Limerick City. The proportions of semi-skilled and unskilled males (16.1%; 28.1%) are also very close to those observed in the city. But while skilled workers accounted for just over 40% of all male manual workers in both locations, it should be noted that Tralee's unskilled workers were less dispersed than their Limerick counterparts since they were heavily employed by the four "Merchant Princes" and the UDC. The occupational breakdown for females in Tralee, on the other

hand, is distinctly different from that in Limerick City. In particular, semi-skilled workers (overwhelmingly domestic servants) formed a far higher percentage of the female paid workforce (53.2% as opposed to 36.7%). This again indicates that the range of paid jobs available to women was significantly larger in the city.

Two occupational categories were predominant among both males and females in Counties Kerry and Limerick. These were "employers", overwhelmingly farmers, and semi-skilled workers, overwhelmingly farm labourers and domestic servants. However, several methodological problems arise in attempting to determine the relative proportions of the male agricultural workforce who were part of the "farming class", broadly speaking, and the "class" of farm workers. First of all, as Fitzpatrick points out, the census figures throughout the nineteenth century are problematic in that many labourers were returning themselves as farmers. However, this issue was superseded in the latter part of the century by the increasing numbers of "farmers and especially their sons acting as labourers." Additionally, many labourers who had acquired small plots of land continued to describe themselves as labourers. Others betrayed a stubborn unwillingness to be put into the category of *agricultural* labourers and classified themselves as general labourers, a practice which leads to a specific note in the census tables.³³

It must also be borne in mind, as the 1905 Fox report to Parliament on the "Wages, Earnings, and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom" states, that "In many districts in the counties of Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Kerry, Cork, and Donegal, agricultural labourers as a class scarcely exist, except on the larger estates..."³⁴ As we have seen, the marginal character of many holdings in West Kerry would scarcely allow for the large scale use of hired labour.

Some of the problems of definition are more easily dealt with than others. General labourers whose residence was outside of the towns (conurbations of over 2,000 people) may be considered to be farm labourers. The census category of "farmer's and grazier's sons, grandsons, brothers and nephews" can also be subsumed under that of "agricultural labourers", as can the category of "farm servants

³³ David Fitzpatrick, "The Disappearance of the Irish Agricultural Labourer, 1841-1912," *Irish Economic and Social History*, v. VII (1980), pp. 68-9.

³⁴ "Second Report by Mr. Wilson Fox on the Wages, Earnings and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in the United Kingdom," PP 1905, v. 97, p. 116.

(indoor)". The question of farm labourers who had come to be small-holders is more vexed. If one includes the non-urban general labourers and relatives assisting under the heading of farm labourers then one finds that in 1911 there were 20,310 male farm labourers in Kerry and 15,973 in Limerick. This compares with 14,577 male farmers in Kerry and 9,274 in Limerick. On the other hand, there were a total of 21,590 occupiers in Kerry and 18,300 in Limerick. The significant difference between the numbers of farmers and occupiers is largely made up by subtracting the occupiers of holdings not exceeding one acre in size. Many of the 2,951 occupiers of such holdings in Kerry and their 5,567 counterparts in Limerick were presumably farm labourers. The percentage of farm labourers who were also occupiers of small-holdings could therefore be as high as 14.5% Kerry and 34.9% in Limerick.³⁵

As the Fox report describes, in many cases employing farmers gave labourers the use of a small piece of land as part of the "allowances in kind". Plots were also attached to the labourers' cottages built with public funds. Under the Labourers (Ireland) Act of 1883 each cottage built had an adjoining half-acre plot. This was increased to a full acre in 1892.³⁶ The report estimates that in Kerry the "excess of weekly earnings over average cash wages", i.e. the value of these "allowances", was 3d while in Limerick it was 9d. By comparison, the average weekly cash wages were 10s in Kerry and 9s.7d in Limerick.³⁷ These figures probably underestimate the importance of the food obtained from this land to the farm labourer's diet and the proportion of his family's income made from selling pigs, fowls and eggs since Fox himself concluded:

...without the opportunity of getting some land, a farm labourer in Ireland must have great difficulty in making both ends meet. In towns, or on the outskirts of them, there are men with no gardens or land, who work partly for farmers and partly for builders or contractors, and if they are in irregular work in the winter they get into great difficulties.³⁸

But if large numbers of farm labourers were dependent on the extra earnings from their bits of land to ensure even basic subsistence, this

³⁵ "Agricultural statistics, 1911," PP 1912-13, v. 106, Table 11

³⁶ John W. Boyle, "A Marginal Figure: The Irish Rural Labourer," in S. Clark, and J. S. Donnelly (eds.), Irish Peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914 (Manchester, 1983), p. 332.

³⁷ Fox, p. 123.

³⁸ *ibid.*, Appendix X, p. 249.

Table 1.10 - Ratio of male farm workers to 100 male farmers, 1841-1911.

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1911: 1841 ratio
Kerry	263	274	232	182	176	172	163	138	.522
Limerick	352	336	271	217	218	226	208	172	.488
Munster	312	326	248	205	196	199	189	159	.509
Ireland	271	229	180	160	149	152	146	131	.483

Source: Fitzpatrick, "Disappearance...", p. 88, Table II.

1.4 SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Recent research indicates that Irish wages grew at a faster rate during the late 19th and early 20th centuries than in Britain and the United States despite the stagnation of demand in many industries in southern Ireland.¹⁹ But it must be noted that most Irish workers started this period in a very poor position relative to their counterparts in these two wealthy countries. In particular, the wage rates of Irish urban unskilled male building workers during 1891-1901 were only 60.1% and 35.2% of the rates obtained by similar workers in Britain and the US respectively.²⁰ It must also be noted that despite the convergence of unskilled wage rates with those in Britain, Irish workers consistently experienced higher levels of unemployment than British workers.

Because of relative poverty, southern Irish workers also benefited disproportionately from the extension of British social legislation, particularly the National Insurance Act of 1911. For a large proportion of British workers, the act meant an increase in already existing benefits provided by self-help organizations or trade

¹⁹ For a summary of this research, see Arthur G. Williamson, "Economic Convergence: Making Poor Farmers Rich in Comparative Perspective," *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol. 19 (1992), pp. 5-27. A detailed discussion of Irish wages over the 19th and 20th centuries is given in Chapter 3.

²⁰ Williamson, p. 6, note 4.

did not suddenly make them any less dependent on the cash wages they received from their employers.

All of this must be taken in conjunction with what Fitzpatrick calls the steady "disappearance" of the farm labourer in rural Ireland which apparently began even before the Famine. Table 1.10 reproduces, from his article on the question, a chart which shows the ratio of male farm workers to 100 male farmers in each census between 1841 and 1911". The ratio was almost halved in Kerry during these seventy years and slightly more than halved in Limerick, in very close conformity with Munster and Ireland as a whole. Since farm labourers were decreasing as a proportion of the agricultural population and since increasing numbers of farmers and their sons were supplementing their earnings by labouring while many labourers had become smallholders, it can be said that economic class differences in the countryside had become somewhat blurred. However, while conditions for labourers had improved somewhat, they remained harsh and the perception of class difference had not changed as shall be seen in discussing the events of 1919-21.

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³⁹ For a summary of this research, see Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Economic Convergence: Placing Post-Famine Ireland in Comparative Perspective," Irish Economic and Social History, v. xxi (1994), pp. 5-27. A detailed discussion of local wage rates in 1913-4 will be given in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Williamson, p. 6, note 4.

unions. By contrast, most workers in the southwest of Ireland became recipients of health benefit for the first time. Who was eligible? The act applied to both men and women between the ages of 16 and 70. All manual workers were compulsorily insured, as were the bulk of employees earning less than £160 per month. The central omissions were of children and homeworkers. Domestic servants, agricultural labourers, clerks and shop assistants were all insured while farmers, professionals and merchants were not.

For a nominal weekly contribution by employers and employees, workers obtained an entitlement to 26 weeks of sickness benefit (10s and 7s weekly for men and women respectively) and unlimited disablement benefit (5s weekly for both sexes). The rates of contribution in Ireland were lower for both employees and employers than they were in Britain. However, the benefits were the same except that in Ireland insured persons were not eligible for medical benefit. Unemployment benefit of 7s per week was also available, but only to manual workers in certain "insured trades" which were particularly affected by seasonal variations in employment. These included building, "construction of works", shipbuilding, mechanical engineering, ironfounding, vehicle construction and sawmilling.⁴¹ However, the range of workers covered by unemployment insurance was expanded steadily over the following decade.

While increased wages for unskilled workers and the extension of the National Insurance Act to Ireland undoubtedly represented a significant improvement in the standard of living of workers and their families, one must also consider other social indices including diet, housing, health, education and working conditions. By all accounts, the dependence on potatoes and milk as virtually the sole source of nourishment of the rural population had decreased substantially by the end of the nineteenth century. The potato was replaced by wheaten bread as the staple for farmers' families and much of the potato crop in prosperous areas went to feed livestock. Consumption of tea and jam, not to mention tobacco, increased enormously by the early 1900s as part of the newly acquired wealth found its way toward the purchase of what had previously been luxuries. Meat also made a far more regular appearance on farmers' dinner tables.

For farm labourers and their families, however, the results are more difficult to assess. The Fox report estimated, based on returns

⁴¹ "National Insurance Act, 1911" in The Public General Acts, 1911.

from 37 farms, that the average quantity of beef, mutton and pork consumed per week by an Irish farm labourer's family in 1904 was 9 oz while the average amount of bacon consumed was 2 lbs, 13 oz.⁴² One of the returns from Kerry gave the following description of the labourer's diet on a particular farm:

Week Days

Breakfast - Tea, bread, sometimes eggs, other times butter.

Dinner - Potatoes, American bacon, and if potatoes are scarce, cabbage, home-made bread, and on fast days, fresh or salt fish.

Tea - about 4 pm. A quart of tea with a piece of bread is brought to the field and consumed while at work. Some few years ago this meal did not exist.

Supper - Potatoes with a little fish, or milk. At other times bread and tea.

Sundays

Breakfast - Tea, bread and butter.

Dinner - Potatoes and meat.

Tea - Tea and bread (dry).

Supper - Bread and milk.

The continuing practice in many areas of meals being part of the payment for work gave farmers wide latitude with regard to the diet of "their" labourers. The occasional bit of meat probably did not nutritionally compensate for the general substitution of white bread for potatoes. And if meals were being deducted from the pay, that left even less for the hapless families of the labourers.

One aspect of the labourers' conditions which definitely improved, however, was housing. Legislation had provided for the building of "labourers' cottages" which were superior in many cases to the dwellings of small farmers, thus leading to jealousy directed at the labourers by their "betters".

The overall improvement in housing can be quantified because the decennial census gave the number of families occupying dwellings according to the quality of the building as well as according to four classes of "accommodation", this being defined both by the quality of the building and the number of families living in it. Hence "fourth class accommodation" included, "all 4th class houses, 3rd class houses with more than one family, 2nd class houses with four or more families, and 1st class houses occupied by six or more families." It is indicative of the improvement on this front that the proportion of families occupying the fourth or worst class of accommodation in Kerry declined from 42.1% in 1851 to a mere 3% in 1911. At the same time, the proportion occupying second and third class accommodation increased from 56.2% in 1851 to 92.1% in 1911.⁴³

⁴² Fox., Appendix X, p. 247; description of diet which follows is on p. 254.

⁴³ Census, 1911, Kerry; Census, 1851.

However, the picture was bleaker if one looked at the large towns. While in the "rural area" of County Limerick only 2.1% of families occupied fourth class housing in 1911 and 91.7% lived in second or third class homes, in the county's "civic area" (including, by the Census definition, Limerick City and Newcastle West) fully 10.1% of families lived in fourth class housing.⁴⁴ Kemmy summarises the situation in Limerick City:

In 1911, the census of Munster showed that there were a total of 1,005 one-roomed tenements in the city which housed 3,054 people, 76% of whom lived in rooms containing three or more persons. In 1915, the medical officer's public health report stated that 1,669 houses in the city were unfit for human habitation. A breakdown of this figure showed that 692 were in a dilapidated state; 977 were "in want of ordinary basic sanitary facilities" and 681 "should be absolutely closed."⁴⁵

The situation in Tralee was equally serious. Many working class people lived in unsanitary, overcrowded laneways off the main streets:

The main streets were provided with piped sewers, most of which were not properly ventilated; the lanes, however, were largely unsewered. The better class of houses were provided with water closets, while many of the middle class of houses and those occupied by the working class were provided with midden privies, with ashpits attached, into which refuse was thrown. Refuse of all kinds was deposited in the streets, which was cleaned up at irregular intervals by the sanitary authority.⁴⁶

The situation was compounded by the presence of a number of private slaughterhouses and a public abattoir, all lacking proper drainage facilities, in the vicinity of private housing. Nor did the general practice of keeping a pig in the yard help matters. Such conditions were, of course, perfect for spreading disease and, in late 1911, there was a typhus epidemic in Listowel which had areas similar to the Tralee districts already described.

⁴⁴ Census, 1911, Limerick.

⁴⁵ Jim Kemmy, "Housing and Social Conditions: 1830-1940," Old Limerick Journal, No. 24 (Winter 1988), p. 72.

⁴⁶ McCullagh, p. 235.

By contrast, the improvement in basic education during the late 19th century was vast. This was due primarily to the establishment of the National School system. Illiteracy dropped steeply from the middle of the century when over half the population could neither read nor write. By 1911, only 11.9% of Kerry's population were illiterate while the proportions for County Limerick and Limerick City were 7.3% and 7.1% respectively.⁴⁷ Within Kerry, illiteracy was concentrated in pockets such as the western end of the Dingle Peninsula.

The final aspect of social well-being which shall be touched on here is working conditions. While conditions varied enormously from trade to trade in pre-war Ireland, long hours were universal for those fortunate enough to obtain full time employment. Almost no group worked less than 50 hours per week and many worked as many as 60 or more hours with only one day's rest in seven. The work of many "unskilled" groups such as dockers, carters, road workers, farm workers and domestic servants was labour-intensive and arduous. From Tralee comes the following description of the working conditions of carters employed by the merchant houses to bring goods to and from the docks at Prince's Quay:

...it was here [the "Basin" in Tralee] that "slave" labour thrived as men worked and starved into the early hours of morning for pittance. Carters with horse and cart kept drawing the material to the merchants' yards in the town and temporary workers made up the labour force at the docks. Some of these carters said in later years that during the prolonged work in the badly lit docks, with the emphasis on the speedy unloading of the boats, "a pint of porter and a penny grinder (bread) was their only sustenance and that they would be nodding off with sleep while driving their carts."⁴⁸

But if the work of most unskilled workers was physically punishing, that did not mean that the lot of semi-skilled and skilled workers was altogether rosy. For example, at Cannock's, the large drapery house in Limerick City, there were, in 1905, 105 apprentice drapers forced to "live in" at the premises. During the five to six year

⁴⁷ Census, 1911.

⁴⁸ Teddy Foley, Trade Unionism in Ireland and Kerry (Tralee Regional Technical College, thesis for National Certificate in Business Studies, 1982).

apprenticeships, the apprentices earned 5s.6d per week though they received food and board free. The really onerous aspect of the arrangement, however, was the 10 pm curfew. As Finbarr Crowe relates, "There were also fines imposed for misbehaviour in the canteen and sleeping quarters and the money could be stopped from their allowances."⁴⁹ Departmental managers "slept in" on a rotating basis in order to supervise the apprentices.

But if lack of personal freedom was the main complaint against the "living-in" system which existed in many drapery establishments, it was not the only one. The union also alleged that workers were forced to live "in over-crowded dormitories in draughty buildings often quite unsuited for human habitation." Consequently, "The risk to even a robust person's health and the danger of contracting tuberculosis...was very high."⁵⁰ There was also an abnormally large number of fires in these dormitories, including one in Limerick at Clancy and Co. on 30 March 1913 which claimed three lives. In an article about this tragedy, the Draper's Assistant declared bitterly:

It has been the same all the time as long as we can remember. Arnott's, Todd Burns, and Aiden Grennell's Dublin. In the last mentioned firm three assistants were trapped like rats in a cage, doors locked against them, and burnt to death. Then we have Revington's (Tralee), Duggan's (Kilkenny), O'Keefe's (Clonmel) and now Clancy's Limerick.⁵¹

Nevertheless, other evidence indicates that there were a number of female assistants who preferred living-in in spite of its disadvantages. Possibly the security of the arrangements appealed to some, especially those young women from rural areas who did not want to search for accommodation in an unfamiliar urban situation.

"Living-in" was not the only method of control used by employers, who expected absolute loyalty. If the situation of Irish assistants was at all similar to that of their English counterparts, then there was probably a complex system of fining for "minor infractions of house discipline or protocol" which even "the most punctilious of

⁴⁹ Finbarr Crowe, "The History of Cannock's, Part 2," Old Limerick Journal, no. 19 (Summer 1986), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Dermot Keogh, "Michael O'Lehane and the Organisation of Linen Drapers Assistants," Saothar 3 (1977), p. 35.

⁵¹ Draper's Assistant (DA), April 1913.

employees could not avoid transgressing."⁵² Whether this system was quite as elaborate in Ireland is not clear but the Draper's Assistant did make references to fines and to particularly notorious managers.⁵³

Demeaning working conditions were not unique to the drapery trade. For example, a large proportion of farm labourers secured employment at the "hiring fairs" held in various towns at particular times of year. Farmers would come and look over the human material on display, trying to judge their physical capacity for work. Pat Feeley describes the Newcastle West hiring fair for servant boys and girls by whom he means those farm labourers who were hired out for nine to eleven month periods, as opposed to permanent, year-round farm labourers or spalpeens, mostly from Kerry, who came simply for the harvest:

Newcastle West is the gateway from the Sliabh Luachra plateau into the golden vale and so it was a central meeting place for the highland servants and the lowland masters. In time [the hiring fair] began to attract business men and professional people from Limerick city who came there looking for women servants thereby competing with the farmers.⁵⁴

Once hired the routine of the farm labourer was by all accounts gruelling. A description of conditions on a farm in the Croom Poor Law Union stated that the labourers worked during the summer months from 7:30 am to 7 pm while in winter they worked from dawn till dusk, roughly 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. An hour was given for dinner and the report also notes that "No piecework is given or any extra payments for hay or corn harvest, but allowances are given while travelling."⁵⁵

While the carters of the Basin in Tralee and the servant boys and girls who sold their services to the farmers of the Golden Vale in 1914 were operating in different parts of the same regional economy, what they had in common was that they were all unskilled workers and, as such, part of the largest and most miserable section of the working class. During the next eight years they were to become the dominant force in the labour movement of the southwest.

⁵² Keogh, pp. 36-7.

⁵³ Reference is made in "Limerick Notes" (DA, May 1912) to the "Black Book" which may be the same as the notorious fine "book" referred to by Keogh.

⁵⁴ Pat Feeley, "Servant boys and girls in Co. Limerick," Old Limerick Journal, no. 1 (Dec. 1979), p. 33.

⁵⁵ Fox, p. 133.

CHAPTER 2

THE LOCAL LABOUR MOVEMENT BEFORE THE WAR

2.1 IRISH LABOUR IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

The beginning of the labour movement in Britain and Ireland coincided with the breakdown of the feudal guild system which had strictly regulated the relationship between masters and journeymen. That the cause of this breakdown was the emergence of capitalism is widely accepted but the precise date of the formation of "combinations" by skilled craftsmen for higher wages and improved working conditions is in many cases unknown. However, by 1729, the combinations were significant enough for the English Parliament to pass the first of many acts making them illegal and imposing stiff punishment on the "combinators". The English legislation was duly reproduced by the Irish Parliament of the time. It was not until 1824-5 that the combination laws were repealed and trade unions were able to emerge from the shadows of illegality. Given the decline of industry in southern Ireland in the early 19th century and the threat to Irish skilled workers using less efficient techniques from the "workshop of the world" it is not surprising, that outside the northeast:

perennial items in the addresses, manifestoes, and agendas issued by the skilled trades from the 1820s onward should be appeals to the public to support Irish manufactures, coupled increasingly with denunciations of the evils of importation.¹

In these conditions lies the key to the southern Irish labour movement's support for Daniel O'Connell in spite of the latter's notorious opposition to trade unions. Skilled southern workers believed that only repeal of the Union could lay the basis for a revival of Irish industry and hence a more secure position for themselves. Nevertheless, in spite of the economic obstacles, Dublin tradesmen managed through sheer strength of organisation to maintain rates comparable with those of their British brethren throughout the nineteenth century.

¹ John W. Boyle, The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century (Washington, D. C., 1988), p. 3.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of "new model" trade unions in Britain which spread rapidly to Ireland. This occurred in the wake of the collapse of the radical Chartist movement which had shaken English society but had only had weak echoes on this side of the Irish sea. The "new model" as exemplified by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), was craft-based and conservative in outlook. It shunned strikes and confrontational tactics and concentrated instead on limiting apprenticeships in order to maintain wage rates. By the end of the century the vast majority of Irish trade unionists, north and south, though especially in the north, were members of British-based "amalgamated" unions such as the ASE. Why did Catholic trade unionists—overwhelmingly in favour of Home Rule—join British-based organisations? The answer lay first of all in the benefits provided by these powerful unions and secondly in the possibility of obtaining work with one's union card in Britain when work was slack at home. These were gains accruing from the Anglicisation of the Irish trade union movement. One of the weaknesses, however, was the reproduction of the craft divisions of the British trade unions on a ridiculously small scale.

A more fundamental weakness of "new model" unionism was that the vast majority of workers who were unskilled or semi-skilled, were left unorganised. While there were real difficulties in organising the unskilled, especially in Ireland, with its high unemployment and large reserves of rural labour, another factor was the barely concealed apathy of craft unions. It was not until 1889-91 that the question was forcefully addressed by a wave of industrial unrest in Britain sparked by "new unionism". The National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL) and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS, whose name changed to the National Union of Railwaymen in 1913) were to the fore of these new unions which brought sections of the semi-skilled and unskilled firmly into the labour movement. These unions organised in Ireland as well but because of the difficulties already alluded to they did not leave as deep a mark. The real cracking of the craft-unionist mould was not to occur here for another twenty years.

In 1894, Irish-based unions as well as the Irish membership of many amalgamateds withdrew from the British Trades Union Congress to form the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC). This did not imply a break with either English trade union methods or the conservative craft-union ethos, but was rather the result of the felt

neglect of Irish issues by the British body. One effect of the formation of the ITUC, however, was that it made nationalist politicians pay more attention to the labour vote.

Several other factors also contributed to this new attitude. First among these was the extension of the parliamentary franchise. Legislation in 1884 had quadrupled the size of the Irish electorate.² The second factor was the reform of local government in 1898 which also expanded the electorate and opened the way for labour to play a much bigger role in local politics. The final factor was the formation of the British Labour Representation Committee in 1900.

The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), reunited in 1900, responded by running a few "labour-nationalists" and claiming to be a labour party since they were the party of all classes of Irishmen. They also supported the odd piece of pro-labour legislation. Most southern Irish trade union leaders found these palliatives acceptable since they continued to believe that Home Rule was the central prerequisite for the revival of Irish industry. All else was secondary in this perspective. Affiliation to the British Labour Party or the establishment of an independent Irish Labour Party, as advocated by socialists and some left-nationalists in the ITUC, would break the popular front for Home Rule and, therefore, was opposed by most activists.

But if the alliance between the southern Irish labour movement and the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie was based on a common desire to create a protected Irish market, then the Orange bond between employer and employee in the north was based on precisely the opposite. Protestant industrialists never lost the opportunity to emphasise to "their" workers that Belfast's relative prosperity was based on access to Imperial markets. Nevertheless, it was in Belfast that Alexander Bowman, the first Irish trade unionist candidate for Westminster, stood in 1885.

The arrival of Jim Larkin in Belfast in 1907 marks the beginning of a new era in the history of the Irish labour movement. Within months of his arrival, his incendiary speeches had sparked a bitter strike on the Belfast docks uniting Catholic and Protestant dockers and carters. Though the strike was defeated with the help of thousands of British troops, Larkin stayed on and began organising other Irish ports. After the NUDL sacked him he and other Irish trade

² E. Rumpf and A. C. Hepburn, Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland (Liverpool, 1977), p. 6.

unionists established the Irish Transport and General Workers Union on 4 January, 1909.

The ITGWU was the second attempt to organise the unskilled and semi-skilled in this country. This development paralleled the deepest and most prolonged wave of industrial unrest in British history up to that time, beginning in 1911 and lasting until the outbreak of World War I. Industrial unrest was also accompanied by the spread of syndicalist ideas in the British trade union movement. These influences as well as the example of the American organisation, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) contributed to the ITGWU's radical project. But in spite of its rapid rise and the fear it inspired in Ireland's capitalists, the union was defeated at the hands of William Martin Murphy and the Dublin employers in 1913-4. Nevertheless a firm foundation for general unionism had been laid which at long last meant the end of craft-union dominance in the Irish labour movement.

2.2 FROM GUILDS TO TRADES COUNCILS

Many of Limerick City's guilds had been in existence well before the start of 19th century, but with the development of capitalist relations of production, the bond between masters and journeymen in the city, as elsewhere, had completely broken down. Robert Herbert records the following episode:

In 1820 the struggle had become so bitter that the United Tradesmen attacked and wrecked the Manufactories of James Quinlan and Stephenson and of B. O'Brien. As a result of the attack, several butchers, harness makers, coach-makers, and smiths were put in Gaol.³

This was only one of many such conflicts in Limerick at the time. The trade unionists, although exclusively skilled artisans, were forced of necessity to adopt extremely militant tactics. As Herbert puts it, "the Masters had so much law on their side that the Journeymen became completely lawless." Though social unrest was certainly not new to Limerick City (for example, food riots had occurred in April 1791), the workers' actions in 1820 were based on a qualitatively different level

³ Robert Herbert, "The Trade Guilds of Limerick," North Munster Antiquarian Journal, v. II (1940-1), p. 130.

of organisation.⁴ Thus, they indicate the emergence of an authentic urban labour movement in the southwest.

But almost thirty five years earlier, in 1786, the "Rightboys" of Castleisland, County Kerry, demanded a 6 1/2d per day minimum rate for rural labourers. The Rightboys, like the Whiteboys, were agrarian terrorists. Their central demand was the abolition of tithes for the established church though they also wanted an abatement of the levies made by their own clergy. The wage demand was not unique to Castleisland but the incident was notable "in that the regulation of wages did not formally appear in the Rightboy notices of county Cork for several months more," Cork being the centre of Rightboy activity.⁵ Though these demands were presumably directed at landlords, they prefigure the later conflicts between labourers and farmers.

The actions of Castleisland's Rightboys and of Limerick's United Trades illustrate the urban and rural components of class struggle in the Kerry/Limerick region and the quite early date at which these components began to express themselves. However, for most of the nineteenth century, the labour movement in Kerry and Limerick remained, like organised labour nationally, dominated by craft unionism. Nevertheless, the wave of industrial unrest which spread across the British Isles during 1889-91 led to local attempts at organising the semi-skilled and unskilled, particularly in Limerick City. But the most dramatic local conflict in that period involved porkbutchers, a group of skilled workers who, unusually, were strategically placed at the heart of a rapidly expanding industry. This gave them an advantageous position in which militant tactics could be used with confidence, instead of desperation.

On 17 January 1890, pig "salters" from Cork, Limerick and Waterford met in the headquarters of the Limerick Porkbutchers Society to form the Amalgamated Society of Porkbutchers. The salters wanted their wages brought up to the level of other craftsmen and they wanted a shortening of their working day which began at 3 am and ended at 6 pm. The day after their meeting, "the Limerick branch of the new union served notice on Shaw's for restoration of 'pig money', a tip of a penny per pig formerly paid by the pig buyers to the salters, but now given over to the curers."⁶ Upon hearing this,

⁴ Hibernian Magazine, cited in Boyle, p. 18.

⁵ Maurice J. Bric, "Popular Protest Movements in Kerry, 1770-1880," Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society, no. 18 (1985), p. 174.

⁶ Emmet O'Connor, A Labour History of Waterford (Waterford, 1989), p. 91.

the owners of the major curing firms declared that if any section of the workforce went out on strike, then there would be a general lockout. The lockout in Limerick, Waterford and Cork was duly put into effect on 27 January after the workers at Shaw's began their strike. But after a hard-fought battle the workers won an increase in their wages and a 60 hour workweek. Nor was this the last example of solidarity between the porkbutchers in this industry's main centres for in 1896, "with guarantees of support from Limerick colleagues, the Porkbutchers [in Waterford] faced down the threat of a lockout to maintain their closed shop in Denny's."⁷

The sympathetic actions of porkbutchers were the result of thorough organisation. Likewise, a sign of the increasing maturity of the broader labour movement was the establishment of trades councils. According to the Board of Trade's records, the Limerick City council was first established in 1893. Before then, local workers came together in more temporary formations, such as the "United Tradesmen" of 1820, to deal with immediate exigencies. By 1895 there were 20 trade unions and 1700 trade unionists affiliated to the council.⁸ But a rapid decline occurred after this and by 1898 only 850 workers were affiliated. The council was dissolved the following year and was not reformed until 1905.⁹ According to Cahill, this was due to pressure from the ITUC, "who had complained that Limerick had failed to manage a respectable presence even once a year at the congress."¹⁰ The council has been in continuous existence ever since.

The reborn Limerick United Trades and Labour Council (LUTLC) started with a membership of 1,250 in 1905, dipping to 880 in 1908. By 1910, the last date for which Board of Trade figures are available, there were 18 unions affiliated with 2,000 members.¹¹ These were mainly, though not exclusively, organisations of skilled workers. However, these figures did not include the unions attached to the Federated Labour Council which had been formed to cater for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. If we combine the reports of

⁷ *ibid*, p. 99.

⁸ "Eighth report by the Chief Labour Correspondent on Trade Unions, 1894 and 1895....," PP 1896, v. 93, p. 420.

⁹ "Report of the Board of Trade (Labour Department) by the Chief Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade on Trade Unions in 1901," PP 1902, v. 97; "Board of Trade...Report on Trade Unions in 1905-7," PP 1909, v. 89.

¹⁰ Liam Cahill, Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet 1919; A Threat to British Power in Ireland (Dublin, 1990), p. 36.

¹¹ "Board of Trade...Report on Trade Unions in 1905-7," PP 1909, v. 89; "Board of Trade...Report on Trade Unions in 1908-10," PP 1912-3, v. 47.

Table 2.1 - Trade unions in Limerick City, 1910.

Name of union	Date of formation	Membership
Limerick United Trades and Labour Council		
Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants		
Bookbinders Society		
Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners		
Engineers (Amalgamated Society of Engineers?)		
Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association		209
Labourers (Limerick Workmen's Labour Union?)		
Limerick Asylum Employés Association		
Limerick Guild of House Painters	1821	67
Limerick Masons and Bricklayers	1810	94
Limerick Operative Bakers Society (branch of National Amalgamated Bakers and Confectioners)	1745, reestablished 1864	80
Limerick Printers' Society (a)		
Limerick Sandmen's Society		
Limerick Society of Coopers	unknown, reorganised 1890	58
Mill Sawyers' Society		
Packing Case Makers		
Plumbers		
Stonecutters		
Tailors' Society		
Limerick Federated Labour Council		
Ballast Carters' Society		
Coalporters		
Hired Carmen		
Limerick Bread Van Men	1900	42
Limerick Corporation Employés	1890	90
Limerick Dock Labourers' Society	1905	263
Limerick Gasworkers' Society		
Limerick United Carmen and Storemen's Union	1907	890
Quarryworkers		
Tannery Operatives		
Others		
Grocers Assistants' Association		
Irish Post Office Clerks		
Irish National Teachers Organisation		
Limerick Harbour Employees	1894	40
Limerick Pork Butchers	1890	300
Plasterers Society		
Postmen's Federation		
Typographical Association		

(a) - This is probably the Typographical Association, also listed under "others".

Sources: "Board of Trade...Report on Trade Unions in 1908-1910," PP 1912-3, v. 47; Draper's Assistant (DA), March 1911; Limerick Leader (LL) 3 January, 17 January, 23 November & 16 December, 1910; records of Limerick Operative Bakers Society, TU1 (Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) Archives, held at University College Dublin (UCD)); Irish Trade Union Congress, 1909 Report.

societies regularly attending meetings, as given in the Limerick Leader, the Limerick societies listed as sending delegates to the 1909 Irish Trade Union Congress, along with membership figures for some societies gleaned from several other sources, we obtain the picture given in Table 2.1.

This gives a total of 36 unions operating in the city in 1910. It is difficult to ascertain how many of these besides the railway servants, carpenters and tailors (and probably the engineers) were part of amalgamated British/Irish unions. Nine unions were listed in the Board of Trade returns as being separate locally-based entities. Five others were branches of national, Irish-based unions.

These returns along with sources for two other unions give membership figures for 5 of the 18 unions affiliated to the Trades and Labour Council or 508 out of 2,000 members. Besides this, we have figures for 6 other unions, accounting for a further 1,625 trade unionists. This still leaves the membership of 12 other unions unaccounted for and it is therefore quite possible that the total organised labour movement numbered over 4,000 men and women. The extant figures also indicate that, due to the size of the United Carmen and Storemen, unskilled and semi-skilled workers may have been the majority of the total.

It is not surprising that the local craft unions whose year of formation is known originate from the early nineteenth century or before. The new unionist wave is reflected in the presence of the Pork Butchers and Corporation Employees both formed in 1890 and perhaps also in the Harbour Employees established four years later. But the formation of the local branch of the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association (IDAA) in 1901; of the Limerick Dock Labourers' Society in 1905 (although the dockers had been organised as early as 1863); and most importantly of the United Carmen and Storemen's Union in 1907 indicates an accelerating drive to organise the semi-skilled and unskilled in the first years of this century.¹² By 1910, the three societies had 1,362 members between them, more than two-thirds of the 2,000 affiliated to the Trades and Labour Council.

By contrast, a permanent trades council was not established in Tralee until 1914. However, more transient formations existed before then. An example was the "Tralee United Building Trades" which met in 1910 and included representatives from the following societies:

¹² For reference to Limerick dockers' organisation in 1863, see Boyle, pp. 104-5.

carpenters, masons, stonecutters, plasterers, plumbers, painters.¹³ Given their temporary character, these bodies would not, as a general rule, have had the administrative or financial structure characteristic of a trades council.

Reports of the early meetings of the Tralee Trades and Labour Council (TTLC) in 1914 indicate a wider base with representatives attending from the following unions: bakers, tailors, carpenters, masons, postmen, printers, IDAA, Workers Union, and the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF).¹⁴ We have no membership figures for these eight unions in 1914 though we know that the IDAA branch had 81 members at the start of 1913.¹⁵ There is thus no way to study the depth of organisation in comparison with Limerick. Like Limerick however, the composition of the trades council may not tell the whole story since other reports indicate the existence of a Stonecutters' Society, a Carpenters' Society, as well as branches of the Grocers Assistants' Association, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), and the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI).¹⁶ It is also noteworthy that the branch of the Workers Union played a similar role to the United Carmen and Storemen since it organised unskilled workers, including the carters of the main merchant houses. Hence, as in Limerick, the work of organising the unskilled was underway by 1914.

2.3 LABOUR AND POLITICS BEFORE 1914

Besides the building of trades councils and the organising of the unskilled, a third sign of the maturation of the labour movement in the southwest in the period before World War I was its involvement in political activity. It has already been noted that the courting of the labour vote by nationalist politicians came in the wake of reforms in the parliamentary and the local government franchises as well as in response to the birth of the British Labour Party. The IPP in the south was largely successful in hitching labour to its cart and Kerry and Limerick were no exception to this rule. However, labour's first foray into politics in the region was on a nominally independent basis.

In Limerick City, labour's preparations for the 1899 Corporation elections were well underway months in advance. The minutes of the

¹³ Kerryman (KM), 12 February 1910.

¹⁴ KM, 19 September 1914 & 28 November 1914.

¹⁵ DA, March 1913.

¹⁶ KM, 14 February, 23 February & 11 July 1914.

Operative Bakers' Society record that during the previous September it was decided at one of their meetings to subscribe £5 for the formation of "Ward Committees" to ensure the "proper representation of the working classes on the Municipal Council."¹⁷ The bakers were responding to a circular sent out by the Mechanics' Institute. In the absence of a trades' council, the Institute had taken the initiative. In general, it seemed to perform some of the functions of a council.

Nominations were submitted in early January and, for the first time, large numbers of the candidates were men with sturdy occupations such as bootmaker, baker, tailor and cooper. However, the "Labour" candidates were not exclusively workers. Of the party's thirty four candidates, we know the occupations of twenty four from newspaper reports. Of these only one was an unskilled worker (shop-porter), sixteen or exactly two-thirds were craftsmen while seven were petty bourgeois (two solicitors; one "licensed spirit dealer and law clerk"; one pig buyer; one horse dealer; one grocer; and one storekeeper).¹⁸ Labour's apparent leader was the Fenian ex-prisoner, John Daly. He was listed as a storekeeper although we know from another source that he was also a master baker.¹⁹ He was the main speaker at two rallies in January, at the second of which he appealed to the workers in the following terms:

And when you go into the booths with all this array of names before you, it will be, perhaps, confusing and many will be nervous on that account. Try and remember this—that you of the people are on the one side, the merchants and flunkeys are on the other side.²⁰

Besides receiving the support of Daly and another prominent nationalist politician, Michael Joyce, who ran on the Labour ticket in the Customhouse Ward, the party had the vocal support of the Limerick Leader. In one editorial, it was emphasised that, "if the Limerick workers want to have their views represented by the Council, they must return a majority of their own class."²¹

While at times the main issue in the election seemed to be John Daly (the report on the demonstration cited above was entitled "'In

¹⁷ minutes of Limerick Operative Bakers' Society, 22 September 1898.

¹⁸ LL, 4 January 1899.

¹⁹ Limerick's Fighting Story 1916-21: Told by the Men Who Made It (Tralee, 1948), p. 20.

²⁰ LL, 16 January 1899.

²¹ LL, 6 January 1899.

the Dock'—John Daly's Defence—Magnificent Meeting Yesterday"), the more substantive issues were working class housing and the city's sanitation. The "housing question" was a continuously recurring theme in labour political activity in the entire period leading up to World War I. It was also the favourite topic for nationalist politicians in the mood to make promises to working class voters.

The elections were held on 16 January 1899 and on the 18th the Limerick Leader headlined "A People's Parliament—King Democracy Reigns in Limerick—A Magnificent Victory for the Workers". There were eighty one candidates for forty seats in eight wards. Poll-toppers in each ward became aldermen and the rest were councillors. In addition to the Labour nominees, twenty seven candidates were members of the outgoing Corporation and a number were fielded by the merchants. Labour's victory was indeed resounding as twenty four of their number were elected including four aldermen. The merchants' slate only saw three of their number become councillors while another became an alderman. Ten of the outgoing members as well as two independents were also elected. Both Daly and Joyce topped the poll in their respective wards. Hence Labour had an absolute majority as well as being by far the largest "party" on the new corporation.

Nor was the success of labour candidates by any means simply a Limerick phenomenon. As O'Connor points out, the elections "...whisked a candy floss of popular power. Standing under various guises, labour candidates scored spectacular, if transient success in the major towns."²² In Tralee, the "United Trades" fielded eight candidates for the twenty one seats on the Urban District Council. Again, housing was the key issue. Outgoing members pleaded that they were very sympathetic but that little could be done because of red tape. One of them, the prominent merchant Robert Mc Cowen, tried to mollify the newly enfranchised workers by stating in a letter "To the Electors of Tralee" that, "I am a large employer of labour and have ever been in sympathy with the working classes, whose condition I should like to see bettered."²³ The result of the elections was good for the labour candidates, if not as dramatic as the Limerick victory. Four of the eight candidates were returned with one coming third in the overall poll. However, McCowen was elected as well.

²² O'Connor, Waterford, p. 107.

²³ Kerry Sentinel (KS), 14 January 1899.

Meanwhile, in Listowel, all seven labour candidates were elected, giving them an absolute majority on the twelve member council. The Kerry Sentinel's correspondent went so far as to declare that:

The return of a few of the other members elected was also directly due to the labour vote, and there can be no doubt that had the working classes selected twelve instead of seven representatives and voted solidly for them that they would have procured their return.²⁴

In Killarney, the Irish National Foresters nominated candidates pledged to support Home Rule and improvement of the conditions of the working class especially housing. And in Newcastle West, a branch of the Trades and Labour Association nominated a candidate. The Association was a successor to Michael Davitt's Irish Democratic Labour Federation but, as Boyle points out, they were both firmly under the control of the nationalist politicians. The local nominee, a merchant, a J.P., and a house and land proprietor was not, however, universally popular among the workers. At an election rally, "...a voice from the crowd denounced the merchant as never having paid a pound in labor, to which his proposer replied, 'That will do now. We don't want to insult anyone.'"²⁵

What happened to the promising Labour "class of '99"? It would appear that the great expectations that workers had placed in the candidates were quickly dissipated as the new councillors proved no more able than their predecessors to deliver immediate relief. Furthermore, the cohesion of the localised labour "parties" was very tenuous given that many of the candidates were simply nationalist or Republican politicians who had donned the "labour" cloak for electoral convenience. The transience of this success was in marked contrast to the way in which Land League slates for Boards of Poor Law Guardians in 1881 had paved the way for a consolidation of local power into the hands of tenant farmers, merchants and the Church.²⁶ Eleven years later, in 1910, a writer to the Limerick Leader, urging the reorganisation of the "Labour Electoral Association" to contest the local elections recalled the initial success of 1899 but declared, "now, I

²⁴ KS, 21 January 1899.

²⁵ Freeman's Journal, 10 January 1899, cited in Boyle, p. 164.

²⁶ William L. Feingold, "The Tralee poor law election, 1881," in S. Clark and J. S. Donnelly (eds.), Irish Peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914 (Manchester, 1983), pp. 285-310.

am not going to question what was the cause of the breakup of that party, because the less said about that matter the better."²⁷

Nonetheless, one effect of the elections was certainly to make the IPP take the labour vote more seriously. An example of this was a meeting held in Tralee in September 1901, "for the purpose of establishing a trade and labour federation for Tralee." The resolutions adopted were standard ones for trade union rallies. They included appeals to support Irish-made goods and prevent importation; a call on local government bodies to employ only local labour; and votes of "sincere sympathy" to striking bakers at Latchford's in Tralee and boot and shoe makers at Hilliard's in Killarney. However, the chairman of the meeting was D.M. Moriarty, a solicitor and chairman of the County Council, and the main speeches were given by Thomas O'Donnell, MP for West Kerry, and two other MPs. Moriarty gave an introductory speech in which he said that:

He did not see anything to be gained by speaking of capitalists as tyrants, and language of that kind. He preferred to regard capitalists as people who are fighting a commercial battle trying to get as far ahead as they can in the commercial race of life; and looking at them from that point of view, they may take it for granted that all they could get out of capitalists was all they could squeeze out of them (loud cheers).²⁸

In this way, mildly radical rhetoric was combined with support to the existing class structure in order to co-opt workers into the IPP fold. Moriarty explicitly promoted the United Irish League (UIL), the Party's constituency organisation. It was a classic example of the IPP/UIL acting as a "labour" party. Rallies were not, however, the only aspect of this strategy since O'Donnell, for example, acted as a mediator in a bitter strike by Tralee carpenters in 1907. He also mediated in other disputes.²⁹

The success of the IPP's approach is reflected in the level of trade union support given to Limerick Alderman Michael Joyce in his bid to retain his Westminster seat in 1910. Joyce, it will be recalled, had been one of the labour candidates in 1899. A Leader piece entitled

²⁷ LL, 9 February 1910.

²⁸ Kerry Evening Post, 25 September 1901.

²⁹ A. J. Gaughan, A Political Odyssey: Thomas O'Donnell M.P. for West Kerry 1900-1918 (Mount Merrion, Co. Dublin, 1983), p. 48.

"Alderman Joyce's Claims" states that his work, "...as a labour organiser and advocate cannot be too highly praised. During the past nine years he has been looked upon as the ablest labour advocate of the Irish Party." The article also praises his efforts at arbitration in a number of strikes and his attempt to set up a local "Court of Arbitration."³⁰ Apparently, local trade unions were impressed with these claims as well since, in the same issue, the paper carried reports of a whole series of labour endorsements: "Harbour Employes Say 'Joyce'"; "United Carmen and Storemen's Society: Support Alderman Joyce"; "Dock Labourers to Support Alderman Joyce". He was duly returned by a two to one majority.

The influence of nationalist politics can be seen even more strongly, however, in the case of the Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA). The ILLA was founded in 1894. It followed in the wake of several other attempts, centred in Cork, to organise farm labourers. The Kanturk Labourers' Club, established in 1869, was the first, followed by the Irish National Agricultural Labourers' Union (INALU), set up as a branch of the British NALU in 1873. Isaac Butt was elected president of the INALU but by the end of 1874 the organisation had largely collapsed. According to Bradley, "a major cause of its failure was the constraints imposed by the lack of an independent political stance, the leaders of the INALU feeling it necessary to work with Butt's Home Government Association from the union's inception."³¹ Yet another attempt was the Labour League, established in 1881 at a convention in Limerick. It played an ancillary role to the Land League though its foundation was soon followed by a wave of farm strikes in Co. Cork. A fourth organisation was the Kanturk Trade and Labour Association, established in 1889.

The ILLA, like previous labourers' organisations was strongest in Cork though it was also well organised in Tipperary and Limerick and present in numerous other counties. A feature of the earlier labourers' organisations had been an uncertainty about whether to focus on seeking better wages, hours and working conditions like other trade unions or, instead, to fight for land redistribution. This uncertainty, "...reflected the mentality of a people who were a rural proletariat but also farmers without land."³² The ILLA chose to

³⁰ LL, 17 January 1910.

³¹ Dan Bradley, Farm Labourers: Irish Struggle 1900-1976 (Belfast, 1988), p. 25. See also Pamela L. R. Horn, "The National Agricultural Labourers' Union in Ireland, 1873-9," Irish Historical Studies, no. 67 (March 1971), pp. 340-52.

³² Bradley, p. 25.

concentrate on exerting pressure on the politicians to obtain more funds for labourers' cottages and on the Estates Commissioners for a larger portion of the land in the settlement of estates. Thus in 1914 the Co. Limerick Organising Committee of the ILLA was calling for "ten acres out of every 100" sold to be set aside for labourers.³³ Demands were also raised on behalf of road workers who were often out of work rural labourers. Thus one ILLA meeting "respectfully" asked the Limerick County Council, "to give preference of work on the roads to members of the Land and Labour Association."³⁴

The reunification of the IPP in 1900 also saw the incorporation of the Land and Labour Association into the nationalist machine. By that point delegates who represented rural labourers had ceased to attend the ITUC's annual meetings, one of them, William Field, MP, having been debarred because he was not a bona fide trade unionist.³⁵ Fusion with the UIL/IPP did not, however, lead to a cosy relationship.

In 1905-6, William O'Brien, the maverick Cork MP, sought to build a base in the wake of his split with Redmond by wresting control of the ILLA from the IPP. His ally in this undertaking was DD. Sheehan, another Cork MP who was the president of the Association. They toured the Munster counties where the organisation was based but the Redmondites were hardly prepared to ignore this challenge. The result was a split in the ILLA with a Cork-based organisation (which subsequently split again) under the control of Sheehan and O'Brien and a rump remaining loyal to Redmond. Hence the energy of rural labour activists in the early part of the century was heavily absorbed in nationalist faction-fighting.

A particular example of how such faction fighting could dominate ILLA activity occurred in April 1906 during a Tralee stop on O'Brien's tour. The "Labour Demonstration" was preceded by a meeting between the Kerry members of the ILLA Central Council and representatives of several of the town's trade unions. The suspicions of urban workers towards O'Brien's campaign were reflected in the insistence by Mr. Myles, speaking for the carpenters, "to get some guarantee before they could join hands, that they would be protected against the 'handyman'." This was a reference to the use of non-union labour by local government bodies. The response by Mr. Shanahan, a member of the ILLA Central Council and a local councillor as well, was

³³ *LL*, 15 April 1914.

³⁴ *LL*, 20 March 1914.

³⁵ O'Connor, *Waterford*, p. 94.

that, "he would neither sit, vote nor act with the handyman (hear, hear)."³⁶ A resolution against the use of non-union labour by public boards was then duly adopted at the demonstration.

However, it was neither this nor any other issue relating to the conditions of rural or urban workers which dominated the proceedings on 15 April. Tom O'Donnell, invited to speak, used the occasion to put forward proposals for the IPP's reunification, blaming both sides equally for the dispute. O'Brien, predictably objected in strong terms since he considered the fault for the split to lie entirely with the Redmondites. To judge from the Kerry Sentinel's account, the crowd was friendlier to O'Brien but what is most striking is that this exchange completely overshadowed the meeting's supposed "labour" objectives. The influence of the O'Brienite policy of "reconciliation" with Unionist landlords was also reflected in the first of the motions that were passed:

That we approve of the proposal to hold a representative conference on the labourers' question; that we thoroughly approve of the policy of establishing a wider union of sympathy, action and endeavour amongst all creeds and classes of Irishmen.³⁷

Nor was the situation particularly different with the rump ILLA which remained loyal to Redmond. By 1910, this organisation seems to have been particularly strong in Limerick.³⁸ The organisation was led by J.J. O'Shee, MP, a staunch Redmondite, and by 1914 the president of the ILLA's Benefit Society, was Thomas Lundon, MP for East Limerick. In April of that year, with Home Rule appearing to be imminent, a meeting of the Committee of Management of the Benefit Society passed a resolution claiming to represent "twelve thousand of the patriotic toilers of this land" which declared its "unbounded confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party and their indomitable leader, Mr. John E. Redmond."³⁹ Bradley is right to say that, "it would be...simplistic to attribute all the ILLA shortcomings to political manipulation by nationalist leaders," citing unemployment and emigration as two factors militating against all organisations of farm

³⁶ KS, 11 April 1906.

³⁷ KS, 18 April 1906.

³⁸ For example, of the twelve men elected to its Central Council in January 1910, fully six were from Limerick (LL, 28 January 1910).

³⁹ LL, 10 April 1914.

labourers.⁴⁰ Nevertheless the degree of subordination to the politicians demonstrated by the several ILLAs is unique among the labour organisations of the period.

It would appear then that the significant political distinction among Limerick and Kerry trade unionists was not whether to ally themselves with nationalism but to what degree. This perspective was based on the belief that capitalism had to be improved not eliminated and that the best immediate hope for Irish workers was in an alliance with their employers to secure Home Rule. One partial exception to this rule came at the ITUC's Athlone Congress in 1906.

At this Congress, the Limerick baker, Stephen Dineen, delivered what Boyle calls, "the first unequivocally socialist presidential address" in the history of the ITUC.⁴¹ Dineen's speech began by emphasising the need for the reform of Ireland's education system as a prerequisite for industrial revival and also held out hope, "for the attainment of a better spirit...between the classes." His conclusion which focused on unemployment was less compromising:

But even with all these palliatives, I have no hesitation in declaring that the Unemployed Problem will still be with us until the workers' Party becomes the dominant force in the State, and the evils of the Capitalist System, under which nineteen out of every twenty of us go down to the grave in poverty, is finally got rid of by the substitution of public for private control of industry.⁴²

It was also at this Congress that an acrimonious debate was set off by the resolution from a Belfast delegate calling on congress to affiliate to the British Labour Representation Committee. A Limerick delegate named Hayes immediately put forward an amendment which concluded by denouncing any call for a new party in Ireland, "...as in our opinion, the Irish Party is everything that labour requires." His seconder, also from Limerick, stated that the British Labour Party was a good idea "for those north of the Boyne" but that any southerner "who would try to put in a man purely on the labour ticket he thought he should be inside a lunatic asylum."⁴³ In the end, both the original resolution and the amendment failed by substantial margins.

⁴⁰ Bradley, p. 27.

⁴¹ Boyle, pp. 234-5.

⁴² Irish Trade Union Congress, 1906 Report, p. 36.

⁴³ *ibid*, pp. 70-3.

Nevertheless, during the next few years, the idea of an independent Irish Labour Party made considerable headway in the ITUC. But, in the southwest, Stephen Dineen represented a small minority indeed.

2.4 A YEAR IN THE SOUTHWESTERN LABOUR MOVEMENT

The following account is based primarily on newspaper reports and to a lesser extent on the "Report on Strikes and Lock-Outs...in 1913" in the Parliamentary Papers and Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) internal reports. Of the three newspapers used, the Kerryman, in existence since 1904, represented extreme nationalism in Kerry. According to Gaughan, "it was the first paper in Ireland to support Sinn Féin."⁴⁴ Its bogeymen were Tom O'Donnell MP and the IPP "bosses". The Limerick Leader, on the other hand, was a Redmondite organ *par excellence* and never missed an opportunity to praise the "great leader". It was also continuously defending Catholicism against its perceived enemies. A typical editorial entitled "The Hibernian Order" was a paean to the AOH for its "support and furtherance of the twin principles of Faith and Fatherland" against "the powers of Freemasonry and Ascendancy." The Freemasons were singled out for exercising, "an immense secret influence in almost every department of life in this country and throughout Europe."⁴⁵ It was similarly extreme Catholicism which had fostered the vicious attack on Limerick's Jewish community in 1904.⁴⁶ The third paper used is the Irish Worker, organ of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, edited by Jim Larkin.

The Parliamentary report on strikes in the United Kingdom declared that 1913:

was the third of a series in which a considerable number of important disputes have occurred. Single years in the past have surpassed one or more of these years in respect of number of disputes, number of workpeople involved or aggregate duration of disputes; but so far as the available statistics show, there has never before been such a series of three consecutive years marked as a whole by such widespread industrial unrest.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ A. J. Gaughan, Austin Stack: Portrait of a Separatist (Mount Merrion, Co. Dublin, 1977), p. 32.

⁴⁵ LL, 20 April 1914.

⁴⁶ Pat Feeley, The Rise and Fall of Irish Anti-Semitism: the 1904 campaign (Dublin, Labour History Workshop, 1984).

⁴⁷ "Report on Strikes and Lock-Outs and on Conciliation and Arbitration in the

The most important strike in Limerick that year was by 300 dock workers and carters and began on 23 January. At one point, 300 police were drafted into the city "for the protection of 'strike-breakers' and property at the docks."⁴⁸ The strike was settled on 11 February "on employers terms" after the intervention of a Conciliation Committee headed by the mayor.⁴⁹

Meanwhile in Tralee, the Drapers' Assistants reached an apparently successful conclusion to their campaign to abolish the hated "living-in" system. On Christmas Eve, the five principal drapery establishments in the town, including Revington & Sons and The Munster Warehouse, signed an agreement with the IDAA. The agreement stipulated that each assistant was to receive £35 a year "in addition to present salary in lieu of board and lodging." There were various exceptions, particularly for women who wanted to continue "living-in" but it was further stipulated that those who remained in the old arrangement would not exceed 10% of the total paid assistants. That many women were reluctant to seek lodging in the town is further indicated by the Draper's Assistant's complaint of the "want of loyalty of a number of the assistants, more especially the women" in one major firm. In the union's view, this hesitation had delayed and even jeopardized the agreement.⁵⁰

The triennial elections for Urban District Councils and Corporations occurred at the beginning of 1914. By comparison with 1899, labour played a much smaller role this time. In Limerick, the local branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) endorsed one of their own members, Michael O'Donnell, standing in the Castle Ward.⁵¹ Meanwhile, another candidate, James Gilligan, denounced his opponent in the Abbey Ward, Alderman O'Brien, as working in the interests of the employers.⁵² A meeting of the Trades and Labour Council after the election passed a motion, "congratulating the representatives of labour who have been elected to the Municipal Council" but there is no evidence of an endorsed slate.⁵³ In all probability, the "representatives" referred to were either the nominees of particular unions or "friends of labour"

United Kingdom in 1913, with Comparative Statistics," PP 1914-16, v. 36, p. ii.

⁴⁸ B. MacGiolla Choille (ed.), Intelligence Notes 1913-16 (Dublin, 1966), p. 12.

⁴⁹ "Report on Strikes...in 1913," pp. 100 ff.

⁵⁰ DA, January 1914.

⁵¹ LL, 12 January 1914.

⁵² LL, 14 January 1914.

⁵³ LL, 28 January 1914.

nationalists. In general, the elections seems to have been a low priority for the Limerick labour movement.

However, in Tralee, there is no indication of even this limited activity. The election was noteworthy only in that it saw the return of the town's first woman councillor, Mrs. Maud Walsh. In her acceptance speech, she promised to ameliorate working class housing and declared that "...any reasonable request from [the working man] shall always have prior claim on my influence as a Town Councillor (cheers)."⁵⁴ This promise was not unique. In a pre-election issue, the Kerryman noted that, "in the addresses of Candidates for Municipal honours...the question of providing proper accommodation for the Working Classes looms up big and large." The paper went on to say that in Tralee and Killarney, "slums exist which are a disgrace to civilisation. Human beings are herded together in unhealthy shanties in such a way as to effectively preclude either physical or moral health."⁵⁵ Housing evidently was still seen as a crucial issue by many voters but labour was unwilling or unable to translate this into an independent electoral campaign.

In mid-February, around forty carters, porters and packers employed by Messrs. J. G. Boyd & Co. of Limerick City went on strike, demanding the re-instatement of a fellow-worker, Fred McDonnell. He had been dismissed for being absent from work without leave though he declared that he had been ill and had tried to inform the management. The managing director, William Holliday, refused to meet a deputation from the United Carmen and Storemen's Union which represented most of the men and within days the strike began. Besides the dismissal, workers expressed the fear that many of them were about to be made redundant by the introduction of motor lorries.⁵⁶ The strike lasted five months and was the most important labour dispute in Kerry and Limerick in 1914. In spite of the relatively small numbers involved, the duration and relative militancy of the strike make it a good case study of the physiognomy of local class struggle in this period.

In his February report, the RIC's County Inspector for Limerick stated that:

The strike has...on the whole, been conducted in a peaceable manner. The local workers have

⁵⁴ KM, 24 January 1914.

⁵⁵ KM, 17 January 1914.

⁵⁶ LL, 16 & 18 February 1914.

to be escorted home by the police. The strikers have not the sympathy of the working men as a body.⁵⁷

Over the next few months, however, several cases were brought against strikers alleged to have attacked those who had taken their jobs. The most serious of these came before the city justices in April. A number of men were accused of several assaults, supposed to have occurred on 1 April. The justices sentenced two strikers to five weeks imprisonment and fined another 10s.⁵⁸

The strike dragged on into the summer with the workers' position looking more and more doubtful since Boyd's claimed they were no longer needed. Colour was added by managing director Holliday's verbal sparring with Charles Moore, secretary of the United Carmen and Storemen. At one point, Holliday wrote to the Leader declaring his devotion to "properly constituted and administered trade unionism." His problem was with "Socialism, Larkinism and Mooreism, the enemies of society and the would-be destroyer of the relations existing between capital and labour."⁵⁹ Moore replied in the next issue of the paper that accusations of socialism were slanderous. This spokesman for the largest union of unskilled workers in the region then went on to assure Holliday that "any Catholic" who supported socialism was nothing less than a "recreant to the creed and a traitor to the ancient Faith for which his ancestors bled."⁶⁰ Such outraged assurances did not, however, soften Holliday's stance.

There was one point at which the strike seemed on the verge of escalation. On 29 May, dockers at the Limerick Steamship Company who were also members of the United Carmen and Storemen refused to work with Boyd's employees. Five men were then dismissed by the company and "a large body of the dock labourers employed by the shipping companies...ceased work."⁶¹ Within a couple of days a settlement was reached as a result of negotiations between the Mayor, Alderman Joyce, MP, and representatives of the Employers' Federation. The dismissed men were reinstated after undertaking to "handle all goods entrusted to them."⁶²

⁵⁷ Limerick County Inspector (LCI), RIC, monthly reports (Colonial Office (CO) 904), February 1914.

⁵⁸ LL, 3 April 1914.

⁵⁹ LL, 11 March 1914.

⁶⁰ LL, 16 March 1914.

⁶¹ LL, 3 June 1914; see also LCI, May 1914.

⁶² LL, 5 June 1914

A month later, with the Boyd's strike drawing to a close, James Connolly came and addressed a large meeting of the Carmen and Storemen's Society. He came at the society's invitation to discuss amalgamation with the ITGWU. Despite the RIC inspector's conclusion that Connolly's attempt "completely failed", it is nevertheless notable that the meeting took place at all. It is also quite ironic that Ireland's leading socialist was invited by the same society whose secretary had so recently fulminated against socialism in the local press.⁶³

In mid-July, the strike came to an end after the intervention of Rev. Mangan, the "Spiritual Director" of the Arch Confraternity of the Holy Family. The settlement was a complete defeat for the union since Holliday only agreed to take back thirteen out of thirty six strikers and the rest as "vacancies occurred."⁶⁴ This followed several other attempts at negotiating a settlement including one by the Farmers Association in May.⁶⁵ The Leader had earlier responded to the impasse by advocating an arbitration board to settle industrial disputes in the city. Both the Federated Labour Council and the Trades and Labour Council discussed and endorsed the idea but nothing more came of it.⁶⁶

A total of three strikes occurred in Limerick City in 1914. Besides the strike at Boyd's and the sympathetic action by dock labourers in June, there was a strike by 70 dock workers employed by two firms for higher wages which began in September. There were two strikes for higher wages by County Council quarry workers Council in January while ILLA members employed at Carrigogunnell Quarry struck over working conditions in June. The only other work stoppage recorded in Limerick that year was by farm labourers employed by Sir Gilbert Greenal at Mount Coote near Kilmallock.

Six strikes were reported in Kerry during 1914, one less than the total for Limerick. Three of these occurred in Tralee and involved small groups of engineering labourers, builders' labourers and dock labourers. Workers building a church in Carrigcannon, Lyrecrumpane walked off the job in May while five carpenters and joiners struck in Killorglin in June. The sixth Kerry dispute occurred in October and involved linesmen on the Tralee and Dingle Railway (whose chairman was Tom O'Donnell). Most workers were unaffected by these small

⁶³ LL, 6 July 1914; LCI, July 1914.

⁶⁴ LCI, July 1914; LL, 17 July 1914.

⁶⁵ LL, 11 May 1914.

⁶⁶ LL, 6, 11 & 25 March 1914.

disputes. More typical of the normal trade-union routine in 1914 was the work of the Listowel Trades and Labour Association.

The 18 April issue of the Kerryman reported a meeting of Listowel "artisans" called to protest against, "giving the contract of the new Carnegie Library to a Cork contractor, Mr. Sisk, without inviting tenders from local contractors." A deputation from the Trades and Labour Association then attended a meeting of the UDC to press their complaint but they were told that the matter was not under the council's control. At the same meeting, representatives from the local branch of the Drapers' Assistants demanded that the UDC enforce the Shop Hours Act.⁶⁷ In June, the Trades and Labour Association were invited to attend another UDC meeting, "to discuss the rent to be charged for the houses proposed to be built by the Council." The deputation emphasised that they wanted local labour and local materials used, referring again to the Cork contractor used on the Carnegie Library.⁶⁸ Yet a further deputation attended a Listowel Rural District Council meeting to protest against the use of "handymen" in the erection and repair of labourers' cottages.⁶⁹

The newly-formed Tralee Trades and Labour Council immediately intervened in social issues affecting workers. At a meeting of the council in September, the conditions of the town's slum housing were high on the agenda. The concern was sparked by an incident in McCowen's Lane where houses were owned by the merchant firm of the same name. After having already been cited by the Town Surveyor for its insanitary conditions, a worker named Joe Sherlock fell through rotten floorboards in one of the houses, injuring himself badly and dying ten days later. According to the Irish Worker's reporter, it was decided that if the UDC did not do something about such dwellings within two months, "the Trades Council intend appointing a Committee which will have on it skilled mechanics to inspect such houses and to take whatever action advisable." At least in regards to McCowen's Lane, these efforts were apparently successful for the UDC told McCowen to make the necessary repairs within a month or the dwellings would be closed.⁷⁰

The formation of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 obviously affected the labour movement though it did not directly participate in the new

⁶⁷ KM, 25 April 1914.

⁶⁸ KM, 20 June 1914.

⁶⁹ KM, 30 May 1914.

⁷⁰ Irish Worker, 19 September 1914.

force. However, as the RIC's Limerick County Inspector noted in May 1914, "the persons joining are principally shop assistants, tradesmen, farmers' sons and laborers," while in Kerry, "all classes of small farmers, shopkeepers' assistants and labourers are joining the force."⁷¹ Although developments after the outbreak of the war will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, it is interesting to note that at the 29 November Manchester Martyrs commemoration march in Limerick, "a number of Trades and Labour bodies" participated alongside contingents from both the Redmondite and MacNeillite Volunteers.⁷² In Tralee, on the other hand, a foreshadowing of the alliance between extreme nationalists and militant labour occurred at a meeting of the "St. Patrick's Day Committee" in February. The committee's purpose was to make St. Patrick's Day a general holiday. In attendance at the meeting were a number of representatives from trade unions including the Drapers' Assistants, the Grocers' Assistants, carpenters, masons, stonecutters, bakers, the NUR and the ASLEF. But also in attendance were the Tralee branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish-American Alliance), linked to John Devoy and Clan-na-Gael as well as the "Parnell Gaelic Football Club". The chairman of the meeting was M.J. O'Connor of the Tralee branch of the Workers Union. He was also a leading member of the local AOH (IAA) and prominent in the Volunteers.

Our survey of 1913-4 concludes by considering rural labour. If one was to judge an organisation's level of activity by the number of meetings mentioned in the press then the Limerick ILLA was the most active labour organisation in either county. The Limerick Leader, in addition to reporting most of the monthly meetings of the ILLA's "County Organising Committee", also contained reports of 19 branch meetings involving 11 branches in 1914. Six more branches were listed in other ways. Furthermore, of the 17 Limerick branches 2 were founded during the year and one was reformed. But the relative activity of the ILLA may have been exaggerated because of the organisation's strong ties with the IPP. The Leader, as a Redmondite paper, seemed to report ILLA meetings with much the same regularity as East and West Limerick UIL executive meetings or Volunteer activities. The regular business meetings of other unions would not, in their eyes, have had the same political importance.

⁷¹ LCI & Kerry County Inspector (KCI), May 1914.

⁷² KCI, November 1914.

Several Limerick ILLA branches endorsed candidates in the RDC and County Council elections held at the end of May. Most of these candidates were successful. But the organisation's major activity during the year was campaigning for a favourable division of several estates by the Estates Commissioners. They were involved in the dispute over the Roche-Kelly estate in the Bruff district which began in March and lasted most of the year, leading to a number of indictments.⁷³ On 3 May the ILLA held a demonstration at Mungret in relation to the impending division of Captain Lyons' Bunlicky estate. The Leader correspondent opined:

It would appear that the labourers in county Limerick are at last awakening to the fact that the untenanted lands of Ireland are slowly but surely slipping away from them and are being divided by the Inspectors under the Estates Commissioners with little regard for the interests of the labourers, artisans and uneconomic holders. It is at present large landholders, or the sons and brothers of large landholders, who are being selected to receive the largest farms.⁷⁴

A banner was draped across the platform which read, "Labour Organised is Labour Triumphant."

Unlike Limerick, there had been no Land and Labour activity in Kerry for many years. However, on the very eve of the war, a "largely attended" meeting of labourers was held in Listowel in relation to the distribution of the Gortacrossane farm.⁷⁵ A meeting of a branch of the "Labourers Cottagers' Improvement Society" was also held in Ballyduff, North Kerry at this time. Like the ILLA, this organisation sought a greater inclusion of labourers in the division of untenanted lands.⁷⁶ The UIL's role on this issue may have also fulfilled part of the role played by the ILLA in Limerick.

2.5 DRAPERS' ASSISTANTS

Most trade unions have no surviving records relating to branches in the southwest. However, it is fortunate that the Drapers' Assistants

⁷³ LCI, March-December 1914 (every report during this ten month period mentioned the dispute).

⁷⁴ LL, 6 May 1914.

⁷⁵ KM, 25 July 1914.

⁷⁶ KM, 1 August 1914.

published a monthly journal throughout this period full of detailed local reports and that a number of records of the Limerick Operative Bakers Society found their way into the Irish Labour History Society archives (housed at University College Dublin). These two unions provide a useful contrast since the first was made up of semi-skilled workers and its leader broadly allied himself with Connolly and Larkin's general unionism while the other was a quintessential craft union.

The Irish Drapers' Assistants' Benefit and Protective Association (IDAA) was founded in 1901 by Michael O'Lehane who became its General Secretary. In setting out to organise the drapery trade, the IDAA was up against the attitudes of respectability and superiority to manual workers assiduously fostered by the owners of the drapery houses. One sympathetic observer captured the contradiction in the following way:

[the drapers' assistants] have to be eternally young and infernally civil, had to dress like dukes on the wages of a dustman and had to maintain the polish of a cabinet minister on the salary of a footman.⁷⁷

Gaughan, in discussing social conditions in North Kerry in the late 19th century, describes how unemployment in rural districts impelled young people into Listowel where a number signed indentures to become apprentices in the shop assistant "trade". The indentures, "did not guarantee them much, if any, financial remuneration" and the life of a shop assistant even upon completion of his or her apprenticeship was one which, "did not leave them much personal freedom." Nevertheless these jobs were in high demand since they occupied:

⁷⁷ O'Lehane quoting John Burns in Dermot Keogh, "Michael O'Lehane and the Organisation of Linen Drapers Assistants," *Saothar* 3 (1977), p. 34.

Table 2.2 - Causes of membership loss in the IDAA, 1912-14.

Cause	National 1912	National 1913	Limerick 1914	Tralee 1913
Left the trade	110	124	4	8
Emigration	82	163	2	2
Death	33	52		
Started business	19	19	2	2
Married ("ladies")	31		3	2
Lapsed	160	85	8	7
Transferred to another branch			6	9
Unaccounted for	159	179		
Total who left	594	624 (a)	25	30
Total joined during year	797	1444	34	54
Total membership at end of year	3461	4209	248	105
Proportion lost (of membership at start of year)	18.2 %	18.4 %	10.5 %	37.0 %

(a) - The actual sum of the different categories is 622 but since the figure given in the Draper's Assistant is 624 and it is not clear where the error lies, I have left the number unchanged.

Source: DA, May 1912; March & April 1913; March 1914.

...a coveted place in the social scale between the 'ordinary' people and the growing middle class, to which those in the professions and in banking, owners of business premises and 'comfortable' farmers belonged. Also the more talented and industrious shop assistants eventually opened their own shops.⁷⁸

Besides the assistants' self-perception, the IDAA also had to contend with a high rate of employee turnover in a business where the material benefits of membership were minimal. Reports from the annual national delegate meetings as well as branch general meetings often gave a breakdown of the causes of membership losses. A few examples of these breakdowns are given in Table 2.2.

Excluding the numbers "unaccounted for" in the national figures which probably reflect incomplete returns from the branches, we find that those who emigrated, left the trade, married and left or started a business accounted for 55.6% of the union's losses in 1912 and 69.1% in 1913. More significant is the overall membership loss of nearly 20% in both years. As a result, the union had no choice but to be on an almost continuous recruitment drive. Limerick's loss of 10.5% during 1914 is therefore comparatively low, especially since a quarter of this loss was actually transfers to other branches. The Tralee branch, on the other hand, showed great resilience in 1913 by shedding 37.0% of the previous year's members while managing to recruit another 54 people (66.7% of the previous figure).

That O'Lehane and the IDAA were able not only to renew but expand the membership in the face of these obstacles is in large measure due to the deep grievances felt by many assistants. Besides long hours and low pay, there was the notorious "living-in" and fine systems which have already been discussed. Another complaint made frequently by the IDAA was against what they termed "the apprenticeship traffic." At the annual organising meeting of the Dublin branch in 1910 a motion was passed stating:

That, as the businesses for which we cater are already over-crowded, we desire to warn parents against apprenticing their sons or daughters to a calling which, at the present rate, not one-half of them would make a livelihood.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ A. J. Gaughan, Listowel and its Vicinity (Cork, 1973), p. 129.

⁷⁹ DA, November 1910.

The union alleged that the employers were taking on far more apprentices than were needed, paying them a pittance and then letting them go on one pretext or another. The purpose was to dilute wages throughout the trade. It was, therefore, a cause of the high turnover which put such pressure on the union.

One of the unusual aspects of the IDAA was that it organised in a trade with a substantial proportion of women. Given the low number of women in paid employment and the relatively narrow number of occupations which were open to them, it is not surprising that the bulk of unions in Ireland were exclusively male. A few, such as the Irish Women Workers Union and Mary Galway's Textile Operatives of Ireland, based in Belfast, were completely female while another handful, including the IDAA and the INTO, had an integrated membership.

Table 2.3 shows that in both 1912 and 1913 women formed nearly a third of the IDAA's membership. According to one union source, women were actually a majority of the workers in the trade.⁸⁰ The 1911 Census, however, seems to contradict this. Under the heading "draper, linen draper, mercer" it counts 8,598 males and 4,989 females. But it is not clear what portion of this category were specifically "drapers' assistants".⁸¹ That women were concentrated in the lower-paid end of the trade is indicated by the higher proportion of females in "scale 2" in 1912 and "scale 3" in 1913. The "scales" are based on different dues rates, with workers in scale 1 paying 2s.6d monthly, scale 2 workers paying 2s and scale 3, 1s.3d.⁸² The more one paid, the more benefit one received. While the system was voluntary, it would be expected that workers earning less would tend to be concentrated in scale 3.

The union's leadership openly acknowledged their difficulties in recruiting women. They were anxious, however, from a pragmatic standpoint, to organise the trade as thoroughly as possible. If a substantial number of women remained aloof from the union they would tend to weaken its bargaining position and might even be used as an anti-union force by the employers. In order to encourage support for the IDAA and its aims, the Draper's Assistant included a number of pieces directed at women, including, for a period, a regular "Ladies' Letter". In a typical piece entitled "Women and the Wages

⁸⁰ DA, January 1914.

⁸¹ Census of Ireland, 1911, General Report.

⁸² DA, February 1912.

Question", Kathleen O'Brennan argues that union organisation is the key to higher pay for women. However, she also objects to women taking men's jobs, citing a particular hypothetical example:

If, as is possible, she had a home and only needed work as a pastime, she should be taught the code of morals of the industrial world. No one objects to such a woman seeking work if she so desires, but she must be a helper and not a checkmate to reform...⁸³

One of the "Ladies' Letters", entitled "The Dilettante Shop Girl", is also a diatribe against young women seeking "pocket-money" and "pastime".⁸⁴ Hence, social conservatism was interwoven into the arguments of a journal which by the standards of the time and certainly of the trade union movement, was quite enlightened. But the IDAA recognised that they were neither going to be able to get rid of nor ignore their female fellow workers. The task was to integrate them for as O'Brennan put it:

As long as women will continue to accept a wage which they and their employers are ashamed to acknowledge, we may be convinced there is something wrong. A little thought over the matter and a little sacrifice, too, may yet be demanded in this cause, which is not particularly the women's, but in the interests of the whole community of honest workers.

⁸³ DA, October 1914.

⁸⁴ DA, November 1910.

Table 2.3 - Sexual composition of IDAA membership, 1912-3

1912	Scale 1	Scale 2	Total	
men	914 (95.0%)	1,384 (58.7)	2,298 (69.2)	
women	48 (5.0)	973 (41.3)	1,021 (30.8)	
	962	2,357	3,319 (a)	
1913	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Total
men	943 (94.4%)	56 (77.8)	1,973 (61.5)	2,972 (69.4)
women	56 (5.6)	16 (22.2)	1,237 (38.5)	1,309 (30.6)
	999	72	3,210	4,281 (b)

(a) - This total does not include "honorary" or "affiliated" members. The "total effective membership" was 3,461.

(b) - Inexplicably, the "total effective membership" listed in the DA was 4,209 or 72 less than the total number of men and women!

Source: DA, May 1912 & April 1913.

In order to achieve a higher female membership, O'Lehane and his colleagues realised that those women already in the IDAA had to take an active role within the organisation. Union women would make the best organisers of their sisters outside the fold. A call was issued to form "Ladies' Auxiliary Committees" in every branch and in December 1911 the formation of such a committee in Dublin was announced in the Assistant. Progress was also registered at the annual national meeting in 1913 which included, for the first time, two women delegates. However, there was still no female presence on the union's executive. Interestingly, women seemed to have played a greater leadership role at branch level, especially in some of the smaller branches. For example, the Tralee branch elected four women onto its twenty-member committee in 1913. Furthermore, of the six members appointed to represent the "insurance section" (see below) three were women, making the total committee 27% female.⁸⁵ The newly-formed Newcastle West branch, with 34 members, elected two women to its six member committee in 1914.⁸⁶ But the Limerick branch which was by far the largest in the two counties does not appear to have had any women on its committee. Why did women have a higher profile in the smaller branches? Part of the explanation may be that the workforce in small shops was said to be almost entirely female whereas the committees in the cities were dominated by representatives from large houses with largely male workforces.⁸⁷

In its efforts to renew and expand membership, both male and female, the IDAA was affected by two pieces of legislation. The first was the Shops Act whose main provisions were the limitation of the employees' working week to 60 hours and, "the compulsory closing of shops, with certain exceptions, on one day of the week not later than 2 o'clock, and on three days of the week not later than 8 o'clock."⁸⁸ The Dublin Corporation sought to have all of Dublin exempted from these regulations, leading to a determined campaign by the IDAA. Many smaller towns had already been exempted in a rather haphazard fashion and the union therefore sought to have the act extended to all towns whose population was over 1,000.⁸⁹ Another

⁸⁵ DA, March 1913.

⁸⁶ DA, February 1914.

⁸⁷ "Our Ladies' Letter", DA, October 1912 for claim that women were concentrated in the smaller houses.

⁸⁸ DA, September 1910.

⁸⁹ DA, November 1912.

problem was the lackadaisical attitude of many local authorities who were supposed to monitor the enforcement of the Act. In February 1914, the Tralee branch threatened to take legal action against the local UDC since the council had allegedly done nothing against recalcitrant employers.⁹⁰ Overall, the union complained that the legislation had led to only modest gains but they gladly claimed credit for these, especially the "weekly half-holiday", since they had long fought for such reforms. Furthermore, the employers' law-breaking gave the union a powerful agitational tool and this issue was central to IDAA activity nationally and locally in the period leading up to the war.

The other important piece of legislation was the National Insurance Act which, as discussed in Chapter 1, provided health insurance for the bulk of employees earning less than £160 per annum and unemployment benefit for a large portion of manual workers. Thus, it usurped two of the most important benefit functions traditionally provided by trade unions and other benefit societies in Britain and to a lesser extent in Ireland. However, unions were allowed to become "approved societies" under the act, administering its operation and, thereby, largely maintaining their role in this field. The Drapers' Assistants saw the Insurance Act as an important opportunity to extend influence among workers in allied trades not eligible for regular membership such as grocers and chemists' assistants and clerks. In a major speech shortly after the enactment of the legislation, O'Lehane also implied that the IDAA should see this as an opportunity to out-muscle smaller unions:

The point that we have to consider is: Is there any likelihood of the existing smaller organisations, such as the Grocers' Assistants and the Irish Clerks' and Assistants' Association, both organisations confined to Dublin, obtaining the requisite numbers to entitle them to become "Approved Societies"? At present ours being the only organisation covering all Ireland, we have decided on catering for all clerks and shops assistants in the country.⁹¹

⁹⁰ KM, 14 February 1914.

⁹¹ DA, February 1912.

By 1913 the union had 9,148 "insurance members".⁹² Undoubtedly the growth of the insurance section helped to spur the growth of the ordinary membership but debate continued in the Irish labour movement on whether this benefit offset the dangers posed by a perceived increase in state interference in union affairs.

While British unions used their new role as approved societies as an effective part of recruitment, Irish unions had less success and were apparently less interested in competing for "insurance members".⁹³ Far more successful in this regard was the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) which by 1913 had recruited over 180,000 insurance members in Ireland, England and Wales as part of its successful bid for political influence.⁹⁴ Fitzpatrick concludes that, "by 1913 the AOH was a direct competitor of the UIL's as principal launching-pad for political office in Nationalist Ireland."⁹⁵ Besides the AOH (BoE), a large proportion of Limerick workers joined local organisation including the Limerick Workers Benefit Society (3,312 members in 1913) and the County Limerick Insurance Society (4,759 members), neither of which were union-affiliated. Of trade union-linked approved societies, probably the most important in Limerick before the war was the Irish Land and Labour Benefit Society whose total national membership in 1913 included 7,696 men and 1,706 women. The IDAA's 550 insurance members in Limerick City constituted possibly the largest urban trade union Insurance Section in the area. Meanwhile, the ITGWU whose national membership is estimated by Greaves to have been 30,000 in the summer of 1913 had only 12,306 insurance members by the end of the year.⁹⁶

Through a highly skilful approach which included exploiting its role as an approved society, the IDAA maintained and developed its presence in the southwest. By 1910, there were already branches in Limerick, Tralee and Killarney. In April 1911, an agreement was reached in Limerick between the union and the city's main drapery houses for the gradual elimination of the "living-in" system. The

⁹² "Report by the Government Actuary on the Valuation of the Assets and Liabilities of Approved Societies as at 31st December 1918," PP 1922, v. 9.

⁹³ For the British experience see E. H. Hunt, British Labour History, 1815-1914 (London 1981).

⁹⁴ "Report by the Government Actuary on...Approved Societies."

⁹⁵ David Fitzpatrick, Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution (Dublin 1977), p. 97.

⁹⁶ "Report by the Government Actuary on...Approved Societies"; C. Desmond Greaves, The Irish Transport and General Workers Union, The Formative Years 1909-1923, p. 91.

agreement was broadly similar to the one reached at the end of 1913 in Tralee. Branch reports in the Assistant credited the fight to enforce the Shops Act and the union's role as an approved society as being largely responsible for local growth during 1911-13. By early 1913, branches had been established in Killorglin, Listowel, Newcastle West and Caherciveen although the last named showed little evidence of activity. This meant that out of fifty IDAA branches, seven were situated in Kerry and Limerick.⁹⁷

Local activity was described in great detail in the regular branch reports carried by the Draper's Assistant. A large part of these communications was devoted to testimonials to members leaving the trade or transferring to other branches, exhortations to members to pay their dues and denunciations of particular employers. In May 1913 Tralee's report contained a different type of exhortation:

We are sorry we do not have the pleasure of our lady committee members' presence at all our meetings. Their advice we are certain would be of great assistance to us, particularly in dealing with such matters as sick, visiting and insurance claims of all kinds. We hope to see them present at all our meetings in future, taking a prominent part in all discussions and striving to advance the reputation of the present day woman.

Meanwhile, in Limerick, a drapery house in William St., owned by M.A. Honey was denounced in December 1912 for keeping its assistants working until 1 am on Saturday night. Late Saturday closings were an abuse frequently decried by various branches. On a lighter note, reports gave glowing accounts of yearly outings and IDAA dances. When the first union-sponsored dance was held in Tralee, the "Tralee Notes" modestly mentioned that in the "artistically decorated" hall, "...the colours of the celebrated Kerry [football] team (some of whom we might mention are the best members of our branch) were largely predominant."⁹⁸

Reports from annual or half-annual local meetings also contain much useful material, including detailed itemisation of income and expenditure. An example is give in Table 2.4. Income was presumably drawn almost entirely from dues. It amounted to nearly

⁹⁷ DA, March 1913.

⁹⁸ DA, May 1913.

a pound per member per year, not an insignificant sum. Fully 82.% of the income was sent to the central office, almost a third of that returning as benefits. Besides the "sick" and "unemployed" benefit provisions, the report noted that free legal aid was available to members. It was also noted that the "medical section...continues to hold its own" with credit of £72.7.0. Contributions to the Draper's Assistant amounted to £4.5.0 with a third of the members subscribing. Finally the 550 members of the local Insurance section are said to have received £164.8.6 in benefit during the year.

In his book on the Waterford labour movement, Emmet O'Connor argues that:

In one respect [the IDAA] anticipated the philosophy that inspired the ITGWU; its founder Michael O'Lehane, believed that Irish workers must build up trade unionism themselves rather than depend on British organisation. From this conviction the Drapers' Assistants acquired a commitment to developing labour as a movement. Despite its base in caste conscious white-collar respectability...[they] were the first to challenge old unionism.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ O'Connor, Waterford, p. 112.

As has been shown, the high labour turnover and the high proportion of women in the drapery trade forced the IDAA to adopt a very aggressive attitude towards recruitment and to devise a wide range of tactics. This self-reliant attitude certainly confirms O'Connor's thesis. In 1913-4, O'Lehane tried to expand the IDAA's brief from those in the "drapery, outfitting, furnishing, hardware, boot and shoe, stationery and fancy goods trades" to include all clerks and shop assistants but this met resistance from many members who did not want "outsiders" joining the union.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it demonstrates O'Lehane's interest in general unionism and his disinterest in the craft ethos. The IDAA also endorsed the notion of an Irish Federation of Labour, a species of the "One Big Union" concept, as well as sending delegates to the yearly meetings of the International Federation of Employees, a European-wide organisation of shop assistants and clerks.

One should not, however, underestimate the differences between the ITGWU and the IDAA. For while O'Lehane allied himself with Larkin inside the ITUC as early as 1910 (by endorsing the Transport Union delegates' bid to be seated at the Dundalk meeting),¹⁰¹ the IDAA's official line could not be characterised as Larkinite. The Draper's Assistant had a much milder tone than Larkin's Irish Worker. O'Lehane seems to have been walking a tightrope between his own views and the need not to alienate his union's more conservative members. For example, the Assistant had almost no coverage of the 1913 lockout. An editorial in its December issue is oblique to say the least:

In the recent or present unrest is to be seen the natural working of a democratic spirit, not entirely emancipated, and much more turbulent on that account. However, with a more liberal extension of the franchise and a more widely diffused system of education, it is reasonable to expect the raising of questions and issues which in the industrial sphere are still in a most unsatisfactory state.

Another editorial on "The Sympathetic Strike—Where We Stand" stated that the IDAA did not want to be involved in the Dublin

¹⁰⁰ Report of Limerick AGM, DA, March 1914.

¹⁰¹ Greaves, pp. 47-9.

struggle, "but our members must absolutely refuse to perform work which belongs to others."¹⁰²

Similarly, the Assistant made no reference during 1912-4 to Carson, the Ulster Volunteers, the Irish Volunteers, Home Rule, partition or any other political issue. It is probable that the presence of a Belfast branch within the union was one of the reasons for this reticence. The only nationalist references in the journal were the standard appeals to "buy Irish" and support for an Irish industrial revival. But if the RIC county inspectors in Kerry and Limerick are to be believed, shop assistants were an important part of the Volunteers in both counties in early 1914. Some of these were doubtlessly IDAA members, perhaps including the Tralee branch's famous footballers.

2.6 LIMERICK BAKERS

The Limerick Operative Bakers' Society worked under very different circumstances to those of the Drapers' Assistants, even though they were both part of the same regional economy. As an organisation in continuous existence since 1864, they clearly did not have to surmount the psychological barriers to trade unionism which existed in the drapery trade. Nor did they have to consider how to recruit men and women together into a common organisation since master bakers and tradesmen were all agreed that this was a man's job. Labour turnover, and hence membership turnover—such a central concern for the IDAA—was less of a preoccupation for the bakers since the union had a tight control over apprenticeships. When the nephew of the old Fenian John Daly (Ned Daly, later executed for his role in the Easter Rising) tried to become a workman baker in Limerick in order to prepare himself to take over his uncle's business:

the then tradesmen would not under any circumstances allow him to enter their domain. This decision was based on a ruling of their society 'That only the sons of bakers had the right to the bakers trade.' John Daly was forced to send his nephew to a technical school in Glasgow.¹⁰³

The "apprenticeship traffic" which the Draper's Assistant so frequently complained of could not occur when it was the union and

¹⁰² DA, October 1913.

¹⁰³ Limerick's Fighting Story, p. 20. By comparison, the rules of the Dublin Bakers set forth in 1875, explicitly declared that only members' sons could be apprenticed to the trade (John Swift, History of the Dublin Bakers and Others (Dublin, 1949), p. 263).

not the employer who took on the apprentice and at the appropriate point decided whether or not to grant him his "freedom".

The bakers, however, did have serious grievances which led to long battles with their employers. The abolition of night work had been the union's central aim in the late nineteenth century. A protracted dispute occurred between 1891 and 1895 with Croom Mills who were trying to reintroduce it, ending in victory for the union. Another long-standing problem was the fluctuation in demand for labour in the trade. The union was almost always paying "walking" or unemployment money to some of its members. Fluctuations in demand also led to the creation of a casual labour system, administered by the union.

The casual workers were known as "jobbers" and were supposed to turn up each evening at a particular location in the city. In strict rotation, they were given work for the next day by a union member known as the "beadle" who was paid extra for doing this work. If the jobber did not turn up at the designated meeting-point, often a pub, he would lose his "walking money".¹⁰⁴

One of the striking features of the bakers' union was the degree to which it was a family affair. This was largely the result of apprenticeships being restricted to sons of members. Of the 80 members listed in the "contribution book" for the period from November 1909 to February 1910, the following surnames recur: Dwyer (9), Dineen (7), Keane (6), O'Brien (5), Maher (4), Cusack (3) and Carroll (3).¹⁰⁵ Between them, these seven names accounted for 37 members or 46.3% of the total. Admittedly, we cannot know what proportion of those with common surnames were actually related.

Another insight into the character of the bakers' society and a further contrast with the Drapers' Assistants is provided by the union's weekly financial accounts, an example of which is given in Table 2.5. Weekly contributions generally amounted to around £8. This implies that the union received over £400 in dues money per year or almost twice the amount collected by the Limerick IDAA who had three times the number of members. Fines were levied by the union on employers who broke agreements particularly in regard to understaffing. "Boys contributions" were received from apprentices. On the expenditure side, comparison with financial records from later

¹⁰⁴ Information comes from an anonymous introduction to the union's records in ILHS Archives, UCD.

¹⁰⁵ TU 1/36, UCD.

years indicates that Maher and Molloy were probably receiving sick pay while the other men listed were receiving walking money or "idle pay". "Superannuated money" was a form of pension. In addition to these expenses, officers were paid a regular salary and "emigration money" was given on a case by case basis (£20 in one instance).

Turning to political matters, the Limerick bakers, unlike the IDAA, had no reticence about showing their nationalist colours. In the minutes for 9 November 1898, the union decided to participate as a body in the Manchester Martyrs procession. In 1905, it was decided to subscribe 10s to the Gaelic League. Nationalism may also have been the prime motive in a contentious decision made at the beginning of that year. A meeting was called to discuss the candidacy of a union member, John Prendergast in the forthcoming local elections. He was opposing the famous John Daly, "one of our employers" in the Irishtown Ward. The minutes record that:

There was a long discussion over the matter - and it seemed to be the feeling of the general body that he [Prendergast] should withdraw. In the event of his declining the secretary was directed to send copy of a resolution to the press condemnatory of his conduct.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the Bakers had been prompt in subscribing money for independent labour representation in the 1899 local elections. In fact, of the twenty four labour candidates whose occupation is known, four were bakers.¹⁰⁷ This was more than the number who went forward from any other trade, the others being represented by one or two candidates. We also know that the most prominent figure in the Bakers' Society during those years, Stephen Dineen, was a self-proclaimed socialist. But was there really a contradiction between supporting "Labour" in 1899 and refusing to support one of their own members against John Daly in 1905? After all, Daly had been the head of that very same Labour slate six years previously. What is consistent in the union's position is its loyalty to nationalist politics.

¹⁰⁶ Limerick Bakers' Minutes, 9 January 1905, TU 1/2, UCD.

¹⁰⁷ LL, 4 January 1899.

It remains to consider the Baker's annual activities. On 9 August 1914, the annual report of the society decided by a vote of 40 to 25, "that we join the Amalgamation." The organization referred to was the National Amalgamated Bakers and Confectioners Union. Despite the "amalgamation" in its title, it was an Irish based union. In 1913, while headquartered in Dublin, the union had branches in several of the Dublin bakeries who were part of the "General Bakers Society". The national union's secretary was James J. O'Connell. Along with Larkin and other revolutionaries, O'Connell was also addressed a very General Meeting of the National Amalgamated Bakers and Confectioners Union.

Table 2.5 - Financial records of the Limerick Bakers Society, for the week of 31 January - 6 February 1914.

Income -	Expenditure -
Weekly contributions £7.14s.0d	Superannuated money £2.16.0
Fines, etc. 16.6	Maher, 2 weeks 1.4.0
Loans 1.13.0	R. Molloy 2 weeks 16.0
Boys contributions 2.2	[unreadable] 12.0
Total 10.5.8	Beadle 9.0
	Tobacco 1.4
	Jm. Carmody 8.0
	P. Donohoe 3.3
	Total 6.9.7

Source: TU 1/14, UCD.

The IDAA challenged the ideas espoused in the process which encouraged the belief that they were not part of the working class at all. Its leaders went so far as to suggest a general trade union for all clerks and shop assistants, an idea for which much of the rank and file was not ready in 1914. The IDAA also attempted, with significant success, to recruit women and, with somewhat less success, to establish female leaders within the union. The BIA on the other hand, did not have to face these craft mobsters and made no attempt to involve women in its affairs unless they were in the Society. Furthermore, its activity was sharply demarcated by its extremely close relationship with nationalist politicians. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether a more radical organization would have had any chance among Limerick's farm labourers in this period. By mostly ignoring the revolutionary tradition of organization and giving political weight to the strategic section of the workforce, the IDAA was clearly benefiting from an established groundwork, a debt which, as shall be seen, it had little interest in acknowledging. It should also be noted

108 See pp. 321-4.

It remains to consider the Bakers' national affiliations. On 9 August 1905, the minutes record that the society decided by a vote of 40 to 25, "that we join the Amalgamation." The organisation referred to was the National Amalgamated Bakers and Confectioners Union. Despite the "amalgamated" in its title, it was an Irish-based union. In 1913, while headquartered in Derry, the union finally managed to recruit the Dublin bakers who were part of the "Ormond Quay Society". The national union's organiser was none other than Dineen. Along with Larkin and other prominent Dublin labour leaders, he addressed a key General Meeting of the Dublin bakers in April. According to John Swift, it was after this meeting that the national organisation changed its name to the Irish Bakers National Amalgamated Union.¹⁰⁸

2.7 CONCLUSION

To what degree did pre-war labour activity foreshadow the dramatic radicalisation of the union movement after 1917? In particular, it must be asked whether the ITGWU which so dominated subsequent events really represented as much of a break from the past as has often been claimed. In fact it would appear that both the Land and Labour Association and the Drapers' Assistants, albeit from rather different perspectives, were helping to clear the way for change.

The IDAA challenged the elitism inculcated in the drapers which encouraged the belief that they were not part of the working class at all. Its leaders went so far as to suggest a general trade union for all clerks and shop assistants, an idea for which much of the rank and file was not ready in 1914. The IDAA also attempted, with significant success, to recruit women and, with somewhat less success, to establish female leaders within the union. The ILLA, on the other hand, did not have to face down craft snobbery and made no attempt to involve women in its affairs unless one counts its Benefit Society. Furthermore, its activity was sharply circumscribed by its extremely close relationship with nationalist politicians. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether a more radical organisation would have had any chance among Limerick's farm labourers in this period. By merely existing it maintained traditions of organisation and gave political weight to this strategic section of the workforce. The ITGWU was thus benefiting from an established groundwork, a debt which, as shall be seen, it had little interest in acknowledging. It should also be noted

¹⁰⁸ Swift, pp. 323-4.

that some of the purely local unions such as the United Carmen and Storemen in Limerick were doing substantial work in organising the urban unskilled.

But the partial organising of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers did not mean that the dominance of the craft unions had been decisively challenged at a local level. Nationally, the ITGWU had come to play a crucial role in the ITUC by 1914 in spite of the defeat of the Dublin workers. But the resolution in favour of an independent Irish labour party, passed by congress in 1912, was still only a piece of paper. Meanwhile, in the southwest, the de-facto alliance between the trade unions and the IPP was as much a reality as ever. Efforts in 1899, and with decreasing intensity thereafter, to achieve labour representation in local government did not alter this basic fact. However, labour's political role was bound to change. If Home Rule had become a reality, the IPP cross-class alliance would have become increasingly strained since its central purpose would have been achieved. But due to the European war and its domestic implications, labour's break from John Redmond took place under far more dramatic circumstances.

Within two years, each political world was to be completely controversial within the southern labour movement by making the Irish Catholic population as large. At the same time, however, John Johnson—a socialist, strongly anti-Unionist and anti-Unionist—hardly a Unionist—refused to use the particular Ireland in the war. It is clearly unnecessary to prove that there was a difference between the views of the ITUC and the ITGWU on the subject of the war. However, the real question is more and why the particular members of the broader labour movement began to shift. No doubt in 1914 the war in itself was connected to other events, particularly the ascendancy of militant nationalism in the ranks of the Irish Army. Did the opinions of workers mirror those of other classes or was there

1. THE PRESENT SITUATION, 'Why Should Ireland Support?', ITUC Bulletin, August 10, 1914, National Library of Ireland (NLI) MS 1112 (Thomas Johnson papers).

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPACT OF WAR ON LABOUR: 1914-18

3.1 LABOUR AND POLITICS ON THE NATIONAL STAGE

Britain's decision to declare war against Germany in August 1914 initially received overwhelming approval from all social classes and ethnic communities in these islands. This fact placed the executive of the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party (ITUCLP) in a tricky situation since a majority of its members held a distinctly anti-war position. If pursued as official policy, this would have very likely led to a significant decampment, especially by northern Protestant workers. Instead, the executive issued a manifesto entitled "The Present Situation: Why Should Ireland Starve?" which focused on the need to keep enough food in Ireland to feed its population. The manifesto avoided explicitly taking a side on the question of the war but nevertheless managed to convey the attitudes of the executive majority:

Irish women, it is you who will suffer most by this foreign war. It is the sons you reared at your bosom that will be sent to be mangled by shot and torn by shell; it is your fathers, husbands and brothers whose corpses will pave the way for an Empire that despises you.¹

Within two years, such sentiments would not be particularly controversial within the southern labour movement or among the Irish Catholic population at large. At the time, however, even Tom Johnson—a socialist, strongly anti-Redmondite and, needless to say, hardly a Unionist—refused to sign the manifesto because he was pro-Allies. It is clearly unnecessary to prove that there was a disjuncture between the views of the ITUCLP Executive majority and the bulk of organised Irish workers on the subject of the war at its outset. However, the real question is when and why the political attitudes of the broader labour movement began to shift. The shift in views on the war in turn was connected to other events, particularly the ascendancy of militant nationalism in the wake of the Easter Rising. Did the opinions of workers mirror those of other classes or was there

¹ "THE PRESENT SITUATION. Why Should Ireland Starve?", ITUCLP manifesto, August 10, 1914, National Library of Ireland (NLI) Ms 17112 (Thomas Johnson papers).

a different tempo and content to their development? These issues can be explored by looking briefly at the response of the Transport Union and the Dublin Trades Council.

The enlistment of a large proportion of the ITGWU's Dublin membership provoked an angry response from the union leadership. In an article in the Irish Worker shortly after the outbreak of war entitled "Recruiting—Let the Wastrels Go", James Connolly declared:

Let those who wish to sacrifice themselves for England—for the Enemy—know the extent of their sacrifice and risks, and then if they go let them know that their country disowns them.²

Nine months later, another ITGWU official, William Partridge, in a speech in Cork, was reported by the RIC as saying, "that there were 2,700 members of the Transport Union in the trenches, and that he as an Irishman was rather ashamed of it."³ On the other hand, the minutes of the union's No 1 branch committee, which effectively ran the union in this period, make almost no direct reference to the war but the 11 August 1915 minutes dryly note that Connolly was going to visit Sligo, "on account of the Secretary of that Branch having joined the Colours, to fight for a foreign ruler."⁴

Given the high level of enlistment among Transport Union members, it might seem surprising that there wasn't more disagreement about the war among the union's leaders. However, it must be remembered that these men had very recently been locked in a bitter battle with the employers of Dublin many of whom, including William Martin Murphy, were now seated on recruiting platforms. Larkin and Connolly opposed the war on the grounds of working class internationalism as well as deep-seated hostility to the British Empire but the leadership also included a former member of the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), in the person of P. T. Daly. Partridge is also supposed to have been an IRB member. As for the rank and file, a hard core undoubtedly agreed with the anti-war line and this core tended to become more prominent as others joined the Army.

However, it was one thing not to join the Army for nationalist or socialist reasons and quite another to prepare for insurrection, as did

² Irish Worker, 5 September 1914.

³ "Precis of Information Received in the Crime Special Branch during May 1915", CO 904/97.

⁴ ITGWU, No. 1 Branch Committee minutes, NLI Ms 7298.

Connolly and his comrades in the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). Though badly disillusioned by the failure of European workers to rise up and stop the war at its outset, Connolly never foreswore his socialist convictions. Nevertheless, he concluded that the only realistic course for Irish revolutionaries during this period was to strike a blow against British rule. He also saw this as utterly necessary if the Irish nation was to survive given the enthusiastic support of so many Irishmen and women to the British war effort.

But despite the Acting General Secretary's numerous flamboyant acts of sedition in the run-up to the Easter Rising, ITGWU members during this period focused their attention largely on the traditional concerns of wages, hours and working conditions. War-time inflation was cutting into workers' living standards but, given the boost provided to many sectors of the economy by the war, unions were actually in a relatively good position to press their wage claims. In Britain, however, many unions surrendered to government pressure and undertook not to engage in strikes "for the duration". This was codified in the Treasury Agreement of March 1915. The ITGWU, however, lacking patriotic qualms, waged a steady struggle to regain lost ground and make wages keep pace with inflation. By mid-1915, the union had largely regained the bargaining position it held on the Dublin docks before 1913.⁵

In September and October 1915, the ITGWU waged a limited series of strikes in several industries in the Dublin area, the most important occurring on the docks. However, Connolly's willingness to settle for what he could get led to some bitter recriminations:

...the meeting of the Dublin and General [shipping company] men was particularly stormy. Some of the dockers including a member of the branch committee, denounced Connolly as a "master's man". He was so angry that he left the room, but not before inviting them to find someone who could get them a better offer. Before long he was asked to return and the offer was accepted.⁶

It is interesting to note that the rank and file were apparently at least as willing to wage a militant economic struggle as Connolly though less willing to participate in the "political strike" against the war which he

⁵ Greaves, p. 144.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

advocated. What is clearly absent from either position, however, is any desire to help the British war effort.

If the ITGWU, or what was left of it, rallied to one degree or another around the anti-war stance of its leadership, what can be said of the wider Irish labour movement? One body, whose activity would suggest that Connolly's position had some resonance beyond the Transport Union, was the Dublin United Trades Council and Labour League, generally referred to as the Dublin Trades Council (DTC). The DTC's general opposition to the war was clear from the start. Both William O'Brien, the president of the council at the outbreak of the war, and Thomas Farren who became president in 1915 were prominent supporters of the short-lived Irish Neutrality League (INL) which included Connolly, Arthur Griffith and several IRB and Irish Volunteer leaders. In October 1915, the council passed a motion proposed by P. P. Macken:

That the Dublin United Trades Council and Labour League, while not disposed to obstruct in any way those persons who, through zeal for the British Empire, might be inclined to volunteer for active service abroad, at the same time calls upon the organized workers to join either the Irish Citizen Army or the Irish Volunteers as the best means to avert conscription.⁷

Macken was himself a member of the Irish Volunteers and urged the union representatives to pass the motion because of the threat of conscription. Thomas Farren agreed, saying, "...if they had to fight they should fight those who were trying to make them fight."⁸ The motion was passed unanimously. It was as close as the broader labour movement came to endorsing Connolly's revolutionary programme while he was still alive.

In June 1915, the DTC decided to contest the College Green constituency in central Dublin left vacant by the death of J. P. Nannetti, a "friend of labour" Redmondite. The DTC was particularly determined because of the United Irish League's (UIL) choice of John Dillon Nugent as the IPP candidate. Farren's election manifesto, probably authored by Connolly, describes Nugent as, "an enemy of Labour, fomenter of sectarian strife, a betrayer of all National causes,

⁷ Workers Republic, 23 October 1915.

⁸ *ibid.*

a source of weakness and paralysis in all National Movements."⁹ Nugent was a leading figure in the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin). He had been a determined opponent of the ITGWU during the Lockout and the labour leadership accused him of having organised strikebreakers. Noticeably absent, however, from the manifesto was any statement of the Irish labour movement's official anti-war positions except in a very veiled way.

Nugent, on the other hand, lost no time in branding Farren as an exponent of pro-German "Larkinism":

The electors of College Green were asked in this contest to decide whether they agreed with the Irish Party and the National Organisation or with Anarchy and Syndicalism combined with pro-German intrigue that was going on in the city of Dublin.¹⁰

But though Nugent and his supporters freely played the "German card", the focus of their attack on Farren was that he was a supporter of Larkin and the ITGWU and of its stand in 1913-4. The Freeman's Journal and the Evening Telegraph were among his most fervent supporters and freely hinted that Farren was financed by "German gold". They expected their man to win easily.

John Dillon Nugent did indeed win the election but his margin of 2,445 to 1,816 was hardly the decisive trouncing for which the Freeman's Journal had called. What was perhaps more worrisome for the defenders of the status quo was that barely more than half of College Green's 8,015 registered electors bothered to go to the polls. Therefore, while not showing a great willingness to stand up and be counted as supporters of Larkin, they seemed positively indifferent to the dreaded "pro-German intrigue". This was the first—and as it turned out it was also the last—time an independent Labour candidate from southern Ireland stood for a seat at Westminster.

While the ITUCLP Executive stood almost alone in its stance at the beginning of the war, the next year and a half witnessed a small but growing discontent in Irish society as a whole. There were several interlinked causes for this. First of all there was the realisation that the war would not be "over by Christmas" and would entail a high level of casualties. Second was disappointment at Redmond's failure

⁹ Workers Republic, 12 June 1915.

¹⁰ From a speech by John Dillon Nugent on 8 June 1915, printed in the Freeman's Journal, 9 June 1915.

to secure the implementation of Home Rule in return for Irish Catholic participation in the war effort. This was not helped by Kitchener's refusal to accommodate Irish Catholic national feelings in organising the army. Furthermore, there was already considerable anger, before the war, over Redmond's willingness to acquiesce to "temporary" partition. Labour was also upset by the proposal to weigh the Home Rule parliament in favour of rural areas thus limiting the potential import of the urban working class vote. Nor did the inclusion of leading Unionists in the May 1915 coalition cabinet help matters. Finally, there was the threat of conscription in late 1915 which led to a spurt of growth for the Irish Volunteers. There is every reason to believe that the actual introduction of conscription, even before the Rising, would have led to massive resistance. The IPP/UIIL's response to these problematic developments was desultory at best. For instance, the RIC had concluded by October 1915 that the National Volunteers which Redmond controlled and which was nominally still over 100,000 strong, had "ceased to be an active force".¹¹

But if the IPP's authority had waned somewhat before the Rising, its collapse did not occur until public opinion turned sharply against the repressive measures implemented by Maxwell in its wake. One would expect that the ITUCLP which had committed itself since 1912 to oppose the Redmondites at the polls would have been to the fore in trying to take advantage of the party's discomfiture by identifying itself with Connolly's stand. Initially, at least, this was not the case. In fact, the tone of Tom Johnson's presidential address to the August 1916 meeting in Sligo—the first held since the outbreak of war—was positively moderate. He called for delegates to stand for a moment's silence as a mark of respect for "all our comrades who have been brave enough to give their lives for the cause they believed in".¹² Hence, by equating those who died in the British Army with those executed by the British, he very deliberately avoided any sign of sympathy with the aims of the Rising. Nor did the delegates present seem to have any complaint to make about this diplomatic and cautious approach. In fact, several of them praised his speech effusively for precisely these qualities.

One reason which has been suggested for Johnson's caution is the fear that identification with the Rising would have led to an immediate split in Congress and the consequent decampment of most

¹¹ Inspector General (IG), RIC, monthly report, CO 904, October 1915.

¹² Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1916 Report, pp. 22-3.

northern workers. This explanation is reinforced by the strongly anti-partitionist line adopted by Congress. Any prospect of labour's weight being used to stem the drift towards partition would recede drastically if the movement were divided into northern and southern camps. A second reason was the fear of further state repression if labour came to be identified with the insurrection. The shelling of Liberty Hall and the deportation of several labour leaders, including P. T. Daly, the Congress secretary, surely had a sobering effect on the naturally conservative trade union officials.

But while fear of state repression was certainly a factor in determining labour's post-Rising policy, it is harder to see fear of alienating northern workers as decisive, given subsequent events. What is most striking about the political development of the ITUCLP in the two and a half years from the Rising to the end of the war is its increasing tilt towards Sinn Féin. Protestant workers might have been mollified by a neutral line on the "national question" but this would probably have resulted in labour renouncing any political authority over southern workers. It was decided instead to mollify Catholic workers who were turning rapidly away from constitutional nationalism. The only alternative was an independent labour policy, either of a British Labourite cast, as advocated by some northern trade unionists, or a Connollyite policy based on competing with Sinn Féin for leadership of the fight for national independence. The latter was inchoately put forward by a few southerners. Both of these options were decisively defeated at the renamed Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress' (ILPTUC) special conference in November 1918. But if labour became effectively an ally of Sinn Féin, this does not mean that it was simply an appendage of militant nationalism. Such a conclusion would negate the impact of the Russian Revolution and Irish labour's increasing self-confidence on the economic front from 1917 onwards.

The political convergence between Labour and Sinn Féin can be seen in ITUCLP and ILPTUC resolutions and manifestos, especially in 1918. At the August conference in Waterford, for example, a motion was passed which called for:

free and absolute self-determination of every people, the Irish included...and obtains for Poles, Yugo-Slavs, Serbs, Belgians, Alsatians, Lorrainers, Egyptians, Indians and other

subject peoples no more than for Ireland, and for Ireland no more than for others.¹³

By listing Ireland as only one of a number of "subject peoples", including nations subject to other powers besides the British Empire, one can detect an attempt to not take too "hard" a line on the question of Irish independence. But in a manifesto issued a month later entitled "Irish Labour and the General Election", the nationalist case is made much more strongly:

We assert before the world that Ireland is denied this right [self-determination] by the power of armed force and we call upon the Democracies to make good their professions by their actions, and set free the Irish nation from its involuntary bondage.¹⁴

The forcefulness of the language used seems to invalidate O'Connor's comment that "the practice of British Labourism", particularly embodied in Tom Johnson, led the Congress leadership to speak of Irish self-determination, "as if it were an item of foreign policy."¹⁵

Aside from the rhetoric of Congress, one can also assess its activity for indications of this de facto alliance with militant nationalism. In this regard, participation in the Mansion House anti-conscription conference is particularly noteworthy. This lash-up of constitutional nationalists, Sinn Féin and Labour sought and received the imprimatur of the Irish Catholic bishops. In the context of the time, it was a clearly nationalist enterprise, despite the statements by Labour spokesmen that they would oppose conscription even under an Irish government. As for the 23 April 1918 general strike against conscription which is often and correctly cited as Irish labour's coming of age—the moment when it began to realise its potential political power—it must be remembered that it was also a complete failure in Belfast. The rhetoric about self-determination and the preparations for all-out resistance in the event of conscription being imposed were undoubtedly anathema to most northern Protestant workers. Despite this, many of them remained affiliated to Congress via the Belfast and Derry trades councils and the amalgamated unions. Nevertheless, if

¹³ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1918 Report, p. 59.

¹⁴ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, November 1918 Special Conference Report, p. 166.

¹⁵ Emmet O'Connor, Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917-23 (Cork, 1988), p. 86.

placating northern workers had been the sole priority of the Congress leadership, they would surely have behaved differently.

Caution was undoubtedly overriding in 1916, but by the end of the war, organisational advances and the beginning of a successful wage offensive had encouraged a more militant political approach. From August 1917 to August 1918, the affiliated membership of the ITUCLP grew dramatically from 100,000 to 253,000.¹⁶ Approximately a sixth of this total was accounted for by the ITGWU whose June 1918 census counted 43,788 members. By the end of the year, this had increased again to 67,827.¹⁷ This represented nearly a tenfold increase over two years and gave the Transport Union, along with the increasingly militant Irish membership of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), an undisputed leadership role in the southern labour movement.

The central reason for this growth was undoubtedly economic. Sharply rising prices, due to wartime conditions, especially on basic food staples, forced workers to organise. Organisation was facilitated by wartime conditions in the British Isles economy which generated an increasing demand for labour in particular sectors and a general decrease in the labour supply, as huge numbers left for the front. Furthermore, profits were high in many sectors of the economy and wage demands could therefore be accommodated. In Ireland, not having a large share of munitions contracts and with a lower level of enlistment, these factors were less pronounced. However, they were very much at work in the key agricultural sector. Farmers were making record profits and many rural areas reported an acute labour shortage, a situation aggravated by government regulations prescribing increased tillage in 1917-8.¹⁸ The situation was ideal for organising farm labourers on a large scale and, already, by mid-1918, the ITGWU census reported that nearly one quarter of its members were farm workers, a proportion which would continue to increase. All of this was reflected in steadily increasing strike activity during the war. The number of strikes, the number of strikers and the

¹⁶ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1917 Report, p. 70; 1918 Report, p. 19. It should be noted that these figures include the membership of affiliated Trades Councils. This means that many people were counted twice.

¹⁷ Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, Annual Report for 1918, p. 8.

¹⁸ Emmet O'Connor, A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-1960 (Dublin 1992), pp. 96-7.

number of workdays lost due to strikes all increased in Ireland during each year from 1915 to 1918.¹⁹

But while the economic conjuncture was crucial to the increasing strength of Irish labour by the end of the war, the spirit of militancy was also fanned by the example of the Russian Revolution. A crowd estimated at 10,000 gathered at the Mansion House in Dublin on 4 February 1918 in response to a call from the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) to celebrate the Bolshevik seizure of power.²⁰ The SPI, dominated by staid ITUCLP and ITGWU officials, had already sent a rapturous telegram to the new government the previous month which ended by triumphantly declaring that, "Ireland has faith in you, Ireland has faith in the revolutionary proletarian democracy, Ireland has faith in the Red International of the Socialist Republic."²¹ The clearest indication of the degree to which enthusiasm for the revolution had infected certain sections of the Irish labour movement was a piece written by the paragon of caution, Tom Johnson, entitled "If the Bolsheviks Come to Ireland":

The Soviets—the councils of workmen, of peasants and of soldiers—who are now in power in Russia, have their Irish equivalents in the trades councils, the agricultural co-operative societies and—dare we say it?—the local groups of the Irish Republican army. An Irish counterpart of the Russian revolution would mean that these three sections co-operating would take control of the industrial, agricultural and social activities of the nation.²²

Leaving aside the quirkiness of his analogies, one still wonders what possessed Johnson to pen these lines. Was he simply trying to keep in step with a growing radical sentiment in Labour's ranks, with the intention of deflecting it into more "constructive" endeavours? Perhaps, but it is also possible that his enthusiasm was in its own way

¹⁹ David Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland, 1914-21" *Saothar* 6, Table III, p. 36. Fitzpatrick's analysis is based on the "Trade Dispute Books" compiled by the Board of Trade and, after 1917, by the Ministry of Labour. While giving a good idea of the pattern of strike activity, this data significantly underestimates the number of strikes, particularly in 1919-21, as shall be seen in Chapter 4.

²⁰ *Irish Opinion: The Voice of Labour*, 9 February 1918.

²¹ "Address of the Socialist Party of Ireland to the People's Government of Republican Russia," William O'Brien Papers, NLI Ms 15674(1).

²² *Voice of Labour*, 23 February 1918.

quite genuine, based on a hope that amidst the horrors of the war, a better day had finally dawned.

Labour's decision to not contest the 1918 elections has often been cited by commentators as a capitulation to Sinn Féin and a partial renunciation, at least, of the goal of a politically independent, self-reliant labour movement advocated by Larkin and Connolly and adopted as Congress policy six years previously. This may be true but it must be remembered that Labour's stand-down also saved it from what would have been, by all indications, a humiliating defeat. Furthermore, the Congress Executive had been engaged in lengthy negotiations with Sinn Féin who had offered them a clear run in four Dublin constituencies in return for a definite promise of abstention from Westminster. If Labour had accepted this offer, it would have rightly been accused of being merely an appendage to militant nationalism. The only alternative was to openly fight Sinn Féin for leadership of the independence movement, a policy which the majority at the special conference rejected unequivocally.

However, as O'Connor points out, "in an entirely ironic way, the failure of nerve in 1918 radicalized Congress by making it more reliant on the syndicalist nature of trade union strategy."²³ Syndicalism, the combination of industrial militancy and an aversion to parliamentary politics, was ideally suited to the temperament of the southern Irish labour movement at the end of the war. For example, Thomas MacPartlin of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) in seconding the Executive's call for a standown at the November 1918 Special Conference, declared, "it was far more effective for them to have the industrial workers organised to fight the Capitalist class than to grip political power."²⁴ The bosses could be fought and the Russian Revolution hailed while leaving Sinn Féin to deal with "politics" unmolested. But what made syndicalism's industrial approach different from earlier types of trade-union activity?

One version of the syndicalist plan was the ITGWU's call for an Irish Workers Union which would incorporate all the craft unions and organise the unorganised. This idea was put forward most forcefully in "The Lines of Progress" pamphlet written by Thomas Foran and issued in July 1918:

²³ O'Connor, Syndicalism, p. 86.

²⁴ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, Special Conference Report, November 1918, p. 105.

The days of the local society are dead; the day of the craft union is passing; the day for the One Big Union has come...To secure effective action in industrial questions there must be unified control—the one Executive Committee—the one General Fund. To secure that Irish Labour shall be free to do its duty in all questions of national importance, the union must have its headquarters in Ireland.²⁵

The final stipulation was clearly aimed at removing British-based unions from Ireland. But while the document tries to make room for local and "sectional" interests within the OBU framework, it was precisely these interests which proved to be the decisive obstacle to Foran and O'Brien's cherished dream. What is impressive, however, is the degree to which the ITGWU itself came to embody the OBU ideal.

While syndicalism's forward march may be seen as largely embodied in the growth of the ITGWU, it was as much characterised by local initiative as by increasing centralisation. Union organisation spread to small towns where it was previously feeble or non-existent; it also mushroomed in the countryside. As a result, farm labourers and "general workers" made up an increasing proportion of membership. To make organisation more than an ephemeral event in areas and among layers previously outside the ambit of trade unionism depended on the dedication of a small army of local branch secretaries. As with the local units of the IRA subsequently, their day to day tactics were of necessity largely devised "on the ground".

Labour's role in this period cannot be assessed simply in terms of electoral performance. In any case, workers did not join trade unions to express a political allegiance but in order to better their standard of living. As mentioned already, the dramatic growth of the ITGWU, the NUR and other unions by the end of the war is principally attributable to the high demand for labour combined with high inflation. Workers had acute grievances but they were also in a good position to make gains if they acted forcefully. Nevertheless, political questions intrude at all levels of analysis because even struggles on basic economic issues tended to take on a political character in the context of the sharpening conflict between Irish separatists and the British state after 1916. In this struggle, southern labour which dominated the ITUCLP/ILPTUC took the side of the militant nationalists and,

²⁵ Thomas Foran, "The Lines of Progress" (ITGWU, Dublin, 1918), p. 3

furthermore, implicitly accepted the idea that "Labour must wait." This was not, after all, so far from the belief held by pro-IPP trade unionists in the past that independent labour politics would have to await Home Rule. The underlying assumption remained that independence was necessary for industrial revival and that, therefore, the "popular front" cross-class alliance for independence must be maintained. This, Irish labour's traditional world view, was certainly under stress by the end of the war, but was in no sense rejected.

3.2 LIMERICK LABOUR DURING THE WAR

3.2.1 Labour's Economic Position

In order to assess the social and political role of Limerick labour during the war, one must first consider the state of the local economy and labour's strength within that economy. Britain, as noted already, saw the contraction of various sectors more than compensated by the growth of war-related production. However, Ireland only received a small share of the munitions and other war contracts. Limerick's first—and apparently only—munitions contract, was worth £4,000 and was awarded in late 1915 to Messrs. J. P. Evans and Co., Engineers, Thomas St.²⁶ This benefit accruing from the war was small indeed when compared, for example, with the dislocation caused to shipping in the port of Limerick.

In 1913, a total of 497 vessels arrived in the port carrying 206,231 tons. By 1916, this had been almost halved to 271 vessels carrying 197,410 tons. The last two years of the war saw this trade halved yet again. Table 3.1 compares the performance of Limerick and several other Irish ports during the war. What is clear is that eastern ports were much less affected than those in the south and west such as Cork, Limerick and Tralee. Dublin's trade, measured in tons, actually increased slightly while even the small port of Waterford saw tonnage drop by only 45.6% between 1913 and 1918 compared to 71% in Cork, 73.4% in Limerick and 75.3% in Tralee.

The reason for this disparity is that the bulk of trade was with Britain and, given the danger from German U-boats, the shorter and more heavily patrolled routes across the Irish Sea were far safer. Wartime regulations prohibited the Irish press from discussing the extent of German attacks on commercial shipping, but at the end of the war, the Limerick Leader reported:

²⁶ Limerick Leader (LL), 8 September 1915.

Table 3.1 - Net tonnage of sailing and steam vessels which arrived in several Irish ports in 1913 and 1918.

Port	1913	1918
Belfast	2,916,511	2,061,386
Cork	1,084,646	314,568
Dublin	2,369,932	2,420,903
Limerick	206,231	54,863
Tralee	81,522	20,162
Waterford	432,157	235,276

Source: The figures for 1913 and 1918 were arrived at by adding the totals for "Colonial and Foreign Trade" and "Coasting Trade" (including "intercourse between Great Britain and Ireland") given in Thom's Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1918 and Thom's...1921. The 1916 figures cited in the text (p. 102) come from LL, 13 March 1918 which cites the Harbour Board's annual (December) report. It should be noted though that the same piece gives a different figure for 1917 total vessels and tonnage (152; 64,345) than Thom's...1920 (159; 73,421) as calculated by the above method.

...City, was reported as being "disastrous" to the "Business" as a result of which the company's AGM presented each of the directors a bonus of £200.²⁷ However, the war's impact upon coasting trade was badly hit despite agricultural prosperity. In late 1913, Alderman McNeice claimed at a public meeting that "the combined landings and exports showed a reduction of almost 50 per cent, as compared with 1910."²⁸ This was not due to a decline in demand for bacon, but rather to increasing exports of live pigs to Britain. The middlemen were obtaining a better price for this "live" trade than they were from the local slaughterhouses.

From the above, it is clear that the war had a differential impact on particular sectors of the Limerick economy, stimulating agriculture and retail trade while depressing the port and the bacon curing industry. But how did it affect labour? Unemployment was higher

²⁷ LL, 10 November 1913.

²⁸ cited in Denis Coffey, Economic Development: Limerick Since 1817: A Study of British Policy in Ireland (Dublin, 1961), p. 26.

²⁹ LL, 9 March 1917.

³⁰ Minister, Home Dept Limerick and Cork (Limerick, 1917), 7 October 1917.

There can be no harm in mentioning now that German submarines, especially for the last year or more, were constantly prowling round the mouth of the Shannon, on the pounce for vessels that might be unlucky enough to come within striking distance. When a few of these had been sunk scarcely any others were allowed to come up the river, with the result that port dues fell off to an alarming extent.²⁷

In addition, employers claimed that labour-intensive methods were causing the port to lose business. The coal importers estimated in 1916 that the unloading of a 600-700 ship took 2-3 days in Limerick whereas it only took ten to twelve hours in Cork.²⁸ Whatever the merits of this case, it was clearly a secondary factor in accounting for the port's difficulties during the war.

Meanwhile, agriculture was booming due to the increased demand and higher prices obtainable in the British market. This in turn was the result of the greatly reduced amount of agricultural imports from overseas caused by the same German naval activity which had hurt the trade of Limerick's port. The rising income of farmers was reflected in increasing deposits in banks and strong retail trading. In 1917, for example, Cannock's, the largest drapery firm in Limerick City, was reported as having "Unprecedented Success in Business" as a result of which the company's AGM awarded each of the directors a bonus of £200.²⁹ However, the city's strategic bacon curing trade was badly hit despite agricultural prosperity. In late 1918, Alderman McNeice claimed at a public meeting that, "the combined killings and exports showed a reduction of almost 50 per cent, as compared with 1916."³⁰ This was not due to a decline in demand for bacon but rather to increasing exports of live pigs to Britain. The middlemen were obtaining a better price for this "live" trade than they were from the local slaughterhouses.

From the above, it is clear that the war had a differential impact on particular sectors of the Limerick economy, stimulating agriculture and retail trade while depressing the port and the bacon curing industry. But how did it affect labour? Unemployment was higher

²⁷ LL, 20 November 1918.

²⁸ cited in Liam Cahill, Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet 1919: A Threat to British Power in Ireland (Dublin, 1990), p. 36.

²⁹ LL, 9 March 1917.

³⁰ Munster News (and Limerick and Clare Advocate) (MN), 2 October 1918.

overall in Ireland than in Britain during the war because of the relative lack of war-related work and the less dramatic drop in the labour supply. The latter was caused primarily by the lower rate of enlistment in Ireland (combined, of course, with the failure to impose conscription) and the cutting off of Ireland's normal emigration routes to America and Australia. Still a substantial number of young Irishmen did enlist. These were mostly from urban areas since, as the RIC inspectors often noted, farmers' sons were the group least inclined to enlist due to the need for their labour on the farms. It would also appear that unskilled workers and other sections of the urban population particularly affected by unemployment were more likely to enlist. For example, Limerick trade unionists claimed in early 1916 that 500 quay labourers had joined the army.³¹ In addition to enlistment the other principal drain on the labour supply was caused by the departure of thousands of women and men for Britain's munitions factories. On 2 February 1916, the Limerick Leader headlined "Limerick Workers for England" saying that 100 had left in one day for the factories. Substantial numbers were also reported to have left in April and September 1917.³² Both of these reports indicated that dockers were predominant among the departing groups which is hardly surprising given the state of the port.

The net effect of these countervailing factors was that unemployment decreased in Ireland during the course of the war but not to the same degree as in Britain. In the Irish building trade, for example, unemployment went from 9.7% in December 1914 to 4.7% in September 1918 while the U.K. figures at these two dates were 5.0% and .6% respectively.³³ As mentioned earlier, the one sector of the Irish economy which experienced a positive labour shortage during the war was agriculture. In April 1916, a meeting of the Limerick and Clare Farmers' Association discussed the situation at length, one member reporting that labourers could be found in Achill Island, Co. Mayo!³⁴

In Britain, the severe shortage of labour caused women to be drawn into munitions work in large numbers (a process which was termed "dilution") and thereby into many skilled jobs that were previously male preserves. However, in Ireland, this process was

³¹ LL, 3 March 1916.

³² LL, 20 April & 19 September 1917.

³³ Labour Gazette.

³⁴ LL, 17 April 1916.

marginal due to the less dramatic shrinkage of the labour supply and the absence of significant war work. Nevertheless, the expectations of many Irish women were certainly heightened during this period as indicated by the "Irish Central Bureau for the Training and Employment of Women"'s annual report for 1917.³⁵ After noting that "the demand for untrained workers has practically ceased, whether in Government or civilian work," the report goes on to say that the Bureau has been trying to convince women to return to more "traditional" occupations for which demand has been increasing. However, they have had no success because:

...while the glamour of war work with high wages continues, our preaching unfortunately does not find willing listeners, and the number of those who can be persuaded to take up the occupation of children's nurse, matron, welfare worker, and so on, is extremely small.

The difference with Britain, however, is that most of the "war work" positions referred to here were clerical rather than industrial. The Bureau concludes by predicting that soon, "...the directing of the discharged [female] war worker to other occupations, and the suitable training for them, will be a work of national importance."

While high unemployment remained a problem facing Irish workers, it was overshadowed by the rapidly rising cost of living. 1914-8 was a period of record inflation in the British Isles. Official UK statistics indicate that the cost of living roughly doubled from July 1914 to the end of 1918. Unfortunately, no separate estimate was made for Ireland. A certain amount of wholesale price data is available for Ireland, including prices in provincial markets, but one cannot assume that retail prices followed wholesale prices, particularly given the government's widescale imposition of price controls in the retail sector.³⁶ In fact, the only series of Irish retail

³⁵ Irish Central Bureau for the Training and Employment of Women, annual report, 1917 (NLI). The Bureau was a non-governmental body which mainly served as a job information service and training centre. Its "foundress" was the countess of Dudley while the countess of Mayo was listed as vice-president. The 1917 report did not list a president but in 1913 this post had been filled by Lady Aberdeen.

³⁶ For a thorough discussion of Irish agricultural (i.e. wholesale) prices see Thomas Barrington, "A Review of Irish Agricultural Prices," Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (1926), pp. 249-80. The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland Journal gave quarterly average wholesale prices from Irish provincial markets.

prices which appears to have been compiled at the time is that for the 4 lb loaf of bread in Dublin. In August 1914, the price of this staple of the working class diet was 6d in Dublin, Belfast and Glasgow while it was 5 1/2d in London. Table 3.2 shows that the difference in bread prices obtaining in these four cities between August 1914 and October 1917 was insignificant. In fact, at almost all points the price of bread in Dublin was exactly the same as that in Glasgow.

While one cannot extrapolate from this single commodity across the range of goods—including food, fuel, rent and clothing—in the working class budget, the close parallel suggests a similar price structure in the two islands. This is what one would expect given the high degree of integration of the British Isles market at the time. It is also noteworthy that the government's Food Controller generally set price maxima across the UK, indicating that the government believed the differences in the price structure between the two islands were not much greater than the differences within Britain itself.³⁷ It is, therefore, a reasonable operative assumption that the price increases in Ireland followed the UK pattern. In any case, an attempt to reconstruct a series of reliable retail prices for certain key commodities (from local newspapers for example) and then to estimate a separate Irish cost of living index, while theoretically possible, is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 3.3 shows the quarterly increase in food, rent, clothing, fuel and the overall cost of living across the UK, as estimated in the "Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics" compiled by the Ministry of Labour. While prices, as usual, remained higher in the large urban areas than outside them, indications are that the percentage increases were just as dramatic in smaller towns and villages. For example, the increase from July 1914 to April 1918 in the price of bacon (streaky) in towns over 50,000 was 145% while in smaller communities it was 134%; bread increased 57% in large towns and 52% in small communities during the same period; tea increased 78% and 80% in large and small towns respectively.³⁸

The principal cause of the increasing cost of living was the dramatic rise in retail food prices. The "All Items Included" figure

³⁷ The Ministry of Food published the National Food Journal from September 1917 to January 1920 which listed all the maxima on retail and wholesale prices which had been fixed by the Food Controller. By the end of 1918, this list had become formidable.

³⁸ Labour Gazette (Ministry of Labour), April 1918.

was calculated by using the following proportions: food, 60%; rent, 16%; clothing, 12%; fuel and light, 8%; other, 4%. Since these estimates were meant to apply to the population at large, it can easily be seen that the impact of inflation would have hit the families of unskilled workers proportionally harder than the norm, since food formed a larger part of their budget.

If one assumes that the cost of living roughly doubled for workers in both islands what can be said of wage increases? The "Abstract of Labour Statistics" estimated that the "average percentage increase in weekly full-time wages", compared with July 1914, was 95-100% at the end of 1918. By this estimate, the "average" worker in the United Kingdom saw his or her wages double during the war and thereby roughly keep pace with inflation. However, this figure masks the widely varying experience of workers in different sectors of the economy. Workers in war industries were paid significantly better than the norm. The absence of such work on any significant scale in southern Ireland meant that, for this reason alone, one would expect the average (mean) increase in Irish wages to have lagged behind that in Britain. Contemporary accounts suggest that most Irish workers experienced nothing like a doubling of their wages. One observer, Andrew E. Malone, writing in mid-1918, estimated that from April 1914 to April 1918, the wages of skilled organised Irish workers increased by 28.2% (from an "average" of 39s per week to 50s per week). The comparable changes for unskilled but organised workers he estimated to be 33.3% (from 22s.6d to 30s) and, for unskilled unorganised workers, 28.2% (19s.6d to 25s). Malone understandably concludes: "That the workers' condition is worse now than it was in 1914 will be obvious to all who are interested in this matter."³⁹ However, gaining a more detailed picture is hampered, as in the case of determining Irish price changes, because of the lack of systematic official statistics for Ireland.

³⁹ Andrew E. Malone, "Irish Labour in War Time," in a symposium on "Four Years of Irish Economics, 1914-1918," *Studies*, v. vii, no. 26 (June 1918), pp. 319-27.

Table 3.2 - Price of the 4 lb loaf of bread in several cities in Britain and Ireland, August 1914-October 1917.

date	London	Glasgow	Belfast	Dublin
1 August 1914	5 1/2d	6d	6d	6d
1 December 1914	6 1/2	6 1/2	6 1/2	6 1/2
1 May 1915	8 1/2	7 1/2	7 1/2	7 1/2
1 December 1915	8 - 8 1/2	8	8	8
12 June 1916	8 1/2	8 1/2	9	9
1 December 1916	10-10 1/2	10	10 1/2	10
1 June 1917	11-12	11 1/2	12	11 1/2-12
1 September 1917	11-12	11 1/2	12	11 1/2-12
1 October 1917	9-9 1/2	9-9 1/2	9-9 1/2	9

Source: *Labour Gazette*, 1914-7. The drop in prices between September and October 1917 was due to the imposition of a maximum price by the Food Controller.

Table 3.3 - Percentage increase, 1915-18, of retail prices in the United Kingdom (as compared with July 1914).

Date	Food	Rent (inc rates)	Clothing	Fuel & light	Other items	All items included
1915						
1 January	18%	0%	10%	5%	0%	10-15%
1 March	24	0	10-15	20	0	15-20
1 June	32	0	20	25	5	25
1 September	35	1	30	25	5	25
1 December	44	2	35	25-30	10	35
1916						
1 March	48	0	45	30	10	35-40
1 June	59	0	55	35	20	45
1 September	65	0	65	35-40	20	50
1 December	84	0	80	40	20	65
1917						
1 March	92	0	90	40-45	25	70
1 June	102	0	100	40-45	40	75-80
1 September	106	0	120	45	40	80-85
1 December	105	0	140	55-60	50	85
1918						
1 March	107	0	170	60	55	90
1 June	108	2	210	65-70	80	100
2 September	116	2	240	85	85	110
2 December	129	2	260	90	90	120

Source: "Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom," PP 1926, v. 29, pp.139-41.

Table 3.4 - Weekly wage rates in the UK for adult workers in certain occupations in July 1914 and at the end of 1918.

Industry and occupation	July 1914	31 Dec 1918	% increase
Bookbinders and machine rulers:	33s.11d	64s.7d	90.4
Boot and shoe:			
Men (heel building & stock & shoe rooms)	27.0	46s.0 - 51s.0	70.4 - 88.9
Other departments	30.0	52.0 - 56.0	73.3 - 86.7
Women	17.0 - 18.0	27.6 - 30.0	61.8 - 76.5
Baking - table hands	30.1	60.11	102.5
Building (average of recognised rates in 39 towns):			
Bricklayers	40.7	69.11	72.3
Masons	39.7	69.1	74.5
Carpenters & joiners	39.11	69.5	73.9
Plumbers	39.8	70.3	77.1
Plasterers	40.0	69.7	74.0
Painters	36.3	64.9	78.6
Labourers	27.0	55.9	106.5
Engineers (average of recognised rates in 16 principal towns):			
Fitters and turners	38.11	76.11	97.6
Hand compositors (book and jobbing)	35.7	65.4	83.6
Shipbuilding (average of recognised rates in 9 principal centres):			
shipwrights	41.4	78.10	90.7
ship joiners	40.0	77.10	94.6
Transport:			
Engine drivers	40.6	73.6	81.5
Goods porters*	22.0	55.0	150
Passenger porters, class 2*	19.2	52.2	172.2
Permanent way labourers*	22.0	55.0	150
Docks - general cargo workers	6.1 p/d	12.7 p/d	106.8
Local authority labourers	26.9	52.7	96.6
Road transport:			
One-horse carters	25.7	56.0	118.9

* - industrial area

Source: "Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics," pp. 116-9.

Table 3.5 - Weekly wage rates in several Irish towns on 1 October 1913.

Occupation	Limerick	Belfast	Cork	Dublin	Waterford
Building:					
Bricklayers	32s.0d	8 1/2d p/h	36s.0d	39s.7d†	30s.0d
Masons	32.0	8 1/2d p/h	36.0	38.3†	30.0
Carpenters	35.7 1/2†	42.7†	34.6	37.6†	30.0
Slaters	5s.4d p/d	6s p/d	34.6	37.6†	--
Plumbers	36.0	9d p/h	34.0†	38.3†	30.0
Plasterers	5s.4d p/d	8 1/2d p/h	34.6	33.4†	30.0
Painters	31.10 1/2†	38.3†	34.0†	31.3 & 36.0†	30.0
Building (labourers):					
Bricklayers'	2s.10d p/d	16-19s	19.0	20.10†*	14.0
Masons'	2s.10d p/d	16-19s	19.0	20.10†*	14.0
Plasterers'	2s.10d p/d	16-19s	19.0	20.10†*	14.0
Engineers:					
Turners	34.0	41.0	34.0	36.0	30.0
Fitters	32.0	41.0	34.0	36.0	30.0
Boilermakers and steel shipbuilders:					
Platers (heavy)	32.0	42.6 (ship yards)	--	42.0	32.0
Riveters	32.0	40.0 " "	--	38.0	32.0
Compositors:					
Case rates (evening newspapers)	29.0	37.0	35.0	37.6	--
Bookbinders	31.0	34.0	32.0	34.0	--
Gas stokers (per shift):					
Week days	5.0	5.9 6/7	5.2 4/7	5.0	5.0
Sundays	7.6	8.9	5.2 4/7	5.0	5.0
Bakers	--	36.0	--	34.0	--

† - specifically summer weekly rates, as extrapolated from hourly rates and standard summer hours.

* - the other summer rate prevalent among Dublin labourers was 21s.10 1/2d.

Source: "Standard Time Rates of Wages [and Hours] in the United Kingdom. At 1st October, 1913," PP 1914, v. 80. Irish-specific data is not available again in the official statistics until 1920.

Table 3.6 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Limerick, 1914-18.

A. Limerick City Corporation employees

Department	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18
All employees (min rates)				30s.0d	33s.0d
Power Station:					
engine drivers	27.6-30.0				42.0
gasmen	26.8				38.2
Electricity Cttee:					
engineer	40.0				
chief clerk	£130 p/y				
fitter	42.0				
lamp fitter	32.0				
lamp trimmer	22.6				
Cleansing, Repairing & Water Depts:					
labourers	18.0		22.0		33.0
sweepers			23.10		33.0
carters			26.6 1/2		33.0
quarrymen	20.0		24s (a)		
sewermen			25s		33.0
Water Cttee: (c)					
members of Stationery Engine Drivers & Firemen's Soc					46.0
plumber					54.0

B. Other workers in Limerick City

Building					
plumbers				40.0	11 1/4d p/h
carpenters (Master Builders)			36.1 1/2		
brick & stone layers					1s p/h
Transport					
carters, Wallis & Sons				30.0	
coal dockers (b)				7.0 p/d	10.0 p/d
coal carters					38.0
Other					
coachbuilding trade (min)					36.0
bakers, Board of Guardians (d)			36.0		
female assistants at small draperies (yearly salary)					£42 min

C. Workers outside Limerick City

Group	location	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18
general workers at Cleeve's	Cos. Lim & Tipp	17.0				
BoG labourers (m)	Newcastle W.		14.0			
saw mills	Foynes					23.0
Roadworkers (County Council)						
labourers		14.0 (e)	15.0		20.6	25.0
surfacemen		16.0	16.0		22.6	27.6
daily carters			6.0 p/d			8.0 p/d
foremen					31.0	

Tables 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 are an attempt to outline this more detailed picture. Table 3.4 shows how wages changed in several occupations from 1914 to 1918. These figures are U.K.-wide. None are given for Ireland separately. However, fairly extensive data is available for several Irish towns in October 1913, including Limerick. This allows us to compare the position of Irish workers with their British counterparts on the eve of the war. Some of this data is reproduced in Table 3.5. Finally, Table 3.6 gives data on wages in Limerick during the war, culled from the local press, Corporation records and the Labour Gazette.

The UK-wide data given in Table 3.4 shows the significant differences in wartime pay increases between skilled and unskilled workers. Building labourers obtained an increase of 106.5% during the war compared to increases for skilled building workers which ranged from 72.3% for bricklayers to 78.6% for painters. Even more dramatically, unskilled "permanent way" labourers on the railways received pay increases which were proportionately twice as high as those of skilled carpenters and joiners (150% as opposed to 73.9%). This, however, is partly attributable to the importance the government attached to the smooth operation of the railways (which they took over) during the war.

A comparison of Tables 3.4 and 3.5 shows the disparity in pre-war wages between Ireland and the U.K. norm. On the basis of the official statistics, Fitzpatrick estimates the ratio of Irish to U.K. rates to have been 85% for skilled building workers, 64% for builders labourers', 91% for shipwrights, 94% for the furnishing trades workers, 87% for bootmakers and 108% for bakers.⁴⁰ The lower ratio for builders' labourers suggests that unskilled Irish workers were in a significantly worse position relative to their British counterparts than skilled Irish workers. It also suggests that the differential between skilled and unskilled workers was greater in Ireland than in Britain. These observations must, however, be taken in conjunction with the evidence mentioned in Chapter 1 which appears to show the "convergence" of unskilled wages in Britain and Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite convergence, wage parity was clearly still a long way off in 1914.

Besides the differences between British and Irish wage rates and the greater skill differential in Ireland, the data also shows the

⁴⁰ Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland, 1914-21," note 4, p. 33.

remarkable disparities between the wage rates in large and small Irish urban areas. For example, bricklayers in Limerick made only 80.8% of the Dublin rate which in turn was very close to the U.K. rate (97.5%). The wage rates seem to be directly proportional to the size of the town with Cork workers making a bit more than those in Limerick and the latter making more than those in Waterford. Meanwhile, skilled workers in Dublin and Belfast in general commanded rates which were comparable to those in the U.K.. The situation was even more drastic for builders' labourers with those in Waterford, Limerick and Cork receiving 51.9%, 63.0%, and 70.4% of the U.K. rate respectively while Dublin labourers received a somewhat better 77.2-81.0%. Such differences may have been partially compensated by the lower cost of living in small towns. Nevertheless, the standard of living of workers, particularly unskilled labourers, in provincial towns appears to have significantly below that of their metropolitan counterparts.⁴¹

But if Limerick workers started from a relatively weak position, how did they fare on the wages front during the war? Data from both the beginning and the end of this period is available for several groups (see Table 3.6). One of these is the labourers employed by the Limerick Corporation whose wages increased by 83.3% (from 18s to 33s) during 1914-8. Road labourers employed by the County Council received a slightly lower increase of 78.6% (14s-25s) while surfacemen obtained a 71.9% increase (16s-27s.6d). On the other hand, engine drivers employed by the Corporation at the Power Station received only a 40.0-52.7% increase (from 27s.6d-30s in 1914 to 42s in 1918). Gasmen employed at the same location obtained a 43.1% rise (26s.8d-38s.2d). Similarly, the plumber employed by the Corporation Water Committee obtained 54s by the end of the war, representing a 50% increase on the Limerick City rate in October 1913 given in Table 3.5. These examples strongly suggest that unskilled workers were obtaining significantly higher increases than skilled workers, in accordance with the UK pattern. Nevertheless, neither

⁴¹ But even these comparisons do not adequately express the differences within Ireland. If one looks at the rates obtained by engineering workers and boilermakers in Table 3.4, one sees the same pattern of wage rates corresponding to the size of the town. However, skilled engineers and shipyard workers made up a far greater proportion of the Belfast working class than anywhere else in Ireland, including Dublin. Hence, the proportion of Belfast workers making over 40s per week was much higher as well. The rates listed for Limerick platers and riveters, on the other hand, were for the comparative handful of men doing this work in the local railway shop.

section was keeping pace with inflation and, therefore, both experienced a decrease in their real wage rates, though not to the same degree suggested by Malone.⁴²

This data also suggests that, during the war, British and Irish wages, instead of converging, were diverging. In 1914, Limerick Corporation labourers were receiving 18s or 67.3% of the UK rate for local authority labourers. But in 1918 they were only receiving 62.8% of the UK rate. Of course, a short-term divergence does not necessarily contradict a long term trend towards convergence. Meanwhile, Limerick coal dockers had secured a wage of 10s per day by August 1918. This was fully 79.5% of the U.K rate for "general cargo workers" on the docks. It is highly unlikely, however, given the lack of trade in the port, that very many of these men would have been able to obtain sufficiently regular work in order to realise a high weekly wage.

What conclusions can be drawn from this analysis? It is clear that Irish workers did not fare as well as British workers in comparable occupations in maintaining their real wage levels. Furthermore, the shift of large numbers of British workers, including women, into more skilled and better paid war work which also had the effect of virtually eliminating unemployment in Britain, was an advantage which did not accrue to Ireland. The report of the "Working Classes Cost of Living Committee" appointed by parliament found that in Britain:

on the evidence of the budgets of working-class expenditure...in June, 1918, the working classes, as a whole, were in a position to purchase food of substantially the same nutritive value as in June, 1914. Indeed, our figures indicate that the families of unskilled workmen were slightly better fed at the later date, in spite of the rise in the cost of food.⁴³

The report goes on to note that, in London, the percentage of children entering school in a "poorly nourished condition" had been more than halved since 1913. While such a positive picture could not have been painted in Ireland due to the strain on family budgets from comparatively low wages there were some counterbalancing factors.

⁴² In fairness to Malone, his estimates were made for April 1918 while many significant wage increases were obtained by the end of the year.

⁴³ "Report of the Committee on the Working Classes Cost of Living," PP 1918, v. 7, p. 9.

Among these was the value of remunerations from Irishmen working in British munitions factories and the value of "separation allowances" to the dependants of Irish soldiers. No attempt has yet been made to calculate the total value of these remunerations but it seems unlikely that they did more than take some of the edge off of a difficult situation.

3.2.2 Industrial Relations

As noted earlier, Irish strike activity, measured from Board of Trade/Ministry of Labour records, increased during each year of the war as workers sought to maintain their standard of living. Table 3.7 measures local strike activity using both official sources and local newspapers. The picture obtained from this analysis does not significantly diverge from the national pattern. Strike activity in Limerick was low during 1915 and 1916 (6 and 3 strikes respectively). Beginning in March 1917, there was a sharp increase in conflict between employers and employees in Limerick City with strikes by printers and dockers, the latter lasting over a month. A total of 12 strikes occurred in 1917 while, in 1918, there were 18 strikes and 1 lockout.

Compared with the last two years of the war, a local strike during 1914-6 was less likely to occur in Limerick City; more likely to be exclusively concerned with wages; far more likely to end in complete defeat for workers; and more likely to be in a narrow range of industrial sectors. During 1914-6 only 37.5% of disputes occurred in Limerick City; this proportion increased dramatically to 80.6% in 1917-8. Of disputes with a known cause or causes, the proportion exclusively concerned with wages dropped from 80.0% in the earlier period to 70.4% in the latter. However, the proportion of disputes at least partly concerned with wages actually increased slightly from 86.7% to 92.6%.

Table 3.7 - Analysis of strikes and lockouts in Limerick, 1914-18.

	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	Totals
strikes/lockouts per year	7	6	3	12	18/1	46/1
location of disputes						
local disputes centred in Limerick City/outside the city	3/4	3/3	0/2	11/1	14/2	31/12
part of national/regional action			1		2/1	3/1
cause(s) of disputes (a)						
over wages only	4	5	3	10	9	31
at least partly over wages	5	5	3	11	14	38
hours					3	3
working conditions	1				1	2
political aims					1	1
union recognition					1	1
reinstatement of dismissed workers	1			1	1	3
sympathetic action	1					1
unclear		1		1	3	5
results of disputes (b)						
workers obtain full demand	1		1	2	3	7
demand entirely refused (or employer obtains his/her full demand)	1	2		2	1	6
compromise		1		5	8	14
unclear	5	3	2	3	6	19
disputes by industrial sector						
building (c)				2	1	3
metals (d)			1	2	2	5
transport (e)	3	1		3	3	10
wood (f)		1			3	4
creamery workers					1	1
other food		1		1	1	3
farm labourers	1			1		2
public authorities (g)	3	2	2		2	9
power workers		1		1	1	3
shop assistants, clerks					1	1
paper, printing				1		1
other/unclear				1	4	5

(a) - Except for wages, all figures refer to the total number of disputes in which a particular cause was cited regardless of whether it was the only cause.

(b) - This does not include most political strikes, where the question of a "result" does not arise.

(c) - including all carpenters.

(d) - including engineering and coachbuilding workers.

(e) - including coalyards.

(f) - not including carpenters.

(g) - including asylum employees, teachers and roadworkers.

Sources: Limerick Leader, 1914-8; Munster News, 1918; RIC internal reports, CO 904; PROLAB 34/14-18 & 32-36 (for the full list of disputes, see Appendix 1).

When workers obtain only part of their strike demands, they may, for various reasons, deem this to be either a success or a failure. However, for statistical purposes, a less subtle distinction must be employed. Thus, in analysing the "results" of disputes, the central distinction made is between instances where workers obtained their full demand(s), part of their demand or none of their demand (corresponding roughly to "success", "compromise" and "failure"). In those instances where an employer initiated a dispute (i.e. a lockout), the result is deemed "successful" for workers if no part of the employer's demand is obtained and unsuccessful if the employer obtains his or her full demand. Measured this way, only 6 of the 16 reported disputes during 1914-6 had a clear "result", the breakdown of "successes", "failures" and "compromises" being 2/3/1 (33.3%/50.0%/16.7%). A far larger proportion of 1917-8 disputes had a clear result (21 of 31), the proportions of successes, failures and compromises being 23.8%/14.3%/61.9%. Despite the small size of the 1914-6 sample, this suggests that workers were far more likely by the end of the war to obtain at least part of their demand and less likely to gain nothing as a result of work stoppages. This reflected the improved bargaining position of labour.

A sectoral analysis also shows dramatic differences between the earlier and latter periods. During 1914-6, 68.8% of Limerick disputes occurred among transport and public authority workers. Besides the three strikes by County Council quarryworkers in 1914, there were three other strikes involving County Council roadworkers and one by Board of Guardians labourers in Newcastle West during the next two years. However, transport and public authority workers accounted for only 25.9% of disputes during 1917-8. This was mainly because of the sharp drop in disputes involving public authority workers. Transport workers, on the other hand, accounted for four (25%) of the disputes in the earlier period, a proportion which only decreased slightly in 1917-8. In the latter period, there were three strikes by dockers in Limerick City and one strike and one lockout at the associated coalyards as well as a strike by employees of the Shannon Steam Company. In general, 1917-8 was characterised by a far wider range of urban workers becoming involved in strike activity. Printers, masons and bricklayers, munitions workers, asylum employees, tobacco factory hands and teachers were among the groups who stopped work in Limerick City. The ITGWU, as the main union organising the increasingly restive layers of unskilled and semi-

skilled urban workers, played a leading role in at least five of the disputes in 1917-8. These included the strike at Messrs. Evans munitions works in November 1917 and the 1918 strikes at the coal docks, Clune's tobacco factory, the Foynes saw mill, as well as the lockout at the coal yards. Farm labourers, on the other hand, did not feature prominently in Limerick strike activity in either period with only two strikes reported in this sector during all of 1914-8.

While strike activity spread to most urban sectors by the end of the war, it is also clear that wage settlements in general—not just as a result of strikes—were leading to larger increases. Printers secured a 5s per week increase in March 1917. Gasworkers received two increases during the year, amounting to a total of 6s while ITGWU members at the Messrs. Evans munitions works received increases of between 2s.6d and 7s.6d. One of largest increases in 1917 was obtained by railworkers. At the end of 1916, the government had taken over the Irish railways. However, the "war bonuses" awarded to Irish members of the NUR and the RCA still lagged behind those awarded to British railworkers. After much agitation, the government conceded the principle of parity in December 1917, meaning that Irish railworkers were entitled to a total increase of at least 15s on pre-war rates.⁴⁴ Women at the Shannon Laundry organised by the ITGWU, on the other hand, only managed to get a 1s.6d raise after negotiations in December.

In many other instances though, the ITGWU was able to win significant pay increases. For example, at the end of the lockout of dockworkers in May-June 1918, a Ministry of Labour arbitrator gave carters a 5s increase and an additional 3s "war bonus", bringing their wages to 38s. The Limerick branch of the Irish Asylum Workers Union (IAWU) demanded an increase which would bring wages to fully one pound above their pre-war level and, after a one-day stoppage in September 1918, they received their full demand. The ICWU won significant increases for many of its members at the end of the year, ranging from 5s for women employed by Messrs Kidd to 8-10s for clerical workers at Lipton's Ltd. Significant increases were also recorded by Corporation employees. For example, the gasmen and engine drivers employed at the electrical power station received a 10s increase in September 1918. Workers employed at the

⁴⁴ LL, 29 December 1916; 25 April & 17 December, 1917.

gasworks meanwhile managed to consolidate the increases they had already received by gaining a total 20s increase on pre-war wages.

This overall view of industrial relations in Limerick during the war can be fleshed out by referring to a couple of specific cases. The sector of the local economy most troubled by labour unrest was clearly the docks. Reference has already been made to the drastic decline in the trade of the port of Limerick due principally to German attacks on commercial shipping which made using Ireland's western and southern ports very risky. However, it is also true, as Cahill points out, that the port was "under-capitalised and unmechanised."⁴⁵ But at least one of the employers, the Limerick Steamship Company, which handled much of the coal trade, went further and contended that organised labour was reducing the harbour's share of business through inflexible hours. In general, the port's employers decided to use the high unemployment resulting from the war to force workers to accept the introduction of new technology and new working practices. However, they encountered stiff resistance, including two dock strikes, a strike in the coal yards and even industrial sabotage. In the end, in spite of resorting to a lockout in 1918, they were only partially successful in their aims.

The battle began in February 1916 when Mr. Morley, of the Limerick Steamship Co., declared at a meeting of the Harbour Board that the Dock Labourers Society (DLS) was refusing to accept the idea that workers starting at 7 am should be paid more than those starting at 8 am, the traditional starting time. He contended that this was an essential change and, in a remarkably Machiavellian fashion, argued that the real problem in getting workers to accede to the new arrangement was that, "the Dock Labourers had no confidence in them [the recent presidents of their society] and say that they were merchants' men".⁴⁶ The clear implication of Morley's remark is that a union leadership which was more militant—at least superficially—would be preferable as an instrument for convincing the workers to make the "required" changes.

Far more controversial than shifting the dockers' starting time, however, was the proposal to introduce steam cranes on the quays for the unloading of coal. In March 1916, the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council (LUTLC) passed a resolution against it. Speaking at the meeting where the resolution was passed, a labour delegate to a

⁴⁵ Cahill, p. 36.

⁴⁶ LL, 28 February 1916.

recent "Coal Conference" with the employers spoke bitterly of the introduction of cranes as a "gross betrayal" of dock labourers:

...who are fighting in France and other fronts at a time when professional men, clerks, shop assistants and tradesmen are all guaranteed their positions on their return to civil life. Were the Limerick Dock labourers the only class to find poverty their reward and their employment gone when they came back from the war?⁴⁷

In a subsequent letter to the press, Denis Clohessy of the DLS, declared that the number of his union's members currently employed on the docks was only 212, compared with perhaps twice that amount before the war.⁴⁸

It was not, however, until March 1917 that the Harbour Commissioners formally announced their intention to bring in electric cranes, "with the object of checking the falling off of coal imports to the port, which was thought to be principally due to the delays and expenses incurred by shipping."⁴⁹ At the end of that month, the first of the wartime dock-related strikes began over the labourers' demand for time and a half payment for night work, instead of the prevailing rate of 1s extra for each night worked. In April, the carters and storemen employed in the city coal yards also came out demanding higher wages. The strike dragged on until the beginning of May when the workers agreed to go back on the old terms with the issues to be reviewed in three months time.⁵⁰

Peace was restored until the end of 1917 when the coal dockers and the workers unloading coal at the railway station, all members of the DLS, struck again for higher wages. The Limerick Steamship Company immediately issued a statement denouncing the union for breaking an agreement to give one month's notice of a strike. The workers demanded an increase of 2s per day and also a 2s increase for night work. Within a week, the strike had been settled with the employers giving the coal workers even more than their initial demand (from 7s to 9s for day work and from 9s.6d to 12s for night

⁴⁷ LL, 3 March 1916.

⁴⁸ LL, 6 March 1916. The Federated Labour Council also sent a letter to the press challenging Morley's statements (LL, 3 April 1916) and Clohessy sent in another letter on the same subject (LL, 7 April 1916).

⁴⁹ LL, 7 March 1917.

⁵⁰ LL, 23-30 March, 16 April & 11 May 1917.

work) but only "temporarily".⁵¹ The consternation of the employers was probably reflected in Morley's contention that the ITGWU was behind the strike, a claim which was immediately rejected by M. J. O'Connor, the Transport Union's Limerick organiser.⁵²

But while the DLS began to make a bit of progress on the wages front, the employers were continuing with their preparations for mechanising the port. In July 1917, the Harbour Board discussed plans for constructing a railway connection to the docks. In December two more meetings with labour representatives, were held on this subject leading to a vague agreement between the parties concerned.⁵³ The unions went so far as to agree to the introduction of cranes with buckets onto the docks but balked when "grab" cranes arrived in early 1918.⁵⁴

The battle on the docks began to reach its climax at this point. In January the RIC Inspector General's report noted that:

At Limerick the branch of the Transport Workers Union objected to the erection of an electric crane at the Docks on the grounds that it would lessen employment. The parts of the crane are lying at the Railway Station, and the carters refuse to move them.

The work was only able to continue under the protection of the police and reinforcements were brought in from outside the city. On 6 February, a carriage for one of the cranes was rolled into the Shannon by persons unknown. And on the 14th, "a crowd followed the men carting the machinery and some stones were thrown."⁵⁵

When exactly the ITGWU gained a foothold among Limerick's dockers was not reported in the local press. However, what is clear is that the carters employed at the coalyards had joined by the beginning of 1918, well before the May lockout. Notably, the arbitration award issued in August as a result of this dispute covered both coal carters and coal dockers. Before the arbitrator made his decision, a conference was held between himself and representatives of the workers and employers. For the workers, besides two representatives of the LUTLC, the delegation consisted of six members

⁵¹ LL, 28 & 31 December, 1917 & 2 January 1918.

⁵² LL, 2 & 4 January 1918.

⁵³ LL, 30 July, 7 & 17 December 1917.

⁵⁴ Cahill, p. 36.

⁵⁵ LCI, February 1918; see also LL, 8 February 1918.

of the ITGWU.⁵⁶ Since the outcome was a substantial wage rise, as noted earlier, as well as an 8 am start, this must have had the effect of further increasing the prestige of the ITGWU on the docks.⁵⁷ Hence, in an ironic way, Mr. Morley got his wish. But if union militancy had succeeded in at least making sure that dock workers did not end the war in a much worse economic position than they had started it, the employers had succeeded in partly mechanising the port. And the question was still just as clearly posed: where would the jobs be for dock labourers who returned from Europe?

The case of the dockers shows that even though the cause of the vast majority of local strikes was a dispute over wages, nevertheless other issues relating to hours and working conditions could and did become part of the broader struggle between employers and workers. Another example of this was the strike by the Limerick Operative Bakers in October-November 1918. The union met with some immediate success when their demand for a 1s.6d increase in the rate for a sack of 100 4 lb loaves was granted by five of the smaller bakeries in the city.⁵⁸ The Master Bakers' Association, however, put up a stiffer resistance and it rapidly became clear that other issues besides wages were involved in this dispute. Two weeks into the strike, a letter from M.J. Russell, the secretary of the Master Bakers, appeared in the local press. He conceded that the wages of the bakers had only increased by 25% since the outbreak of war, but contended that their pre-war rate was very high. This, however, was not his only argument:

I also hold that so long as there are nearly twice as many men in the local society as are required and so long as the men's Executive have the sole right to determine how many men shall be employed in each bakery, increase or decrease cannot be calculated on a percentage basis.⁵⁹

In the same issue, a letter was also printed from David O'Dwyer, the assistant secretary of the Executive Council of the Operative Bakers who angrily declared that, "the master bakers have shown their hand...They are out to break our system of work, which means, in

⁵⁶ MN, 13 July 1918.

⁵⁷ MN, 14 August 1918.

⁵⁸ MN, 19 October 1918.

⁵⁹ MN, 26 October 1918.

short, breaking our Society." Russell's statement certainly lends credence to the accusation that management were trying to effect a serious curtailment of the union's power. In the end, both sides accepted arbitration. But, unlike the coal workers, the bakers had reason to regret this decision since the arbitrator "awarded" no increase whatsoever.⁶⁰ This was one of six Limerick strikes during the war which ended in a clear defeat for the workers involved. However, the Master Bakers were apparently not successful in their broader aim of taking the power to hire and fire away from the union.

The lockout at the coalyards and the bakers' strike illustrate another facet of local industrial relations during the war, namely, the increasing role of arbitration. On 30 June 1916, the Limerick Leader headlined: "Limerick Carpentry Trade—Threatened Dispute Averted—Lord Bishop Acts as Arbitrator". Details were then given of Bishop O'Dwyer's recommendations on changing the prevailing summer and winter rates of wages and hours to one standard for the whole year. Both the ASCJ which represented the workers and the LUTLC publicly thanked the bishop for his intervention. Not to be outdone, the Limerick Leader also praised O'Dwyer editorially.⁶¹ This was the first reported use of arbitration since the beginning of 1915. It was not, however, Bishop O'Dwyer's last appearance in this role as he also intervened to avert a strike by masons and bricklayers in May 1917.⁶² After O'Dwyer's death in August of that year, there is one further report of the Roman Catholic hierarchy's involvement in industrial relations. This occurred in April 1918 when the new bishop, Hallinan, played a role in resolving a strike by the Limerick Furnishing Trades' Association which had been going on for several weeks.⁶³

It was also during the course of the furnishing trades' strike that Rev. Richard Devane, CC, St. Michael's, turned up at a meeting of LUTLC to discuss the proposed "Conciliation Board" for the city.⁶⁴ This was not a new idea. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it was raised during the Boyd's dispute in 1914. However, increased pressure had built up over the previous year to create such a body in order to curb the increasing number of strikes. The Limerick Leader had editorialised

⁶⁰ MN, 23 November 1918.

⁶¹ LL, 5 July 1916.

⁶² LL, 30 May 1917.

⁶³ LL, 8 April 1918.

⁶⁴ LL, 29 March 1918.

no less than three times in 1917 on the subject.⁶⁵ But even before the first of these editorials, labour and employers' bodies had already taken steps towards the formation of a board. The Federated Labour Council (FLC) passed a motion in favour of an "Arbitration or Conciliation Board" in May after the resolution of the dock strike in which both it and the LUTLC had intervened.⁶⁶ The Harbour Board, in fact, had thanked them for their role in settling the strike.⁶⁷ By June 1917, the Conciliation Board seemed to be nearly ready for operation after negotiations between the LUTLC, the FLC and the Employers' Federation. At the end of July, the press still spoke of the board as an imminent reality. It even gave the current proposal for its composition as being twelve members including three delegates each from the LUTLC and the FLC and six from "the Associated or groups of employment" with a "neutral" chairman.⁶⁸ But as shall be seen in Chapter 4, it was not until January 1920 that the Board was finally established.⁶⁹

Conciliation Board or no, 1918 saw an increasing and increasingly sophisticated use of arbitration. In one form or another, an arbitrator was used to resolve at least five strikes, lockouts and disputes including those of the furnishing trades' workers, coal workers, bakers, gasworkers and the women employed in the small "drapery houses". The arbitrator was named in three of these instances. In one case, the arbitrator was the bishop and in two others (the coalworkers and the bakers) it was a Ministry of Labour official. The award given by Sir Dunbar Barton in the case of the coal workers was probably the most comprehensive in its scope since it specified not only wages and hours for carters and dockers but also listed specific rates per ton for the discharging of coal steamers by crane. These examples illustrate that in spite of increasing labour militancy and the bitterness which accompanied certain disputes, both sides felt an interest in finding ways of mitigating the effects of conflict and preventing further escalation. At the same time, it must be said that many unions exhibited a certain ambivalence about arbitration for, although the FLC and LUTLC passed resolutions in favour of a Conciliation Board, in

⁶⁵ LL, 30 July, 9 November & 14 December 1917.

⁶⁶ LL, 23 May 1917.

⁶⁷ LL, 14 May 1917.

⁶⁸ LL, 30 July 1917.

⁶⁹ By June, however, the LUTLC had already gone so far as to appoint delegates to the proposed board (LL, 21 June 1918).

practice many unions refused binding arbitration unless they saw no choice or felt their case to be so strong that the arbitrator would have to rule in their favour. Thus the gasworkers specifically refused arbitration in August after negotiations had fallen through. Within a couple of weeks, however, they accepted arbitration on outstanding issues after the bulk of their wage claim was conceded outright.⁷⁰

3.2.3 Growth and Development of Urban Trade Unions

The heightened militancy of the local labour movement by the end of the war as shown in strike activity, was also reflected in the growth of trade unions and their increasingly high public profile. One way of measuring this development is by counting the number of trade union meetings and labour rallies reported in the local press.⁷¹ If one excludes meetings of rural labourers (which shall be considered separately), then the total number of meetings reported by the press in County Limerick for 1915 was 16; for 1916, 47; for 1917, 74; and for 1918, 62. This corresponds fairly well to the pattern of strike activity discussed earlier, with the last two years of the war being far more active than the first two. The slightly lower figure for 1918 is probably largely the result of the prohibition of public meetings without a permit (issued in July) and the further ban (issued in August) on newspapers even reporting unsanctioned meetings. The highest amount of press coverage occurred during the nine month period from August 1917 to April 1918 when 81 meetings were reported. This represented fully 40.7% of the 199 meetings and rallies reported during the war.

Besides reports of LUTLC, FLC and Mechanics' Institute Delegate Board meetings, all of which represented several unions, the data covers 32 unions and societies which are listed in Appendix 2. Of these, two unions, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and the NUR, received coverage of more than one branch's activity. But besides the Caherconlish, Newcastle West, West Limerick and Dromcollogher branches of the INTO, all of the other organisations and branches were based in Limerick City. This list is not, however, inclusive, since it omits the DLS, the Limerick Gasworkers Society, the Limerick Masons and Bricklayers, the Postmen's Federation, the hairdressers' union, the Harness Makers and the Operative Plumbers and Gasfitters Society, all of which are known to have been active

⁷⁰ MN, 24 August & 4 September 1918.

⁷¹ Once again, the papers used were the Limerick Leader (January 1915-June 1918) and the Munster News (July 1918-December 1918).

from other evidence. It must also be remembered that some of the unions listed such as the Irish Automobile Drivers and Mechanics Union (IADMU) and the ICWU were apparently only recently established. Circumstantial evidence also indicates that some, particularly locally-based societies, did not survive past 1918. The membership of the Limerick Gasworkers Society, the Limerick United Carmen's and Storemen's Union and the DLS appear to have largely transferred to the ITGWU while the Limerick Asylum Attendants Association became the local branch of the IAWU in 1917.⁷²

The labour organisation which received the most press attention during 1915-8 was the LUTLC, 48 of whose meetings were reported. As the war progressed and as union membership grew and strikes spread, the council came to play an increasingly important role as a local parliament of labour. This was reflected in the steady stream of union branches which sought affiliation to the council from mid-1917 onwards. In July, the Limerick Furnishing Trades' Association applied.⁷³ They were followed in August by the Harness Makers.⁷⁴ October was an especially auspicious month since it saw the arrival of the ITGWU No 1 branch, the IADMU and the "Limerick Insurance Agent [sic]".⁷⁵ An editorial in the 25 January 1918 Limerick Leader, discussing the growth of the LUTLC, said that there were 26 societies affiliated at that point, not counting the INTO and the Association of Irish Post Office Clerks who were about to join. The process of consolidation was only beginning to come to a head, however, because in April, the FLC which had represented many of the city's unskilled workers, decided to merge with the LUTLC. This process was probably eased by the ITGWU's decision to join the Trades' Council. But if the merger meant that the overwhelming bulk of the city's trade unionists were affiliated to the council, it was not true to say, as the report of the merger had it, that it, "now includes all the trade union bodies in the city."⁷⁶ In May, the RCA joined and in June they were followed by the Postmen's Federation (distinct from the Post Office Clerks), the Hairdressers', the Limerick Commercial Workers Association (LCWA) and finally the "Women's Branch" of the ITGWU.⁷⁷

⁷² However, the Carmen and Storemen and the Gasworkers Society were still reportedly active as late as 1921.

⁷³ LL, 18 July 1917.

⁷⁴ LL, 1 August 1917.

⁷⁵ LL, 12 October 1917.

⁷⁶ LL, 29 April 1917.

⁷⁷ LL, 22 May, 10 June & 21 June 1918.

Besides the apparent desire of virtually every trade union in Limerick City to be affiliated, the LUTLC's increasing authority within the labour movement was indicated by several other phenomena. In December 1917, for example, the North Munster Law Clerks Society appealed to the council for help in pressuring the Bar Association to concede their demand for a 25% increase in their salaries.⁷⁸ The LUTLC's role in resolving the 1917 dock strike has already been mentioned. But besides intervening on behalf of unions or helping to resolve strikes, the LUTLC also played a role as an arbiter of inter-union disputes. In mid-1916, the council rejected the application of the No. 3 branch of the NUR for affiliation on the grounds that the section of the workforce targeted by this branch was already catered for by the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Footplatemen (ASLEF).⁷⁹ In 1917, the Irish Drapers' Assistants Association (IDAA) objected to the affiliation of the Limerick Clerks and Assistants Association (LCAA), forerunner of the LCWA, on the grounds that the Drapers' Assistants already catered for clerks.⁸⁰ While the IDAA may have succeeded in the short term, their attempt to "claim" territory by blocking affiliation had clearly failed by the time the LCWA began attending meetings the following year. In 1918, the brunt of inter-union disputes aired before the council concerned the ITGWU whose rapid expansion was bound to cause some friction. The ASE objected to the ITGWU's activities at the Creamery Supply Co., while the Operative Plumbers were competing for recruits with the Transport Union at the city gasworks.⁸¹

But even if the ITGWU stepped on a few toes in the local labour movement, its relationship with the officials of the LUTLC and especially with its secretary, B. J. Dineen, was very close. From its arrival in late 1917, in fact, one could say that the two bodies developed in tandem. In September, M. J. O'Connor was appointed by the Transport Union to be its organiser in Limerick.⁸² O'Connor who had originally joined the union in 1915 when he helped bring the Tralee branch of the Workers' Union into the fold, was well suited to the task and was soon able to record striking successes. Among the early recruits were the munition workers at Messrs Evans and the

⁷⁸ LL, 12 December 1917.

⁷⁹ LL, 19 July 1916.

⁸⁰ LL, 4 & 18 July 1917.

⁸¹ LL, 21 June 1918.

⁸² Greaves, p. 190.

women employed by Cleeve's at their Lansdowne premises.⁸³ The alliance with the LUTLC was cemented at a rally in mid-November at the O'Connell Monument. Speakers included P. T. Daly, Cathal O'Shannon, M. J. O'Connor and two local "labour" politicians, James Bourke, a Poor Law Guardian, and R. P. O'Connor, a member of the Borough Council. After the meeting opened, James O'Neill, representing the LUTLC, seconded by Bourke, moved a resolution:

calling on the different city workers to join their local Trade Unions, pledging support to the Irish Transport Workers' Union and the local bodies formed to secure better housing, and directing public attention to alleged profiteering in the city.⁸⁴

By the end of the month, the ITGWU claimed 600 members, including 150 women, in the city.⁸⁵

Seven months later, in June 1918, at an ITGWU meeting in Croom, B.J. Dineen declared that the membership in the city and county had swelled to 3,000 and that the union, "had secured £10,000 a year in increased wages for these members (hear, hear)."⁸⁶ The RIC, on the other hand, estimated in July that there were 2,801 members. This represented 69.8% of the Sinn Féin membership in the county. By December, the police estimate of 3,433 Transport Union members was equal to 74.1% of the SF total.⁸⁷ By year's end, besides the workers in the coal yards and many, if not all, of the quay labourers, the city branches encompassed workers at the Limerick Clothing Factory, the city gasworks, at least 250 employees at O'Callaghan's tannery and female workers at the printing firm of McKerr & Sons and Clune's tobacco factory.

The ITGWU was not, however, the only union to experience significant growth during the war. While local figures are not available for railworkers' unions, their national growth combined with their high public profile in Limerick lead one to conclude that they were among the fastest growing local unions. The NUR and the RCA both held well-reported rallies in 1915 demanding increased war bonuses and parity with British railworkers. Two years later, the NUR

⁸³ Bottom Dog (BD), 3 November 1917.

⁸⁴ LL, 14 November 1917.

⁸⁵ LL, 19 November 1917.

⁸⁶ LL, 14 June 1918.

⁸⁷ LCI, July & December 1918.

held another rally on the same theme in Limerick's Town Hall.⁸⁸ The LCWA was another union which grew, particularly in 1918. In March, they claimed 60 new members at one meeting.⁸⁹ At another in May, with 250 members in attendance, it was decided to accept "lady commercial workers" into membership and another 60 apparently joined afterwards.⁹⁰ Three months later, at the inaugural meeting of the Limerick branch of the ICWU which may have incorporated the LCWA, 600 were said to have joined.⁹¹ The LCWA's erstwhile competitor, the IDAA, also grew rapidly, from 204 members at the beginning of 1917 to 306 a year later. Almost half of this increase came from the "small houses" where the IDAA had waged an active campaign among the mostly female workforce.⁹²

3.2.4 Labour and Social Issues

The growing self-confidence of the Limerick labour movement found expression in the participation of trade-union bodies, particularly the Trades Council, in agitation on broader social issues. The peak of this intervention occurred during late 1917-early 1918 when local labour received most press attention and when trade union growth was most prolific. There were two main issues upon which labour focused its attention. The first was food, particularly its cost and availability. This concern was largely the product of wartime inflation and fears over Ireland's food reserves being drained by the British market. Housing was the other main issue and while this was a perennial concern, fuel was added to the fire by the publication in late 1917 of Dr McGrath's report which detailed the extent of slum conditions in Limerick City.

Within a week of the beginning of the war, the FLC passed a motion as the "representatives of the unskilled workers of the city" protesting, "in the strongest possible manner against the unwarrantable and premature action of shopkeepers and merchants who have exorbitantly raised the prices of food stuffs."⁹³ The LUTLC, however, was not reported to have spoken out on this question until late in 1916. Pointing especially to the alleged 200% increase in the

⁸⁸ LL, 29 March & 14 April 1915; 27 August 1917.

⁸⁹ LL, 8 March 1918.

⁹⁰ LL, 10 May 1918.

⁹¹ MN, 17 August 1918.

⁹² LL, 4 February 1918.

⁹³ LL, 10 August 1914.

price of potatoes during the previous year, the council declared in a fairly general resolution that:

we are of the opinion that such continued advances will cause grave unrest among the workers who are scarcely able to live even at present, and we call on the public bodies of the country to urge the Government or their officials to devise some means of keeping the food in the country.⁹⁴

Four months later, representatives of the Trades Council met with members of local public bodies in the Town Hall to discuss the formation of a "Citizens" or "Vigilance" Committee in order to "conserve" the local food supply.⁹⁵ Little seems to have come of this in the immediate sense. However, in mid-December 1917, M. J. O'Connor of the ITGWU spoke from a platform which included no less than six members of the Borough Council and various other notables, at a public meeting initiated by the County Council calling for "conserving the local food supply".⁹⁶ A month later, O'Connor was again present, along with representatives of the DLS and the LUTLC, at a meeting of the "Limerick Food Committee".⁹⁷ But besides broad resolutions and much talk, the only concrete action taken by labour occurred during the bakers strike in October-November 1918 when the LUTLC and others demanded that the Food Controller, "release the flour supplies alleged to have been held up in consequence of the dispute." The Controller then replied saying that flour was being sent to "all bakers able and willing to bake."⁹⁸

In relation to working class housing, the LUTLC formulated a very specific set of demands which it agitated for vociferously. However, their first intervention on this issue went badly wrong. In January 1917, representatives from the ASE, LUTLC and the painters, bakers and porkbutchers' societies attended a meeting of the Executive of the Town Tenants League (TTL) to help organise a demonstration calling for a 20% reduction in rents.⁹⁹ The TTL, being a Redmondite organisation, naturally invited Thomas Lundon, MP for East Limerick,

⁹⁴ LL, 10 November 1916.

⁹⁵ LL, 16 March 1917.

⁹⁶ LL, 19 December 1917.

⁹⁷ LL, 16 January 1918.

⁹⁸ MN, 2 November 1918.

⁹⁹ LL, 15 & 19 January 1917.

to address the gathering. In the event, the meeting was broken up by Sinn Féin supporters and Lundon was singled out for physical attack. Five men were subsequently tried and four were convicted for participating in this assault.¹⁰⁰

As with the food-control issue, labour was then quiet until late in the year when a Limerick City Housing Committee was formed.¹⁰¹ The committee was said to represent, "all the local trades bodies and the Town Tenants' League and the Plottolders' Association". A conference was then held with the members of the Corporation in mid-December to discuss a scheme for building 2,000 dwellings in groups of eight on one acre plots.¹⁰² It was decided to formulate a plan and ask the government for funding. In February 1918, the committee sponsored a rally in the Town Hall over which the Mayor, Alphonsus O'Mara, presided. Among those present were several clergymen, Alderman Joyce, MP for Limerick City, and delegates from 31 trade unions. M. J. O'Connor seconded the motion which called for a national solution to the "housing question", saying:

We all hear of the conditions of the Dublin slums, but he could testify that Limerick's slums even if they did not cover such a large area, were as bad as any in Dublin.¹⁰³

The February rally seemed to reflect a cross-class political alliance on this question since it included labour, Sinn Féin, in the person of the mayor, the Redmondite MP and the clergy. However, at another rally in May, the committee, which had taken to calling itself the Limerick City Housing Association, placed its central demand not on the British government but on the Corporation, calling on it to enforce the Public Health Acts.¹⁰⁴

Besides staid resolutions at rallies and conferences, labour gave vent to its increasing frustration at the extent of slum housing, high food prices, low wages and other ills via a feisty little journal called the Bottom Dog. Dineen, the secretary of the LUTLC, was its editor and although it was produced secretly, it was backed by the council.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ IG, January 1917. See also LL, 31 January & 9 February 1917.

¹⁰¹ LL, 7 December 1917.

¹⁰² LL, 14 December 1917.

¹⁰³ LL, 13 February 1918.

¹⁰⁴ LL, 8 May 1918.

¹⁰⁵ Frank Hamilton, "Days of the 'Bottom Dog'," Obair No. 3 (February 1976), pp. 9-15.

The journal which made its first appearance in October 1917 boldly declared on its masthead that, "we must look at life in all its aspects from the point of view of the Bottom Dog—the oppressed—be it nation, class, or sex." Dineen certainly lived up to this promise on the question of housing. During its year-long existence, the Bottom Dog made continuous reference to the issue, citing the fourteenth annual report on the health and condition of the city issued at the end of 1917 by Limerick's Medical Superintendent, Dr. McGrath. Particularly damning was McGrath's conclusion that 1,812 houses in the city were "unfit for human habitation".¹⁰⁶ By May 1918, Dineen's anger had turned to fury:

1,213, for God's sake let it burn in your brains. In the name of an outraged God do you grasp it? 1,213 Houses, containing approximately 6,065 persons without water-closets...The Guts, Excreta, dogs and children rolled up in parcels in the lanes and alleys of Limerick (and left to dry and rot) because no man of grit can be found to tackle the slum owners talk, talk, talk...¹⁰⁷

The Bottom Dog suggested that unless the Councillors and Aldermen took action, the slum-dwellers should start a rent-strike.

3.2.5 Labour and Politics

Labour's intervention on social questions raises the wider issue of its political affiliations. After all, demands for food control or building new homes for slum dwellers were not made in a vacuum. At any particular time, the interested labour organisations must have had some estimate of who their friends and enemies were in the political arena. These assessments would in turn be influenced by opinions on issues not immediately connected to labour's day to day activities, such as the war, the Easter Rising and conscription. The botched attempt by the LUTLC and several skilled workers' unions to hold a joint demonstration with the TTL in January 1917, for example, poses interesting questions. Nine months after the Rising, was Limerick labour, at least on the official level, still as politically close to the Redmondites as it had been before the war? Assuming that this was the case, did attitudes towards Sinn Féin change later on and if so why? What was Limerick labour's reaction to the idea of an

¹⁰⁶ BD, 15 December 1917 (see also LL, 28 November 1917).

¹⁰⁷ BD, 11 May 1918.

independent labour party and to the general political line taken by the ITUCLP in 1917-8? Finally, were the LUTLC and other bodies in "front" of or "behind" the shifts in local political opinion?

The outbreak of war and the IPP's active support for the British army does not seem to have made any immediate impact on the Limerick labour movement's longstanding allegiance to John Redmond. When the "Irish leader" announced that he would review a National Volunteers march in Limerick on 20 December 1914, the Delegate Board of the Mechanics' Institute voted unanimously to attend.¹⁰⁸ The Limerick Leader also carried a brief report which stated that unspecified "Limerick Trades Bodies and Bands" would be present.¹⁰⁹ But the clearest indication of how little had changed came seven months later when the UIL held a county convention in Limerick. This convention was part of a nation-wide campaign to breathe some life into the Redmondite organisation and was preceded by frenetic reorganisation of rural UIL branches in County Limerick. In the event, no less than seventeen Limerick City labour bodies sent delegates to hear John Dillon orate, including the LUTLC, the FLC and the Mechanics' Institute. Of the individual societies which participated, there did not seem to be any preponderance of skilled or unskilled workers' organisations since, for example, both the ASE and the DLS were there, as well as the Porkbutchers, several craft unions from the building trades and the United Carmen and Storemen's Society. Prominent absentees included the ASCJ, the NUR and the IDAA whose leader, O'Lehane, was an ally of the ITGWU (see Chapter 2).¹¹⁰

That some latent political divisions may have existed within the Limerick labour movement is suggested by a debate which took place at a LUTLC meeting in February 1916 on whether or not to continue affiliating to the ITUC. McConkey of the ASE opened the discussion by stating that he thought they should no longer "pay any money to the National Executive," since in his view, "they had departed altogether from the original standards laid down and become more of a Socialistic clique." Other delegates agreed. Cronin, the future president of the council who represented the ASCJ, declared that the

¹⁰⁸ LL, 7 December 1914.

¹⁰⁹ LL, 11 December 1914.

¹¹⁰ LL, 26 & 28 July 1915. That all was not entirely well in the Redmondite camp, however, is indicated by the RIC's report that, "some interruptions took place [at the convention] and a few delegates were forcibly removed." (LCI, July 1915).

national movement, "was being run by men who had never worked at any trade or labour or at least at present are not following any trade or labour". He accused these unspecified men of "using the Trade Union movement for their own ends." Nevertheless some delegates spoke in support of the ITUC Executive and in the end it was decided not to put the matter to a vote and instead to instruct the secretary to "write [to the ITUC] for further particulars re the present constitution, etc".¹¹¹

But while the war was apparently not directly discussed, one cannot help inferring that a large section of the council were alienated from the Congress Executive precisely because of its anti-British stance and its active opposition to the IPP. Their desire to disaffiliate would place them squarely in the most conservative wing of the southern labour movement. However, at least a few trade unionists must have supported the MacNeillite Irish Volunteers (IV) which were very active in the city in spite of representing only a small minority of public opinion.

Besides the opprobrium they faced in the Redmondite press, the Volunteers were once attacked by irate Limerick civilians. This occurred on Whit Sunday 1915 when 1100 Volunteers, 700 armed with rifles, coming from Limerick, Dublin, Cork and Tipperary marched through the city. According to the RIC's account, as they passed through Irishtown, a poor district, "...where the relatives of soldiers reside they had a hostile reception. Some revolver shots were fired in the air by the Vols: and some stones were thrown at them by the people."¹¹² Nevertheless, IV membership which stood at 437 in Limerick city and county in December 1914, compared to a National Volunteer (INV) complement of 7,145, grew, particularly in early 1916, to reach a peak of 872 on the eve of the Rising. The RIC's figure of 4,447 for the INV at the later date is purely nominal since by the police's own admission, the Redmondite force was quite defunct by then.¹¹³ The Limerick IV also benefited from the active support of John Daly, the redoubtable Fenian who led the "Labour"

¹¹¹ LL, 18 February 1916.

¹¹² IG, May 1915. The Volunteers' own account (given in Limerick's Fighting Story, pp. 10-3) largely agrees with this but their less charitable term for soldiers' relatives is "separation ladies". See also LL, 26 May 1915.

¹¹³ LCI, December 1914 & April 1916.

ticket in 1899, and took comfort from Bishop O'Dwyer's clear hostility to the IPP's stand on the war.¹¹⁴

But whatever part some individual Limerick trade unionists may have played in the Irish Volunteers, there was no analogy to the vocal republican-socialist bloc in the Dublin movement which had the strength to pass a pro IV/ICA motion in the DTC in 1915. The only visible change in labour's political behaviour by early 1916—in comparison with the immediate pre-war period—was the disappearance of the effusive resolutions of praise for the "great leader" which had been so common before. It was not long after the Easter Rising, however, that the tone of Limerick labour's nationalism began to shift more perceptibly. Hence, when Bishop O'Dwyer sent a sharp retort to General Maxwell's request that he move two of his more outspoken priests "to such employment as will deny their having intercourse with the people", three labour societies including the FLC were reported to have passed resolutions praising him.¹¹⁵ In mid-June, the LUTLC passed a simple motion of condolence to the families of R. O'Carroll and James Connolly without taking a stand on their actions.¹¹⁶ The most interesting reaction, however, came from the Porkbutchers' Society who at a Special General Meeting, decided to contribute £50 for, "the support of the relatives and dependants of those brave men who lost their lives in the fight for the freedom of our native land—the most noble fight in which men can die." This implied sympathy with the republican aims of the Rising was nevertheless balanced by another resolution passed at the same meeting which called on the IPP to "follow the advice of our bishops" and oppose any measure of partition as part of a Home Rule settlement.¹¹⁷ When John Daly died in July 1916, four labour organisations, including the LUTLC, expressed condolences.

This change in tone represented more of a distancing from the IPP rather than active support for the politics of the Irish Volunteers or Sinn Féin and was no more "radical" than the political shifts made by many local public bodies. For example, in September 1916, the Limerick Corporation, still of course in the hands of Redmondites, threw caution to the wind and gave the freedom of the city to

¹¹⁴ IG, July & November 1915.

¹¹⁵ LL, 14 & 19 June 1916. For the full O'Dwyer-Maxwell correspondence, see "Letters of the late Bishop O'Dwyer" (no details).

¹¹⁶ LL, 19 June 1916.

¹¹⁷ LL, 16 June 1916.

O'Dwyer whose support to Sinn Féin was an open secret. The maverick bishop who was anathema to a previous generation of nationalists because of his opposition to boycotting and the Plan of Campaign was now honoured because his anti-British invective had accurately captured the popular mood.¹¹⁸ In his address to the crowd at the Town Hall he declared that:

Canada and Australia are parts of the Empire, but we are not, for we are ruled not by ourselves, but by some English barrister from Bristol or Manchester, or some Jew from Shoreditch...Sinn Fein is, in my judgment, the true principle, and alliance with English politicians is the alliance of the lamb with the wolf; and it is at this point precisely that I differ from the present political leaders.¹¹⁹

The councillors and aldermen whose careers had been built around allegiance to the "present political leaders" doubtlessly did not need to be told that they were witnessing a remarkable turning point in Limerick's political history.

As for labour, the January 1917 TTL demonstration showed the continued willingness of many to work alongside the Redmondites. There was no question, therefore, at least in the case of the LUTLC, of "leading" public opinion. But as 1917 progressed, the new political situation proved more and more difficult to ignore. In June, the RUC counted seven Sinn Féin clubs in the county with a membership of only 800. By October, there were no less than 53 clubs with 3,702 members.

October was also the month when the ITGWU arrived in Limerick. Given the union's politics, the active cooperation which it received from the LUTLC was the first real indication of a qualitative shift in local labour opinion. Coincidentally, at the very meeting where the council received the application for affiliation from the ITGWU's No. 1 branch, they also passed a resolution of sympathy for the recently deceased republican hunger striker, Thomas Ashe.¹²⁰

Another indication of a decisive turn away from the IPP was the council's more positive attitude towards the ITUCLP. Already, at the

¹¹⁸ John Rushe, "Edward Thomas O'Dwyer - Part One", Old Limerick Journal No. 2 (March 1980), pp. 12-8.

¹¹⁹ LL, 15 September 1916.

¹²⁰ LL, 12 October 1917. The Limerick City branches of the Typographical Association and the INTO passed similar resolutions.

1916 Sligo meeting, the LUTLC's then president, Joseph Buckner, had seen fit to formally move Congress' ritual anti-partition motion.¹²¹ Then in 1918, the council, which represented a rapidly increasing proportion of local organised labour, gave full support to Congress' call for a nationwide general strike against conscription on 23 April. It is noteworthy that at the main anti-conscription rally in Limerick City before the one-day stoppage, with an estimated crowd of 15-20,000, the new council president, John Cronin, chose to emphasise Labour's opposition to conscription on class rather than national grounds:

he simply wanted to make known to them the decision of the Trades Congress held in Dublin on Saturday. As workmen they would not consent to be conscripted by capitalists. They would be opposed to conscription even if it were imposed by an Irish Republican Parliament.¹²²

But the LUTLC's new-found enthusiasm for the ITUCLP was most evident at the Waterford meeting of Congress in August 1918 and the Special Conference in November. Eight delegates went to Waterford from Limerick City, including four from the council. Two other delegates came from rural areas in County Limerick. Both Cronin, representing the council, and O'Connor, as part of the ITGWU delegation, spoke during discussions on conscription, and O'Connor seconded a motion supporting the stand of Labour's representatives in the Mansion House Conference.¹²³ The LUTLC also proposed two motions, the first being a call for immediate government funding, "for the re-housing, with plots attached, of the Working Classes in Towns and Cities of Ireland, as has already been done in the country for the Agricultural Labourers."¹²⁴ The second motion called for the medical benefits under the National Insurance Act to be extended to Ireland.¹²⁵

At the Special Conference, there were only four Limerick delegates compared to the ten in Waterford. However, the LUTLC, played a very substantial role in the proceedings. During the initial discussion on whether Labour should contest the upcoming national

¹²¹ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1916 Report, p. 37.

¹²² LL, 22 April 1918.

¹²³ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1918 Report, p. 40 & pp. 58-9.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, pp. 68-9.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, p. 72.

elections, Cronin intervened and gave unambiguous support to the Executive's proposal to withdraw:

...no matter what they might think at a Conference like that or how powerful they might claim Labour to be in Ireland they might be fairly certain that the great bulk of Labour would vote for one political party or another. There was no doubt about that. He had heard organised bodies of Labour down south stating that they would vote Sinn Fein against any man. They had that kind of element, and until they had their fling at one another Labour ought to stand aside and await its turn to win.¹²⁶

On the second day of the Special Conference, Congress considered the Executive's proposal for a revised constitution. The LUTLC put forward a whole series of amendments. Several of these were withdrawn including one which objected to individual subscribing members because of fears that this would allow non-trade unionists to become Labour candidates in elections. This was withdrawn when the Executive guaranteed that the Trades Councils would have final authority in the selection of candidates. Cronin declared that Limerick trade unionists, "...had bitter recollections of friends of Labour, and in future they were going to have no friends of Labour, except those affiliated with the Union."¹²⁷ The LUTLC did, however, choose to fight for another of their amendments which called for the new Executive to include either representatives from each of the four provinces or from each of the main cities. In proposing this amendment, Cronin mentioned a speech by Denis Houston, the ITGWU organiser, in which he had allegedly said that, between them, the ITGWU and the railworkers' unions were in a position to effectively dominate Congress. Cronin concluded that, "if that was the line upon which the Congresses were going to be run such small Unions as that at Limerick had small use of coming there." This led to an extensive discussion, including heated interventions from Foran and O'Shannon, but in the end the LUTLC amendment lost "practically unanimously".¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, November 1918 Special Conference Report, pp. 113-4.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p. 140.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p. 153-7.

Cronin's forceful interventions at the ITUCLP Special Conference did not mean, however, that there was unanimity within the LUTLC on how best to further the goal of independent labour representation. At a council meeting in September 1918, J. Byrne of the ITGWU advocated a pledge-bound Labour Party for local elections and went on to criticise the current "Labour" delegation on the Borough Council saying that, "if it did its duty" it would change the prevailing social conditions and the "score of other things which the democracy of this city had to endure." D. Griffin, a councillor and a member of the Harbour Board, defended himself weakly, if truthfully, by saying that "it was not possible to change all at once, as if by the touch of a wand..."¹²⁹ However, this was hardly the first trade union criticism of local "Labour" politicians as indicated by Cronin's comments at the Special Conference.

Another instance of union dissatisfaction occurred in early 1916 when the FLC, the Corporation Employees and the Quarrymen's Society passed resolutions condemning the role of certain "labour" councillors in supporting a decision to have street cleaning and repair done by contractors instead of "direct labour". The joint motion passed by the Corporation Employees' and the Quarrymen was particularly ferocious in denouncing, "those self-styled workers representatives who would not scruple to have us revert back to the days of slavery under a contractor". The two societies then decided to hold a march with their fife and drum band playing the "Dead March" outside the homes of councillors who had voted the wrong way.¹³⁰

By the end of 1918, the labour movement of Limerick City was politically far closer to the ILPTUC Executive than it had been at the beginning of the war in spite of the lingering reservations which were voiced at the Special Conference. The main reason for this was the dramatic shift in southern popular opinion away from constitutional nationalism and towards the renewed Sinn Féin. This meant that the Labour leadership's position on the war became far more acceptable. However, Limerick labour's radical tilt was also a reflection of its increasing organisational and industrial strength, a process which had been substantially aided by the arrival of the certifiably radical ITGWU. It is therefore not surprising that at the Labour Day march in May 1918, the local labour officials put forward a resolution hailing

¹²⁹ MN, 25 September 1918.

¹³⁰ LL, 15 March 1916.

"...our Russian comrades, who have waged such a magnificent struggle for their social and political emancipation" and supporting the "Irish Labour Party and its aims and objects".¹³¹

But just as noticeable as the radicalisation of Limerick labour, were the limits of that radicalisation. In particular, local labour bodies demonstrated a hardheaded pragmatism in pursuing their perceived interests. A good example of this was the already mentioned February 1918 rally calling for a national solution to the housing question where labour, Sinn Féin and the IPP were all represented. In this and other situations, labour directed its demands at the Corporation, the British government or whoever was thought most likely to be able to provide the necessary funds. Sympathy for republican aims did not extend, for example, to refusing the money being paid out by National Insurance and while some local bodies in the country had condemned the whole scheme as just another part of British perfidy, the LUTLC, as late as August 1918, was calling for the extension of the act's medical benefits to Ireland. Local labour officials also demonstrated their desire to regulate and contain social conflict through their participation in the long-running negotiations with employers on the establishment of a Conciliation Board. But in all of this, local labour was in no way out of step with the national leadership who were just as "pragmatic" on a day to day level regardless of the incendiary rhetoric of the Voice of Labour.

Another example of the limits of Limerick labour's political shift is to be found in its relationship with the Catholic hierarchy. During the course of the war, on numerous occasions, various labour bodies expressed their loyalty to particular clerics and church organisations by means of resolutions printed in the press. In August 1914, the LUTLC and the Limerick Workers Approved Benefit Society expressed their condolences on the death of Pius X. During February and March 1916, at least five societies extended congratulations to Father Hackett, the Spiritual Director of the Arch Confraternity of the Holy Family of Limerick who was appointed Bishop of Waterford. Also in March, the Porkbutchers' Society expressed regret on the departure from the city of Father Mangan, another priest attached to the Confraternity. Three months later, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Christian Brothers' arrival in Limerick, addresses were presented by the FLC, the LUTLC and the Porkbutchers. When

¹³¹ LL, 8 May 1918.

Bishop O'Dwyer died in August 1917, eight societies expressed regret. The LUTLC devoted a whole meeting to this subject.¹³² And when the new bishop, Hallinan, was appointed in January 1918, no less than ten societies sent messages of support.

While most of these resolutions were straightforward expressions of pious loyalty, current politics played a role in some instances. This is clearest in the previously cited motions supporting O'Dwyer's stand against Maxwell. One of these, from the Bread Vanmen's Society, is a particularly good example of the whole genre and deserves to be quoted in full:

We condemn in the strongest manner possible the action of any military officer who thinks fit to interfere in the ecclesiastical duties of our clergy, and we uphold his Lordship in every way in our power. The people of Ireland were ever faithful to their clergy, whose interest was ever for the welfare of their flock, to whom they discharged their duty in a most commendable manner.¹³³

Since O'Dwyer became associated in the public mind with Sinn Féin and since his successor, Hallinan, was also a republican, the subsequent resolutions in relation to these men may be seen to some extent as support of their political stance. Nevertheless it seems likely that many societies would have dutifully passed such motions even if O'Dwyer had been a diehard Redmondite. For example, the Porkbutchers were represented in five of the seven sets of motions mentioned while the ASCJ were represented three times. On the other hand, a number of trade unions, including the RCA, the DLS, the IDAA and the ITGWU showed no inclination towards public statements of support to the clergy except to the extent that their representatives in the LUTLC or the FLC acquiesced to them.

Resolutions were not the only form of labour support for the Catholic Church and its values. In late 1915, with the blessing of the Director of the Arch Confraternity, a Limerick Vigilance Association was formed to root out "printed filth" which was allegedly pouring in from Britain. While it is unclear how active the "association" became, at least eight trade unions were reported to have been affiliated, including the ASCJ, the Operative Plumbers, the Operative Bakers, the

¹³² LL, 27 August 1917.

¹³³ LL, 14 June 1916.

ASE, the Tailors Society, the Corporation Employees, the Bread Vanmen and the Harbour Employees.¹³⁴ In general, it is clear that the exclusively male Arch Confraternity of the Holy Family which claimed 6-7,000 members at this time, played an important role in the lives of a substantial section of Limerick's working class as evidenced by the massive procession which took place on the organisation's Golden Jubilee in June 1918.¹³⁵

The relationship between labour and the hierarchy was not, however, simply a matter of trade unions reiterating their adherence to the church and its values on appropriate occasions. The clergy also intervened in labour's affairs as we have seen, particularly by acting as arbitrators in industrial disputes. But at least one local priest went a step further. In August 1916, Father Devane, C C, attended a meeting of the LUTLC and proposed that a series of lectures be organised for workingmen. The council agreed and in early 1917 four lectures were held on the topics of "Education and Democracy"; "Protection in its Relations to Ireland and England"; "Labour, Capital and the Nation after the War"; and "Casual Labour, its Causes and Remedies".¹³⁶ At the end of the last lecture in the series, several trade unionists were said to have joined the "Catholic Social League".¹³⁷ Therefore, Father Devane's intervention was at least in part an attempt to ensure that labour activists would be given sound Catholic social teaching to counteract any newfangled subversive theories which might be likely to gain currency. He need not have been overly concerned as even the militant and comparatively radical Bottom Dog made a point on one occasion of citing Leo XIII to explain "The Employer's Duty".¹³⁸

But if adherence to Catholic social and moral teaching show the inherent limits of Limerick labour's political shift during the war, the partial change of attitude towards the role of women in the movement shows that radicalisation went beyond opposition to conscription and more strident wage demands. Key to this process, was the ITGWU's role in organising a number of unskilled women workers and the

¹³⁴ LL, 13 December 1915.

¹³⁵ LL, 21 January & 24 June 1918. A rather one-sided but nevertheless interesting account of the organisation's role is given in T. A. Murphy, C.S.S.R., "The Arch Confraternity of the Holy Family of Limerick", Irish Monthly, May 1923, pp. 209-16.

¹³⁶ LL, 30 August 1916 & 3 January 1917.

¹³⁷ LL, 19 February 1917.

¹³⁸ BD, 3 November 1917.

affiliation of its "Women's Branch" to the LUTLC. The Bottom Dog agitated tirelessly against the miserable wages made by female laundry workers, dressmakers and others. Organising women was seen by the journal as part of building the One Big Union. As the editor put it, "when every worker—male and female—is thoroughly organised, then the Bottom Dog hopes to come into his own."¹³⁹ Interestingly though, a year before the arrival of the ITGWU, the Limerick Leader contained an editorial supporting the INTO's demand that female teachers should receive the same salary increases as their male counterparts.¹⁴⁰ In mid-1918, this Redmondite organ, doubtless reflecting the "new thinking" in the local labour movement, went so far as to advocate this as a general principle:

Equal rates for equal work is a motto, however, that is much more honoured in the breach than in the observance, and the results are injurious alike to both sexes. Women are affected by being insufficiently paid, if not glaringly sweated, while the men suffer because of the competition of such miserably cheap labour....There are, it is true, certain kinds of work that the fair sex cannot do as well as men but there are others that they can do just as efficiently in every respect.¹⁴¹

One might question the degree to which the LUTLC and its affiliated bodies were prepared to fight for this principle in practice. However, the very fact that it was being discussed was an indication of a shift in outlook from the pre-war period when only the IDAA seemed to show much interest in the organisation of female workers.

3.2.6 Rural Labour in County Limerick

In considering "rural" as opposed to "urban" labour, we will focus on the activity of two groups of workers, namely farm labourers and the road workers employed by the County Council. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these two groups tended to overlap. But it should be noted that aside from farm labourers and road workers, there were a number of workers in County Limerick whom it is difficult to fit neatly into the urban/rural divide. These include the Bruff Carriers Society and the labourers employed by the Board of Guardians in Newcastle West, both of whom struck for higher wages in 1915.

¹³⁹ ibid.

¹⁴⁰ LL, 3 November 1916

¹⁴¹ LL, 19 June 1918.

Likewise it is difficult to see the workers at the Drombanna Creamery, the Foynes' Saw Mill and the employees of the Shannon Steam Company, all of whom struck in 1918, as part of an urban labour movement since they lived and worked in small towns and villages. Nevertheless, the nature of their work was clearly distinct from that of farm labourers. Another group who may be seen as part of this intermediate layer were the national school teachers organised in INTO branches outside of Limerick City.

If one considers only strike activity, then, barring the six strikes by County Council employees during 1914-6, Limerick's rural workers were relatively quiet during the war. As has been already mentioned, there were only two strikes by farm labourers during 1914-8 the first in March 1914 at Mount Coote, Kilmallock and the second in March 1917 in the Clarina district. According to the RIC's Limerick County Inspector, "the cause of the strike is the dismissal of one laborer in order to increase the wages of the others."¹⁴² A year later, the campaign by labourers and small farmers in the west to break up the large grazing farms had almost no echo in Limerick. Of the 140 cases of "cattle driving" reported nationally by the police in February 1918, only one occurred in Limerick. According to a report in the press, police fired on the participants who were driving cattle off the lands of Lord Massy, between Lisnagry and Castleconnell, wounding four.¹⁴³ Along with two other "agrarian outrages" reported in the county that month, this was one of the few examples of this type of activity in Limerick during the war, in contrast to neighbouring Clare which seemed to be in a perpetual state of agrarian unrest.¹⁴⁴

As the main organisation representing Limerick's rural workers, the Irish Land and Labour Association agitated for higher wages and lower hours. However, it is notable that this type of "trade unionist" demand—at least as far as press reports indicate—was made largely on behalf of County Council road workers. For example, at its County Organising Committee's AGM in August 1914, the ILLA passed a motion calling on the County Council to allow "men who are employed

¹⁴² LCI, March 1917.

¹⁴³ LL, 27 February 1918.

¹⁴⁴ Another case of cattle driving was reported in the press in 1915 (LL, 14 July 1915). Interestingly, one of the few cases of industrial sabotage in Limerick also occurred in the countryside. On the night of 25-6 November 1917, equipment of the Kantoher Creamery in Newcastle West was burned allegedly "...in order to give employment to carters, who were thrown out of work when [an] engine and waggon were purchased by the Creamery Co." (LCI, November 1917).

at the steam-rolling and other similar machinery" to stop work on Saturday at 1 pm instead of 6 pm as previously.¹⁴⁵ The issue of hours was again raised in early 1915 when the organisation protested against the 7 am starting time stipulated under a new road scheme. The previous starting time had been an hour later. In order to increase the pressure on the politicians, a general meeting of county branches was held in Limerick City, a deputation was sent to the County Council and a rally was held subsequently in Rathkeale.¹⁴⁶

In late 1915, the ILLA's attention switched from hours to wages, as inflation began to bite. At a meeting in Rathkeale in early November, the organisation demanded 18s per week for surfacemen, 16s per week for labourers and 6s per day for carters.¹⁴⁷ A delegation attended a County Council meeting shortly thereafter to press this demand. District Councillor (DC) Michael Ryan, speaking for the ILLA, declared that price increases were bringing labourers to the edge of real hunger:

During the last 12 months butter and meat had been practically outside the pale of the labourer...The price of American meat, which was practically the poor man's food was 11d per lb, a ridiculous price from the labourers' point of view.

The County Council seemed ready to make concessions but the patrician tone of one of the councillors, Mr. T. W. W. Bennett, was typical of the attitude taken by many politicians in dealing with any demands by labourers:

...he hoped that if labourers did get the increase that they would show they were worthy of the increase by giving additional labour on the roads, and not allow by their idleness to have the criticism levelled at them, as in the past, that they were paid for dragging their shovels after them (hear, hear). There was nothing more demeaning than that a man should draw wages for doing nothing.¹⁴⁸

By December, a general increase of 1s per week for road workers and 1s per day for carters had been conceded (bringing them to 15s per

¹⁴⁵ LL, 10 August 1914

¹⁴⁶ LL, 1, 8, 15 & 19 February 1915.

¹⁴⁷ LL, 5 November 1915.

¹⁴⁸ LL, 8 November 1915.

week and 6s per day respectively) although the Local Government Board (LGB) was delaying implementation by insisting that all the Rural District Councils (RDCs) had to approve the increase.¹⁴⁹

A further 2s increase appeared to be in the offing in late 1916 though James O'Dwyer, having recently been elected the chairman of the ILLA, made a point of appealing to the men to "Keep Regular Hours".¹⁵⁰ Earlier in the year, the organisation had been forced to fight to secure regular employment for road workers, let alone improved wages, when hundreds were dismissed "to promote economy". The County Council backed down after the Limerick Board of Guardians publicly protested this measure.¹⁵¹

But while the position of road workers was the central focus of the ILLA in 1915-6, it was not their only concern. The organisation also agitated with some success for the reduction of rents on labourers' cottages. In October 1915, for example, the Tipperary #2 RDC, which encompassed part of East Limerick, passed a resolution for a six month 50% reduction on the cottage rents as a form of "war bonus".¹⁵² Then in March 1916, the Croom RDC approved a 6d per week reduction.¹⁵³ When the LGB wrote to the council, as they had to Tipperary #2 RDC, saying that they had no power to reduce the rents, the councillors decided that their mistake was not making the reduction general as they had given it only to "deserving" tenants. They promptly and unanimously passed a new motion specifying a reduction of 1s per month for the next three months.¹⁵⁴ At a meeting of the County Organising Committee held in Mungret in late August, the ILLA called on all the RDCs to lower the cottage rents for the upcoming winter.¹⁵⁵

Besides agitation for higher wages for road workers and for lower rents on labourers' cottages, one further type of rural labour activity was exemplified by a protest meeting in 1915 against an eviction near Kilmallock. Thomas Lundon MP, whose close ties with the ILLA have already been mentioned, was the main speaker. However, evictions were rare and even that other staple of pre-war ILLA activity, the

¹⁴⁹ LL, 24 December 1915.

¹⁵⁰ LL, 3 November 1916.

¹⁵¹ LL, 31 May & 21 June 1916.

¹⁵² LL, 27 September & 18 October 1915.

¹⁵³ LL, 13 March 1916.

¹⁵⁴ LL, 31 March 1916.

¹⁵⁵ LL, 25 August 1916.

agitation for "fair" redistribution of land by the Estates Commissioners largely ceased because landlords were unwilling to sell in the conditions of high wartime profits and government funds were not available for purchase. In March 1915, the RIC County Inspector reported that there were, "no sales or negotiations [sic] for sales under Land Purchase Act of 1903". Over two years later, in May 1917, he similarly noted that, "land purchase is at a standstill in the co."

During 1915-6, the organisation of rural labour was still the exclusive preserve of the ILLA. The level of activity is indicated by the number of meetings reported in the Limerick Leader (see also Appendix 2). While the newspaper's political bias in favour of the pro-Redmond ILLA must not be overlooked, the assiduousness of its coverage allows one to see with some accuracy how the organisation's rate of activity changed over time. In 1915, 39 ILLA meetings were reported. In 6 cases, the location of these meetings was not reported while the other 33 were held in 16 Limerick locations. In 1916, the number of reported ILLA meetings dropped by 36% to 25 with 19 of these occurring in 11 locations around the county and 6 in unreported locations.

This decrease in reported activity indicated the beginning of difficulties for the ILLA. One reason for the fall-off in interest was the especially close alliance between the ILLA and the IPP/UIIL from which large sections of the rural population, particularly the young, were thoroughly alienated by the end of 1916. At the beginning of the war, strong links with constitutional nationalism did not make the ILLA particularly different from most labour organisations in Limerick City who were also eager to demonstrate their loyalty to John Redmond. Like many of their urban counterparts, for example, the ILLA were conspicuously present at the Limerick City INV march reviewed by Redmond in December 1914.¹⁵⁶ Of course, the ILLA's position on the split in the Volunteers was in no doubt at any stage. At the beginning of October, it had been announced that the Redmondite Volunteers would hold a review in Pallasgreen with Dillon MP and Colonel Moore, the Officer Commanding, present:

Posters and circulars would be got out at once and be in the hands of all secretaries of the United Irish League, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Irish Land and Labour Association

¹⁵⁶ LL, 21 December 1914.

and Irish National Volunteers, before next Sunday. The demonstration will be held under the joint auspices of the four organisations...¹⁵⁷

The ILLA's loyalty as well as its privileged position in the firmament of constitutional nationalist politics could not have been more strikingly demonstrated. But this role which had formerly given the organisation a certain weight in local and even national politics, thereby enabling it to deliver some concessions for rural workers, was to prove a positive liability by the end of the war.

Urban and rural labour organisations still marched to the same political beat in July 1915 when both attended the county UIL convention in Limerick City in force. No less than fifteen ILLA branches sent representatives.¹⁵⁸ But whereas resolutions of praise to the "Irish leader" by urban trade unions decreased even before the Rising and disappeared entirely afterwards, a reportedly well-attended ILLA meeting in Roxborough in June 1916 gave voice to absolute support to Redmond.¹⁵⁹ And although the LUTLC and other urban trade unions incautiously decided to share a platform with Thomas Lundon in January 1917, six months later the ILLA's Central Council chose him to be their delegate to the forthcoming "Irish Convention".¹⁶⁰ Their very willingness to participate in this convention, sponsored by Lloyd George with the ostensible aim of seeking a compromise between the Irish political factions and boycotted by Sinn Féin, showed the political gap which had opened between the ILLA and the bulk of urban labour.

The other, and possibly more important, immediate reason for the ILLA's troubles was its entire style of agitation which, of course, flowed partly from its politics. As we have seen, the ILLA was a past master at making alliances with local politicians in order to pressure RDCs, the County Council, the Estates Commissioners and even the British Parliament into making concessions. It only resorted to confrontational tactics under severe duress. Its tone towards the local political hierarchy which largely represented farmers' interests was polite and entreating rather than militant. This style may have worked to produce results before 1914 but the war had brought dramatic changes in the economic situation of the countryside. In

¹⁵⁷ LL, 5 October 1914.

¹⁵⁸ LL, 28 July 1915.

¹⁵⁹ LL, 21 June 1916.

¹⁶⁰ LL, 20 July 1917.

particular, inflation had made the precarious position of rural labourers intolerable. However, workers on the farms were in a good position to demand wage increases because of the record profits being made by farmers and the shortage of labour. The writing was on the wall. If the ILLA were unable to change its tactics and rhetoric, it would only be a matter of time before another organisation would arrive to fill the vacuum.

To judge by the number of meetings reported in the Limerick Leader, the ILLA appeared to partially stem the tide of decline in 1917. Twenty-three meetings were reported; 19 were held in 12 Limerick locations, while in 4 cases the location was not reported. However, in the middle of the year, an organisation calling itself the County Limerick Trades and Labour Association (TLA), centered in Bruff, began to organise rural workers in competition with the ILLA. The newspaper reported six TLA meetings by the end of 1917, four in Bruff and two in Kilmallock.

The TLA immediately distinguished itself from its staid counterpart. At its first reported meeting, held in July in Kilmallock, it forcefully denounced the ILLA's decision to have Landon represent them at the Irish Convention:

That we repudiate the idea of Mr. Thomas Landon, M.P., representing in any way the labour interest of any portion of his constituency at the Convention; that we do not countenance any man to represent same except a recognised worker, deputed by his fellow workers, and that we fully endorse the principle of trade and labour bodies in Ireland in Ireland in holding aloof from the Convention.¹⁶¹

However, two months later, Patrick Kiely, the president of the Bruff branch of the TLA, felt compelled to write a letter to the press, in order to counter a "rumour" that their organisation was, "...a political body under the banner of Sinn Féin, and as such must be opposed to the Irish Party." Kiely claimed that the Association was "non-political" and that most members were in fact IPP supporters. Furthermore, he denied that the TLA was "up against the Land and Labour Association", pointing out that the ILLA "had ceased to exist in several parts of the country." He concluded by saying that, "we are out to

¹⁶¹ LL, 27 July 1917.

organise all workers in the country, no matter what their calling in life may be..."¹⁶²

A Redmondite rural labourer could, however, have been excused for doubting this statement when, two weeks later, the very same Bruff branch of the TLA held a meeting with P. T. Daly and M. J. O'Connor as guest speakers.¹⁶³ By the end of October, the Association had completely regained its earlier rhetorical militancy. At another meeting in Bruff, the chairman, W. J. Ryan, complained that the new Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) provisions meant that the 25s minimum would apply only in the North and South Rural Districts of Limerick, while in the rest of the county, the minimum was 22s.6d. After Ryan spoke, George Downes, the chairman of the TLA's "County Limerick Executive" declared, "if something were not done, and quickly too, to alleviate the hardships, misery and degradation of the workingman, he failed to see how a revolution could be averted."¹⁶⁴

The different approaches of the TLA and the ILLA were encapsulated at a County Council meeting in December 1917 when it was decided to give 20s.6d to road labourers and 22s.6d to surfacemen. Ryan, the ILLA representative, accepted the offer immediately. However, the TLA delegate refused, insisting on 25s for all workers in keeping with his organisation's opposition to the lower AWB minimum. In typical style, the County Council chairman then declared, "very well. We have Mr. Ryan's reply on behalf of the Land and Labour Association, and that is the only body we are interested in. That Association represents the labourers of the country as a whole."¹⁶⁵

In November 1917, the LUTLC, after much discussion, decided that their relationship with the TLA would not be one of formal affiliation but rather a "fraternal working relationship."¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, this move indicated the increasing closeness between the TLA and ITGWU which was already playing an important role in the LUTLC and whose hand was very visible in the October rally in Bruff. It would appear, therefore, that many of those rural workers who were attracted to the TLA's militancy went over to the ITGWU especially since the press reported no further Association meetings

¹⁶² LL, 26 September 1917.

¹⁶³ LL, 5 October 1917.

¹⁶⁴ LL, 29 October 1917.

¹⁶⁵ LL, 14 December 1917

¹⁶⁶ LL, 26 November 1917.

after 1917. For example, the ITGWU's meeting in Hospital the following July was organised under the auspices of the local TLA branch.¹⁶⁷

The arrival of the ITGWU in the countryside was first indicated during the 1918 strike by five workers at the Drombanna Creamery in Ballysimon in protest at the dismissal of the buttermaker. The police reported that the Transport Union held a meeting in support of these strikers on 24 February. By March 1919, the Transport Union had established 24 branches in the county outside the city.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, a total of thirteen ITGWU meetings in thirteen different locations were noted in press and police reports by August 1918 when the official ban on "unauthorised" public meetings began to take effect.¹⁶⁹ The press also reported thirteen ILLA meetings in 1918 in seven Limerick venues. In one case, the venue was not reported.

In the eight months between February and October 1918, the ITGWU clearly managed to outpace the ILLA, at least in terms of the number of areas where it was actively organising. But what is most striking about the statistics relating to meetings is that, whereas in January there were six ILLA gatherings reported as well as a joint UIL/ILLA rally but none of the ITGWU, by July the picture had been completely reversed. In that month, there were six ITGWU meetings reported but only one ILLA event.

Nevertheless, in spite of the challenge of the TLA in 1917 and the ITGWU in 1918, the ILLA did not simply roll over and die. While its position was being eroded in its Limerick base, the Association was able to keep afloat for a while by means of extensive growth in other parts of the country. Already, by mid-1916, opportunities had been glimpsed further afield. In June, Michael Ryan DC, now the ILLA's secretary, sent a letter to the Tipperary Star calling for a rally in Thurles to reorganise the Tipperary ILLA.¹⁷⁰ A month later, the Central Council appointed organisers for King's Co. and Tipperary as well as Limerick.¹⁷¹ By the end of the year, another meeting of the Central Council reported growth especially in Tipperary although applications had come in from as far away as Dundalk and Freshford,

¹⁶⁷ MN, 10 July 1918

¹⁶⁸ Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, Annual Report for 1918.

¹⁶⁹ Of the 13 ITGWU meetings, 2 were reported in the Limerick Leader, 7 in the Munster News and 4 by the RIC County Inspector.

¹⁷⁰ letter reprinted in LL, 16 June 1916.

¹⁷¹ LL, 4 August 1916.

Co. Kilkenny. Besides Limerick delegates, representatives were present from Clare and King's Co.¹⁷²

The ILLA's central accomplishment in 1917 was holding a conference in Mallow, Co. Cork in October where they succeeded in reuniting with one wing of the estranged Cork LLA. Bradley's "Cork County and City Land and Labour Association", however, refused to attend. At the conference, a motion was passed calling on the AWB to decree a general 25s minimum for farm labourers.¹⁷³ A Central Council meeting held shortly thereafter in Tipperary decided to press ahead and appointed 4 organisers, including 2 for Cork, 1 for Kilkenny and Queen's Co. and 1 for King's Co. On this occasion they declared their intent to, "...break up the grass ranches of the country, and distribute same amongst the deserving labourers, artisans and uneconomic holders."¹⁷⁴

Ironically, the ILLA's most impressive national growth during the war came just as the ITGWU began its 1918 campaign to recruit in the Limerick countryside. At a meeting of the Central Council in Limerick City in March, it was reported that since the last meeting in December, no less than 17 branches had affiliated in Cork, 14 in Queen's Co., 2 in Clare, 1 in Kildare and 1 in King's Co. Seven branches were also reported to have affiliated or reaffiliated in Limerick including Oola, Newtown, Cahirconlish, Templeglantine, Tournafulla, St. Malo and Knocklong. The St. Malo branch was said to be fighting for the breakup of the Ballinahinch Estate.¹⁷⁵ While it was not mentioned at the meeting, the Limerick ILLA had also been very active in recent months in seeking the breakup of the Derryknockane estate near Raheen. Between October 1917 and March 1918, no less than six ILLA meetings were held in Raheen. A resolution passed at one of these rallies in early 1918 captures the more militant tone adopted by the ILLA at this stage:

we...do hereby call upon the powers that be to break up the land known as Pike's Field, and the land known as Kelly's Field...for the production of more food, which is much needed in our midst, as there are labourers

¹⁷² LL, 29 December 1916.

¹⁷³ LL, 24 October 1917.

¹⁷⁴ LL, 2 November 1917.

¹⁷⁵ LL, 6 March 1918.

amongst us who have not as much land as
would sod a lark...¹⁷⁶

And even though a "sub-committee" of the ILLA send condolences to Redmond's funeral, this was an exceptional instance since by and large the political resolutions had disappeared.¹⁷⁷ It is also noteworthy that the tone of the organisation towards local politicians changed dramatically by the end of 1918. In a letter to the press in September protesting the County Council's decision to suspend road work for one month, Michael Ryan, the Central Secretary, declared pointedly:

...it is hardly possible to conceive the hardship of poor men, being now thrown out to starve for a whole month, especially by men who are always clamouring for self-government, and some of them, I believe go the whole hog and demand an "independent Irish Republic." I often wonder if they got either where would the working man come in, or would he be left to their tender mercies as he is today.¹⁷⁸

This shift in rhetoric was necessary if the ILLA was to maintain any authority in the changed political and economic environment at war's end. What is remarkable is the degree to which the ILLA adapted under these pressures, going so far as to decide to affiliate to the ITUCLP in September 1918.¹⁷⁹ The organisation was able to recoup some ground and even grow in certain parts of the country, though not especially in Limerick. The decisive factor facilitating the ILLA as well as the ITGWU's growth in the countryside was the AWB minimum rates which gave official backing to wage demands and meant that labourers could threaten recalcitrant farmers with legal action. But, as will be seen in Chapter 4, the ILLA's efforts to keep up with change were not enough to prevent the ITGWU from becoming the pre-eminent organisation of rural workers.

3.3 KERRY LABOUR DURING THE WAR

3.3.1 Labour's Economic Position

Kerry's economy was, of course, affected by many of the same factors which operated in neighbouring Limerick. The most important

¹⁷⁶ LL, 4 February 1918.

¹⁷⁷ LL, 13 March 1918.

¹⁷⁸ MN, 18 September 1918.

¹⁷⁹ MN, 11 September 1918.

of these was the high price for agricultural products which brought prosperity to farmers. In mid-1918, the RIC's County Inspector reported that local farmers were even able to turn a shortage of coal to their advantage by selling turf at "enormous" prices.¹⁸⁰ Besides farming, the fishing industry at Dingle and Caherciveen was also said to be prospering.¹⁸¹ As a result, the County Council announced towards the end of the war that it would help finance an extension to the pier at Renard Point near Caherciveen to accommodate increased traffic. The local fish merchants were also said to be planning an "ice factory".¹⁸² Among other ventures begun during the war were corn mills in Kenmare; a sawmill in Killarney; and a leather tanning establishment near Sneem.¹⁸³

But if the war spurred profits in the county's most important economic sector, agriculture, it also depressed other sectors. It has already been mentioned that the net tonnage of vessels which arrived in the port of Tralee dropped by three fourths between 1913 and 1918 (see Table 3.1). The war also had a devastating impact on the tourism trade in Killarney. In fact, the Killarney Urban District Council (UDC) formed a "Relief Committee" at the end of 1914, specifically due to the distress caused by the collapse of tourism.¹⁸⁴ Yet another sector which suffered was the building trade in Tralee. In early 1915, the Tralee Trades and Labour Council (TTLC) estimated that 111 of the town's building workers (including labourers) were unemployed as opposed to an "average" of 20 during "previous winters."¹⁸⁵

On three separate occasions, the police reported that men were leaving for Britain's munitions plants in significant numbers. In May 1916, many were said to have gone to factories in Wales. A year later, in September 1917, 100 labourers left for Britain and the following month's report said that the flow of labourers was continuing. The latter report also noted, however, that, "there appears to be good employment both on the farms & in the fishing industry on the coast." Hence, the outward flow of labourers may have reflected the lure of high wages as much as difficulty in finding work locally. This phenomenon was not restricted to unskilled workers. Many

¹⁸⁰ Kerry County Inspector (KCI), RIC, monthly report, July 1918.

¹⁸¹ KCI, June 1916.

¹⁸² Kerryman (KM), 10 & 24 August 1918.

¹⁸³ IG, January 1916; KM, 8 January 1916; KM, 17 August 1918.

¹⁸⁴ KM, 5 December 1914.

¹⁸⁵ KM, 20 February 1915.

members of the ASCJ, for example, were reported to have left for Britain by early 1917.¹⁸⁶ In their case, however, inability to find work in their trade may well have been more of a factor than with the labourers. It is worth noting that the only local "munitions contract" reported in Kerry was obtained by Donovan's in Tralee. The firm employed members of the ASCJ on the contract but the union alleged that the firm was trying to replace them with "diluted" labour, i.e. young boys and women.¹⁸⁷

But whatever lure "war work" may have held for Kerry workers, this did not extend to enthusiasm for joining the army. Between 15 December 1914 and 15 December 1915, only 3.3% of Catholic males occupied outside agriculture enlisted. This was the lowest rate in the entire country and compared with 8.2% in Limerick and 13.5% in Antrim (including Belfast). The national average was 6.8% for Catholics and 8.3% for Protestants.¹⁸⁸ As for males employed in agriculture, all observers agreed that farmers' sons were the group least likely to join. To the extent that any section of Kerry society showed an inclination to enlist it would appear to have been urban unskilled labourers.

This led to the phenomenon of "separation ladies" who were described by—admittedly hostile—militant nationalists as coming from the most destitute areas of the towns, particularly Tralee. For example, in June 1915, the Workers Republic's correspondent ranted against "the Ladies Battalion of soldiers' dependants from historic Mary Street" who had been allegedly parading the streets on several occasions "cheering for John Redmond (happy man!) and waving sundry Union Jacks and Royal Standards". The women were also referred to as "viragoes", "daring dames" and "bawling, drunken specimens of womanhood."¹⁸⁹

But how did workers who remained in the area fare economically in the face of steep inflation which, as we have seen, caused the cost of living to double? Table 3.8 gives some weekly wage rates in Kerry during 1914-8, particularly for unskilled workers employed by public authorities. In 1914, builders' labourers in Tralee and Listowel

¹⁸⁶ KM, 7 April 1917.

¹⁸⁷ KM, 7 & 21 April 1917.

¹⁸⁸ David Fitzpatrick, "Logic of Collective Sacrifice": Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918," The Historical Journal (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) with additional information from the author.

¹⁸⁹ Workers Republic (WR), 26 June 1915.

quarryworkers were both earning 15s. The rate for builders' labourers was only slightly below the 17s (2s.10d per day) obtained in Limerick in October 1913 but still represented only 55.6% of the UK rate in July 1914. Meanwhile, linesmen on the Tralee & Dingle railway were receiving a mere 14s. By June, however, UDC employees in Tralee were reported to have secured a 20s minimum, 2s higher than the rate received by Limerick Corporation labourers in March and a respectable 74.8% of the UK rate for local authority labourers. Remarkably, the 36s rate for carpenters and joiners in Killorglin was higher than the 35s.7½d summer rate reported for Limerick carpenters in October 1913.

No direct comparisons between pre-war wages in Kerry and those obtaining at the end of the war is possible based on the available data. However, Listowel UDC workers experienced a 76.5% wage increase during 1915-8 (17s-30s). The latter wage was 90.9% of the 33s minimum obtained by Limerick Corporation workers in 1918. Road labourers working for the Killarney Rural District Council saw their wages rise by 7s.6d in 1918 to 27s.6d which, while lower than the wages of Listowel's UDC employees, was still higher than the 25s per week paid to road labourers by the Limerick County Council. The only skilled rate reported during the year was the 48s secured by Tralee carpenters and joiners in November. This represented 88.9% of the 54s obtained a month later by the plumber employed by the Limerick Corporation's Water Committee. Towards the end of the war, the RIC's Kerry County Inspector noted that although the wages of labourers and the "poorer classes" had increased greatly they had not kept pace with inflation. He concluded by saying that, "it is a matter of surprise that there is not more distress."¹⁹⁰

3.3.2 Industrial Relations

Strike activity in Kerry during 1914-8 followed a slightly different pattern from that observed in Limerick. As in the neighbouring county, the number of disputes was relatively low in 1914-6, with a total of 17 reported during these three years. However, unlike Limerick, 1917 did not see a sharp increase in work stoppages. Seven disputes occurred in Kerry that year, two of which were lockouts. This was an increase of only two on the total for 1916. Nevertheless, the last year of the war did see a sharp increase, with a total of 15 disputes reported.

¹⁹⁰ KCI, October 1918.

Table 3.8 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Kerry, 1915-18.

Kerry 1914-8

Sector	14	15	16	17	18
Building					
carpenters & joiners Killorglin	36.0				
carpenters (Donovan's) Tralee				38.0	
carpenters & joiners, Tralee					48.0
builders' labourers, Tralee	15.0				
UDC employees					
<u>Listowel:</u>					
labourers		17.0			30.0
steward					35.0
"man guiding horse"					32.6
quarryworkers	15.0				
<u>Tralee:</u>					
employees (minimum)	20.0				
asst in Clerk's office	25.0				
RDC roadworkers					
<u>Listowel:</u>					
labourers			18.0		
<u>Tralee:</u>					
stewards				27.6	
labourers				25.0	
<u>Killarney:</u>					
stewards				22.6	
labourers				20.0	27.6
Other					
rail workers, Tralee & Dingle	14.0	15.0		20.0	
engineering labourers, Tralee	5d p/h				
labourers, Killorglin				20.0	

Source: Kerryman 1914-8; Labour Gazette, 1914-8; Tralee UDC minutes.

Table 3.9 - Analysis of strikes and lockouts in Kerry, 1914-18.

	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	Totals
strikes/lockouts per year	6	6	5	5/2	15	37/2
location of disputes						
local disputes centred in Tralee	3	3	2	4	6	18
local disputes centred in Tralee, Killarney, Listowel/outside the main towns (a)	3/2	5/0	3/1	4/2	8/4	23/9
part of national action					2	2
cause(s) of disputes (b)						
over wages only	3	2	2	4	10	21
at least partly over wages	5	3	4	6	10	28
hours	1			1	1	3
working conditions		1	1	1		3
political aims			1		1	2
reinstatement of dismissed workers					2	2
use of non-union or "diluted" labour		3		1		4
speed-up				1		1
other	1					1
unclear	1		1		1	3
results of disputes (c)						
workers obtain full demand		1		1	5	7
demand entirely refused (or employer obtains his/her full demand)	1	2	1	1	3	8
compromise	3	2	1	1	2	9
unclear	2	1	3	4	4	14
disputes by industrial sector						
building (d)	3	3		2	3	11
metals	1		1			2
clothing			1		3	4
transport	2	1	3	1	1	8
food		1		1		2
farm labourers				2	1	3
public authorities (e)					3	3
shop assistants, clerks		1		1	1	3
other/unclear					3	3

(a) - not including the five strikes (one each year) on the Tralee & Dingle railway.

(b) - Except for wages, all figures refer to the total number of disputes in which a particular cause was cited regardless of whether it was the only cause.

(c) - not including most political strikes, where the question of a "result" does not arise.

(d) - including all carpenters.

(e) - including asylum employees and teachers.

Source: Kerryman 1914-18; RIC internal reports, CO 904; PRO LAB 34/14-18 & 32-36 (for the full list of disputes, see Appendix 1).

Despite this difference, it is still useful, for purposes of analysis, to compare Kerry strike activity during 1914-6 with that of 1917-8. This reveals that, unlike Limerick, disputes in the last two years of the war were less concentrated in the county's main urban areas and more often initiated exclusively over wage demands. During 1914-6, 47.1% of reported disputes occurred in Tralee but this decreased slightly to 45.5% in 1917-8. The proportion of disputes which occurred in the three main towns of Tralee, Killarney and Listowel also declined from 64.7% to 54.5%.¹⁹¹ Of disputes with a known cause, those exclusively about wages increased from 53.3% to 66.7% of the total. However, the proportion involving wages as at least one of the issues in contention decreased from 80.0% to 76.2% in the latter period.

Analysis of disputes with a known "result" also reveals some differences with Limerick where the proportion of reported "failures" decreased dramatically while "compromises" increased from 16.7% to 61.9%. In Kerry, failures also decreased but only slightly from 36.4% in 1914-6 to 30.8% in 1917-8 while compromises decreased sharply from 54.5% to 23.1%. On the other hand, instances where workers obtained their full demand increased dramatically from 9.1% to 46.1%. Despite differences, however, the experience of both counties reveals a definite trend towards increasing success in obtaining demands, wholly or partly.

The experience of Kerry and Limerick is also similar in the concentration of strike activity among a small number of industrial sectors in 1914-6. Building and transport accounted for 70.6% of Kerry disputes during these three years. Building remained a disturbed sector in 1917-8, accounting for 22.7% of disputes but no other sector accounted for more than 13.6% of reported activity while transport declined to 9.1%. Hence, while Kerry may have differed from Limerick in that the end of the war brought an extension of strike activity to smaller centres (particularly Killorglin where three strikes were reported in 1918), both counties saw a wider range of workers using the strike weapon. In Kerry, these included grocers' assistants, drapers' assistants and UDC carters in Tralee, as well as tailors and Congested Districts Board workers in Killorglin and farm labourers in Dromore and Droumlought.

¹⁹¹ These figures do not include strikes on the Tralee & Dingle railway which accounted for 17.6% (3) of disputes in 1914-6 and 9.1% (2) in the latter period.

Other groups of workers obtained wage increases without strike action. In 1915, UDC workers in Tralee and Listowel both received 2s increases. The TTLC was also successful in obtaining a general increase of 2s for unskilled workers from the town's employers. The following March, the rapidly-growing ITGWU succeeded in obtaining another 2s general increase from the Tralee merchants, the town's main employers of unskilled labour, as well as an unspecified increase for unskilled workers in Killarney. These successes, while they did not require strike action, were inseparable, however, from the strength of the workers' organisation and the implicit threat of a solid stoppage.

While Kerry's urban unskilled workers were often successful during 1915-6 in obtaining wage increases without resorting to strike action, road workers began making progress in late 1916. The first significant gain was made by labourers employed by the Listowel RDC whose wages were raised in October to 18s per week from a miserable 14s. This was followed a year later by an increase of 2s.6d for road labourers employed by Killarney RDC and a 4s increase for town labourers in Killorglin. In 1918, the ITGWU again succeeded in securing a general agreement with the main Tralee employers. Employees of the merchants received a 5s increase; UDC workers and employees of Revington's received 4s; and employees of the CWS bacon factory, 3s. The 5s increase received by UDC workers in Listowel in December was also obtained through the recently reformed ITGWU branch.

Besides considering the overall picture of industrial relations, it is useful to consider several particular examples. The most remarkable dispute in Kerry during the war was clearly that waged by the IDAA at the Munster Warehouse in Tralee. Only 15 assistants were on strike but the sheer longevity of the affair—34 months—is proof enough of the bitter determination on both sides. From the union's standpoint, the issue at stake was an alleged breach of the agreement which had been signed in December 1913 between the IDAA and the five main "drapery houses" which provided for the partial abolition of the "living-in" system so despised by the union. That agreement had itself been the product of a long campaign and the Munster Warehouse strike became a *cause célèbre* for the IDAA nationally in

its drive to see that the principle of "living out" was not reversed where it had been established.¹⁹²

From the start, it was clear that the strikers had wide public support and this brought with it the endorsement of various local politicians. At the first of several rallies held to support the IDAA's cause, there were no less than five members of the UDC on the platform and Councillor T. Kelliher chaired the meeting. The speakers included Thomas O'Donnell, MP and M. O'Connell, Vice President of the Trades Council. Michael O'Lehane, General Secretary of the IDAA, concluded by declaring, "we know that we have nothing opposed to us but the upholders of a broken treaty, backed up by their money bags, by their arrogance and by their stubbornness."¹⁹³

It quickly became clear, however, that despite the backing of the labour movement and the verbal support of many local politicians, the IDAA faced a significant obstacle in the form of assistants at the Munster Warehouse who refused to join the strike. While the local newspaper reports do not tell us much about this group it is possible that they were the among the assistants who had resisted the abolition of the living-in system in the first place. At the time, the union's journal, the Draper's Assistant, complained bitterly about the female workers at one particular (unspecified) establishment who had allegedly delayed the agreement.¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, the Workers Republic referred to the workers crossing the picket line at the Munster Warehouse as "blackleg ladies" although at least one, Bill Sullivan, obviously did not fit this category.¹⁹⁵

The union received a boost when the five members of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors at the Munster Warehouse joined the strike in late June 1915.¹⁹⁶ However, the conflict with those drapers' assistants who were crossing the picket line escalated and from July to December several cases involving alleged intimidation by members of the IDAA were brought before the courts.¹⁹⁷ Finally, in December, two separate groups of defendants pleaded guilty at Cork winter

¹⁹² "Tralee Notes by Robal," WR, 29 May & 5 June 1915 gives a pro-IDAA account of the background to the strike.

¹⁹³ KM, 29 May 1915.

¹⁹⁴ Draper's Assistant, January 1914.

¹⁹⁵ WR, 24 July 1915. Bill Sullivan was a particular hate figure for the journal's correspondent and emphasis was laid on his membership of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) (see for example, WR, 30 October 1915).

¹⁹⁶ WR, 26 June 1915; KM, 26 June 1915.

¹⁹⁷ KM, 17 July, 23 October & 7 November 1917.

assizes to "persistent following" and were released on promises of good behaviour.¹⁹⁸

From this point onwards, the dispute went into a type of stalemate. Since there was not a great number of workers involved, the union was able to afford to pay them strike pay indefinitely in order to make its point. At the 1916 meeting of the ITUCLP in Sligo, O'Lehane declared, "they really are our heroes of the trenches."¹⁹⁹ The management of the Munster Warehouse, on the other hand, clearly felt that it was able to do sufficient business with the staff it had. Therefore, it could afford to ignore the strike as simply a nuisance. The cause of the Munster Warehouse IDAA was taken up by William Partridge of the ITGWU as he organised branches in Kerry in late 1915 and early 1916. He was the main speaker at labour rallies to support the strike in November 1915 and March 1916.²⁰⁰ After this one hears less about the dispute although both the Sligo and Derry meetings of the ITUCLP passed resolutions supporting the IDAA's stand.²⁰¹ At the end of 1916, Tom O'Donnell asked a question in Parliament regarding the alleged harassment of pickets outside the Warehouse.²⁰²

Finally, in February 1918, the dispute was submitted to the arbitration of the new Bishop of Kerry, Charles O'Sullivan.²⁰³ His "award" was announced a few weeks later. Its main stipulation was that "living in" and "living out" were to be voluntary options in the future. Five assistants were to be reinstated within a month and the rest, "shall get preference from the Company if any vacancies arise."²⁰⁴ This was a clear defeat for the IDAA. Understandably, the union withheld giving its sanction to the agreement for several weeks, declaring that "one or two points" needed to be clarified.²⁰⁵

The seemingly continuous low-level confrontation on the Tralee & Dingle rail line provides another example of local industrial relations during the war. Between 1914 and 1918, no less than five strikes occurred on the line. They generally involved only part of the

¹⁹⁸ KM, 4 December 1915.

¹⁹⁹ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1916 Report, p. 61.

²⁰⁰ KM, 13 November 1915 & 4 March 1916.

²⁰¹ Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, 1916 Report, pp. 60-1; ITUCLP, 1917 Report, p. 60.

²⁰² KM, 23 December 1916.

²⁰³ KM, 9 February 1918.

²⁰⁴ KM, 2 March 1918.

²⁰⁵ KM, 30 March 1918.

workforce and, in one case, a strike began because of the personal action of the "steam riser" in Dingle which spread when other men refused to do his job.²⁰⁶ At different points, both the ITGWU and the NUR negotiated on behalf of the workers but in some instances it was unclear if any union was involved.

Wage rates were the central issue at stake in these disputes. However, those who reported on them seemed to usually have an added political agenda because the chairman of the T&D management committee was none other than Tom O'Donnell, MP. During the November 1915 stoppage by engine drivers, the Workers Republic correspondent referred to O'Donnell's personal position by saying, "of course, the chairman of the Railway...has his £400 a year from Parliament and £70 a year from the Railway, and he therefore can say it is disgraceful for the men to ask for more than 15/- a week."²⁰⁷

The militant nationalist Kerryman was even more scathing:

The base ingratitude of these workers to strike and otherwise afflict and grieve the gentle heart of so good a man [O'Donnell]...What horrid Larkinites you must be, you workingmen; industrial Oliver Twists as it were, asking for more after being graciously allowed to appease your hunger by licking the porridge spoon which the Dingle Railway Committee have been good enough to hold out to you!²⁰⁸

In June 1918, the Kerryman saw its fondest wish realised when the County Council voted overwhelmingly to remove O'Donnell as chairman of the T&D and replace him with the republican leader, Austin Stack.²⁰⁹

A third example of industrial conflict was the lockout of Tralee bakers by their employers in March-April 1917. The dispute apparently began in Thomas Healy's establishment on the Mall. The union alleged that its rules were being broken while Healy responded in a letter which the press summarised as "Bakers the Bosses and not the Employers".²¹⁰ However, the dispute quickly became more general. Our main source of information for what happened next is a letter from Thomas O'Gorman, the president of the Trades Council to

²⁰⁶ KM, 18 & 25 November 1916.

²⁰⁷ WR, 6 November 1915.

²⁰⁸ KM, 7 November 1915.

²⁰⁹ KM, 15 June 1918.

²¹⁰ KM, 3 March 1917.

the press. He stated that the Food Controller sought a reduction in the price of bread after which the merchant bakers demanded that their employees roughly double their output with only a marginal increase in wages. According to O'Gorman, the society offered a compromise but this was refused and the bakers were locked out. They then formed a cooperative "Workers Bakery" which O'Gorman claimed employed all 36 bakers who were locked out at a "decent living wage" making less expensive bread.²¹¹ The next issue of the Kerryman merely reported that, "the trouble in the baking trade has come to an end."²¹²

Like the strike by the Limerick Operative Bakers in 1918, the lockout in Tralee raised broader questions than pay. In both cases, the employers clearly sought to inflict a serious blow to the union's power within the workplace. The lockout of the Tralee bakers was typical of disputes in Kerry during the 1914-8 period which involved skilled or semi-skilled workers in the majority of instances. The "Workers Bakery" also typified the labour movement's increasing militancy and its willingness to use new tactics. Another example of this was the wage demands placed on all the main employers of unskilled labour in Tralee, first by the TTLC and then by the ITGWU. This enabled the union to enforce a type of "closed shop" policy and by establishing a standard rate prevented employers from pitting groups of workers against each other.

The increasing number of disputes beginning in early 1917 led to calls for an arbitration board. The Kerryman, at the time of the bakers' lockout, emphasised that it wanted a local arbitration board, objecting to the fact that the British government's Board of Trade was involved in trying to settle the concurrent dispute over "diluted" labour and wages *between* the ASCJ and Donovan's. For that matter, the paper's commentator didn't like the presence of an ASCJ official from Manchester in Tralee and called for Irish trade unions for Irish workers.²¹³ In practice, however, arbitration did not play as large a role in industrial relations in Tralee as it did in Limerick City. Besides the dispute at Donovan's and the bishop's intervention in the Munster Warehouse strike, there was only one other reported instance of arbitration during the war. This again involved a Ministry of Labour official, Sir Plunkett Barton, who was called in to adjudicate the

211 KM, 14 April 1917.

212 KM, 21 April 1917.

213 KM, 3 March 1917.

already mentioned wage negotiations between the ITGWU and several Tralee employers in 1918.²¹⁴

3.3.3 Nationalism and Class Conflict, 1914-6

In striking contrast to Limerick City, the urban labour movement in Kerry, particularly in Tralee, experienced the high point of its political and possibly even its organisational activity during the war in late 1915-early 1916 rather than late 1917-early 1918. The dynamic for this earlier development was provided by the intervention of the ITGWU and the close relationship between local labour leaders in Tralee and the Irish Volunteers who were particularly strong in Kerry. But before describing how the Transport Union made its striking debut in the southwest, it is necessary to describe certain aspects of the political life of the county at the beginning of the war and the process that led to the growth of the Irish Volunteers.

When war was declared, a large majority of the Kerry population supported John Redmond's pro-British stance. The RIC's County Inspector in his report for August noted, "an extremely strong anti-German feeling in the county which is partly religious." Clearly, an important element of popular enthusiasm came from appeals on behalf of "Catholic Belgium and France". Even the virulently anti-Redmond Kerryman felt constrained to publish a pro-Allies editorial:

Although Irishmen have not, so far, received any undue provocation to fall in love with England, there is not a man in the country—even, we feel sure, the most extreme of patriots—who would not support England to the utmost of his ability in the struggle now on. We want no sauer-kraut—no Germans; so much is a certainty...²¹⁵

However, it was precisely the small group of "extreme patriots" who saw Redmond's declaration that the Volunteers would stand shoulder to shoulder with England as the greatest possible betrayal of Irish nationality.

In Kerry, this minority viewpoint was represented by a capable group of activists who dominated the local Volunteer leadership. In Tralee, Austin Stack, head of the Kerry IRB, and A. W. Cotton, also in

²¹⁴ KM, 28 September 1918. The Board of Trade turned over its arbitration responsibilities to the new Ministry of Labour in 1917.

²¹⁵ KM, 8 August 1914.

the IRB, were probably the most important figures in this faction. Another leading Tralee Volunteer in definite sympathy with their views was M. J. O'Connor, the secretary of the TTLC, local organiser for the Workers' Union and possibly also an IRB member. Further to the west, at the very tip of the Dingle Peninsula, Desmond FitzGerald, who had come to the area in 1913 to set up house and wait for the Irish national resurgence which he could "feel" in his bones, had managed to organise a strong Volunteer corps. In this work, he was assisted by Ernest Blythe, yet another IRB agent. It is also noteworthy that "The O'Rahilly", a leading Volunteer, had a bungalow next to Ventry Harbour where he usually spent the summer with his family. Blythe, FitzGerald and The O'Rahilly came to know each other quite well and there can be little doubt that these contacts played a significant role in the emphasis that the Irish Volunteers came to place on Kerry. Certainly, all three of these men were convinced that the remote corners of the country were more truly "Irish" and "national" and would necessarily play an important role in coming events.²¹⁶

The split in the Volunteers in early October 1914 gave Kerry's separatists an opportunity to gauge their strength. In Tralee, the initial meeting of the Volunteers, on October 14, to discuss the issue was a great success for the followers of Eoin MacNeill since only twenty men declared themselves for Redmond while over 200 others supported the anti-Redmondite Provisional Committee. Tom O'Donnell MP was ejected from the meeting to cries of, "remove the recruiting sergeant" while M. J. O'Connor took the lead in insisting on a division, saying, "it was a question of standing for Ireland or the Empire..."²¹⁷ O'Donnell was quick to recover from his humiliation, however, and soon organised a meeting in the County Hall to found a branch of Redmond's new National Volunteers. Over 2,000 attended which led the Irish Worker's correspondent to comment ungraciously that, "the theatre was packed in every sense. There were Unionists (present by invitation), Red Cross followers, Aberdeenites, Shoneen Nationalists, capitalists, and old women of both sexes."²¹⁸ The Redmondites also managed to secure easy majorities in the Castleisland and Ardfert corps, although the Irish Volunteers held a rally in Castleisland in November, with M. J. O'Connor as principal speaker, to boost their

²¹⁶ Desmond FitzGerald, Memoirs of Desmond FitzGerald, 1913-1916 (London, 1968).

²¹⁷ KCI, October 1914; KM, 17 October 1914; IW, 24 October 1914.

²¹⁸ IW, 31 October 1914.

local affiliate.²¹⁹ In Dingle, on the other hand, Desmond FitzGerald obtained an overwhelming majority in favour of the Provisional Executive at an initial corps meeting. But at a subsequent and more riotous gathering organised by his opponents, FitzGerald was unable to make himself heard and was finally knocked unconscious by a man crying, "down with the traitor." To FitzGerald's chagrin, the next drill was attended by less than a quarter of the men.²²⁰

Of the 4,000 Volunteers in Kerry in October 1914, the MacNeillites only kept a minority, though a significantly larger minority than elsewhere in the country. In November 1914, according to police estimates, the national membership of the Irish Volunteers was equal to 7.1% of that of the National Volunteers. In Kerry, the figure was 31.6%. As the war went on, the National Volunteers on both the national and local levels shrunk drastically, nationally by 33.7% and locally by 33.9% (i.e. February 1916 compared to November 1914). Even the nominal membership which remained was by all accounts inactive to the point of being moribund. Meanwhile, the Irish Volunteers grew slowly but steadily.

By February 1916, the national membership of the Irish Volunteers had risen to 12% of that of the Redmondites. In Kerry, however, that proportion had risen sharply to 58.7%. The period of fastest growth for the organisation both nationally and locally was late 1915 when they capitalized on the fear that Ireland would be included in the proposed system of conscription. In Kerry, the fear of conscription was noted in several RIC reports. This factor, however, intersected a more general dissatisfaction with the IPP. In August 1915, the party's local agents were putting pressure on public bodies to draft addresses of welcome for Redmond who was due to visit Tralee shortly for a major UIL rally. When the addresses were not forthcoming, the pressure was increased until a few councils "caved in" and did their duty.²²¹ In the end, both Redmond's visit and the UIL rally were cancelled indefinitely.²²²

What made Kerry especially fertile ground for the Irish Volunteers? Already in May 1915, the RIC's Inspector General had noted that, "there is reason to fear that as a result of this [Sinn Féin] activity, a spirit of disloyalty and pro-Germanism, which hitherto was

²¹⁹ KCI, October 1914; KM 14 November 1914.

²²⁰ FitzGerald, pp. 54-9.

²²¹ WR, 28 August 1915; KM, 21 August & 25 September 1915

²²² KCI, October 1915; KM, 23 October 1915.

confined to a small number, is spreading—particularly in Kerry." During the same month, the Volunteers held an impressive parade in Killarney. The Kerryman claimed 1500 were reviewed by Eoin MacNeill whereas the RIC estimated 550 but all were agreed that it was a significant show of force.²²³

The extremely low recruitment rate for the British army among men occupied outside of agriculture in Kerry has already been noted. Recruitment figures were in fact low throughout the west and south of Ireland. This may be connected to the more peripheral position of these regions in relation to the British Isles economy as well as to the long standing traditions of rural agitation, and, to a lesser extent, of Fenianism in certain districts. In the case of Kerry, it is noteworthy that when Tom O'Donnell originally won his parliamentary seat in 1900, he did so with the active support of local IRB members. Michael Moynihan, the IRB's "head centre" in the county, played an especially prominent role.²²⁴ O'Donnell's subsequent transformation into a loyal Redmondite notwithstanding, this episode showed the continuing, if largely passive support, of some sections of the population for a more militant brand of nationalism than that offered by the IPP. On the other end of the nationalist spectrum, the challenge of William O'Brien's All for Ireland League, though concentrated in Cork, also found a certain resonance in Kerry. While the O'Brienites held an even more moderate line than the IPP—seeking, as they did, a political accommodation with Unionist landlords—their overriding desire to accentuate any discomfiture felt by the Redmondites should not be underestimated. Hence this confluence of economic and political factors may explain the pattern of low recruitment in the west and south.

Reluctance to join the British Army was by no means synonymous with a desire to take advantage of "Britain's difficulty" by organising an insurrection or even by merely drilling in a "pro-German" organisation. Needless to say, most young men did not choose this course and, even at its pre-Rising height, the Irish Volunteers in Kerry had only 1,742 members, a figure well below the post-Rising peak of the Sinn Féin/Volunteer movement. Nor had the virulent hostility of significant numbers to anything smacking of "Sinn Féinism" abated. The Volunteers did manage, however, to make a noise far out of

²²³ KM, 29 May 1915; KCI, May 1915.

²²⁴ Gaughan, O'Donnell, pp. 23-4.

proportion to their numbers. But in order to explain this phenomenon, as well as their relative numerical density compared to Volunteers in other parts of the country, one must consider their peculiar relationship with the local labour movement.

The most notable event for the Kerry labour movement in 1914 was the formation of the Tralee Trades and Labour Council. From its inception, the TTLC aimed to organise the unorganised. This was the theme of the council's first public rally in August at which the speakers' list included Councillor R. P. O'Carroll of Dublin, General Secretary of the Ancient Guild of Brick and Stonelayers; N. Rimmer, the Irish secretary of the NUR; and W. D. Hannaway, the Irish organiser of the Workers Union.²²⁵ According to Greaves, the Workers Union was, "a small general labourers' union founded by Tom Mann in 1898 to cater for what the Webbs called 'nondescript and semi-skilled workers of all sorts'."²²⁶ The Workers Union played a key role in the formation of the TTLC with two of its members, M. O'Connell and M. J. O'Connor, selected to be the new council's vice-president and secretary respectively. These selections demonstrated the delegates' desire to create a body that would appeal not only to skilled workers but to semi-skilled and unskilled workers as well.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the TTLC from its inception put social conditions, particularly housing, high on its agenda. In order to combat slum housing as well as unemployment, the council proposed in October 1914 that the UDC's "Distress Committee", begin a building scheme.²²⁷ However, the council's demand for greater labour representation on the committee (apparently appointed at the behest of the Local Government Board (LGB) to organise the local distribution of the National Relief Fund) was refused.²²⁸

The Distress Committee became a focus of labour agitation during the winter of 1914-5 as wartime inflation began to take its toll on workers' living standards. The Workers Republic correspondent later summarised labour's grievances by commenting acidly that, "the

²²⁵ KM, 22 August 1914.

²²⁶ Greaves, p. 20.

²²⁷ KM, 3 October 1914. The TTLC again placed this demand on the UDC the following year (KM, 6 March 1915).

²²⁸ The demand had been made shortly after the committee's appointment the previous month. Four of the forty appointees were labour representatives (KM, 19 September, 1914). Parenthetically, the October TTLC meeting also heard that labour representative had been co-opted to a "Citizens' Food Committee" of which nothing was heard subsequently.

Committee, with the exception of the four Trades Council representatives, were so fond of their task that they laid down by the side of it and fell asleep."²²⁹ On 20 February 1915, the Kerryman headlined, "Mobilisation of Tralee Distress Committee—Twelve Members out of Forty Turn Up—After a Four Months' Rest." By then the Trades Council had already established its own fund for Tralee's poor while calling on the government to take control, "of the necessaries of life, and so prevent profit being made from the workers' needs during the present crisis."²³⁰ A month later, the TTLC held a benefit for its fund in the Picturedrome at which £9.17s was raised. Another "entertainment" held in the Theatre Royal in April raised £16.11s.6d.²³¹ It was around this time that the TTLC decided to withdraw its representatives from the Distress Committee altogether, in spite of M. J. O'Connor having been made its honorary secretary.²³²

The most striking aspect of the Trades Council's activity in the first year of its existence was its willingness to take to the streets to protest any perceived injustice. In addition to the organising rally held at its inception and the "Trades and Labour Procession" in June 1915 to support the Munster Warehouse strike, the council called a demonstration to protest the dismissal of seven cleaners by the UDC at the end of July. According to the report in the Workers Republic:

One of the largest and most enthusiastic public meetings held in Tralee took place in the Square on Wednesday the 18th inst., at 8 p.m. The Strand Street Band paraded the town prior to the meeting. Mr P. O'Riordan, President Tralee Branch Workers Union was moved to the chair, and explained the objects of the meeting to demand the reinstatement of the seven U.D.C. employees who had been wrongfully dismissed.²³³

The Strand Street Band was to be found leading most labour and Irish Volunteer demonstrations in Tralee during this period. Meanwhile, tired of what they saw as the hostile attitude of the town councillors to labour interests, the TTLC demanded yearly local elections and the

²²⁹ WR, 5 June 1915.

²³⁰ KM, 6 February 1915

²³¹ KM, 24 April & 15 May 1915.

²³² WR, 5 June 1915. For reference to O'Connor's position, see KM, 3 April 1915.

²³³ WR, 28 August 1915.

replacement of the current system of 21 councillors elected at large by a ward system with one alderman elected from each of seven wards.²³⁴

While the Trades Council's high public profile represented quite a radical departure for the Tralee labour movement, one should not infer that the social philosophy animating its most prominent activists was particularly revolutionary. On 1 May 1915, the Kerryman carried a report of a TTLC meeting where, besides the usual complaints regarding the Local Government Board's perceived inaction on "distress" ("Work Not Charity Wanted"), a ten volume set of encyclopaedias was presented to O'Connor in appreciation of his work in founding the council. In returning thanks, O'Connor declared:

Though but a short time in existence they had done much for the class they represented—the working class. They realised that capital and labour—employer and employee—were dependent one upon the other, and that harmonious working was essential to both.

He went on to advocate the "peaceful" resolution of disputes. This aversion to any notion of "class struggle" was typical of provincial Irish trade unionists. However, such reassurances did not prevent some of the local employers from becoming rather alarmed at the local labour movement's new-found vigour.

At a meeting of the Harbour Board a few weeks later, the chairman, M. J. Kelliher, and Jeremiah O'Keefe (who was also a member of the UDC) vehemently denounced an unnamed labour organisation which they claimed was on the verge of ruining the local economy. Kelliher declared that this organisation, "seems to be taking the whole control out of the business firms hands," citing as evidence that, "the holiday hour of closing is fixed by it and I had my place closed without being consulted." He warned the people of the town against a "great danger", saying that Wexford had been "ruined" by "rowdies" who were trying to do the same in Tralee. O'Keefe backed this up by calling the unnamed troublemakers "an imported crowd."²³⁵ The TTLC predictably passed a motion denouncing Kelliher's remarks at its next meeting but interestingly the Kerryman which was very supportive of the council at this time also saw fit to print a long attack on Kelliher in its regular "Tralee Topics" column for

²³⁴ KM, 21 August 1915.

²³⁵ KM, 19 June 1915.

what it termed his "anti-Socialistic cant". Davitt and Fintan Lalor were then quoted to show that socialist ideas were neither new nor disreputable.²³⁶

Defending the TTLC against charges of "socialism" would hardly seem to have been necessary in light of O'Connor's comments on the inter-"dependence" of capital and labour. However, an item at the same council meeting which responded to Kelliher's charges make his attack seem slightly less paranoid. O'Connell, the council's vice-president, made a plug for the newly established Workers Republic, edited by Connolly, declaring rather incredibly that, "from what he had read of the editorial policy, it was not going to enter into party politics of any description, but is to be solely devoted to the workers cause."²³⁷ In fact, the Tralee correspondent of the new journal which the RIC's Inspector General cited several months later as a prime example of "the rebel spirit which animates the Irish Volunteer leaders" was apparently none other than M. J. O'Connor.²³⁸

While Kelliher's comments were sparked by what he saw as the threat of industrial unrest, a different sort of threat to the established order emanating from the TTLC was foreshadowed by a motion against conscription passed by the council in mid-1915 and then sent to local public bodies for their approval. Several of these, including the Tralee and Killarney RDCs and the Listowel UDC adopted it while the Tralee UDC marked it "read", declaring that a discussion on the matter would cause young men to emigrate and expressing confidence in the IPP's handling of the matter.²³⁹

The TTLC's motion indicated a willingness on the part of the local labour leadership to take a stand on political questions outside of the realm of social conditions. Meanwhile, via his weekly columns in the Workers Republic, the council's activist secretary was steadily laying the basis for the next stage of the Kerry labour movement's organisational and political involvement—the arrival of the decidedly militant Transport Union. M. J. Kelliher's nightmares were rapidly becoming reality.

²³⁶ KM, 26 June 1915. See also WR, 26 June & 3 July 1915.

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ IG, December 1915. Although the author of "Tralee Notes" in the Workers Republic signed himself simply "Robal", Greaves (p. 147) declares that it must be O'Connor, presumably because of his role in founding the ITGWU branch in Tralee. This conclusion is also supported by much internal evidence in the pieces.

²³⁹ WR, 24 July 1915.

On 5 May 1915, at the regular weekly meeting of the ITGWU's No. 1 Branch Committee, Connolly gave a report on his recent trip to the Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Belfast branches and suggested that William Partridge, one of the union's most able orators and organisers, "be appointed to go from branch to branch and hold meetings of same in order to work them up."²⁴⁰ This proposal was accepted. The union's attempt to intersect new layers outside Dublin and thereby improve its position—in the wake of the Lockout and the subsequent departure of half of its membership into the ranks of the British Army—bore fruit in Kerry when Connolly received an invitation to address a TTLC organising rally on 17 October. The "Tralee Notes" in the Workers Republic enthusiastically declared, "we sincerely hope he will come, we bespeak for Jim a royal Kerry welcome."²⁴¹

Connolly did indeed accept and was accompanied by M. J. O'Lehane of the IDAA and Councillor O'Carroll, two Dublin trade unionists who were allies of the Transport Union and who had both addressed meetings in Tralee in the past. The rally was reportedly well attended and even included, "a sprinkling of the Capitalist class".²⁴² The Kerryman devoted more than a full page to verbatim reports of the speeches. At the beginning, a strongly-worded resolution was read by the council's current secretary, M. O'Connell, advocating the unionisation of all unorganised workers and opposing conscription. M. J. O'Connor then gave an animated speech in which he railed against the impoverishment of the workers and declared that, while the Trades Council represented 500 workers, "they would not be satisfied until it had into the movement every workingman in Tralee." Connolly also took up these themes. He then addressed the other part of the resolution regarding conscription and concluded with comments that were typical of what he was saying at the time as well as being quite prophetic:

They knew to their sorrow that they could force them to fight, but there was one thing which the British Government could not settle and that was for them (the workers) alone to settle, where they were to fight (applause). If fight they must they would never be sold by

²⁴⁰ ITGWU No. 1 Branch Committee minutes, 5 May 1915, NLI Ms 7298.

²⁴¹ WR, 25 September 1915.

²⁴² WR, 23 October 1915.

the Irish working classes who will fight for Ireland in Ireland (loud applause).²⁴³

Within two weeks, the Tralee Workers Union claimed to have recruited 160 new members as a result of the rally.²⁴⁴ But the news was especially good for the ITGWU since Connolly was able to report that he was hopeful "that the branch of the Workers Union there would transfer to the Transport Union".²⁴⁵ This transfer apparently occurred shortly thereafter although the branch kept using its old name during the next few months.

There was, however, another event which immediately focused the union's attention as its main spokesman, the indefatigable O'Connor, was dismissed from his position as a clerk at the solicitors' firm of F. & C. Downing. The reason given was that he had spoken at an "anti-recruiting" meeting, namely the labour rally on 17 October.²⁴⁶ At a Workers Union meeting at the end of the month, outrage was expressed but, interestingly, there was also an attempt by M. O'Connell and O'Riordan, the branch president, to deny that the rally had been opposed to recruiting. O'Connell was particularly emphatic, saying, "would it be likely that I, whose brother sacrificed his life in the present war, would have anything to do with an anti-recruiting meeting; not likely."²⁴⁷ It was, of course, O'Connell himself who had introduced an anti-conscription motion from a platform where James Connolly, whose rhetoric could be easily construed as not merely "anti-recruiting" but pro-insurrection, was the main speaker. O'Connell's awkward position certainly indicates that O'Connor's militant nationalism was not unanimously accepted by his colleagues.

F. & C. Downing's action was not, however, the only negative reaction to the October rally. The Redmondite Kerry Press ran a series of articles denouncing the leadership of the Tralee labour movement for playing into the hands of "Sinn Féin". The first piece, entitled "Workers Used by Factionists", described Connolly as "Jim Larkin's chief henchman" and concluded that the demonstration, "was really nothing else than a counter-blast to Mr. Redmond's Convention."²⁴⁸ This was a reference to the UIL rally which was subsequently cancelled. Two weeks later, another piece expressed its concern by

²⁴³ KM, 23 October 1915.

²⁴⁴ WR, 30 October 1915.

²⁴⁵ ITGWU No. 1 Branch Committee minutes, 27 October 1915, NLI Ms. 7298.

²⁴⁶ M. J. O'Connor, Stone Walls... (Dublin, 1966), pp. 92-3.

²⁴⁷ KM, 30 October 1915.

²⁴⁸ Kerry Press (KP), 19 October 1915.

saying, "do the workers of Tralee exactly know whither they are tending?" and referred to alleged instance of disrespect against two local priests by the "Sinn Fein-Cum-Labour crowd" via the Workers Republic's "Tralee Notes" column.²⁴⁹ The 8 November issue found the Kerry Press editor still preoccupied with all these pernicious developments. In a long polemic against Connolly's speech, he focused on his statement that "everyman...who owns a bit of the Empire let him go and fight for it. The Germans never did me any harm and I will say nothing against those whom I never had a complaint." But for Connolly's Redmondite critic, the rights and benefits of British citizenship meant that the man "who will not fight for [the Empire] now that its existence is at stake is a cowardly wretch," unworthy of those benefits. Despite the reservations of O'Connell and possibly others, the Tralee labour movement had been definitely dragged into the political fray.

At a rally organised by the Trades Council to protest M. J. O'Connor's dismissal, Councillor Partridge went a step further than Connolly and called on the assembled workers to join either the Irish Volunteers or the Irish Citizen Army.²⁵⁰ This statement was probably the cause of a worried letter from Austin Stack to Connolly, inquiring whether it was the ITGWU's intention to establish a branch of the ICA in Tralee. Connolly wrote back saying:

It is not our purpose to disrupt but rather to increase and strengthen the true national movement, and in a town the size of Tralee there is no necessity for any other military body than the Volunteer Corps which has stood out so splendidly by the true Irish ideal.²⁵¹

From then on, the relations between the Tralee Volunteers and the ITGWU were marked by increasing cooperation.

Both the TTLC and the ITGWU were represented in the annual Manchester Martyrs parade which in 1915 was dominated by the Irish Volunteers.²⁵² A week later, the Workers Republic reported that J. M. Slattery had dismissed one his employees, Robert Hannafin,

²⁴⁹ KP, 2 November 1915.

²⁵⁰ KM, 6 November 1915.

²⁵¹ quoted in Samuel Levenson, James Connolly: A Biography (London, 1973), p. 278.

²⁵² WR, 4 December 1915.

for leading the Strand Street Band in the parade.²⁵³ By the end of December, a total of seven ITGWU members had been dismissed at Slattery's, due to "slackness of work".²⁵⁴ M. J. O'Connor, meanwhile was not ignoring his duties as a Volunteer organiser. He was the main speaker at both the Castleisland and Killarney Manchester Martyr parades.²⁵⁵

An even clearer instance of cooperation between the Tralee labour movement and the local Volunteers was over the case of Jack McGaley, a member of both the Kerry Junior Football Team and the Volunteers, who was convicted of violating the Defence of the Realm Act for having allegedly shouted "down the King". He was released on bail in November 1915 but his conviction was upheld in February 1916 and he was sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour.²⁵⁶ In the wake of the sentencing, a protest meeting was organised by the Tralee branch of the National Union of Clerks. Partridge was the main speaker and his typical style—utterly disrespectful of authority, especially the police—was well illustrated on this occasion. He caused "considerable amusement", referring to alleged harassment of local "Sinn Feiners" by Britten, the RIC's District Inspector, by stating that, "as a Sinn Feiner he would wish to have his friend Britten in a seven foot ring for ten minutes and if he did not succeed in changing his opinions—he would at least alter his appearance."²⁵⁷ Partridge seems to have acquired a certain celebrity status for this sort of impudence which apparently did not hamper his organising efforts for the Transport Union.

Of course, he and O'Connor also continued to speak out against the prevailing working and social conditions of unskilled workers. The Workers Republic's local popularity was no doubt largely due to O'Connor's trenchant commentary on these issues in his column. For example, when an employee at McCowen & Sons named Patrick Callaghan lost his life after falling through a latchway in an allegedly highly unsafe part of the company's flour stores, O'Connor undoubtedly captured many workers' feelings by declaring:

²⁵³ WR, 11 December 1915.

²⁵⁴ WR, 18 & 25 December 1915.

²⁵⁵ KM, 27 November & 4 December 1915.

²⁵⁶ KM, 4 March 1916.

²⁵⁷ KM, 26 February 1916.

One cannot find words expressive enough to condemn these arrant church-going hypocrites who wax fat on the sweat and blood—aye, even death, of some of God's creatures.²⁵⁸

Meanwhile, the ITGWU continued to make remarkable progress in Kerry. The Tralee branch claimed to have doubled by the end of 1915.²⁵⁹ By then, via the efforts of Partridge and M. J. O'Connor—who had been appointed as a Transport Union organiser in the wake of losing his job—the union had spread beyond the town. In late November, Partridge, O'Connor and O'Gorman, the president of the TTLC, spoke at a meeting in Churchill, near Fenit. A branch was duly founded and 100 dockers joined.²⁶⁰ A month later found Partridge speaking again in Fenit but also addressing meetings in Dingle and Killarney, the last being organised "under the auspices of the local Trade and Labour bodies."²⁶¹ As 1916 began, Connolly reported to the ITGWU's Executive Committee that there were now three branches in Kerry, namely Tralee, Fenit and Dingle.²⁶²

In Killarney, the Transport Union combined its organising campaign with attempts to form a local trades council, thereby ensuring the cooperation of local trade unionists and increasing the likelihood of success on both fronts. At the end of January 1916, O'Connor told a branch meeting in Tralee that 50 members had been recruited in Killarney.²⁶³ The first meeting of the Killarney Trades and Labour Council (KTLC) occurred a couple of weeks later. Those in attendance included representatives of the IDAA, the Brick and Stonelayers' union, the local bakers' society, the ITGWU and the National Asylum Attendants Union.²⁶⁴

Partridge then moved on to Listowel. After a "Trade and Labour Meeting" in the town in February where he attempted, as in Killarney, to combine agitation for the Transport Union with a call to establish a local trades council, a branch was established.²⁶⁵ However, there is no evidence that a trades council followed in its wake. Hence on the eve

²⁵⁸ WR, 20 November 1915.

²⁵⁹ KM, 8 January 1916.

²⁶⁰ KM, 27 November 1915.

²⁶¹ KM, 25 December 1915.

²⁶² ITGWU No. 1 Branch Committee minutes, 2 January 1916, NLI Ms 7298.

²⁶³ KM, 22 January 1916.

²⁶⁴ KM, 12 February 1916.

²⁶⁵ KM, 26 February & 1 April 1916.

of the Rising, the ITGWU had established five branches in Kerry while its only other outpost on the entire western seaboard was in Sligo.

As seen in both Tralee and Killarney, the Transport Union's intervention could not have occurred successfully without the help of local trade union officials. But it was not simply the ITGWU which benefited from this cooperation. The TTLC saw its authority considerably augmented and the KTLC would probably not have been established at this time without the efforts of Partridge and O'Connor. One indication of labour's increasing self-confidence came when the TTLC demanded in November 1915 that the UDC co-opt a labour representative to fill the position of a recently deceased councillor. The UDC refused by one vote leading the Trades Council to immediately call a public protest.²⁶⁶

Another indication of the general increase in labour activity is provided by the number of labour meetings and rallies reported in the Kerryman. During the seven month period between October 1915 and April 1916, no less than 57 labour events were reported, which was only two less than the total for all of 1915. Interestingly, the Workers Union/ITGWU accounts for only 5 or 8.5% of the reports in 1915 whereas the TTLC accounts for 21 (35.6%); the INTO, 13 (22.0%); and the IDAA 8 (13.6%). It is also worth noting that the total number of meetings reported decreased from 59 in 1915 to 49 in 1916 and 44 in 1917 before dropping sharply to 22 in 1918. This is exactly the opposite of the pattern observed in Limerick. The political reasons why the Kerryman may have chosen to focus or not focus on labour activity at different times will be discussed in the next section but these figures nevertheless confirm the importance of the late 1915-early 1916 period for the Kerry labour movement.

While the ITGWU played a decisive role in these developments, there was also a symbiotic relationship between the local labour movement and the militant nationalists of the Irish Volunteers. This alliance was reflected in the nationalist rhetoric used by Partridge and O'Connor in their organising drive; in the presence of a labour contingent at an Irish Volunteer-organised Manchester Martyrs celebration; in the joint work on the McGaley case; and in the mutual compliments regularly paid by the Workers Republic and the

²⁶⁶ KM, 20 November & 4 December 1915.

Kerryman to each other. The latter even reproduced entire articles from Connolly's journal on a couple of occasions.²⁶⁷

In the weeks immediately preceding the Rising, the relations between militant labour and militant nationalism appeared to become even closer. Armed Volunteers were present at an ITGWU rally in Tralee at the end of February.²⁶⁸ Two weeks later, at a "special general meeting" of the ITGWU, arrangements were made for, "the public parade on St. Patrick's Day in conjunction with the Irish Volunteers."²⁶⁹ The Workers Republic subsequently reported that 300 ITGWU members marched alongside 500 Volunteers. The IDAA also had a contingent.²⁷⁰

One factor which allowed for the dramatic growth of both the ITGWU and the Irish Volunteers in Kerry was clearly the relative weakness of the IPP/UIIL in the county, due at least partly to lingering O'Brienite influence and the residual strength of the Fenian tradition. At the February labour rally in support of McGaley, the speakers included—besides Partridge and O'Connor—a member of the County Council, J. P. O'Donnell, and T. Slattery, the chairman of the Tralee RDC.²⁷¹ Slattery was also present at a "McGaley Indemnity Concert" organised by the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish American Alliance) at which O'Connor, a National Director of the organisation, presided. The guest of honour was Padraic Pearse.²⁷² But if "Sinn Féinism" was clearly winning a few converts among Kerry's rural district councillors and even on the County Council by early 1916, the Tralee UDC remained utterly loyal to Redmond. When J. M. Slattery was reelected as the council's chairman in February, he made a point of declaring that, "they were at one with England in this war and the man who was not prepared to fight for his country was not worthy of having it."²⁷³ Not surprisingly, the UDC overwhelmingly passed a resolution supporting the McGaley conviction.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁷ See, for example, a piece on wages paid to female servants entitled "Atrocities in Ireland", reprinted in KM, 7 November 1915.

²⁶⁸ KM, 4 March 1916.

²⁶⁹ KM, 18 March 1916.

²⁷⁰ WR, 25 March 1916.

²⁷¹ WR, 4 March 1916.

²⁷² KM, 4 March 1916. The Tralee AOH (IAA), of which O'Connor was a founder, by his own account played an important role in the founding and building the town's Irish Volunteer corps (Stone Walls..., p. 6).

²⁷³ WR, 5 February 1916.

²⁷⁴ KM, 11 March 1916.

As we have seen, fear of conscription was the main reason for the growth of the Irish Volunteers. On the other hand, the ravages of inflation were the central incentive for unskilled workers to join the ITGWU regardless of the political sympathies of its organisers. What then is the connection between the parallel rise of the two organisations in Kerry? The political wisdom of the alliance for militant nationalists is clear. They had nothing like the hegemonic influence which accrued to them after the Rising and they therefore needed allies. Labour, with whom they shared common enemies in the local business and political establishments, was well suited for this role, at least in the short term. It may also be that the Tralee Volunteers in particular felt that identification with labour would help garner more working class recruits.²⁷⁵

O'Connell's comments about recruiting show that the local labour leadership did not unanimously share Partridge and O'Connor's avowed Fenianism. However, the advantages of giving the two firebrands free rein—even from the standpoint of politically conservative trade unionists—was that it gave labour an added rhetorical lever in its drive to organise the unorganised. Labour's role as a partner in the vanguard of the local political opposition seems to have clearly increased its appeal among many workers already infected with "Sinn Féinism". It was not, however, the basis of its appeal which doubtlessly had at least as much to do with the wage increases obtained for the unskilled workers of Tralee through organisation.

C. Desmond Greaves has also suggested that the ITGWU's push in Kerry may have been connected to preparations for the Rising. While expressing doubt that Partridge and O'Connor, despite their IRB connections, would have been "in the confidence" of the Military Committee planning the insurrection, Greaves goes on to say that:

There is no doubt that the IRB favoured the organisation of the general workers, and there may have been influences specially favouring the south-west. Their ultimate plan, after Fenit had been finally decided upon, was to

²⁷⁵ One source claimed that workers, at least before the split, formed the bulk of the town's Volunteer corps. In late 1914, the Irish Worker's Tralee correspondent, referring to a local magistrate who had recently been seen wearing a Volunteer uniform, declared, "The Tralee Volunteers are all workers and they should see that the Corps is not used to obtain cheap notoriety for this capitalist who dons the uniform but never drills." (IW, 26 September 1914).

use a large body of Volunteers to bring the arms to Tralee and then to dispatch them by rail eastwards into Co. Cork and northwards as far as Athenry. The plan would be facilitated if ITGWU branches were established at the two port towns of Fenit and Dingle and in the railway towns of Tralee, Killarney and Listowel.²⁷⁶

Greaves emphasises, however, that there is no direct evidence that the branches were built with this purpose in mind. This scenario may not be as far fetched as it appears since Partridge is described by Billy Mullins, a leading Kerry Volunteer whose memoirs were published after Greaves' book, as "the IRB link between Headquarters and Tralee". Mullins and Partridge were the two men sent to Dublin to deliver Casement's message to the leadership in the wake of his capture and the failed attempt to land German guns.²⁷⁷ And while the evidence presented here does not confirm or deny Greaves' hypothesis, it can at least be said that a workforce imbued with "Sinn Féinism" would be an invaluable asset to any putative insurrection in the southwest. Hence the possibility that trade union organisation in Kerry was connected to the plans for the Rising cannot be excluded.

3.3.4 Labour after the Rising

While Kerry was quiet during the Rising, popular reaction, at least in North Kerry, was reportedly overwhelmingly hostile to the Dublin rebels.²⁷⁸ However, the subsequent executions, as well as the arrest of numerous Kerry separatists, soon began to produce a decisive political shift away from the already weakened IPP. On 3 June, the Kerryman reported that the Caherciveen Board of Guardians, by a 7-3 vote, rescinded a recent motion condemning the Rising. A month later, anti-partition motions critical of Redmond were passed by both

²⁷⁶ Greaves, p. 152.

²⁷⁷ Billy Mullins, Memoirs of Billy Mullins: Veteran of the War of Independence (Tralee, 1983), p. 48. For more regarding Easter Week in Kerry, see Kerry's Fighting Story, 1916-21: Told by the Men Who Made It (Tralee, 1947), pp. 41-77 and Mannix Joyce, "The Story of Limerick and Kerry in 1916," in The Capuchin Annual (1966), pp. 327-70. It should be noted that these events also marked the end of William Partridge's remarkable career. After the Rising, he was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude (commuted to 10). He was released in poor health in April 1917 and died on 26 July (Greaves, p. 185).

²⁷⁸ J. A. Gaughan, Listowel and its Vicinity (Cork, 1973), pp. 347-8.

the Dingle and Killarney Guardians.²⁷⁹ At the end of July, the County Council called for Roger Casement to be reprieved.²⁸⁰

As for the Kerry labour movement, the frenetic activity which had characterised it in the months preceding the Rising, was replaced by almost total silence. In part this was doubtless due to the imprisonment of its two loudest agitators, Partridge and O'Connor. During the eight month period from May to December 1916, the Kerryman reported only 15 labour meetings (8 of these being in November) barely a quarter of the number reported in the previous seven months. But even more striking is the fact that, with the exception of one meeting of the Killarney Trades Council in November, all of these reports were of INTO or INTO-related activity.

The INTO leadership was notable for its closeness to the IPP and the Catholic hierarchy. As for the INTO's relationship with the Redmondites, one has only to look at the reports of the two half-yearly meetings of the Kerry organisation held in January and August 1915. At the January meeting, with delegates from the various county branches present, a resolution was passed expressing regret at the departure of Lord and Lady Aberdeen from Ireland.²⁸¹ Such a motion would have been anathema to militant nationalists. Division came to the fore, however, at the August meeting when the chairman, P. M. Griffin, ended his speech with a statement of unequivocal support for British war aims:

The desperate, brutal, murderous, liberty-killing cry of German despotism is 'the Fatherland over all.' If successful this would mean European slavery. Our rallying cry should be for 'King and Empire and European liberty'.

This was reportedly opposed by the majority of the delegates who, "expressed their disapproval in very strong terms." As a result, the chairman was forced to declare that he was speaking solely for himself.²⁸²

When the INTO held a rally at the Tralee Courthouse in October 1916 in support of its demand for a "war bonus", the chairman of the meeting was none other than J. M. Slattery, the aforementioned conservative chairman of the UDC. Tom O'Donnell MP, himself a

²⁷⁹ KM, 1 & 8 July 1916.

²⁸⁰ KM, 29 July 1916.

²⁸¹ KM, 30 January 1915.

²⁸² KM, 7 August 1915.

former member of the INTO Central Executive Committee, also spoke.²⁸³ Interestingly, the meeting was also addressed by O'Lehane of the IDAA and M. O'Connell of the ITGWU. This was an early indication of a political shift in the local INTO, mirroring the national organisation's move towards the ITUCLP. But it was not until May 1918, more than a year and a half later, that the Tralee INTO decided to affiliate to the TTLC.²⁸⁴ This was several months after the Limerick INTO affiliated to the LUTLC.

If the second half of 1916 was characterised by the virtual absence of publicly reported labour activity, with the exception of the teachers, then 1917 saw a slow and uneven recovery by the broader labour movement. It also witnessed the first signs of an awakening of rural workers. This had been foreshadowed in June 1915 when the RIC's Inspector General reported:

serious unrest at Ballybunion, County Kerry in connection with the impending eviction of town tenants [for refusal to pay increased rents]...A public indignation meeting was held on the 13th ult. at which Mr. Flavin M. P., said he would bring the local Volunteers (both Redmondite and Sinn Fein), armed with rifles, to assist the tenants at the evictions.

The Inspector General again reported "unrest" in February 1916, this time in Kilmurry which was "quelled" by the reinstatement of an evicted tenant. But aside from these incidents which did not imply any more lasting organisation, all was apparently quiet in the Kerry countryside through the end of 1916.

In January 1917, labourers in the Arfert district, near Tralee, held a meeting calling for "the distribution amongst them of grazing lands in the possession of Mr. E. W. Talbot Crosbie."²⁸⁵ A month later, the labourers held another meeting, with Flavin MP present, demanding the redistribution of "certain untenanted lands". Flavin took the opportunity to denounce Sinn Féin's accusation that IPP members had cheered the execution of rebels in the House of Commons as a "disgraceful attack".²⁸⁶ Then at the beginning of March, "130 labourers walked into [Tralee] three abreast against the sale of a

²⁸³ For O'Donnell's role in the INTO, see Gaughan, O'Donnell, p. 18.

²⁸⁴ KM, 4 May 1918.

²⁸⁵ KM, 13 January 1917.

²⁸⁶ KM, 10 February 1917.

large farm at Ardfert. They carried a banner inscribed 'The Land for the Poor' and 'We Will Not Starve'.²⁸⁷ The "large farm" in question was presumably the same land which was the subject of the two previous meetings.

The demand for land for tillage was also the theme of a "large and representative" meeting of farmers and labourers in Kilgobnet in February.²⁸⁸ Wages, however, were the focus of agitation in Dromlought. The labourers there demanded 15s per week with board until the recently established Agricultural Wages Board set an official rate. When this was refused, they went on strike.²⁸⁹ Meanwhile, in Ballylongford, a "Labour Federation" also made wage demands and at a meeting in May, "it was decided to get the Branch affiliated as soon as possible".²⁹⁰ Although the organisation is not specified, this may be a reference to the ILLA.

Another strike by rural labourers occurred at Lord Kenmare's estate near Killarney in September though the cause is unclear. The KTLC became involved and appealed to various figures, including two local priests, to intervene in the dispute.²⁹¹ Finally, at the ITUCLP's meeting in Derry in August 1917, Lynch, a delegate from the Cork Trades Council, drew attention to yet another indication of unrest among rural labourers in Kerry when he said, "God bless the people of Kenmare for smashing the farmers and letting the potatoes run about the streets for the people."²⁹²

While there are no reports of ITGWU activity in the Kerry countryside in 1917, this does not mean that they had disappeared from urban areas. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least the Listowel branch was disbanded in the wake of the Rising. Nor was all well in Tralee where serious differences among the members caused them to appeal to national headquarters for help in late 1916. Foran, the Acting General Secretary, replied on 24 October saying that there was no one immediately available to visit the branch but he hoped that Denis Houston, the ITGWU's newly appointed organiser, could visit soon. The severity of the dispute was underlined by his anxiety "that the Branch should not go out of existence which would be a deplorable

²⁸⁷ Greaves, p. 179.

²⁸⁸ KM, 17 February 1917.

²⁸⁹ KM, 24 March 1917. The townland was spelled three different ways in the report. It may be Dromloughra in North Kerry.

²⁹⁰ KM, 19 May 1917.

²⁹¹ KM, 15 September 1917.

²⁹² ITUCLP, 1917 Report, p. 18.

thing and I am sure would be great satisfaction to the enemies of the working class." He finished by calling on them to stay together until M. J. O'Connor was released from internment in Frongoch so that, "he will find that the men he left behind him have not been idle." A second letter dated 13 November indicated that Houston had been unable to visit Tralee as of yet because of duties in Cork. He apparently did arrive shortly thereafter, successfully resolved the internal dispute and, according to Greaves, left the town "almost completely organised".²⁹³ It was probably also on this visit that Houston established a branch in Killorglin, "through the absorption of a local society".²⁹⁴

By January 1917, the RIC's County Inspector was reporting increased ITGWU activity. However, he declared that both the Transport Union and Gaelic League "are run more or less by Sinn Feiners" and that their meetings, "may be partly a cloak for discussing Sinn Fein matters". Hence, if this report is to be believed, the alliance between the Kerry ITGWU and militant nationalists remained intact. But whatever "Sinn Féin matters" were being discussed at ITGWU meetings, it was clear that wages were at least as high on the agenda. In June, Houston made a report to a meeting of the Tralee branch, stating:

...in accordance with instructions from this branch, the Munster District Committee directed him to make a request to the principal employers in Tralee for an increase of wages for all male workers, a reduction in hours, and increased payment for overtime, night work and Sunday work.

Houston told the members that the employers had agreed to increase wages by 2s for men and 1s.6d for boys but there was no satisfaction on other issues. The meeting then passed a motion instructing Houston to go back and argue for the full demands while accepting the wage offer "in the meantime".²⁹⁵

The Tralee Trades Council held its first public meeting in almost a year in March 1917 to support the carpenters at Donovan's and the bakers who were both locked out as well as the Munster Warehouse

²⁹³ NLI Ms 27037 & Greaves, p. 175.

²⁹⁴ Greaves, p. 178.

²⁹⁵ KM, 16 June 1917.

strikers.²⁹⁶ As we have seen, the bakers and carpenters' disputes marked the beginning of a period of increasing industrial unrest in Kerry. But the "urban" union which displayed the most public activity in 1917, the NUR, was not involved in any work stoppages unless one counts the perpetual disputes on the T&D. In 1915, the Tralee NUR had organised a rally in the Picturedrome to demand a wage increase and a year later it called for parity with British railworkers.²⁹⁷ When the NUR held its next rally in Tralee, in May 1917, the demand for parity was again to the fore.²⁹⁸ In December, it was the turn of Killarney to host a major railworkers meeting. Contingents came from Headford, Kenmare, Molahiffe, Farranfore, Ballybrack as well as well as Killarney. A speaker named Ryan declared that, "unfortunately the Railwayman's life in the past was a most monotonous one, principally from bed to work and work to bed, working like horses for boys' wages."²⁹⁹

The only other noteworthy public labour meeting during 1917 was held under the auspices of the TTLC at the Theatre Royal in October. M.J. O'Connor, who had spent most of the last year and a half in Frongoch, Wales and Wetherby, England after being twice deported, chaired the event and introduced Countess Markievicz who delivered a lecture on Connolly. She claimed to be in full agreement with Connolly's vision of a new society:

When she used the word 'socialist' she used it as James Connolly used it. She meant a better socialist condition for the people of Ireland. She did not mean anything anti-clerical or against religion; she meant...a better division of money, a better division of labour, in fact the building up of the workers' republic in Ireland in which the working people of Ireland were no longer separated by class distinction.³⁰⁰

Although her use of rhetoric may seem confused, the clear implication is that socialism could be brought about gradually. While declaring that it would require a redistribution of wealth, she makes no reference to wholesale expropriations of capitalist property or other

²⁹⁶ KM, 31 March 1917.

²⁹⁷ KM, 3 April 1915 & 15 April 1916.

²⁹⁸ KM, 5 May 1917.

²⁹⁹ KM, 15 December 1917.

³⁰⁰ KM, 27 October 1917.

social revolutionary measures. This vision of socialism was entirely compatible with Dail Eireann's Democratic Programme. It is noteworthy, however, that even O'Connor and Partridge's most militant declamations in 1915-6 had never referred to anything but the worker getting his "fair share".

1918 witnessed a rising wave of conflict between militant nationalists and the authorities in Kerry. On 13 April, an attempted raid for arms on Gortaglea Barracks led to a shootout in which two of the attackers were killed. Also in April, agitation against the proposed extension of conscription reached its peak and the police reported "nightly meetings throughout the county many of which the police are unable to get into touch with."³⁰¹ The mood appeared to be almost insurrectionary. Then in June, just as tempers seemed to cool, an attempt was made to murder two policemen in Tralee. In spite of the attack occurring in broad daylight in front of a large number of onlookers, the police could not find a single witness and in fact alleged that the crowd had helped the attackers escape. As a result, Tralee was declared a "special military area" under Defence of the Realm Regulations, a strict curfew was enforced and passes had to be obtained to enter the town. These restrictions were only lifted on 23 August.³⁰² The year ended with Sinn Féin making a clean sweep in the general election, with none of the sitting Redmondite MPs, including Tom O'Donnell, even bothering to stand.

The eleven strikes which occurred in Kerry in 1918 indicate that industrial relations were also becoming more strained. However, this is only one indication of labour activity. Looking at the broader picture, it is noteworthy that rural labour figured prominently, as it had in 1917. In February, at a meeting of the "Kilflynn Land and Labour Association", 20 new members were reportedly enrolled.³⁰³ In May, labourers at Dromore drew up a petition asking Mrs Colonel Hood of Dromore Castle, "to raise their wages, as they could no longer make ends meet."³⁰⁴ The issue was apparently not resolved to their satisfaction as they went on strike later in the year.³⁰⁵ But the most dramatic example of rural unrest in 1918 was not concerned with

³⁰¹ KCI, April 1918.

³⁰² KCI, June and August 1918.

³⁰³ KM, 9 February 1918.

³⁰⁴ KM, 25 May 1918.

³⁰⁵ KM, 7 September 1918.

"trade unionist" demands for higher wages but rather with land redistribution.

In February, the Listowel Food Committee, run by Sinn Féin, invited Irish Volunteer units across North Kerry to assemble in the town in furtherance of their demand that two fields at Gurtenard owned by Lord Listowel be given to local people for tillage. They then marched to Lord Listowel's estate office and, after failing to receive satisfaction from his agent, proceeded to the disputed fields. They were met by a large force of RIC who apparently brought machine guns but were persuaded to allow the protesters to enter the fields. In May, fourteen members of the Food Committee, including the County Council chairman, Jack McKenna, and the chairmen of the Listowel UDC and Board of Guardians were charged with trespassing and ploughing the Gurtenard lands and sentenced to one month in prison. McKenna, however, was sentenced to a further eleven months in Cork Jail on an unrelated charge of concealing weapons.³⁰⁶

While there was no reported trade union presence in the Gurtenard events, the episode nevertheless clearly demonstrates—especially with the involvement of such prominent public officials—the complete political dominance of Sinn Féin in Kerry by early 1918 and the organisation's willingness, for a brief period, to associate itself with demands for land redistribution. Nationally, "cattle drives", with Volunteer participation and often leadership, reached a peak in February 1918. They were concentrated in Clare and Connaught. But in March, the RIC's Inspector General reported rumours that Sinn Féin was worried that participation by its activists in agrarian unrest alongside land-hungry small farmers and labourers, "might provoke hostility towards it on the part of extensive farmers and shopkeepers who are frequently interested in grazing." In fact, Sinn Féin's Standing Committee had already issued instructions that no branch should "organise or conduct a cattle drive" without the approval of its divisional executive.³⁰⁷ The support of wealthier nationalists was clearly more important than identifying with social agitation.

Gurtenard also reflected the traditional concentration of rural unrest in North Kerry. Therefore, when the ITGWU began to organise

³⁰⁶ Gaughan, *Listowel*, pp. 358-60. See also *KM*, 11 & 18 May 1918. According to the RIC's County Inspector, the dispute was finally resolved when the Food Committee purchased the disputed farm from Lord Listowel's agent (KCI, August 1918).

³⁰⁷ quoted in David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-21: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin, 1977), p. 158.

in the Kerry countryside late in the year, it was no accident that the drive was spearheaded from Listowel where the town branch was also being reformed. A report of the reorganisation meeting stated that, "branches are also being formed in Newtownsandes, Knockane, Tarbert, Ballylongford, Duagh, Lixnaw and other centres throughout North Kerry."³⁰⁸ However, as early as July, the Transport Union was reported to have held a meeting in Kenmare, near Killarney, where 32 workers joined.³⁰⁹

While these new ITGWU branches were presumably made up overwhelmingly of agricultural labourers, another group of rural workers had begun to organise independently at the end of 1917. On 5 January, the Kerryman carried a report of the second meeting of the recently founded Kerry Road Stewards' Association which subsequently changed its name to the Stewards' and Labourers' Association (SLA). The union received a fair bit of press attention during the year because of a dispute between the County Council and the Local Government Board during which the LGB refused to sanction the council's new six month "direct labour" road scheme unless three "assistant surveyors" were hired.³¹⁰ As a result, road work was discontinued for four months, between April and August. At a meeting in June, the council appeared to have caved in to the demand after a last-minute wire from the LGB rejected the council's most recent proposal. At this same meeting, a solicitor sent by the SLA warned the council that the union was preparing to take legal action on behalf of 116 stewards and 200 labourers whom it claimed were unemployed due to the dispute.³¹¹ But over a month later, the road workers had still not been re-employed because the LGB was waiting for the council to complete the appointments of the assistant surveyors.³¹² The appointments were finally made a week later, with the council resisting to the bitter end.³¹³

Interestingly, the SLA did not seem to be on especially good terms with the local labour movement. At a special meeting in May the association considered whether or not to join the TTLC. They had already paid an affiliation fee but apparently some hitch had

³⁰⁸ KM, 23 November 1918.

³⁰⁹ KM, 20 July 1918.

³¹⁰ KM, 13 April 1918.

³¹¹ KM, 15 June 1918.

³¹² KM, 27 July 1918.

³¹³ KM, 3 August 1918.

occurred. Complaints were also aired that the TTLC's help had not been forthcoming when they needed it. In the end a motion was passed unanimously, "that we stick to our own association".³¹⁴ However, since there are no reports of SLA activity after mid-1918, it is a fair bet that most of its members were absorbed into the ITGWU.

Meanwhile, the INTO was moving steadily into the orbit of the trade union movement. Besides the Tralee branch's affiliation to the Trades Council, the new alliance was also reflected in labour's support to the INTO's one-day national strike in October 1918. At a major rally in Killarney shortly before the strike, a speaker declared that the TTLC had, "unanimously recommended the Executive of the Trades Congress to call out all workers in Ireland in support of the Teachers' demand." This was reportedly greeted with much cheering.³¹⁵ The Killarney Trades Council also declared its support for the INTO's action.³¹⁶

However, the most impressive action taken by labour in 1918 was the general strike against conscription in April. Kerry's towns and villages were completely shut down. A demonstration took place in Tralee which ended at the County Hall where, "the no-conscription pledge was administered by Fr. Lyne to the large gathering of men."³¹⁷ The week before another demonstration had been held in the town and the Kerryman enthusiastically headlined, "Monster Meeting in Tralee—Against Conscription—Combination of All Classes—Sinn Feiners, UILeaguers, Irish Volunteers & National Volunteers Combine." M. O'Connell spoke for the TTLC.³¹⁸

But while the anti-conscription campaign brought together all factions in southern Irish society except the Unionists, the local RIC inspector was of the opinion that the Catholic clergy were in charge of the protests and "are endeavoring [sic] to make the movement religious as well as political."³¹⁹ The Inspector General also seemed genuinely alarmed at what he termed the "strong efforts" being made by the clergy to "induce the younger members of the RIC to resign rather than take part in the enforcement of Conscription". However, as early as January 1917, and on several occasions thereafter, he had

³¹⁴ KM, 11 May 1918.

³¹⁵ KM, 21 September 1918.

³¹⁶ KM, 5 October 1918.

³¹⁷ KM, 27 April 1918.

³¹⁸ KM, 20 April 1918.

³¹⁹ KCI, April 1918.

referred to the "numerous instances of disloyalty displayed by the junior Roman Catholic Clergy." In his view, the younger clerics were playing a major role in increasing the influence of Sinn Féin among youth in general.³²⁰

From the standpoint of labour, it is ironic that the general strike which is widely and correctly perceived as its "coming of age" redounded to the political benefit of other forces in Irish society, particularly Sinn Féin. We have already seen how the Limerick labour movement shifted its political allegiance from the IPP to Sinn Féin in a fairly undramatic way. This was closer to the national pattern. In Kerry, on the other hand, labour had been virtually a co-equal partner, alongside the Irish Volunteers, in the local political opposition in 1915-6. The end of the war, however, found labour's political role in the county reduced from "partner" to "supporter" of the middle-class dominated separatists and, hence, back in line with national developments.

This change became explicit in the TTLC's discussions about the upcoming general election. In late September, the Kerryman, speaking for the local Sinn Féin organisation and no doubt well aware of the question mark hanging over the ITUCLP's plans to run candidates, decided to make its position clear to Kerry's separatist trade unionists. They urged that Labour and Sinn Féin should enter into, "a working arrangement...in order that their full united strength could be exerted to destroy the common foe—for the capitalist and the West Briton are one and the same lot." Any notion that the Kerryman might be supporting generalised class warfare is quickly dispelled in the next few lines where it is made clear that not all capitalists are equal:

By 'Capitalist' we don't mean every employer or man of money. You will find many a man tolerably well situated above the hunger line who is no enemy to labour. The Capitalist, according to our view, is the fellow who wants to pay the worker just enough to prevent him from being prevented from working by starvation.

Hence the fair-minded nationalist employer is not a "real" capitalist. The paper concludes by stating that while Sinn Féin and Labour "may

³²⁰ See also IG, June & December 1917 & LCI, June 1918.

possibly have different roads to travel...at present their pathway is the same."³²¹

As it turned out, the local separatist leadership didn't have much to worry about. When the TTLC met on 24 October to decide what instructions to give its delegates for the upcoming ITUCLP special conference, the council president, P. Casey, opened the discussion by stating flatly that, "a conflict of Labour and Sinn Fein means the destruction of both." His central theme was that the future of Irish labour would best be secured not through an "internationalist" alliance with the British labour movement but rather by a pan-class Irish nationalist alliance:

The curse of many so-called Irish movements was their dependence on England, and Irish labour has often been blighted by this dependence. We are not indebted to English labour—on the contrary, English labour has been shown a headline by Irish labour (applause).

This expression of militant nationalism did elicit at least a couple of objections. P. Colbert of the NUR and M. O'Connell, whose attitude on recruiting was noted earlier, both wanted the council to "leave politics outside altogether." Whether this meant that they supported running independent Labour candidates is unclear. In the end, there was only one unspecified dissident to a resolution which instructed the TTLC's delegates to the ITUCLP meeting to support "absolute abstention from Westminster". However, a proviso was attached that (Sinn Féin) candidates were to be asked "to state in their election address [sic] that the cause of Labour will have their full support."³²² A week later, on 30 October, without even awaiting the outcome of the Special Conference in Dublin, the Trades Council gave its official support to Austin Stack, Sinn Féin's choice to stand in West Kerry against Tom O'Donnell.³²³

The changed relationship between the Kerry labour movement and Sinn Féin is reflected by the shift in the tone of the separatists' mouthpiece, the Kerryman. In mid-1915, the journal defended the TTLC against the chairman of the Harbour Board, Kelliher. It even cited Lalor and Davitt to show that "socialism" was perfectly Irish and respectable. When Connolly came to Tralee and then during

³²¹ KM, 28 September 1918.

³²² KM, 9 November 1918.

³²³ *ibid.*

Partridge's organising tour, virtually every speech made by these labour spokesmen was reprinted verbatim. This uncritically positive attitude reflected the Irish Volunteers' need for an alliance with the vibrant local trade union movement in the context of the separatists' relative weakness vis a vis the local power structure. But as Sinn Féin began to sweep all before it in 1917-8, there was far less pressure to offer labour or anyone else a "partnership" role. Labour was still needed politically, especially given its increasing organisational strength, but its "duty" now was to march loyally in the ranks of militant nationalism.

Any hint of an independent political stance or even the use of class struggle rhetoric was now treated with alarm. Reporting on the TTLC's first main post-Rising rally in March 1917, the Kerryman referred to one speaker's alleged insistence "on the necessity of doing away with all the big firms." Already concerned by the three local disputes underway in Tralee, the paper did not mince its words at what it considered irresponsible language: "some would look upon this as enunciating socialistic doctrines; I think it could be more truly classified as anarchical."³²⁴ A year and a half later, on the eve of the ITGWU's organising drive in North Kerry, the paper's "Kerryisms" column referred to the British-based Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers Union's call for government control of agriculture. Obviously worried that local labourers who had begun to organise for wage increases and the redistribution of land would be affected by these "foreign" ideas, the author declared:

The labourer did his bit in helping to chase the landlord—far more than the average farmer did. He is entitled to his share of the happy result of his endeavours...But no land socialism for Ireland.³²⁵

As shall be seen, these fears of radical action by Kerry labourers were to prove well-founded.

If labour had been "reduced" to an ancillary political role, this did not mean that Sinn Féin could afford to simply take it for granted. This is clearly shown in the paper's already-cited statement that, "the capitalist and the West Briton are one and the same foe," whom Sinn Féin and labour should fight together. In the very same issue of the

³²⁴ KM, 7 April 1917.

³²⁵ KM, 7 September 1918.

paper which reported the TTLC's decision to support Austin Stack, an attempt is again made to mollify labour militants by citing Connolly as the author of the alliance between militant separatists and trade unionists:

he recognised that, at the present anyway, the interests of the Sinn Feiner and the worker are identical. He sacrificed all for that belief.

Unfortunately for the leadership of Sinn Féin in Kerry, the spectre of 'Bolshevism' had only begun to haunt them.

It was not long before the TTLC's decision to support Austin Stack was widely reported in the press. The TTLC's decision was widely reported in the press. The TTLC's decision was widely reported in the press. The TTLC's decision was widely reported in the press. The TTLC's decision was widely reported in the press.

This was exemplified in the case of the *Journal of Labour*, which became the official organ of the TTLC in March 1917. A few weeks later, the journal's editorial called for 'The Dictatorship of the Irish Proletariat'.² Also in April, the *Irish Socialist Workers and Labour Council* called a general strike to protest a military conscription; the council effectively ran the city for eleven days, going as far as to issue its own money. During the following five years numerous strikes where the workers occupied the workplace and continued production were baptised 'soviets'.

The context of the turn to the left had three components. First there was the revolutionary wave which appeared to be sweeping westwards from Bolshevik Russia. Irish Labour's enthusiastic response to the 1917 revolution has already been noted. In the fall of 1918, the Kaiser abdicated. This was followed by the declaration of a republic and the establishment of workers' 'councils' in Germany. There were, however, manifestations of social unrest even closer to home. In both Glasgow and Belfast, the strategic engineering and shipbuilding workers stopped work at the end of January 1919 in

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 125-30.

² *Journal of Labour* (Yola), 3 March 1917.

³ *Yola*, 12 April 1917.

CHAPTER 4

LABOUR'S RADICAL TURN, 1919-21

4.1 NATIONAL OVERVIEW

All analysts agree that in spite of Irish Labour's "standown" in the general election at the end of 1918, the aftermath witnessed a decisive shift to the left in the tone and content of the movement's politics. As Desmond Greaves put it in discussing the union whose explosive growth was a major catalyst in this shift:

If we look back from this point, we can see that from 1909 to 1913 the ITGWU played a part not radically different from that of any militant trade union in England. Political overtones obtruded increasingly, in 1913, 1916 and 1918, but still as interruptions of the normal course of trade union work. From the beginning of 1919 politics were dominant and constantly dictated the course of trade union action.¹

This was exemplified in the pages of the Voice of Labour which became the official organ of the ITGWU in March 1919.² A few weeks later, the journal's editorial called for "The Dictatorship of the Irish Proletariat".³ Also in April, the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council called a general strike to protest a military permit system; the council effectively ran the city for eleven days going as far as to issue its own money. During the following five years numerous strikes where the workers occupied the workplace and continued production were baptized "soviets".

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¹ Greaves, pp 129-30.

² Voice of Labour (VoL), 8 March 1919.

³ VoL, 12 April 1919.

pursuit of their demand for a shorter workweek. Both of these actions spread and took on the character of local general strikes.⁴

The second factor facilitating labour militancy in Ireland was continuing inflation. Official UK statistics showed retail prices peaking in November 1920 at 176% above (that is, nearly treble) the level which obtained in July 1914. After that retail prices came down steadily. By December 1921, they stood at 99% above the pre-war level.⁵ In Ireland, the labour movement contended that inflation was higher and persisted longer than in Britain, a claim which will be considered later. But from the end of 1918, increasing inflation was combined with increasing unemployment brought on by the end of war production and the return of soldiers into the civilian economy.

In spite of this, 1919-20 witnessed the peak of trade union expansion (up until then) and record levels of strike activity in Ireland. The ILPTUC's affiliated membership reached 229,000 in 1920 while the number of strikers, as tabulated by the Ministry of Labour, peaked at over seventy thousand in 1919. Leaving aside 1913 when two million workdays were lost, largely due to the Dublin lockout, 1919 was also the peak year in this category with nearly one and a half million workdays lost. The total number of strikes, recorded by the Ministry peaked in 1920 though a significant decline occurred late in the year as the increasing intensity of the War of Independence made normal trade union activity increasingly difficult.⁶ Unemployment worsened with the onset of the international recession in 1921. However, it was not until 1923, with the consolidation of the Free State, that southern employers were able, after a series of bitter defensive struggles by the unions, to decisively reduce wage levels.

The third factor spurring labour's shift to the left was the movement's close relationship to the republican struggle which brought it into increasing conflict with the British state. This was, of course, not universally the case since the labour movement of the northeast, the most industrialised section of the Irish workforce, was overwhelmingly hostile to Dáil Éireann. However, the majority of organised southern workers and a minority in the north approved of the Dublin-based leadership's electoral assistance to Sinn Féin in 1918

⁴ H. A., Clegg, A History of British Trade Unions since 1899 (Oxford, 1985), v. ii, p. 270-1.

⁵ "Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom", PP 1926, v. 29, pp. 139-41.

⁶ David Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland, 1914-21," Saothar 6 (1980), p. 36, Table III.

and its subsequent stands in support of "self-determination". The most dramatic examples of this support were the two day general strike called by the ILPTUC in April 1920 for the release of republican political prisoners; the "Munitions of War" strike which lasted from June to December 1920 and virtually crippled the rail network in parts of the country; and finally, the "Belfast Boycott" which was enforced by labour and republicans at Dáil Éireann's behest following the pogroms in July of the same year. But in political terms perhaps the most significant episode was Labour's first national appearance on the electoral stage, in the municipal elections held in January 1920. Though Labour did remarkably well, it did so not on the basis of clear-cut independence but rather via a de-facto alliance with Sinn Féin. This alliance extended into collaboration with Dáil Éireann in setting up an apparatus of local administration independent of British control. It should be noted, however, that the trade unions continued their pragmatic policy of cooperating with British institutions where this was perceived to be in their interests.

The net effect of these actions was that the British state increasingly came to see the labour movement and especially the ITGWU as part of the enemy it faced in Ireland. Numerous trade unionists spent time in prison, including prominent leaders such as William O'Brien. Of course some were actually involved in the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Trade union offices, including Liberty Hall, were raided. The Voice of Labour was suppressed, along with a number of other papers, in September 1919 for publishing Dáil Éireann's appeal for funds. Labour's increasing verbal radicalism must be seen in this context. Being a union activist in this period required a high degree of personal commitment. This was combined with the belief that the revolutionary causes to which the movement had allied itself nationally and internationally were on the road to victory. Thus for the cadre of the labour movement, radical rhetoric was not simply a device to frighten recalcitrant employers but a serious statement of intent.

Nevertheless there were decisive factors, both "objective" and "subjective" limiting Irish labour's capacity to wage an all-out struggle against the capitalist system it denounced. First of all, there was the failure of revolutionary struggle to emerge in Britain in spite of much official (largely paranoid) speculation. The rail strike in late 1919 and the coal strike in early 1921 were watched with keen interest by both the nationalist and labour press in Ireland. The failure of the Triple

Alliance to act in solidarity with the miners in 1921 was perceived by Irish labour activists to have been decisive in leading to a collapse of British labour's economic gains. In his presidential address to the ILPTUC's annual meeting in 1921, Thomas Foran commented bitterly:

We have nothing to learn from the English Labour movement except from its mistakes (hear, hear). If the most formidable combination of labour that was ever brought together—The Triple Alliance—only used half the power that a combination of that kind could use on behalf of its members things would be very different.⁷

Still, Foran seemed quite sanguine about Irish labour's chances of resisting the employers' coming offensive despite mass unemployment. Irish labour believed itself to be more prepared for a major confrontation with the state.

The second factor inhibiting any move towards social revolution was the consolidation of partition. As in 1907, united action by Belfast's Protestant and Catholic workers in the 1919 engineering strike, though impressive, proved to be very temporary. The specter of class struggle, combined with the establishment of Dáil Éireann, hardened the determination of northern reactionaries to create a separate sectarian political entity within the British framework. Central to this was a concerted attack, not only on Catholic "Sinn Féiners" but also on the left wing of the Protestant working class.

A central problem for the southern labour movement which partition exacerbated was the weakness of the domestic industrial base and the consequent weakness of the industrial working class. The obvious solution in a country whose largest "industry" was agriculture was the alliance of urban workers with farm labourers. In fact, as described in Chapter 3, the ITGWU was growing rapidly in the countryside by the end of World War I. By 1920, farm labourers were by far the largest group of workers within the union. But, as discussed in Chapter 1, farm labourers represented a dispersed minority of the rural population. If the bulk of farmers were organised against them they would face daunting odds. This scenario unfolded between 1919 and 1921 as farmers rallied to the Irish Farmers Union and became increasingly effective in resisting workers' demands. Indeed it is a testament to the determination of the farm

⁷ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1921 Report, p. 76.

labourers and the commitment of the ITGWU that many were able to retain their peak wage rates even after the collapse of prices for agricultural goods in 1921. Some ILPTUC leaders, particularly Tom Johnson, came to realise that only an alliance with small farmers could, in the short term, turn the tables decisively in labour's favour. At the annual meeting of Congress in 1921, Johnson, in proposing a resolution which anticipated Fianna Fail's later campaign against land annuities, declared:

...the whole policy of the Congress was to base any social order upon labour, not necessarily upon proletarian labour...the majority of toilers in this country who lived by their labour were not proletarians...⁸

By then it was probably too late for such an appeal. After several years of rural labour conflict, small farmers were far more prepared to identify with medium and big farmers than with their fellow "toilers".

But to these "objective" factors must be added the "subjective" factors, i.e. those relating specifically to the formation of class consciousness. Especially important was the lack of a secular political/intellectual tradition in the country. The United Irishmen and even the Fenians may have represented a secular programme in an earlier period, but the dominance of the strong farmer class in the national movement subsequently was reflected in the dominance of Catholic ideology. It is therefore hardly surprising that the consciousness of labour activists, particularly in the provincial context, was circumscribed by Catholic social teaching. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum was cited far more often by local labour leaders in their speeches than the Communist Manifesto or even Connolly's Labour in Irish History.

It has already been noted that syndicalism was well suited to Irish conditions in this period because it advocated the vigorous prosecution of the "class struggle" while opposing any involvement in "politics". In Irish terms, this meant that the ITGWU and ILPTUC leadership could pursue a militant policy in the "wages movement", replete with revolutionary symbols and rhetoric, while acceding to Sinn Féin's leadership of the national struggle. Perhaps syndicalism was the necessary form of labour consciousness in a country where

⁸ *ibid*, p. 181.

both "objective" and "subjective" factors made social revolution virtually impossible. Nevertheless, the obsession of nationalist and "revisionist" historians alike with the military and political aspects of the War of Independence has led them to generally underestimate the degree to which Dáil Éireann was dependent on labour's support. This took the form of official actions as in the examples cited earlier as well as the more informal assistance provided by IRA recruits from labour's ranks, logistical support, etc.

In general, labour's role in playing second fiddle to Sinn Féin has been seen as the end of the discussion rather than the beginning. But it is also necessary to ask why the Irish labour movement believed that the best use of its substantial social power lay in this strategy. What did its leaders as well as the "rank and file" believe would be gained through an alliance with forces who were at best indifferent and often openly hostile to labour's claims? The southwest where the alliance was particularly developed is crucial to such an analysis.

4.2 LIMERICK, 1919-21

4.2.1 Economic Overview

Limerick's economy during the 1919-21 period was affected by the partial postwar recovery of the world economy and the international recession which began in 1921 as well as by the War of Independence. The high prices obtainable for agricultural products during World War I continued and even accelerated through 1920. This meant high profit margins for farmers and employers engaged in food processing but workers experienced this as massive inflation in retail food prices.

Table 4.1 - Total tonnage of vessels which arrived and departed from several Irish ports, 1919-20, and the percentage increase or decrease compared to 1913.⁹

Port	Arrived, 1919		Departed, 1919		Arrived, 1920		Departed, 1920	
Belfast	2,294,733	-21.3	1,415,950	-30.5	2,782,574	-4.6	1,775,489	-12.9
Cork	419,349	-61.3	216,108	-86.8	537,548	-50.4	247,514	-84.8
Dublin	2,522,776	+6.4	1,806,833	+6.4	2,682,885	+13.2	1,808,323	+6.5
Limerick	86,243	-58.2	19,851	-68.5	117,680	-42.9	29,499	-53.2
Tralee	22,840	-72.0	6,842	+30.2	42,148	-48.3	11,016	+109.6
Waterford	270,241	-37.5	218,434	-37.9	357,291	-17.3	263,933	-25
Ireland	6,388,375	-25.9	4,206,927	-39.7	7,510,371	-12.9	4,873,972	-30.1

⁹ Thom's...1921, p. 681 and Thom's...1922, p. 681.

⁹ Thom's Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1918, p. 681; Thom's Official Directory of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1922, p. 681; Thom's...1923, p. 681.

Incoming trade in the port of Limerick went up significantly in 1919-20. In 1919, the total tonnage of vessels which arrived rose by 57.2% on the 1918 level. However, the total tonnage of departing vessels was down 38.3%. In 1920 the comparable figures were +114.5% and -8.4% on the 1918 level.¹⁰ Nationally, the tonnage of arriving and departing vessels increased by only 9.5% and 3.5% respectively in 1919 while in 1920 the increases were 28.7% and 20.0%. Nevertheless, as can be seen in Table 4.1, the 1919-20 figures for Limerick were still significantly lower than the 1913 levels even for incoming vessels. This was true across Ireland but was most pronounced in the southern and western ports.¹¹ Thus the eastern ports held on to much of the relative advantage which had accrued to them due to the specific wartime factors discussed in Chapter 3. It is also worth noting that while nationally the total tonnage of departing vessels was 65.9% that of arrivals in 1919 and 64.9% in 1920 (compared to 69.6% in 1918 and 80.9% in 1913) the imbalance was much more marked in Limerick where the proportions were 30.6% in 1913; 58.7% in 1918; 23.0% in 1919; and 25.1% in 1920. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that this necessarily implied a balance of trade heavily tilted towards imports. In 1918, for example, the total estimated value of exports from Irish ports exceeded the total estimated value of imports by £26,914,898 or 21.4%. In 1919 and 1920, the value of exports exceeded that of imports by 10.9% and 0.5% respectively.¹²

Figures for the port's trade in 1921 are not available but the figures for total passengers and tonnage carried on the Great Southern and Western Railway (GSWR) in Table 4.2 may give some indication of the effect of the world recession on the regional economy. In 1919-20, the line carried only slightly less goods, general merchandise and minerals than in 1913 though the total number of passengers dropped by 27.6% in 1920. This was no doubt due in large measure to the impact of the Munitions of War strike which affected the southwest with particular severity. However, 1921 saw a sharp decline of 24.7% in the goods carried in spite of the end of the War of Independence.

¹⁰ Thom's...1921, p. 681 gives 1918 figures.

¹¹ The increase in Dublin's trade in relation to 1913 is largely the result of the 1913-4 lockout.

¹² Thom's...1923, p. 682 (separate figures for the value of imports and exports at Limerick are not included in Thom's).

Table 4.2 - Total passengers and tonnage carried on GSWR and Listowel & Ballybunion railways in 1913 and 1919-21 and the percentage increase/decrease compared to 1913.¹³

Line, year	Total passengers		Goods, general merchandise & minerals (tons)	
GSWR				
1913	6,540,904	0	2,155,278	0
1919	6,311,240	-3.5	2,131,857	-1.1
1920	4,736,919	-27.6	2,133,194	-1.0
1921	4,594,964	-29.8	1,623,768	-24.7
Listowel & Ballybunion				
1913	69,920	0	6,813	0
1919	56,221	-19.6	5,102	-25.1
1920	41,360	-40.8	3,956	-41.9
1921	44,103	-36.9	2,856	-58.1

¹³ Thom's...1924, p. 718.

If the local and regional economy can be said to have performed reasonably well in 1919-20 before slumping sharply in 1921, how did this affect working people? As explained in Chapter 3, the construction of a separate Irish cost of living index is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the integration of the British Isles economy makes it reasonable to assume that the Irish price structure was not radically different from the UK norm. Nevertheless, it is important to note the ILPTUC's already-cited claims that the level of inflation in Ireland was significantly higher than that officially calculated for the British Isles as a whole. The National Executive claimed, for example, that in the spring of 1920, food prices in Irish towns were 175% above their pre-war level while official statistics only reported a 135% increase.¹⁴ In 1921, Tom Johnson again claimed that Irish food prices were significantly higher than those in Britain. According to him, Irish prices in March and May were 187% and 178% above those obtaining in March 1914 while the official figures for March and May were 149% and 132% above those of July 1914. He based this conclusion on "the food ration of a third-class officer of the Belfast Union, pre-war as sanctioned by the Local Government Board".¹⁵ Johnson never explained why this particular comparison should be decisive nor did the ILPTUC ever publish any detailed material to justify its claims though Trades Councils were urged to send local price data to the Executive.¹⁶

Year	Official UK Index	ILPTUC Claim (Spring 1920)	ILPTUC Claim (March 1921)	ILPTUC Claim (May 1921)
1919	100	100	100	100
1920	135	175	149	132
1921	170	175	187	178

* All UK figures use July 1914 as a base. Double figures for Irish figures are based on the second quarter of 1914 egg, butter and wheat figures for 1919-20 and all 1921 figures are based on a 1914 standard price index.

¹⁴ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1920 Report, p. 38. It is unclear which months "spring" 1920 refers to but the average of the officially reported increases in food prices at 1 April, 1 May and 1 June was 145.3% ("Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom", pp. 139-41).

¹⁵ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1921 Report, p. 37.

¹⁶ The Limerick Trades Council, for example, received at least two letters requesting such data (LUTLC minutes, 26 August and 4 November 1921).

Table 4.3 - Percentage change in prices, 1919-21, compared with 1914.*¹⁷

Item; year; quarter	UK, large towns (over 50,000)	UK, small towns & villages	UK	Dublin
Bread				
1919, 1st	58	52	55	58.3
2nd	58	52	55	58.3
3rd	62	55.3	58.3	66.7
4th	65	59.7	62	66.7
1920, 1st	65.7	60	62.7	66.7
2nd	119	114.7	117	116.7
3rd	119.7	116.7	118	125
4th	177.7	173.7	175.7	187.5
Potatoes				
1919, 1st	81	46	63.3	111.7
2nd	100	58.5	78	149.4
3rd	183	149	166	220.8
4th	138.3	99	118.7	141.6
1920, 1st	186.3	134.7	160.7	227.3
2nd	263.7	207.7	235.7	302.6
3rd	171.3	158.3	165	253.2
4th	152	121.7	137	214.3
1921 average	130.8	93.8	112.5	157.1
Beef**				
1919, 1st	86.7 - 186.3	93 - 171.3	90.3 - 178.7	149.8
2nd	80.7 - 143.3	88 - 130.7	84 - 137	178.9
3rd	81 - 107	88 - 97	84 - 102	142.7
4th	106 - 150	114 - 137	110 - 144	138.7
1920, 1st	106.7 - 107	114.3 - 97	110.3 - 102	166.7
2nd	107 - 107	116 - 97	111.3 - 102	198.7
3rd	141.7 - 107	146.7 - 97	144 - 102	191.1
4th	148.7 - 107	152 - 97	150.7 - 102	183.1
1921, average	134.3 - 81.3	137.1 - 79.4	136 - 80.4	119.6
Eggs				
1919, average	292.1	272	282.2	237.8
1920	280.3	262	271.2	216
1921	198.6	182.4	190.3	110.2
Butter				
1919	95.1	102.3	98.9	159.9
1920	139.5	147.3	143.3	189.6
1921	110.6	121.9	116.3	82.4
Mutton***				
1919	90.5 - 146.9	91.3 - 137	90.9 - 142.1	109.9
1920	126.6 - 71	127.3 - 66.3	126.9 - 68.5	159.9
1921	142.3 - 52	142.7 - 51.7	142.5 - 51.8	88.7

* all UK figures use July 1914 as a base; Dublin figures for bread, potatoes and beef for 1919-20 are based on the second quarter of 1914; egg, butter and mutton figures for 1919-20 and all 1921 figures are based on a 1914 average which would tend to understate Irish inflation.

** all UK beef entries include two figures: 1) "British beef, ribs"; 2) "beef, chilled or frozen, thin flank".

*** all UK mutton entries include two figures: 1) "mutton, British, legs"; 2) "mutton, frozen, breast".

¹⁷ Labour Gazette (Ministry of Labour), 1919-21; Thom's...1923, p. 1428; Thom's Official Directory of Ireland for the Year 1927, p. 1275.

Table 3 gives wholesale price data for several food items in the UK as a whole and Ireland during 1919-21, as well as the retail price of bread during 1919-20. While one must be very wary of extrapolating from wholesale prices, this data nevertheless broadly supports the contention of Johnson and the ILPTUC Executive regarding inflation in 1919-20 but suggests that food prices came down more quickly in 1921 in Ireland than across the UK. The increase in the price of bread in Dublin in 1919-20 was, except for the second quarter of 1920, slightly higher than the increase in large towns across the UK. By contrast, the increase in the wholesale price of potatoes in Dublin was significantly higher than the increase of the price per 7 lbs in large UK towns through the whole 1919-21 period. Throughout 1919-20, the increase in the price of beef "per cwt live weight" in Dublin was higher than the increase in prices per lb of "British beef, ribs" and "beef, chilled or frozen, thin flank" in large UK towns but in 1921, Irish wholesale prices fell far more rapidly than British retail prices. This was also the pattern with butter while the increase of mutton prices in Dublin only exceeded the UK rate in 1920. Only the relative price of eggs, a small part of working-class food consumption, was persistently higher in Britain.

But even if the increase in retail prices of certain food items turned out to be consistently higher in Dublin than in large British towns during 1919-20, this would still not tell us definitely the position in a smaller Irish city such as Limerick or in the villages of County Limerick. To compound difficulties, food, though clearly the largest single item of working-class expenditure, is not the only item relevant to the determination of the "cost of living" and the increase of the cost of accomodation, clothing, etc would still have to be established separately for Ireland. Nor would the official formula which "weighted" the importance of these items in the "average" working class budget necessarily apply exactly to Ireland. Nevertheless the data given in Table 4.3 seems to support the contention that until 1921 inflation of food prices was at least as high in Ireland as in Britain. The problem with interpreting the 1921 data is that the rapid decrease in wholesale prices in Ireland did not mean that these savings were immediately passed on to the consumer. In

June, the Limerick Leader gave several examples of how local prices were not falling to the degree suggested by official UK figures.¹⁸

Having discussed the changes in the "cost of living" during 1919-21, it is now necessary to consider whether wage rates in Limerick kept pace with inflation/deflation. Column 2 in Table 4.4 compares the change in wage rates for certain occupations in Limerick City, mostly in the building trade, at the end of 1920, with the local rates prevailing on 1 October 1913. If one takes the UK retail price index for 1 January 1921—which stood at 165% above July 1914—as a lower boundary for the rate of inflation in Ireland, then it can be seen that most types of skilled workers in the Limerick building trade managed to obtain wage rates which, at best, left them marginally better off than before World War I. Carpenters and plumbers, however, had seen their wages increase by only 141.9% and 139.4% respectively because their pre-war rates had been higher than the other trades. By comparison with increases achieved by their counterparts across the UK relative to July 1914, Limerick bricklayers, masons and plasterers did somewhat better than the norm while carpenters, plumbers and painters did somewhat worse. But, as discussed in Chapter 3, prewar rates for skilled workers in Limerick were significantly lower than the UK norm ranging from 78.9% for bricklayers to 90.8% for plumbers. This position was not fundamentally altered by the end of 1920. At the latter date, the rates obtained by Limerick workers ranged from 84.1% of the UK norm for plumbers to 86.3% for painters. Limerick's "jobbing" compositors, however, experienced some improvement in relative wages to stand at 87.4% of the UK norm in 1920 as opposed to 81.5% before the war.

¹⁸ Limerick Leader, 24 June 1921.

Table 4.4 - Comparison between weekly wage rates in several Irish towns and the UK at the end of 1920, as well as increase in UK and Limerick rates relative to prewar rates.¹⁹

sector/occupation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Building Trades						
bricklayers	148.5	169.3	85.5	94.5	90.4	103.4
masons	155.2	169.3	85.3	92.6	92.2	103.4
carpenters & joiners	152.2	141.9	85.6	92.9	92.2	103.4
plumbers	158.4	139.4	84.1	92.1	91.3	103.4
plasterers	151.7	169.3	85.6	92.9	92.2	103.4
painters	175.4	170.3	86.3	91.8	94.0	106.1
labourers	224.7	291.7	76.0	79.5 - 80.5	95.6 - 94.3	94.0
Transport						
dock labourers: casuals	165.8	—	99.0 - 105.2	92.8 - 111.3		106.7 - 113.3
Food						
bakers: table hands	175.6	—	96.5	113.4	85.1	84.2
Other						
printing: "jobbing" compositors	162.1	162.9	87.4	99.2	88.1	107.2

Column 1: % increase in UK rate at 31 December 1920, from July 1914.

Column 2: increase in Limerick rate at 31 December 1920, from 1 October 1913.

Column 3: Limerick rate at 31 December 1920 as a percentage of 1920 UK rate.

Column 4: Dublin rate at 31 December 1920 as a percentage of 1920 UK rate.

Column 5: 1920 Limerick rate, as a percentage of 1920 Dublin rate.

Column 6: 1920 Limerick rate, as a percentage of 1920 Waterford rate.

¹⁹ Source: "Standard Time Rates of Wages [and Hours] in the United Kingdom. At 1st October 1913," PP 1914, v. 80; "Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour, 31st December 1920," PP 1921, v. 60; and "Eighteenth Abstract of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom," PP 1926, v. 29, pp. 116-9.

Table 4.5 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Limerick City, 1919-21.²⁰

sector or occupation	1919	1920	1921
Building			
trades rate (14 firms)	68s.6 1/2d	86s.2d	97s.11d
labourers	48.11 1/2	66.7	70.6
Metals			
coachbuilders (3 firms)	62.8		
porters & packers (5 hardware firms)	40.0		
carmen (5 hardware firms)	42.0		
Transport			
carters (Wallis Carters)	@ 43.0		
dockers (constant men)	44.0	69.0	
"casual" dockers	12.0 p/d	16.0-17.0 p/d ²¹	
railworkers		51.0 ²²	
engineers (rail works)	66.3 ²³		
Clothing			
drapers assistants (Todd's & Cannock's) ²⁴	£150 p/y		
porters (some drapery houses)		48.0	
vanmen (some drapery houses)		50.0	
carters (O'Callaghan's Tannery)		53.0-54.0	
<i>Munster Laundries Assoc:</i>			
timeworkers (women over 18) ²⁵		30.0	
hydro women		34.0	
vanmen & warehousemen		62.6	
Wood			
sawyers		70.6	
woodcutting machinists		76.4 1/2- 86.2	
labourers		58.9	
Food			
creamery workers (Cleeve Bros)	48.0		
bacon workers	48.6	60.0	
stationary engine drivers & firemen, flour mills (Messrs Bannatyne & Messrs Russell)	51.6		
<i>operative bakers:</i>			
table hands	60.0	80.0	90.0
ovenmen			92.6

²⁰ **Source:** *Limerick Leader*, 1919-21; *Voice of Labour*, 1919; *Watchword of Labour*, 1919-20; Public Record Office, London (PROL), LAB 34/37; "Standard Time Rates...1920,"; Limerick United Trades and Labour Council (LUTLC) minute book.

²¹ See Appendix 1 for details.

²² This minimum rate applied in Britain (since 1919) and Ireland as long as cost of living remains at least 110% above pre-war level. Other UK-wide increases were reported in 1920 (see Appendix 1).

²³ This basic rate does not apparently include the "12 1/2%" war bonus and compares with basic rates in other cities as follows: Cork - 67s.6d; Dublin - 67s.3d; and Belfast - 70s.6d.

²⁴ minimum salary after 3 years (post apprenticeship).

²⁵ Girls under 15 receive 16s p/wk; girls aged 15-6 - 18s; 16-7 - 21s; 17-8 - 24s.

doughmakers			100.0
Public Authority			
labourers (Harbour Board)	45.0		
district nurses (Board of Guardians)	£45 p/y	£80 p/y	
gas stokers, etc		10.3 p/d ²⁶	
Other			
"saddlery trade"	58.9		82.3
bank workers ²⁷		£100 p/y	
printers		81.6 ²⁸	81.6
coopers		81.1 3/4	
chemists assistants ²⁹ :			
males		67.6	
females		60.0	

were earning 99.0-105.7% and 12.3%-111.7% of the UK rates respectively. Of the Irish groups listed in Table 4.4, besides Limerick and Dublin dockers as my rates, only table makers in the Dublin and Waterford bakeries managed to obtain a higher wage than the UK norm in 1920. Meanwhile, dock labourers across the UK saw their wages increase by 165.8% compared to July 1914 (i.e. just above the rate of inflation). If, as seems likely, their Irish counterparts mirrored the war with rates considerably lower than those in Britain, this implies that Limerick and Dublin dockers obtained increases significantly in excess of inflation.

The limited data in Table 4.4 therefore suggests that unskilled workers in Limerick managed to obtain wage increases by the end of 1920 which significantly outstripped inflation while skilled workers barely managed to maintain the standard of living they had before World War I. It must be remembered though that building labourers in Limerick City made only 17% per week in 1913. On the other hand, the top rate of 17% per day obtained by some dock labourers in 1920 sounds very good but it is still questionable whether they would have been able to turn that into a high weekly wage given the low volume of trade in the port relative to 1913.

While Limerick workers as a whole certainly did not seem to lose ground relative to British workers during the inflationary spiral begun by the war, and in some cases even gained ground, what can be said of their position relative to workers in other Irish towns? In

26 With double time on Sunday included, the gas workers allegedly could make 80s p/wk.

27 starting salary, rising to £450 p/yr after 22 years.

28 rate for compositors and machinemen "jobbing" or working on weekly or bi-weekly papers; the rate for "evening news" was 84s.0d and "morning & tri-weekly news", 89s.6d p/wk.

29 rate after four years (post-apprenticeship).

In sharp contrast, labourers in the Limerick building trades saw their wages rise by 291.7%. This meant that their income went from being a mere 47.7% of that of Limerick carpenters (and 53.1% of that of Limerick bricklayers, masons, and plasterers) in 1913 to a far more respectable 77.3% of the skilled building rate in the city in 1920. Furthermore, although British building labourers also experienced a wage increase far in excess of inflation, the Limerick labourers' rate went from 63.0% to 76.0% of the UK norm. In the case of "casual" labourers on the docks, pre-war figures for Ireland are unavailable but it is striking that, at the end of 1920, Limerick and Dublin dockers were earning 99.0-105.2% and 92.8%-111.3% of the UK norm respectively. Of the Irish groups listed in Table 4.4, besides Limerick and Dublin dockers on top rates, only "table hands" in the Dublin and Waterford bakeries managed to obtain a higher wage than the UK norm in 1920. Meanwhile, dock labourers across the UK saw their wages increase by 165.8% compared to July 1914 (i.e., just above the rate of inflation). If, as seems likely, their Irish counterparts started the war with rates considerably lower than those in Britain, this implies that Limerick and Dublin dockers obtained increases significantly in excess of inflation.

The limited data in Table 4.4 therefore suggests that unskilled workers in Limerick managed to obtain wage increases by the end of 1920 which significantly outstripped inflation while skilled workers barely managed to maintain the standard of living they had before World War I. It must be remembered though that building labourers in Limerick City made only 17s per week in 1913. On the other hand, the top rate of 17s per day obtained by some dock labourers in 1920 sounded very good but it is still questionable whether they would have been able to turn that into a high weekly wage given the low volume of trade in the port relative to 1913.

While Limerick workers as a whole certainly did not seem to lose ground relative to British workers during the inflationary spiral begun by the war, and in some cases even gained ground, what can be said of their position relative to workers in other Irish towns? In 1913, Limerick bricklayers made only 80.8% of the prevailing Dublin rate while Limerick building labourers made 77.7-81.6% of the Dublin rate. By the end of 1920, these proportions had increased to 90.4% and 94.3-95.6% respectively. Meanwhile, Waterford's skilled building workers saw their wages increase by 177.8% between 1913 and 1920,

thus allowing them to slightly improve their position relative to their Limerick counterparts. Remarkably, the wages of Waterford building labourers went from 14s per week before the war to 70s.10d at the end of 1920, a staggering increase of 406.0%! This meant that, besides table hands in the bakery trade, building labourers were the only group of Waterford workers making a weekly wage higher than the Limerick rate. In general, however, the pattern of larger towns having higher wage rates persisted if in a less acute form. Of course, prices were also higher in larger urban areas.

Table 4.5 gives weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Limerick City between 1919-21, with the bulk of the data being for the first two years. Where more than one rate was recorded during a particular year the highest rate obtained is given (for a full list of recorded rates see Appendix 1). Perhaps the most striking aspect of the data are the large wage increases made during 1919-20. Casual dockers saw wages go up 60-70% (from 10s to 16-17s per day); the rate for skilled building workers went up 44.8% (from 59s.6d to 86s.2d per week); for building labourers the increase was 74.1% (38s.3d - 66s.7d); and the yearly salary of district nurses rose by 77.8% (from £45 to £80). Smaller increases were made by porters and vanmen in some drapery houses (14.3% and 13.6% respectively), bacon workers (23.7%) and table hands in the bakeries (33.3%).

Table 4.6 shows the range of weekly wage rates for male workers in Limerick City during 1919-20. While unskilled building workers were earning fully 77.3% of the skilled trades' rate by mid-1920, compared to 64.3% in February 1919, it is difficult to guess the precise degree of convergence between skilled and unskilled wages in other sectors during the two years. However, the available data suggests that workers employed on the docks remained towards the upper end of unskilled rates in both years while porters and carters employed outside the docks remained at the bottom end.

Table 4.6 - Range of weekly wage rates for male workers, Limerick City, 1919-21.(a)

1919 (s.d)		1920 (s.d)	
porters & packers (hardware)	40.0	porters (draperies)	48.0
carmen (hardware)	42.0	vanmen (draperies)	50.0
carters (Wallis)	43.0	carters (tannery)	53.0- 54.0
"constant" dockers	44.0	labourers (sawmills)	58.9
labourers (Harbour Board)	45.0	bacon workers	60.0
creamery workers (Cleeve's)	48.0	vanmen, warehousemen (laundries)	62.6
bacon workers	48.6	building labourers	66.7
building labourers	48.11 1/2	carters, fillers & shedmen (docks)	69.0
stationary engine drivers & firemen (flour mills)	51.6		
"saddlery trade"	58.9	sawyers	70.6
bakers: table hands	60.0	woodcutting machinists (some)	76.4 1/2
coachbuilders	62.8	bakers: table hands	80.0
engineers (railworks)	66.3	coopers	81.1 3/4
building trades rate	68.6 1/2	printers	81.6
		building trades rate; woodcutting machinists (some)	86.2

(a) - It should be noted again that these are the highest rates for each particular group reported in each year.

The continuing difference in the wages paid to men and women was also striking. For example, timeworkers and "hydro women" working for the Munster Laundries Association made only 30s and 34s per week respectively in 1920. These rates were 37.5% and 29.2% below the lowest reported rate made by male unskilled workers in the city that year and only half the 62s.6d made by vanmen and warehousemen working for the Laundries Association. It is perhaps even more striking that the new yearly salary of the female and, unarguably, skilled district nurses employed by the Board of Guardians worked out at just over 30s per week. Only among chemists assistants was there anything remotely approaching parity. Under the terms of an agreement made in December 1920, covering assistants in Dublin, Belfast, Limerick and Waterford, women, during the first year after their apprenticeship, made 40s or 84.2% of the male rate, rising to 60s or 88.9% of the male rate after four years.

Table 4.5 contains rates only limited data for 1921. Nonetheless, these suggest that most workers may have managed to hold or even improve on their top 1920 rates in spite of the deflationary pressure which brought the official retail price index down to 119% in June and to 99% by December 1. This would imply a significant increase in real wages. Skilled workers in the building trades obtained an increase to 97s.11d while labourers obtained 70s.6d. Meanwhile, table hands in the bakeries obtained a 12.5% increase (from 80s to 90s) while doughmakers achieved a weekly wage of 100s. Compositors and machinemen "jobbing" or working on weekly or bi-weekly papers maintained their 1920 rate of 81s.6d.

Table 4.7 gives weekly wage rates for several groups of workers outside Limerick City, not including farm labourers and creamery workers who will be discussed separately below. The data provided only a limited view of the general wage situation in Limerick City data. Nevertheless, it is clear that wages in Limerick City were significantly lower than those in other parts of the country. Rebuilding a cigarette factory in Adare, Co. Wick, in 1919 was marginally better than the wages in Limerick City.

Table 4.7 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Co. Limerick, 1919-21 (not including farm labourers and creamery workers)³⁰

	location	1919	1920
Walsh's & Sutton's	Kilmallock	34s.0d	
mineral water workers:	Newcastle W		
males		41.0	
females		23.0	
labourers (rebuilding cigarette factory)	Adare	38.6	
roadworkers:	CoCo		
labourers		32.0	42.0
surfacemen			47.0
"man & horse" (carters)		12.0 p/d	15.0 p/d
fishery workers	Castleconnell		30s

Clearly expected that they would only be given about 100 p/d per week. Of course, these reported rates do not necessarily imply a drastically lower standard of living for workers outside the city, given that one would expect prices to be somewhat lower in the smaller towns and villages and many workers probably had plots of land on which to grow vegetables. However, the 23s p/d paid to mineral water workers in 1919 and the 30s earned by fishery workers in 1920 can in no way be considered "living wages".

4.2.2 Industrial Relations

As noted earlier, the number of strikes in Ireland as recorded by the Ministry of Labour, reached its peak in 1920.³¹ Compared to

³¹ Figures derived from this official statistical source, however, significantly underestimate the number of strikes which occurred, as can be seen from Table 4.3 which is based on information derived from local papers, the national labour press, the monthly book of the Limerick Labour Union and Limerick Labour (L.L.U.), as well as the official journal. The total number of strikes, lockouts and worker occupations which occurred in Limerick during 1919-21, as reported in all these sources, was 85 but only 35 of these were recorded by the Ministry of Labour. The implications of over claims in this respect are 100%

³⁰ Source: Limerick Leader, 1919; Voice of Labour, 1919; Watchword of Labour, 1919-20.

Table 4.7 gives weekly wage rates for several groups of workers outside Limerick City, not including farm labourers or creamery workers who will be discussed in section 4.2.6. The five groups cited provide only a limited basis for comparison with the Limerick City data. Nevertheless, it is clear, as would be expected, that wage rates were significantly lower outside the city. In 1919, labourers rebuilding a cigarette factory at Adare made 38s.6d per week which was marginally better than the bottom end of the unskilled rates in the city while male mineral water workers in Newcastle West made 41s which was still quite low by comparison with city rates. However, workers at Walsh's and Sutton's in Kilmallock and road labourers employed by the County Council received only 34s and 32s respectively. The latter did see their wages raised over the following year by 31.3% to 42s. Hence, the road labourers, who were a significant part of the rural workforce, went from earning 80.0% of the minimum reported rate in the city in 1919 to 87.5% in 1920. Even surfacemen who earned 47s in 1920 were under the minimum. And while carters earned 12s per day in 1919 and 15s in 1920, rates which were near or equal to those earned by casual dockers, it was clearly expected that they would only be given work a few days per week. Of course, these reported rates do not necessarily imply a drastically lower standard of living for workers outside the city, given that one would expect prices to be somewhat lower in the smaller towns and villages and many workers probably had plots of land on which to grow vegetables. However the 23s pittance paid to female mineral water workers in 1919 and the 30s earned by fishery workers in 1920 can in no way be considered "living wages".

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As noted earlier, the number of strikes in Ireland, as tabulated by the Ministry of Labour, reached its peak in 1920.³¹ Compared to

³¹ Figures derived from this officially-collated material, however, significantly underestimate the number of strikes which occurred, as can be seen from Table 4.8 which is based on information derived from local papers, the national labour press, the minute book of the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council (LUTLC), as well as the official material. The total number of strikes, lockouts and worker occupations which occurred in Limerick during 1919-21, as reported in all these sources, was 85 but only 35 of these were recorded by the Ministry of Labour. The implications are even clearer if one compares the 109 disputes in Limerick and Kerry during this period (seven national disputes involving both Kerry and Limerick workers are counted only once), reported in all sources, with the 186 listed by the Ministry of Labour for Munster as a

1914-8, the total number of strikes reported nationally during 1919-21 was only slightly higher but the yearly mean rose by 72.3%. The increase in Munster was even more dramatic with the yearly mean rising by 148.0% or more than twice the national average.³² But in Limerick, the mean yearly number of strikes, lockouts and worker occupations, reported from all sources, went from 9.4 during 1914-8 to 28.3 during 1919-21, a staggering increase of 201.1%. The peak year was 1919 when the total number of disputes reported in Limerick reached 39, over twice the number reported in 1918 which itself had been significantly higher than any year during 1914-7.

The explosion of strike activity on the national and local level was not simply an even expansion in those sectors which were normally strike-prone. As Fitzpatrick has observed in discussing the official data, "...Irish strike activity after the Armistice became diversified, both in regional and industrial terms, to an unprecedented extent." Citing the intensification of activity in sectors, "such as wood and furnishing, food, public authority work, general labour, carting, agricultural labour and retail trade," he goes on to say:

...These 'new' sectors embraced a medley of workers who had traditionally been found resistant to the appeals of union organisers: scattered artisans; shop assistants and clerks with strong links with their employers and strong rivalries with others of their class; unskilled workers without regular or sustained employment.³³

whole (Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland," Table V, p. 37). O'Connor counted 18 general local strikes in 14 towns in Ireland between 1917-21; only 6 of these were listed by the Ministry of Labour ("Active Sabotage in Industrial Conflict, 1917-23," Irish Economic and Social History, v. xii (1985), p. 55). Part of the reason for this disparity is that the Ministry did not record political strikes which accounted for ten of the Limerick/Kerry total. Nor did the Ministry take account of very brief strikes or those involving only a few workpeople. These factors meant that farm labourers and creamery workers whose actions were often short and involved small numbers were particularly under-represented. Of the 22 disputes listed for these two groups in Table 4.8, only five were recorded by the Ministry. Nevertheless, the figures derived from the Ministry of Labour's records still provide a good indication of the pattern of national and regional activity over time.

³² National and Munster means are derived from "Strikes in Ireland," Table V, p. 37.

³³ Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland," p. 31.

Table 4.8 - Analysis of strikes, lockouts and worker occupations in Limerick, 1919-21.³⁴

	1919	1920	1921	Total
strikes/lockouts/worker occupations per year	37/2/0	25/0/1	18/0/2	80/2/3
location of disputes				
local disputes centred in Limerick City/outside the city	18/15	14/7	13/5	45/27
part of national action	5	5	2	12
part of regional action	1	0	0	1
cause(s) of disputes³⁵				
over wages only/against wage reduction	9	10	8/4	27/4
at least partly over wages	20	14	13	47
hours	9	2	1	12
working conditions	1	1	0	2
political aims	3	4	1	8
union recognition	2	0	0	2
reinstatement of dismissed workers	2	1	3	6
sympathetic action	1	2	0	3
other	7	2	0	9
unclear	10	4	3	17
results of disputes³⁶				
workers obtain full demand	6	4	4	14
demand entirely refused (or employer obtains his/her full demand)	1	0	4	5
compromise	10	8	6	24
unclear	19	11	5	35
disputes by industrial sector				
building ³⁷	2	1	5	8
metals ³⁸	2	3	3	8
clothing ³⁹	3	0	0	3
transport	3	4	3	10
wood ⁴⁰	3	2	0	5
food:	6 (total)	2 (total)	3 (total)	11(total)
creamery workers	5	2	1	8

³⁴ **Source:** *Limerick Leader* 1919-21; *PROL LAB* 34/19 and 37-39; *Voice of Labour*, 1919 and 1921; *Watchword of Labour*, 1919-20; *LUTLC minutes*, 1919-21; *Irish Farmer*, 1919-21 (for the full list of disputes, see Appendix 1).

³⁵ Except for wages, all figures refer to the total number of disputes in which a particular cause was cited regardless of whether it was the only cause. However, in any dispute where political aims, reinstatement of dismissed workers or sympathetic action was given as a cause, this was the only cause cited.

³⁶ not including most political strikes, where the question of a "result" does not arise.

³⁷ including all carpenters, masons, etc.

³⁸ including coachmakers, railway wagon builders, boilermakers and blacksmiths.

³⁹ including tannery and laundry workers.

⁴⁰ not including carpenters.

farm labourers	6	5	3	14
public authorities ⁴¹	1	0	3	4
power workers	1	1	0	2
shop assistants, clerks	5	1	0	6
other/unclear	7	742	0	14

The proportion of disputes with a known cause in which wages were cited declined from 33.8% to 45.4% as did the proportion in which wages was at least one of the causes cited (down from 50.5% to 59.1%). Besides wages, the causes most often cited were hours of labour and political issues. As opposed to the 1914-8 period when only one political strike was reported, there were fifty

To obtain a fuller picture of strike activity, it is also necessary to consider the location, cause(s), reach and duration of disputes. Such an analysis reveals that during 1917-21, disputes in Limerick, by comparison with 1914-8, were more likely to occur outside the city, less likely to focus on wage issues and a bit more likely to result in workers obtaining their full demand. As seen in Chapter 3, the initial phase of the expansion of strike activity during 1917-8 was largely centred in Limerick City. During 1917-21, however, the proportion of local disputes (i.e., not part of a national or regional action) which were centred in Limerick City declined from 72.1% to 62.5%. This is largely accounted for by the significant relative increase in disputes involving farm labourers and creamery workers. However, fishermen, saw mill workers, workers at the Askeaton Cable Works, and fishery workers at Castlemore were also amongst those taking action outside the City.

The proportion of disputes with a known cause in which only wages issues were cited declined from 33.8% to 45.4% as did the proportion in which wages was at least one of the causes cited (down from 50.5% to 59.1%). Besides wages, the causes most often cited were hours of labour and political issues. As opposed to the 1914-8 period when only one political strike was reported, there were fifty

41 including asylum employees and teachers.

42 of which three were general stoppages.

The phenomenon of "new" sectors in post World War I strike activity was also evident in Limerick, but was particularly expressed in food (including creameries), agricultural labour, and retail trade. These three sectors accounted for 31 or 36.5% of all disputes during 1919-21 as opposed to only 7 or 14.9% of strikes during 1914-8. Unlike the national picture derived from official statistics, however, the sectors of wood and furnishing, public authority work and power generation were less important in Limerick during the latter period, accounting for only 11 or 12.9% of activity compared to 16 or fully 34.0% during 1914-8. In sectors which had traditionally been more unionised and strike-prone on the national level, including building, metals, clothing and transport, and where activity decreased as a proportion of the total after the war, Limerick was again slightly deviant with strike activity in these sectors only decreasing slightly from 38.3% to 34.1% of the local total from the 1914-8 to 1919-21 periods.⁴³

To obtain a fuller picture of strike activity, it is also necessary to consider the location, cause(s), result and duration of disputes. Such an analysis reveals that during 1919-21, disputes in Limerick, by comparison with 1914-8, were more likely to occur outside the city; less likely to focus on wage issues; and a bit more likely to result in workers obtaining their full demand. As seen in Chapter 3, the initial phase of the expansion of strike activity during 1917-8 was largely centred in Limerick City. During 1919-21, however, the proportion of local disputes (i.e., not part of a national or regional action) which were centred in Limerick City declined from 72.1% to 62.5%. This is largely accounted for by the significant relative increase in disputes involving farm labourers and creamery workers. However, fishermen; saw mill workers; workers at the Askeaton Carbide Works; and fishery workers at Castleconnell were also amongst those taking action outside the City.

The proportion of disputes with a known cause in which only wage issues were cited declined from 73.8% to 45.6% as did the proportion in which wages was at least one of the causes cited (down from 90.5% to 69.1%). Besides wages, the causes most often cited were hours of labour and political issues. As opposed to the 1914-8 period when only one political strike was reported, there were fully

⁴³ For comparison with national picture, see Fitzpatrick, "Strikes in Ireland," Table IV, p. 37.

eight during the following three years, of which four were part of national actions.

Using the method for analyzing the "results" of disputes outlined in Chapter 3 yields the following: of all disputes in Limerick during 1914-8 with a known result, the proportions of "successes", "failures" or "compromises" for the workers involved were 25.9/22.2/51.8. The comparable figures for 1919-21 were 32.5/11.6/55.8. This shows that not only were strikers more likely to obtain their full demand, they were also less likely to fail entirely.

While the clear implication from the data on disputes in Limerick during 1919-21 is that workers were more willing than before to take industrial action on a range of issues with a reasonable expectation of success, an important distinction must be drawn between the earlier and latter parts of this period. During the eight month period from the end of August 1920 until May 1921, only 6 work stoppages were reported in Limerick, two of which only lasted only one day. The primary reason for this sharp drop in industrial conflict was the increasing intensity of the War of Independence. Taking 1921 as a whole, the total number of disputes declined to 20 (compared to 26 in 1920) but this was still higher than in any year during the 1914-8 period. In sharp contrast to 1919-20, however, the number of recorded "successes" (4) was equal to the number of "failures" (4). This indicates the increasing strength of the employers' position and the increasingly defensive nature of workers' actions in the context of recession and mass unemployment. Another indication of this shift is that disputes in which wages were the only reported cause represented 70.6% of all disputes with a known cause in 1921, as opposed to 45.5% in 1920. Furthermore, of the 12 disputes in which wages were the only issue in 1921, four were fought over a demand for a wage reduction by the employer.

Turning from the overall picture of industrial relations in Limerick given by analysis of aggregate data to specific disputes, one is immediately struck by the diversity of groups who took action during 1919-21. In Limerick City, every type of worker from gas stokers to coachbuilders to secondary school teachers seemed to be on strike at one point or another. An example of a group taking strike action who would traditionally have been impervious to militancy was law clerks. In October 1919, the Law Clerks Association which was part of the Irish Clerical Workers Union (ICWU) in Limerick City demanded a £3 per week minimum wage (after five years),

representing a 100% increase on their pre war earnings. They also sought recognition of the union by the solicitors in seventeen local legal firms. Within two weeks, the 42 clerks were on strike.⁴⁴

They received a great deal of support from the labour movement and the public generally, reflected in the resolution passed by the Limerick Corporation, calling on the solicitors to grant recognition.⁴⁵ At a meeting on 28 October of the Executive of the Trades Council, John Cronin made an impassioned speech denouncing the solicitors for refusing to meet council representatives. He went on to say that:

The Law Clerks were not used to strikes but when the fight is now on the clerks must succeed or the whole Trades Union movement goes down. If the solicitors refuse to recognise us (Trades & Labour) we should let them see we do not recognise them.⁴⁶

Despite a threat of "drastic action" by the council, a conference with the employers, held shortly afterwards, failed to make headway. The ICWU apparently offered to submit the dispute to Ministry of Labour arbitration but this was refused.⁴⁷ At a subsequent meeting of the full Trades Council, a resolution was passed to collect a voluntary levy from all affiliated societies to support the strike.⁴⁸ In November a new local paper called the Watchdog of Labour took up the clerk's cause denouncing their employers in graphic terms:

Shame, Shame, black shame, on the soul—
destroying "employers" the Solicitors, Rather
call them the slave drivers.⁴⁹

Around the same time, the clerks held a public meeting in the Town Hall to publicise their claims.⁵⁰ It was also announced that the ICWU and the ITGWU had formed a joint strike committee for the clerks and

⁴⁴ LL, 6 & 17 October 1919. In this case and on the following pages, references to numbers of strikers and workdays lost, unless otherwise noted, are those listed in the Ministry of Labour's records.

⁴⁵ LL, 24 October 1919.

⁴⁶ LUTLC minutes, 28 October 1919.

⁴⁷ LUTLC minutes, 31 October 1919; LL, 7 November 1919.

⁴⁸ LUTLC minutes, 7 November 1919. This was accompanied by a call for a labour boycott. However, a subsequent report suggested that some supplies were still getting through to the solicitors (LUTLC minutes, 21 November 1919).

⁴⁹ Watchdog of Labour, 11 November 1919, quoted in Dave Lee (ed) Revolt of the Bottom Dogs: History of the Trade Union Movement, Limerick City and County, 1916-21 (Limerick, 1988), p. 16.

⁵⁰ LL, 12 November.

for Transport Union members in the hardware shops who were also out at this point. A hurling match was organised whose proceeds were to "supplement the funds" of the committee and a free legal advice bureau was set up at the ITGWU offices in O'Connell St., manned by the striking clerks.⁵¹ By the beginning of December, the dispute in the "ironmongery trade" was settled but the law clerks were still on strike and reported to be in a very determined mood, with supplies to their employers being "blacked" where possible.⁵² In mid-December, the solicitors again refused an offer to submit the dispute to arbitration.⁵³ The strike ended after ten weeks on 24 December with the intervention of the mayor. The union was recognised and unspecified increases were agreed. Only a few weeks before, another group of "white collar" workers, the bank officials, organised in the Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA), obtained union recognition after threatening a national strike.⁵⁴

The law clerks' strike was typical of disputes recorded by the Ministry of Labour which were centred in Limerick City during 1919-21, in that it involved less than a hundred workers directly and less than 5,000 workdays were lost. Only six city disputes recorded by the Ministry during this period involved more than a hundred workers directly and only three caused more than 5,000 workdays to be lost (of course, the main political strikes which were not recorded by the Ministry were all larger than this). One strike in the city which fulfilled both conditions was that of 350 building workers which began on 21 June 1919. This pitted the seven unions organised in the "Builders' Operatives Federation" against the Master Builders Association. A threatened strike at the beginning of the year had been averted by arbitration involving L. Morley who was vice president of the Chamber of Commerce and D. Griffin, a Labour Borough Councillor.⁵⁵ But in June the tradesmen demanded a 1s.9d per hour rate, i.e. a 7d increase. Over six weeks and 13,650 workdays later, the strike was settled at a conference at which Morley presided. The building workers obtained a 3½d per hour increase and a reduction of hours from 51 to 47. This meant their weekly wage rose

⁵¹ LL, 14 & 17 November 1919.

⁵² LL, 3 December 1919.

⁵³ LL, 12 December 1919.

⁵⁴ LL, 8 December 1919; see also McMullan, Gordon, "The Irish Bank 'strike', 1919" Saothar 5 (1979), pp. 39-49.

⁵⁵ LL 14 February 1919.

from 59s.6d to 68s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.⁵⁶ Building labourers obtained a 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d per hour increase, representing a weekly increase from 38s.3d to 48s.11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

However, the largest strike centred in the city, as measured by the Ministry in workdays lost, was the dock strike of December 1919-January 1920. It will be recalled that a series of strikes (and one lockout) took place on the Limerick docks from March 1917 to June 1918. These disputes concerned wages but also flowed from the attempts of the employers to mechanise the port and, in particular, to introduce electric cranes for the unloading of coal. It was also during this period that the city's dock workers joined the ITGWU.

By December 1919, cranes appeared to be a fact of life on the coal docks, given a reference in the Limerick Leader to the rate of pay for "cranemen". The ITGWU's new demands were exclusively about wages and hours. They wanted a 10s increase and a 46 hour week for "constant" dockers who were earning 44s and an increase of 4s per day on the 12s rate obtaining for "casuals". These demands were refused and the employer's counter-offer of a 1s increase for casuals and 10d to those working on "cross-Channel" trade, made on 2 December, was deemed unacceptable. The seriousness of the situation was underlined by the arrival of Tom Foran, General President of the ITGWU, three days later. On 8 December, the 360 dockers (400 according to labour sources) stopped work. The port ground to a halt and pickets were placed on the railway station to prevent overland delivery of coal to the merchants. One employer, Mssrs. Wallace Brothers of Dublin, immediately settled on the men's terms. The other firms, however, showed no inclination to compromise.⁵⁷

Within days, the strike led to a renewal of the Limerick Leader's campaign for a "Conciliation Board". Coming at the end of a year of record labour unrest in the city when three or more strikes were often being waged concurrently, not to mention the "Soviet" in April, the dock situation clearly alarmed certain "influential" elements in the city. This was particularly so because the stoppage of coal had the potential to shut down most of the city's industries when current stocks were finished. As the Leader put it on 17 December, the strike could prove to be, "if not speedily settled...one of the most serious and disastrous in the history of labour troubles, in this city."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ LL, 8 August 1919.

⁵⁷ LL, 8 December 1919; Watchword of Labour (WoL), 31 January 1920.

⁵⁸ LL, 17 December 1919.

The Transport Union, however, was angry at what it saw as the intransigence of the employers and issued a statement condemning the Corporation's Gas Committee for taking the employers' side in the dispute and also Mayor O'Mara, a Sinn Féin supporter, for "using his official position to stigmatise the dock labourers."⁵⁹ However, many members of the Trades Council also appeared frustrated by the strike. At a meeting on 19 December, an Automobile Drivers' delegate named Quin, referring to the priest who initiated Cork's Conciliation Board—fervently promoted by the Leader as a "model" for Limerick—declared, "it was a disgrace to Limerick not to have a strong man like Fr. Thomas to settle disputes."⁶⁰

The fears about the potential effects of the strike rapidly became realised. By Christmas, 1,000 were unemployed in the city as a result of the dispute, including the 400 strikers and 530 workers at Bannatyne's Flour Mills.⁶¹ The Trades Council made an attempt to broker a settlement but a conference held at the end of the year led nowhere. A Ministry of Labour representative, O'Hanlon, also failed to make a breakthrough. Trades Council leaders including John Cronin and James Carr complained that the ITGWU was ignoring them in the conduct of the strike. In Carr's words, "all this happened through ignoring Council."⁶² The 9 January issue of the Leader reported a coal shortage in the city.

However, despite the bitterness of the dispute, or perhaps because of it, the long-delayed plans for a Conciliation Board finally came to fruition in mid-January. The newly-formed body immediately intervened. According to the ITGWU's Watchword of Labour, the board drew up "four points" on 14 January as the basis for a settlement. The dockers' representatives agreed with "great reluctance" to recommend the package to the strikers. They in turn voted to accept the terms. But at the last moment the merchants balked. The Watchword's response to this was predictable:

Who speaks of broken agreements and to hell with contracts now? Is it any wonder the Irish workers are becoming revolutionary?
Deadlock was reached. The whole city was faced with a big crisis. But the men and

⁵⁹ LL, 12 December 1919.

⁶⁰ LUTLC minutes, 19 December 1919.

⁶¹ LL, 22 & 24 December 1919.

⁶² LUTLC minutes, 2 January 1919.

women who have sprung from those who manned the battered walls of the City of the Violated Treaty are made of the right stuff. And so on Sunday week their mass meeting in the theatre had a hearty greeting for Alderman Wm O'Brien, general treasurer, and a no less hearty welcome, of course, for his assurance that they would have the full moral and financial support of the Union.⁶³

The ITGWU next moved to escalate the strike by calling out carters employed by Messrs. Wallis and the Limerick Carting Company. It was announced that, "merchants and others requiring goods to be carted from the Railway will have to apply to the Transport Union for a permit." The gasworkers were rumoured to be the next group who would "cease work".⁶⁴ The workers' determination was reflected in a letter from "Justice" to the Limerick Leader declaring that the city's merchants were "out to smash, crush and destroy the ill-paid and ill-treated men who have served their interests faithfully for years..."⁶⁵

By the end of January, 2,000 workers, including those at Cleeve's caramel factory, were reported by the union to be out of work due to the dispute, although the dockers were said to be "facilitating" supplies to the gas works and by "special arrangement" to the city's condensed milk factory.⁶⁶ It was earlier alleged that employers were engaged in their own boycott by disrupting Wallace Bros. from bringing coal into the city.⁶⁷ On 2 February, the local press headlined "Limerick Strike—The Bishop's Appeal for Policy of Give and Take" and also reported that the new Sinn Féin-dominated Corporation had passed a resolution calling for support to the Conciliation Board's renewed efforts. On 4 February, the strike finally came to an end after eight weeks and 17,280 workdays lost (by the dockers alone).

The only reported element of the settlement was the new daily rate for casual dockers of 13s.6d. This represented only a 1s.6d increase and was therefore closer to the merchants' original offer than to the ITGWU's 4s demand. However, it would appear that the strike laid the basis for the 16-17s rate achieved in June. This represented rough parity with Dublin rates and was a significant achievement for

⁶³ WOL, 31 January 1920.

⁶⁴ LL, 23 January 1920.

⁶⁵ LL, 26 January 1920

⁶⁶ WOL, 24 & 31 January 1920; the closing of the caramel factory which employed 170 was also reported in LL, 19 January 1920.

⁶⁷ LL, 14 January 1920.

Limerick dockers. Nevertheless, in February, the Limerick Leader did not lose the opportunity to reinforce its claim that conciliation was in the best interests of both capital and labour:

Now that the strike is really over both sides can learn many lessons. They can learn the lesson that strikes are always bad—bad for the merchants and bad for men.⁶⁸

In the short term, this hope was apparently vindicated. For the first time in months, the city was strike-free. The RIC's County Inspector reported a "great improvement in the feeling between employers and workmen".⁶⁹ Unfortunately, for the Leader, however, the 26 disputes reported in the city and county during 1920 clearly showed that workers had yet to "learn the lesson". What the strike had actually demonstrated, in spite of meagre immediate results for the dockers, was the determination of the ITGWU to fight its corner no matter what "public opinion" said and even, if necessary, in the teeth of the local labour establishment. The fact that headquarters in Dublin could and did pay strike benefit week after week and that national officers made a strong show of support sent a clear message to the city's unskilled workers that their union was there to stay. It is certainly significant that of the 53 disputes in Limerick City and county during 1919-21 in which the union(s) involved was specified, fully 31 found the ITGWU leading at least some of the affected workers. The Drapers' Assistants and the NUR were the second most frequently reported unions; they were both involved in four disputes.

The militancy of Limerick City's labour movement was best captured during the six week strike by 64 IDAA members at McBirney's drapery establishment which began on 19 March 1919. At the beginning of the strike, a few workers decided to stay on the job but on leaving work, "...were escorted to their homes by a picket and a large crowd, who jeered at them and at times jostled them off the footpath despite police protection." The next day, workers gathered outside McBirney's with a banner reading "An injury to one is an injury to all".⁷⁰ The Voice of Labour reported further demonstrations by the strikers, "being reinforced at night by the workers of the city, accompanied by bands and banners—the latter

⁶⁸ LL, 4 February 1920.

⁶⁹ LCI, February 1920; LL, 6 February 1920.

⁷⁰ LL, 21 March 1919.

always deepest red."⁷¹ A week into the strike, a daily strike sheet called the Worker's Bulletin, edited by the IDAA organiser Duffy, sought to put this local conflict into a wider context:

It is inconceivable that all these men and women can be left to wander and roam the streets indefinitely without producing a resentment and reaction that will overwhelm the very basis of social order...We insist that the dispute is of such magnitude and the hate which the wrongs inflicted by McBirney & Co. upon their workers has called forth is so intense that Limerick is surely and rapidly becoming a vast reservoir of resentment, embitterment, but above all—and thank God for it—of class consciousness.⁷²

The publication of local labour propaganda which began with the Bottom Dog of 1917-8 was resumed sporadically and usually in the context of particular strikes. The Watchdog of Labour produced during the law clerks' strike in late 1919 has already been mentioned. Another example of this phenomenon was the Kilmallock Strike Bulletin which was reportedly issued daily in early 1919.⁷³ Two strikes were reported in the town during February and March, as well as a farm labourers' strike in nearby Mount Coote. Others threatened strike action, including saw mill and grist mill employees as well as chauffeurs.⁷⁴

By late 1921, however, the labour movement's confident determination had given way to a grim expectation of difficult battles to maintain the positions that had only recently been secured. Nevertheless, the city's operative bakers waged a largely successful eight week strike which ended in August. They demanded a 15s per week increase for all grades and secured 10s, bringing table hands to 90s and and doughmakers to 100s. Meanwhile, forty fitters at the city's bacon factories obtained a 5s increase in July after a month long dispute in which the employers closed the factories, thus laying off

⁷¹ VoL, 10 May 1919; LL, 31 March also reported "A procession of the strikers, headed by a band, again paraded the streets on Saturday," thus suggesting that such processions occurred on at least two occasions.

⁷² Worker's Bulletin, no. 7, 27 March 1919, reproduced in Revolt of the Bottom Dogs...

⁷³ VoL, 1 March 1919.

⁷⁴ VoL, 22 February 1919.

another 460 workers.⁷⁵ But the clamour for wage reductions by employers was increasing. The Limerick Leader editorialised:

While there is no commensurate reduction in the cost of living it seems to be the policy of those to whom such cost is of no material object to do all in their power to ensure that there will be a reduction in the wages of the workers...The time for reduction of wages is not yet.⁷⁶

This was small consolation, however, to the railwaymen who were the first strategic sector to meet the full brunt of this demand for "cuts".

From early August, there were warnings of trouble looming because of imminent government decontrol of the Irish railways. Decontrol occurred on the 14th and at the same time negotiations between the NUR and management were reported to have broken down. A "mass meeting" of Limerick railwaymen was held which passed the following resolution:

...whilst ready as railwaymen ever are, to make sacrifices towards preserving the necessary atmosphere for securing an honourable settlement of the political crisis in our country, we refuse absolutely to admit the right of any body to relegate us back to the old slavish conditions of pre-war times, and warn all whom it may concern that the retention of the 8 hours day is our irreducible minimum.⁷⁷

Clearly, local railworkers felt at pains to emphasise that defence of economic gains was not "unpatriotic". The immediate crisis was averted by the establishment of a national arbitration tribunal to adjudicate the matters in dispute.⁷⁸ The tribunal's decision to cut wages by 6s per week was met by an immediate unofficial strike by railway shopmen and coalmen which began on 19 September and lasted a week, involving 450 workers in the Limerick Railway Works alone.⁷⁹ The Ministry of Labour also recorded an unofficial strike by 5,000 GSWR employees starting on the same day and ending on the

⁷⁵ This was the third local dispute listed by the Ministry during 1919-21 which cost over 5,000 workdays.

⁷⁶ LL, 29 July 1921.

⁷⁷ LL, 15 August 1921.

⁷⁸ LL, 17 August 1921.

⁷⁹ The source for this figure is the Limerick Trades Council

30th. It is unclear, however, exactly what proportion of Limerick workers were involved in the latter action although reports indicate that only a very restricted service was being run from the city.⁸⁰ The Trades Council strongly backed the railworkers and wrote a letter to the press arguing that the cut would leave the men employed at the Railway Works earning a wage "12 1/2 to 25 per cent less than that paid locally to workers in the same occupations..."⁸¹

The outcome of these strikes was that, in the absence of support from the NUR leadership who had already accepted heavy cuts in Britain, workers were forced to accept the arbitration "award", i.e. the 6s reduction.⁸² In October, a further 6s cut in wages was announced. A month later, the No. 2 branch of the NUR in Limerick passed a resolution rejecting the "Carrigan award" and again declaring that they would not allow themselves "to be brought back to pre-war slavery."⁸³ If the 1919-20 dock strike in Limerick City and its outcome may be said to mark the high point of local trade union power between 1914-23, then the "railway crisis" of 1921 marked the beginning of a long retreat for labour.

In drawing a balance sheet on non-political disputes during this period, one of the most striking features is the degree of tactical innovation displayed by local union activists. Examples of such innovation range from the free legal aid provided during the law clerks strike; to the issuing of permits by the ITGWU to cart goods during the dock strike; to the strike bulletin and "processions" which were features of the McBirney's dispute. However the most daring improvisation was the takeover of the workplace by striking workers and the carrying on of production under "soviet" control. This occurred in three cases during 1920-1.

The 1921 Castleconnell soviet grew out of a dispute between local fishery workers and their employer, Tony Mackey. In October 1920, the workers who were members of the ITGWU had demanded an increase of 2s.6d on the pitifully low wage of 30s per week. Six months later, Mackey finally agreed to arbitration by Dáil Éireann's Department of Labour. In May 1921, the arbitrator decided in favour of the ITGWU's claim and this was backdated to October 1920. Mackey, however, didn't pay in spite of many promises to do so and

⁸⁰ LL, 19, 21, 23, 26, 28 & 30 September 1921.

⁸¹ LL, 23 September 1921; LUTLC minutes 21 & 23 September 1921.

⁸² LL, 3 October 1921.

⁸³ LL, 30 November 1921.

finally in late October the workers went on strike. When Mackey again agreed to pay the claim but failed to deposit the money, the workers occupied the fishery and continued production. The Voice of Labour jokingly referred to the reaction in certain quarters at this invasion of sacred property rights by saying, "this was terrible. The idea of Soviet eels in the Shannon and bold, bad Bolsheviks, even if of Irish birth, in Castleconnell!" According to the paper, the union was told that the IRA would be brought in to remove the strikers which led them to remark acerbically, "we don't hear of any proposal of police or soldiers to compel Mr. Mackey to keep his word."⁸⁴ However, the following issue headlined "Anthony Mackey Netted at Last". Apparently, the union insisted that he deposit the money due under the May award before returning the fishery to him.⁸⁵ The "Castleconnell Soviet" showed the continuing determination of local workers to press their claims in spite of the increasingly unfavourable economic circumstances.

But if militancy and tactical innovation were significant features of strike activity during 1919-21, another aspect of industrial relations was the widespread use of conciliation and arbitration. Reference has already been made to the formation of the Conciliation Board in Limerick City in January 1920. The support given to this undertaking came not only from the local press and the Catholic clergy, as one would expect, but also from significant elements of the local "labour establishment". John Cronin, president of the Trades Council between February 1918 and February 1920, was a particularly fervent advocate of the conciliation schemes.⁸⁶ As the dock strike began to cripple the city's economy in December 1919, Father Thomas, the previously mentioned initiator of Cork's Conciliation Board, delivered a talk in Limerick. The Limerick Leader's report covered over three full columns under the heading, "Labour Unrest—Its Causes and its Remedies—Principles that Employers Must Grasp—What Leo XIII Enunciated—Splendid lectures...—Convincing Plea for Conciliation Board".⁸⁷ Cronin attended

⁸⁴ VoL, 10 December 1921.

⁸⁵ VoL, 17 December 1921.

⁸⁶ For example, when the council received a letter from Dáil Éireann regarding the proposed establishment of Conciliation Boards "under their authority", Cronin urged the delegates to support the move (LUTLC minutes, 10 October 1919).

⁸⁷ LL, 15 December 1919. This was Father Thomas' second visit to the city in 1919. In March he gave a talk entitled "The Worker's Due" at St. Michael's

and intervened after the talk to explain the Trades Council's efforts to bring about such a body. In fact it would appear that the long delays in setting up the board were largely due to stalling by the employers.⁸⁸

"Definite moves" were again reported at the end of December, spearheaded by Rev. Canon O'Driscoll PP, and a letter from Bishop Hallinan was sent to the Trades Council inviting labour representatives to a conference in the Town Hall. A resolution was overwhelmingly passed by the council to accept the invitation, but, significantly, Dowling, the ITGWU's organiser in the city, expressed caution.⁸⁹ The issue was definitely decided, however, at a meeting on 12 January 1920. Hartney, president of the local Typographical Association, spoke strongly in favour of accepting the proposals and Cronin then addressed the criticisms of certain militants:

...the worker had no fear to go into Conciliation, as his demands were always just...There is no hope of any Board preventing strikes for strikes will happen...The placing of your case before the Board shows to the public that the workers are willing to do all in their power to avoid taking direct action.⁹⁰

For the moment, these arguments convinced the delegates and the five initial labour representatives to the Conciliation Board even included a representative of the ITGWU.⁹¹ But while the board had no statutory powers, the agreement which established it specified that, "no stoppage of work, strike or lock out shall take place, until the Board has dealt with the matter in dispute, and has reported to the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council and the Limerick Employers' Federation Ltd., that the Board has not been able to effect a settlement."⁹² Clearly, despite Cronin's suggestions to the contrary, this agreement potentially provided a very useful weapon to those,

Temperance Hall, where he talked at length about his experiences in resolving disputes in Cork (LL, 24 March 1919).

⁸⁸ It was reported in October 1919 that the Conciliation Board would have already been formed were it not for employer objections to certain (unspecified) labour nominees (LL 17 October 1919).

⁸⁹ LL, 31 December 1919; LUTLC minutes, 31 December 1919.

⁹⁰ LUTLC minutes, 12 January 1920.

⁹¹ Michael Reddan, representative of the union's "creamery workers section" on the Trades Council.

⁹² LL, 12 January 1920.

inside and outside the labour movement, who opposed the "reckless" use of strikes.

In the months following the dock strike, the Limerick Leader credited the new board with preventing strikes by cinematograph operators, workers in the furnishing trades and bakers.⁹³ But on 10 May, the paper reported that the gas workers whose demand for a 30s increase had been referred to the board, balked at the ruling for a 10s increase because of the attached condition that new machinery be introduced.⁹⁴ The decision of the gas workers to defy the Conciliation Board and strike led the paper to urge them to "take a more reasonable view of the question" before declaring that the workers' attitude, "is the subject of a great deal of adverse comment in the city." The following week it was reported that the very influential Father Philip, OFM, "delivered a lecture to the [strikers] at their society rooms today."⁹⁵ Within days the gas workers capitulated and accepted the terms originally proposed by the board.⁹⁶

In sharp contrast with the official LUTLC position, the ITGWU's Voice of Labour carried a trenchant editorial after Countess Markievicz, Dáil Éireann's Minister of Labour, declared in late 1921 that it was the "duty" of workers to settle their differences with employers via arbitration:

In short plain speech arbitration means that the workers concerned have been defeated. It means that the only fighting instrument we have, the strike, has been broken in our hands. Arbitration means compromise, it means handing your fate to an outsider. It means in a falling market a sure and certain cut in wages, in a rising market less wages than you want and need...⁹⁷

This statement precisely reflected the attitude of the union's hardline militants, including the bulk of its organisers. Clearly, unless arbitration was made legally compulsory, there were going to be strikes as long as any significant section of the labour movement shared these views. Of course, this did not mean that the Conciliation Board, the Catholic clergy and, to a lesser extent, the Ministry of

⁹³ LL, 26 April, 3 & 5 May.

⁹⁴ According to the Ministry of Labour, the demand was for a 20s increase.

⁹⁵ LL, 17 May 1920.

⁹⁶ LL, 21 May 1920.

⁹⁷ VoL, 19 November 1920.

Labour and Dáil Éireann's Department of Labour, were not turned to with great regularity to resolve strikes during 1919-21.⁹⁸ But fundamentally the idea that conciliation/arbitration would stop the "plague" of strikes could not and did not work in this period.

4.2.3 Trade Union Organisation

There are several ways to measure the extent of trade union activity, one of which is through the analysis of disputes given above. Fully 21 different unions were reported to have been involved in disputes in County Limerick during 1919-21 but this is undoubtedly an underestimate, since the union was not specified in 32 cases.⁹⁹ Another measure of union activity is the number of meetings of labour organisations reported in the local press. During 1919, 1920 and 1921 the number of meetings held in Limerick City which were reported by the Limerick Leader was 56, 29 and 31 respectively. Nineteen nineteen was comparable with 1918, when 60 meetings were reported. However, the increasing difficulty of holding meetings as the War of Independence escalated must have been a factor in the sharp drop in reported activity during 1920-1. Labour bodies may also have been reluctant to publicise their internal affairs. For example, no minutes were taken at Trades Council meetings between 17 September 1920 and 9 January 1921, supposedly because of the non-attendance of the secretary. This seems disingenuous since the normal procedure would simply have been to appoint a temporary replacement.

The 116 newspaper reports during 1919-21 refer to 36 labour organisations. This total is not far below the 43 societies which were affiliated to the Trades Council in January 1919.¹⁰⁰ The ILPTUC listed the council as having 10,000 members at the start of the year.¹⁰¹ However, the council continued to expand during the next year and a half. In fact, the January 1919 figure only includes two of the fifteen organisations which sought to affiliate to the council during this period. The Society of Musicians and the Limerick Boot and Shoe Operatives Society who had joined in January were followed in May

⁹⁸ It would appear that Limerick Corporation also had its own Conciliation Board to deal with disputes involving their own employees (LUTLC minutes, 27 April 1921).

⁹⁹ One of the union bodies was the Limerick Building Operatives Federation in Limerick City which actually represented seven separate craft unions as well as labourers.

¹⁰⁰ LUTLC minutes, 24 January 1919.

¹⁰¹ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1919 Report, p. 152-61.

by the recently-formed local branch of the Irish Nurses Association and the Limerick Co-Operative Society. In July the local branch of the Irish Tailors and Tailoresses affiliated. The Sheet Metal Workers and the Limerick Hairdressers Assistants Society affiliated in November and December 1919 respectively, while the Operative Barbers applied to the Council in August but it is not recorded if their application was accepted. Seven societies applied for affiliation in 1920, the first being the Wagon Makers who were accepted in January. The other six applications were received between April and July and included the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI); the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF); the Pig Dealers Society; the Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding and Foundry Trade Union (IEU); the Irish Republican Technical Instructors Society; and finally the Brick and Stone Layers Society. All of these organisations were accepted except the Brick and Stone Layers whose application was referred to the Executive because, "there are two local unions for the trade in the city at present."¹⁰²

Of these organisations, both the ASLEF and ASTI branches had been present in the city for a number of years. Several, including the musicians, barbers, hairdressers and pig dealers, appear to be local societies of recent vintage. Another category comprises branches of Irish-based unions formed to compete with already established branches of British-based unions. The Irish Tailors and Tailoresses were invading the "territory" of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses while the IEU was a split from the long-established ASE. At the meeting which founded the IEU branch in mid-1920, James Carr, the president of the Trades Council and a long standing member of the ASE, rehearsed the arguments for Irish-based unions, describing, "the struggles made for more autonomy in the Irish societies, or an Irish Executive, in the case of the ASE." It was claimed that 98 workers had joined the new union and that fifty others had "signified their intention of joining".¹⁰³ The clear aim was to remove the ASE altogether, but the latter, though weakened, did manage to maintain its presence in the city.

Three months later, the Limerick Leader hailed the growth of the IEU, declaring:

¹⁰² LUTLC minutes, 23 July 1920. It is unclear whether or not this means that there were two unions organising bricklayers and masons besides this society. The ITGWU reportedly had a "Stone Cutters' Branch".

¹⁰³ LL, 2 June 1920.

This section of the Engineers stands for Irish industrial freedom to-day, and it is only a matter of time until they will be joined by others [and]...until the Irish worker stands emancipated from the thralls of British [trade union] domination.¹⁰⁴

This reflected the views of a large section of the labour movement as well as many in Sinn Féin. The Limerick Corporation went so far as to pass a resolution that preference should be given in employment to members of the IEU. After receiving a complaint from the renamed Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the ILPTUC Executive wrote to the Corporation, strenuously objecting to the practice. The Executive later commented:

Such disputes and differences as there are within the ranks of Trade Unions will eventually be settled by the Trade Unionists themselves. The position that the Labour movement must adopt towards the employers in such cases—even when the employer is a democratically elected public authority—is that it is not the province of the employer to patronise or give character references to one Union over another, and it is not in keeping with the good name of Trade Unionism for any Union to seek such a certificate from any employer.¹⁰⁵

This was an implied criticism of the IEU. Carr who was elected to the ILPTUC Executive at its August 1921 meeting subsequently told the Trades Council that he, "would use his influence" to remove the resolution from the Corporation's books.¹⁰⁶ At the end of 1921, the delegates of another Irish-based competitor to the "amalgamateds", the Irish Woodworkers Union, began attending council meetings though there is no record of their application.

Another feature of the Trades Council's composition during 1919-21 was the increasing presence of white collar workers. Reference has been made to the Law Clerks Association which was part of the ICWU. In November 1919, the ICWU claimed 700 members in the city and had nine delegates on the council.¹⁰⁷ The Secondary

¹⁰⁴ LL, 30 August 1920.

¹⁰⁵ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1921 Report, pp. 20-1.

¹⁰⁶ LUTLC minutes, 26 August 1921.

¹⁰⁷ LUTLC minutes, 7 November 1919.

Teachers who affiliated in April 1920 represented a far smaller number but they were part of a group which was historically even more immune from trade unionism than most clerks.¹⁰⁸ However, at least two white collar unions apparently never applied to the Trades Council for affiliation. These were the IBOA and the branch of the Local Government Officials' (Ireland) Trade Union formed by officials of the Limerick Union in October 1920.¹⁰⁹

But if the nineteen months from January 1919 to July 1920 witnessed a continuing expansion of the Trades Council until it seemed to embrace almost every conceivable type of worker, the rest of the 1919-21 period saw a definite waning in the council's influence. As of 31 December 1921, the secretary could only say that there were "over thirty" affiliates. The most important departure, as well as the most acrimonious, was that of the ITGWU in March 1921.¹¹⁰

It will be recalled that when the ITGWU first arrived in Limerick City in late 1917, its relationship with the council and, in particular, the relationship between M. J. O'Connor and Ben Dineen seemed very close. However, during the following year, the ITGWU's rapid growth had provoked charges of "poaching" by other unions. By the beginning of 1919, the Trades Council had a "disputes committee" to regulate inter-union friction.¹¹¹ During the course of the following two years, several disputes between the ITGWU and other local unions found their way to the council. These involved the Stationary Engine Drivers, the ASE, the Bread Van Drivers, the masons' union and the IADMU.¹¹² Most of these disputes were of a fairly minor nature and only the Automobile Drivers directly accused the Transport Union of "poaching". Nevertheless, they were symptomatic of the displeasure felt by many unions at the Transport Union's attempts to organise all workers under the umbrella of the "One Big Union".

The first sign of more serious trouble was a letter from the ITGWU to the Trades Council in February 1919 asking that either they be allowed to pay a lower affiliation fee or be given "full representation" on the council. The union clearly felt that they did

¹⁰⁸ John Coolahan, "The ASTI and the Secondary Teachers' Strike of 1920," *Saothar* 10 (1984), pp. 43-59.

¹⁰⁹ For reference to the Government Officials' branch, see *LL*, 25 October 1920.

¹¹⁰ LUTLC minutes, 6 March 1921.

¹¹¹ LUTLC minutes, 14 February 1919.

¹¹² LUTLC minutes, 12 August, 17 November & 12 December 1919; 19 March & 30 April 1920.

not have a sufficient number of delegates by comparison with their size.¹¹³ Dowling's first intervention at a LUTLC meeting also referred to the need for the alteration of a number of the council's rules.¹¹⁴ However, the matter was not satisfactorily resolved and in August a full-scale row broke out over the refusal of the council's treasurer, James Casey, to pay the ITGWU's Michael Reddan his fees as a delegate from the council to the ILPTUC's annual meeting. This apparently was in retaliation for the Transport Union's failure to pay part of its affiliation fees to the council in line with their previous complaints of underrepresentation. Reddan denied that the Transport Union were trying "to rule the Council" but asked pointedly, "what I want to know now is there a distinction between Trade and Labour...Who is going to dictate to Council the members or the Chairman & Treasurer." Cronin heatedly denied charges of "Treachery and Conspiracy", saying, "the only Conspiracy I was ever guilty of was Conspiring for the uplifting of the Workers of this City." He tendered his resignation but was later persuaded to remain as president. The discussion ended inconclusively but clearly demonstrated the rift that had opened between Limerick City's largest union and some of the leading figures in the local labour establishment.¹¹⁵ The rift was also clearly evident in Cronin's previously cited criticisms of the ITGWU's conduct of the 1919-20 dock strike. The Transport Union, in turn, displayed decreasing interest in the council's affairs during the following year. Although the minutes do not give the ITGWU's reason for finally leaving in March 1921, it must be surmised that their failure to obtain what they perceived as due representation was decisive.

It should be noted, however, that there were inter-union disputes which did not involve the Transport Union. The ASE and ICWU, for example, were engaged in a demarcation dispute in December 1919 and, in July 1921, the bakers complained of "mechanics doing [repair] work at bakeries where their strike was on." The council instructed the "societies implicated" to "refrain" from carrying out this work during the strike.¹¹⁶ An even more acrimonious dispute had occurred the previous month between the ASE and the IEU as a result of the

¹¹³ LUTLC minutes, 27 February 1919.

¹¹⁴ LUTLC minutes, 11 April 1919.

¹¹⁵ LUTLC minutes, 19 August 1919.

¹¹⁶ LUTLC minutes, 5 & 19 December 1919.

fitters' strike at the bacon factories. It was decided on this occasion to ask the Rev Fr Philip, to intervene.¹¹⁷

No account of the Trades Council's internal affairs during 1919-21 would be complete though without reference to the "bespoke label" affair. In April 1919, following a complaint from the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses (AST), the local branch of the Irish Asylum Workers Union passed a resolution pledging that in the future they would only wear uniforms "bearing the Bespoke Label", that is, uniforms made by trade union labour.¹¹⁸ In June, however, the Asylum Workers were accused, at a meeting of the council's executive, of having "broken away from resolution Re Uniforms".¹¹⁹ Two weeks later, at a general meeting, it was decided to suspend the union from the council for six months.¹²⁰ They were readmitted in February 1920, but the question of union made uniforms was apparently still unresolved.¹²¹ Though the action taken against the Asylum Workers was particularly extreme, it was typical of the seriousness with which the council treated breaches of the trade union code.¹²² However, the amount of attention paid to demarcation disputes and other matters which were largely of concern to skilled workers may have contributed to the alienation of the ITGWU.

Among urban workers outside Limerick City, one significant organisational development was the formation of the Newcastle West Trades Council in late 1921. Those initiating this body wrote to the Limerick Trades Council requesting speakers for their inaugural meeting. It was decided to send Carr and Cronin as representatives.¹²³ At the next LUTLC meeting, Carr reported that 50 delegates had attended.¹²⁴ He didn't specify the unions involved but a subsequent meeting which was reported in the press was attended

¹¹⁷ LUTLC minutes, 5 June 1921.

¹¹⁸ LUTLC minutes, 11 April 1919.

¹¹⁹ LUTLC minutes, 10 June 1919.

¹²⁰ LUTLC minutes, 27 June 1919; LL, 7 July 1919.

¹²¹ LUTLC minutes, 6 February 1920. Carr subsequently led a LUTLC delegation to the Asylum Board to demand that the attendants' uniforms bear the bespoke label, declaring, "Clothes with the bespoke label attached were a guarantee of trades union labour." The board unanimously agreed (LL, 18 February 1920).

¹²² Other examples of this included: 1) taking a labour Borough Councillor to task for not being present at a meeting to ensure that a member of the Plumbers Society obtained a job as water inspector; 2) a resolution calling on all religious denominations and labour bodies to have their printing done only in unionised shops (LUTLC minutes, 20 June 1919 and 5 March 1920).

¹²³ LUTLC minutes, 26 August 1921.

¹²⁴ LUTLC minutes, 9 September 1921.

by the Postal Union, the NUR, the AST and the ITGWU.¹²⁵ The launch of the Newcastle West Trades Council coincided with the attempt to reorganise the rural labour movement in the wake of the Truce. The ITGWU, as shall be seen later, made a particularly strong push to reorganise its branches in West Limerick, many of which had become moribund in the later stages of the War of Independence.

4.2.4 Women and the Labour Movement

The largest group of female trade unionists in Limerick City at the end of World War I were those organised in the "women's branch" of the local ITGWU. The union's census taken on 30 June 1918 counted 1001 women in the branch which represented 42.0% of the total membership in the city.¹²⁶ As was seen in Chapter 2, the IDAA had also recruited women, particularly in the small drapery establishments. A third union with a significant female component was the INTO.

In March 1919, a meeting in the Town Hall established the District Maternity Nurses Union, thus bringing another group of local women into the trade union fold. It was reported that nurses from Limerick and Clare attended.¹²⁷ Two months later, the new organisation decided to join the Irish Nurses Association, headquartered in Dublin, and to affiliate to the Limerick Trades Council.¹²⁸ In February 1920, the union demanded a 56 hour week for nurses in the Limerick Union and a standard yearly salary of £100 for district nurses.¹²⁹ As a result, the nurses at the Union obtained a £35 increase, mentioned earlier, on the pitifully low £45 they had been receiving. They also secured a 56 hour week and Nurse McMahon thanked the Trades Council for their help.¹³⁰

Female workers were involved in several strikes in Limerick City during 1919-21, almost all of them in 1919. At the end of January, the workers at the Model Laundry went on strike, demanding a 6s per

¹²⁵ LL, 3 October 1921.

¹²⁶ NLI Ms 13,948: "A census of the membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union arranged by branch and occupation with lists of the officers of the several branches, June 1918" (William O'Brien Papers).

¹²⁷ LL, 3 March 1919.

¹²⁸ LL, 14 May 1919; LUTLC minutes, 16 May 1919. Since the Irish Nurses Union was listed by the ILPTUC as a "branch" of the Irish Women Workers Union in 1920 and 1921, this means the Limerick nurses also became indirectly affiliated to the IWWU.

¹²⁹ LUTLC minutes, 6 February 1920.

¹³⁰ LUTLC minutes, 5 March 1920. In late 1921 it was reported that, with the support of the council, the nurses had won a fight with the Board of Guardians over their fees (LUTLC minutes, 21 October 1921).

week increase. A few days later, they secured 3s after the intervention of Mayor O'Mara.¹³¹ In July, there was another strike at the Model Laundry but the cause and result are unclear. At least two of the three strikes by drapers assistants in Limerick City during the year also involved women. The strike at Messrs O'Mahony & Co which began in June over wage and hour demands was reported to involve only female workers while the strike by the IDAA at the small drapery houses in November involved both men and women. They demanded a 50% increase in wage rates and a decrease in working hours but it is unclear what result was obtained. Lastly, 126 tailors and tailoresses represented by the AST went on strike in June at 12 city firms and succeeded after two weeks in obtaining their full demand for a 100% increase on pre-war wages.

It also happened that women were laid off as a result of actions by male workers. For example, it was reported that the strike by fitters at the city's bacon factories in mid-1921 had resulted in 350 porkbutchers being laid off and "nearly as many women who were working in the stores."¹³² Female workers were also involved, of course, in many of the political strikes during 1919-21. After the April 1920 general strike called by the ILPTUC for the release of political prisoners, women at Clune's Tobacco Factory were said to have been victimised. When they turned up for work the day after the strike concluded, the manager reportedly said, "he had no work for them. He sent them home because he did not want to pay for half holiday".¹³³

While it is possible to describe the level of organisation of women in paid employment in Limerick City and the proportion of work stoppages involving women, it is more difficult to assess the relationship between women and men within the trade union movement. It is noteworthy that the debate which occurred at the 1921 meeting of the ILPTUC on the proposal for a "Women's Labour Council" found no echo in the Limerick Trades Council.¹³⁴ Furthermore, when the council received a letter from the Connolly Labour College's Labour Research Department regarding the establishment of a "monthly journal for women", the communication

¹³¹ LL, 31 January and 3 February 1920.

¹³² LUTLC minutes, 18 June 1921.

¹³³ LUTLC minutes, 16 April 1920.

¹³⁴ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1921 Report, pp. 190-4.

was simply marked "read".¹³⁵ However, it should also be noted that the council leadership gave a warm welcome to the ITGWU's women's branch in August 1918 and strongly supported the nurses' demands in 1920.

During the course of a discussion regarding alleged profiteering by local Jewish milk suppliers, Cronin declared that because, "the milk question was not a matter for men" it was necessary, "to get some energetic women to take action on the question."¹³⁶ It may also be indicative that there was only one woman elected to any position by the council during this period, namely Nurse McMahan, who became the council's representative to the Ministry of Labour's Juvenile Advisory Committee and was also asked, along with Carr, Cronin and Alderman Casey to represent the council on the Irish Products League.¹³⁷ However, the local ITGWU's attitudes are also open to question. During the acrimonious exchanges regarding the union's representation on the council, Dowling declared that the affiliation fees the union was paying were too high because, the fees had been, "made up...reckoning up ladies first." This cryptic comment was partially clarified at the following meeting when the council's treasurer explained that other unions, "in same position as Transport Union paid same rate for men and women."¹³⁸

4.2.5 Labour and Politics

The industrial militancy and organisational strength of the Limerick labour movement during 1919-21 are evident, but to what extent did this social power become reflected in the political arena? In particular, how did the movement's relationship with other political forces, including Sinn Féin, the Catholic Church, the British state and the embryonic institutions of Dáil Éireann develop during these years? Some of the most important political episodes which bear upon these issues, such as the Limerick Soviet of 1919; the Motor Permits strike of 1919-20; the Munitions Strike of 1920; the national actions called by the ILPTUC; and Labour's interventions in national, municipal and rural elections have been dealt with in detail by several authors. It is not, therefore, necessary to recount all of the details relating to these events. Rather, it is proposed to discuss how the intervention of the local labour movement in these events

135 LUTLC minutes, 17 June 1920.

136 LUTLC minutes, 14 February 1919.

137 LUTLC minutes, 17 April 1921.

138 LUTLC minutes, 12 September & 10 October 1919.

affected the movement's self-perception. What did activists believe their role in the "national struggle" was or should be and how did they see their aims being achieved in post-independence Ireland?

The first political intervention by the Limerick labour movement during 1919-21 was the Limerick Soviet. This is the name which was coined at the time to describe the general strike called by the Limerick Trades Council on 13 April 1919 as a protest against the imposition of martial law in Limerick City. From the standpoint of the labour movement, the most onerous part of the military restrictions (imposed in the wake of the botched rescue of an IRA prisoner and trade union activist named Robert Byrne), was the permits required of all those entering or leaving the Special Military Area. Limerick labour's stance, however, went beyond opposition to restrictions on civil liberties. In motivating the Trades Council's resolution of sympathy to Byrne's mother, Cronin made it very clear that he, for one, identified with the dead man's republican convictions:

...[Byrne] was murdered by the minions of English tyranny here in our midst. But whilst condoling with Mrs Byrne I must also congratulate her in having reared a son of such a heroic disposition, whose name will be handed down in generations to come as an example of what an Irish man should be.¹³⁹

The Limerick County Inspector of the RIC suggested that the strike was the brainchild of a "number of SFs who are employed at the Cleeve's factory..."¹⁴⁰ In fact, the workers at Cleeve's, members of the ITGWU, went on strike against the permit system on 12 April, i.e. the day before the Trades Council met to discuss its response.

What has most impressed commentators about the Soviet is the effective order that was imposed on the city by the Strike Committee elected by the Trades Council. Shops were only allowed to open with the committee's permission, and no vehicle could move without their say-so. The committee coordinated the distribution of food and fuel, issued a daily bulletin, and even launched its own "currency". In this sense the general strike is far more deserving of the term "soviet" than most of the subsequent factory occupations which were christened with this label. The word soviet in Russian literally means "council". In 1905 and then again in 1917 this term came to describe

¹³⁹ LUTLC minutes, 11 April 1919.

¹⁴⁰ LCI, April 1919; see also Cahill, p. 62.

bodies of delegates, representing workplaces rather than residential areas, which coordinated working class political struggles and acted as an alternative administrative framework to the established civil power. The Limerick Strike Committee was in some ways not far removed from this model, especially since they took on various functions which were not associated with any normal work stoppage.

However, the Limerick Soviet was certainly far removed from the historical meaning imparted to this term by the Bolshevik revolution; i.e. an organ of "workers' rule" consciously aimed at the overthrow of capitalism. Some commentators, including Lysaght and Molan, clearly wish that the events in Limerick had become a tocsin for such a revolutionary struggle.¹⁴¹ Cahill is more cautious than the other two authors though the title of his book (Forgotten Revolution) is in itself suggestive and he concludes that if the strike had been more successful:

...the subsequent independence struggle might have been entirely different in character. Sinn Fein and the IRA would have had to listen more closely to the economic demands of Labour and take account of them in any settlement with Britain. From such a position, Labour would have found greater support, and exerted greater influence, in the fledgeling Irish Free State.¹⁴²

All of these authors point to evidence that many local activists hoped and expected that the ILPTUC National Executive would call a national general strike in sympathy with workers in Limerick.¹⁴³ Some workers in other centres apparently expressed their willingness to answer such a "call".¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, when Tom Johnson arrived in Limerick on Wednesday, 15 April, as the Executive's emissary, his public pronouncements suggested that national action might be imminent. What emerged over the next week, however, is that the National Executive's plan, worked out in close coordination with Dáil Éireann, was that Limerick workers should evacuate the city and leave it an "empty shell" for the military, i.e. no national action would

¹⁴¹ D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, The Story of the Limerick Soviet (Limerick, 1979); Timothy Molan, The Limerick Soviet 1919 (thesis, National Institute of Higher Education, Limerick, n.d.).

¹⁴² Cahill, p. 150.

¹⁴³ Cahill, p. 110. He cites National Archives, Chief Secretary's Office, Registered Papers 1919, 10926.

¹⁴⁴ Cahill, p. 111. He cites Irish Independent, 19 April 1919.

be called.¹⁴⁵ As the general strike dragged on into its second week, the local business, political and religious establishment began pressing for a compromise. The Strike Committee understandably balked at the enormous logistical difficulties involved in the "evacuation" proposal. They were left with little choice but to tell those workers who could get to work without having to obtain a permit to do so immediately. This announcement was made on Thursday, 24 April. On the following Monday, the remaining strikers also returned to work.

The actions of the Executive led some radicals in the local and national labour movement at the time to accuse Johnson and O'Brien of betrayal. In particular, supporters of the Dublin Trades Council leader, P. T. Daly, who was waging a personal fight against O'Brien, tried to capitalise on this discontent. However, Daly refused to be drawn into an open fight at the August ILPTUC meeting and the Executive's actions in Limerick received the overwhelming approval of the delegates. Only Michael O'Donnell, an ICWU delegate who had been a member of the Strike Committee declared that the Limerick workers "were let down", though he refused to say by whom. Johnson defended the Executive, saying:

They could never win a strike by downing tools against the British army. But there was always the possibility in Ireland that aggressive action on this side might prompt aggressive action on the other side of the Channel...A general strike could have been legitimately called in Ireland on twelve occasions within the last two years. But it was not a question of justification. It was a question of strategy. Were they to take the enemy's time or were they to take their own?¹⁴⁶

One aspect of what Johnson is saying is clearly valid. The initial success of the soviet depended on the toleration of the British Army which operated the permit system but did not interfere with the Strike Committee's work inside the city. This was clearly a decision taken to avoid any further escalation and there is even some evidence of fraternisation between troops and strikers.¹⁴⁷ However, the strike

¹⁴⁵ Cahill, pp. 106-14.

¹⁴⁶ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1919 Report, pp. 73-83.

¹⁴⁷ Cahill, pp. 94-5.

also depended on the support of the IRA. As James Casey, the Trades Council treasurer, recounted:

Whilst the Trades Council and Strike Committee controlled all activities inside Limerick city, during the General Strike, the Irish Republican Army was busy without. Supplies of much needed food for the beleaguered population were systematically collected from neighbouring towns and villages. After nightfall, relays of boats with muffled oars were successfully used to run the food and other supplies through the blockade and to maintain communications with the citizens.¹⁴⁸

Without the support of Dáil Éireann or the IRA, a national general strike would have meant that the National Executive would have been openly vying with the republicans for the leadership of the national struggle. It is of course possible that such a move would have met with some initial success. It is even possible that some of the support "from the other side of the Channel" mentioned by Johnson might have materialised.¹⁴⁹ But what would labour's next step have been? To pose the question in this way is simply to show that the members of the National Executive (who effectively constituted the Irish "labour leadership") had no plan, despite their rhetoric, for a social revolution. But then, as the discussion at the ILPTUC's meeting demonstrated, neither did their opponents within the labour movement. At the local level, some, even many, Limerick activists may have been frustrated by the failure to widen the soviet, but their perspective, as far as the evidence indicates, was for further radical action coordinated with the nationalist forces. No one advocated that the labour movement should, if necessary, "go it alone".

The Limerick Soviet was not the only example of Irish labour exercising administrative control, however temporary, over significant geographical areas. This type of "workers' control" was also evident during the general strike called by the ILPTUC for the release of republican political prisoners in April 1920. A subsequent report in

¹⁴⁸ Limerick's Fighting Story, p. 46.

¹⁴⁹ Cahill, pp. 123-5, cites resolutions of support from several British trade union and socialist groups. H. R. Stockman, speaking for the TUC, admitted strong agitation in Britain among railwaymen for sympathetic action, but the NUR and TUC leaderships made clear their opposition to political strikes (Cahill, p. 113. He cites Irish Independent, 22 April 1919).

the Watchword of Labour gives a vivid account of how this worked in Kilmallock, County Limerick. On the first day of the strike, roadblocks were set up and no vehicle was allowed to proceed without a permit. A committee was also set up to ration necessities:

A visit to the local Town Hall—commandeered for the purpose of issuing permits—and one was struck by the absolute recognition of the Soviet system—in deed if not in name. At one table sat a school teacher dispensing bread permits, at another a trade union official controlling the flour supply—at a third a railwayman controlling coal, at a fourth a creamery clerk distributing butter tickets—each man having before him exactly the amount which could be given to a household of 2, 3, or 4 as the case might be, all working smoothly.¹⁵⁰

In the evening, a procession of a thousand workers, "marshalled two deep, and with military precision marched to the church to join in the prayer for those who were suffering all, that we might be free." The local strike committee also issued a bulletin. The commentator concluded that he was only sorry, "that things had not carried on thus for a few days more at least". But again what must be noted was that this strike was carried out in close coordination with Dáil Éireann and the IRA for an objective that was supported by a wide spectrum of the population. There was no question of labour trying to carry out such measures for independent initiatives.

The April 1920 general strike was not the only political action undertaken by the Limerick labour movement on behalf of republican prisoners. At the end of August 1920, the nationalist press was full of reports on the failing health of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, who was on hunger strike. On 30 August, the Limerick Leader reported:

At 11 o'clock this morning Masses were offered in all the city churches for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the Lord Mayor of Cork. The arrangements for the masses were made by the Limerick branch of the IT&GWU. At 11:45 work ceased all over the city and business houses marched in a

¹⁵⁰ WOL, 15 May 1920.

body to the Catholic churches, which were filled to overcrowding.

When MacSwiney died in late October, a full day stoppage occurred in the city. According to the police, this action was also instigated by the ITGWU.¹⁵¹ A flag atop the Mechanics' Institute which read "Labor omnia vincit" was flown at half-mast as a mark of respect and was removed by unspecified "armed forces". This flag was replaced by a "Republican" flag which was also removed. A third flag stayed as the police were unable to get into the building.¹⁵²

The cross-class nationalist alliance which created the political space for the Limerick Soviet and the April 1920 general strike was put under certain strains, however, by the "Munitions of War" strike which began in May 1920 and lasted until December of that year. The term "strike" is perhaps a misnomer since the main union involved, the NUR, never called on its members to withdraw their labour. Rather, this dispute arose out of the refusal by dockers and railworkers to handle certain types of goods destined for the military and the refusal of train drivers and guards to work trains carrying armed soldiers and police. This policy, however, resulted in massive dismissals by the rail companies and thus crippled the rail network in large parts of the country.

Contrary to official propaganda, it seems clear that the railworkers' action was taken on their own initiative, not that of the republicans. But by August, the Limerick County Inspector of the RIC felt that, "the want and unemployment brought about by this abortive strike is slowly but surely turning Labour against Sinn Féin."¹⁵³ This contention flowed from the premise that the railworkers were continuing the strike under duress. Indeed, Sinn Féin was intimately involved in the "Munitions of War Fund" which kept the strike going and there were numerous reports nationally of IRA intimidation of recalcitrant workers. The local press in Limerick reported two instances of workers being held up and having their pay cheques taken because they had failed to make "voluntary" contributions to the fund.¹⁵⁴ As well as this, a joint committee of the Limerick Trades Council and local Sinn Féin was apparently formed to deal with

¹⁵¹ LCI, October 1920.

¹⁵² LL, 25 & 27 October 1920.

¹⁵³ LCI, August 1920.

¹⁵⁴ LL, 13 August & 20 September 1920.

"conserving of food stuffs".¹⁵⁵ It would be wrong, however, as Townshend points out, to conclude that "an action of such scale could have been maintained for six months if the railwaymen had been 'bitterly opposed' to it."¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, intimidation by police and soldiers against strikers was also reported.

There were clearly different levels of enthusiasm for the strike among the railworkers, with a diehard section probably willing to carry on indefinitely. But in the latter stages of the conflict, "public opinion", including the nationalist press, became alarmed by the economic consequences of the strike and it was strongly hinted that the railworkers should capitulate.¹⁵⁷ When the end came, the Limerick Leader's relief was palpable: "The Irish railwaymen on yesterday came to a decision that all Nationalist Ireland will heartily approve."¹⁵⁸

In the meantime, however, labour had become involved in another political action which, unlike the others discussed above, was clearly initiated by the republicans. This was the so-called "Belfast boycott". On 1 September, it was reported in the local press that a meeting of the Limerick branch of the ITGWU had passed a resolution calling on its members not to handle goods from Belfast as of the 3rd of the month. The secretary stated that:

This decision was arrived at in consequence of the religious and political tests now being applied in Belfast by a section of bigoted workers who are the tools of capitalists and Orangemen.¹⁵⁹

Two days later it was reported that the Corporation had endorsed the boycott, calling for good measure on local citizens "to withdraw their money from Ulster banks."¹⁶⁰ The Trades Council also gave its

¹⁵⁵ LUTLC minutes, 25 June & 23 July 1920. At the latter meeting, it was suggested that this committee discuss the unemployment of members of the Waggon Builders union caused by the strike.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Townshend, "The Irish Railway Strike of 1920: Industrial Action and Civil Resistance in the Struggle for Independence," Irish Historical Studies, v. xxi, no. 83 (March 1979). Townshend also points out that the number of stoppages caused by workers refusing to work trains was highest on the GSWR, i.e. in the region of highest IRA military activity.

¹⁵⁷ LL, 5 November & 15 November 1920; Townshend also cites the Freeman's Journal, 17 November 1920.

¹⁵⁸ LL, 22 December 1920.

¹⁵⁹ LL, 1 September 1920.

¹⁶⁰ LL, 3 September 1920.

blessing.¹⁶¹ In early October, both Carr and Cronin spoke at a meeting in the Town Hall, presided over by Mayor O'Callaghan, to support the fund for Belfast's expelled workers.¹⁶²

The boycott was an ongoing priority for the Trades Council. Carr laid particular stress on it during his report on the previous year's work at the council's January 1921 AGM.¹⁶³ Two weeks later he again urged the delegates to cooperate, "in making Limerick 'airtight' not alone against goods coming from Belfast but also from the Six County Partition Area."¹⁶⁴ In September, Father Philip congratulated the council on its efforts, declaring that Limerick, "was looked upon as the one bright spot" in the boycott campaign.¹⁶⁵

The political alliance between the Limerick labour movement and Sinn Féin, reflected in these political strikes and boycotts, was naturally also reflected in the electoral arena. Labour's standown in the 1918 general election which "cleared the field" for the republicans has already been discussed. In October 1919, the ILPTUC held a special conference which decided in favour of contesting the municipal elections which were to be held the following January. In the event, Labour did remarkably well, gaining 17.9% of the first preference votes and returning 364 (21.0%) of the total 1,735 contested seats, compared to Sinn Féin's 520.¹⁶⁶ Particularly striking was the party's performance in Ulster where it gained 27,504 first preferences which was equivalent to 82.9% of the total nationalist (Sinn Féin and Home Rule) vote.¹⁶⁷ This represented a serious challenge to Unionist domination, particularly in Belfast where Labour's 13 councillors became the largest single opposition group in the city council.

The Limerick Trades Council did not send representatives to the October 1919 special conference.¹⁶⁸ However, by the middle of

¹⁶¹ LUTLC minutes, 17 September 1920.

¹⁶² LL, 11 October 1920.

¹⁶³ LUTLC minutes, 23 January 1921.

¹⁶⁴ LUTLC minutes, 6 February 1921.

¹⁶⁵ LUTLC minutes, 9 September 1921.

¹⁶⁶ WoL, 6 March 1920. These were the final results compiled by the Proportional Representation Society of Ireland. It should be noted that there were 249 uncontested seats.

¹⁶⁷ The first preferences obtained by other parties in Ulster were: 12,457 for Sinn Féin, 20,719 for the Nationalists and 73,233 for Unionist candidates (including those representing the Ulster Unionist Labour Association).

¹⁶⁸ This decision was taken because of financial considerations and because Tom Johnson was due to visit Limerick (LUTLC minutes, 10 October 1919).

November, the council was beginning to consider its options. At two meetings held to discuss the matter, the consensus seemed to be to seek an electoral pact with Sinn Féin.¹⁶⁹ It was therefore arranged to meet the local SF Executive. Though it is unclear what happened at this meeting, the republicans subsequently sent the council a provisional list of their candidates.¹⁷⁰ But by the end of December, the Trades Council had still not reached any decision. Meanwhile, the IDAA and the ASE had already endorsed candidates. Confusion reigned at a council meeting on the 31st. Ryan, representing the Typographical Association, urged that a manifesto be issued calling for support to Labour candidates. When the subject of relations with Sinn Féin arose, Cronin said cryptically that SF was, "ready to help on all matters." But Dowling immediately pointed out that the republicans would not accept the ILPTUC's election programme to which Cronin replied that Labour's programme was "ideal" but, "under present state no [sic] workable. Small things must be attended to first." Finally it was decided to endorse sitting Labour members and other candidates put forward by individual unions. Pleading a lack of money, however, the council effectively left the campaign in the hands of interested affiliates. Nor was any programme agreed.¹⁷¹

In spite of this desultory effort, Labour obtained 1,307 first preferences (15.2%) and five of the forty seats contested in Limerick County Borough. Among those returned were Cronin, Carr and Casey, the Trades Council's three most prominent spokesmen. Patrick Walsh, James McInerney, as well as Casey, topped the poll in their wards and therefore became aldermen. Eleven other trade unionists were returned on the Sinn Féin ticket, including five members of the ITGWU. Sinn Féin obtained a total of 26 seats (and an overwhelming 63.0% of first preferences); the other nine seats were filled by Ratepayer and independent candidates. In Newcastle West, the Labour/republican pact was even more explicit, with seven Labour candidates, all members of the ITGWU, and eight Sinn Féiners elected unopposed to the fifteen available seats. In Rathkeale, Labour returned two of the fifteen Town Commissioners. As in Newcastle West, both were members of the Transport Union.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ LUTLC minutes, 13 and 16 November 1919.

¹⁷⁰ LUTLC minutes, 5 and 19 December 1919.

¹⁷¹ LUTLC minutes, 31 December 1919.

¹⁷² WOL, 31 January & 6 March 1920. It should be noted that the later report says there were only five successful Labour candidates in Limerick City but other evidence suggests there were in fact six.

While the results of the municipal elections represented the acme of Labour's political success in this period as well as the consummation of its de facto alliance with the republicans, the subsequent relationship of the two parties in office was not without friction. Within weeks of the election, anger was expressed at a meeting of the Limerick Trades Council at Sinn Féin's action in blocking Labour nominees to certain municipal boards. Councillor Canty declared that the republicans were, "treating Labour like a lot of school children." There was talk of refusing to take any position on Corporation committees unless Labour's representation was increased. Sinn Féin refused to increase Labour's share but it does not appear that Labour in turn carried out its threat.¹⁷³

Dissension between the two parties surfaced again in 1921. In January, a representative named Donnellan demanded that a resolution giving a 10% wage increase to clerical workers employed by the Corporation be rescinded. Another named Flynn supported Donnellan's motion saying:

The clerical staff were like a lot of vampires—they would have their pound of flesh at any cost. There were no clerical workers in the city as well paid as the Corporation staff.

Clearly, however, the republican "city fathers" were not yet ready to disrupt nationalist unity by attacking labour's economic interests and the increase was confirmed by an 18-3 vote.¹⁷⁴ By October, the republican position had changed. When the Corporation received the report of its "Retrenchments Committee" which included proposals for pensioning off certain workers (particularly "night watchmen"), there was heated opposition from Labour members. Alderman Walsh emotionally declared that:

...he stood by his old principles. He never came [to?] inflict injustice on anyone and he certainly had not come to support proposals that would mean that people of his own class would have to starve.

In the end, the report's recommendations were adopted by a 15-8 vote. Only two non-Labour members opposed the motion and at least some Sinn Féin trade unionists voted for the report. That this was a

¹⁷³ LUTLC minutes, 6 & 20 February 1920.

¹⁷⁴ LL, 10 January 1921.

shock to Labour is reflected in Councillor Griffin's comment, "I am surprised at the voting of some of the members." Councillor Canty added, "of the labour men especially".¹⁷⁵

But if the increasing demand for wage reductions and retrenchments, backed by some in Sinn Féin, led to a certain amount of acrimony, there was still notable cooperation between labour and the republicans on social issues, even after the Truce. Only days before the Corporation vote on retrenchments, a delegation from the Trades Council attended to discuss alleged profiteering in food prices. This initiative would appear to have been in response to a call from Dáil Éireann for action by local authorities on this issue.¹⁷⁶ As a result of the delegation's visit, an "Anti-Profiteering Committee" was appointed by the Corporation "to act in conjunction" with the Trades Council.¹⁷⁷ At its first meeting, Carr presided and it was decided, "to request all shopkeepers in the city to display price lists of their goods, etc. in a prominent place on their establishments."¹⁷⁸ Subsequently the committee met a deputation of local butchers who agreed "to reconsider their prices" and promised to forward a price list to the committee for its consideration.¹⁷⁹ Apparently, this led to a reduction in the price of chops and steaks from 1s.6d to 1s.4d per lb. The committee also decreed that the price of milk in the city should be 1s.4d per gallon.¹⁸⁰

Alleged profiteering in milk prices had also concerned the Trades Council at the beginning of 1919 when a delegation from the Corkanree Plot Holders Association approached the council with allegations regarding "the monoplizing [sic] of milk by a Jewish Capitalist..." Cronin thanked the deputation for bringing this to their notice.¹⁸¹ At the council's next meeting, however, concern was expressed by Carr, Bennis and R. P. O'Connor, BC, that Jews were being

¹⁷⁵ LL, 10 October 1921.

¹⁷⁶ See LL, 28 November 1921 ("Dail Suggestions—For Fighting the Profiteers"). Correspondence from the anti-profiteering committees formed in Dublin, Cork and Waterford was read at the first meeting of the Limerick committee (LL, 28 October 1921). It was also reported that at a meeting of the Tullamore Urban Council, a letter from Dáil Éireann's Trade Department was read, urging the formation of a committee in the town (LL, 23 November 1921).

¹⁷⁷ LL, 7 October 1921; LUTLC minutes, 7 October 1921.

¹⁷⁸ LL, 28 October 1921.

¹⁷⁹ LL, 31 October 1921.

¹⁸⁰ LUTLC minutes, 4 & 18 November 1921.

¹⁸¹ LUTLC minutes, 24 January 1919.

unfairly singled out for blame. Cronin seemed unsympathetic to this line of thinking, declaring:

That if the Jews overcharged for milk or anything else the only remedy was to prosecute them for overcharging and...there was no remedy unless the citizens got a combination together to supply at a cheaper rate than the Jews.

It was decided to send a deputation to Cleeve Bros to urge them to open a depot in the city in co-operation with the council. This was apparently not successful.¹⁸² In November, it was reported that a member of the Board of Guardians, P. Bourke, was again blaming "Polish Jews" for exorbitant milk prices.¹⁸³

Besides food prices, housing was the other social question which drew the local labour movement's particular attention, as it had during World War I. In mid-1919, the Town Tenants League (TTL) was reported to be reorganising and growing rapidly in response to a threatened rent increase in the city. The TTL's Limerick executive claimed nearly 800 new members.¹⁸⁴ In August, the organisation held a rally in the Town Hall.¹⁸⁵ After a meeting in September, nothing more was heard from the TTL until the following August when a meeting of its local executive called on tenants to refuse to pay increases stipulated under the new Rent Act.¹⁸⁶ In January 1921, the Limerick ITGWU endorsed this stand and also, "strongly condemn[ed] the action of some trade unionists who have already paid the increases demanded".¹⁸⁷ Shortly thereafter, the TTL and the Trades Council formed a joint committee to determine "definite and fair rents" which would then be submitted to the mayor.¹⁸⁸ This agitation led to the formation of a body "somewhat on the lines of the Limerick Conciliation Board" to settle rent disputes. The so called Rents Conciliation Board included representatives of landlords and tenants' interests (the latter apparently including both TTL and

¹⁸² LUTLC minutes, 28 January & 14 February 1919.

¹⁸³ LL, 7 November 1919. A Jewish milk supplier named Newman replied to these allegations in a letter to the press (LL, 10 November 1919).

¹⁸⁴ LL, 25 July 1919.

¹⁸⁵ LL, 20 August 1919.

¹⁸⁶ LL, 20 August 1920.

¹⁸⁷ LL, 14 January 1921. The TTL Executive held meetings in the Transport Union hall at this time.

¹⁸⁸ LUTLC minutes, 23 January 1921.

Trades Council representatives).¹⁸⁹ The Limerick Leader subsequently wrote an editorial praising the work of the "Adjustment Board".¹⁹⁰

In the case of the local ITGWU, its opposition to paying rent increases in early 1921 dovetailed with a resolution it had placed before the Trades Council a year and a half previously against paying rent or insurance to "Ex-Policemen Collectors." The resolution argued that, "pensioners of the Foreign Government work for a miserable pittance," thus undermining union rates. However, it also alleged that, "Ex policemen utilize their positions as collectors against the Community," and hinted strongly that retaliation against the pensioners was justified in the light of martial law being declared in the city.¹⁹¹ The issue of police pensioners working as insurance collectors came up again before the Trades Council in March 1920. It was pointed out that, contrary to the council's policy, the local branch of the assurance workers' union had ex-policemen as members. The union's delegate, Clarke, acknowledged that there were two in the branch but pleaded that, "his union was powerless in the matter at present". Carr responded by saying that, "he was sure the Assurance Workers Union would rectify this matter and carry out the wishes of Council re same."¹⁹²

Ex-policemen were the object of far more hostility from the Limerick labour movement than Irish ex-soldiers or even British soldiers stationed in the city. In his description of the April 1919 soviet, Cahill comments that:

In the Easter Monday issue of the Workers' Bulletin, a writer expressed "the greatest feelings of joy that our fellow Trade Unionists in khaki are refusing to do the dirty work, which is only fit for such invertebrates as the RIC". Occasionally, the Bulletin referred to the

¹⁸⁹ LL, 29 April 1921. A subsequent dispute on the right of LUTLC to appoint replacements to its members serving on the Rents Conciliation Board led to its chairman, J. Davern, replying that, "any Delegates the Council would nominate would be acceptable to him." The Trades Council's treasurer, Scallon, was apparently acting as the board's secretary (LUTLC minutes, 27 May 1921).

¹⁹⁰ LL, 13 May 1921. This issue also contains a report on the board's work, including details of settlements.

¹⁹¹ LUTLC minutes, 10 May 1919. The resolution also alleged that the government was giving ex-policemen positions as postmasters, "to further intimidate the country's interests."

¹⁹² LUTLC minutes, 5 March 1920.

RIC as "swine", sometimes as the "Royal Irish Swine" or "Royal Irish Cowards". On the other hand, the British soldiers are referred to as "Tommy", who was not the real enemy, merely "a tool of his Imperialistic, Capitalistic Government".¹⁹³

Undoubtedly, as the conflict between the IRA and British forces intensified and as the policy of official reprisals—including the destruction of family homes and business premises—took effect in late 1920, such friendly feelings were largely forgotten.¹⁹⁴

However, the attitude to Irish ex-soldiers remained more contradictory. The ILPTUC, in a resolution at its 1919 meeting in Drogheda strongly protested alleged attempts, "to persuade discharged and demobilised soldiers and sailors to enter civil employment as scabs and strike-breakers." Particular concern was expressed about the role of ex-soldiers with pensions accepting work at less than union rates. Congress urged ex-soldiers to join the unions, "and take their proper place in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class."¹⁹⁵ In Limerick City, friction over this issue was only reported once. This was in February 1919 when the Voice of Labour said there was "trouble brewing" at local flour mills over the hiring of demobilised soldiers which it was thought might lead to "dismissal of old employees."¹⁹⁶ A year later, in Newcastle West, a "Vigilance Committee" initiated by the newly-elected Town Commissioners to deal with "highway robberies" (in which Sinn Féin, the ITGWU, the GAA and "business men who profess no politics" all participated) was reportedly attacked by "ex-soldiers and others". The report, however, noted that, "the more respectable ex-army men took no part in this attack".¹⁹⁷ But while ex-soldiers were frequently in conflict with republicans, there were also reports of conflict between ex-soldiers and the forces of "law and order". In August

¹⁹³ Cahill, p. 94.

¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless it is intriguing that the Catholic Church reportedly converted a number of British soldiers stationed in Limerick City. A harrowing republican account of raids is given in Kathleen Clarke, Revolutionary Woman (Dublin, 1991), pp. 178-86.

¹⁹⁵ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1919 Report, p. 145.

¹⁹⁶ VoL, 15 February 1919.

¹⁹⁷ LL, 19 January 1920; according to the RIC, the "Sinn Fein vigilance party paraded Newcastle West and ordered ex-soldiers off the streets. A row occurred and 10 Sinn Feiners were arrested." (IG, January 1920); a different account is given in, "When the IRA Held Newcastle West Town," Limerick's Fighting Story, pp. 61-3.

1920, a meeting of ex-servicemen in Limerick City protested the killing of two ex-soldiers by the police.¹⁹⁸ Two weeks later a deputation of ex-servicemen called on the Competent Military Authority demanding, "protection from further molestation by the 'black and tans'."¹⁹⁹

If one includes its enthusiastic participation in political actions in support of republican aims; the de-facto electoral alliance with Sinn Féin in 1920; co-operation with Dáil Éireann in the "anti-profiteering" campaign; and vocal hostility to ex-policemen, then the nationalist credentials of Limerick's labour movement are certainly not in question. Some local activists went even further. Robert Byrne, killed in the failed rescue attempt in April 1919, was both the president of the local branch of the Post Office Clerks Association and the adjutant of the Second Battalion, Mid-Limerick Brigade, IRA. In February 1920, it was reported that three members of the trades council had been arrested and deported. One of these may have been P. Dunne, BC. (Sinn Féin), a representative of the Breadvan Drivers on the Council who was welcomed back in June from Brixton Prison where he had been on hunger strike.²⁰⁰ The following February, delegates were told that Thomas Blake, the council's ex-treasurer had "given his life for Ireland."²⁰¹

Inevitably, the labour movement itself received the "attention" of the police and the British army. The removal of the flags from atop the Mechanics Institute in the wake of MacSwiney's death in October 1920 has already been mentioned.²⁰² Earlier that month, the military raided the ITGWU offices on O'Connell St., the Mechanics Institute, and Ozanam House, the headquarters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.²⁰³ The military would have doubtless been very interested to find out

¹⁹⁸ LL, 23 August 1920.

¹⁹⁹ LL, 6 September 1920.

²⁰⁰ LUTLC minutes, 6 February & 25 June 1920.

²⁰¹ LUTLC minutes, 6 February 1921. Blake was one of three brothers who were all members of the IRA. He was employed in a local pharmacy and was studying to be a pharmaceutical chemist which meant that, "he was in a position to facilitate the procuring of materials for munitions for the Army, and to direct and assist in their preparation." (Limerick's Fighting Story, p. 183).

²⁰² In March 1921, the "Trades Flag" was again removed after the killing of Limerick's mayor, George Clancy and ex-mayor, Michael O'Callaghan (LL, 9 March 1921). A question was subsequently asked in Parliament about a "robbery and attack" on the Institute. The government predictably denied that the military had anything to do it, claiming that, "the Bomb that was thrown was of Rebel Manufacture." (LUTLC minutes, 3 April 1921).

²⁰³ LL, 1 October 1920.

that the Transport Union Hall also housed the headquarters of the Mid-Limerick Brigade of the IRA. Despite numerous police and military raids on the building, these secret offices were never discovered. The members of the ITGWU were subsequently praised by an IRA activist, Patrick Maloney, for their "magnificent support":

That IRA activities were directed from the building must have been obvious to numbers of the workers who occupied the rooms for Union meetings, card playing and other activities. Situated in a back attic at the top of this four-storey building, the Brigade Headquarters was almost always occupied by a small complement of staff officers, sending and receiving despatches and communications from all parts of the country, covering the movement and activities of IRA and British forces alike.²⁰⁴

On at least one occasion, however, the Trades Council sought to calm tensions in Limerick City. At the beginning of May 1920, with increasing levels of crime and regular confrontations between youth and soldiers in the streets, the council issued an appeal to "Limerick's Manhood":

The Trades Council view, with the gravest apprehension, the disturbances that arise so often in the city. They feel with the rest of the community that these are due, in some degree, to the thoughtless acts of irresponsible youngsters of both sexes. In order to avert strife, to preserve the fair name of Limerick, and to keep public property from wanton damage, the Council calls on its members to take charge of the streets, to exercise vigilance at all times over the citizens' belongings, and to set the example themselves by bringing the younger children, at least, within doors at a reasonable hour.²⁰⁵

It seems unlikely that this statement had much effect since three weeks later, the Limerick Leader headlined, "Night of Horror—In Limerick Streets—Civilian Shot Dead—And a Number of Others Wounded—Two Attempts at Incendiarism—Extraordinary Sequel to

²⁰⁴ Limerick's Fighting Story, pp. 197-8.

²⁰⁵ LL, 3 May 1920; see also LUTLC minutes, 30 April 1920.

Shooting of Police Sergeants." The paper also reported that the Trades Council had reissued its "useful appeal".²⁰⁶

In assessing the political role of the Limerick labour movement, it is necessary, however, to consider not only its relationship with the local Sinn Féin/IRA but with the national labour movement as well. Reference has already been made to the effective split in the Trades Council with the departure of the ITGWU in March 1921. This was primarily due to the organisational tensions between the Transport Union and the local "labour establishment". However, it also reflected a different political emphasis, with the local ITGWU more in tune with the verbal radicalism of the ILPTUC/ITGWU leadership. This was exemplified in the discussion on electoral strategy at the end of 1919. Dowling was far more wary of the embrace of Sinn Féin than Cronin who found the ILPTUC's electoral programme too radical.

Some in the Trades Council, and Cronin in particular, clearly chafed at what they saw as dictation from Dublin on national actions. This may have been reinforced by their experience during the Limerick Soviet. In the wake of the April 1920 general strike, there were grumblings at a council meeting because instructions had been sent to Limerick via the ITGWU and not directly to them. Cronin snippily declared, "not only did Foran take things into his own hands but went to capitalists to make terms." At the same meeting, doubts were expressed about the ILPTUC's embargo on food exports which was meant to strike a blow at profiteering.²⁰⁷ Limerick dockers, along with dockers nationally, were refusing to handle butter, bacon or live pigs for export. A settlement was, however, rapidly reached.²⁰⁸

A more explicitly political critique by the Trades Council of the line of the national labour leadership came in response to the Easter 1921 ILPTUC manifesto, The Country in Danger, which is often considered the most radical statement of Labour intent penned during this period. Carr, summarising the feeling of many delegates, declared it was "not practical for the present age". As usual, Cronin was more blunt, opining that the manifesto should be renamed "the Dream of an

²⁰⁶ LL, 21 May 1920.

²⁰⁷ LUTLC minutes, 16 April 1920.

²⁰⁸ LL, 19 April 1920. The Limerick Leader was also very concerned because the bacon curing firms, obviously a large part of the city's economy, announced they would not purchase pigs until further notice (LL, 21 & 28 April 1920, give details of the settlement. Manufacturers agreed to restrict bacon and pig exports and keep domestic prices at pre-decontrol levels, i.e. those obtaining at the end of March. Significantly, the Irish Farmers Union was not a party to the agreement).

Idealist" while the council's treasurer, J. Scallon, said "it reminded him of the story called 'Utopia'."²⁰⁹ All of this is strongly reminiscent of the February 1916 debate on whether the council should continue affiliating to the ITUC. However, during the five intervening years, the council had become far more closely involved with the national body. Nor did this dissatisfaction prevent Carr from going forward for election to the National Executive four months later. But following another letter from Dublin in December 1921, Carr asked for the delegates' views on the idea of a "Workers Republic". The minutes eloquently state that, "after a lengthy discussion in which Messrs Lawlor, Hennessy & Hayes took part, it was considered inadvisable to move in that direction yet."²¹⁰

In sharp contrast, the local ITGWU had little fear of radical rhetoric. When the Trades Council was asked in June 1919 to endorse an upcoming meeting in the Theatre Royal of the "Hands off Russia" campaign, Cronin hesitated, saying, "there is too much trouble at home at present." Dowling, however, forthrightly supported the application on the basis that, "if protest is taken up in all centres of British Isles it may help to stop Capitalistic England from crushing Russian workers." In the end, Carr proposed and the delegates agreed that because, "the notice was too short, promoters should be satisfied if this meeting endorsed their action." This meant that the Trades Council had no official speaker at the meeting which went ahead though the police reported only a small attendance.²¹¹

By June 1920, the RIC's Limerick County Inspector felt that the ITGWU had become:

...purely a tyrannical Bolshevist organisation and even the better class Sinn Feiners (farmers, clergy, business men & c) are getting afraid of it and longing for a return to firm government.

Undoubtedly, the inspector fervently hoped that the tensions caused in the cross-class republican alliance by the militant prosecution of the "class struggle" would sharpen, thus giving the government a political opening. However, as shown during the Limerick Soviet and in the 1920 municipal elections, the ITGWU leadership had no intention of breaking this alliance. Nevertheless they remained very

²⁰⁹ LUTLC minutes, 27 April 1921.

²¹⁰ LUTLC minutes, 16 December 1921.

²¹¹ LUTLC minutes, 27 June 1919; LL, 7 July 1919; IG, July 1919.

wary of republican intentions and were prepared to be sharply critical of their pro-business positions.

At the end of 1920, the union's organ published an article which looked at the practice of the new Sinn Féin-dominated County Councils. The piece was suggestively headlined, "Reactionary Republicans—Limerick and Roscommon Councils Lick Old Gang in Repression of Workers."²¹² A year later, as the terms of the Treaty were being debated by nationalists, the paper printed the depressing predictions of one unnamed labour activist under the heading, "The Sharks are Gathering—A Pleasant Picture for Irish Working Class":

Last week I had occasion to tell many workers in the South that under either the Irish Republic or the Irish Free State they will be faced with a combination of all the employing and conservative elements, and that those elements will use the full force of the executive arm of the State, courts, police and military against our class just as under the old regime.

Many of the workers are quite wise to that. They are under no illusions about it.²¹³

One could not describe the leadership of the Limerick Trades Council as living in a world of "illusions". However, one cannot help contrasting this analysis with the fawning address which the council had issued only a few days earlier on the occasion of the granting of the freedom of the city to de Valera and Kathleen Clarke. After a lengthy reference to the Limerick Soviet, the council addressed de Valera in tones it used to reserve for John Redmond:

In speaking thus, we claim no more than Labour's right to a place in the ranks in the fight for our country's cause; and we deem it fitting to tender afresh in this momentous hour the unswerving loyalty and devotion of the workers of Limerick to you as Leader, and to your heroic colleagues, in your noble and glorious efforts to free our Motherland.

²¹² WOL, 4 December 1920. Two months earlier, the journal had published a front page response to Griffith and MacNeill's interview with the Financial Times in which Griffith had said, "you can tell your City men that they have nothing to fear in the way of confiscation or unjust discrimination." (WOL, 25 September 1920).

²¹³ VoL, 17 December 1921.

The limits of the aspirations of many traditional Limerick trade union leaders are accurately if, perhaps unconsciously, captured in the phrase, "Labour's right to a place in the ranks".²¹⁴

This political conservatism was also reflected in the maintenance of the close relationship between the Limerick labour establishment and the Catholic Church. It has already been shown that priests played a very important role in mediating various local disputes and that certain clerics, particularly Canon O'Driscoll and Fr Philip OFM, were instrumental in the formation of the local Conciliation Board in January 1920. Fr Philip was one of the board's original co-chairmen, having been one of the Trades Council's three nominees.²¹⁵ Additionally, he was reported to have personally intervened in strikes involving the city's gas workers and carters at O'Callaghan's Tannery, both in May 1920, and was credited with preventing strikes by the Stationary Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Society at Cleeve's in February 1921 and by builders' labourers' two months later.²¹⁶ April 1921 was also the month that Fr Philip left Limerick. Carr, reflecting the strong affection for the priest in the Trades Council, sought the delegates' permission to appeal directly to the Bishop to keep him in Limerick.²¹⁷ Two weeks later, Fr Philip dropped by to say farewell to the council. He was presented with "a new habit and cloak of his order...as a token of our gratitude."²¹⁸

This closeness did not prevent the local Catholic hierarchy—along with prominent clerics nationally—from waging an offensive against socialist and communist doctrines which they felt might be seeping into the Irish labour movement. In its 14 March 1919 issue, the Limerick Leader gave over four full columns to reprinting a "Lenten lecture" given in the local Augustinian church by Rev Dr. Murphy, OSA. The lecture was entitled "Ideals and Industrialism" and was to be the first of a series entitled "Christ and the Labour World". Notably, it contained a long polemic against materialist philosophy. The subsequent Lenten lectures by Dr. Murphy, all likewise reprinted

²¹⁴ LL, 5 December 1921; see also LUTLC minutes, 2 December 1921. The members of the council seemed very pleased that they had "...secured a nomination for presentation of address (only five been [sic] allowed altogether)," as well as 25 tickets for members of the Executive.

²¹⁵ LL, 12 January 1920; LUTLC minutes, 12 Jan 1920. The other two LUTLC nominees were Fr Hackett, SJ, and E. Stevenson, president of the Limerick Co-operative Society.

²¹⁶ LL 17 May 1920; 21 February & 18 April 1921

²¹⁷ LUTLC minutes, 3 April 1921.

²¹⁸ LUTLC minutes, 17 April 1921.

in full in the press, were entitled "Property and Tenure", "Ownership and the State", "Nationalisation and Morals" and "Christ the Adjudicator".²¹⁹ A month later, Fr. Hackett, SJ, who also became the honorary president of the Limerick Co-operative Society, attended a meeting of the Trades Council to inform delegates about the forming a "Social Society" whose purpose would be, "to bring employer & employee into closer connections by means of lectures."²²⁰ Meanwhile, in Athlone, the Most Rev Dr. Hoare also called for the formation of conciliation boards: "Any other course, his Lordship added, would produce revolution and Socialism."²²¹

The rest of 1919 did not provide much comfort to the hierarchy on the "social question". Industrial peace seemed more and more difficult to attain. In December, with Limerick gripped by the conflict on the docks, Rev. Dr Murphy returned to the themes of his Lenten talks. But, in a series of four Advent lectures, he focused even more directly on attacking the ideology of class struggle. The press summarised the themes of his first talk as "Socialist aims—And the Moral Law—Searching Analysis of a Dangerous Theory—Suggested Plan to Ensure 'Frugal Comfort' For All...". The other three lectures developed this analysis, the final one being apocalyptically titled, "The Empire of Socialism—Its Encounter With the Church—A Peep Into the Future."²²²

By February 1920, it would appear that Fr. Hackett's "Social Institute" was up and running after a meeting of representatives of the Trades Council and local employers.²²³ The press reported the official launch of the institute a couple of weeks later at Ozanam House. The object of the institute was said to be the provision of, "a common ground where workers and employers can meet to discuss and enlighten each other on labour, civic and economic subjects." The committee in charge included six representatives from the Trades Council, six from the employers, four "prominent clergymen", four ex-officio members and both bishops of Limerick, with Rev. Hackett as president. Despite the fanfare, however, little was subsequently reported about the work of the institute.²²⁴

²¹⁹ LL, 21 & 28 March; 4 April & 11 April 1919.

²²⁰ LUTLC minutes, 16 May 1919.

²²¹ LL, 12 May 1919.

²²² LL, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, 22 & 29 December 1919.

²²³ LUTLC minutes, 20 February 1920.

²²⁴ LL, 10 March 1920. The press also reported the inauguration of a Limerick Social and Industrial League at the end of March at which Hackett presided.

The focus on communist ideology by Rev. Dr Murphy may strike one as excessive; it is in fact probable that these talks were the first significant "introduction", albeit from a hostile viewpoint, that most of his listeners had to these ideas. But Murphy did not go as far as Fr. Peter Finlay, SJ, Professor of Theology in the National University of Ireland, who decided in March 1920 to personally excommunicate all those who were in organisations affiliated to the ILPTUC because the latter body was supposedly affiliated to the Second International, an immoral atheist organisation.²²⁵ Most Limerick clergy, on the other hand, adopted a pragmatic approach to the labour movement. There is only one report of clerical censure of the local labour movement in this period. This occurred towards the end of the Limerick Soviet when, Fr. Dwane, the administrator of St. Micheal's parish, told his congregation that the clergy were opposed to the continuance of the strike. He also complained that they had not been consulted by the Trades Council beforehand.²²⁶

The effect of the Church's ideological crusade is, of course, difficult to assess. In general though, the ideas of class cooperation espoused by local clerics, seem to be reflected in the attitudes of the leaders of the Trades Council and served as a counterweight to the pro-Bolshevik syndicalist fervour espoused in the pages of the Voice of Labour. On another level, the local labour movement shared the social values of the Church and this was also a factor mitigating against the spread of "cosmopolitan" ideas. The work of the Vigilance Association which had significant labour support was discussed in Chapter 3. In November 1921, Carr outlined his scheme for film censorship in the new "Gaelic state" at a meeting of the Trades Council. Father Philip, who was paying a visit to Limerick, was in attendance

Carr and John Nolan, the secretary of the co-operative society, were on the platform (LL, 29 March 1920)

²²⁵ LL, 8 March 1920. Tom Johnson wrote a very legalistic response to Finlay, pointing out, among other things, that the ILPTUC was not in fact affiliated to the Second International (WoL, 3 April 1920). The Watchword of Labour also subsequently reprinted "Father Kelliher's Trenchant Reply to Father Finlay" from the Irish Theological Quarterly (WoL, 4 September 1920).

²²⁶ Cahill, p. 120. He cites Irish Times & Irish Independent, 26 April 1919. Cahill also describes criticism of the soviet by clerics outside Limerick City and, particularly, by the Irish Catholic (ibid, pp.103-4). Limerick labour and the Church also indirectly came into conflict over the strike by secondary school teachers' against the Catholic Headmasters Association in mid-1920. The Trades Council was to the fore in supporting the teachers' cause, particularly those who were employed by the Christian Brothers (LL, 24-26 May & 21 June 1920; see also John Coolahan, "The ASTI and the Secondary Teachers' Strike of 1920," Saothar 10 (1984), pp. 43-59).

and expressed his approval.²²⁷ A letter was subsequently received from Dáil Éireann, saying the council's proposal "will have their serious attention".²²⁸

4.2.6 The Rural Labour Movement

In discussing County Limerick's rural labour movement during 1919-21, attention will be focused on three groups, namely farm labourers, creamery workers and road workers employed by the County Council. Wage data for road workers and several other groups outside Limerick City has already been given in Table 4.7. Not surprisingly, it was found that rural unskilled workers were at best being paid rates equivalent to those in the lower end of Limerick City's unskilled male rates while some, including road workers, were receiving rates below any reported for men in the city. It was noted, however, that lower prices for foodstuffs in country towns and villages as well as the vegetables that many rural workers would have obtained from their own plots have to be taken into account in comparing urban and rural wages. Obviously, this is also a consideration when looking at the wage rates of farm labourers and creamery workers.

Table 4.9 gives wage rates for several groups of farm labourers in the county during 1919-21. With the exception of the rates from Adare, located just over the dividing line between East and West Limerick, this data is all from the eastern half of the county. In 1919, farm labourers in Effin, Kilfinnane, Mount Coote, Adare and Killballyowen were earning a wage broadly comparable with the 32s rate achieved by the county's road labourers. Only constant workers in Kilfinnane who were receiving "diet" (i.e. their main meals) from employers obtained less than 30s per week. According to the Department of Agriculture, the average weekly wage ("without free housing or other allowances") paid to "ordinary" Irish farm labourers in 1914 was 12s.²²⁹ While pre-war data for Limerick is unavailable, if one takes the December 1914 wage for the county's road labourers (2s.4d per day or 14s for a 6 day week) as indicative of local farm workers' wages, then rates more than doubled by the end of 1919.

²²⁷ LUTLC minutes, 18 November 1921. Carr said his idea arose from a conversation with Fr. Devane "re the sermon given lately by Fr Halpin SJ in Limk where he spoke of the effects caused by the pictures. [Carr] outlined a scheme to pay for the work of censors which he said Dail Eireann should appoint."

²²⁸ LUTLC minutes, 27 January 1922.

²²⁹ cited in Irish Farmer (IF), 2 April 1921.

That farm labourers were able to keep pace with inflation was due to the legal sanction of AWB rates, combined with the arrival of the ITGWU in the Limerick countryside during 1918.²³⁰

However, 1920 saw some Limerick farm labourers achieve rates which represented an increase in real wages above inflation. The top rates of 42-45s reported in Oola, Kilfrush, Bruff and Ballyneety represented a 200% increase on a pre-war wage of 14-15s. The significantly lower rate of 32s.6d for Colonel O'Grady's employees at Killballyowen was reported in May and may have increased by the end of the year. However, the rate for constant workers with diet in Kilfinnane appears to have actually gone down to 23s. The same rate was reported for some workers in the Oola area. The top rates obtained in Limerick compared well with the 43s and 38s.6d "outdoor" county rates negotiated in Dublin and Waterford respectively in early 1920.²³¹ However, Limerick farm labourers never achieved the level of organisation necessary to establish and enforce a county-wide rate. The situation in East Limerick was very similar to that in North Cork where labourers in the Churchtown and Buttevant districts obtained a 40s outdoor rate in August.²³² O'Connor Lysaght reports that the rates in Tipperary during 1920 ranged from 35s to 43s.²³³ The highest rates in the region were, however, those prevailing in areas adjacent to Cork City, ranging from 52s.6d to 57s.6d, and making these farm workers, according to Bradley, "the best paid...in Ireland."²³⁴ The Limerick, Tipperary and Cork rates compare well with the Department of Agriculture's estimate that the average wage for farm labourers across Ireland was 28s.5d in 1919 and 32s.2d in 1920.²³⁵

²³⁰ The IFU claimed, however, that AWB rates were ignored "in quite large areas of south and west." (IF, 2 April 1921).

²³¹ Bradley, p. 51. According to the IF (31 January 1920), Kildare farm workers obtained 33-35s as a result of a settlement.

²³² Bradley, p. 53.

²³³ D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, "County Tipperary: Class Struggle and National Struggle 1914-1924," in William Nolan and Thomas G. McGrath (eds.) Tipperary: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County (Dublin, 1985), p. 404.

²³⁴ Bradley, p. 54-5.

²³⁵ IF, 2 April 1921.

Table 4.9 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of County Limerick farm labourers, 1919-21.²³⁶

Agricultural Wages Board rates (without board or lodging):²³⁷

	1919	1920	1921
—Group I	27s	32s.6d	34s
—Group II	24s.6d	30s	32s
—Group III	22s		

part 2 (with or without diet):

	1919		1920	
	w/diet	w/out	w/diet	w/out
Effin (Kilmallock): constant weekly	30s 35s			
Kilfinnane: constant casuals	25s 30s	35s 10s p/d	23s	
Oola			23s	

part 3 (unspecified as to diet):

	1919	1920	1921
Mount Coote (Kilmallock)	30s		
Adare (Nigel Baring)	35s		
Adare (Dunraven Estate)	30s		
Bulgaden (Kilmallock)		38s.6d ²³⁸	
Killballyowen (Bruff) (Colonel O'Grady) ploughman & herdsman	30s 32s.6d	32s.6d 36s	
Oola (Ballykisten Stud) grooms		40s 45s	
Kilfrush (near Knocklong)		42s	
Bruff (Nigel Baring)		42s	
Ballyneety		42s	
Ballyneety (Ballynagarde estate workers)		40s ²³⁹	
Bruff stable lads during hunting season			40-45s 36s
Mungret (Mungret College)			36s

²³⁶ Sources: VoL, 1919; LL, 1919; WoL, 1920; VoL, 1921.

²³⁷ These rates were the legal minima for male farm labourers over the age of 18 working a 54 hour week. Group I (in 1920 and 1921) included the County Borough of Limerick as well as the Kilmallock, Limerick No. 1 and Tipperary No. 2 RDC areas. All other parts of the county were in Group II.

²³⁸ In addition to money wages, workers were to receive a half acre, "tilled and seeded, and a quart of milk daily."

²³⁹ until next April; 42s.6d p/wk after that.

Lack of data makes it impossible to judge whether Limerick farm workers were generally able to maintain their 1920 rates as prices for agricultural products fell during the next twelve months. Nevertheless, a Labour Department arbitration award in November 1921 maintained farm workers in Bruff at their previous 40-45s rates while decreasing the wages of stable lads during the hunting season by 9s to 36s.²⁴⁰ The only other rate reported was that of farm workers at Mungret College employed by the Catholic Church. After an attempt by the "Rev. Bursar" to reduce wages, the workers managed to keep their 36s rate.²⁴¹

Limerick's creamery workers, as can be seen in Table 4.10, were, just as successful as local farm workers in obtaining modest increases in their real wages during 1919 and 1920. For example, 17s per week was the standard wage paid to "general workers" in 1914 by Cleeve Brothers, by far the largest single employer of creamery workers not only in Limerick but also in Tipperary.²⁴² In May 1919, the company's workers outside Limerick City obtained a rate of 42s although in Knocklong it was necessary to wage a seven week strike to confirm an increase to a 39s minimum.²⁴³ Meanwhile in Limerick City, Cleeve's workers had obtained 45s which was raised to 48s in October. It is unclear what rates were obtained by most Cleeve workers in 1920-1 although the Knocklong factory occupation in May 1920 led to the company accepting rates of 53s.6d for general workers (49s at the auxiliaries) and 58s.6d for firemen (51s at the auxiliaries).²⁴⁴

Comparable rates were achieved in co-operative creameries. General workers at Ballinvarra Co-op, Ardpatrick Co-op and "England's Creamery" in Kilfinnane obtained 43s, 42s and 40-45s respectively in 1919. The lower rates of 23-30s at Meenahela Creamery in Templeglantine in southwest Limerick was reported in March and may well have increased during the year. By April 1920, dairy hands and butter makers in 14 creameries in the "junction district" (including part of Tipperary and East Limerick) were receiving 55s

²⁴⁰ VOL, 19 November 1921.

²⁴¹ VOL, 17 & 24 December 1921. The initial report amusingly queried, "Is the Sermon on the Mount on the Index Expurgatoria in Mungret College?"

²⁴² VOL, 1 April 1922.

²⁴³ VOL, 5 July 1919 & 29 May 1920.

²⁴⁴ WOL, 29 May 1920.

and the following month dairy hands at the Golden Vein Dairy Co. in Kilfinnane obtained 48-55s while butter makers achieved a remarkable 63s wage.

Employer	Location	Wage	Notes
Sheehans	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
Boys			
Girls			
Balfour's	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
Bromes			
general run			
casuals			
Cleave Bros	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
unspecified			
Arparks	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
general hands			
firms			
"England's Creamery"	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
buttermakers			
firms			
general			
14 creameries (incl. Kilfinnane)	Kilfinnane	48-55s	
Bromes, Daniels & Co.			
dairy hands & butter makers			
boys under 20			
girl helpers			
Golden Vein Dairy Co. (old)	Kilfinnane	63s	
french			
butter makers			
dairy hands			
Cleave Bros	Kilfinnane	63s	
general workers			
french			
general workers of various			
firms of various			

145 *ibid.* Vol. 1919, P. 140; Vol. 1920, P. 141.
 146 Creamery Conference Board statement. The *Blackboard of Labour* also reports in May that three creameries in the Galway area agreed "at the Conference rate", probably referring to the conference rate.

Table 4.10 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of creamery workers (outside Lim City), 1919-20.²⁴⁵

employer and occupation	location	1919	1920
Meenahela Creamery: boys men	Templeglantine	16s 23-30s	
Ballinvarra Co-op Creamery: firemen general men casuals	Ballinvarra (near Kilmallock)	45s 43s 50s	
Cleeve Bros (outside Lim City)	Lim, Tipp & dist, Clonmel	42s	
<i>unspecified</i>	Glin	43s	
Ardpatrick Co-op Dairy: general hands firemen	Ardpatrick	42s 45s	
"England's Creamery": buttermakers firemen general	Kilfinnane	53s 48-50s 40-45s	
14 creameries (not inc Cleeve's)²⁴⁶: firemen, casuals & asst managers dairy hands & butter makers boys under 20 girl helpers	"junction district" (Cos. Tipp & Lim)		60s 55s 45s 40s
Golden Vein Dairy Co. (60): firemen butter makers dairy hands	Kilfinnane		60s 63s 48-55s
Cleeve Bros general workers firemen general workers at auxiliaries firemen at auxiliaries	Knocklong	39s min	53s.6d 58s.6d 49s 51s

²⁴⁵ Source: VoL, 1919; PROL LAB 34/37; WoL 1920; VoL, 1921.

²⁴⁶ Creamery Conference Board settlement. The Watchword of Labour also reports in May that three creameries in the Oola area settled "at the Co-operative rate", probably referring to this settlement.

As seen in Chapter 3, by the end of World War I, the ITGWU had become the predominant organisation of Limerick farm labourers, superseding the ILLA. In fact the last meeting of the ILLA reported in the local press was held in September 1918.²⁴⁷ Greaves says that in early 1919, "the EC of the ITGWU decided to try to absorb," the county LLAs and succeeded in amalgamating the Co. Laois and Co. Waterford organisations.²⁴⁸ Whether the Limerick ILLA was formally absorbed or simply collapsed is unclear. What is clear is that at the end of March 1919, the Transport Union had 25 branches in County Limerick outside Limerick City.²⁴⁹ The union's census, taken nine months before, had reported only five branches outside the city. The police, meanwhile, reported that the union had 3,827 members in the city and county. Sinn Féin, on the other hand, was said to have 4,766 members.²⁵⁰ But by June the union had registered another dramatic increase in the county, with the police reporting 6,118 members in 36 branches. The membership of Sinn Féin, however, was said to be unchanged.²⁵¹ By December, the Transport Union was said to have no less than 7,478 members in 44 branches.²⁵²

The Limerick ITGWU's massive expansion in the countryside during 1919 reflected a national pattern. The union's second census, taken on 31 January 1920, showed that 40,439 of the total membership of 102,823 were employed in agriculture, mining and fishing.²⁵³ The union claimed that membership rose to over 120,000 "by the end of the third quarter" of 1920.²⁵⁴ In Limerick, the union's growth appears to have peaked in mid 1920, with the police reporting 7,738 members in 45 branches.²⁵⁵ However, the toll taken on rural

²⁴⁷ MN, 11 September 1918. This was a meeting of the ILLA's Central Council held in Limerick Junction, with representatives from Co. Limerick present, at which it was decided to affiliate to the ITUCLP. Shortly afterwards, the ILLA wrote to the Limerick County Council regarding road workers' wages (see Chapter 3) after which no more was heard from them in Limerick.

²⁴⁸ Greaves, p. 245.

²⁴⁹ Irish Transport and General Workers Union, Annual Report for 1918, pp. 10-23. Parteen, Co. Clare was consistently listed as a Limerick branch and because of its proximity to Limerick City and its clear orientation towards the county's labour movement, it is included here as a "Limerick" branch.

²⁵⁰ LCI, March 1919.

²⁵¹ LCI, June 1919.

²⁵² LCI, December 1919. The union's annual report for 1919, however, only listed 39 branches outside the city.

²⁵³ Greaves, pp. 259-60.

²⁵⁴ Irish Transport and General Workers Union, Annual Report for 1920, p. 5.

²⁵⁵ LCI, June 1920.

organisation by the increasing intensity of the War of Independence can be gaged by the union's 1920 report (compiled at the end of the year) which listed only 25 branches in County Limerick. A partial recovery was made by a vigorous re-organising campaign and by the end of 1921, there were 31 branches outside the city. This figure may underestimate the recovery since some small branches were consolidated via the union's "Big Branch Scheme" begun in late 1921.²⁵⁶ Map 1 shows the distribution of the 48 County Limerick ITGWU branches reported between 1918-21 and the 28 ILLA branches reported between 1915-8.²⁵⁷ While the ITGWU clearly achieved a far more extensive presence than its predecessor, it was also concentrated in East Limerick, if not to the same degree. Only 7 ILLA branches were reported in the west of the county, while the east/west distribution of the ITGWU's branches was 27/21. This concentration of rural labour organisation in the eastern part of the county reflects the concentration of larger farms employing more labourers in the east and particularly the south-east.²⁵⁸

The ITGWU's expansion in 1919-20 among rural workers and its militant pursuit of wage demands met with increasing opposition from farmers, reflected in the growth of the Irish Farmers' Union (IFU) which claimed to have 50,000 members in March 1920, compared to 8,000 twelve months previously.²⁵⁹ In 1919, the Limerick Leader carried 17 reports of meetings of farmers' organisations. The number of reports rose dramatically to 68 in 1920, declining to 48 in 1921.²⁶⁰ This compares to 15, 18 and 16 reports of ITGWU meetings outside Limerick City reported during 1919, 1920 and 1921 respectively. However, the difficulties involved in holding union meetings must be remembered. Besides this, the ITGWU was

²⁵⁶ Bradley, p. 71.

²⁵⁷ ILLA branches in the county borough are included in East Limerick; however, map does not include the Ahane, Boher, Clino and South Rural (No. 1) branches, nor the "Central Council" based in Limerick City.

²⁵⁸ The greater preponderance of ILLA branches in East Limerick may also reflect the particularly close relationship of the ILLA and Thomas Lundon's political machine.

²⁵⁹ IF, 13 March 1920. The IFU was not the only farmers' organisation operating in Limerick. The Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) and the Limerick and Clare Farmers' Association (L&CFA) were also active in the county. In January 1919, the L&CFA decided not to merge with the IFU for another twelve months (LL, 6 January 1919). They did, however, cooperate with the IFU which was clearly the more important organisation in the county. Since no L&CFA meetings were reported after October 1919, it would appear to have carried out its merger with the larger body.

²⁶⁰ See Appendix 3 for a full breakdown.

probably less inclined than the ILLA had been to use the local press for publicity purposes.²⁶¹ The concentration of rural labour activity in East Limerick is again reflected in the venues of these meetings, shown in Map 2. Only 9 of the reported ITGWU meetings were held in West Limerick, compared to 40 in East Limerick. By contrast, the distribution of IFU meetings was much more even with 39 and 41 in West and East Limerick respectively.²⁶²

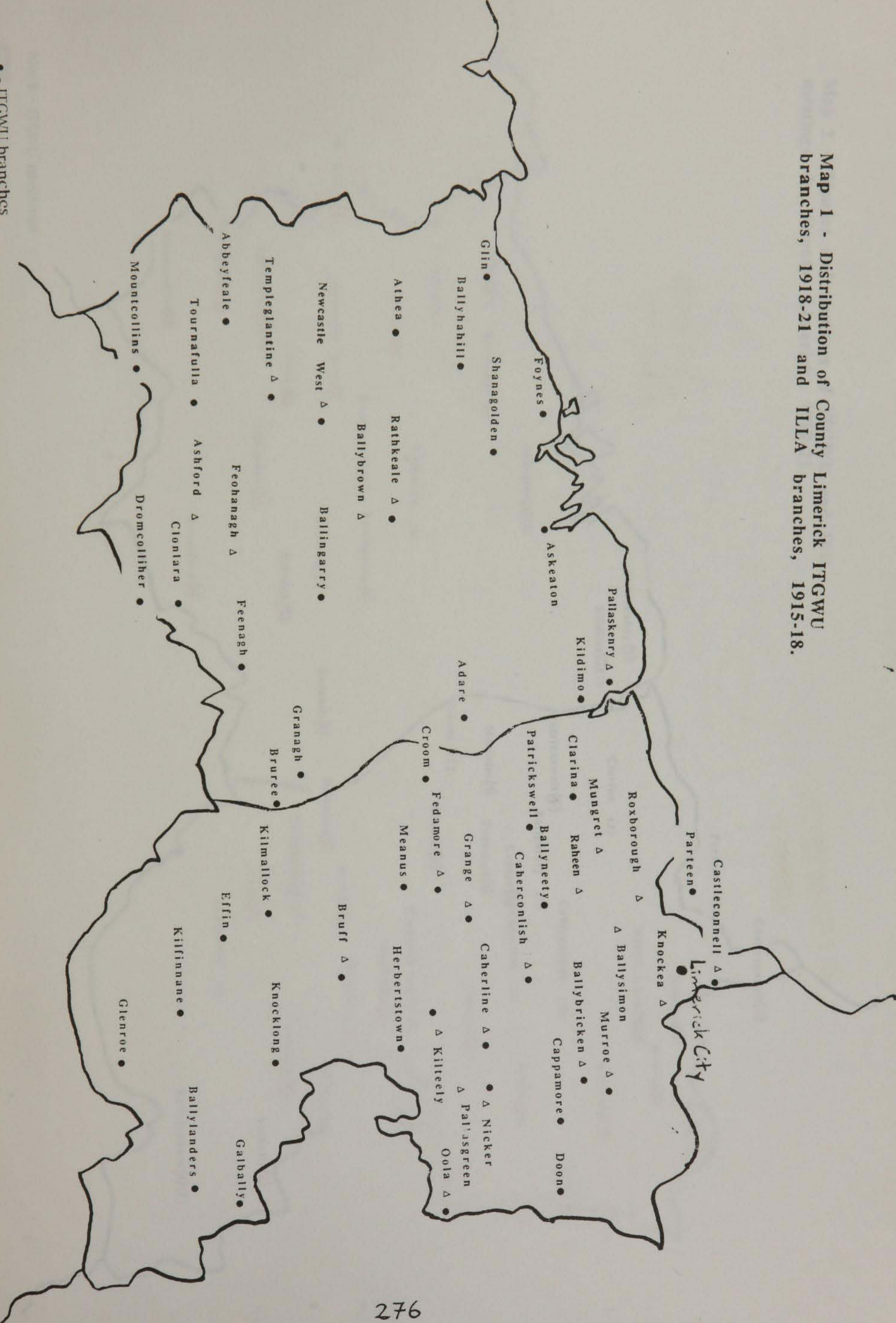
However, the clearest indication of the main zones of rural labour conflict in Limerick during 1919-21 is the geographical distribution of strikes, lockouts and occupations as shown in Map 3. Of the 20 disputes marked on the map, 8 occurred in West and 12 in East Limerick. But if one compares farm disputes with those centred in creameries, a more subtle pattern emerges since 10 of the 14 farm disputes occurred in the east while four of the six creamery disputes took place in the west of the county.²⁶³ Furthermore, almost all rural disputes occurred in the southern half of the county, in two distinct phases. The first phase was March-November 1919, during which 12 disputes were reported, seven of them in West Limerick and six of these in the southwest. During 1920-1, however, only one strike occurred in West Limerick, namely the Bruree "soviet" of August 1921. Of the eight reported strikes in East Limerick during this period, five occurred in the vicinity of Kilmallock and Knocklong in the southeast. Three of the four rural disputes reported in East Limerick during 1919 also occurred in this small area. Bruree, it should be noted, is adjacent to Kilmallock and along with Knocklong defines a triangle which was the cockpit of rural labour struggle in County Limerick.

²⁶¹ Aside from the ITGWU, 10 other meetings of labour organisations were reported outside Limerick City during 1919-21 (see Appendix 2 for a full breakdown).

²⁶² Fifty two reports of farmers' meetings are not included in these figures, including those of non-IFU bodies, as well as the IFU's county executive and "standing committee", its "Central Branch" in Limerick City, as well as meetings of the Ahane, Bohermore, Bridgetown, Monaleen and Donoughmore branches. For the full list of meetings, see Appendix 3.

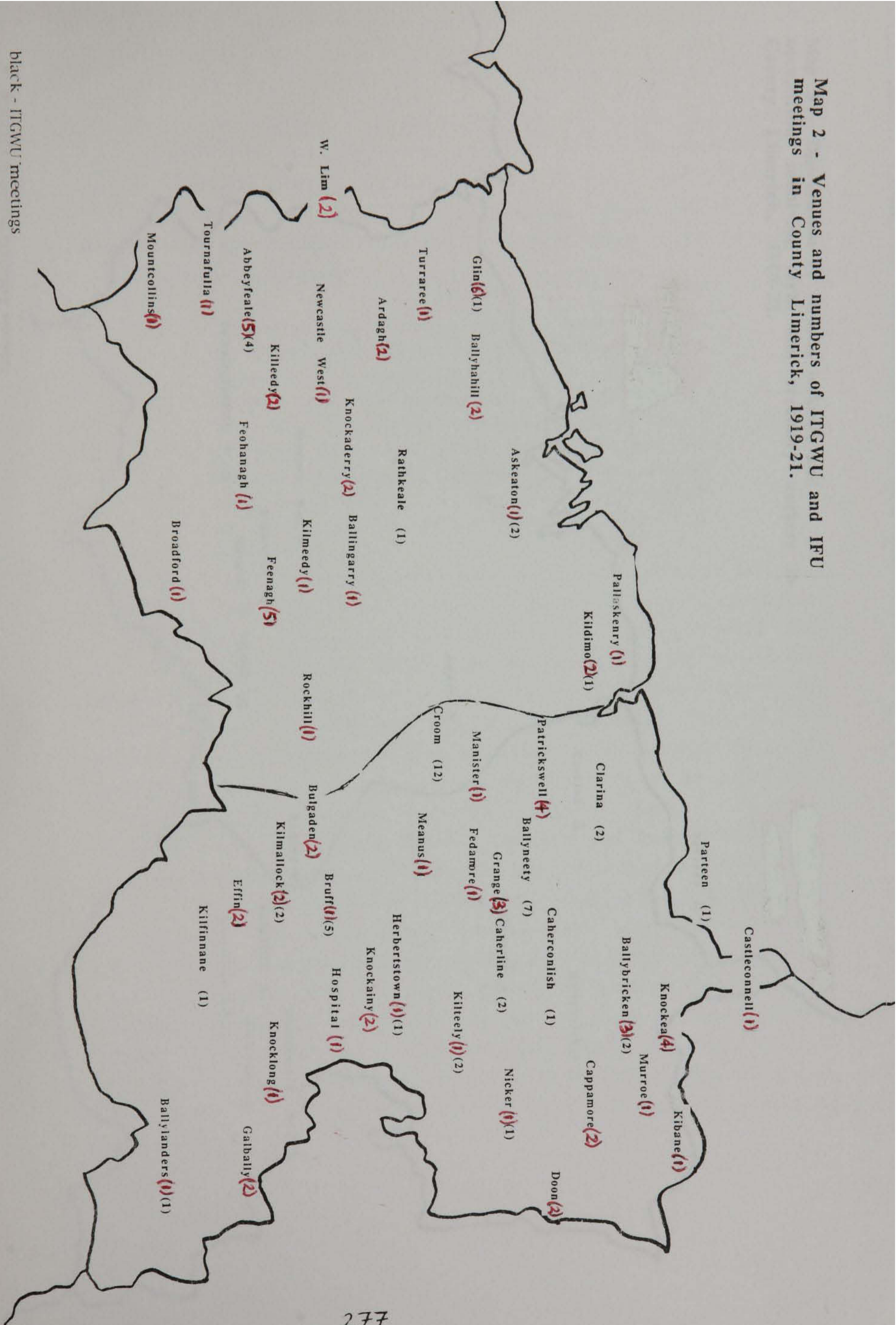
²⁶³ The strike by Cleeve's workers in Limerick City, Tipperary and District and Clonmel in May 1919 is not included nor is the February 1920 strike at the Greybridge Creamery (location unknown). The Bruree "soviet" in August 1920 was centered at Cleeve's bakery in the village, but included creamery workers employed by the company. For the purposes of this analysis, it is easier to consider it as a "creamery dispute".

Map 1 - Distribution of County Limerick ITGWU branches, 1918-21 and ILLA branches, 1915-18.



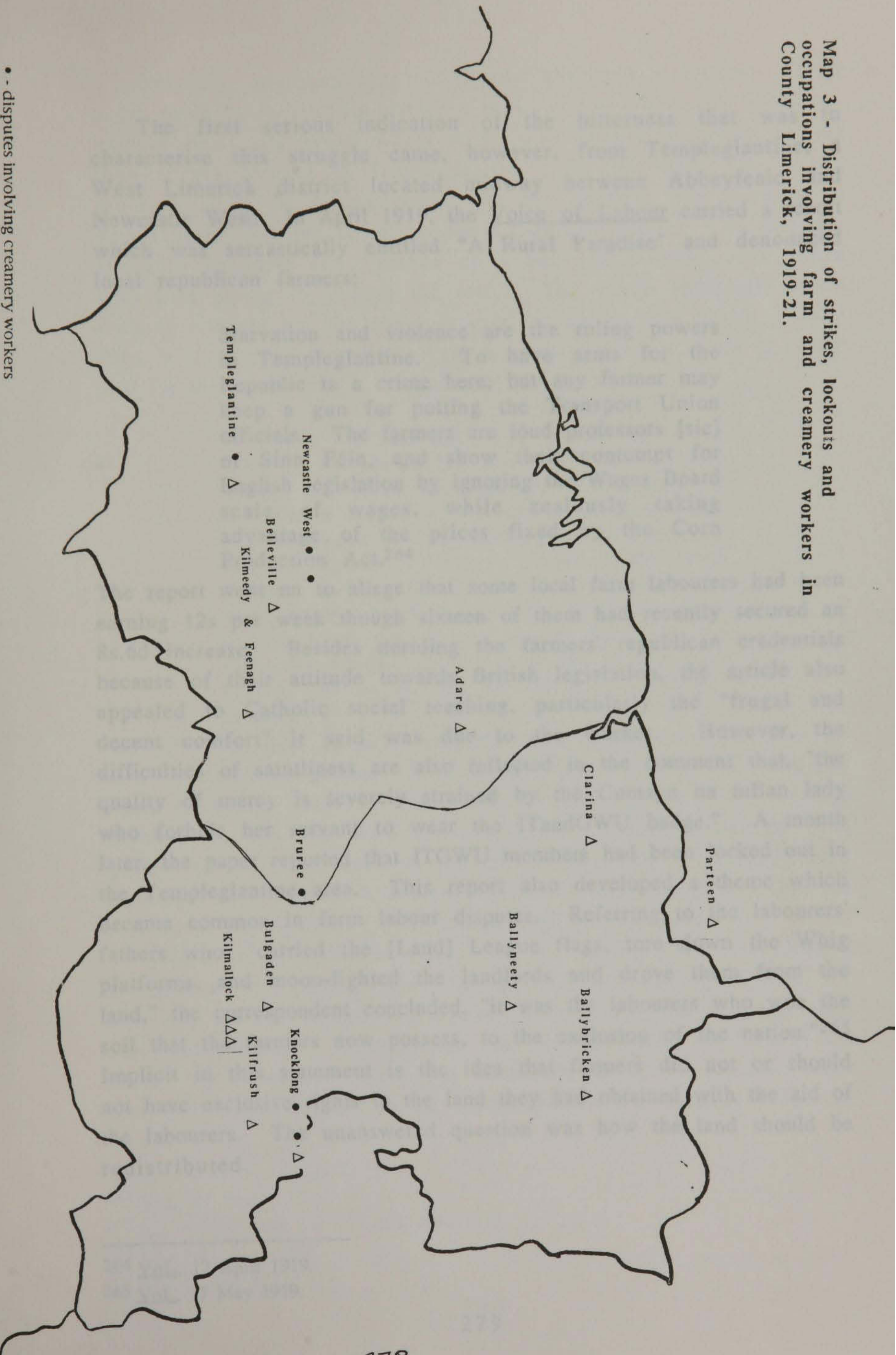
- - ITGWU branches
- Δ - ILLA branches

Map 2 - Venues and numbers of ITGWU and IFU meetings in County Limerick, 1919-21.



black - ITGWU meetings
 red - IFU meetings

Map 3 - Distribution of strikes, lockouts and occupations involving farm and creamery workers in County Limerick, 1919-21.



• - disputes involving creamery workers

Δ - disputes involving farm workers

The first serious indication of the bitterness that was to characterise this struggle came, however, from Templeglantine, a West Limerick district located midway between Abbeyfeale and Newcastle West. In April 1919, the Voice of Labour carried a report which was sarcastically entitled "A Rural Paradise" and denounced local republican farmers:

Starvation and violence are the ruling powers in Templeglantine. To have arms for the Republic is a crime here, but any farmer may keep a gun for potting the Transport Union officials. The farmers are loud professors [sic] of Sinn Féin, and show their contempt for English legislation by ignoring the Wages Board scale of wages, while zealously taking advantage of the prices fixed by the Corn Production Act.²⁶⁴

The report went on to allege that some local farm labourers had been earning 12s per week though sixteen of them had recently secured an 8s.6d increase. Besides deriding the farmers' republican credentials because of their attitude towards British legislation, the article also appealed to Catholic social teaching, particularly the "frugal and decent comfort" it said was due to the worker. However, the difficulties of saintliness are also reflected in the comment that, "the quality of mercy is severely strained by the Cumann na mBan lady who forbids her servant to wear the ITandGWU badge." A month later, the paper reported that ITGWU members had been locked out in the Templeglantine area. This report also developed a theme which became common in farm labour disputes. Referring to the labourers' fathers who, "carried the [Land] League flags, tore down the Whig platforms, and moon-lighted the landlords and drove them from the land," the correspondent concluded, "it was the labourers who won the soil that the farmers now possess, to the exclusion of the nation."²⁶⁵ Implicit in this statement is the idea that farmers did not or should not have exclusive rights to the land they had obtained with the aid of the labourers. The unanswered question was how the land should be redistributed.

²⁶⁴ VoL, 12 April 1919.

²⁶⁵ VoL, 17 May 1919.

Naturally, any such suggestions were anathema to farmers. Their anger came to the surface during a strike at the Clouncagh Creamery, east of Newcastle West. This strike was already underway by the time of the lockout in Templeglantine. On 26 April, the Voice reported a "huge demonstration" by the strikers which began at Knockaderry and proceeded to the Clouncagh plant. The manager allegedly panicked and, "rushed up a body of farmers' sons armed with lead piping to 'defend the fort'." The march apparently ended without violence but the strike dragged on for another month. On 5 June, a number of farmers brought carts to Newcastle West to obtain coal for the struck plant. According to the union:

Warnings to abstain from scabbing were ignored by the hefty farmers. When they sought to unload the coal the entire body of workers in the town was mobilised, and under the command of an ex-Sergeant Major, the attack began. Victory wreathed the Red Banner, and as the carts containing the coal were somewhat damaged, the deserving poor of the town got theirs cheap. "We had no difficulty routing them," said one of the Red Guard, "owing to our knowledge of military tactics."²⁶⁶

The following day, ITGWU members from Newcastle West went by train to Rathkeale because of a rumour that coal for the creamery would be carted from the town's railway station. The 30-40 workers marched through the town and when the creamery's manager was spotted, he was, "set upon by the crowd and narrowly escaped rough handling." The trap he had brought to town was then thrown into the Deel river, but mercifully after "the animal was unloosed."²⁶⁷

Within days, malicious injury claims totalling £410 were lodged by farmers for, "damage done during the Clouncagh strike riots."²⁶⁸ However, the strike itself had already been settled although the terms were not reported. Predictably, the Limerick IFU condemned the attack "by Newcastle West and Rathkeale mobs."²⁶⁹ A few weeks later, police and soldiers raided several homes in Newcastle West and

²⁶⁶ VoL, 21 June 1919.

²⁶⁷ LL, 6 June 1919; see also LCI, June 1919.

²⁶⁸ LL, 9-11 June 1919.

²⁶⁹ LL, 23 July 1919.

arrested several men on charges of unlawful assembly, "in connection with a disturbance arising out of a recent strike."²⁷⁰

The outcome of the legal proceedings is unclear, but the threat of prison or fines failed to stop labour unrest in southwest Limerick which continued unabated until the end of the year. In the Kilmeedy-Feenagh district south of Clouncagh, labourers won a £4 harvest bonus for men and a £2 bonus for women after a six-hour strike in August. But a strike in the same area several weeks later had a less satisfactory conclusion for the ITGWU. The IFU congratulated the local farmers, "who stood so loyally by each other when their rights were sought to be trampled upon and their property threatened with destruction," and claimed that workers in the Belville district accepted onerous terms including:

2. That farmers can employ Union or non-Union labour without interference from the ITandGWU...

4. That there be no compulsion on a farmer to employ a labourer he considers unsatisfactory.

No wages were to be paid for the time workers were on strike though all strikers were re-employed. The IFU concluded that this settlement, "has furnished an object lesson not only to West Limerick but to the whole county."²⁷¹

However, several weeks before, 127 farm workers at the Dunraven Estate in Adare, secured a 5s.6d per week increase after a two week strike during which police reinforcements were called in.²⁷² Meanwhile, the union reported that four armed raiders attempted to steal £200 in "bonus money" (recently turned over by the IFU as part of a settlement) from the home of T. Flanagan, assistant secretary of the Newcastle West ITGWU. According to the Voice of Labour, Flanagan recognised the raiders to be "local farmers". They only managed to get £18 and fired shots outside the house. Then the ITGWU retaliated:

On Monday and Tuesday the famous Red Army of Newcastle West mobilised 100 men and scoured the country. The four farmers were apprehended and brought to the local RIC

²⁷⁰ LL, 2 July 1919.

²⁷¹ IE, 18 October 1919. Their report said nothing about wage rates or hours.

²⁷² LL, 3 September 1919.

barracks and handed over to the police...While carefully arresting the bodies of the farmers, the Red Army safeguarded the interests of the members by impounding an up-to-date reaper and binder as security for the stolen money. It will be sufficient.²⁷³

In November, the Feohanagh IFU alleged further attacks on farmers during a recent strike at the Balvill Creamery near Newcastle West. They threatened to boycott the town if the attacks continued.

The final chapter of the unrest in southwest Limerick occurred in early 1920. Two members of the West Limerick farmers' "Vigilance Committee" were charged with unlawful possession of arms at a courtmartial hearing in Cork. In their defence they admitted being members of the committee and possessing arms but declared that they had no choice because the police were not protecting them against the "outrages" committed by a small section of labourers. As an example, they cited, "threatening notices with coffins on them," which were sent to farmers. They contended that the Vigilance Committee had succeeded in restoring order. Remarkably, Head Constable Walsh testified on their behalf and they were found not guilty.²⁷⁴ Shortly thereafter, seven rural labourers who had allegedly blocked farmers in Fedamore from bringing their milk to the creameries on 17 November were indicted for unlawful assembly. The men pleaded guilty and were let off with a warning by Lord Justice O'Connor at Limerick Spring Assizes.²⁷⁵

As O'Connor points out, "active" sabotage, defined as, "attacks on the machinery of production or the product itself designed to enforce the loss of output," though historically rare, became a prominent feature during 1917-23 in rural labour disputes in Munster and Leinster. Farm workers, as indicated by the Voice of Labour's Templeglantine correspondent, could claim the lineage of the Land League and even "Captain Moonlight". In the urban context, active sabotage played a far smaller role in labour disputes during these years.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ VoL, 13 September 1919.

²⁷⁴ LL, 20 February 1920. In mid-1919, it had also been reported in the local press that a farmer's son was "fired at" during the course of a "serious labour dispute" in Churchtown, north Co. Cork (LL, 14 July 1919).

²⁷⁵ LL, 8 March 1920.

²⁷⁶ Emmet O'Connor, "Active Sabotage in Industrial Conflict, 1917-23," Irish Economic and Social History, v. xii (1985), pp. 51-2.

West Limerick was the focus for violent labour conflict in 1919, but "outrages" were also alleged late in the year in Ballyneety, East Limerick. In mid-November, the local ITGWU evenhandedly condemned the attack on a union member Patrick Keogh whose house was "maliciously set on fire", as well as "the person or persons who drove Mr. E. O'Dwyer's cattle to Limerick Fair with the intention of selling them."²⁷⁷ During the same month the RIC's Limerick County Inspector described both the Bruff and Newcastle West districts as, "disturbed...owing to friction between laborers and farmers on account of wages."²⁷⁸ Meanwhile, a strike in the Kilmallock area over a demand for a harvest bonus led to a riot in the town during which "blows were freely exchanged".²⁷⁹

Over the following months, several further incidents were reported in northeast Limerick. At the end of January, the ITGWU accused farmers in the Ballybricken district, near Ballyneety, of prompting the police to raid workers' homes after shots were fired into the house of a local IFU leader, T. B. Mitchell. They complained that "it is a great injustice to the members of our branch to have themselves and their houses searched whenever any crime is committed in the district." But as before, they also condemned the attack on Mitchell, adding unconvincingly, "we feel certain that the outrage has no connection with the present labour dispute."²⁸⁰ The police also reported that during January, "there were 5 agrarian outrages a few cases of firing into dwelling houses and malicious injury to property arising out of disputes by members of the ITGWU." However, the district or districts where these incidents took place was not specified.²⁸¹ Tension continued in the Ballybricken area. In July, the ITGWU again passed a motion of condemnation, this time against the burning of hay belonging to two local farmers.²⁸²

Besides active sabotage, another feature of rural labour disputes was the remarkable degree of solidarity between different sectors of the workforce. The riots in Newcastle West and Rathkeale during the

²⁷⁷ LL, 14 November 1919.

²⁷⁸ See also LCI, October 1919.

²⁷⁹ LL, 12 November 1919 (Bradley, p. 45 also cites Cork Examiner, 13 November 1919). The union reported success in obtaining the harvest bonus not only in Kilmallock but also in Bruff (where 80% of farmers were said to have paid) and Ballylanders (WOL, 15 & 22 November, 13 & 20 December).

²⁸⁰ LL, 30 January & 4 February 1920.

²⁸¹ LCI, January 1920.

²⁸² LL, 23 July 1920.

Clouncagh creamery strike were particularly striking but it was also common for creamery workers to refuse to handle milk from farmers who were engaged in a dispute with their workers. In at least one case this led to a full fledged sympathy strike.²⁸³ The IFU, however, also blamed Cleeve Bros for refusing to take milk at their creameries in December 1919, "because the farmers will not respond to the dictates of the Transport Workers' Union as in the cases of Greybridge and Ballybricken."²⁸⁴ It must be surmised though that Cleeve's took this stand because of fear of further action by their own workers.

The response of the Limerick IFU to the ITGWU's offensive on the land and in the creameries during 1919-20 alternated between bellicosity and attempts to set up arbitration machinery so that disputes could be settled without recourse to strikes or lockouts. This dual approach reflected that of the IFU's national leadership. In his presidential address to the IFU's annual congress in March 1920, R. A. Butler declared:

...he wished it again to go forth that the [IFU] was not opposed to labour and that it was their aim to maintain good relations between employer and employed. The future of agriculture depended on the maintenance of these good relations; but unless adequate guaranteed prices were given for farm produce there would be a living wage for neither the labourer nor the farmer.²⁸⁵

Locally, it was the Limerick & Clare Farmers' Association which first put forward the idea for a rural conciliation board in late 1919. They then sent a deputation to the Limerick IFU to discuss the idea.²⁸⁶ Five months later, a resolution from the Abbeyfeale IFU branch calling for a conciliation board for the creamery and farm sectors was adopted unanimously by the Co. Limerick Executive.²⁸⁷ On May 14, the Limerick Leader ran an editorial supporting the action of the West

²⁸³ Workers at the Greybridge Creamery refused to handle milk from farmers who refused to pay a bonus to farm labourers (LL, 20 February 1920; IE, 28 February 1920). The refusal of creamery workers to handle milk from farmers employing non-union labour was also reported in the Oola district (LL, 26 April 1920).

²⁸⁴ LL, 12 December 1919; IE, 13 December 1919. The Limerick Dairymen's Association passed a similar motion (LL, 9 January 1920).

²⁸⁵ IE, 13 March 1920.

²⁸⁶ IE, 1 November 1919; LL, 21 November 1919.

²⁸⁷ IE, 10 April 1920; LL, 9 April 1920.

Limerick IFU in taking steps to form such a body.²⁸⁸ It does not appear that the ITGWU showed any interest in this project since no more was heard about it. By April 1920, however, a "Limerick Junction Creamery Conference Board", including ITGWU representatives, was in existence and appears to have arbitrated in some situations.²⁸⁹

Bellicosity, however, was the more common theme. As early as October 1919, the Co Limerick Executive expressed concern about the decrease of milk production in the county, "due to the insecurity of contracted labour", saying that the dairy industry could collapse, leading to the loss of 5,000 jobs.²⁹⁰ The "insecurity of contracted labour" clearly referred to strikes by creamery workers and their refusal to handle milk from farmers in dispute with their employees. One month later, the Executive passed a resolution to confer with the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (DATII), "on the advisability of giving instruction to farmers' sons in the various districts on butter making, cheese making, and the working of agricultural machinery."²⁹¹ This was clearly a proposal to turn the farmers' sons into a professional strike-breaking force. The response of the Department was deemed "most unsatisfactory" but this did not stop the IFU raising this idea on at least one other occasion during 1920.²⁹² The Limerick IFU also suggested that "men engaged in labour disputes be not eligible for employment on the roads." Only slightly less dangerous to the ITGWU's interests was the proposal which was discussed with the sympathetic Manager of the Limerick Labour Exchange in early 1920 to, "secure workers from the congested districts in the West of Ireland," to fill an alleged shortage of labour in Limerick.²⁹³ It is unclear to what extent this scheme was put into practice though in February the prolific Ballyneety branch of

²⁸⁸ A meeting of the West Limerick branches had in fact appointed six members to represent farmers on such a body. Mr. Walshe, the IFU's organiser in the county was instructed to communicate, "with the official representatives of the Labour Union re the nomination of six from their body." (IE, 15 May 1920).

²⁸⁹ LL, 26 April 1920.

²⁹⁰ IE, 18 October 1919. This point of view received official backing in the 1920 report issued by the Department of Agriculture on the causes of the decline of the Irish dairy industry (see IE, 7 August 1920).

²⁹¹ IE, 15 November 1919.

²⁹² IE, 31 January 1920; LL, 26 March 1920.

²⁹³ IE, 10 January & 7 February 1920. A year earlier, the police also reported a low supply of farm labour, allegedly due to the high rate paid to those on the "dole". The other cause was said to be, "the backwardness of tillage operations." (LCI, February 1919)

the ITGWU condemned the IFU for "importing" labourers from Mayo, "when there is plenty surplus labour to be had in Limerick if they only pay them a living wage."²⁹⁴ The Croom ITGWU also denounced the importation of labourers into the district.²⁹⁵

But while in most cases, the IFU's fighting stratagems did not go beyond the level of passing resolutions, some West Limerick farmers, as already mentioned, went as far as forming an armed "Vigilance Committee" in late 1919. A meeting of the county organisation subsequently called on all branches to form such bodies.²⁹⁶ Several months later, Colonel Bryan, chairman of the Wexford IFU, called for the formation a "Farmers Freedom Force", essentially an extension of the Vigilance Committee idea. The Irish Farmer described the proposed FFF as a body, "...capable of meeting force by force, where the action of the existing governments is either undesirable, unavailable, or unexercised". More grandiosely, it was to act as, "...a national bulwark against Labour Socialism and Bolshevism".²⁹⁷ This call came in the immediate wake of the ILPTUC ban on the export of butter, bacon and live pigs which provoked extreme hostility from the IFU, nationally and locally.²⁹⁸

Naturally, the ITGWU bitterly denounced Bryan's mooted "Freedom Force". Even the Limerick Leader which tried to be evenhanded in its treatment of rural labour conflict called it "Brutal and Foolish". Quoting William O'Brien to the effect that, "If the Irish Farmers' Union are determined to have a fight then they can have it," the paper editorialised:

The farmers and rural labourers have their respective organisations to voice and advocate their views and to suggest a scheme which could result only in bringing these classes into

²⁹⁴ LL, 16 February 1920.

²⁹⁵ LL, 11 February 1920.

²⁹⁶ LL, 9 January 1920.

²⁹⁷ IF, 29 May 1920.

²⁹⁸ IF, 24 April 1920 gives the official reply of the IFU's national executive to the ILPTUC ban (see also IF 1, 15 and 22 May 1920). The IFU saw the embargo as a direct assault on farmers' property rights. At a meeting of the Co. Limerick Executive, a West Limerick delegate said that workers should have been immediately dismissed for refusing to handle goods. There was also some dissatisfaction expressed with the national executive for not taking a sufficiently "strong lead" though the decision of the executive not to negotiate with the ILPTUC until the embargo was lifted was greeted with applause (IF, 8 May 1920; LL, 7 May 1920).

frequent bloody conflict and making the relations between them more bitter seems little short of criminal fatuity.²⁹⁹

The only local IFU response to the proposal was from the Hospital branch which considered the "Farmers' Fighting [sic] Force" to be unnecessary, "...as we believe the present National Movement to be strong and disciplined enough to preserve order." They also expressed their confidence in the Dáil Éireann Courts, "now being set up throughout the County," to settle differences between farmers and labourers.³⁰⁰ Shortly afterwards, the IFU's National Executive, after considering the response from a number of its county organisations, decided to drop the FFF idea, saying that, "the present time was not opportune for the establishment of such a force."³⁰¹

But in April, the IFU's "Standing Committee" in Limerick had raised the Vigilance Committee idea in a different context, namely, the increasing number of fires at creameries. It declared that it was necessary to determine who was responsible for the arson but that, in the meantime, a Vigilance Committee was needed, with labour participation, "to guard the people's property."³⁰² The Limerick Leader supported this call, and claimed that at least seven creameries had been burnt down in East Limerick alone. The paper hinted at military involvement.³⁰³ By the end of September, the IFU reported that 20 co-op creameries in Co. Limerick had been destroyed during the previous six months and also suggested official complicity.³⁰⁴ In November, Hamar Greenwood, speaking for the Government in the House of Commons, admitted that two creameries (not in Kerry or Limerick) were burned by police "in an outburst of passion".³⁰⁵ The

²⁹⁹ LL, 24-26 May 1920. An example of the paper's generally positive attitude towards the IFU is an editorial in the 20 May 1921 issue.

³⁰⁰ IF, 12 June 1920. This resolution was unusual for the IFU in that it explicitly supported the republican forces; in general the organisation did its best to avoid all "political" questions (see also IF, 19 June 1920 for a response to the Hospital resolution from an IFU activist in West Cork).

³⁰¹ IF, 3 July 1920.

³⁰² IF, 24 April 1920; LL, 23 April 1920.

³⁰³ LL, 30 April 1920.

³⁰⁴ LL, 1 October 1920. The 20 November Irish Farmer gave a list of 29 Irish creameries wholly or partially destroyed since 1 July, including 13 in Tipperary, 8 in Limerick, 4 in Sligo, 3 in Kerry and 1 in Cork. The Limerick creameries which were "wholly" destroyed included those at Newcastle West, Kildimo, Shanagolden, Kilrenan (auxiliary) and Garryspillane. Bridgetown Co-operative Creamery was burned down in early 1921 (IF, 29 January 1921)

³⁰⁵ IF, 27 November 1920 (for other references to the destruction of Limerick creameries see IF, 18 September, 16 October & 6 November 1920; 14 May 1921).

government also claimed that some creameries destroyed by Crown forces had been used as bases for IRA attacks, a charge refuted by George W Russell ("AE") of the co-operative movement.³⁰⁶ Towards the end of the War of Independence, the disruption of the dairy industry was further exacerbated by the government's policy of closing creameries in the martial law area which included Limerick and Kerry, "in localities where [IRA] outrages had been committed."³⁰⁷

While Colonel Bryan and William O'Brien exchanged threats, ITGWU members employed by Cleeve's in southeast Limerick took the rural labour struggle on to a new plane. After making demands for higher wages and better working conditions which employers responded to in a "half-hearted way", the workers proceeded on 16 May 1920 to "seize and work" the central local creamery in Knocklong and 12 auxiliary creameries spread across a wide area.³⁰⁸ According to the union journal, the decision to occupy the plants was not haphazard, "but was taken after much thinking and hard deliberation. All the circumstances and all the factors were taken into consideration, from the supply of the raw material to the marketing of the final product." Both the red flag and the republican tricolour were flown over the central creamery whose door bore the inscription "Knocklong Soviet Creamery" and, above this, "We make butter, not profits." Sean O'Hagan (Hedley), a socialist who had played a role in the Belfast engineering strike, was made plant manager. The other two members of the trio who masterminded the soviet were Jack Dowling and John McGrath, both ITGWU organisers. The occupation lasted five days and the union claimed that, "97% per cent of the ordinary supplies came in as usual." Besides the wage rates given in Table 4.10, the union also secured the removal of Riordan, the hated plant manager.³⁰⁹ A sad sequel to the occupation was the partial burning of the central creamery in September. The ITGWU accused the British Army of carrying out this attack.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ IE, 5 February 1920.

³⁰⁷ IE, 4 June 1921 (see also IE, 18 & 25 June; 2 July 1921).

³⁰⁸ WOL, 29 May 1920. The twelve auxiliaries were located in Ballynamona, Gormanstown, Kiltely, Elton, Knockcarron, Hospital, Knockaney, Ballingaddy, Kilbreedy, Bilboa, Lisnakilla and Ballylanders. It is worth noting that the Knocklong workers had already displayed a radical consciousness during their strike in 1919 by issuing a strike bulletin (WOL, 14 June 1919).

³⁰⁹ *ibid*; see also Greaves, pp. 269-72.

³¹⁰ WOL, 11 September 1920.

During August, September and October 1920 there were four strikes by farm labourers in East Limerick, but aside from this spate of activity, no rural labour disputes were reported in Limerick between the Knocklong Soviet and the Bruree Soviet which began on 26 August 1921.³¹¹ The workers at Cleeve's mills and bakery in Bruree followed the example of Knocklong by taking over the premises, putting up the red flag and inscribing above the door, the motto, "Bruree Soviet Workers Mills. We make bread not profits." The ITGWU's demands were the reinstatement of two dismissed workers and payment of £70 in wages for the fourteen weeks during which they were unemployed. The union claimed they were selling goods more cheaply than before and to have increased production of bread.³¹² After a week, a settlement was reached, following a conference at Liberty Hall. The details were not reported.³¹³ According to the union, the negotiations occurred after the intervention of Countess Markievicz, the Dail's Minister of Labour, who threatened to send in the IRA to remove the strikers.³¹⁴ In assessing the importance of the Knocklong and Bruree occupations, it must be noted that, according to the union, creamery workers in the Oola area considered a takeover at the end of 1920 when three local creameries shut down.³¹⁵ Furthermore, the Bruree action was immediately preceded by the occupation of a creamery in nearby Charleville, Co. Cork and in December 1921 the ITGWU called on the workers at Rathkeale's co-operative creamery to, "get a Red Flag ready. There is a lovely place on the creamery roof for it."³¹⁶

As workers seized the Bruree mills, the ITGWU was attempting to reorganise farm labourers in the context of recession, increasing unemployment and the mooted abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board.³¹⁷ At a union meeting in Ballyneety which was also addressed by Alderman Walsh of Limerick City, Dowling assessed the new situation facing the labour movement:

³¹¹ For a detailed account of one of these strikes (that at Kilfrush in August), see "Co. Limerick Farm Workers—An Oppressor Supplanted" (WOL, 14 August 1920).

³¹² LL, 31 August 1921.

³¹³ LL, 5 September 1921.

³¹⁴ Revolt of the Bottom Dogs..., p. 13.

³¹⁵ WOL, 30 October 1920.

³¹⁶ LL, 19 August 1921; VoL, 10 December 1921.

³¹⁷ The AWB "ceased to be" on 1 October after the passing of the Agricultural Act Repeal Bill. (see IE, 17 September & 8 October 1921).

...though the war which prevailed for the past five years in our land, and which we hope is now successfully concluded with the removal of the foreign oppressor, yet the native capitalist remains to grind us down, and must be dealt with. All along the years the workers of this country have had two enemies to contend with viz—the foreign foe, and the native tyrant; and whenever the worker raised his head to demand his rightful share of the wealth he produced, both of these combined to crush him.³¹⁸

That Dowling's radical message was clearly welcome to many is reflected in the union's growth over the following months. In October the Voice of Labour carried numerous reports from across the county and particularly from its western half. Great dissatisfaction was reported with Dáil Éireann's Parish Arbitration Courts because, "the workers are not represented on them, and are taking strong exception to some of the decisions of these Courts."³¹⁹ At the end of November, a meeting of ITGWU delegates in Newcastle West heard that ten West Limerick districts had been reorganised since 1 October and that the Union had 500 new members in the area.³²⁰

But while the ITGWU was reorganising, the IFU was also marshalling its forces.³²¹ In the wake of the Truce and given the worsening economic situation, farmers across Leinster and Munster began to rally around the demand for a reduction in wages. Already in April, the Standing Committee of the Limerick IFU had denounced the new AWB minimum rates which had gone up while prices for agricultural produce were declining. They saw the AWB's action as particularly unjustifiable at a time when, "the best organised industrial Labour Unions have to take a smaller wage than they enjoyed during the past year."³²² Clashes were inevitable. In Limerick, attention focused on a strike by 120 labourers at Bulgaden, near Kilmallock, which began in early November after local farmers had refused Dáil Éireann arbitration on the workers' demand for a £5

³¹⁸ LL, 19 August 1921.

³¹⁹ VoL, 29 October & 5 November 1921.

³²⁰ VoL, 10 December 1921.

³²¹ LL, 4 November 1921.

³²² IF, 9 April 1921. The squeeze on farmers' profit margins from low prices for agricultural produce and high wages became a central IFU theme in late 1921 (see IF, 23 July, 6 August & 12 November 1921).

harvest bonus.³²³ According to the union, in 1919 and 1920, they had obtained bonuses of £3 and £4 respectively. The Transport Union's contempt for its opponents is readily discernable:

They had decided to fling down the gauge of battle to the Transport Workers and, with the full backing of their county and National Executive, were determined to wipe the floor in Bulgaden! Alas, poor, foolish farmers! The twopenny halfpenny employers of Bulgaden have somewhat different ideas to day. Not a tint of tainted milk be touched in even one of the dozen dairies which dot the Golden Vein here-about.³²⁴

The IFU's Co. Executive immediately condemned the workers' "outrageous demand" and "the cowardly weapon of stopping the milk at the creameries."³²⁵ The Bulgaden branch deemed the demand to be, "a gross insult, considering the kindness and generosity shown by the farmers of this branch to their workers and the poor in general." Shortly thereafter the Limerick Leader reported that a local creamery had been shut down as a "Sequel to Harvest Bonus Demand". The IFU, meanwhile, refused to talk to Sean Moylan TD and a representative of the Dail's Department of Labour who had gone to the area to try to arbitrate.³²⁶ Clearly, both sides were prepared for an all-out fight.

The Bulgaden strike witnessed the re-emergence of the active sabotage which had characterised the disputes in West Limerick in 1919 and in northeast Limerick in early 1920. This was part of a national pattern which began during a bitter strike in South Wexford.³²⁷ In late November, a farmer's hand separator, bought for butter making during the strike, was broken by intruders.³²⁸ Again in mid-December, at least two farmers' homes were entered and their separators broken. In one such case, according to the IFU, a farmer's

³²³ IF, 19 November 1921.

³²⁴ VoL, 12 November 1921.

³²⁵ LL, 11 November, 1921 (see also IF, 15 October & 26 November 1921)

³²⁶ LL, 16 November 1921; VoL, 12 November 1921. A few weeks after the strike began, the Department of Labour again failed to obtain the IFU's agreement to let it arbitrate. (LL, 14 December 1921). By mid-December, two local creameries had closed (LL, 16 December 1921; IF, 24 December 1921).

³²⁷ IF, 8 October 1921. According to the IFU, attacks on machinery, destruction of produce and intimidation of farmers including, "the dispatch of bogus notices under the assumed guise of other authority," also occurred in Tipperary, Wicklow and Kilkenny (IF, 19 November 1921).

³²⁸ LL, 21 November 1921.

wife was assaulted by a "picket of workers" who then, "left this highly respectable and good natured woman to her fate".³²⁹ The Irish Farmer, wrote a furious editorial denouncing the violence in this and other strikes:

The worst forms of blackguardism are now being practiced by Labour malcontents in the country...Open assaults and attacks on the person have not hitherto been common, but they have recently come well into prominence, and so far has restraint been removed or control lost that even women are subjected to violence and intimidation...When, however, the authors of these acts descend so far as to contaminate the sources from which people draw supplies of water and to mutilate domestic pets and animals, their degradation is pretty complete.³³⁰

A few weeks later, the paper threatened an all-Ireland lockout of ITGWU members, "if the present strike methods are persisted in."³³¹ By mid-January 1922, the Co. Executive of the IFU claimed the total damage to farmers' property to be over £4,000. Now it was the farmers who were clamoring for Dáil Éireann intervention to protect their property.³³² A report two weeks later declared that hay and farm produce valued at between £6-7000 had been destroyed. This figure did not include the destruction of milk separators, "cattle driven or stolen, trees felled across roads and bridges broken."³³³ But by this stage, Commandant O'Hannigan of the IRA's East Limerick Brigade had proclaimed martial law in the Kilmallock district.

Compared to creamery workers and farm labourers, Limerick's road workers were not as prominent in labour unrest during the years 1919-21. The arena of conflict was the meetings of the County Council but, even here, the ITGWU's style clearly differentiated it from the ILLA. In March 1919, Dowling attended a council meeting along with a delegation of road workers. When the meeting was adjourned as a "mark of respect to Mrs [Kathleen] Clarke and her mother," the workers' mood turned ugly:

³²⁹ LL, 14 & 16 December 1921 (see also IF, 24 December 1921).

³³⁰ IF, 26 November 1921.

³³¹ IF, 10 December 1921 (see also IF, 24 December 1921).

³³² LL, 13 January 1922.

³³³ LL, 25 January 1922.

Cries of 'You are nice Sinn Féiners,' 'We will give you the red flag,' and hissing and booing from the occupants of the gallery followed...Mr Dowling—The members of the Council are only humbugging us but we will not stand it (applause and cries of 'To hell with them and the roads')...³³⁴

Dowling then announced that the road workers would go on strike the following Monday but this does not appear to have happened. In November, a large group of workers again attended a council meeting after the Finance Committee rejected a wage claim. But when the meeting fell through due to the lack of a quorum, Dowling led them on a march through Limerick City, with a banner which read, "the labourers of the County Council demand a living wage."³³⁵ A month later, the labourers' wage rate was raised by 4s to 32s per week, while carters received a 2s per day increase, bringing them to 12s per day. Dowling and McGrath declared these increases to be insufficient while the IFU sent a letter to the council, calling on it to give no wage increases to the labourers, "while they were so unreasonable," and urging a return to the "contract system".³³⁶

The new County Council elected in June 1920 did not lead to any significant improvement from the ITGWU's viewpoint. In December, the Voice of Labour, referring to how Labour, "in large part, sank much of its own interests," in the elections declared, "the workers now find themselves scurvily repaid by the Sinn Féin majorities in some of the councils." Limerick's council was singled out for condemnation because of low wages, long hours on Saturday and an increase in the weight carried by carters.³³⁷ By January 1921, unemployment among road workers had become acute and the Bruff branch of the ITGWU strongly condemned ratepayers who, "have overlooked or failed to pay their rates in time," for, "bringing the workers face to face with starvation." The Kiltteely branch passed a similar resolution.³³⁸ The situation had not improved seven months later when a meeting of ITGWU delegates from several districts meeting at Croom complained

³³⁴ LL, 5 March 1919.

³³⁵ LL, 10 November 1919.

³³⁶ LL, 22 December 1919.

³³⁷ LL, 4 December 1920.

³³⁸ LL, 28 January 1921.

that the council owed workers, "arrears of wages accumulating now for the past nine months..."³³⁹

Kerry's economy during 1917-21 largely followed the pattern observed in Limerick. The primary factor was the onset of the international recession which led to the partial collapse of market prices for agricultural produce and a consequent fall in profit margins of farmers and those engaged in food processing. It was also reported in early 1921 that the market for cured mackerel had collapsed in America with serious consequences for the fish curing industry in the Dingle district.³⁴⁰ It has already been noted (see Table 4.2) that the tonnage of goods, general merchandise and minerals carried on the GSWR decreased by 25.7% during 1921 compared to the 1913 level. However, in May, the Tralee Harbour Board reported that the tonnage of shipping "for the year outward and inward" had increased by 77% on the previous year's level.³⁴¹

³³⁹ *Kerry Express* (K.E.), 27 January 1921.

³⁴¹ *Kerry Express* (K.E.), 28 May 1921. It is unclear whether the figure relates to the first half of 1921. The figure of 7,441 tons for 1920 was 7% higher than the figure for 1913 and 1920 was 11% higher than the figure for 1914.

3.3 KERRY, 1919-21

4.3.1 Economic Overview

Kerry's economy during 1919-21 largely followed the pattern observed in Limerick. High wartime prices for agricultural produce continued during 1919-20 which meant the continuation of high profits for farmers. Meanwhile, the port of Tralee and Fenit experienced a significant increase in incoming trade (see Table 4.1). In 1919, the total tonnage of vessels which arrived in the port was 13.3% higher than the year before while in 1920 the figure rose sharply to 109% over the 1918 level. However, the 1920 figure was still 48.3% lower than the 1913 level, reflecting the limited character of postwar economic growth. Furthermore, the total tonnage of vessels departing the port suffered a sharp decrease of 68.2% in 1919 compared to the year before. While the 1920 figure increased by 61% compared to 1919, this still left the tonnage of departing vessels down by 48.7% on the 1918 level. However, 1918 was unusual in that the tonnage of departing vessels exceeded that of incoming vessels whereas in 1913 the tonnage of departing vessels was a mere 6.4% that of arrivals. The corresponding proportions in subsequent years were 57.5% in 1917; 106.6% in 1918; 30.0% in 1919; and 26.1% in 1920. This imbalance towards incoming trade is similar to that noted in Limerick.

From late 1920 the Kerry economy was adversely affected by the same factors at work in Limerick. The primary factor was the onset of the international recession which led to the partial collapse of market prices for agricultural produce thus drastically cutting the profit margins of farmers and those engaged in food processing. It was also reported in early 1921 that the market for cured mackerel had collapsed in America with serious consequences for the fish curing industry in the Dingle district.³⁴⁰ It has already been noted (see Table 4.2) that the tonnage of goods, general merchandise and minerals carried on the GSWR decreased by 24.7% during 1921 compared to the 1913 level. However, in May, the Tralee Harbour Board reported that the tonnage of shipping "for the year outward and inward" had increased by 125% on the previous year's level.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Kerryman (KM), 29 January 1921.

³⁴¹ Kerry People (KP), 28 May 1921. It is unclear whether this figure includes the first months of 1921. The figures of 75,641 tons and 33,645 tons "for the year previously" are significantly higher than the 1919 and 1920 totals of arriving and departing vessels derived from Thom's... (29,682 and 53,164 respectively).

The other factor which exacerbated the economic downturn, especially in Munster, was the increasing intensity of the War of Independence. Of the 29 "wholly or partially destroyed" creameries, listed in the 20 November 1920 issue of the Irish Farmer, three were in Kerry. These included the Lixnaw and Ballydwyer creameries, said to be completely wrecked, and the Abbeydorney creamery which was partially destroyed. In March, complaints were aired in the local press about a military order banning cattle and pig fairs in Tralee.³⁴² By the end of April, the Tralee Employers' Association publicly urged the removal of military restrictions, particularly the closing of the critical Mallow-Tralee rail line. The Kerry People, in summarising the employers' statement, stated, "These crushing restrictions, it is said, are killing three-fourths of the trade of the town, and great unemployment is imminent." The same issue of the paper reported that in retaliation for IRA attacks, the military had destroyed certain "Tralee Residences, Business Places & Newspaper Offices", including that of the Kerryman and Liberator newspapers whose printing press was smashed.³⁴³ But in the last two months of the war, military restrictions on economic activity actually intensified. In May, five Kerry creameries were closed by the authorities. The Tralee & Dingle and Farranfore & Valentia rail lines were also closed, thus isolating the south and west of the county.³⁴⁴ Finally at the beginning of June, in response to IRA "road cutting", the General Office Commanding (GOC), issued a blanket prohibition on fairs and markets in Tralee, Killorglin, Castleisland, Molahiffe and Castlemaine.³⁴⁵ The paralysis gripping the county is captured in the 4 June headline in the local press: "Rails Torn Up—Tralee Cut Off For Two Days—No Papers, No Mails, No County Court Judge."

³⁴² KM, 12 March 1921.

³⁴³ KP, 23 April 1921

³⁴⁴ KP, 21 & 28 May 1921.

³⁴⁵ KP, 4 June 1921.

Table 4.11 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of workers in Tralee (T), Killarney (K) and Listowel (L), 1919-21.³⁴⁶

Sector or occupation	1919	1920	1921
Townwide agreements for unskilled			
general workers (T) ³⁴⁷	40s.0d	52s.0d	55s.0d 348
Building			
carpenters (T)(Builders Assoc & merchants)	70.0		84.0
"country" rate	72.0		
stone mason (UDC) (T)	70.0		
plumbers (UDC) (T)		70.0	
carpenters (UDC) (T)	70.0	77.6	
standard wage for "tradesmen" (K) ³⁴⁹		12.0 p/d	
Transport			
railworkers (general)		51.0 ³⁵⁰	
railworkers (T&D)	47.0		
carters (T)		55.0	
Wood			
saw milling workers (T):		1.2 p/hr	
labourers		1.0 p/hr	
Food			
butter & egg workers (5 firms) (T)		50.0 (max)	
<i>food workers in hotels (T):</i> ³⁵¹			
cooks		£40 p/y	
kitchen, parlour & housemaids		£22 p/y	
pantry boys		£25 p/y	
pantry maids		£20 p/y	
bakers (5 firms) (L)	55.0		
mill hands (Latchford & Sons) (L)	37.0	48.0	
Shop assistants, clerks			
grocers assistants (T)	40.0 ³⁵²		
<i>shop assistants (Co Kerry Merchants Assoc):</i>			
"drapery section"	40.0 ³⁵³		
"hardware section"	20.0 ³⁵⁴		

³⁴⁶ Sources: Kerryman, 1919-21; Kerry People, 1921; Voice of Labour; Watchword of Labour.

³⁴⁷ employers covered include: R. McCowen & Sons; Latchford; J. Donovan; M. Kelliher, Donovan's; Lim Steamship Co.

³⁴⁸ not achieved at all firms.

³⁴⁹ according to the ITGWU.

³⁵⁰ minimum rate in Britain (since 1919) and Ireland as long as cost of living remains at least 110% above pre-war level.

³⁵¹ arbitration award; all rates are for an 80 hour week; rates "are calculated on an indoor basis, 22s.6d weekly being estimated as the value of board and lodging."

³⁵² during 1st & 2nd years after apprenticeship, rising to 60s p/wk after 4th year.

³⁵³ minimum after apprenticeship, rising gradually to £160 p/yr.

³⁵⁴ rising by 5s each year until 70s p/wk is reached.

clerical worker (Tralee Clerk's office)	60.0 ³⁵⁵		
Other/unclear			
boots, waiters & waitresses @ hotels (T) ³⁵⁶		20.0	
storemen, shopmen & porters (K)		43.0	
ex-servicemen (40) @ limestone quarry (L)			48.0

Table 4.12 - Weekly wage rates for Urban District Council (UDC) workers in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel, 1919-21 (not including building workers).³⁵⁷

location	occupation	1919	1920
<i>Tralee:</i>	labourers	40s.0d	54s.0d
	carters	43.0	56.0
	gas stokers		10.0-10.4 p/d
<i>Killarney:</i>	roadmen	40.0-42.0	
	stonebreakers	4.0 p/yd	6.0 p/yd
	unspecified (12)		40.0-42.0
<i>Listowel:</i>	roadmen		48.0 ³⁵⁸
	surfacemen		53.0
	stonebreakers		4.6 p/yd

³⁵⁵ ICWU minimum in Tralee.

³⁵⁶ see note 12.

³⁵⁷ **Source:** *Kerryman*, 1919-21; *Kerry People*, 1921; *Voice of Labour*; *Watchword of Labour*.

³⁵⁸ said to be "general town rate".

How did these developments affect the local working class? As, in Limerick, workers vigorously pressed wage demands during 1919-20 to halt the erosion of their standard of living by spiralling inflation. The wage rates given in Tables 4.11 and 4.12 indicate that in the three main Kerry towns of Tralee, Killarney and Listowel, workers achieved rates in 1919 which were often as high or higher than those of their Limerick counterparts. Thus Tralee carpenters and a stone mason employed by the UDC obtained 70s per week compared to the Limerick City building "trades rate" of 68s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. The ITGWU secured 40s for Tralee's general workers while labourers and carters employed by the Urban District Council (UDC) obtained 40s and 43s respectively. These rates were comparable to wages reported for Limerick City's porters, packers, carters and vanmen (see Table 4.6). The 40-42s rate obtained by roadsmen employed by the Killarney UDC indicate that rates for unskilled labour in Kerry's second largest town were also in this range. Meanwhile in Listowel, the ITGWU obtained 5-10s increases for 27 town workers in January.³⁵⁹

Both Tralee grocers' assistants and drapers' assistants employed by the Co. Kerry Merchants' Association also achieved a 40s minimum for workers who had completed their apprenticeship. In the case of the grocers' assistants, wages rose to 60s after four years of employment, while the drapers' assistants received a 40s minimum after apprenticeship, rising gradually to £160 per year, equivalent to a weekly wage of just over 61s.6d. By contrast, the drapers' assistants employed at Todd's and Cannock's in Limerick City obtained a minimum yearly salary after three years (post-apprenticeship) which was equivalent to a weekly wage of just over 57s.8d per week. The Irish Clerical Workers Union (ICWU), representing workers in the same social bracket as drapers' assistants, were said to be insisting on a minimum wage of 60s in Tralee. This rate was actually secured for the assistant in the Tralee Clerk's office in November. This 200% increase on the 20s earned by the Clerk's assistant in 1914 was well ahead of the official inflation index which stood at 125% on 1 November 1919 (compared to July 1914). However, one group of urban Kerry workers who did not fare as well as their well-organised Limerick City colleagues were the bakers at five Listowel firms who

³⁵⁹ In February, another report said the union obtained an "average increase" of 9s.6d for 36 Listowel workers.

only managed to obtain a 55s wage in July in spite of a hefty 17s.6d increase.

If the available evidence indicates that workers in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel kept pace with workers in Limerick City on the wages front in 1919, the same cannot be said of 1920. In April, plumbers and carpenters employed by the Tralee UDC received increases to 70s and 77s.6d respectively which represented 81.2-89.9% of the 86s.2s trades rate reported in Limerick City at year's end. It is likely, however, that Tralee's skilled building workers achieved higher rates later in the year since, at the end of 1921, the town's carpenters were reported to be earning 84s. In Killarney, the ITGWU claimed in March 1920 that the standard wage for "tradesmen" was 12s per day which would represent a weekly wage of 72s.

Unskilled workers did not have a uniform experience. In June, general workers and carters employed by Tralee's main merchant firms obtained a 6s increase, bringing their wages to 52s and 55s respectively. Also covered in the June agreement were the UDC's labourers and carters who secured an even higher 54s and 56s respectively. These wages were comparable to those obtained by carters employed at O'Callaghan's Tannery in Limerick City and better than the 48-50s earned by porters and vanmen working in some of Limerick's draperies. However, even the top rate earned by the UDC carters was only 84.1% of the 66s.7d rate for Limerick City building labourers. Furthermore, it appears certain that the June rates were not exceeded in Tralee during 1920. Outside of Tralee, only surfacemen employed by the Listowel UDC (reported in September to be receiving 53s) came close to the Tralee rates. The 48s wage paid to Listowel's roadmen was said to be the "general town rate". Though lower than the Tralee norm, this nevertheless represented a 220% increase on the 15s earned by UDC workers at the beginning of 1915 (the official inflation index stood at 161% on 1 September). Meanwhile, the mill hands employed by Latchford's obtained a 5s increase in August to also stand at 48s. In Killarney, the UDC stonebreakers obtained a 2s per yard increase in March but the 40-42s reported for 12 other council employees and the 43s obtained by the town's storemen, shopmen and porters in April seem certain to have been exceeded.

As in the case of Limerick City, the relative lack of data for 1921 makes it difficult to assess how wage rates fared in Kerry's main

towns in the context of decreasing prices and rising unemployment. Tralee carpenters were earning 84s in December, a 154.5% increase on the 33s apparently earned by carpenters at Donovan's in early 1917 and 133.3% above the 36s wage obtained by carpenters and joiners in Killorglin in June 1914. That this was maintained at a time when the inflation index stood at 99%, indicates a substantial increase in real wages. Remarkably, many of the town's "general workers" obtained a 3s increase to 55s in October. If the 48s rate was maintained in Listowel this would indicate that unskilled urban workers in Kerry who were fortunate enough to maintain steady employment during this difficult year at least had the consolation of a temporary advance in real wages. This significant accomplishment was due largely to the ITGWU.

Table 4.13 shows weekly wage rates for several groups of workers outside Tralee, Killarney and Listowel—excluding farm labourers, road workers and creamery workers—during 1919-21. The only groups of skilled workers for which data is available are building workers, coopers and tailors in Dingle who were included in a townwide agreement with employers in July 1919 after a local general strike. The building trades secured a 60s rate which represented a 10s increase. Coopers saw their wages rise by 15s while the town's tailors received an 8s increase to bring their wages up to 48s per week. That Dingle's skilled trades improved on this subsequently is indicated by the 72s rate reported for local carpenters in December 1921, equivalent to the 1920 rate for Killarney tradesmen.

Trade	Location	1919	1920	1921
Public authority				
CDB workers				
Shop assistants & clerks				
Shop assistants				
Junior boys				
Senior boys				
Coopers				
Digger/handclerk				
Capl J V. Street, the Road				

140 mostly in Dingle district
 141 at height of season
 142 "Lady assistants 18 per cent less in 1921"

Table 4.13 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of Kerry workers outside Tralee, Killarney and Listowel, 1919-21 (not including farm labourers, rural road workers or creamery workers).

Sector or occupation	location	1919	1920	1921
Townwide agreements for unskilled workers				
"permanent" workers (merchants)	Dingle & dist	35s.0d	45s.0d	
"casuals" ³⁶⁰	Dingle & dist		9.0 p/d	
"girl workers"	Dingle	5.0 p/d		
ITGWU members	Killorglin	35.0	42.0	
town workers	Kenmare	35.0		
town workers	Castleisland	36.0	44.0	44.0
Building				
carpenters	Dingle & dist	60.0		72.0
masons, plasterers, painters	Dingle & dist	60.0		
builders' labourers	Dingle & dist	35.0		
labourers (making drain) (Commercial Cable Co)	Waterville		7.0 p/d	
men building cable works	Iveragh Peninsula	8.4 p/d		
Clothing				
tailors	Dingle & dist	48.0		
Transport				
railworkers (T&D)	Dingle	47.0		
dockers (corn; coal)	Dingle		1.9; 1.6 p/ton	
dockers (Limerick Steamship Co)	Tralee	9.6 p/d		
port workers	Fenit		14.6 p/d	
crane drivers (2) (Tralee Harbour Board)	Fenit		61.0	
casual carters	Dingle		20.0?	
Wood				
coopers	Dingle & dist	60.0		
Food				
fish curers (60)	Valentia Harbour	60.0	20.0-30.0 p/d ³⁶¹	
Public authority				
CDB workers	Castlemaine dist		30.0	
Shop assistants & clerks				
shop assts (m) ³⁶² : junior assts senior assts charge assts	Killorglin	40.0 55.0 60.0		
Other/unclear				
Capt J F Shea's, the Hotel	Glenbeigh	30.0	35.0	

³⁶⁰ mostly in fishing industry.

³⁶¹ at height of season.

³⁶² "Lady assistants 15 per cent less all round".

Donovan's	Sallowglen, Tarbert	30.0		
storemen (Russell & Sons)	Tarbert & Ballylongford		44.6	

... for general workers in Kerry. In Dingle, it represented a 30% increase on the average weekly wage of 22s compared to the 27% increase obtained by skilled building workers. The differential between skilled and unskilled rates had narrowed though perhaps not as dramatically as in Limerick City. Building labourers were now earning 33.7% of the skilled building rate as opposed to 30.0% previously. The 33s rate was also obtained by some workers in Kenmare and ITGWU members in Killorglin. However, even before the July settlement, workers in Castletown were reported to be earning 36s after an award by the newly formed Conciliation Board.

Of course, these rates were not obtained by all unskilled workers in Kerry's small towns and villages as can be seen by the 30s wage reported for workers at J. P. Shea's in Glenties and at Donovan's in Tarbert. On the other hand, male shop assistants in Killorglin obtained 40-60s with female assistants receiving "15 per cent less all round", rates comparable to those for grocers and drapers' assistants in the larger towns. Fish curers in Valentia Harbour also obtained 40s but this work was seasonal. Besides Killorglin shop assistants, the only other rate reported for female workers was the 3s per day for "girl workers" in the Dingle settlement. This would represent a 30s wage for a six day week, 14.3% less than the rate for male unskilled workers, but a less drastic differential than that which appeared to exist between male and female unskilled workers in Limerick City in 1920.

In July 1920, Fisher Dockers employed by the Limerick Steamship Company obtained a 1s.6d per day increase to bring them to 9s.6d per day. While this represented a 25.7% increase it was still only 79.2% of the 12s per day rate for "beasts" reported in Limerick City during the same month. By July 1920, Port's port workers had achieved a 14s.6d per day rate, which was 35.1-35.4% of the 16.17s reported in Limerick the previous month. These July rates cannot of course be directly translated into weekly wages given the lack of constant employment but the 51s per week rate obtained by two Port cases awarded in October 1920 probably represented an upper boundary for the dock labourers' weekly wage. The piece rates of

The unskilled "permanent" workers employed by Dingle's merchants and the town's building labourers also obtained a 10s increase in the July settlement. The new 35s wage was 87.5% of the rate for general workers in Tralee. In Dingle, it represented a 40% increase on the average unskilled wage of 25s, compared to the 20% increase obtained by skilled building workers. The differential between skilled and unskilled rates thus narrowed though perhaps not as dramatically as in Limerick City. Building labourers were now earning 58.3% of the skilled building rate as opposed to 50.0% previously. The 35s rate was also obtained by town workers in Kenmare and ITGWU members in Killorglin. However, even before the July settlement, workers in Castleisland were reported to be earning 36s after an award by the town's newly formed Conciliation Board.

Of course, these rates were not obtained by all unskilled workers in Kerry's small towns and villages as can be seen by the 30s wage reported for workers at J. F. Shea's in Glenbeigh and at Donovan's in Tarbert. On the other hand, male shop assistants in Killorglin obtained 40-60s with female assistants receiving "15 per cent less all round", rates comparable to those for grocers and drapers' assistants in the larger towns. Fish curers in Valentia Harbour also obtained 60s but this work was seasonal. Besides Killorglin shop assistants, the only other rate reported for female workers was the 5s per day for "girl workers" in the Dingle settlement. This would represent a 30s wage for a six day week, 14.3% less than the rate for male unskilled workers, but a less drastic differential than that which appeared to exist between male and female unskilled workers in Limerick City in 1920.

In July 1919, Tralee dockers employed by the Limerick Steamship Company obtained a 2s.6d per day increase to bring them to 9s.6d per day. While this represented a 35.7% increase it was still only 79.2% of the 12s per day rate for "casuals" reported in Limerick City during the same month. By July 1920, Fenit's port workers had achieved a 14s.6d per day rate, which was 85.3-90.6% of the 16-17s reported in Limerick the previous month. These daily rates cannot of course be directly translated into weekly wages given the lack of constant employment but the 61s per week rate obtained by two Fenit crane drivers in October 1920 probably represents an upper boundary for the dock labourers' weekly wage. The piece rates of

1s.6d per ton of coal and 1s.9d per ton of corn obtained by Dingle's dockers is even more difficult to assess.

Though Tralee and Fenit dockers may have experienced a slight relative improvement in their rates compared to Limerick during 1920, general labourers in Dingle, Killorglin and Castleisland (obtaining 45s, 42s and 44s respectively) experienced a certain erosion compared to Tralee's general workers. The unskilled rates in these three towns in 1919 were 87.5-90.0% of the top Tralee rate while in 1920 the proportion declined to 80.8-86.5%. But if we accept 48s as the top rate obtained by labourers in Listowel during 1920, the Dingle, Kenmare and Castleisland wages score a more respectable 87.5-93.8%. Meanwhile the workers at J. F. Shea's in Glenbeigh obtained a 5s increase in April to bring their wages to 35s while storemen at Russell & Sons in Tarbert and Ballylongford were reported to be earning 44s.6d per week in November. However, labourers employed by the Congested Districts Board in the Castlemaine district were still earning only 30s in August. That the top rate obtained by workers in some of Kerry's smaller towns may have been maintained in 1921 is indicated by Castleisland's town workers who were still earning 44s in November and by the aforementioned carpenters in Dingle.

4.3.2 Industrial Relations

During 1914-8, the mean yearly number of strikes and lockouts in Kerry was 7.8, just under the 9.4 reported in Limerick. As in Limerick, 1919-21 saw a sharp increase in disputes in Kerry with 54 strikes and lockouts reported. This represented a yearly mean of 18 disputes, a 130.8% increase on the figure for 1914-8. However, this was below the 148.0% increase in the yearly mean in Munster (based on Ministry of Labour records only) and well below the 201.1% increase in Limerick (to 28.3 disputes per year). Nevertheless the Kerry increase was still significantly higher than the 72.3% increase in the national yearly mean tabulated from official data only. The smaller increase in Kerry compared to Limerick was due particularly to the steep fall in reported disputes after November 1920. During 1919, 24 strikes were reported and in 1920 this increased to 26 strikes and one lockout, which was marginally higher than the 26 work stoppages reported in Limerick that year. But while in Limerick, strike activity remained high in 1921 with a total of 20 disputes reported, there were only three strikes in Kerry, two of which were part of national actions.

Table 4.14 - Analysis of strikes and lockouts in Kerry, 1919-21.³⁶³

	1919	1920	1921	Total
strikes/lockouts/worker occupations per year	24/0 ³⁶⁴	26/1	3/0	53/1
location of disputes				
local disputes centred in Tralee	8	13	0	21
local disputes centred in Tralee, Killarney, Listowel/outside the main towns	12/10	16/7 ³⁶⁵	0/1	28/18
part of national action	2	3	2	7
cause(s) of disputes³⁶⁶				
over wages only/against wage cuts	12/1	14	0/2	26/3
at least partly over wages	15	16	2	33
hours	2	1	0	3
political aims	2	4	0	6
reinstatement of dismissed workers	0	2	0	2
sympathetic action	0	1	1	2
other	0	2	0	2
unclear	7	3	0	10
results of disputes³⁶⁷				
workers obtain full demand	1	7	0	8
demand entirely refused (or employer obtains his/her full demand)	0	0	2	2
compromise	9	8	0	17
unclear	12	9	1	22
disputes by industrial sector				
building	4	3	0	7
metals	1	0	0	2
textiles	0	1	0	1
clothing	2	1	0	3
transport	2	4	3	9
food:	4	3	0	7
creamery workers	1	1	0	2
farm labourers	2	1	0	3
public authorities	1	2	0	3
power workers	1	1	0	2
shop assistants, clerks	3	3	0	6
paper/printing	0	1	0	1
other/unclear	4	7	0	11

³⁶³ Sources: Kerryman 1919-21, Kerry People, 1921; PRO LAB 34/19 and 37-39; Voice of Labour, 1919 and 1921; Watchword of Labour, 1919-20 (for the full list of disputes, see Appendix 1).

³⁶⁴ However, according to the police, one strike (that at O'Brien Corkery's in Kenmare) became a lockout.

³⁶⁵ This breakdown does not include a strike which was centred in Tralee and Dingle.

³⁶⁶ Except for wages, all figures refer to the total number of disputes in which a particular cause was cited regardless of whether it was the only cause.

³⁶⁷ not including most political strikes, where the question of a "result" does not arise.

Table 4.14 analyses Kerry disputes during 1919-21, reported from all sources, in terms of location, cause, result and sector of the workforce involved. Compared to 1914-8, strikes which were part of national actions increased from 2 to 7, most of these being political actions. This reflected the increasing pull of national issues in the affairs of the local labour movement. The proportion of local disputes centred in the county's three main towns was somewhat less than in the previous period, 60.9% compared to 71.9% during 1914-8.³⁶⁸ However, the proportion of local disputes centred in Tralee declined from 56.3% to 45.7%. Despite this relative decline, Tralee still remained the main centre of labour activity in the county.

Kerry workers appear to have used the strike weapon just as effectively as their Limerick counterparts during 1919-21. The proportion of Kerry disputes with a known result (27) which ended in the granting of the workers entire demand(s) was only slightly less (29.6% compared to 32.5% in Limerick); compromises were a bit higher (63.0% as against 55.8%); while complete defeats were even rarer (7.4%; 11.6%). Compared to 1914-8 when the proportions of successes, defeats and compromises in Kerry were 29.2/33.3/37.5, it is clear that local workers could confidently expect to gain at least part of their demands through work stoppages.

Wage demands remained the central cause of work stoppages in Kerry. Of those disputes in which a cause or causes was reported, the proportion in which wages was the only factor cited increased from 58.3% during 1914-8 to 65.9% during 1919-21. However, the proportion of cases in which wages was at least one of the causes cited declined slightly from 77.8% to 75.0%. This represents a striking contrast to the situation in Limerick, discussed earlier, in which the proportion of disputes over wages alone declined to 45.6% in 1919-21 (from 73.8% during 1914-8). This indicates that the strike movement in Kerry did not tend to take up as wide a range of issues as in Limerick and, while just as "successful" in obtaining demands could be described as more "primitive" in its objectives. On the other hand, the second most frequently cited cause of disputes in Kerry, as in Limerick, was political issues.

³⁶⁸ It must be noted, however, that during 1914-8, 5 strikes (representing 13.5% of all local disputes) occurred on the Tralee & Dingle (T&D) railway and could not therefore be said to be centred in either the main towns or outside of them. In 1919-21 only one strike, again on the T&D (representing only 2.1% of local disputes) fell into this intermediate category.

Kerry was closer to the national pattern than Limerick in the spread of strike activity to "new" industrial sectors and away from "old", traditionally more strike-prone, sectors. The proportion of Kerry disputes in the "old" sectors of building, metals, clothing and transport declined sharply from 64.1% during 1914-8 to 38.9% during 1919-21 while the proportion of disputes among food workers (including creamery workers), power workers, shop assistants and clerks increased from 12.8% to 27.8%. However, the proportion of disputes involving farm labourers actually declined from 7.7% to 5.6%. By comparison the proportion of Limerick disputes involving farm labourers during 1919-21 was 16.5%. The reasons for this particular contrast between the two counties will be discussed later.

Several other aspects of industrial relations in Kerry during 1919-21 can be illustrated by reference to specific disputes. One notable feature—already alluded to in the discussion of wage data—was the "townwide" demands made by unskilled workers affiliated to the ITGWU. Of course, in Tralee, the carters and general workers employed by the "merchant princes" had been solidly organised and successfully obtaining "townwide" increases since 1914 without recourse to strike action.³⁶⁹ However, this type of "collective bargaining" may have also suited Tralee's employers since they would have known that once a rate was agreed, there was little likelihood of strike action for another year.

Peace was maintained until January 1919, when carters employed at McCowen's, Latchford's, Kelliher's and Donovan's—the four main firms—as well as vanmen employed by the bakeries, went on strike in pursuit of a demand for a 6s increase. The author of "Tralee Topics" in the Liberator, sister paper of the Kerryman, reported that some employers seemed determined, "to carry the issue this time to a finish; one of them...opinining that this is as good a time as any other for smashing up the workers' organisation." The paper then pointedly asked:

But what if the organisation refuses to smash?
What's going to happen then?...It may be
soothing to a disturbed mind to talk about
Bolsheviks, and to fret and fume and threaten
war to the knife. But the question is, are these
sound tactics? The men, on the other hand,

³⁶⁹ Uniform increases for workers employed by the merchants appear to have been obtained during all years from 1914-8, except for 1917 (see Appendix 1).

may refer to profiteering and the swollen fortunes which our local traders have amassed out of the war, and they may incline to the belief that they are entitled to a share of such wealth.

The vista of a prolonged strike and its attendant bitterness was clearly unsettling to the mouthpiece of local "advanced" nationalism. After referring to labour unrest internationally, the author urged the two sides to accept arbitration.³⁷⁰ However, the following issue of the Liberator had a different tone, alleging that the merchants were refusing to sell coal to the poor. Any attempt to "visit the carters' strike on the most helpless section of the community," would backfire, the paper declared angrily, for, "instead of arousing the indignation of the general mass of the people against the strikers, [the employers] would only create the bitterest resentment against themselves."³⁷¹

Meanwhile, the town was on the verge of a general strike as non-striking workers at the four merchant firms refused to handle goods "for carting by country cars," leading to large scale dismissals. Demonstrations were being held and instances of violence against "country carters" were reported.³⁷² However, the strike was over within a week, with both sides agreeing to arbitration.³⁷³ This led to an increase of 3s for the carters and vanmen.

At the end of February, it was Killarney's turn to experience a townwide strike by workers demanding 40s for a 48 hour week.³⁷⁴ According to the RIC's County Inspector, at the start of the strike, "there was trouble as the strikers tried to interfere with shopkeepers...but the police promptly intervened and restored order."³⁷⁵ The Voice of Labour reported that organiser Dempsey of the ITGWU, "found the Duke of Lancs-Stout Yeomanry carting goods for the Right Hon. the Earl of Kenmare [but] After a sharp talk, the Captain pledged his word that the scabbing would cease." While the overall outcome was not reported, the fact that the UDC roadmen obtained 40-42s suggests that the strike was a definite success for the union.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ Liberator, 11 January 1919.

³⁷¹ Liberator, 14 January 1919.

³⁷² *ibid.*

³⁷³ KM, 18 January 1919; VoL, 25 January 1919.

³⁷⁴ VoL, 1 March 1919.

³⁷⁵ KCI, February 1919.

³⁷⁶ VoL, 8 March 1919. See also report in VoL, 1 May 1919, on the general progress made by the labour movement in the town.

As the year progressed, the phenomenon of "townwide" demands spread outside Kerry's main towns into smaller centres. In June, as mentioned earlier, the newly established Conciliation Board in Castleisland gave a general "award" of 36s to the town's unskilled workers.³⁷⁷ During the same month, a report in the Kerryman indicated that labour unrest had spread even to the remote fishing village of Valentia:

There were talks of "ultimatums" having been delivered, and the grocery, drapery and bakery trades are mentioned in confidential reports we have received.³⁷⁸

Another report in the same issue said that a strike by employees of the local fish merchants was underway. But the most dramatic conflict over a townwide demand occurred in July 1919 in Dingle. The ITGWU which claimed 300 members in the town, "and now embraces all trades" demanded 36s per week and an eight hour day. They also sought 8s per day for casual workers, a demand particularly resisted by the fish merchants who employed the largest group of casuals.³⁷⁹ According to the Ministry of Labour, 200 workers then stopped work, the largest number of workers in any officially recorded dispute in the county that year.

During the six days of what was effectively a local general strike, Dingle seemed to assume a carnival-like atmosphere:

Two bands headed a march of the workers through the town on Tuesday night. Banners inscribed with various labour mottoes were carried in the procession. A public meeting was held in the Mall and was addressed by the labour organiser, Mr. M. Neligan.

It was, however, also reported that on Wednesday, a market day in the town, "vendors of butter and other produce were spoken to by the workers." What these conversations entailed is unclear but all was said to have passed off peacefully.³⁸⁰ The outcome of the strike, discussed earlier, was a marked success for the ITGWU which obtained nearly all its demands.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ VoL, 7 June 1919.

³⁷⁸ KM, 14 June 1919.

³⁷⁹ KM, 26 July 1919.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*

³⁸¹ KM, 2 & 9 August 1919.

In October 1919, the Kenmare ITGWU refused local employers' offer of 30s per week, declaring they were not ready to accept less than 36s.³⁸² Several IDAA members employed in O'Brien Corkery's local firm were already on strike. The ITGWU held a public meeting at which Maurice Neligan, the union's aforementioned organiser, addressed the crowd for forty minutes and ended with a poem by Connolly. He was followed by T. Cronin who declared that, "he was proud to be with them under the banner which Connolly and Larkin stood for." He went on to sharply criticise local nationalists: ...who spouted freedom from the Square in days gone by. There would be no freedom while slavery exists. We have heard leading nationalists say that the workers of the town could live comfortably on the present wage. Your presence here tonight has given them their answer.³⁸³

The politicisation of disputes, even over narrow economic issues, observed in Limerick, had thus reached into some of Kerry's smallest towns by late 1919.³⁸⁴

Militant rhetoric undoubtedly increased the ITGWU's appeal among workers facing a seemingly endless reduction in the value of money. In the short term, rhetorical ferocity may have also increased the union's effectiveness in "persuading" employers to concede wage increases. The Kenmare workers obtained 35s—nearly their full demand—apparently without a strike. The threat of a stoppage was also sufficient in Killorglin where the the ITGWU obtained a 7s increase for "town workers" in February 1920 and in Dingle where labourers obtained a 9s increase in May.³⁸⁵

Meanwhile, ITGWU members in the county's larger towns continued to press their demands. In February, the Killarney branch sought a 50s wage for carters and stone porters and 60s for harness makers.³⁸⁶ This demand met with stiff resistance from the

³⁸² KM, 18 October 1919.

³⁸³ KM, 18 October 1919.

³⁸⁴ Labour unrest continued in Kenmare until early 1920, as the strike at O'Brien Corkery's became a lockout. The owner sold his drapery house but, "transferred that part of his business to the hardware house, in which he has secured a few 'blacklegs'". One of these was apparently the IDAA's former branch treasurer. Picketing continued and reportedly led to "free fights" in the town. The dispute was not settled until the end of April (KM, 24 January & 1 May 1920; see also KCI, December 1919; February 1920).

³⁸⁵ KM, 21 February & 29 May 1920.

³⁸⁶ WOL, 14 February 1920.

employers. The Watchword of Labour warned them to "spring something on their 40s offer or our chaps are just going to follow the song and 'fold their wings and rest in that Eden of the West.'"³⁸⁷ But if the 43s wage negotiated a month later for local storemen, shopmen and porters is indicative, the strike threat proved less effective in Killarney than in Kenmare, Killorglin and Dingle.³⁸⁸ However, in a report in the union's journal, Killarney, along with Ballaghaderreen and Athenry, was listed as a successful example of the "Class War Tactic" of making wage demands "en bloc, instead of on individual employers." This was described as particularly effective in provincial towns:

As in the case of county movements for farm workers...or of national movements for such sections as flour, grist or saw mill workers, action along an entire front guarantees the necessary weight and solidarity behind demands, minimises the risks of gaps being breached by the opposition forces and immeasurably strengthens the probability of carrying the entire position.³⁸⁹

The Tralee ITGWU which had pioneered this strategy in Kerry was not remiss in 1920. In February, the town's main employers averted a strike by giving in to a 6s demand, "...after a plaintive wail which failed to bring a tear to the workers' eyes".³⁹⁰ The Harbour Board then conceded the 6s as well, followed by the UDC which raised labourers wages from 40s to 48s per week and drivers to 50s.³⁹¹ By May, however, the Transport Union was demanding a 20s increase on wages for the town's workers and 3s per day increase for casual labourers.³⁹² A similar claim was also placed on the UDC, the union declaring that, "the men find it impossible to live on their present rate of pay."³⁹³

This came in the wake of a rather curious strike by the UDC "scavenging staff" who demanded the reinstatement of Denis McEnery as Overseer and Timekeeper. The dispute had its origins several

387 WOL, 28 February 1920.

388 WOL, 3 April 1920.

389 WOL, 10 April 1920.

390 WOL, 21 February 1920.

391 KM, 21 February & 13 March 1920.

392 KM, 22 May 1920

393 Tralee UDC minutes, 3 June 1920.

months before when McEnery was replaced by Daniel Finn, a republican who allegedly lost the post in 1916, "owing to his connection with the Volunteers and Sinn Fein". Finn's reappointment by the newly elected Sinn Féin-Labour council followed a campaign, including resolutions from the Tralee Trades and Labour Council (TTLC) and the Tralee RDC.³⁹⁴ However, at the November 1919 UDC meeting where these resolutions were first submitted, a petition was also received, "signed by a large number of the Workmen employed in the Surveyor's Department...protesting against the re-instatement of Mr. Finn."³⁹⁵ The reasons for the workers' dislike of Finn are unclear.

But when the Tralee gas workers came out in sympathy with the UDC employees' demand for the reinstatement of McEnery, the Kerryman was perplexed, commenting that, "since the majority of the members of the new Council are suspected of possessing predilections in favor of labor, the situation is an amazing one."³⁹⁶ The UDC workers returned to work on 28 May after a week on strike. It was agreed that Neligan should supervise work until the issue of Finn versus McEnery was settled by arbitration.³⁹⁷ However, a demand by the workers that they be paid for the time they were on strike led to furious recriminations at a subsequent UDC meeting. Councillor Dennehy objected on principle stating, "so long as you pay these men any time they take it into their heads to go out on strike, it is only a holiday for them. They go out for hooliganism." Councillor Moynihan echoed this sentiment, declaring in exasperation, "suppose the Council go out and let these fellows and their Soviets run the town." Councillor Jeremiah Murphy—the secretary of the Tralee ITGWU—replied by warning their opponents that labour, "have the key to the town." Naturally this did not calm the Transport Union's detractors and even the normally sympathetic Kerryman caustically declared that if Murphy "suffered from the illusion that the Labour Party can ride roughshod over the people, let him forget the illusion." The paper also worried about the beginning of a rift between Sinn Féin and Labour.³⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the ITGWU concluded its negotiations with the town's employers by settling for a 6s increase and a 1s per

³⁹⁴ Tralee UDC minutes, 6 February 1920; 5 March 1920.

³⁹⁵ Tralee UDC minutes, 7 November & 5 December 1919;

³⁹⁶ KM, 29 May 1920.

³⁹⁷ McEnery was apparently reinstated since the Ministry of Labour gives the outcome as "successful" for the workers.

³⁹⁸ KM, 12 June 1920. The 3 June UDC minutes state that the proposal to pay the workers for the time they were on strike was defeated by a 6 to 4 vote.

day increase for casual labour.³⁹⁹ A few weeks later, the Watchword of Labour reported that the Tralee branch was the first "town" branch in Ireland, "to seek a week's holiday for general workers." Negotiations on this issue were said to be underway.⁴⁰⁰

Unlike Limerick City where three of the disputes recorded by the Ministry of Labour during 1919-21 resulted in over 10,000 workdays lost and another eleven resulted in over 1,000 workdays lost, the only Kerry strike in this period which led to over 10,000 days lost was that waged by North Kerry farm labourers in 1920. The second longest strike measured in days lost (3,995) was the 1920 action by the county's road workers. These two disputes also involved the largest number of workers. The largest urban strike in Kerry—and the third largest overall—measured by the number of strikers (200) was the July 1919 general strike in Dingle which led to the loss of 1,200 workdays. Besides this, only two other officially recorded disputes in Kerry led to the loss of over 1,000 workdays. One of these was the strike by Tralee carters and vanmen at the beginning of 1919. The other was that waged by 65 tailors employed at nine Tralee firms which began in July 1919, lasted just over a month and led to the loss of 1,820 workdays.

The tailors' strike is worth mentioning for two reasons. First of all, it is an example of a dispute involving skilled workers, whose participation in local industrial unrest can easily be missed in the context of the more visible actions involving unskilled workers. Other groups of skilled workers in Kerry who went on strike during this period included tailors in Killorglin; plumbers, carpenters, boot and shoe makers, and printing workers in Tralee; bakers in Listowel; and motor drivers and mechanics in Tralee and Dingle. It is also worth noting that Dingle's building workers participated in the July 1919 general strike and won significant gains in the settlement which were referred to earlier.

The strike by Tralee's tailors also demonstrates that Kerry's skilled workers were willing to use the militant tactics which had become associated with the actions of unskilled workers. In late August 1919, with the strike coming to an end, the Kerryman reported that four strikers had been prosecuted for "intimidation"

³⁹⁹ Tralee UDC minutes, 10 June 1920.

⁴⁰⁰ WoL, 31 July 1920.

directed against William Lynn, a master tailor.⁴⁰¹ The workers' militancy led to a wage increase, though not as large as the one they had demanded. The settlement also addressed other matters including the ratio of apprentices to "qualified" men in the trade which was fixed at 1 to 5.

So-called "white collar" workers were also pressing their demands during 1919-21. Reference has been made to the strike by solicitors' clerks in Limerick City during October-December 1919 and the threatened national strike by bank clerks at the end of the same year. Solicitors' clerks in Tralee also stopped work in July 1919 over unspecified demands. A few weeks before, it was reported in the local press that postal workers were demanding a shorter workweek:

The strong movement against existing conditions of night work which is disturbing the postal workers...has been developing over a long period, but the return of men from the army has given it increased impetus...the modification of the night work system is chiefly desired by the sorters, who are organised in the Fawcett Association.⁴⁰²

In May 1920, secondary school teachers stopped work as part of a national action and, in August, the clerical staff at Slattery's in Tralee also went on strike briefly. However, the group of white collar workers who received the most attention in the local press during this period were the national school teachers organised in the INTO.

In October 1919, the Kerryman carried a lengthy report of a special meeting of the Co. Kerry INTO which protested against the British government's delay in implementing the "Killanin recommendations".⁴⁰³ But the following May, a "largely attended" meeting of Kerry teachers in Tralee opposed the "secularizing and denationalizing" aims of the Macpherson Bill. The INTO Executive, on the other hand, apparently supported the bill because of the significant salary increases it contained. In line with the Catholic clergy, the Kerryman supported the local teachers' stand declaring:

⁴⁰¹ KM, 23 August 1919. The paper also made several disparaging references to Lynn getting work done by Jews in Whitechapel (London). For the sequel to the charges of intimidation, see KM, 11 October 1919.

⁴⁰² KM, 21 June 1919. The article refers to three postal unions, but it is unclear whether this includes the Fawcett Association or even whether this organisation was present in Tralee.

⁴⁰³ KM, 4 October 1919.

Let it be well understood that the teachers who are opposing Macpherson's proselytizing stunt are making tremendous sacrifices from a money point of view...We sincerely trust there will be no necessity for any break up in the splendid organisation which the teachers have established. Officials and Executives may go wrong and have been known to go wrong before this.⁴⁰⁴

A subsequent report of an INTO meeting in Killarney indicated that while teachers had obtained significant salary increases through arbitration, the union faced difficulties, at least locally, because some members had seceded.⁴⁰⁵

As noted earlier, 1921 saw the lowest number of reported disputes in Kerry during the entire 1914-21 period. All three of the strikes that year involved railworkers and two were part of the national actions already discussed. As in Limerick, railworkers in Kerry vigorously resisted the two 6s cuts imposed on them in September and October. In December a large protest meeting sponsored by the NUR, ASLEF and the RCA was held against the "Carrigan Award" in Tralee. A resolution was passed describing the award as "a most humiliating insult to Irish Labour generally and to railwaymen particularly."⁴⁰⁶ A week later, the Tralee branch of the Union of Post Office Workers held a special meeting to oppose the abolition of the Civil Service bonus and, "any attempt to destroy the National Whitley Council Agreement." The Killorglin branch took a similar stand.⁴⁰⁷

Besides work stoppages, another significant aspect of industrial relations was the use of arbitration and conciliation. As mentioned already, a Conciliation Board existed at least temporarily in Castleisland in 1919. A year later, the Kenmare ITGWU demanded representation on a local committee set up "to settle disputes" which included two farmers and one merchant.⁴⁰⁸ Arbitration was used to resolve the January 1919 strike by carters and vanmen in Tralee.

⁴⁰⁴ KM, 8 May 1920. Ironically, the national strike by secondary school teachers for higher wages began the following week (KM, 15 May 1920). For the position of the Catholic hierarchy on the Education Bill see KM, 20 Mar 1920.

⁴⁰⁵ KM, 16 October 1920.

⁴⁰⁶ KP, 10 December 1921.

⁴⁰⁷ KP, 17 December 1921.

⁴⁰⁸ KM, 3 July 1920.

Interestingly, the workers insisted on "private arbitration" rather than Ministry of Labour intervention which would have supposedly prevented, "any further demands being made for four months."⁴⁰⁹ The two arbitrators agreed on were Arthur Carleton and Patrick Coates, the ITGWU organiser on the scene. However, a strike by grist mill workers in the town in May appears to have been settled by a Ministry of Labour arbitrator. A strike by drapers' assistants in Killarney a year later was settled by Dáil Éireann's Department of Labour.⁴¹⁰ In late 1921 the Department also adjudicated the Tralee ITGWU's demand for a 10s increase; 3s was awarded.⁴¹¹ Support for arbitration and conciliation boards came both from the Kerryman as well as Bishop O'Sullivan who urged the formation of such boards, as well as the establishment of co-operative societies and profit sharing, in a February 1920 Lenten pastoral.⁴¹² In four reported cases, clerical intervention played a role in resolving disputes including those at O'Brien Corkery's in Kenmare and the tailors strike in Tralee.⁴¹³

But despite these important examples of the use of arbitration and conciliation in Kerry, there was no analogue to the vigorous campaign waged by the clergy and the local press in Limerick City to set up a Conciliation Board. More generally, the urban strike movement in Kerry during 1919-21 did not develop the pitch of intensity witnessed in the city particularly during the 1919-20 dock strike. Nor did the Kerry labour movement show any tendency to use the ultimate strike tactic, pioneered in Limerick: the workplace occupation. Nevertheless, the pursuit of townwide demands for unskilled workers, seen even in some of Kerry's smallest towns, was not matched in Newcastle West, Rathkeale or Kilmallock and was probably impossible on principle in Limerick City.

4.3.3 Trade Union Organisation

As in Limerick, several types of evidence must be weighed in trying to assess the extent of trade union organisation in Kerry during 1919-21. Dispute data is one very important source of information.

⁴⁰⁹ Liberator, 14 January 1919.

⁴¹⁰ KM, 16 October 1920.

⁴¹¹ KP, 10 December 1921; Tralee UDC minutes, 3 November 1921

⁴¹² KM, 28 February 1920.

⁴¹³ KM, 30 August 1919; 1 May 1920. The other disputes in which clerical involvement was reported were the strike by Castleisland farm labourers in August 1919 and the Tralee carpenters strike during September-October 1919 (KM 9 August & 18 October 1919).

Of the 21 disputes in which a union or other labour body was specified, 10 involved the ITGWU. Two strikes were called by the ILPTUC and one by the Tralee Workers' Council (TWC). The other eight disputes involved six unions (the NUR and IADMU were both involved in two strikes). Even if one takes into account that the union(s) involved was specified more frequently in Limerick (62.4% of the time) than in Kerry (38.9%) and that the total number of disputes was 57.4% higher in Limerick, the 21 unions and labour bodies cited in Limerick still reflect a much more heterogeneous movement, particularly in the city. However, the fact that the ITGWU was involved in 58.5% of the disputes where the organisation was specified in Limerick and 47.6% in Kerry, reflects the Transport Union's predominance in the labour movement of both counties during this period.

These statements are confirmed by data from other sources. Only 11 unions and trades councils were reported in the local press to have held meetings in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel during 1919-21, as opposed to the 39 organisations reported to have held meetings in Limerick City. In Tralee, these included the TTLC, renamed the Tralee Workers' Council in 1920, and local branches of the ITGWU, INTO (2 branches), IADMU, Grocers Assistants' Union, Irish Tailors and Tailoresses Union, NUR, ASCJ, and the Union of Post Office Workers. In Killarney, besides the Killarney Trades and Labour Council (KTLC, renamed the Killarney Workers' Council (KWC)), meetings of local branches of the Asylum Workers Union and the INTO were reported while in Listowel, only meetings of the ITGWU and the INTO were cited.

These were not of course the only unions active in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel during this period. The IDAA, for example, was present in all three localities. Other reports indicate the presence in Tralee of ASLEF, RCA, the National Amalgamated Union of Bakers, ASTI, ICWU, the Typographical Association, and the "Tralee Plumbers & Gas Fitters & Electrical Fitters Society."⁴¹⁴ But even the total of 16 organisations (not including the TTLC/TWC) reported in Tralee is far short of the 56 who were affiliated or sought affiliation to LUTLC during 1919-21. While no list of the affiliates of the Tralee Trades Council has survived, the report of the ILPTUC's 1919 meeting, listed it as having 2,000 members.

⁴¹⁴ Presumably, other societies of skilled building workers also continued to operate in the town.

In Killarney, a meeting of the Workers' Council in mid-1920 was attended by representatives of the ITGWU, NUR, IDAA, Asylum Workers Union and carpenters and bakers societies.⁴¹⁵ In December 1919, another report indicated the existence of a Killarney Building Trades Federation. Besides this, a branch of the Post Office Workers was said to exist in the town at the end of 1921. This makes a total of nine reported organisations (not including the KTLC/KWC) present during 1919-21. Listowel, on the other hand, never seems to have had a stable trades council and besides the ITGWU, INTO and IDAA branches, the town's bakers were the only other group of local workers with a visible organisation during this period.⁴¹⁶

In smaller towns and villages, one is struck by the overwhelming predominance of the ITGWU. Of 66 labour meetings reported in the local press outside the county's three main towns, 44 or 66.7% were organised by the Transport Union. This stemmed mainly from the union's role in organising farm labourers which will be discussed later. Six other unions were reported to have held meetings in the county's smaller centres, though these accounted for only 11 of the other 22 meetings. The other union bodies included the INTO's branches in Rathmore and Killorglin, the Kenmare branch of the IDAA, the Dingle branch of IADMU, the Killorglin Post Office Workers, the Stewards and Labourers Association and the West Kerry Blacksmiths Association. Other reports suggested that the INTO also had branches in Castleisland, Castlemaine and Dingle. Besides these, a solitary January 1920 report mentioned the existence of an RDC Clerks' Association in Kerry.

More generally, the 65 labour meetings reported in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel during 1919-21 represented a yearly mean of 21.7 meetings, a decrease of 42.1% on the yearly mean of 37.5 during 1915-8. However, the 66 meetings reported outside the three main towns—a yearly mean of 22—was a massive 266.7% increase on the yearly mean of 6 during 1915-8. This again reflects the spread of trade unionism into the smaller centres and rural areas of the county. The decrease in the level of reported activity in the large towns, on the other hand, was at least partly due to the previously discussed difficulties associated with holding meetings as the War of

⁴¹⁵ KM, 3 July 1920. A year earlier, a report in the ITGWU journal said there 8 unions in the KTLC though these were not specified (VoL, 1 May 1919).

⁴¹⁶ Again though, one must presume that the building trades in the town were organised.

Independence intensified. Thus, in July 1920, 19 labour meetings were reported across the county. But during the twelve month period from August 1920 to July 1921, only 17 meetings were reported. During the whole of 1921, only 11 meetings were reported in Kerry's main towns and a mere 4 in the rest of the county. By contrast, the yearly mean of reported meetings in Limerick City decreased by a less dramatic 18.5% from 47.5 during 1915-8 to 38.7 during 1919-21.

The fortunes of the labour movement in Kerry during 1919-21 followed the fortunes of the local Transport Union. In March 1919, it was reported that the union's Listowel branch had recently reorganised and recruited 303 members. This included, "most of the workingmen of the town, as well as many from the surrounding districts."⁴¹⁷ Over the next three months, fish curers and labourers formed a branch in Caherciveen; 140 joined in Waterville; and the new Dingle branch was said to have 200 members.⁴¹⁸ The effect of the ITGWU's arrival in a remote village like Waterville can be gauged by a mid-June report in the Kerryman which claimed that the branch had grown to 197 members and that, "everyone—even the smallest employer—has recognised the Union, and has been paying his employes the wages which the Union agreed upon."⁴¹⁹ Another example of the Transport Union's impact was in Kenmare, a village with an especially active branch (no less than 23 of its meetings were reported in the local press during 1919-21!), where the formation of a Trades Council was seriously discussed in late 1919.⁴²⁰

However, the difficulty of maintaining this level of organisation outside of the main towns is reflected in the apparent collapse of the Caherciveen branch sometime during 1919. In September, Neligan attended a meeting to "re-organise" this outpost.⁴²¹ The ability of a branch, particularly in a remote area, to last more than a few months depended heavily on the quality of its secretary and other officers.

⁴¹⁷ KM, 25 January-15 March 1919.

⁴¹⁸ KM, 3 & 24 May; 7 June 1919. As mentioned earlier, the membership of the Dingle branch increased to 300 over the following month. The RIC at the time reported that the union was particularly active in Dingle and Castleisland (KCI, July 1919).

⁴¹⁹ KM, 14 June 1919. This quote is contained almost word for word in a subsequent piece in the union's paper (VoL, 5 July 1919). It can be surmised that the Kerryman's local correspondent was also the ITGWU branch secretary. Extremely positive coverage by the paper of ITGWU activities in some other areas, particularly Kenmare, suggest this may not have been a unique phenomenon.

⁴²⁰ KM, 23 August 1919.

⁴²¹ KM, 27 September 1919.

The War of Independence took a heavy toll on the county organisation with the number of branches declining from 15 in 1919 to 8 in 1920 before recovering slightly to 10 in 1921.⁴²²

In the wake of the Truce, a push was made to reorganise branches. The 29 October 1921 issue of the Voice of Labour included brief reports from Castleisland, Dingle, Killarney, Listowel, Tralee and Kenmare to warn the employers that the workers were "back" now that "the Terror" was over. The union, however, was now facing a new enemy, namely recalcitrant workers who were unwilling or unable to pay their dues. In December, the Dingle branch held a meeting at which shop stewards were instructed to make sure that all arrears were paid by the end of the year:

Any members with clear cards will get preference of job at waterworks, sewerage, etc., in the coming year. Slackers, look alive, and clear your cards; failing to do so, you will have a clear member in your job.⁴²³

Dire warnings against "slackers" were frequent at the time but in many cases it is doubtful whether the union really had the power to carry out its threats. In reality, these outbursts reflect the increasing weakness of the ITGWU even as it desperately sought to reestablish the position it had achieved in 1919 and early 1920.

Before closing the discussion of trade union organisation, it is necessary to note the Kerry labour movement's involvement in several co-operative ventures during 1919-21. As early as January 1919, the members of the Listowel ITGWU were enthusiastically discussing the establishment of a co-operative store in the town.⁴²⁴ Shortly thereafter, the union's paper reported that its members were involved in plans for co-operative stores in both Listowel and Tralee.⁴²⁵ By June, the new store in Tralee was said to be "doing splendidly".⁴²⁶ The development of "the Co-Operative stores

⁴²² ITGWU, Annual Report, 1919-21.

⁴²³ VoL, 24 December 1921.

⁴²⁴ KM, 11 January 1919. According to O'Connor, this store was subsequently established (Syndicalism, p. 48).

⁴²⁵ VoL, 8 February 1919. Two weeks later, the paper carried an advertisement for a manager of the Tralee Co-Operative Society, Ltd. (VoL, 22 February 1919).

⁴²⁶ KM, 14 June 1919 (see also KM, 16 August 1919 which referred to the store's "marvellous success"). In 1921, it was reported that a parliamentary question had been asked about the breaking into and damaging of the store by the military on 7 December 1920 (KM, 5 March 1921).

movement" in Kerry even rated a mention in the RIC Inspector General's monthly report.⁴²⁷ Finally, in December 1919, it was announced that a Co-Operative Fishing Company was to be established in Dingle.⁴²⁸ While initial reports of this venture do not mention any involvement by the labour movement, by February 1920 it was reported that the Dingle ITGWU was involved in the Co-operative Fishing Society's plans to take over a local mill and stores.⁴²⁹

From the available evidence, it does not appear that the Kerry labour movement experienced the clashes over alleged ITGWU "poaching" which were a feature of the Limerick Trades Council's internal life. Nor does there appear to have been any equivalent of the general rift between the Transport Union and the city's craft unions which led to a temporary split in the movement. Nevertheless, there was an echo of the sentiments against English-based craft unions which were aired in Limerick. In May 1919, the Kerryman carried a long polemic urging Irish workers to leave British unions such as the ASE, ASCJ, NUR and Typographical Association (TA). The ITGWU and IDAA, on the other hand, were praised. Congratulations were also extended to the Irish members of the NUR who ignored J. H. Thomas' instruction to work on May Day. "It is pitiful," declared the author of "Tralee Topics", "to see Irish workers' combines being merely tails of British labor organisations."⁴³⁰

Subsequently, the Tralee members of the TA decided to leave their British-based union and join the new Irish Typographical Union. During a long discussion at the 1921 meeting of the ILPTUC on "poaching", Cassidy of the TA described the plight of these men after the destruction of the Kerryman/Liberator press by the British army in April:

...when the men found themselves on the streets after the destruction of the printing works, there was no support for them coming forward from the Union they joined. He was rather sympathetic with the men, and

⁴²⁷ IG, November 1919.

⁴²⁸ KM, 13 December 1919. The Watchword of Labour subsequently carried a report on the meetings held to form the West Kerry Co-Operative Fishing Society (WoL, 3 January 1920).

⁴²⁹ KM, 28 February 1920.

⁴³⁰ KM, 10 May 1919 (see also KM, 3 May 1919 for another attack on Thomas).

prevailed upon the Executive Council to reinstate them.⁴³¹

Despite Cassidy's obvious bias, this episode is a good illustration of why so many Irish skilled workers, with thoroughly republican convictions, remained members of financially powerful organisations headquartered in London and Manchester.

4.3.4 Labour and Politics

As seen in Chapter 3, the political alliance between the labour movement and radical nationalists began earlier in Kerry than anywhere else in the country outside of Dublin. Furthermore, the relationship between the ITGWU and the Irish Volunteers in Tralee during 1915-6 was arguably even more developed than in the capital. While the enormous surge of support for Sinn Féin after the Rising meant that the local separatist leadership no longer needed to give labour an equal role in the alliance, nevertheless—for all the reasons discussed in the case of Limerick—the unequal partnership persisted during 1919-21.

The Kerry labour movement's support for republican aims was first of all expressed in its participation in national political strikes, including the Motor Permits strike of 1919-20 and the Munitions of War dispute. Local unions also expressed support for the Limerick Soviet. At the height of the conflict, the Kerryman declared, "a day or two will decide whether there is to be a general strike in sympathy with those who are out at Limerick." This indicates that the local labour movement was anticipating such a call.⁴³² But the most impressive action taken by Kerry labour during 1919-21 was during the April 1920 general strike for the release of political prisoners.

The Kerry Weekly Reporter headlined its extensive report "Labours' Smashing Blow For Freedom". On the first day of the strike, a massive labour rally in Tralee passed a resolution, proposed by Neligan of the ITGWU, denouncing, "the brutal treatment meted out by a foreign capitalist Government to the Irish prisoners of war." Neligan then gave a highly emotive speech, declaring:

Lust for wealth and lust for gain on the part of
their foreign oppressors might starve the

⁴³¹ Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. 1921 Report, p. 96.

⁴³² KM, 26 April 1919. This issue also reported that several prominent trade unionists spoke at a Tralee rally chaired by two Catholic priests to, "protest against the imposition of Martial Law in Limerick." The following week an advertisement appeared in the paper announcing that a Cork v. Kerry football match would be held by the GAA as a benefit for the Limerick strikers (KM, 3 May 1919).

bodies of the Irish people, they might be bayoneted and massacred, but the soul and spirit of the Irish people would rise triumphant over the tyranny and sordid materialism of the British Empire (loud cheers).

Significantly, the rally was also addressed by two Catholic priests whose rhetoric was no less fierce. Local clergy also presided at the rally held the following day after the release of the prisoners was announced.

The degree of control exercised by the Strike Committee, selected by the Tralee Trades Council, was remarkable. Besides organising food distribution and regulating transport, the sale of alcohol was prohibited:

Pickets kept a strict watch on public houses and those who showed any desire to enter for drink were stopped and questioned; publicans and those found entering premises were warned that fines would be imposed if there was any breach of the laws framed by the Strike Committee.

After an initial altercation between strikers and police and a raid on the Strike Committee headquarters, District Inspector McNally of the RIC visited the committee's president and offered that, "if Labour would be responsible for good order in the town the military and police would be withdrawn from the streets altogether." The committee agreed and there was no further disturbances.⁴³³

Labour's action on behalf of the republican prisoners received enormous popular support locally with even the Band of the Discharged Sailors and Soldiers joining the victory parade. It was said to be the first time the band, "took part publicly with their brother workers in protest against the bad treatment meted out to their brother Irishmen." John Leisk, the secretary of the Trades Council, officially greeted them from the platform.⁴³⁴ But such apparent unanimity did not always exist during other political strikes by labour. For example, during the auto permits strike, two garages were

⁴³³ Kerry Weekly Reporter (KWR), 17 April 1920 (see also KM, 17 & 24 April 1920).

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

entered in Caherciveen and two cars damaged in each case, allegedly because their owners had obtained permits.⁴³⁵

Even more serious cases of intimidation took place during the Munitions of War strike in 1920. In June, it was reported that a railway inspector was kidnapped at Gortatlea, apparently for having worked a train which the unions had boycotted.⁴³⁶ Two months later, another report said that a railway guard was forced to appear before an IRA courtmartial in North Kerry for "agreeing to carry, among other passengers, armed RIC." He was fined £12 and, "...expressed his gratitude to the court for dealing with him so leniently."⁴³⁷ Local republicans also became heavily involved in fundraising for the railworkers. In Killorglin, a collection was conducted by "SF Volunteers" while in Listowel, the SF/Labour-controlled UDC arranged a house to house collection. In Glenbeigh, the local priest announced that a collection would be held the following Sunday.⁴³⁸

As in Limerick, the Tralee Workers Council called a one hour stoppage in the town at the beginning of September so that workers could attend mass for Terence MacSwiney who was on hunger strike. The Kerryman described it as a "touching spectacle" and thanked Protestant employers for their co-operation. A similar stoppage was held in Killarney.⁴³⁹ After MacSwiney's death, a day of mourning, "in accordance with the wishes of Dail Eireann," was observed in Kerry and, at least in Killarney, "all business houses were closed and work in general suspended." Businesses were also said to have shut in Listowel although the military forced them to reopen.⁴⁴⁰

Besides political strikes, the alliance between the local labour movement and Sinn Féin was reflected in local government. However, in December 1919, the RIC's County Inspector reported that, "the coming municipal elections are likely to widen the split between Sinn

⁴³⁵ KCI, January 1920 & KM, 31 January 1920.

⁴³⁶ KM, 26 June 1920. The same issue reported that a guard named Sykes also, "came in for some rough handling," in Mallow for working on a train which had stopped in Tralee because of the dismissal of another man.

⁴³⁷ KM, 28 August 1920.

⁴³⁸ KM, 3 & 17 July 1920 (see also, KM, 31 July 1920).

⁴³⁹ KM, 4 September 1920. The following issue of the paper reported that, "at the instance of the Listowel branch of the ITU, Mass was celebrated in St. Mary's Parish Church for the benefit of the imprisoned Lord Mayor," but there was no report of a stoppage in the town (KM, 11 September 1920).

⁴⁴⁰ KM, 6-20 November 1920. This contrasts with Limerick City where the one day strike after MacSwiney's death was said to have been called by the ITGWU (LCI, October 1920).

Fein and Labour, as there is yet no sign of agreement regarding candidates and Labour are likely to oust sitting Sinn Féin Councillors." Several months earlier the inspector had argued that labour troubles and the growth of the ITGWU were creating difficulties for Sinn Féin even though most Transport Union members were "keen to be Sinn Feiners".⁴⁴¹ As shall be seen, this analysis may have been valid in rural areas where the conflict between farmers and farm labourers had become increasingly bitter during the course of the year. However, it does not seem valid in the large towns. For while a contested election did occur in the county's three Urban Districts, there is no indication that it was particularly divisive.

In Tralee, Labour won only 4 of the 21 UDC seats while Sinn Féin secured 9. One new councillor represented the Town Tenants League (TTL) and 7 independents were also returned. Labour's four councillors included Jeremiah Murphy and William Farmer, secretary and chairman respectively of the ITGWU branch, as well as Patrick Casey, president of the TTLC and member of the bakers union, and Richard Heaslip of the NUR. The Kerryman which waged an incessant campaign against the old council was disappointed that 9 of its members were back. It was also surprised that Labour didn't do better, and—commenting on the re-election of Kelliher, Latchford, McCowen and J.M. Slattery—said, "the 'good employer' is still a great influence in Tralee." But, on the whole, the paper still considered the outcome satisfactory:

The one consolation is that the overwhelming bulk of the Sinn Féin members are also Labor men. At the same time, more than half the Labor Councillors—if not the whole of them—would support Sinn Féin.⁴⁴²

The Kerryman's estimate of the allegiances of the Labour representatives was soon confirmed. At the second meeting of the new council a resolution declaring, "allegiance to the Irish Republic," and pledging to, "comply with any Orders we may receive from Dail Eireann," was passed with cross-party agreement, the only dissentients being Kelliher, Latchford, McCowen, J. M. Slattery and T. Slattery.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ KCI, September 1919 (see also KCI, November 1919).

⁴⁴² KM, 24 January 1920.

⁴⁴³ Tralee UDC minutes, 6 February 1920.

In Killarney and Listowel, Labour secured a much higher proportion of the seats winning 3 of 12 in Killarney and 5 of 12 in Listowel. Two of the three elected in Killarney were member of the ITGWU as were all those returned for Labour in Listowel. The other Killarney Labour councillor was William Bland, a member of the Carpenters Society and secretary of the Trades Council.⁴⁴⁴ An indication of the de facto alliance between Labour and Sinn Féin in the three new Kerry councils is that all three of them elected Sinn Féin chairmen and Labour vice-chairmen.⁴⁴⁵ This was also nicely symbolic of the relationship of the two parties within this alliance. In Tralee, at least, the alliance was formalised in mid-1920 when Sinn Féin and Labour produced an agreed slate for the Board of Guardians of 10 nominees—split evenly between the two parties—for the 10 available seats. There was no contest. The Kerryman concluded, "it isn't easy to distinguish between the Labor and Sinn Féin Candidates in every case—but, at present, they constitute one and the same Party."⁴⁴⁶

The real test, however, was how the two parties co-habited in office. Labour's national election manifesto called for price controls, an immediate start to a massive house building programme, and significant wage increases for local authority workers. An attempt to seriously implement these proposals was bound to antagonise some in Sinn Féin. Allusion has already been made to the sharp exchanges in the Tralee council over payment of wages to the road sweepers and gas workers for the time they had been on strike demanding the reinstatement of Denis McEnery. On the other hand, that dispute also indicated that, even with the blessing of the local labour leadership, the pursuit of the "republican agenda"—in this case the reappointment of a "wrongfully dismissed" republican foreman—could meet with opposition from sections of the workforce.

Nevertheless, on the key issues of profiteering, housing, and the "Belfast boycott", Labour and Sinn Féin displayed a significant degree of co-operation. The first action against high food prices, however, came from outside the UDC. This was the April 1920 ILPTUC order prohibiting the export of butter, bacon and live pigs. Interestingly,

⁴⁴⁴ WOL, 31 January 1920.

⁴⁴⁵ KM, 7 February 1920. The three Labour vice-chairmen were Casey in Tralee, Bland in Killarney and John Collins in Listowel. In Tralee, the arithmetic of the new council meant that a Sinn Féin chairman could not have been elected without Labour support.

⁴⁴⁶ KM, 8 May 1920. The five Labour nominees were Richard Heaslip, Maurice Neligan, Patrick Casey, P. O'Connor (tailor) and Jeremiah Murphy.

the Kerryman thought this was an excellent idea and urged the labour movement to go even further, pointing out that in some other parts of the country,

...organised labor committees visited several of the markets within the last week, and acting as Food Controllers, fixed maximum prices for potatoes and other articles of food. People are asking why the same couldn't be done in Kerry.⁴⁴⁷

The following issue complained that the prices set by the ITGWU for butter (3s.4d p/lb) and rashers (2s.8d p/lb) might represent a reduction in Dublin but would be exorbitant in Tralee. Meanwhile, the Tralee Trades Council had acted to control the price of potatoes sold in the Tralee Market "at the rate of 14s per half-quarter (half-stone)". The editorial writer, however, was still unimpressed:

If the workers want to control prices, let them do so all the way and thoroughly. They shouldn't spoil the job if they aren't fit for it. Of course when I say "the workers" I speak of those who represent them. It is to the vital...interests of the workers and their dependents that prices of food should be rigorously "censored".⁴⁴⁸

On the 8th of May, the paper mentioned the formation of a "Food Control Committee" by the town's "Labour Party" but again chided the organisers that there was no point in fixing prices, "...if there is no driving force back of the operation." In speaking thus, the Kerryman reflected the frustration of urban dwellers with inflation. On the other hand, the IFU, representing the dominant rural interest, vigorously objected to any price controls on agricultural produce.

The question of profiteering appears to have been formally taken up by the Tralee UDC only in late 1921, as part of the Dáil Éireann-initiated campaign already discussed in relation to Limerick City. However, the first suggestion for an anti-profiteering campaign came from the TWC which urged the UDC to appoint at least five members, "to act in conjunction with a Committee of the Workers' Council to investigate the prices of food stuffs & c in Tralee and take such steps as may be considered advisable with a view to the reduction of such

⁴⁴⁷ KM, 24 April 1920.

⁴⁴⁸ KM, 1 May 1920.

prices."⁴⁴⁹ Shortly after this, the Kerry People reported the first meeting of an anti-profiteering committee composed of members of the UDC and TWC at which it was alleged that 200% profit was being made on milk and meat. The committee forwarded a resolution to the UDC which, in turn, unanimously voted to, "respectfully request the Irish Government to empower Local Authorities [to set up committees]...with full powers to regulate and fix prices of foodstuffs and other household articles within their respective districts."⁴⁵⁰ A Dáil Éireann circular regarding the establishment of anti-profiteering committees was subsequently received by the UDC but there were no further reports of activity on this issue.⁴⁵¹

While labour's anti-profiteering stance seemed quite popular and unobjectionable to Sinn Féin, at least in urban areas, the housing question generated a bit more controversy. At the same meeting of the Tralee UDC which declared its allegiance to Dáil Éireann, a Housing Committee was established. The committee was composed of seven members of the UDC's Roads, Building and Sanitation Committee, four representatives from the TTLC and two from the TTL.⁴⁵² But a month later, the Labour councillors came in for criticism from the Kerryman for allegedly seeking, as per their manifesto, to build new houses immediately, regardless of the cost and then to lease them at low rents. The paper concluded, "rates are fearfully high already. Yet it is calmly suggested to make them intolerably so as regards the housing question, and to crush the small man of the middle class out of existence."⁴⁵³ This was in sharp contrast to the paper's support to the ILPTUC embargo on food and local price fixing by labour. The Kerryman, however, seems to have been misinformed because the council's actual strategy was not to drastically increase the rates but rather to apply to the British Local Government Board (LGB) for a £145,000 loan to build 150 houses. Obviously, the council's allegiance to Dáil Éireann had not prevented them from adopting a pragmatic

⁴⁴⁹ Tralee UDC minutes, 26 September 1921 (see also KP, 24 September 1921). As early as November 1919, the TTLC had called on the UDC to form a committee to deal with profiteering. The UDC clerk said a special meeting had already been held to form such a committee and they were waiting for Board of Trade instructions. No more was heard of this venture (KM, 29 November 1919).

⁴⁵⁰ Tralee UDC minutes, 6 October 1921; KP, 8 & 15 October.

⁴⁵¹ Tralee UDC minutes, 1 December 1921. An Anti-Profiteering Committee was also formed by the Caherciveen RDC (KP, 15 October 1921).

⁴⁵² Tralee UDC minutes, 6 February 1920.

⁴⁵³ KM, 27 March 1920.

approach to the agencies of the Empire.⁴⁵⁴ Subsequently, it was reported that the LGB would only grant the loan if the UDC agreed to, "impossible conditions which would compromise the Council in their political convictions."⁴⁵⁵

This seems to have signalled a breakdown in relations between the UDC and the LGB, as well as the end of the ambitious housing programme. But it was also part of a wider struggle between republican-dominated Irish local authorities and the British government. The LGB demanded that all local authorities which had recognised the Dáil submit their accounts to the Board for audit. Otherwise, no grants or loans would be granted.⁴⁵⁶ By December 1920, it was reported that the Board was seeking and obtaining writs of mandamus to force recalcitrant councils—including the Tralee Board of Guardians, the Killarney RDC and Limerick County Council—to hand over their books.⁴⁵⁷ A month later, the Kerryman stated that public authorities in Kerry were, "in a state of bankruptcy" but in March 1921 it was said that the Tralee UDC was actually £4,000 in the black. The paper proudly declared, "They are, we believe, the only Council in Ireland who can boast of carrying on under present difficulties."⁴⁵⁸ Labour profligacy had either been contained or never materialised.

Meanwhile, in August 1920, the Tralee branch of the TTL was said to be "manifesting symptoms of great vitality..." due to threatened rent increases for "Union Cottages".⁴⁵⁹ Unfortunately, no UDC minutes are extant between July 1920 and August 1921. But in October, a meeting of the Sanitation Committee decided that the rents on the cottages would not be raised. The issue of rent increases reemerged in Tralee in late 1921. A meeting of the Workers' Council in November supported the TTL's opposition to any increases. The Tenants' League thanked the council for its support.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁴ Tralee UDC minutes, 3 June 1920; KM, 19 June 1920.

⁴⁵⁵ KM, 4 September 1920.

⁴⁵⁶ KM, 14 August 1920. In some places this demand was flatly refused but the Tralee UDC initially agreed. By September, however, it was clearly felt that these were "impossible conditions" (see also KM, 21 August 1920 which reported that Irish councils loyal to the Dáil had decided to withhold repayments on outstanding loans to the LGB to offset the threatened cut-off of new funds).

⁴⁵⁷ KM, 4 December 1920 (see also KM, 25 December 1920 which reports that several Irish local authorities, though none in Kerry, agreed to let the LGB audit their books).

⁴⁵⁸ KM, 22 January 1920 & 26 March 1921.

⁴⁵⁹ KM, 7 August 1920.

⁴⁶⁰ KP, 19 November 1921.

Yet another example of Labour-Sinn Féin co-operation in local government was the implementation of the "Belfast Boycott". In mid-August 1920, it was reported that the Listowel UDC had endorsed the boycott, followed a couple of weeks later by the Tralee UDC.⁴⁶¹ A month after that, the TWC was said to have collected £234.17s for the "Belfast expelled workers fund". This was still a live issue as late as May 1921, when the Kerry People headlined, "Belfast Goods Destroyed—At Tralee Station".⁴⁶²

But in at least one instance, there was an alliance of local Labour and Sinn Féin against the Dáil Éireann authorities in Dublin. In September 1921, the Kerry People reported that the TWC had sent a letter to the Tralee Board of Guardians opposing the Dail's proposed scheme to amalgamate all six Kerry workhouses into one central institution in Killarney for the sake of efficiency. The main objection of the Workers' Council was that some people would have to travel long distances to see their relatives. They also objected strongly to situating the central workhouse in Killarney. The SF/Labour-run Board of Guardians supported the TWC's position unanimously. A meeting of the Killarney UDC also objected to the plan on the grounds that labour organisations and public bodies were not being consulted. The campaign against the scheme gathered momentum over the next few weeks with a meeting held in Killarney and a "Strong Protest Against Amalgamation" by the Listowel UDC. It was reported that the Dail's Local Government Department decided to postpone the scheme for three months but in mid-November it appears to have been implemented anyway.⁴⁶³

Besides political strikes and participation in local government, an analysis of labour's political activity must also consider rhetoric. As early as the carters' strike in Tralee in January 1919, the local press suggested that employers considered the strikers, or at least their leaders, to be "Bolsheviks". However, as mentioned earlier, the Kerryman argued that the workers' demands were legitimate and certainly not revolutionary. Over the next few months, the terms "Bolshevik" and "Bolshevism" were increasingly used to describe the activities of militant farm labourers. Nor was alarm isolated to infuriated employers. It gripped nationalist editorial writers as well.

⁴⁶¹ KM, 14 & 28 August 1920.

⁴⁶² KP, 28 May 1921.

⁴⁶³ KP, 1 October & 12 November 1921. According to the latter report, the Central Home was to be situated in Killarney and the Central Hospital in Tralee.

In May, the author of "Tralee Topics" in the Kerryman complained about the recently issued ILPTUC National Executive manifesto addressed to the "Employers of Labour and Property Owners of Ireland":

So far as I can understand the document, these individuals [the employers] are severely admonished for possessing any property and for being in a position to employ anybody...Isn't there some other way of doing justice to the workers than resorting to communism of this kind?⁴⁶⁴

However, a year later, the author of the same column was urging the local labour movement to rigorously enforce price controls which many employers would undoubtedly have seen as a prime example of "communism". But this same writer was not even consistent in seeing Russian Bolshevism itself as a bad thing. In August 1919—only three months after the RIC's County Inspector claimed that the Catholic clergy in Kerry, "do not support the labour movement as they fear its tendency to Bolshevism which they dread"—he seems to have temporarily warmed to Lenin and Trotsky:

It has yet to be determined whether the term Bolshevik is destined to become one of reproach or not. In the good old days of the French Revolution the people were called Canaille, Sans-coullotes and other nice names—but that didn't prevent these terms of opprobrium from becoming names of honor afterwards. In the same way, the Bolsheviks in more countries than one may yet glory in their name, now supposed to be an epithet of contumely.⁴⁶⁵

However, for Catholic priests concerned with the spread of communist ideas, there was no comfort in the analogy to the French Revolution.

While the Kerryman waxed and waned in its enthusiasm for local labour militancy, one aspect of its coverage of the labour movement was entirely consistent. This was its opposition, already mentioned, to British unions. The paper became particularly vitriolic at the

⁴⁶⁴ KM, 17 May 1919. For the text of the manifesto, see Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, 1919 Report, pp. 50-5.

⁴⁶⁵ KCI, May 1919; KM, 2 August 1919.

beginning of the Munitions of War strike because of the failure of the British labour movement to support this action:

A Britisher, lord or serf, peer or peasant, noble or hind, is just the same. All, or nearly all, Britishers hate Ireland...it is a shame that Irish labor organisations should coalesce with English ones.⁴⁶⁶

Hatred for all "Britishers" apparently extended to Irish Protestants. Another editorial, entitled "Removals", written a few months earlier, urged Carson's "kith and kin" in the south and west to pack their bags and head for Ulster.⁴⁶⁷

There is no doubt that the rhetoric of many local labour activists, particularly in the ITGWU, was tinged with socialism, even revolutionary socialism. This can be seen in the reports of local demonstrations on May Day 1919, the only political general strike during 1919-21 which was not connected in some way to the "national question". In Listowel, a procession headed by the ITGWU set out from the Carnegie Library at 1 pm and, "marched through the town, some of the members carrying the Red Flag." Maurice Neligan was the main speaker at the rally held afterwards. He opened by referring to World War I:

...it took 4 1/2 years of this orgy of blood to wipe the scales from the eyes of the workers, not alone of Ireland but of every other country, and to make them see that they were being worked, not as human beings, but as mere machines...The speaker said that the powers that be had warned them not to hoist the Red Flag, but he wished to tell them it was not the bloody flag of England, but the flag of the organised workers (loud and prolonged cheers).

Interestingly, Neligan, "went on to quote from James Connolly and Pope Leo 13". Red flags were also hoisted in Newtownsandes where

⁴⁶⁶ KM, 12 June 1920. Another editorial on the British Labour Party's alleged hypocrisy in opposing intervention against Russia while giving no support to the Munitions Strike referred to, "shaggy, unkempt English alleged Socialists, [who] may wave the Red Flag and sing the International," but have no interest in helping Ireland (KM, 21 August 1920).

⁴⁶⁷ KM, 13 March 1920. Amazingly, the author of "Tralee Topics" was subsequently enraged by loyalist allegations of discrimination against Protestants in southern Ireland (see, for example, KM, 17 July 1920).

local ITGWU activists addressed the rally, stressing, "...the necessity of a republic but especially a Workers' Republic for Ireland."⁴⁶⁸

Maurice Neligan came from Templeglantine, West Limerick and had been a school teacher before becoming an ITGWU organiser in 1919. He was also a member of the Socialist Party of Ireland.⁴⁶⁹ His views were epitomised in comments he made at a meeting to re-organise the Caherciveen branch of the Transport Union. He told his audience that, "the old order was passing away and in the re-shaping of the world the workers, thoroughly organised, would climb to power in proportion to the perfection of their organisation."⁴⁷⁰ During his brief career with the ITGWU—cut short by his death in a motor cycle crash in July 1920—he displayed prodigious energy, always responding swiftly to any perceived attack on his union. Typical of this was his letter to the local press in March 1920 in which he complained of the, "entirely one-sided and and absolutely unfair," comments on recent strikes in Tralee. Neligan was particularly critical of the idea that workers were going on strike for frivolous reasons, concluding:

Workers existing beyond the border of "the poverty line" that divides destitution from "the frugal and decent comfort" proclaimed by Pope Leo XIII to be their due, do not rashly rush on the streets to face sheer starvation.⁴⁷¹

Neligan apparently saw no contradiction between Catholic social teaching and the revolutionary socialism he advocated. Nor did he see a contradiction between socialism and militant nationalism. The strength of his connection to the republican movement was reflected at his funeral in Templeglantine at which 200 IRA members led the procession to the graveyard.⁴⁷²

That Neligan's ideas may have been shared by some other Kerry labour activists in this period, including some outside the ITGWU, is suggested by the appearance of the Kerry Worker at the end of 1919. The journal, of which no copies are extant, was apparently produced

⁴⁶⁸ KM, 10 May 1919 (see also KCI, May 1919).

⁴⁶⁹ WoL, 10 July 1920.

⁴⁷⁰ KM, 27 September 1920. Neligan gave other talks on broad themes including one in Castleisland on, "the men who made the Irish Labour Movement," and another in Glenbeigh on, "the history of the labour movement" (KM, 3 January & 6 March 1920).

⁴⁷¹ KM, 27 March 1920.

⁴⁷² KM, 10 July 1920 (see also WoL, 17 July 1920).

by the Killarney Trades Council. A piece in the Kerryman declared optimistically, "The 'Kerry Worker' should remove a long-standing obstacle from the path of organised labour in Kerry, seeing it is to be run as a Labour paper and will include Labour Notes from all parts of Kerry."⁴⁷³ Several pieces from the journal were reproduced in the Kerryman. These were entitled "The Increased Cost of Living", "Local Industry", "Trade Unionism—Viewed by an Old Worker" and "Labour As the Governing Power". The last piece was signed "MAOD—RCA", suggesting that it was written by a member of the Railway Clerks' Association. Though the language is rather vague, the author seemed to be trying to combine republican and socialist goals:

Let us be among the pioneers of a new day, a day wherein none shall be masters and none shall be slaves...Let us prove that we are not selfish in our aims...and above all, that we will take a part—an noble part—in the fight for Ireland's justice—complete independence.⁴⁷⁴

4.3.5 The rural labour movement

While Kerry's urban labour movement largely followed the pattern observed in Limerick City, the county's rural labour movement during 1919-21 differed from that of its neighbour in certain important respects. The root of these differences lay in the geography of farming and landholding discussed in Chapter 1. Specifically, the predominance of small-scale subsistence farming in South and West Kerry meant that strike activity by farm labourers was not a significant feature in these areas, although the organisation of migratory labourers from the Glenbeigh and Killorglin districts was undertaken by the ITGWU. North and East Kerry—with larger farms and a significant dairy sector—were more akin economically to west Limerick and it was in these areas that labour agitation and strike activity were concentrated. However, even here, there is an important difference because the demand for higher wages became mixed with—and even superseded by—an agitation for land redistribution in late 1919-early 1920.

Table 4.15 gives weekly wage rates for several groups of rural workers in Kerry during 1919-20. Unfortunately, the data for farm labourers and creamery workers, compared to that available for

⁴⁷³ KM, 27 December 1919.

⁴⁷⁴ KM, 20 December 1919.

Limerick, is quite sparse and relates almost entirely to 1919. The 25s "indoor" rate (including board and lodging) reported in April for labourers in Kilflynn, North Kerry, is the same as that obtained by farm labourers receiving "diet" only in Kilfinnane, East Limerick, in August. This was the lowest reported rate in Limerick during 1919. Lixnaw labourers receiving diet were also earning 25s in April but those living with farmers only earned 20s. The following month, rates in Newtownsandes, also in North Kerry, were reported to range from 21s with diet for those employed "continuously" to 5s per day for casual labourers. Permanent labourers in Castleisland, East Kerry, were obtaining a comparable rate of 22s.6d per week in August. Higher rates were only reported in the district around the town of Dingle. There, labourers receiving diet earned 30s while those not receiving diet earned 35s, equal to the top reported rates in Limerick. On the other hand, the indoor rate in Dingle was 20s per week, the same as in Lixnaw. It should be noted that the extremely high 40s per week indoor rate paid to labourers in Maharees on the Dingle Peninsula only applied during potato digging.

The AWB Group I minimum rate of 27s (without diet) applied to the Tralee UDC area and the "District Electoral Division of Tralee Rural, in the Rural District of Tralee," while the Group II and Group III rates of 24s.6d and 22s applied elsewhere in the county. The value of board and lodging for seven days was reckoned by the AWB to be equal to 13s in Group II and 12s in Group III. If one accepts this estimate, then the 25s "indoor" rate in Kilflynn would be equivalent to 37s-38s "without diet" while the 20s reported in Dingle and Lixnaw would equal 32s-33s. From this vantage point, the Kerry rates compare very well to those obtained in Limerick which, as noted earlier, represented at least a doubling of pre-war rates, and possibly even a modest increase in real wages.⁴⁷⁵

However, the rates reported at the Newtownsandes and Tarbert creameries, in May and July 1919 respectively, were significantly below most reported rates in Limerick. In both creameries, general workers were receiving 37s.6d while engine drivers earned 40s. Except for the 23-30s rates reported in March at the Meenahela Creamery in Templeglantine—undoubtedly exceeded later in the year—all other Limerick general workers were receiving rates above

⁴⁷⁵ "Report on the Operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, during the period September 1917 to September 1921," (held in NLI pamphlet collection).

40s while firemen received no less than 45s. However, it must be borne in mind that the Kerry rates may have increased by the end of 1919.

	1918	1919	1921
Group I	40s	45s	45s
Group II	35s	40s	40s
Group III	30s	35s	35s
Group IV	25s	30s	30s
Group V	20s	25s	25s
Group VI	15s	20s	20s
Group VII	10s	15s	15s
Group VIII	5s	10s	10s
Group IX	0s	5s	5s
Group X	0s	0s	0s

	1918
Group I	40s
Group II	35s
Group III	30s
Group IV	25s
Group V	20s
Group VI	15s
Group VII	10s
Group VIII	5s
Group IX	0s
Group X	0s

	Kerry 1918	Traler RDC 1918	Traler RDC 1919	Traler RDC 1920	Traler RDC 1921
Group I	40s	45s	45s	45s	45s
Group II	35s	40s	40s	40s	40s
Group III	30s	35s	35s	35s	35s
Group IV	25s	30s	30s	30s	30s
Group V	20s	25s	25s	25s	25s
Group VI	15s	20s	20s	20s	20s
Group VII	10s	15s	15s	15s	15s
Group VIII	5s	10s	10s	10s	10s
Group IX	0s	5s	5s	5s	5s
Group X	0s	0s	0s	0s	0s

470 Source: *Irish Labourer*, 1918-1921. Rates for 1921 are based on the 1918 rates.
 471 Rates do not include board and lodging and apply to 1918-1921. Group III was amalgamated with Group II in 1920.

Table 4.15 - Weekly wage rates for several groups of County Kerry rural workers, 1919-20.⁴⁷⁶
part 1 - farm labourers

	1919	1920	1921
AWB rates⁴⁷⁷:			
Group I	27s	32s.6d	34s
Group II	24s.6d	30s	32s
Group III	22s		
Kilflynn (indoor)	25s		
Lixnaw (only?): w/diet	25s		
living w/ farmers	20s		
Newtownsandes dist:			
employed "continuously" w/diet	21s		
employed weekly w/diet	22s.6d		
casual labourers w/diet	5s p/d		
Dingle dist: w/diet	30s		
w/out diet	35s		
indoor "all found"	20s		
unspecified		40s	
Castleisland (permanent)	22s.6d		
Maharees (labourers doing potato digging, indoor)	40s		

part 2 - creamery workers

	1919
Newtownsandes: general workers	37s.6d
engine drivers & butter maker	40s
Tarbert co-op: general workers	37s.6d
dairymaid & engine driver	40s

part 3 - road workers

	Kenmare 1919	Tralee RDC, 1919	Listowel RDC, 1919	CoCo 1919	CoCo 1920
stewards	27s.6d	38s	45s	35s	45s
labourers	25s	35s	40s	30s	40s
carters			60s		

There was no doubt they (the labourers) were on top for the present moment, and the country was full of money and Bohemian was in the air but they would never have Bohemian in that country.⁴⁷⁸

Shortly after this, cattle drives were reported on certain farms in the Ballymacelligott area. It was said that local labourers, "they been for some time agitating to get (these lands) allotted for village purposes."⁴⁷⁹

While the IFL was busy establishing itself, the Transport Union's drive to organize farm labourers in North Kerry was also underway. A meeting of the recently re-formed Labour branch was attended

⁴⁷⁶ Source: Kerryman, 1919-21; Kerry People, 1921; Voice of Labour; Watchword of Labour.

⁴⁷⁷ Rates do not include board and lodging and apply to a 54 hr week. Group III was amalgamated with Group II in 1920.

The performance of road workers employed by the Kerry County Council on the wages front was comparable to that of their Limerick colleagues during 1919-20. In March 1919, Kerry labourers were receiving 30s while the top rate obtained in Limerick in December was 32s. However, it is possible that by then the Kerry rate was above this, given that labourers employed by the Tralee and Listowel RDCs were receiving 35s and 40s respectively by the end of the year. The following February, County Council wages went up to 40s but this was slightly under the 42s achieved in Limerick in July.

The first indication of a looming conflict between farm labourers and farmers in North Kerry came at the beginning of March 1919. A newspaper report stated that, one afternoon, while labourers gathered in Listowel to collect their unemployment benefit, a meeting of farmers was being held in the town to establish a branch of the IFU. A riot almost ensued as labourers apparently believed that, "the farmers' intentions were to go there to deprive them of their weekly donations." This was vigorously denied by the chairman of the farmers' meeting, P. Trant. However, at least one farmer explicitly argued that labourers should not receive benefit, implying that the high rate being paid was discouraging labourers from taking jobs on the farms. He concluded, "probably when those donations will cease the labourers will be quite willing to come to work." Another farmer warned of a growing radicalism:

There was no doubt they (the labourers) were on top for the present moment, and the country was full of money and Bolshevism was in the air but they would never have Bolshevism in that country.⁴⁷⁸

Shortly after this, cattle drives were reported on certain farms in the in the Ballymacelligott area. It was said that local labourers, "...have been for some time agitating to get [these lands] allotted for tillage purposes."⁴⁷⁹

While the IFU was busy establishing itself, the Transport Union's drive to organise farm labourers in North Kerry was also underway. A meeting of the recently re-formed Listowel branch was attended

⁴⁷⁸ KWR, 1 March 1919 (for beginnings of IFU, see also KM, 25 January-15 March 1919).

⁴⁷⁹ KM, 25 January-15 March 1919. The cattle drives were said to have occurred on, "the lands of Ballyseedy, Ballycarthy and Gortbrack."

by, "many from the surrounding districts, augmented on this occasion by a large body of labourers from Coolard and Knockenagh." Branch membership was said to stand at 303. Proceedings were dominated by Neligan who had been the branch secretary before being appointed organiser. He claimed that the union had already withstood an attack from farmers in the Finuge area. He also alleged that farm labourers had recently been made ineligible for unemployment benefit. When a member named Hannan queried Neligan's focus on rural workers, saying, "what about the other classes of labourers in towns," he replied sharply:

All the others must take a secondary place, that is the teaching of the leading socialists of the world—the men who produced the food were the most important men.

Despite a rather woolly line of argument, Neligan clearly believed that winning the allegiance of farm labourers was a strategic necessity for the union.⁴⁸⁰

However, it appears that the ITGWU was not the only organisation catering for local labourers. Newspaper reports indicate the existence of a "North Kerry Labourers' Association" whose general secretary was J. McCarthy.⁴⁸¹ A meeting of labourers in Listowel, "representing all the existing branches of their organisation," at which McCarthy presided, demanded a 10s increase and appointed a delegation to talk to the IFU. Meanwhile, the "general feeling" at a meeting to launch the Co. Kerry IFU in Tralee was that, "the maximum wages which farmers could afford to pay would be 15s per week." The two sides were clearly very far apart and a strike appeared imminent.⁴⁸²

A week later, McCarthy and other labourers' representatives attended a meeting of the North Kerry IFU. They wanted to establish a standard wage but the IFU claimed they weren't sufficiently organised yet to enter into negotiations on behalf of the farmers. McCarthy, however, warned them that if the issues weren't settled immediately the labourers, "would have nothing to do but strike all over Kerry." He also claimed, "we have organised the whole of North

⁴⁸⁰ KM, 25 January-15 March 1919.

⁴⁸¹ However, a J. McCarthy was also listed as the ITGWU's branch secretary in Kilflynn in 1918.

⁴⁸² KM, 22 March 1919. In fact, this issue reports a "rumour" that labourers were already on strike.

Kerry for the last six weeks." Eugene Horgan RDC a member of the delegation representing, "the Lixnaw section of the labourers," then intervened and tried to reason with the farmers:

...he came there that day with the hope of settling the question and that the old friendly relations that always existed and which he hoped would ever exist between the labourers and farmer would continue as in the past (hear, hear). After all they were not dealing with the commercial capitalists of Belfast or Dublin. They (the farmers) were more of a christian democracy than that...

In the end, it was decided to hold another conference.⁴⁸³ This was held a week later. It was noteworthy because Neligan was part of the labourers' delegation along with McCarthy who was still listed as "General Secretary". From this point onwards, it was clear that the ITGWU, and no one else, represented the farm labourers. However, the meeting itself did not lead to any resolution. While Horgan again spoke at length and amused the audience with his wit, the bottom line of the labourers was their demand for 25s with diet. The IFU offered 20s but "an intermediary offer" of 22s.6d was not acceptable to either side."⁴⁸⁴

It is not clear exactly when North Kerry farm labourers stopped work or if the 1919 strike became general in the area. It seems that strikes occurred in a number of districts but that these were not thoroughly co-ordinated. In his March report, the RIC's County Inspector stated that labourers:

in the Ballyheigue, Ardfert and Abbeydorney sub dists have gone out and gone through the country in bands of from 50 to 80 calling at farmers houses and taking out the labourers

⁴⁸³ KM, 29 March 1919. At this meeting, Nolan, the IFU's organiser and member of the County Council, announced that he had a letter from Murphy of the Tralee ITGWU, saying that the union had established branches in Ardfert, Kilmoyley and Ballyheigue and calling for a settlement of the issues in dispute. This again seems to suggest that the North Kerry Labourers Association and the ITGWU were separate operations.

⁴⁸⁴ KM, 5 April 1919. An example of Horgan's wit is the following: "They [the farmers] could turn around and fit up mansions as well as the landlords in the past—and more luck to them. They could keep their sons at Maynooth and their daughters at boarding schools—and more luck to them—and while the labourer had to keep his child from school to go to the creamery, the farmers' sons were dancing 'ragtime' at the Gresham (laughter and applause)."

who had not joined with them. In some cases even intimidation was used.⁴⁸⁵

In his next report, the County Inspector said that some of the workers' leaders had been arrested. He also stated that, "some farmers who stood up against the dictation by the labour body were subject to outrages." This included the destruction of ploughs and one case of maiming cattle.⁴⁸⁶ In mid-April, a settlement was reached between farmers and farm labourers in the Lixnaw area which appeared to be an outright victory for the workers who obtained their 25s demand. The announcement of the result to the hundreds of labourers gathered outside the local hall, "was received with enthusiastic cheering and satisfaction."⁴⁸⁷ However, at a meeting of the IFU in Tralee two weeks later, it was reported that while a settlement was also reached in Ardfert, a strike was still on in the Kilmoyley area. One of the workers' demands was the re-hiring of all men employed before the strike. This was not acceptable to the IFU who unanimously passed a resolution, "not to submit to any rule restricting farmers in their choice of labour." Another report in the Kerryman stated that some farmers were threatening not to plant "their usual quantity of crops." The paper declared that, "this selfish action is scarcely in keeping with the character of the Irish farmer."⁴⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the North Kerry dispute came to a climax in Newtownsandess. According to one report, 140 farmers, "armed with pikes and other agra-bellum weapons," hastily converged on the small village. They were met by a large crowd of farm labourers armed with sticks. The farmers claimed they were there to prevent the labourers from seizing two local creameries. A standoff ensued:

For a considerable time excitement ran very high in the village and on more than one occasion it was feared—and with reason too—that the two contending elements would rush into conflict, but when this eventuality became eminently [sic] apparent the Rev Fr. Michael Keane, P.P., put in an appearance...

485 KCI, March 1919 (see also O'Connor, Syndicalism, p. 42).

486 KCI, April 1919.

487 KM, 12 April 1919.

488 KM, 26 April 1919.

Fr. Keane succeeded in persuading the two sides to begin negotiations. This led to a settlement which did not provide as high a wage rate as in Lixnaw (see Table 4.15) but did stipulate that all men employed before the strike would be rehired and that, "the employment of non-union labourers [would] terminate agreement."⁴⁸⁹ This marked the end of the dispute in North Kerry. The author of "Kerryisms" in the Kerryman hoped that, in the future, arbitration would be used "before disputants resort to extremes."⁴⁹⁰

While North Kerry was gripped in early 1919 by the struggle between farmers and labourers over wages, the beginnings of an even more bitter dispute could be discerned. In February 1919, the police had reported, "there are some indications of the greed for land on part of landless men resulting in attempts to compel certain farmers to sell for distribution."⁴⁹¹ A month after the North Kerry strike was over, the police stated that the Listowel and Tralee districts, "continued to be in a disturbed state." In the Listowel area alone, there was an increase of eight "outrages" compared to the previous month. Most of these were connected to disputes over land. The RIC commented further that:

In almost every case where a farm has changed hands there is an agitation amongst the labourers and small holders to have the farm divided up amongst them irrespective of the right of owners...The trouble is that land was never so valuable and the greed for land is becoming serious.⁴⁹²

An example of this type of agitation occurred in August when a large group of labourers, "headed by a Pipers' Band", marched into Tralee and stopped in front of the "Auction Room" on Edward St., "where the lands of Crotia Demesne were billed for a sale". The labourers carried a banner inscribed, "Back to the Land Again" and succeeded in stopping the sale from going ahead. The Kerryman worried about this interference with property rights, questioning whether the labourers were prepared to pay the full market value for the land. Anything else would be intolerable "Bolshevism".⁴⁹³ This

⁴⁸⁹ KM, 3 May 1919 (for the farmers' response to this "one-sided and garbled report" which denies the claim that they were armed, see KM, 10 May 1919).

⁴⁹⁰ KM, 10 May 1919.

⁴⁹¹ KCI, February 1919.

⁴⁹² KCI, June 1919.

⁴⁹³ KM, 23 August 1919.

met with a sharp response from Neligan whose letter was printed in the next issue:

I have been instructed to inform you that the labourers whose procession on the 17th inst., seems to have irritated you were not partaking in a 'popular pastime' as you insinuate. They mean business. They mean to possess the lands of Crovia, every sod of which is saturated with the bloody sweat of their forefathers...When you speak of Bolshevism, it is quite obvious you don't understand what you seek to make a "bogy" of in the approved fashion of the "Morning Post"...

Neligan went on to say that the labourers had offered to buy one fifth of the estate from Mr. Savage for a sum, "many times the price he paid for the whole lands."⁴⁹⁴ Of course, the ITGWU's involvement in this particular dispute does not necessarily mean that they were behind all or even most of the other cases referred to by the police.

The conflict between republican labourers and republican farmers over wages and land was obviously dangerous to Sinn Féin, a fact repeatedly stressed in police reports.⁴⁹⁵ It was also claimed in early 1919 that the North Kerry SF organisation was experiencing internal problems with three prominent members, including the chairman of the County Council, threatening to resign.⁴⁹⁶ In August, the County Inspector claimed that Sinn Féin support was decreasing significantly due largely to "labour troubles":

The farmers who previously took the lead in Sinn Feinism were helpless when the labourers organised and they had to fall back on the police for protection. They no longer meet with the labourers at SF clubs.⁴⁹⁷

One must, however, beware of the possibility of "wish fulfilment" in the police analysis. Being so desirous of a split or weakening of Sinn Féin, they may have seized on any evidence, no matter how slim, to "prove" that this was happening.

⁴⁹⁴ KM, 30 August 1919.

⁴⁹⁵ For example, in May 1919, it was claimed that the ITGWU's organising drive in rural areas was to, "the detriment of Sinn Fein" (KCI, May 1919).

⁴⁹⁶ KCI, February 1919.

⁴⁹⁷ KCI, August 1919.

Nevertheless, it is clear that land agitation was continuing unabated. In September, the police reported another increase in outrages—34 as opposed to 31 in August—12 of which occurred in the Listowel area. All the Listowel incidents were "connected with agrarian troubles":

...in the two cases from [the] district of shooting into dwellings the injured persons are Sinn Feiners. Indeed in most of the outrages now taking place [across the county] such as malicious injury to property and firing into dwellings they are purely agrarian and it is Sinn Feiners against Sinn Feiners and all help in the split that is gradually widening.⁴⁹⁸

The inspector also suggested that, as the police withdrew from certain areas under pressure from the IRA, the way was opened for, "the people to pay off old scores".⁴⁹⁹

This "movement" which involved both labourers and small farmers—i.e. "landless men" in general—was not clearly led by any organisation at this stage. The most that can be said was that at various points it overlapped with labour agitation. But at the end of November, the Kerryman headlined its report of a meeting in Ballyduff, "Labourers' New Movement in North Kerry—An Extra Half-Acre of Land Claimed". The demand that farmers give each of their labourers an "extra half-acre" for their plots had apparently already been endorsed by the Listowel RDC. A member of the council, John P. Dineen, chaired the Ballyduff meeting. The paper also reported the presence of, "a large sprinkling of sympathetic farmers". No mention was made of the ITGWU but John Dennehy, who gave the main address, was described as the "very able hon. sec." The intention of the organisers was said to be to hold meetings across North Kerry.⁵⁰⁰

The following week, Dennehy addressed a meeting in Lixnaw. The movement's demand had increased to a full Irish acre for "Union cottage-holders" to be leased from farmers "at reasonable rents". Dennehy said that labourers wanted "the grass of a cow" and claimed

⁴⁹⁸ KCI, September 1919.

⁴⁹⁹ The total number of outrages in Kerry in 1919 was 332, compared to 230 in 1918. This increase was largely attributable to labour and agrarian trouble. In the Listowel district alone, "there were 38 cases of firing into dwellings...four cases of malicious use of explosives and four cases of firing at and wounding." (O'Connor, Syndicalism, p. 42; he cites PROL, CO 903/19/5).

⁵⁰⁰ KM, 29 November 1919.

that skim milk was selling at 9d per gallon in Lixnaw.⁵⁰¹ At the next reported meeting, again held in Ballyduff, and described as the weekly meeting of the "committee of farmers and labourers", negotiations were held. It was decided, "on the suggestion of the farmers present...to fix the rent of the additional Irish acre to each labourer's cottage at £2 per annum for 20 years under the con-acre system."⁵⁰² Farmers were also in attendance at a labourers' meeting in Liselton in late December 1919. At this meeting, Dennehy read a letter of support from Father T. Curtayne, C.C., Ballybunion, who declared:

The aims and objects of their new association—which was of local inspiration—commanded the goodwill and assistance of all reasonable and disinterested persons.⁵⁰³

This letter as well as the fact that the ITGWU was not mentioned in any of the newspaper reports suggest strongly that despite the union's leading role in the earlier strike, it was not in control of this new movement.

The "extra acre" agitation continued to spread in the new year. A meeting in Causeway called for the extension of the Ballyduff agreement to other areas.⁵⁰⁴ On 10 January, the Kerryman reported a meeting in Listowel attended by, "a number of the union cottiers" which discussed the formation of "a branch of the new movement". The same issue also reported that:

During the week a large procession of the union cottiers headed by a Sinn Fein flag, marched through Listowel, and afterwards left for the country, demanding from the various farmers the extra acre of land as decided upon by the new labour organisation. It is said there were few refusals and those, like Ulster, will, it is believed, "come in" later on.⁵⁰⁵

A week later, the "Ballybunion Land and Labour Association" were also said to have, "paid their first visit to local farmers in quest of an

⁵⁰¹ KM, 6 December 1919.

⁵⁰² KM, 13 December 1919.

⁵⁰³ KM, 20 December 1919. This issue also reported a meeting calling for the "extra acre" in Castleisland.

⁵⁰⁴ KM, 3 January 1920.

⁵⁰⁵ See also LL, 12 & 16 January 1920.

extra acre of land."⁵⁰⁶ In all but one case, the results of these interviews were "very successful". In late January, a list of North Kerry farmers who had given the extra acre was published in the local press. There were, however, already signs of friction. A letter from Denis Moloney, a Lixnaw labourer, defended the movement against charges of "Bolshevism", saying:

I can inform you from personal knowledge that up to the present four out of every five farmers that we approached through the very extensive district from Abbeydorney bounds to the Smeuria Bridge gave the acre willingly, and none of them can show that violence...was used...Farmers of Kerry! Act as the many of your class have generously done in North Kerry, and don't grudge an Irish acre of land to the poor, struggling labourer neighbour of yours, whose blood is as Irish as your own...

But while appealing to the conscience of the farmers, seeking to allay their fears, and claiming that the loss of a few acres would not hurt them this letter still manages—perhaps unintentionally—to be menacing. It concluded by reminding farmers that, "the day is not far distant when a plot of the self-same Irish soil, area seven feet by three, will suffice for all your needs."⁵⁰⁷

Given the increasing force of the extra acre movement, it is not surprising that the second half of January also saw moves to reorganise the IFU in North Kerry. A letter to the press from Patrick Trant claimed that the first attempt to establish the IFU in Listowel collapsed after the "absurd and groundless" rumour that the organisation sought to stop labourers' unemployment benefits led to extreme hostility from workers. As a result, according to Trant, "our meetings were obstructed and some of our members assaulted...[thus] the timid amongst us abstained from giving our movement the support necessary to success."⁵⁰⁸

However, it was not just the IFU who were reorganising in North Kerry. A meeting in Lixnaw at the end of January marked the merging of the ITGWU and the extra acre movement. Neligan was the

⁵⁰⁶ KM, 17 January 1920.

⁵⁰⁷ KM, 24 January 1920.

⁵⁰⁸ KM, 31 January 1920 (IF, 21 February 1920, reports, "Kerry is the latest addition to the ranks of the Irish Farmers Union." The IFU had remained active, however, in South and East Kerry during late 1919).

main speaker. He put the blame for the collapse of the first attempt to form a branch of the Transport Union in the district squarely on the shoulders of the members of the branch committee who allegedly, "didn't take a really active interest in it and [didn't] run it on business lines." Dennehy also spoke and moved a vote of thanks to Neligan. There were numerous references to the help given by labourers to farmers during the "Land League days". This echoed the rhetoric used the year before in West Limerick. Neligan quipped that the farmer, "showed far greater hospitality and good nature towards the labourer when he was dragging the devil by the tail (loud cheers and laughter)." However, a farmer named Dowling who was a Land League veteran was also present and pledged to give the extra acre. This was received with acclamation and a voice cried out, "Kind father for you." Traditions of deference died hard.⁵⁰⁹

But while Dowling and some other farmers may have been willing to compromise, the friction between militants on both sides escalated into outright violence. In January, the police reported that the processions of labourers demanding the extra acre from farmers were, "most orderly and no threats have been used." However, on the night of 19 January, shots were fired into five labourers' homes, allegedly by farmers' sons. The County Inspector commented cynically that the increased friction, "may be all for the general good and will be to the disadvantage of Sinn Fein as they will not combine to attack the police and each party will be afraid of the other."⁵¹⁰ In February, the police reported that "indictable offences" doubled, compared to the previous month, from 48 to 96. Of these, 42 were "agrarian", compared to 16 in January. This was not simply a local phenomenon but part of a wave of agrarian agitation which swept across large parts of Munster and Connaught.⁵¹¹ On 7 February, the Kerryman reported a number of cases of arson in North Kerry which it attributed to, "bitter disputes between the farmers and labourers over grants of land". In Ballylongford, shots were fired into the homes of three labourers who had taken part, "in the labour procession through the parish asking for land from the farmers." Ricks of hay and a "dwelling house" belonging to farmers were burned to the ground the following night. Hay was also burned in Ballyheigue.

⁵⁰⁹ KM, 31 January 1920

⁵¹⁰ KCI, January 1920.

⁵¹¹ IG & KCI, February 1920.

Letters from farmers to the press became more strident in their tone. One declared, "God forbid that Bolshevism or Atheism should ever be tolerated in this land of ours." A meeting to found an IFU branch in Lixnaw unanimously opposed the extra acre demand, declaring that to submit to the scheme, "would be to admit the right of bodies of men without legitimate or moral authority, to demand from private individuals part of their private property." By the middle of February, the IFU had reestablished its county organisation and there was talk of Vigilance Committees being formed by farmers' sons.⁵¹² At this stage, the Catholic Church decided to intervene. In a previously mentioned Lenten pastoral, Bishop O'Sullivan denounced:

wilful and wanton destruction of private property by fire in certain parts of our diocese...In ordinary justice, we must say, on the other hand, that many persons declare these acts of sabotage to have no connection with any movement of an economic or political character.⁵¹³

Clearly the bishop did not want to be perceived as putting all the blame for the violence on labour and farmers' organisations.

Meanwhile, the ITGWU was spreading its rural organisation into the Glenbeigh and Killorglin districts in the southwest of the county. These areas provided a significant migratory labour force who worked on the farms of North Kerry and Limerick. At the founding meeting of the Glenbeigh branch, Neligan alleged that the Limerick IFU, meeting in Kilmallock, had recently pledged:

...not to employ a single member of the Transport Union, but to send their agents to the congested districts of Kerry and Connaught to import cheap labour and so break the combination of the Limerick workers. Mr Neligan advised all who wanted to go seeking work in these districts to become members of the Transport Union and so protect themselves and save themselves the scorn of being used as strike-breakers and blacklegs.

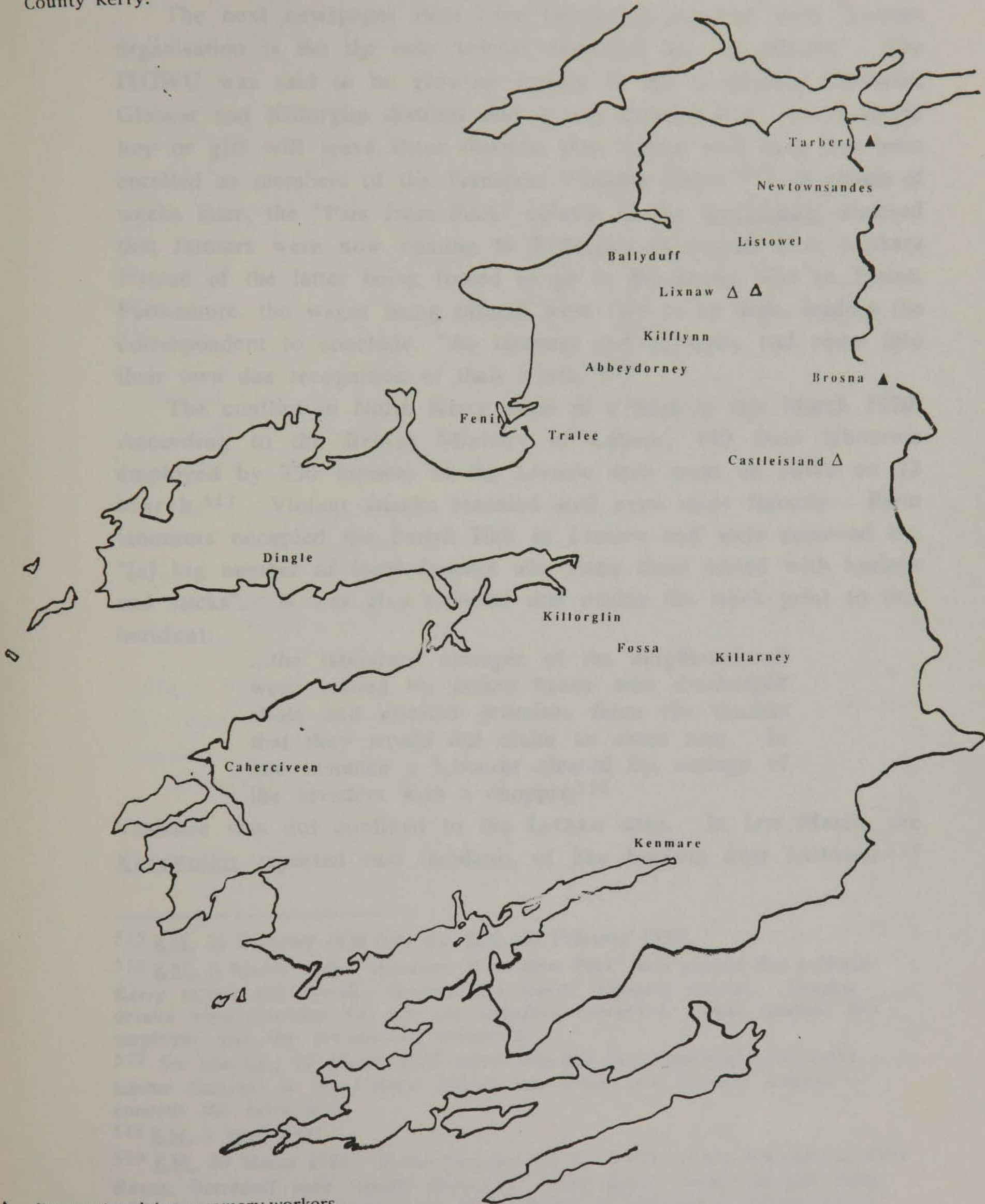
⁵¹² KM, 14 February 1920. More correspondence on the extra acre issue appeared in KM, 21 & 28 February 1920.

⁵¹³ KM, 28 February 1920.

Neligan also said that a union-run "labour bureau" would be set up in Tralee and other towns which would replace the "slave markets" and protect workers from "unscrupulous employers".⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ KM, 14 February 1920 (see also KM, 24 January 1920, for background information).

Map 4 - Distribution of ITGWU branches, 1915-21 and strikes involving farm and creamery workers in 1919-21, County Kerry.



▲ - disputes involving creamery workers

△ - disputes involving farm workers

The next newspaper item from Glenbeigh reported that, "Labour organisation is the the only subject discussed here at present." The ITGWU was said to be growing rapidly in the Glenbeigh, Cromane, Glencar and Killorglin districts and it was claimed that, "not a single boy or girl will leave these districts this Spring who have not been enrolled as members of the Transport Workers Union."⁵¹⁵ A couple of weeks later, the "Pars from Puck" column in the Kerryman claimed that farmers were now coming to Killorglin to recruit farm workers instead of the latter being forced to go to the hiring fairs in Tralee. Furthermore, the wages being offered were said to be high, leading the correspondent to conclude, "the labourer and domestic had come into their own due recognition of their worth."⁵¹⁶

The conflict in North Kerry came to a head in late March 1920. According to the British Ministry of Labour, 440 farm labourers employed by 250 farmers in the Lixnaw area went on strike on 22 March.⁵¹⁷ Violent attacks resumed with even more ferocity. Farm labourers occupied the Parish Hall in Lixnaw and were removed by, "[a] big number of local farmers who came there armed with hurleys and sticks". It was also reported that during the week prior to this incident:

...the labourers' cottages of the neighbourhood were visited by armed bands who discharged shots and elicited promises from the tenants that they would not claim an extra acre. In one instance a labourer cleared his cottage of the invaders with a chopper.⁵¹⁸

Violence was not confined to the Lixnaw area. In late March, the Kerryman reported two incidents of hay burning near Listowel.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁵ KM, 21 February 1920 (see also KM, 28 February 1920).

⁵¹⁶ KM, 6 March 1920. However, "Pars from Puck" also alleged that a North Kerry farmer had brutally mistreated a female domestic servant. Graphic details were provided but the correspondent concluded, "thank heaven, this employer was the present-day exception."

⁵¹⁷ See also LL, 29 March 1920 which reported that "practically the entire labour element" in the Lixnaw district had struck after farmers refused to concede the extra acre.

⁵¹⁸ KM, 3 April 1920.

⁵¹⁹ KM, 20 March 1920. In the first case, 13 to 16 tons of hay belonging to Cors Keane, Barraduff were "totally destroyed." The paper commented that, "this with the many other burnings in North Kerry, is assigned to labour unrest." The other incident arose from a dispute in Coolnaleen, "in connection with Dr. Davidge's property, the uneconomic holders demanding the parceling out of the land." This appears to fall more into the "agrarian" than the "labour" category.

The extra acre agitation spread to the Killorglin and Glenbeigh districts as well. At first many local farmers were said to have responded positively to the demand but in, early April, masked men raided several houses in the area, "in connection with the agrarian dispute."⁵²⁰

Until early April, farm labourers appeared to be on the receiving end of most reported attacks. This began to change. On 10 April 1920, the Kerryman reported a series of serious assaults in the Ballylongford area. A farmer named Carroll was attacked at home. The raiders allegedly threatened to shoot him if he did not give them land. They then, "broke all the windows and furniture and took their departure." A worker named Crowe was dragged from his bed, "half naked and received some severe threatening, accompanied with an occasional blow of a gun." Shortly thereafter, "armed and masked men" broke into the house of a farmer named Wallace in Ballyline and began firing shots through the roof:

When the firing ceased the raiders took Mr Wallace's brother-in-law out in the yard and belaboured him with the stocks of the guns. Mr Wallace seized a shovel and went to his brother-in-law's assistance, when one of the raiders fired and blew away part of his leg.

Wallace was said to be in critical condition. The Kerryman's correspondent suggested the formation of a "strong vigilance committee" to stop outrages on both sides.⁵²¹

According to the Ministry of Labour, the strike in the Lixnaw area ended on 11 April with "extra land granted in some cases".⁵²² But by this stage, Sinn Féin and the Catholic clergy were thoroughly alarmed. The Kerryman reprinted a letter from a "Kerry Priest" to the Irish Independent on the "Land Agitation in Kerry". Significantly, the letter does not mention labour or the ITGWU. Rather, the unnamed cleric believed that land hunger was exacerbated by the increasing intensity of the national struggle. He concluded that unless "speedily checked", this movement, "threatens to work irreparable injury to the Sinn Féin cause through the county." Sinn Féin and the IRA apparently agreed

⁵²⁰ KM, 27 March & 3 April 1920.

⁵²¹ KM, 10 April 1920.

⁵²² According to one source, the tension between farmers and labourers in North Kerry was settled by Dail Eireann arbitration (O'Connor, Syndicalism, p. 42).

with this analysis. In Ballyheigue, 300 hundred "local Sinn Feiners" marched through the village "in full equipment" before Sunday mass. They posted notices outside the church:

warning the people that none of these [land] claims would be tolerated or anything allowed to crop up to divide the National Forces "until the common ideal of an Irish Republic is realised." Those who dared disobey the notices were warned to look out for the consequences. Labourers who refused to work for farmers against whom such claims were made were warned to return to work. The demonstration created a profound impression.⁵²³

The same issue of the Kerryman reported, however, that two men were shot in Ballinvoher and one in Kilflynn in connection with "Land Disputes in North Kerry".

The show of force in Ballyheigue was followed by the publication of a manifesto signed by all four Kerry TDs. The manifesto focused on the issue of land claims and did not mention the labour movement. It declared, "all our energies must be directed towards clearing out—not the occupier of this or that piece of land—but the foreigner who holds the Nation in his grip." Claimants were ordered to go to the Sinn Féin courts which were being formed across the county. A thinly veiled warning was included that the IRA ("the forces of the Nation") would be used if those seeking land persisted in "high-handed methods".⁵²⁴ A couple of weeks later, a conference "of the clergy and representative laity of the united diocese of Ardfert and Aghadoe", was held in Killarney to discuss, "arrangements for settling land disputes in an amicable manner."⁵²⁵

⁵²³ KM, 24 April 1920.

⁵²⁴ KM, 1 May 1920. In mid June, it was reported that land courts were to be established in Kerry to adjudicate claims (KM, 19 June 1920). Sinn Féin courts were certainly functioning widely by late July (e.g. KM, 24 July 1920) In early August, it was also reported that "Sinn Fein Arbitration and General Courts" were to be set up in the county to supplement the currently functioning "parish" and "district" courts (KM, 7 August 1920).

⁵²⁵ KM, 15 May 1920. This report sought to blame the Redmondites for land disputes, declaring, "when the 'Party' relied chiefly on the Land Agitation to bolster them up politically and keep them in power, the Irish Tenant Farmers were enthusiastically invited to sacrifice themselves 'for the cause'. Promises were copiously made that 'the wounded soldiers of the Land War' would not be forgotten. We all know how honorably these promises were honored."

The pressure from republican and religious leaders may have had an effect as reports of agrarian violence decreased markedly. However, the primary factors in quelling unrest were the ferocious resistance of farmers to any perceived attack on their property rights as well as the intensification of the War of Independence. Nevertheless, sporadic incidents continued. In early May, the press reported a cattle drive on a farm in Ballynablann near Caherciveen. It was said that, "labourers in the districts adjoining this ranch want to get a part of the lands under a con-acre system."⁵²⁶ At the end of the month, a newspaper report was headlined, "Sinn Fein Arrests in North Kerry—Charge of Throwing Down Fences—Prisoners Removed to an Unknown Destination."⁵²⁷ The extra acre campaign was reported to be continuing in the Killorglin area in early June with "many" farmers agreeing to the demand.⁵²⁸ But these were the dying gasps of farm labourer agitation in this period. In both June and July, the police reported a decrease in the number of "outrages" in Kerry. Specifically, "agrarian" outrages declined from 14 in May to 2 in June.⁵²⁹

Despite all the bitterness generated during 1919-20 between farmers and labourers in Kerry, the June elections for the Rural District Councils and the County Council were remarkably devoid of acrimony. Reports from various districts indicated that SF/Labour agreed slates were the norm. Hence, there were very few contests and none which appeared to pit Labour against Sinn Féin. In the Kenmare district, the two parties were said to have made a "clean sweep" of the council without a contest. Of four electoral divisions in Caherciveen, only one had a contested election because an independent candidate stood against the SF slate. In the other three areas, SF candidates, many of them labourers and fishermen, were unopposed. The author of "Ballylongford Notes" declared, "I am happy to say we have fallen into line with the rest of 'The Kingdom' and Sinn Fein plus Labour rules the roost."⁵³⁰ Introducing new RDC members

⁵²⁶ KM, 8 May 1920.

⁵²⁷ KM, 29 May 1920.

⁵²⁸ KM, 5 June 1920.

⁵²⁹ KCI, June; IG & KCI, July 1920.

⁵³⁰ KM, 15 May 1920. The following issue of the paper reported that only one division in the Caherciveen, Dingle and Tralee districts would be contested. Apparently, all the seats in the other Kerry RDCs were uncontested. KM, 5 June 1920 reported that the contest in the Ardfert division of Tralee RDC only occurred because 8 SF candidates had stood for 7 seats and a withdrawal was handed in late. The independent candidate in Caher division of Caherciveen RDC only received 13 votes.

from the Killorglin area, "Pars from Puck" describes Dan O'Dwyer as having been, "sent forward in the interests of Labour, the local branch of which he was Secretary, and we may add Organiser...A prominent member of the Sinn Fein organisation also, he combines the two interests."⁵³¹

The pattern of farm labourer unrest in Kerry which overlapped heavily with land hunger and agrarian agitation was clearly different from that in Limerick. This was not, however the only distinction between the rural labour movement of the two counties. Creamery workers figured far less prominently in labour unrest in Kerry despite the importance of the dairy sector in the north of the county. During 1919-21, there were only two reported strikes involving creamery workers, the first being in December 1919 in Brosna and the second in June 1920 in Tarbert.⁵³² Both were led by the ITGWU but aside from this little is known about these disputes. In fact, the most bitter Kerry dispute involving creamery workers does not appear to have had anything to do with the labour movement. This was the spate of violence in Ballymacelligot in late 1919 between supporters of the local co-operative creamery and a "proprietary" creamery owned by Slattery's. According to the Inspector General of the RIC, the dispute between the rival creameries had escalated after a court case:

...the supporters of the defeated party—a co-operative creamery—resolved to take the law into their own hands. Houses were fired into, a horse drawing a milk cart was shot, and persons taking milk to Slattery's Creamery were attacked on the road and turned back.

According to the County Inspector, this dispute led to 22 outrages during October.⁵³³

The solidarity between farm labourers and creamery workers which was so evident in Limerick was not apparent in Kerry. However, the activity of farm labourers clearly did spur on other

⁵³¹ KM, 22 May 1920 (see also KM, 8 May 1920).

⁵³² Of course, it could be pointed out that there were only three strikes involving farm labourers in the county during this period. However, the two which have been discussed were clearly major disputes. The third was a strike by farm labourers in the Castleisland district which began in August 1919 and lasted less than a month. The cause and outcome of this strike were not reported.

⁵³³ IG & KCI, October 1919. The County Inspector also claimed that the violence ceased after he told a local priest who was a strong supporter of the co-operative that, "the creameries might be closed and the the district proclaimed a military area." (see also KM, 18 October & 6 December 1919)

sections of the rural labour movement, particularly in the spring of 1920. The Watchword of Labour reported in April that a "forward push" had begun in the Kerry creameries, "simultaneously with that in Co Limerick." It was said that, "recent wins over farmers combinations in the area point to a smooth passage."⁵³⁴ Two months earlier, as the extra acre agitation picked up steam, road workers across the county went out on strike for a wage increase. According to the Ministry of Labour, the strike involved 235 workers but the police said 800 County Council and RDC road workers stopped work. The strike began on 20 January and lasted two weeks. The outcome was a success for the workers as the Ministry of Transport approved rates of 45s and 40s for County Council stewards and labourers respectively. This represented a 10s increase.⁵³⁵

The successful 1920 strike by road workers followed a year of agitation. In January 1919, a disturbance occurred on Kenmare's Main Street when labourers spotted a councillor who had opposed the demand for increased wages.⁵³⁶ On 28 February, 18 Kenmare road workers went on strike demanding a wage of 30s for labourers and 35s for stewards. The strike lasted almost two months. In the end, the labourers and stewards settled for 25s and 27s.6d respectively.⁵³⁷ In November, Neligan and other ITGWU members attended a County Council meeting to push for wage increases.⁵³⁸

The final point of difference between the rural labour movement in Kerry and Limerick which has already been noted in the urban setting was that the Kerry movement did not recover after the Truce. After the strike by Tarbert creamery workers in June 1920, there were no further reported rural disputes until March 1922. However, the one section of the rural labour movement in Kerry which at least

⁵³⁴ WoL, 19 April 1920. Later in the year, it was reported that, "a Conference Board, on the lines of Limerick Junction Board," was being established in Kerry to set wage rates in the county's co-operative creameries.

⁵³⁵ IG, February 1920; KM, 14 February 1920. The LGB had originally vetoed rates of 50s for stewards and 45s for labourers which had been approved by the County Council (see also KM, 31 January 1920 & WoL, 7 February 1920).

⁵³⁶ KM, 18 January 1919.

⁵³⁷ PROL, LAB 34/37 (see also KM, 15 & 29 March 1919). A sequel to this strike was that the committee of the Kenmare ITGWU branch fined two members who remained at work during the dispute. The fine was, "£1 each, being the full penalty, but was afterwards reduced according to their means, James Leary's being reduced to 10s and Daniel Murphy's to 2s.6d. It must be remembered that Murphy is a disabled man and has nothing to live on and Leary, on the other hand, a farmer. The Committee took all this into consideration" (KM, 7 June 1919).

⁵³⁸ KM, 15 November 1919.

showed signs of life during this period were road workers. In August 1920, County Council employees were said to be angry over rumours that direct labour would be eliminated and the contract system reestablished. They threatened to take action if the rumour proved to be correct.⁵³⁹ In October, the Killarney RDC decided, "that all roads in their district be maintained by the contract system and that contracts be given to agricultural labourers limited to three miles."⁵⁴⁰ A few weeks later, McGrath, an ITGWU organiser, arrived in Killarney and was reportedly pushing the claims of road workers on the Kenmare-Killarney road as well as several groups of workers in the town.⁵⁴¹

The disruption of the finances of republican public authorities led to serious hardship for road workers during the winter of 1920-1, as noted in Limerick. In Kerry, it was reported in early February that hundreds of road workers had been laid off. The local press also stated that, "in almost every case, the laborers were paid no wages from October 21st last till the middle of last month when—what do you think of it? paying orders were actually issued for a fortnight's wages."⁵⁴² In August 1921, a meeting to protest the dismissal of 16 North Kerry road stewards was organised in Listowel by the ITGWU. The dismissed stewards, said to be half of the total number in the area, were allegedly replaced by "outsiders".⁵⁴³ In October, the ITGWU claimed that two-thirds of Kerry road workers, "have been workless for some months past."⁵⁴⁴

That the situation on the roads had still not returned to normal at the end of 1921 is indicated in a piece from the Voice of Labour's Tarbert correspondent which was reproduced in the Kerry People in early December. He complained that the County Council was rehiring all of its old stewards, including those, "who farm 40 acres and 15 cows," while many labourers had still not been rehired. The same issue also carried a letter from a Kerry IFU spokesman calling for direct labour to be replaced by contract labour, "at no distant date."⁵⁴⁵ Two weeks later, the Irish Farmer carried a resolution from the IFU's

⁵³⁹ WoL, 7 August 1920; KM, 14 August 1920.

⁵⁴⁰ KM, 23 October 1920.

⁵⁴¹ WoL, 6 November 1920.

⁵⁴² KM, 5 February 1921.

⁵⁴³ KP, 6 August 1921

⁵⁴⁴ VoL, 22 October 1921.

⁵⁴⁵ KP, 3 December 1921 (see also VoL, 26 November 1921).

Lixnaw branch repeating this call.⁵⁴⁶ This agitation by the IFU intersected the refusal of many Kerry farmers to pay rates. The Tarbert branch of the IFU publicly complained in October about the 18s.3d rate (per pound of valuation) struck by the County Council and resolved to only pay 10s.⁵⁴⁷ The Co Kerry Executive, however, opposed the stand of the Tarbert branch and defended the County Council.⁵⁴⁸ Nevertheless, this issue remained a bone of contention among farmers until the end of the year.⁵⁴⁹

What accounts for the difference in the post-Truce rural labour movement in Kerry and Limerick? The impact of the War of Independence on the two counties was not enormously different. It would appear that the association of the Kerry ITGWU with agrarian agitation, while providing a spur for militancy initially, may have also damaged it when Sinn Féin and the Catholic Church turned sharply against the violent pursuit of land claims in mid-1920. The death of Neligan, the county's most outspoken labour activist, in July 1920 did not help matters. What is especially striking is that after the spring 1920 strike there was no attempt on the part of electoral Labour locally to differentiate themselves from the republicans despite the enormous class antagonisms which had opened up in the countryside over the past year and a half.

The Limerick City labour "establishment", personified in John Cronin and James Carr, maintained control of the Trades Council after the arrival of the ITGWU and the fusion with the P.L.C. Despite initial co-operation with the Transport Union, Carr retained his power by the representatives of unskilled trade unions to share power. In this they were supported by other unions who felt threatened by perceived ITGWU empire-building.

The Trades Council and the "Three Cs" (Cronin, Carr and Casey) are most often remembered for leading the Limerick "General" in April 1922. The most impressive actions undertaken by the Irish labour movement in the post-war period were, however, in fact led by a comparatively conservative group of men who had a conservative conservative

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⁵⁴⁶ IF, 17 December 1921.

⁵⁴⁷ IF, 1 October 1921

⁵⁴⁸ IF, 22 October 1921

⁵⁴⁹ See KP, 26 November, 10 & 17 December 1921; IF, 31 December 1921.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the labour movement during 1914-21 in Limerick and Kerry's several "microeconomies" reveals a number of striking contrasts. For example, while the number of women listed as "not producing" was twice that of men in both urban and rural areas, in Limerick City the range of paid occupations available to women was far wider. This was reflected in a greater participation of women in the trade unions during 1917-21 than anywhere else in the two counties. There was no parallel to the Limerick ITGWU's "women section", nor to the strikes involving women workers, even in Tralee, the area's second largest town.

The occupational distribution among males, on the other hand, was quite similar in Limerick City and Tralee, with the proportion of "skilled" workers just slightly exceeding that of unskilled workers, and representing just over four tenths of the total manual workforce. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, craft unions of skilled workers were the most stable labour bodies in both towns. However, Limerick City's relative size meant that the labour movement was better organised from an earlier date. This was exemplified by the establishment of a Trades Council in 1893 which was in continuous existence after being reestablished in 1905. The council was dominated by the craft unions whose representatives entrenched themselves as a type of "labour establishment" or "aristocracy" to a far greater extent than in Tralee. A large proportion of Limerick City's unskilled workers were also organised before the First World War, but the degree of stratification in the local labour movement was reflected in the existence of a separate Federated Labour Council.

The Limerick City labour "establishment", personified in John Cronin and James Carr, maintained control of the Trades Council after the arrival of the ITGWU and the fusion with the FLC. Despite initial co-operation with the Transport Union, they resisted any move by the representatives of unskilled trade unionists to share power. In this they were supported by other unions who felt threatened by perceived ITGWU empire-building.

The Trades Council and the "three Cs" (Cronin, Carr and Casey) are most often remembered for leading the Limerick "Soviet" in April 1919, one of the most impressive actions undertaken by the Irish labour movement during its post-war radical turn. However, it has been shown that these men also had a consistently conservative worldview. Without significant dissent, they supported the

constitutional nationalism of the IPP/UIIL until the aftermath of the Easter Rising caused a massive shift in southern Irish public opinion. In sharp contrast, the Dublin Trades Council passed a resolution supporting the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army in 1915. Nor were the LUTLC stalwarts affected to any significant degree by the enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution which subsequently gripped many of their Dublin counterparts.

This conservatism was also reflected in the close relationship between the LUTLC and the local Catholic clergy. Examples include union involvement in the Vigilance Committee; the 1917 lecture series co-sponsored by Fr. Devane; and participation in Fr. Hackett's attempt to establish a "Social Institute" in 1920. Of course, FLC-affiliated unions were also involved in the Vigilance Committee and in passing resolutions of support for the clergy. Even ITGWU activists gave public, if usually less demonstrative, voice to Catholic beliefs. It was not the fact but rather the degree of co-operation involving Trades Council officials which was striking.

Labour-clerical cooperation was also a factor in the formation of the Conciliation Board in January 1920. The longstanding campaign of the Limerick Leader to form such a board finally came to fruition in the midst of the bitter dock strike led by the ITGWU. While the FLC had previously supported the Conciliation Board idea, Dowling, the ITGWU organiser in the city, showed little enthusiasm. Cronin, on the other hand, used every opportunity to impress upon labour activists the necessity of supporting the scheme. When the board was established, one of its co-chairmen was Fr. Philip, the Limerick cleric most involved in labour affairs at the time, and one of the council's nominees for the post.

By contrast with Limerick City, the representatives of unskilled workers played a leading role in the affairs of the Tralee Trades and Labour Council from its formation in 1914. The lack of an entrenched craft union "establishment" in Tralee also facilitated the ITGWU's remarkable breakthrough in 1915-16 when it led the town's labour movement into a de-facto alliance with local republicans. And although there is much less material extant on the TTLC, the divisive frictions which preoccupied the Limerick council do not appear to have been reproduced. The unskilled workers of the town, concentrated in the four "Merchant Princes" and the UDC, were strategically placed in the local economy and, once organised, were able to gain most of their demands without resorting to strike action.

The prolonged disputes which wracked the Limerick docks were not paralleled in Tralee. Strikes in the town, though very frequent during 1918-20, were generally of short duration and involved relatively few workers. Nor was a local Conciliation Board, though occasionally advocated by the Kerryman, ever seriously posed.

The rural workers of County Limerick operated in a more "developed" economic situation than their Kerry counterparts, with a large layer of strong farmers sitting atop a polarised social order. Rural labour organisation had existed from the beginning of the century and formed an important component of the Redmondite political machine, especially in East Limerick. During 1919-21, the ITGWU maintained a firmer rural base in the county than in Kerry. This was partly predicated on the symbiosis of farm and creamery militancy which had no parallel in Kerry.

The internal contrasts within the rural economy of Kerry were far sharper than those between East and West Limerick. The rural labour movement was largely a phenomenon of North and East Kerry, areas similar to West Limerick. Agricultural workers in South Kerry, on the other hand, were largely a migratory labour force for the farms of North Kerry and Limerick. The ILLA featured little in Kerry's pre-war labour movement though the UIL may have partly substituted via its agitation for redistribution of landlords' estates to small farmers and labourers.

In general, land redistribution, encapsulated in the demand for an "extra acre", played a far greater role in farm labourer agitation in 1919-20 in Kerry than it did in Limerick. Besides strike action, arson and other forms of sabotage flourished in North Kerry and at many points it did not appear as though the ITGWU or any other organisation was "in control" of developments. Sabotage was also widespread in West Limerick during 1919 and later in East Limerick, but there it was more clearly an adjunct of strike activity fought mainly over the "trade unionist" demand for higher wages. The de-facto alliance which emerged in Kerry between small farmers and labourers in late 1919 and early 1920 combined land hunger and labour agitation. It was the most socially explosive development in the two counties during 1914-21, as reflected in the concern of Sinn Féin TDs and the Catholic hierarchy and in the virtual glee of RIC internal reports. But while explosive, this movement also proved less sustainable than the ITGWU presence in rural Limerick. Having met the determined resistance of farmers, republicans and clergy, and

with no coherent social programme to pose as an alternative to the "Gaelic State", Kerry' rural labour movement became moribund after mid-1920. By contrast, in West Limerick, the ITGWU went on a successful organising drive in late 1921 and, at the end of the year a major strike was underway in Bulgaden, with the workers in confident and determined mood.

But despite the contrasting characteristics of trade unionism in the "microeconomies" of Kerry and Limerick, the overall experience in the two counties did not deviate significantly from that of the southern Irish labour movement as a whole. Both counties conformed to the national pattern of wage militancy beginning in the latter half of the First World War in response to the ravages of inflation and resulting in an exponential growth in strike activity. While detailed study has not been undertaken in other Irish counties on wage increases/decreases during 1914-21, it seems reasonable to expect that the pattern observed in Kerry and Limerick, where unskilled workers posted significantly better relative gains than skilled workers by the end of 1920, would be reproduced. The limited local data for 1921 also suggests that, in the context of deflation, Irish workers made substantial, if perhaps temporary, gains in real wages. Overall, the data presented in Chapters 3 and 4, though covering only a short time span, seems to accord with the thesis that, since the mid-19th century, Irish wages, particularly for unskilled males, have "converged" with those in Britain. It must, however, also be noted that wage rates in the two islands appeared to diverge during the First World War before a sharp convergence occurred in 1919-20.

The experience of organised workers in Kerry and Limerick also conformed to broad national political patterns. Even the exceptional labour-republican alliance in Kerry during 1915-16 only predates national developments by a few months and was echoed at the time by a wing of the Dublin Trades Council. The post-Rising development of this political axis involved both labour's conservative and radical wings. In Limerick City, John Cronin advocated close cooperation with Sinn Féin in the 1920 municipal elections while consistently deriding attempts to introduce any tinge of revolutionary socialism into Labour's electoral work. Meanwhile, numerous ITGWU activists, presumably having fewer qualms about the "Workers' Republic" ran openly on the Sinn Féin ticket in the municipal and subsequent rural elections in both counties. In Tralee, Killarney and Listowel, the alliance was codified in the sharing of municipal honours by the two

parties and in Tralee an agreed slate was presented for the Board of Guardians. The most symbolic aspects of the labour-republican alliance did not, however, occur in the electoral sphere. In Limerick City, the mid-Limerick Brigade of the IRA used the ITGWU's offices as its headquarters while, at the end of 1921, the Limerick Trades Council was overwhelmed with gratitude for the honour of being able to present an address of welcome to deValera. Adulation once reserved for Redmond had been switched to a new "Leader".

It would be false, however, to present this political alliance simply in terms of the "subordination" of labour's aims to those of militant nationalism. This would cancel out the radicalisation which infused large sections of the labour movement with such remarkable energy and led to such diverse phenomena as the production of local labour journals in Limerick City, Kilmallock and Killarney, as well as the famous worker occupations of 1920-1 which were baptised "soviets". The fiery speeches of John Dowling and Maurice Neligan met with an enthusiastic response among many labourers working on farms, roads, and docks. Nor was revolutionary rhetoric the exclusive preserve of the ITGWU as seen during the 1919 strike by drapers' assistants at McBirney's in Limerick City.

Labour radicalism may seem at first sight to be at odds with the partial subordination of social and political aims involved in the alliance with militant nationalism. It must be remembered, however, that the southern labour movement had consistently maintained since the early 19th century that only by breaking the Union with Britain could Irish economic development proceed. This meant effectively that the resolution of the "national question" must precede the resolution of the "social question". Of course, radicals like Dowling and Neligan wanted to go far further than reproducing the industrialisation of Britain under an Irish flag. Nevertheless, the ITGWU, while warning workers not to trust republicans in power to behave any differently than the British administration, in practice accepted the "leading role" of the IRA and Sinn Fein in the "fight for freedom". The frustration felt by many labour activists after the ILPTUC leadership refused to "extend" the Limerick Soviet into a national action was not accompanied by any clear alternative strategy. Simply put, no wing of the Irish labour movement sought to challenge Sinn Fein for political control of the national struggle.

Rather, labour activists sought to use the alliance with militant nationalism to achieve at least part of their ends, in the first instance

the mutually agreed aim of removing the British administration. More than this, labour activists also sought to create an economic and political force within the framework of nationalism which would be too strong to ignore in the "Gaelic State". This did not mean the conscious renunciation of socialism by radicals but rather its deferment until the next stage of the "class struggle". Clearly this assumed a labour movement moving from strength to strength, probably a conceivable scenario in 1919, but obviously not what actually happened. The debate as to whether labour's approach in the turbulent years of 1914-21 served the movement well under the new state cannot be addressed here. It is hoped, however, that the record of activity given in this thesis is a testament to the hopes and idealism of the men and women of the labour movement in Kerry and Limerick.

Column I gives the location of the dispute.
Column II gives the cause of the dispute, a - wages, b - hours, c - working conditions, d - mix of reasons, e - general, f - union recognition, g - introduction of compulsory arbitration, h - general, i - sympathetic strikes, j - other.
Column III gives the outcome of the dispute, a - workers' claims fully granted, b - workers' claims partially granted, c - employers' claims fully granted, d - arbitration, e - inconclusive.
The tables relating to wage rates are divided into two main areas, (a) - agreed rates in weekly wage orders otherwise indicated.
Column I gives the names of the date (although the month when it was reported), a - wage increases, b - no action, c - arbitration, d - other.
Column II indicates the employer, the type of worker (where known), the value (where known) and the number involved in percentage (if indicated the number of men and female workers where known). In the case of a region or national settlement, only the number of workers affected locally is given.
Column III gives the location of the dispute.
Column IV gives the new wage (where known).
Column V gives the old wage (where known).
Column VI gives the nature of "rate award" granted (where known) or the reduction (where known) in value.
Column VII gives the increase awarded (where known) or the reduction demanded by employees (where known) in value. In those cases where only the full wage demanded was reported and the old wage was not specified, then the full demand is given.

Sources: Kerryman, 1914-21; Kerry News, 1914-21; Limerick Leader, 1914-21; Limerick News, 1914; WJC annual reports, 1914-20; WJC Labour Gazette, 1914-21; PRO, LAB 34-14-22 A 15-21; Studies Into Irish Labour, 1914-21; Studies Into Irish Labour, 1914-21; Limerick Chronicle, 1914-21; Limerick News, 1914-21; Trade Union Congress, 1914-21; Limerick County Council records, 1914-21; Journal of Labour, 1911-9 & 1921; Department of Labour, 1914-21; Irish Times, 1914-21.

¹ Some Limerick wage data for 1913 is included to assist in the comparison of pre- and post-war rates.

APPENDIX 1

ANALYSIS OF WAGE AND DISPUTE DATA, 1914-21¹

Introduction

The tables relating to strikes, lockouts (indicated by italics), and worker occupations (underlined) are divided into five columns:

Column I gives the duration of the strike/lockout (alongside the month when it was first reported): aa - one day; a - more than one day and less than one week; b - more than one week and less than one month; c - 1-2 months; d - 2-6 months; e - more than 6 months; f - unclear. Note that strikes which occur in more than one year (i.e. begin in one and end in another) are only reported once.

Column II indicates the employer(s) (where known), the type of worker (where known), the union (where known) and the number of workers involved in parentheses. The number of workers indirectly affected is underlined while m/f indicate the number of male and female workers where known. In the case of a regional or national dispute, only the number of workers involved locally is given.

Column III gives the location of the dispute.

Column IV gives the cause of the strike/lockout: a - wages (**bold** when fight is over demand for a wage reduction by an employer); b - hours; c - working conditions; d - use of non-union or "diluted" labour; e - political; f - union recognition; g - reinstatement of dismissed worker(s); h - speed-up; i - sympathetic action; j - unclear; k - other.

Column V gives the outcome of the dispute: a - workers obtain full demand; b - workers obtain no part of their demand (or the employer obtains his/her full demand); c - compromise; d - indeterminate.

The tables relating to wage data are divided into into seven columns (all figures refer to weekly wages unless otherwise indicated).

Column I gives the source of the data (alongside the month when it was reported): a - wage settlement (i.e. no strike); b - strike/lockout settlement; c - neither.

Column II indicates the employer, the type of worker (where known), the union (where known) and the number involved in parentheses (m/f indicates the number of male and female workers where known). In the case of a regional or national settlement, only the number of workers affected locally is given.

Column III gives the location of the dispute.

Column IV gives the new wage (where known).

Column V gives the old wage (where known).

Column VI gives the increase or "war bonus" obtained (where known) or the *reduction* (where known) in italics.

Column VII gives the increase demanded (where known) or the *reduction* demanded by employers (where known) in italics. In those cases where only the full wage demanded was reported and the old wage was not specified, then the full demand is given.

Sources: Kerryman, 1914-21; Kerry People, 1921; Limerick Leader, 1914-21; Munster News, 1918; RIC internal reports, PROL CO 904; Labour Gazette, 1914-21; PROL LAB 34/14-19 & 32-39; "Standard Time Rates...1913"; "Standard Time Rates...1920"; Limerick Corporation minutes, 1914-21; LUTLC minutes, 1918-21; Tralee UDC minutes, 1914-21; Limerick County Council minutes, 1914-6; Voice of Labour, 1917-9 & 1921; Watchword of Labour, 1919-20; Irish Farmer, 1919-21.

¹ Some Limerick wage data for 1913 is included to round out the comparison of pre- and post-war rates.

I. Limerick

A. Strikes/lockouts/worker occupations

	I	II	III	IV	V
1914					
Jan	f	Gibbinstown Quarry (CoCo)	near Kilmallock	a	d
Jan	f	men tending stone crusher at Moloney's Quarry (CoCo)	Bruree	a	d
Feb	d	carmen & storemen at J & G Boyd (United Carmen and Storemen)	Lim City	a g	b
Mar	f	farm labourers (Sir Gilbert Greenal)	Mount Coote, Kilmallock	a	d
Jun	a	dock labourers at shipping companies	Lim City	i ²	d
Jun	f	Carrigogunnell Quarry (ILLA) (CoCo)	?	c	d
Sep	c	dock workers (70+40) (2 firms)	Lim City	a	a
1915					
Feb	f	CoCo road carters	Barna, Newcastle W.	j	d
May	f	BoG labourers (m)	Newcastle W.	a	d
Jul	a	saw mill machine helpers & c (2 firms) (46)	Lim City	a	b
Aug	c	Bruff Carriers Soc	Bruff	a	d
Sept	a	Cleeve's caramel factory (200)	Lim City	a	b
Oct	a	Corpo gasworkers (101) (Lim Gasworkers Soc)	Lim City	a	c
1916					
Feb	f	CoCo road carters ³	Croom RDC area	a	d
Apr	f	Co Co road workers	West Lim	a	d
Jun	c	boilermakers (1 firm)	Lim City (& Inchicore, Cork & Waterford)	a	a
1917					
Feb	a	labourers (bacon curing) (1 firm) (30)	Lim City	a	c
Mar	b	printers (general) (63) (8 firms)	Lim City	a	c
Mar	c	docks (DLS &?)	Lim City	a	b
Mar	f	farm labourers	Clarina dist.	a g	d
Mar	c	masons & bricklayers (15) (7 firms)	Lim City	a	c
Apr	b	coal yards (6 firms)(200)	Lim City	a	c
Jun	f	ASE on railways (part of national action)	Lim City	j	d
Jul	c	tannery workers (carmen?)(1 firm) (10)	Lim City	a	b
Oct	a	Corpo gasworkers (100m)	Lim City	a	c
Nov	aa	Messrs Evans	Lim City	a	d

² sympathy action with strikers at J & G Boyd's.

³ strike occurred because Glin RDC has not approved 1s increase.

		munitions works (ITGWU)			
Dec	a	coal docks (DLS v. Limerick Steamship Co)	Lim City	a	a
Dec	d	Plumbers Soc (7 firms) (10)	Lim City	a	a
1918					
Feb	e	Drombanna Creamery ⁴	Ballysimon	g	d
Mar	c	cabinet makers, polishers, upholsterers (Furnishing & Allied Trades) (45) (5 firms)	Lim City	a	a
Mar	f	workmen at Spaight's (timber merchants)	Lim City	a	d
Apr	c	painters, body & wheelmakers (5) (1 firm)	Lim City	a	a
Apr	aa	general strike (ITUCLP)	national	e	
May	a	harness makers (25) (9 firms)	Lim City	a	c
May	b	coal yards (ITGWU) (150) (6 firms)	Lim City	ab	c
Jun	f	Shannon Steam Co.	Shannon- side towns	j	d
Jul	a	coachbuilders (3 firms) (41)	Lim City	ab	c
Aug	a	Clune's tobacco factory (ITGWU) (29w, 2m, 2b+1)	Lim City	a	c
Aug	c	saw mill (ITGWU) (27+10)	Foynes	a	c
Aug	a	Corpo gasworkers (78)	Lim City	ac	c
Sept	aa	Limerick Asylum (IAWU) (68+2)	Lim City	ab	c ⁵
Oct	aa	teachers (INTO)	national	a	d
Oct	c	Lim Op. Bakers (general) (90+47)	Lim City	a	b
Oct	b	labourers, O'Callaghan's tannery (70) ⁶	Lim City	af	a
Dec ⁷	a	general assts & clerks at Messrs Kidd's (ICWU) (34+10 m&f)	Lim City	a	c
Dec	f	building trade	Lim City	j	d
Dec	f	coal dockers (ITGWU)	Lim City	j	d
1919					
Jan	a	Model Laundry (ITGWU?) (f)	Lim City	a	c
Feb	aa	Railway Clerks Assoc (116)	national	fk	d
Feb	b	Limerick Asylum (IAWU) (100)	Lim City	b	a
Feb	f	S B Walsh & Son	Kilmallock ⁸	j	d
Mar	f	Askeaton Carbide Works (ITGWU)	Askeaton	j	d
Mar	f	Lax Weir fishermen	Parteen	j	d

⁴ settled in 1919 with reinstatement of all workers.

⁵ wage demand granted.

⁶ 250 on strike according to Munster News.

⁷ According to the RIC's county inspector, there were 5 strikes in the city and county during December 1918.

⁸ spread "to other districts where the firm did business".

		(ITGWU)				
Mar	f	Meenahela Creamery (ITGWU)	Temple- glantine	a	d	
Mar	c	drapers assts (IDAA) at McBirney (64 + <u>21</u>)	Lim City	a k	c	
Mar	c	coachbuilders (3 firms) (35 + <u>5</u>)	Lim City	a b	c	
Mar	c	Sir Robert Greenall (50m)	Mount Coote (near Kilmallock)	a	b	
Mar	b	labourers at T A Walsh, builder & contractor	Kilmallock	j	d	
Apr	f	Clouncagh Co-op Creamery	Newcastle W	j	d	
Apr	b	Limerick Soviet (LUTLC) (general)	Lim City	e		
May	aa	May Day (ILPTUC) (NUR & RCA only in Lim City)	national	e		
May	d	<i>farm labourers</i> (ITGWU)	<i>Temple- glantine area</i>	j	d	
May	a	creamery workers at Cleeve's	Limerick, Tipp & Dist, Clonmel	a k	c	
Jun	b	creamery workers (ITGWU)	Knocklong	a	d	
Jun	f	drapers assts at Messrs O'Mahony & Co (f)	Lim City	a b	d	
Jun	c	Building Operatives Fed v. Master Builders Assoc (350) (14 firms)	Lim City	a b	c	
Jun	b	tailors, tailoresses, AST (126) (12 firms)	Lim City	a	a	
Jul	a	labourers at Spaight's timber merchants, ITGWU (63 + <u>27</u>)	Lim City	g	a	
Jul	aa	<i>yardmen, coopers, etc</i> <i>at McMahan's, timber</i> <i>merchants (100 + <u>33</u>)</i>	Lim City	i	a	
Jul	f	Model Laundry (f) (ITGWU?)	Lim City	j	d	
Aug	aa	farm labourers (ITGWU) (m&f)	Kilmeedy, Feenagh, Castlemahon	a	d	
Aug	b	farm labourers at Dunraven Estate (ITGWU) (127 + <u>38</u>)	Adare	a	c	
Oct	c	IDAA at Messrs P Bourke & Co, hardware	Lim City	j	d	
Oct	d	Law Clerks Assoc (ICWU) (42) (17 firms)	Lim City	a f	c	
Oct	f	farm labourers (ITGWU)	Belville & dist	j	d	
Oct	aa	Gas Works	Lim City	a	d	
Oct	c	packers, carmen at J P Evans & Co & hardware firms (ITGWU) (50) (5 firms) ⁹	Lim City	a b k	c	
Nov	f	O'Shaughnessy's saw mills & stores (ITGWU)	Newcastle W.	g	a	
Nov	f	Balvill Creamery	Newcastle W	j	d	

⁹ In mid-November, the engineering section at J P Evans was shut down as a result of this strike.

Nov	f	farm labourers	Kilmallock dist	a	d
Nov	b	small drapery houses (IDAA) (m&f)	Lim City	ab	d
Nov	d	motor permits strike (IADMU)	national	e	
Dec	c	St Francis Abbey Tannery	Lim City	abk	a
Dec	c	Chemists Assts Assoc (25) (6 firms)	Dublin, Belfast, Cork	abk	c
Dec	c	dock labourers (ITGWU) (7 firms) (360 + 700) ¹⁰	Waterford, Lim City Lim City	ab	c
Dec	f	insurance agents ¹¹	UK	ck	d
1920					
Jan	f	carters at Messrs Wallis & the Lim Carting Co (ITGWU)	Lim City	i	d
Feb	f	farm labourers	Ballybricken dist	j	d
Feb	f	Dowling & Lindsay's (IDAA)	Lim City	j	d
Feb	f	Greybridge Creamery	?	i ¹²	d
Apr	a	general strike (ILPTUC)	national	e	a
Apr	a	dockers (ITGWU)	Lim City	k ¹³	d
May	a	13 Cleeve's creameries (ITGWU)	Knocklong	ac	d
May	a	hotel workers (6 firms) (70) (ITGWU)	Lim City	ab	c
May	b	gas stokers, etc (82)	Lim City	ak ¹⁴	c
May	b	secondary school teachers (30), ASTI v. Catholic Headmasters Assoc	national	a	c
May	a	carters at O'Callaghan's Tannery (4) (ITGWU)	Lim City	a	d
May	d	railway wagon builders (53) (1 firm)	Lim City	a	c
May	f	carpenters at GSWR ("affecting 200")	Lim City	j	d
May	e	munitions strike (NUR)	national	e	
Jun	b	carters, etc at Lim City Sawmills (190)	Lim City	a	c
Jun	d	coach body makers (30) (Wagon Builders)(1 firm)	Lim City	a	a
Jun	aa	hairdressers assts (50) (10 firms) (Hairdressers Assts Assoc)	Lim City	ab	c ¹⁵
Jun	b	saw mills (machinists & labourers)	Cork, Lim City & Waterford	a	c
Aug	d	boilermakers, blacksmiths (railway)	Dublin & Lim City	a	d

¹⁰ Workers laid off as a result of the dock labourers strike included those at Bannatyne Flour Mills and Cleeve's Caramel Factory.

¹¹ including members of the Assurance Agents at the Pearl Co. in Limerick.

¹² Workers refuse to handle milk of farmers who refused to pay bonus to labourers.

¹³ Dockers refuse to handle butter, bacon or live pigs for export in accordance with ILPTUC decision.

¹⁴ against introduction of new machinery.

¹⁵ According to LUTLC, however, they obtained their full demand.

Aug	aa	general stoppage called by ITGWU ¹⁶	Lim City	e	
Aug	f	farm labourers (1 farm) (ITGWU)	Knocklong	j	d
Aug	f	farm labourers (ITGWU) ¹⁷	Kilfrush (near Knocklong)	a	c
Sept	f	farm labourers (ITGWU)	Ballyneety	a	a
Oct	aa	general strike (ITGWU) ¹⁸	Lim City	e	
Oct	f	farm labourers (6 farms) (ITGWU)	Parteen dist (Co. Clare)	a	d
Nov	f	cinema workers (ITGWU)	Lim City	g	a
1921					
Feb	aa	Corpo cleaning & repairing staff & quarrymen (approx. 60)	Lim City	g	d
Mar	f	Lim Corpo Emp Soc	Lim City	e ¹⁹	
May	d	carpenters & masons (butter industry) (12)	Lim City	a	a
May	c	carpenters (9)	Lim City	j	a
Jun	b	fitters (butter industry) (14)	Lim City	a	c
Jun	b	fitters & stationary engine drivers at bacon factories (40 + 460) (ASE or IEU?) ²⁰	Lim City	a	c
Jun	c	operative bakers (50) (Lim Operative Bakers)	Lim City	a	c
Jun	f	stonecutters doing repair work at St Munchin's	Lim City	j	d
Jul	b	dock labourers employed on the "new 'Soaker'" (ITGWU)	Lim City	j	d
Aug	a	Cleeve's creamery & bakery workers (38) (ITGWU)	Bruree	g	c
Sep	b	railway shopmen & coalmen (inc GSWR) ²¹	national	a	b
Sep	b	GSWR employees (NUR)	national	a	b
Sep	f	carpenters & masons at Cleeve's	Lim City	a	d
Oct	c	fishery workers (ITGWU) (employed by Tony Mackey) ²²	Castleconnell	a	a
Oct	d	farm workers (120) (ITGWU)	Bulgaden dist (near	a	b

¹⁶ so workers can attend masses for the Lord Mayor of Cork (Terence MacSwiney).

¹⁷ According to the Watchword of Labour, there were at least three strikes in recent years on this estate.

¹⁸ after death of Lord Mayor of Cork.

¹⁹ resolve not to work until interment of murdered mayors.

²⁰ The strike leads to employers closing bacon factories.

²¹ 400-450 employed at Limerick Railway Works (5 unions involved inc. ASE, NUR #3 br, ASLEF, IEU, ITGWU).

²² Workers takeover begins in mid-December.

Nov	f	Carr St. depot men (6) (Lim Corpo)	Kilmallock) ²³ Lim City	g	a
Nov	a	farm workers employed by Nigel Baring (17)	Kilmallock	a	c
Dec	d	vehicle workers (11) at Mr Christie	Lim City	a	c
Dec	f	carpenters & joiners at New Barracks (Mechanical Transport Co.)(7)	Lim City	a b	b
Dec	f	farm labourers	Churchfield (Clarina)	a	d

B. Wage data (inc. strikes/lockouts)

		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1913								
Oct	c	<u>building trades:</u>	Lim City					
		bricklayers			32s			
		masons			32s			
		carpenters & joiners ²⁴			35s.7 1/2d			
		slaters; plasterers			32s			
		plumbers			36s			
		painters ²⁵			31s.10 1/2d			
		building labourers ²⁶			17s			
Oct	c	<u>engineers:</u>	Lim City					
		turners			34s			
		fitters			32s			
		smiths			32s			
		mill-wrights			34s			
		pattern-makers			34s			
Oct	c	<u>railway shops:</u>	Lim City					
		angle-iron smiths			32s			
		platers (heavy)			32s			
		platers (light)			32s			
		riveters			32s			
		holders-up			24s			
Oct	c	<u>compositors case rates:</u>	Lim City					
		jobbing			31s			
		evening			29s			
		newspapers						
Oct	c	bookbinders & machine rulers	Lim City		31s			

²³ A meeting of the IFU in December referred to a separate strike at Ballivana(sp?) but for all practical purposes this appears to be the same dispute.

²⁴ rate in summer.

²⁵ rate in summer.

²⁶ working for bricklayers, masons and carpenters.

Oct	c	gas stokers: hand stokers weekdays Sundays	Lim City						
				5s p/shift 7s.6d p/shift					

1914

pre-war	a	Power Station (Corpo)	Lim City						
		engine drivers (2)		27s.6d & 30s					
		gasmen		26s.8d					
pre-war	c	general workers at Cleeve's	Cos. Lim & Tipp		17s				
Jan	a	OAPs working as general workmen under Direct Labour Scheme	Lim CoCo	11s					
Jan	a	CoCo stonebreakers	Newcastle W.	1s.4d p/yd ?	1s.2d p/yd	2d p/yd ?		2d p/yd ?	
Mar	c	Street Repairing Dept, casual labourers (Corpo)	Lim City		18s			2s	
Mar	c	quarrymen (CoCo)	Mungret		3s p/yd			6d p/yd	
Aug	a	Lim Corpo Electricity Cttee:	Lim City						
		engineer (1)		40s	25s	15s			
		chief clerk (1)		£130 p/yr	£104 p/yr	£26 p/yr			
		fitter (1)		42s	36s	6s			
		lamp fitter (1)		32s	30s	2s			
		lamp trimmer (1)		22s.6d	20s	2s.6d			
Oct	c	Lim Corpo:	Lim City						
		quarrymen (10)			20s				
		boys (6)			15s				
Nov	b	dock workers	Lim City			1s		1s	
Dec	a	CoCo Direct Labour scheme:	Co Lim						
		general workmen		14s					
		surfacemen		16s					
		carters		3d p/mile 27					

1915

Feb	c	Corpo Emp Soc	Lim City					3s	
May	b	BoG labourers (m)	Newcastle W.		14s			4s	
May	a	Lim Army Clothing Factory	Lim City				w b		
Oct	b	Corpo gasworkers	Lim City				4d p/d	6d p/d	
Nov	a	Corpo cleaners	Lim City				1s	3s	
Nov	a	Harbour Board	Lim City		<50s		2s wb		
Nov	a	Corpo quarryworkers	Lim City				1s		

27 not to exceed 5s per day.

Dec	a	road workers	CoCo ²⁸	15s	14s	1s	1s
		surfacemen	" "	16s			18s
		daily carters	" "	6s p/d	5s p/d	1s p/d	1s p/d

1916

Mar	a	BoG bakers ²⁹	Lim City	36s	32s	4s	4s
Mar	a	Cannock's (IDAA)	Lim City			w b	
Jun	a	Lim CoCo officials	Co Lim			10% w b	
Jun	a	Carpenters Soc. v. Master Builders	Lim City	36s.1 1/2d	34s (5mo) 33s.9d (7 mo) 30	2s.1 1/2d 2s.4 1/2d	
Aug	b	boilermakers	Lim City			3s	3s
Aug	a	"monster" drapers	Lim City			w b	
Oct	a	INTO	national			w b	
Oct	c	Lim Corpo Cleaving, Repairing & Water Depts (85):	Lim City				
		sweepers			23s.10d		5s
		labourers			22s		5s
		breakers			21s		5s
		Waterworks City Labourers			21s		5s
		carters			26s.6 1/2 d		5s
		quarrymen			24s		5s
		sewermen			25s		5s
		Clareville?			19s		5s
Oct	a	GSWR workers	national			1s w b ³¹	
Nov	a	Corpo workers	Lim City		<=25s	2s w b	
Nov	a	BoG "officers"	Lim City		40s <40s	2s w b 4s w b	

1917

Jan	a	Harbour Board	Lim City		<25s 25-40s	2s w b 1s w b	
Feb	b	labourers (bacon curing) (1 firm)	Lim City			4s (m) w b 2s (f) ³²	
Mar	b	printers	Lim City			4s + 1s in July	7s
Apr	a	Corpo gasworkers	Lim City			2s	4s
May	a	railway station-masters & clerks	national	12s w b		5s w b	
May	a	women on railways	national	6s w b		2s.6d w b	

28 Increases subject to RDC ratification.

29 According to the bakers' union, this brings the Board of Guardians bakers in line with the prevailing city rate in the trade.

30 This rate is 1s.10 1/2d lower than the rate for carpenters and joiners given in the "Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours..." for October 1913 (see above).

31 This makes a total of 4s increase since the beginning of the war.

32 and for males earning less than 16s.

May	b	carters, storemen, coal fillers casual labourers	Lim City			3s 1s6d p/ night	5s
May	a	postal employees	national			w b	
Jul	b	Chemists' Assts	Lim City			w b	
Aug	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades	UK			3s wb (m)	
Oct	b	Corpo gasworkers (100m)	Lim City			4s	6s
Nov	a	Messrs. Evans munitions works (ITGWU)	Lim City			2s.6d- 7s.6d	
Nov	a	Corpo employees	Lim City	30s (min)			
Nov	a	Limerick Asylum	Lim City			w b	
Nov	a	AWB min rates:	national				
		<u>Group I:</u> 48 hrs 54 hrs 60 hrs		22s.6d 24s 25s			
		<u>Group II:</u> 48 hrs 54 hrs 60 hrs		20s.6d 21s.6d 22s.6d			
		<u>Group III:</u> 48 hrs 54 hrs 60 hrs		18s 19s 20s			
Dec	a	Shannon Laundry (ITGWU) (f)	Lim City			1s.6d	
Dec	a	carters, Wallis & Sons	Lim City	30s			
Dec	a	labourers	CoCo ³³	20s.6d			
		surfacemen	" "	22s.6d			
		foremen	" "	31s			
Dec	a	railworkers	national	to get same increases as British railworkers			
Dec	b	Plumbers Soc	Lim City		40s		3s

1918

Jan	b	coal docks night work	Lim City	9s p/d 12s p/d	7s p/d 9s.6d p/d	2s p/d 2s.6d p/d	2s p/d 2s p/d
Jan	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades	UK			5s wb (m)	
Feb	a	Corpo quarryworkers	Lim City			1d p/load	
Mar	a	boot and shoe operatives: -females, over 19 -males, over 20 ³⁴	UK	8s wb 15s wb	5s.6d wb	2s.6d wb	

³³ subject to RDC & LGB approval.

³⁴ earning 30s and over.

Apr	b	cabinet makers, polishers, upholsterers (5 firms)	Lim City	9 3/4d p/hr	7d p/hr	2 3/4d p/hr	
May	a	porkbutchers	Lim City			6s	10s
May	a	Corpo:	Lim City				
		employees generally		33s min ³⁵	30s	3s	
		carters		33s			5s6d
		stone spreaders, sweepers, & sewer men		33s			8s
		cleansing stewards & sanitary officers		33s		2s	
May	b	harness makers (9 firms)	Lim City			6s	
May	b	painters, body & wheelmakers (1 firm)	Lim City	36s ³⁶		36s min	36s min
May	a	plumbers	Lim City	11 1/4d p/hr	40s	incr	
Jun	a	brick and stone layers	Lim City	11 1/2d p/hr	9 1/2d p/hr	2d p/hr	
Jul	a	ASE mem at Power Station (Corpo)				12.5% wb	
Aug	b	coachbuilders (3 firms)	Lim City			8s	10s
Aug	b	coal carters	Lim City	38s	30s	8s (3s wb)	
		coal dockers		10s p/d	9s p/d	1s p/d	
Aug	b	Clune's tobacco factory(ITGWU)	Lim City (29f, 2m, 2 boys)			8s (1m) 7s (1m) 5s (2f) 4s(27f, 2 boys)	10s
Aug	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ³⁷	UK			3s.6d wb	
Sep	a	brick & stone layers	Lim City	1s p/hr	11 1/2d p/hr	1/2d p/hr	
Sep	a	Power Station (Corpo) (Engine Drivers Soc):	Lim City				
		engine drivers (2)		42s		10s	
		gasmen (2)		38s.2d		10s	
Sep	b	saw mills (ITGWU)	Foynes		23s	3s	5s

³⁵ In June, the new Corporation minimum wage of 33s is extended to two members of the clerical staff at the Gas Works.

³⁶ According to the Labour Gazette (May 1918), this is the new minimum in the coachbuilding trade in Limerick City.

³⁷ Except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

Sep	b	Corpo gasworkers: stokers others	Lim City			20s wb 18s.6d	20s ³⁸ 20s
Sep	b	Limerick Asylum (IAWU)	Lim City			20s	20s ³⁹
Oct	a	<u>Corpo</u> : ⁴⁰ 1. general employees 2. officials	Lim City			18s.6d £50 p/yr	
Oct	b	5 small bakeries	Lim City	7s ⁴¹	5s.6d	1s.6d	1s.6d
Oct	b	O'Callaghan's tannery (250)	Lim City				10s
Nov	b	Master Bakers	Lim City	5s.6d ⁴²	5s.6d	0	1s6d
Nov	a	ICWU members at several sites ⁴³	Lim City			incr	
Nov	a	road labourers	CoCo	25s	20s.6d	4s.6d	15s.6d 44
		surfacemen		27s.6d	22s.6d	5s	
		carters		8s p/d	7s p/d	1s p/d	8s p/d
Nov	a	out of work donation: ⁴⁵	national				
		adult men		24s			
		adult women		20s			
Dec	a	<u>Corpo Water Cttee</u> : ⁴⁶	Lim City				
		mem of Stationary Engine Drivers & Firemen's Soc		46s		3s.6d	
		plumber		54s			
Dec	a	IDAA women at small draperies	Lim City	£42 p/yr min		50% incr ⁴⁷	
Dec	b	ICWU at Messrs Kidd's(50m&f) ⁴⁸	Lim City			7s.6d (m) 5s (f)	10s 10s

³⁸ on pre-war rates.

³⁹ on pre-war rates.

⁴⁰ total increase on pre-war rates.

⁴¹ per sack of 100 4 lb loaves.

⁴² per sack of 100 4lb loaves.

⁴³ Cleeve Bros.; Spillane, Lynch and Spain; Looney and Co.; D. O'Connor.

⁴⁴ The demands listed were made by the ITGWU. The ILLA also made demands (27s.6d p/wk for labourers; 30s p/wk for surfacemen; 9s p/d for carters). The ITGWU apparently made no demand for the surfacemen.

⁴⁵ 6s extra for first dependent child (under 15) & 3s for each succeeding dependent child. This is meant to be a temporary measure to deal with the effects of the return of soldiers to civilian life. Soldiers can claim for up to 26 weeks during the 12 months after demobilisation.

⁴⁶ Both these rates are said to be standard rates in the city.

⁴⁷ This increase applied to all assistants (except "indoor" assistants) on less than £40 p/yr. A £12 p/yr increase was given to those living-in.

⁴⁸ According to the Voice of Labour, the pre-strike wages ranged from 10s p/wk for women to £2 p/wk for a man with 18 years service.

Dec	a	ICWU assistants at Lipton's Ltd	Lim City			8-10s	
1919							
Jan	a	flour mill workers (ITGWU)	national			7s.6d (m) 5s (f)	12s
Jan	a	Stationary Engine Drivers & Firemens Soc v. Messrs Bannatyne & Messrs Russell (flour millers)	Lim City	51s.6d	44s	7s.6d	5s.6d
Jan	a	Wallis Carters	Waterford, Cork, Lim	approx 43s	approx 36s	7s	
Jan	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ⁴⁹	UK	28s.6d 50		5s wb	
Jan	a	AWB min rates:	national				
		<u>Group I:</u> 54 hrs 60 hrs		27s 28s.6d			
		<u>Group II:</u> 54 hrs 60 hrs		24s.6d 26s			
		<u>Group III:</u> 54 hrs 60 hrs		22s 23s.6d			
Feb	a	ICWU mem (Corpo Electricity Cttee) (2)	Lim City	£227. 10s p/yr	£178 p/yr	75% ⁵¹	75%
Feb	b	Walsh's & Sutton's (ITGWU)	Kilmallock	34s		34s	34s
Feb	b	workers at Model Laundry (f)	Lim City			3s	6s
Feb	a	building trades:	Lim City				
		carpenters & joiners		59s.6d	1s. 1 1/2d p/hr	1/2d p/hr	3d p/hr
		slaters & plasterers		59s.6d	11 1/2d p/hr	2 1/2d p/hr	3d p/hr
		bricklayers, stonecutters, plumbers, painters		59s.6d		2d p/hr	3d p/hr
		labourers		38s.3d		2d p/hr	
Feb	a	labourers at Harbour Board	Lim City	38s.6d		incr	
Mar	a	boot & shoe operatives:	national				
		males over 23		53-56s min			
		females over 20		30s min			

⁴⁹ except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

⁵⁰ minimum total war advance for time workers plus a bonus of 12 1/2% on earnings.

⁵¹ increase on pre-war salary.

Mar	a	district nurses employed by BoG	Lim City	£45 p/yr			
Mar	b	Meenahela Creamery (ITGWU):	Templeglantine				
		boys			16s		12s
		men			23-30s		12-18s
Apr	a	ASE mem (6) (Corpo Electricity Cttee)	Lim City	72s.6d		incr	
Apr	a	Corpo Cleansing, Repairing, etc cttee:	Lim City				
		Stationary Engine Drivers Soc (1)		53s.6d 52			
		Corpo Emp Soc			50s min		11s.6d
		ICWU					£50 p/yr
Apr	c	ITGWU: dockers (constant men)	Lim City		38s		12s
		"casual" dockers			10s p/d		6s p/d
Apr	a	Grist Mills ⁵³	towns >5,000			7s	
			country mills			5s	
Apr	b	farm labourers (ITGWU)	Mount Coote (Kilmallock)	30s			
Apr	b	drapers assts at McBirney:	Lim City				
		"juniors"					£2 min
		over-23s					£3 min
May	a	Corpo employees	Lim City			5s	
May	a	ASE mem (2) (Corpo Water Cttee)	Lim City	92s.3d & 72s.6d		5s	
May	a	Ballinvarra Co-op Creamery, ITGWU:	Ballinvarra 54				
		firemen		45s			
		general men		43s			
		casuals		50s			
May	b	coachbuilders (3 firms)	Lim City	62s.8d	44s	18s.8d	70s.6d
May	b	creamery workers at Cleeve Bros (outside Lim City)	Lim, Tipp & dist, Clonmel	42s			
May	a	Cleeve Bros	Lim City	45s		incr	
Jun	a	labourers (2) (Corpo Electricity Cttee)	Lim City	43s.6d			

⁵² said to be standard rate in the city (30 April).

⁵³ final arbitration award.

⁵⁴ Voice of Labour reports that, "similar rates now obtain in Kilmallock district."

Jun	a	engineers at rail works (ASE) (arbitration award)	Lim City	66s3d ⁵⁵	64s.6d	1s.9d	
Jun	a	coal merchants:	Lim City				
		yardmen, carters & fillers				6s p/d?	
		casuals, inc dock labourers				2s p/d?	
Jul	b	creamery workers at Cleeve's	Knocklong	39s min			
Jul	a	ITGWU: dockers (constant men)	Lim City	44s	38s	6s	
		casual dockers		12s p/d			
		carters				6s	
Jul	c	rural labourers (900)	Adare, Patrickswell, Croom, Kildimo, Bruree, Pallasgreen				37s
Jul	a	farm labourers (employed by Nigel Baring)	Adare	35s			
Jul	a	creamery workers (ITGWU)	Glin	43s		incr	
Jul	a	drapers assts at Todd's & Cannock's ⁵⁶	Lim City	£150 min			
Jul	b	tailors, tailoresses (12 firms)	Lim City			100% over pre-war	100% over pre-war
Aug	a	farm labourers (w/diet), ITGWU:	Effin (Kilmallock)				
		constant men		30s	27s	3s	
		weekly men		35s	33s	2s	
Aug	a	Ardpatrick Co-op Dairy (ITGWU):	Ardpatrick				
		general hands		42s			
		firemen		45s			
Aug	a	"England's Creamery", ITGWU:	Kilfinnane				
		buttermakers		53s			
		firemen		50s & 48s			
		general		40s to 45s			

⁵⁵ This basic rate does not apparently include the "12 1/2%" war bonus and compares with basic rates in other cities as follows: Cork - 67s.6d; Dublin - 67s.3d; and Belfast - 70s.6d.

⁵⁶ £35 war bonus made permanent; minimum salary after 3 years (post apprenticeship).

Aug	a	agricultural labourers, ITGWU:	Kilfinnane				
		constant (w/diet)		25s			
		casuals (w/diet)		30s			
		constant (w/out diet)		35s			
		casuals (w/out diet)		10s p/d			
Aug	a	mineral water workers (ITGWU):	Newcastle W				
		males		41s	36s	5s	
		females		23s	18s	5s	
Aug	b	farm labourers (ITGWU)	Kilmeedy, Feenagh, Castlemahon			£4 (m) £2 (f) 57	£558 £2.10s
Aug	a	labourers rebuilding cigarette factory (ITGWU)	Adare	38s.6d			
Aug	b	building trades (14 firms)	Lim City	68s. 6 1/2d	59s.6d	3 1/2d p/hr	7d p/hr
		building labourers		48s. 11 1/2d	38s.3d	2 1/2d p/hr	
Aug	c	Assoc of Ir Post Office Clerks ⁵⁹					
Sep	b	farm labourers at Dunraven Estate (ITGWU)	Adare	30s	24s.6d 60	5s.6d	10s.6d
Sep	a	Corpo carters & sweepers ⁶¹	Lim City				
Sep	a	Harbour Board labourers	Lim City	45s			
Sep	a	ICWU mem at Harbour Board	Lim City				60s
Sep	a	flour mills (ITGWU & six other unions) ⁶²	national			4s (m) 2s.6d (f)	20s (m) 13s (f)
Oct	a	<u>Corpo:</u>					
		carters, sweepers stonespreaders, seweragemen & superannuated men at Carr St. depot	Lim City			4s	
		quarrymen				6s.6d	

57 amount of bonus received.

58 harvest bonus

59 want "new entrants" to get £3 p/wk rising by annual increments of 10s p/wk to £8 p/wk.

60 The Voice of Labour claimed the pre-strike wage was 31s.6d p/wk and in a later report stated that the strike was against a reduction from 30s to 25s.

61 demand full day's pay for 3 hours work on Sunday; demand granted.

62 including stationary engine drivers at Dublin and Limerick.

Oct	a	dressmakers at Cannock's & McBirney's (ITGWU)	Lim City			5s	
Oct	a	Cleeve's employees	Lim City	48s ⁶³	45s	3s	5s
Oct	a	railworkers	Britain	51s ⁶⁴			
Oct	a	Lim Porkbutchers Soc (m)	Lim City			5s 3s boys	12s.6d
Oct	a	bakers	Lim City	60s			70s
Nov	a	Corpo Water Cttee:	Lim City				
		labourers (3), Corpo Emp Soc				4s	
		Stationary Engine Drivers				3s.6d	
		labourers (3), ITGWU				4s	
		labourer (1), United Carmen & Storemen				4s	
Nov	a	Corpo Cleansing, Repairing, etc cttee:	Lim City				
		engine drivers at steam roller & steam crusher		57s ⁶⁵			
		Mayor's staff				5s	
Nov	a	Stationary Engine Drivers at Power Plant (Corpo)				3s.6d	
Nov	a	"saddlery trade"	Lim City	58s.9d		58s.9d	58s.9d
Dec	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ⁶⁶	UK	33s.6d 67		5s	
Dec	a	coachmakers, smiths, trimmers, wheelers, vicemen & painters	Lim City	1s.7d p/hr min	1s.4d p/hr min	3d p/hr	
Dec	b	small drapery houses: IDAA v. Small Traders Assoc (30 firms)	Lim City				50% incr
Dec	a	roadworkers (ITGWU):	CoCo				
		labourers		32s	28s	4s	20s
		surfacemen				2s	20s
		"man & horse"		12s p/d	10s p/d	2s p/d	8s p/d

⁶³ new minimum wage.

⁶⁴ minimum rate as long as cost of living remains at least 110% above pre-war level; in February 1920, it is announced that Irish rail workers will get the same increase.

⁶⁵ said to be the standard wage in the city.

⁶⁶ except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

⁶⁷ minimum total war bonus for time workers plus a bonus of 12 1/2%.

Dec	b	law clerks (17 firms)	Lim City			incr	60s p/w min ⁶⁸
Dec	b	hardware (5 firms):	Lim City				
		porters & packers			40s ⁶⁹	incr	10s
		carmen			42s ⁷⁰	incr	10s

1920

Jan	a	ASE mem at Power Plant	Lim City			5s	
Jan	a	ICWU v. Corpo, arbitration award (J. B. Baillie) ⁷¹	Lim City				
Feb	b	dock labourers (7 firms) ⁷² :	Lim City				
		carters, fillers & shedmen (constant men)		49s	44s	5s	10s
		"casual" labourers		13s.6d p/d	12s p/d	1s.6d p/d	4s p/d
Feb	c	Nurses of Munster at Lim Unions	Co Lim				£100 p/yr
Mar	a	tobacco trade: -males over 20 -females over 20	national	49s.6d min 31s.6d min			
Mar	a	males' readymade & wholesale bespoke tailoring trade (timeworkers)	national	1s.0 3/4d - 1s.4d (m) 8d p/hr (f)	8d (m) 4 1/2d p/hr (f)	3 1/2d p/hr (f)	
Apr	a	boot & shoe repairing trade (timeworkers)	national	65s (m) min 45s (f) min			
Mar	a	new AWB rates —Group I —Group II ⁷³	national	32s.6d 30s			
Mar	a	ITGWU: saw milling award labourers	Lim City & Tralee	1s.2d p/hr 1s p/hr			

68 100% over pre-war wage.

69 46s according to the Voice of Labour.

70 48s according to the Voice of Labour.

71 main stipulations: 1) to officials whose "ordinary rate of remuneration" (not including "war bonuses") is not higher than 60s p/wk, a 24s p/wk increase + 30% of ordinary remuneration. 2) to officials receiving more than 60s p/wk, a £50 p/yr increase + 30% of ordinary remuneration (not to exceed £300 p/yr).

72 Wallace Bros concedes the full increase demanded at the beginning of the strike in December.

73 Both rates are for a 54 hour week; Group III has been amalgamated with Group II.

Mar	a	Nurses of Munster at Lim Union	Lim City	£80 p/yr	£45 p/yr	£35 p/yr	£65 p/yr
Mar	a	INTO ⁷⁴ : men	national			£15 p/yr	
		women				£12.10s p/yr	
		junior asst mistresses				£6 p/yr	
Mar	a	IBOA & banks ⁷⁵	national	£100 p/yr			
Mar	a	milling section (ITGWU) ⁷⁶	Lim City			6s (m) 3s (f & under 21s)	
Mar	a	workers in railway shops male piece workers	national			6s (m over 21) 15%	15s
Mar	a	J & G Boyd	Lim City			10% bonus 77	
Mar	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ⁷⁸	UK			3s	
Mar	a	tailoring trade ("log workers") (Irish Merchant Tailors v. AST&T)	Lim City ⁷⁹	10 1/2-11d p/log hr			
Apr	a	building trades	Lim City	82s.3d	68s.6 1/2d	3 1/2d p/hr	
		labourers		62s.8d	48s.11 1/2d	3 1/2 d p/hr	
Apr	a	mechanical operators in cinemas (ITGWU) ⁸⁰	Lim City			incr	
Apr	a	Condensed Milk Co (Cleeve's):	Lim City only?				
		men & boys				4s	
		women "piece workers"				5s	
		women "time workers"				2s.6d	

⁷⁴ award by Civil Service Arbitration Board.

⁷⁵ starting salary rising to £450 p/yr after 22 years.

⁷⁶ part of national settlement.

⁷⁷ on wages earned in 1919.

⁷⁸ except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

⁷⁹ part of national agreement.

⁸⁰ employed by Limerick Exhibitors Association.

Apr	a	14 creameries ⁸¹ :	"junction district"(Lim & Tipp?)				
		firemen, casuals & asst managers		60s			
		dairy hands & butter makers		55s			
		boys under 20		45s			
		girl helpers		40s			
Apr	a	farm workers (ITGWU)	Oola	23s w/diet			
Apr	a	general workers (ITGWU)	Rathkeale			5s	
Apr	a	farm workers (ITGWU)	Bulgaden (Kilmallock)	38s.6d 82			
Apr	a	railworkers ⁸³	UK			2s	
May	a	farm workers (constant men) (ITGWU)	Kilfinane	23s w/diet			
May	a	Wallis Carters (ITGWU)	Waterford, Cork, Lim & Passage			4s	
May	a	employees of Colonel O'Grady (8) (ITGWU):	Kilballyowen (Bruff)				
		6		32s.6d	30s	2s.6d	
		ploughman & herdsman		36s	32s.6d	3s.6d	
May	a	"some" big drapery houses (ITGWU):	Lim City				
		porters		48s	42s	6s	
		vanmen		50s	44s	6s	
May	a	Golden Vein Dairy Co. (60) (ITGWU):	Kilfinane				
		firemen		60s			
		butter makers		63s			
		dairy hands		48-55s			
May	a	Ballykisten Stud (ITGWU):	Oola				
		grooms		45s			
		farm workers		40s			
May	a	bacon workers	Lim City	60s	48s.6d	11s6d 10s ⁸⁴ 5s (boys)	£1
May	a	bakers	Lim City	80s	60s	20s	30s

⁸¹ Creamery Conference Board settlement. The Watchword of Labour also reports in May that three creameries in the Oola area settled "at the Co-operative rate", probably referring to this settlement.

⁸² In addition to money wages, workers were to receive a half acre, "tilled and seeded, and a quart of milk daily."

⁸³ except clerical and supervisory grades.

⁸⁴ to those earning more than 48s.6d.

May	b	carters at O'Callaghan's Tannery (ITGWU)	Lim City	53-54s			15s
May	b	hotel workers (6 firms)	Lim City			incr	5-30s
May	b	secondary school teachers (ASTI)	national			incr	£80 p/yr ⁸⁵
May	b	gas stokers, etc	Lim City		10s.3d p/d ⁸⁶	10s	20s
May	b	creamery workers: -general workers -general workers at auxiliaries -firemen at auxiliaries	Knocklong	53s.6d 49s 51s			
May	a	sawmilling labourers	Lim City	1s.3d p/hr	1s p/hr	3d p/hr	4d p/hr
May	a	sugar confectionery and food preserving trades	national	58s (m) 27s (f)			
May	a	building trades ⁸⁷	Lim City	86s.2d	82s.3d	1d p/hr	
		labourers	Lim City	66s.7d	62s.8d	1d p/hr	
Jun	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ⁸⁸	UK			3s	
Jun	a	Corpo Cleansing, Repairing, etc cttee:	Lim City				
		general staff				5s	
		Engine Drivers at Steam Roller & Steam Crusher				10s	
Jun	a	Stationary Engine Drivers Soc (Corpo Electricity Cttee)	Lim City			10s ⁸⁹	
Jun	a	shop porters & draymen ⁹⁰	Lim City			7s6d	15s
Jun	b	hairdressers assts (10 firms)	Lim City			incr ⁹¹	
Jun	b	carters, etc (1 firm)	Lim City			2d p/hr	4d p/hr

85 increase on pre-war salary.

86 With double time on Sunday included, the gas workers allegedly could make £4 p/wk.

87 According to "Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour" (PP 1921, v. lx), these rates were still in effect at the end of 1920.

88 except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

89 "as awarded by the City Employers".

90 at "large grocery establishments and bottling stores" (Limerick Conciliation Board award).

91 "full demand" according to LUTLC.

Jun	a	dockers (ITGWU): ⁹²	Lim City				
		<u>timber</u> (casuals): —in ship's hold —on quay		16s p/d 17s p/d			
		<u>cement, slag and salt</u> (casuals)		17s p/d			
		<u>grain</u> (casuals): —elevator man —hand discharge		16s p/d 17s p/d			
		<u>Cross-Channel trade</u> - (casuals)		16s p/d	13s.6d p/d	2s.6d p/d	
		<u>Coal Trade</u> : —casuals —fillers in hold		16s p/d 17s p/d			
		carters, fillers, shedmen		69s	49s	20s	
Jun	a	railworkers: -engine drivers -firemen -cleaners	UK			7s 4s 2s	
Jul	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 2s	
Jul	a	clerks (ITGWU)	Knocklong			£10-15 p/yr	
Jul	a	roadworkers (ITGWU):	CoCo ⁹³				
		roadsmen		42s	32s	10s	45s
		surfacemen		47s	34s	13s	50s
		carters w/ horses		15s p/d			16s p/d
		carters w/ jennets		72s			14s p/d
Aug	a	stationary engine drivers, cranemen, motormen & firemen empl in flour mills	Dublin & Lim City			8s.6d- 10s	
Aug	b	railway wagon builders (1 firm)	Lim City			incr	
Aug	a	grist mill workers (ITGWU)	Lim City			6s ⁹⁴	
Aug	b	farm workers (ITGWU)	Kilfrush (near Knocklong)	42s		incr	50s
Sep		librarian & asst librarian (both female) (Corpo Public Health Cttee)	Lim City	50s			

⁹² According to "Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour" (PP 1921, v. lx), these rates were still in effect at the end of 1920.

⁹³ new rates require RDC approval.

⁹⁴ "on the January award rates".

Sep	a	"Baring's farm workers" (ITGWU)	Bruff	42s			
Sep	b	farm workers (ITGWU)	Ballyneety	42s		42s	42s
Sep	a	Corpo empl (ICWU)	Lim City			10% incr	
Sep	b	coach body makers (Wagon Builders)(1 firm)	Lim City	2s p/hr		2s p/hr	2s p/hr
Oct	a	hired carters (Corpo Cleansing, Repairing, etc. cttee)	Lim City	17s.6d p/d ⁹⁵			
Oct	a	fishery workers (Tony Mackey) (ITGWU)	Castleconnell		30s		2s.6d
Oct	a	flour mill settlement (ITGWU)	Dublin, Cork, Lim, Belfast ⁹⁶			10s (m) 5s(f&b)	
Nov	a	<u>Corpo:</u>	Lim City				
		carters, sweepers, depotmen, seweragemen, stonespreaders, watermen (Clareville), Fire Brigade Staff				4s	
		skilled quarrymen				7s	
		quarry labourers				5s	
		mayor's staff				4s	
Nov	a	Munster Laundries Assoc. (ITGWU):	Lim City				
		timeworkers: girls under 15 15-6 16-7 17-8 over 18		16s 18s 21s 24s 30s			
		hydro women		34s			
		vanmen & washhousemen		62s.6d			
Nov	c	porkbutchers	Lim City				20s
Nov	a	bacon factory workers	national ⁹⁷			10s	
Nov	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			4s 2s	

⁹⁵ rate also paid by Gas Committee.

⁹⁶ Other mills with "over five sack plant" get 6s incr; 5s elsewhere; half increases to "females and boys". "Advances on pre-war rates": Dublin, Cork, Belfast - 49s; Limerick - 46s.6d; other mills over five sack - 39s.6d.

⁹⁷ part of national agreement reached at Mallow conference.

Dec	a	retail bespoke tailors (male timeworkers)	towns over 2,000	1s.7d p/hr			
Dec	a	sugar confectionery and food preserving trades	national	54s min (m) 31s min (f)			
Dec	a	Ballynagarde estate workers (ITGWU)	Ballyneety	40s ⁹⁸			
Dec	c	<u>printing trade (compositors & machine men):</u>					
		jobbing, weekly & bi-wkly news	Lim City	81s.6d			
		evening news		84s			
		morning & tri-wkly news		89s.6d			
		jobbing, weekly & bi-wkly news	Newcastle West	71s			
		evening news		73s.6d			
		morning & tri-wkly news		79s			
Dec	c	coopers	Lim City	81s.1 3/4d			
Dec	c	<u>saw mill workers:</u>	Lim City				
		sawyers		70s.6d			
		woodcutting machinists		76s.4 1/2d - 86s.2d			
		labourers		58s.9d			
Dec	c	<u>chemists' assistants:</u>	Dublin, Belfast, Waterford, Lim City				
		males: 1st yr after apprenticeship		47s.6d			
		4th year		67s.6d			
		females: 1st year		40s			
		4th year ⁹⁹		60s			
Dec	c	bakers: table hands	Limerick	80s			

1921

Jan	a	ICWU (Corpo)	Lim City			incr 100	
Jan	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			2s 1s	

⁹⁸ until next April; 42s.6d after that.

⁹⁹ 25s to be deducted for board and lodging.

¹⁰⁰ long list of increases given in Corporation minutes, 6 January 1920, ranging from £11.10s to £30 per year.

Feb	a	Corpo Water Cttee: -engine drivers -night enginemen (2) at Clareville	Lim City			10s 5s	
Feb	a	Stationary Engine Drivers Soc at Power Plant (Corpo)	Lim City			5s	
Feb	a	rail workshop (NUR v GSWR) ¹⁰¹	Lim City				
May	c	new AWB min rates: Group I Group II		34s 32s			
Mar	a	retail bespoke tailors (male timeworkers)	national	1s.5d p/hr min			
Apr	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 4s	
Apr	a	building trades	Lim City	97s.11d	86s.2d	3d p/hr	
		labourers		70s.6d	66s.7d	1d p/hr	2d p/hr
Apr	c	Corpo Emp Soc	Lim City				10s
Apr	c	Fire Brigade Staff (Corpo)	Lim City				10s
Apr	c	ICWU (Corpo)	Lim City				incr 102
Jun	a	engine drivers (2) (City Surveyor)	Lim City	75s ¹⁰³			
Jun	b	fitters (butter industry)	Lim City				incr
Jun	a	"harvest helpers" (ITGWU) ¹⁰⁴ :	Ballyneety				
		w/ board					30s
		w/out board					45s
		hired daily					10s p/d
Jul	b	fitters (only?) at bacon factories	Lim City			5s	20s
Jul	a	saddlery trade	Lim City	82s.3d	1s.3d p/hr	6d p/hr	
Jul	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ¹⁰⁵	UK			3s	

101 demand is parity with wage levels at the Inchicore rail works; the Industrial Court finds that the claim is "not established".

102 ICWU demands increase for its members "on the Civil Service scale".

103 said to be the standard rate in the city.

104 employed between 1 July and 1 November.

105 except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

Aug	a	engineering, boilermaking & foundry trades ¹⁰⁶	UK			3s	
Aug	a	railworkers: ¹⁰⁷ -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 5s (m) 2s.6d (f)	
Aug	a	AEU (2) (Corpo Water Cttee)	Lim City			5s ¹⁰⁸	
Aug	c	<u>Power Station</u> (Corpo):	Lim City				
		IEU (3)				5s	
		apprentices			40s		
Aug	b	operative bakers:	Lim City				
		table hands		90s	80s	10s	15s
		ovenmen		92s.6d	82s.6d	10s	15s
		doughmakers		100s	90s	10s	15s
Sept	b	carpenters & masons at Cleeve's	Lim City			incr 109	
Sep	b	railway shopmen & coalmen (inc GSR)	national			6s	6s
Sep	b	carpenters & masons (butter industry)	Lim City			incr	
Sep	a	dock labourers ¹¹⁰	Belfast, Dublin, Lim, Sligo & other ports			1s p/d	
Oct	a	ready made & <u>wholesale</u> bespoke tailoring (m) min rates:	national				
		cutters, tailors, machinists		1s.2 1/2d - 1s.8 1/2d p/hr			
		warehousemen & packers		1s.1 1/2d - 1s.4 1/2d p/hr			
		porters & all others		1s.1 1/2d p/hr			

¹⁰⁶ except those whose wages are regulated by movements in other trades.

¹⁰⁷ According to the Limerick Leader, the August cut for Irish railworkers, "generally averaged about 6s a week."

¹⁰⁸ said to have been paid to AEU members at Cleeve's.

¹⁰⁹ obtain "Standard Rate of wages".

¹¹⁰ and other workers employed in actual handling of cargoes in or on a ship, quay, warehouse or craft.

Oct	b	farm workers	Bulgaden dist				£5 ¹¹¹
Oct	a	GSWR (notice to all staff) ¹¹²					
Nov	b	farm workers (17)	Kilmallock			<i>reduc</i>	
Nov	a	farm workers? ¹¹³	Bruff	40-45s	40-45s	0	
		stable lads during hunting season		36s	45s	9s	
Nov	a	retail bespoke tailoring min rates	national	56s(m) 10-10 1/2d p/hr (f)			
Dec	a	printers	national ¹¹⁴		81s.6d		7s.6d
Dec	a	farm workers at Mungret College	Mungret	36s			
late	a	postal workers	national?			15s.6d	

II. Kerry

A. Strikes/lockouts/worker occupations

	I	II	III	IV	V
1914					
Jan	a	engineering labourers (40)(1 firm)	Tralee	a k	c
May	f	workers building a church	Carrigcannon Lyrecrumpane	j	d
Jun	b	carpenters & joiners, (5 + 33)	Killorglin	a b	c
Aug	aa	builders' labourers (P. Murphy)	Tralee	a	c
Aug	a	dock labourers (10) (1 firm)	Tralee	a	b
Oct	f	T&D linesmen	Tralee & Dingle	a	d
1915					
Jan	f	bakers	Tralee	d	d
Apr	c	plasterers (1 firm) (10 + 18)	Killarney	a	b
May	e	Munster Warehouse IDAA & tailors (25)	Tralee	c	b
Jun	c	labourers & plasterers (13) (1 firm)	Killarney	ad	c ¹¹⁵
Jul	a	masons & bricklayers (20) (1 firm)	Tralee	d	a
Nov	f	T&D (ITGWU?)(8)	Tralee, Dingle	a	c
1916					
Mar	f	dock workers (ITGWU)	Fenit	ac	c
Apr	f	Hilliard's Boot Factory	Killarney	j	d
Apr	f	Mc Cowen's foundry	Tralee	ae	d

¹¹¹ harvest bonus.

¹¹² cut equal to August cut "which generally averaged about 6s a week".

¹¹³ Labour Department arbitration award.

¹¹⁴ Notice of cut applies across Ireland except in Dublin, Belfast and Cork.

¹¹⁵ Plasterers get wage increase but labourers "replaced".

		workers (15)				
Aug	aa	dock labourers (10) (1 firm)	Tralee	a	b	
Nov	a	T&D workers	Tralee, Dingle	a	d	
1917						
Jan	b	carpenters at Donovan's (ASCJ)(34 + 21)	Tralee	a	a	
Mar	f	agricultural labourers	Droumlought district ¹¹⁶	a	d	
Mar	c	bakers (4 firms)(39 + 18)	Tralee	a c h	c	
Apr	f	carpenters at Donovan's (ASCJ)	Tralee	a d	d	
Jul	a	T&D workers (7) (NUR)	Tralee, Dingle	a	d	
Aug	b	Lord Kenmare's estate labourers (52)	Killarney dist.	a	b	
Nov	f	Grocers' Assts	Tralee	b	d	
1918						
Jan	c	plasterers (6 firms) (18)	Tralee	a	a	
Mar	f	CDB workers (40m)	Killorglin	a	a	
Apr	a	tailors	Killorglin	a	d	
Apr	c	tailors (17) (1 firm)	Listowel	a	a	
Apr	aa	anti-conscription (ITUCLP)	national	e		
May	a	UDC carters, scavengers, skilled labourers (24 + 3)	Tralee	b	a	
May	c	Wm Hill Ltd (IDAA) (7)	Tralee	g	b	
Jun	a	T&D (NUR)	Tralee, Dingle	g	b	
Jun	c	painters (8 firms) (41)	Tralee	a	a	
Aug	d	GSWR Hotel; workmen	Killarney	a	b	
Sept	f	farm labourers	Dromore (near Kenmare)	j	d	
Oct	aa	teachers (INTO)	national	a	d	
Oct	f	boot & shoemakers	Killorglin?	a	d	
Oct	a	sawyers, stone cutters, labourers (19) (1 firm) ¹¹⁷	Tralee	a	c	
Nov	b	carpenters (33)	Tralee	a	c	
1919						
Jan	a	carters, vanmen (ITGWU) (54 + 146) (4 firms) ¹¹⁸	Tralee	a	c	
Feb	f	labourers; local general strike (42) (ITGWU)	Killarney	j	d	
Feb	c	road stewards & labourers (18)	Kenmare RDC area	a	c	
Mar	f	men building cable works (40)	Iveragh Peninsula	a b	d	
Mar	f	workers at John Faley, hardware merchant	Listowel	j	d	
Mar	f	workers engaged in "improvement" of waterworks	Killorglin	a	d	
Mar	b	farm labourers (ITGWU)	several N Kerry dists	a	d	

¹¹⁶ The townland was spelled three different ways in the report of the dispute. It may be Dromloughra in North Kerry.

¹¹⁷ According to the RIC's county inspector, there were two "small strikes" in Tralee in October.

¹¹⁸ The four main merchant firms in Tralee: McCowen's, Latchford's, Kelliher's & Donovan's.

Apr	f	tailors	Killorglin	a	c
May	aa	May Day (ILPTUC)	national	e	
May	b	plumbers (6 firms)(14)	Tralee	a	a
May	b	grist mill workers, carters, etc (42 + 2)(2 firms)	Tralee	j	c
Jun	a	Grocers Assts (11 firms) (56 m&f)	Tralee	a	c ¹¹⁹
Jun	f	employees of fish merchants (ITGWU)	Valentia	a	d
Jul	f	solicitors' clerks	Tralee	j	d
Jul	f	Latchford's (ITGWU)	Listowel	a	d
Jul	b	bakers (5 firms)(10)	Listowel	a	c
Jul	c	tailors (9 firms)(65)	Tralee	a	c
Jul	a	merchants' employees & building workers (200)(ITGWU)	Dingle	ab	c
Aug	b	farm labourers	Castleisland	j	d
Sep	c	Carpenters Soc v Builders Assoc (10 or 15)	Tralee	a	c
Oct	d	drapers assts at O'Brien Corkery's (IDAA) ¹²⁰	Kenmare	a	d
Nov	d	motor permits strike (IADMU)	national	e	
Dec	f	gas workers (2 walkouts)	Tralee	j	d
Dec	f	creamery labourers	Brosna	j	d
1920					
Jan	b	road stewards & labourers (235) ¹²¹	Kerry	a	c
Feb	a	carmen & shop porters at Hardware Dept. Donovan's (13)	Tralee	a	a
Feb	c	motor drivers & mechanics (3 firms)(25) (IADMU) ¹²²	Tralee	ak	c
Feb	c	motor drivers & mechanics (8 firms)(20)	Tralee & Dingle	ab	a
Mar	f	builders' labourers	Tralee	a	d
Mar	f	labourers making drain for Commercial Cable Co	Waterville	a	d
Mar	b	farm labourers, etc (250 farms)(440+60)	Lixnaw dist	k ¹²³	c
Mar	a	butter & egg workers (5 firms)(100)	Tralee	a	c
Apr	f	builders labourers (ITGWU)	Killarney	a	d
Apr	a	general strike (ILPTUC)	national	e	a
Apr	b	Capt J F Shea's, the Hotel, Glenbeigh	Glenbeigh	a	c
May	b	secondary school teachers (ASTI)	national	a	c
May	a	UDC labourers	Tralee	g	a

¹¹⁹ The men got their demand; the women's demand went to arbitration, resulting in an increase.

¹²⁰ According to the RIC's county inspector, this strike became a lockout.

¹²¹ According to the RIC's county inspector, 800 were involved.

¹²² Mr Benner and Mr Flower's garages and Messrs Mulligan's cycle works.

¹²³ demand is for an extra acre of land.

("scavenging staff")(46)						
May	a	gas workers (17)	Tralee	i ¹²⁴	a	
May	a	boot and shoe makers & repairers (14)(3 firms)	Tralee	a	c	
May	e	munitions strike (NUR)	national	e		
Jun	f	creamery workers (ITGWU)	Tarbert	j	d	
Jun	b	bookbinders, compositors, linesmen, etc (1 firm)(25)	Tralee	g	a	
Jul	f	drapers assts	Killarney	a	d	
Jul	aa	hotel workers (ITGWU)	Tralee	j	d	
Aug	b	clerical staff at Slattery's	Tralee	a	d	
Sep	f	shop assts (1firm)(25)	Tralee	a	c	
Sep	aa	general stoppage (TWC)	Tralee	e ¹²⁵		
Sep	aa	general stoppage	Killarney	e ¹²⁶		
Oct	f	storemen at Russell & Sons (ITGWU)	Tarbert & Ballylongford	a	d	
Oct	f	woolen mills	Killorglin dist	j	d	
Nov	b	bacon factories (CWS & Slattery's)	Tralee	a	a	
1921						
Sep	b	railway shopmen & coalmen (inc GSWR)(NUR)	national	a	b	
Sep	b	GSWR employees	national	a	b	
Dec	b	T&D	Dingle	i	d	

B. Wage data (inc. strikes/lockouts)

		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1914								
Jan	b	engineering labourers (40)	Tralee	5d p/hr			incr	6d p/hr
May	a	UDC quarryworkers	Listowel	15s	14s	1s	2s	
Jun	b	carpenters & joiners	Killorglin	36s	30s	6s		
Jun	a	UDC employees	Tralee	20s ¹²⁷				
Aug	b	builders' labourers	Tralee		15s	incr	5s	
Aug	a	workers employed by merchants	Tralee			1s		
Oct	b	T&D linesmen	Tralee & Dingle		14s			2s
Nov	a	asst in Clerk's office, UDC	Tralee	25s	20s	5s		
1915								
Mar	a	main employers (TTLC)	Tralee			2s		
Mar	a	UDC workers	Listowel	17s	15s	2s		
Apr	a	UDC unskilled	Tralee		<=30s	2s		

124 sympathy with strike by UDC labourers.

125 one hour stoppage called so that workers can attend mass in honour of the Lord Mayor of Cork (Terence MacSwiney).

126 one hour stoppage called so that workers can attend mass in honour of the Lord Mayor of Cork.

127 minimum wage.

		labourers					
Jul	b	plasterers (1 firm)	Killarney			2s	
Nov	b	T&D (ITGWU?)	Tralee, Dingle		15s	1s (2) 2s (2) 5s(4)	5s

1916

Jan	a	dockworkers ITGWU	Fenit			up to 2s.6d	
Mar	b	dockworkers ITGWU	Fenit			incr	
Mar	a	workers for Tralee merchants ITGWU	Tralee			2s	5s
Apr	b	McCowen's foundry (15)	Tralee ¹²⁸				
Apr	a	Revington & Sons (ITGWU)	Tralee ¹²⁹				
Apr	a	unskilled (ITGWU)	Killarney			incr	
May	c	UDC scavenging staff (ITGWU)	Tralee				5s
Aug	b	dock labourers (1 firm)	Tralee			no incr	1s p/d
Oct	a	road workers	Listowel RDC	18s	14s	4s wb	
Oct	a	INTO	national			w b	
Nov	b	T&D steamriser(1)	Dingle				2s
Nov	a	AWB min rates:	national				
		Group I: 48 hrs		22s.6d			
		54 hrs		24s			
		60 hrs		25s			
		Group II: 48 hrs		20s.6d			
		54 hrs		21s.6d			
		60 hrs		22s.6d			
		Group III: 48 hrs		18s			
		54 hrs		19s			
		60 hrs		20s			
Dec	a	Killarney Asylum				3s wb	

1917

Feb	b	carpenters (1 firm)	Tralee			w b	w b
Mar	b	farm labourers	Droumlought dist.				15s w/ board
Apr	b	carpenters at Donovan's (ASCJ)	Tralee	38s	33s?	3s wb +2s for "war work"	5s
May	c	Ballylongford Labour Federation					3s- 4s.6d p/d ¹³⁰

128 They demanded half a day's pay for St. Patrick's Day.

129 They received half a day's pay for St. Patrick's Day.

130 The lower rate was for those labourers receiving meals. Both rates were for the summer and harvest months.

Jul	b	T&D workers, NUR (7)	Tralee, Dingle		20s		12s wb ¹³¹
Nov	a	labourers	Killorglin	20s	16s	4s	14s
Nov	a	road stewards	Tralee RDC	27s.6d			
		road labourers	" "	25s			
Nov	a	road stewards	Killarney	22s.6d	20s	2s.6d	
		road labourers	RDC	20s	17s.6d	2s.6d	

1918

Feb	b	plasterers (6 firms)	Tralee			6s	6s
Mar	b	CDB workers (40m)	Killorglin			incr	
May	b	tailors	Listowel			incr	
May	a	carpenters & joiners	Tralee	42s	40s	2s	
Aug	b	painters (8 firms)	Tralee			4s	4s
Sept	a	employees of merchants	Tralee (all ITGWU)			5s	
		UDC workers	" "			4s	
		Revington's employees	" "			4s	
		CWS employees	" "			3s	
Oct	b	sawyers, stone cutters, labourers	Tralee			3s	
Nov	b	carpenters	Tralee	48s	42s	6s	13s
Nov	a	out of work donation: ¹³²					
		adult men		24s			
		adult women		20s			
Dec	a	road workers	Listowel RDC			incr	
Dec	a	road labourers	Killarney RDC	27s.6d	25s	2s.6d	
Dec	a	UDC labourers (ITGWU)	Listowel	30s	25s	5s	10s
		UDC steward	" "	35s			10s
		UDC "man guiding horse"	" "	32s.6d			10s

1919

Jan	b	carters, vanmen (4 firms)	Tralee	37s	34s	3s	6s
Jan	a	workers at Jack McKenna's (ITGWU)	Listowel			5s	
Jan	a	town workers (27) (ITGWU)	Listowel			5-10s	
Jan	a	AWB min rates:	national				
		Group I: 54 hrs		27s			
		60 hrs		28s.6d			

¹³¹ The employer wanted a previous 6s increase deducted from the 12s war bonus (26s total wage) whereas workers wanted an effective 12s increase (32s).

¹³² 6s extra for first dependent child (under 15) & 3s for each succeeding dependent child. This is meant to be a temporary measure to deal with the effects of the return of soldiers to civilian life. Soldiers can claim for up to 26 weeks during the 12 months after demobilisation.

		Group II: 54 hrs 60 hrs		24s.6d 26s			
		Group III: 54 hrs 60 hrs		22s 23s.6d			
Feb	b	labourers (ITGWU)	Killarney			5s	
Feb	a	ITGWU (36)	Listowel			9s.6d 133	
Feb	a	carpenters & joiners	Tralee	50s	48s	2s	
Mar	a	farm labourers (ITGWU): w/diet	Listowel				20s
		without diet					40s
		casuals					7s p/d
Mar	b	men building cable works	Iveragh Peninsula	8s.4d p/d ¹³⁴	7s.6d p/d	1d p/hr	
Mar	b	workers engaged in "improvement" of waterworks	Killorglin				7s.6d
Mar	a	town workers (ITGWU)	Killorglin			5s- 7s.6d	
Mar	b	ITGWU: town workers	Killarney				40s
		UDC roadmen		40-42s			
Mar	a	CoCo road workers ¹³⁵ :	Kerry				
		stewards		35s			
		labourers		30s			
Mar	a	boot & shoe operatives:	national				
		males over 23		53-56s min			
		females over 20		30s min			
Apr	a	Grist Mills ¹³⁶	towns over 5,000 "country mills"			7s 5s	
Apr	b	farm labourers (indoor)	Kilflynn	25s			
Apr	b	road stewards	Kenmare RDC	27s.6d	23s	4s.6d	12s
		road labourers		25s	18s	7s	12s
Apr	b	tailors	Killorglin			50%	60%
Apr	a	farm labourers w/diet living w/ farmers	Lixnaw (only?)	25s 20s			
May	b	plumbers (6 firms)	Tralee			incr	

133 "average increase".

134 for a 10 hour day.

135 approved by LGB.

136 final arbitration award.

May	b	farm labourers ¹³⁷ :	Newtown-sandes dist				
		employed "continuously"		21s			
		employed weekly		22s.6d			
		casual labourers		5s p/d			
May	a	fish curers (60) (ITGWU)	Valentia Harbour	60s			
May	a	creamery workers:	Newtown-sandes				
		general workers		37s.6d	22s.6d	15s	
		engine drivers & butter maker		40s			
Jun	a	town workers (ITGWU) ¹³⁸	Castleisland	36s			
Jun	b	Grocers Assts:	Tralee				
		1st & 2nd yrs after apprenticeship		40s			
		3rd & 4th yrs		50s			
		after 4th yr		60s			
Jun	a	Donovan's (ITGWU)	Sallowglen, Tarbert	30s	25s	5s	
Jun	c	labourers employed by merchants	Tralee	40s	34s	6s	10s
Jun	a	UDC: carters labourers	Tralee	43s 40s			
Jul	b	bakers (5 firms)	Listowel	55s	37s.6d	17s.6d (or 10s?)	
Jul	b	general settlement: merchants' "permanent" workers (ITGWU)	Dingle & dist	35s ¹³⁹	25s (av)	10s	36s
		"casuals" ¹⁴⁰					8s p/d
		carpenters		60s	50s	10s	
		masons		60s	50s	10s	
		plasterers		60s	50s	10s	
		painters		60s	50s	10s	
		coopers		60s	45s	15s	
		builders' labourers		35s ¹⁴¹	25s (av)	10s	
		farm labourers: w/diet		30s	15s	15s	
		w/out diet		35s ¹⁴²			
		indoor		20s ¹⁴³			

137 all wages include diet.

138 award by newly formed Castleisland Conciliation Board.

139 36s according to the Voice of Labour.

140 mostly in fishing industry.

141 36s according to the Voice of Labour.

142 36s according to the Voice of Labour.

143 "all found".

		tailors		48s	40s	8s	
Jul	a	IDAA v Co Kerry Merchants Assoc:	Tralee				
		"drapery section"		40s ¹⁴⁴			
		"hardware section"		20s ¹⁴⁵			
Jul	b	Latchford's (ITGWU)	Listowel	37s		incr	
Jul	a	Tarbert co-op creamery, ITGWU:	Tarbert				
		general workers		37s.6d			
		dairymaid & engine driver		40s			
Jul	a	employers outside Association (?) (ITGWU)	Tralee			6s ¹⁴⁶	
Jul	a	dockers, Limerick Steamship Co (ITGWU)	Tralee (Fenit?)	9s.6d p/d	7s p/d	2s.6d p/d	
Aug	a	"girl workers" (ITGWU)	Dingle	5s p/d			
Aug	a	Slattery's (ITGWU)	Tralee			4s	
		coopers				10s	
Aug	a	farm workers (permanent) (ITGWU)	Castleisland	22s.6d			
Aug	c	CoCo road workers ¹⁴⁷ :	N Kerry				
		stewards			35s		15s
		labourers			30s		15s
Aug	b	tailors (9 firms)	Tralee			2d p/hr	3d p/hr
Aug	a	shop assts (m) ¹⁴⁸ : junior assts senior assts charge assts	Killorglin	40s 55s 60s			
Sep	a	labourers doing potato digging	Maharees	40s ¹⁴⁹			
Oct	b	carpenters v. Builders Assoc (5 firms) "country" rate	Tralee	70s	60s ¹⁵⁰ 72s	10s	24s 33s
Oct	a	railworkers	Britain	51s ¹⁵¹			

144 minimum after apprenticeship, rising gradually to £160 p/yr.

145 rising by 5s p/yr until £3.10s is reached.

146 increase recently granted by the Association.

147 The Voice of Labour reported that the County Council approved 50s for stewards and 45s for labourers.

148 "Lady assistants 15 per cent less all round".

149 indoor.

150 Carpenters were already receiving £3.10s rate from Tralee merchants.

151 minimum rate as long as cost of living remains at least 110% above pre-war level; in February 1920, it is announced that Irish rail workers will get the same increase.

Oct	c	T&D workers			47s ¹⁵²		
Oct	c	general demand on employers (ITGWU)	Kenmare	35s			36s
Oct	a	RDC roadworkers (ITGWU):	Tralee RDC area				
		road stewards		38s			
		labourers		35s			
Nov	a	stone mason & carpenter, UDC	Tralee	70s ¹⁵³			
Nov	a	asst in Tralee Clerk's office (ICWU)	Tralee	60s ¹⁵⁴			
Nov	a	RDC road workers:	Listowel				
		stewards		45s	35s	10s	
		labourers		40s	30s	10s	
		carters		60s	60s	0	
Nov	a	grist mill workers	Tralee			6s (m) 155 3s.6d(f)	
Dec	c	Building Trades Federation	Killarney				12s p/d

1920

Feb	b	CoCo road workers	Kerry				
		stewards		45s		10s	
		labourers		40s		10s ¹⁵⁶	
Feb	a	ITGWU members	Killorglin	42s	35s	7s	
Feb	a	ITGWU members at main employers	Tralee	46s	40s	6s	6s
Feb	a	Harbour Board (ITGWU)	Tralee			6s	
Feb	b	carmen & shop porters (1 firm)	Tralee			6s	6s
Feb	c	ITGWU: carters & stone porters harness makers	Killarney				50s 60s
Mar	a	males' readymade & wholesale bespoke tailoring trade (timeworkers)	national	1s.0 3/4d - 1s.4d (m) 8d p/hr (f)	8d (m) 4 1/2d p/hr (f)	3 1/2d p/hr (f)	

152 14s pre-war rate + 33s war bonus.

153 "standard rate" paid to carpenters and stone masons in Tralee.

154 ICWU minimum in Tralee.

155 not to exceed 30s over pre-war rates. At the beginning of 1920, the Watchword of Labour reports this increase will "apply to all town workers".

156 according to the Ministry of Labour.

Mar	a	boot & shoe repairing trade (timeworkers)	national	65s (m) min 45s (f) min			
Mar	a	IBOA & banks ¹⁵⁷	national				
Mar	b	butter & egg workers (5 firms)	Tralee		50s (max)	incr	10s
Mar	a	UDC stonebreakers	Killarney	6s p/yd	4s p/yd	2s p/yd	
Mar	a	UDC employees (ITGWU)(12):	Killarney				
		3 get			42s		15s
		9 get			40s		15s
Mar	a	standard wage for "tradesmen" ¹⁵⁸	Killarney		12s p/d		
Mar	a	labourers making drain, Commercial Cable Co.	Waterville		7s p/d		3s p/d
Mar	a	UDC workmen	Tralee	48s	40s	8s	12s
		UDC carters		50s	43s	7s	12s
Mar	b	builders' labourers	Tralee				6s
Mar	a	new AWB rates ¹⁵⁹ —Group I —Group II	national	32s.6d 30s			
Mar	a	ITGWU: saw milling award	Lim City & Tralee	1s.2d p/hr			
		labourers		1s p/hr			
Apr	a	railworkers ¹⁶⁰	UK			2s	
Apr	b	builders labourers, ITGWU	Killarney				52s.6d
Apr	a	ITGWU:	Killarney				
		storemen, shopmen & porters		43s			
		carters				2s	
Apr	a	UDC: ¹⁶¹	Tralee				
		Plumbers Soc		70s		70s	70s
		Carpenters Soc		77s.6d		77s.6d	77s.6d
Apr	b	motor drivers & mechanics (3 firms)	Tralee			incr	
Apr	b	motor drivers & mechanics (8 firms)	Tralee & Dingle			incr	
Apr	b	workers at Capt J F Shea's, the Hotel, Glenbeigh	Glenbeigh	35s	30s	5s	10s
May	b	secondary school teachers	national			incr	

¹⁵⁷ £100 p/yr starting salary rising to £450 p/yr after 22 years.

¹⁵⁸ according to the ITGWU.

¹⁵⁹ rates apply to a 54 hr week; Group III has been amalgamated with Group II.

¹⁶⁰ except clerical and supervisory grades.

¹⁶¹ Both of the rates obtained were said to be town rates for these trades.

May	a	town workers (ITGWU)	Castleisland	44s			
May	a	building trades: ¹⁶²	Killarney				
		bricklayers, masons, carpenters & joiners, plasterers		1s.6d p/hr	1s.2d p/hr	4d p/hr	
		scaffolders		1s.1d p/hr	1s p/hr	1d p/hr	
		general labourers		1s p/hr	10d p/hr	2d p/hr	
May	a	coal cargo workers (timeworkers)	all Irish ports except Lim City			3s.4d	
Jun	a	ITGWU ¹⁶³ :	Tralee				
		general workers		52s	46s	6s	20s
		carters		55s	49s	6s	
		UDC workers		54s	48s	6s	20s
		UDC carters		56s	50s	6s	
		gas stokers		10s- 10s.4d p/shift			
		casual labour				1s p/d	3s p/d
		"youths" 18-21				3s.6d	
		boys under 18				2s	
Jun	a	ITGWU:	Dingle				
		general workers		45s	36s	9s	9s
		casuals		9s p/d			
		farm labourers		40s			
		dockers: —corn —coal		1s.9d p/ton 1s.6d p/ton			
Jun	b	boot and shoe makers & repairers (3 firms)	Tralee ¹⁶⁴				
Jun	a	railworkers: -engine drivers -firemen -cleaners	UK			7s 4s 2s	
Jul	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 2s	
Jul	a	port workers (ITGWU)	Fenit	14s.6d p/d			

¹⁶² According to "Standard Time Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour" (PP 1921, v. ix), these rates were still in effect at the end of 1920.

¹⁶³ employers who agreed to terms: R. McCowen & Sons; Latchford & Sons Ltd.; J. Donovan & Sons Ltd.; M. Kelliher & Sons Ltd.; Donovan's Ltd.; Limerick Steamship Co.; UDC.

¹⁶⁴ Workers demand an advance on Trade Board rates and receive a 15% increase on these rates.

Aug	a	mill hands at R Latchford & Sons (flour mills)	Listowel	48s	43s	5s	
Aug	a	CDB workers	Castlemaine dist		30s		
Aug	b	clerical staff at Slattery & Sons	Tralee				100s min
Aug	c	fish curers at height of season	Valentia Harbour		20s-30s p/d		
Sep	b	shop assts (1 firm)	Tralee			incr	
Sept	a	ITGWU v. Listowel UDC ¹⁶⁵ :	Listowel				
		roadmen		48s ¹⁶⁶			
		surfacemen		53s			
		stone-breakers		4s.6d p/yd			
Oct	a	saw mill workers (boys) (ITGWU)	Killarney			6s	
Oct	b	DE award: drapers assts charge hands & senior clerks lady assts	Killarney	£125 p/yr 167 £225 p/yr 12 1/2% less			
Oct	b ?	hotel workers (ITGWU): ¹⁶⁸	Tralee				
		boots, waiters & waitresses		20s			
		cooks		£40 p/yr			
		kitchen, parlour & housemaids		£22 p/yr			
		pantry boys		£25 p/yr			
		pantry maids		£20 p/yr			
Oct	a	crane drivers (2) at Fenit Pier (Tralee Harbour Board)	Fenit	61s	56s	5s	
Nov	a	bacon factory workers	national ¹⁶⁹			10s	

165 Conciliation Board award.

166 said to be "general town rate".

167 minimum after 4 years; rising to £195 after 10 years

168 arbitration award; all rates are for an 80 hour week; rates "are calculated on an indoor basis, 22s.6d weekly being estimated as the value of board and lodging."

169 part of national agreement reached at Mallow conference.

Nov	b	storemen at Russell & Sons (ITGWU)	Tarbert & Ballylongford	44s.6d			170
Nov	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			4s 2s	
Dec	a	retail bespoke tailors (male timeworkers)	towns over 2,000	1s.7d p/hr			
Dec	c	printing trade (compositors & machine men):					
		jobbing, wkly & bi-wkly news	Tralee	73s.6d			
		evening news		76s			
		morning & tri-wkly news		81s.6d			
		jobbing, wkly & bi-wkly news	Killarney	71s			
		evening news		73s.6d			
		morning & tri-wkly news		79s			

1921

Jan	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			2s 1s	
Mar	c	new AWB min rates: Group I Group II		34s 32s			
Mar	a	UDC employees (ITGWU) ¹⁷¹ :	Killarney				
		labourers					50s
		"horsemen"					52s
Mar	a	retail bespoke tailors (male timeworkers)	national	1s.5d p/hr min			
Apr	a	railworkers: -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 4s	
Apr	c	ex-servicemen (40) at limestone quarry ¹⁷²	Listowel		48s		
Aug	a	railworkers: ¹⁷³ -clerical & supervisory staff -all other grades	UK			8s 5s (m) 2s.6d (f)	

170 demand same rate of pay as Russell's employees in Listowel.

171 According to the union, they are demanding the "standard rate" agreed by Killarney's traders the previous October.

172 work begun as a result of Ministry of Transport grant.

173 According to the Limerick Leader, the August cut for Irish railworkers, "generally averaged about 6s a week."

Sep	b	railway shopmen & coalmen (inc GSWR)	national			6s	6s
Sep	a	dock labourers ¹⁷⁴	Belfast, Dublin, Lim, Sligo & other ports			1s p/d	
Oct	a	ready made & <u>wholesale</u> bespoke tailoring (m) min rates:	national				
		cutters, tailors, machinists		1s.2 1/2d - 1s.8 1/2d p/hr			
		warehousemen & packers		1s.1 1/2d - 1s.4 1/2d			
		porters & all others		1s.1 1/2d			
Oct	a	GSWR gives notice to all staff					<i>reduc</i> 175
Oct	a	town workers (ITGWU) ¹⁷⁶	Tralee	55s ¹⁷⁷	52s	3s	5s ¹⁷⁸
Nov	c	UDC employees (ITGWU)					3s ¹⁷⁹
Nov	a	"town rate", ITGWU	Castleisland		44s		
Nov	a	retail bespoke tailoring min rates	national	56s(m) 10-10 1/2d p/hr (f)			
Dec	c	carpenters	Tralee		84s		
			Dingle		72s		
late	a	postal workers	national			15s.6d	

174 and other workers employed in actual handling of cargoes in or on a ship, quay, warehouse or craft.

175 cut equal to cut made in August "which generally averaged about 6s a week."

176 result of arbitration; does not apply to all employers.

177 "town minimum".

178 ITGWU wanted 10s increase.

179 Workers demand increase recently obtained from town's employers after DE arbitration (ITGWU originally demanded 10s); UDC claim submitted to arbitration.

APPENDIX 2

ANALYSIS OF LABOUR ACTIVITY 1915-21

I. Limerick, 1915-8

A. Number of meetings and rallies reported in the local press per labour organisation per year in Limerick City.

Name of organisation	19	'15	'16	'17	'18	'15- '18
Limerick United Trades and Labour Council (LUT&LC)		6	13	18	11	48
National Union of Railwaymen (NUR)		2		2		4
Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE)		1	1	1	1	4
Limerick Municipal Officers Association, Executive Committee		1				1
Grocers and Vintners Assistants' Association		1				1
Limerick Operative Bakers Society		1		1	1	3
Irish Drapers Assistants' Association (IDAA)		1	1	2	1	5
Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ)			3	1	2	6
Federated Labour Council (FLC)			4	2	1	7
Limerick Porkbutchers Society			4	1	2	7
Limerick United Corporation Employees Society			3			3
Quarrymen's Society			1			1
Association of Irish Post Office Clerks			2			2
Limerick Bread Vanmen's Society			2			2
Limerick United Carmen's and Storemen's Society			1			1
Harbour Employés			1			1
Mechanics' Institute, Delegate Board			2	2	1	5
Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)			3	7	3	13
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland			1	1	1	3
"Loco men", Great Southern & Western Railway			2			2
Limerick Hackney Drivers			1	1		2
Railway Clerks Association (RCA)				3		3
LUT&LC/FLC lecture series				4		4
Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF)				2	1	3
Irish Assistant Teachers Union				1	1	2
Limerick Clerks and Assistants' Assoc. (LCAA) ¹⁸⁰				11	7	18
Limerick Asylum Attendants Association ¹⁸¹				3	2	5
North Munster Law Clerks Association				3		3
Typographical Association				2	3	5
NUR No. 3 branch				1	4	5
Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU)				1	1	2
Limerick Tailors Society				1		1
Irish Automobile Drivers and Mechanics Union (IADMU)				1	1	2
Limerick Furnishing Trades Association					2	2
Irish Chemists' Assistants' Association					2	2

¹⁸⁰ The LCAA changed its name to the Limerick Commercial Workers Association (LCWA) in 1918.

¹⁸¹ The Limerick Asylum Attendants became a branch of the Irish Asylum Workers Union (IAWU) in 1917.

Town Hall rally re: housing				1	1
Town Hall rally in defence of Byrne				1	1
meetings of trades to organise May Day				2	2
Limerick Assurance Workers Society				1	1
General Strike against conscription				1	1
Anti-conscription labour demonstration				1	1
FLC/LUT&LC amalgamation				1	1
Labour Day procession				1	1
Irish Clerical Workers Union (ICWU)				2	2
Town Hall rally to defend bacon trade				1	1
Totals	13	45	72	60	190

B. Number of Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA) meetings reported in the local press.

Venue	1915	1916	1917	1918	'15-'18
Limerick City	4			1	5
Pallaskenry, Kildimo & Stonehall	1				1
Rathkeale	4				4
Mungret	3				3
Newcastle West	3				3
Ashford	1				1
Fedamore	3	3	2		8
Crecora	1	1			2
Bruff	1	2	1		4
Manister	2	1	1		4
Caherline	2	2	1		5
Murroe	2		1		3
Ballybrown	1				1
Ahane	1	1	1		3
Feohanagh	1				1
Oola	3	2	4	2	11
Knockea		1			1
Roxborough		3			3
Pallasgreen		2	2		4
Nicker		1	1		2
Blackboy			1		1
Grange			1		1
Raheen			3	2	5
Ballysimon				2	2
Newtown				1	1
Templeglantine				1	1
Derryknockane				3	3
Central Council (no venue given)	2	2	1		5
County Organising Committee (no venue given)	3	4	2		9
other meetings with no specific venue	1		1	1	3
Totals	39	25	23	13	100

C. Other labour meetings reported in the local press outside Limerick City.

Name of organisation	19	'15	'16	'17	'18	'15-'18
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Caherconlish Teachers Association (Irish National Teachers Organisation-INTO)	2	1	1		4
Newcastle West Teachers Assoc. (INTO)	1			1	2
West Limerick INTO		1	1		2
Trade and Labour Association, Kilmallock			2		2
Trade and Labour Association, Bruff			4		4
Dromcollogher INTO				1	1
Croom ITGWU				2	2
Patrickswell ITGWU				1	1
Foynes ITGWU				1	1
Kilmallock ITGWU				1	1
Hospital ITGWU				1	1
Athlacca ITGWU				1	1
Newcastle West ITGWU				1	1
Askeaton ITGWU				1	1
"uneconomic holders and labourers" near Ballyfrawley Estate (Newcastle West area)				1	1
"Derryknockane Lands—Prospective Plotolders meeting"				1	1
"Demand for Land in East and West Limerick—Public Meetings Held"				1	1
Totals	3	2	8	14	27

II. Limerick, 1919-21

A. Limerick City

Name of organisation	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19- '21
Mechanics Institute Delegate Board		2		1	3
Limerick Asylum Workers		4	2		6
NUR No. 4 branch		1			1
INTO		3	2	2	7
Limerick Drapers Club		1			1
LUTLC		8	1	1	10
NUR No. 3		2			2
Limerick Chemists Assistants		2			2
RCA		2	3		5
Limerick Insurance Workers (NAULAW)		1	1	1	3
Secondary Teachers Assoc (ASTI)		1	1		2
Limerick Gasworkers Society		1		1	2
District Maternity Nurses Union		2			2
IDAA		1			1
Furnishing Trades Association		1			1
Post Office employees (AIPOC?)		1			1
Limerick Boot and Shoe Operatives		1			1
"procession" of strikers		1			1
Limerick Hairdressers Assoc		1			1
railworkers' May Day rally		1			1
Coachmakers Society		1			1
Lim Plumbers Society		1			1
ITGWU		2	2	1	5
Limerick Typographical Association		2	1		3
Limerick, Tipperary & Clare Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA) at Limerick City		1			1
Co Limerick INTO (including committee mtg)		1	1	1	3

ICWU	3			3
Limerick Porkbutchers Soc (inc cttee)	1		3	4
roadworkers march through city	1			1
Limerick United Carmen's & Storemen's Soc	1			1
Limerick Co-operative Society "Management & Propaganda" committee	3	1		4
ASLEF	1	2	4	7
Labour protest meeting re: Motor Permits Order	1			1
ITGWU general mtg at Town Hall to support dockers		1		1
NUR No. 2 branch		1	2	3
Lim Assurance Agents Society (same as NAULAW branch?)		1		1
Irish Bakers Amalgamated Union		1		1
Limerick Co-operative Society (not committee)		2	2	4
LWABS		1	1	2
Standing Committee, Co Limerick INTO		1		1
Creamery Workers Guild (ICWU?)		1		1
ITGWU branch committee		1	2	3
Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding & Foundry Trade Union		1		1
ASCI		1		1
Limerick Workers Benefit Society, Committee of Management			1	1
Limerick Brick and Stone Layers Society			1	1
Limerick Corporation Employees Society			2	2
Cleeve's Creamery Section, ITGWU			1	1
"mass meeting" of Limerick railwaymen			1	1
Stationary Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Society			1	1
Munster Nurses Association			1	1
"smoker" held in aid of "Building Fund" at Mechanics Institute			1	1
Totals	5 6	2 9	3 1	1 1 6

B. ITGWU (outside Limerick City)

Branch/venue	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19 - '21
Kilmallock		1		1	2
Clarina		2			2
Caherline		1		1	2
Askeaton		2			2
meeting re: farm near Kildimo, ITGWU presiding		1			1
Abbeyfeale		3	1		4
Bruff		1	2	2	5
Croom (inc cttee)		2	7	3	12
Ballyneety		2	3	2	7
Parteen & Cratloe			1		1
Ballybricken			2		2
Rathkeale			1		1
Caherconlish			1		1
Kilteely				2	2
Herbertstown				1	1
Kilfinane				1	1

Ballylanders			1	1
Glin			1	1
Nicker			1	1
Totals	15	18	16	49

C. Other labour meetings outside Limerick City

Name of organisation	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19- '21
May Day rally at Kilmallock		1			1
May Day rally at Newcastle West		1			1
Co Limerick Carpenters Assoc			1	4	5
Rathkeale INTO				2	2
Newcastle West Trade and Labour Council				1	1
Totals		2	1	7	10

III. Kerry, 1915-8

A. Number of meetings reported in the local press held in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel per organisation per year.

Name of organisation	19	'15	'16	'17	'18	'15- '18
Tralee Trades & Labour Council (TTLC)		21	2	6	5	34
Tralee IDAA		4	1	2	1	8
County Kerry INTO		2	2	2		6
Tralee INTO		1	4	3	1	9
North Kerry (No. 2) INTO		2	2	2		6
Tralee NUR		2	1	3	1	7
Killarney INTO		3	3	3		9
Tralee Typographical Association		2		1	1	4
Killarney IDAA		1				1
Tralee labour processions to support Munster Warehouse strikers		2	1			3
Listowel IDAA		1		1		2
Killarney Grocers Assistants Association		1				1
Workers Union, Tralee branch (ITGWU)		3	5	1		9
Tralee Bakers Society, branch of Irish Bakers National Amalgamated Union		1	1			2
Tralee labour demonstration to protest dismissal of M.J. O'Connor		1				1
Tralee ASLEF		1		1		2
Tralee Grocers' Assistants ¹⁸²		1	2	3		6
Labour protest meeting against Tralee UDC's refusal to co-opt a Labour representative		1				1
Labour public meeting in Killarney		1	2			3
Killarney ITGWU			1			1
National Union of Clerks (NUC) ?			2			2
Killarney Trades & Labour Council (KT&LC)			4	1	1	6
NUC-organised rally against imprisonment of Jack McGaley, Tralee			1			1

¹⁸² subsequently the Tralee branch of the Irish Grocers Assistants' Association.

Trade and Labour meeting, Listowel		2			2					
Listowel ITGWU		1		2	3					
Listowel "Trade and Labour Association"		1			1					
National Asylum Workers Union, Killarney branch		1			1					
Tralee (No. 2) INTO		1	3	2	6					
INTO rally at Tralee courthouse for war bonus		1			1					
Listowel INTO		1			1					
Irish Creamery Assistants Association, Tralee branch			2		2					
Irish Assistant Teachers Union, Tralee branch			2	1	3					
Teachers Assistants, Listowel branch			1		1					
North Kerry INTO			1		1					
NUR meeting, Killarney			1		1					
"railwaymen of Tralee and district"				1	1					
Tralee labour demonstration against conscription				1	1					
Tralee RCA				1	1					
Totals	5	1	4	2	3	1	8	1	5	0

B. Meetings held outside Tralee, Killarney and Listowel

Name of organisation	19	'15	'16	'17	'18	'15- '18
Castleisland INTO		3	1	1		5
Castlemaine INTO		2				2
ITGWU meeting at Churchill		1				1
ITGWU meeting at Fenit		1	1			2
Labour public meeting in Dingle		1	1			2
Caherciveen INTO			1			1
Killorglin INTO			2	3	1	6
Killorglin TAS (Teachers' Assistants ?)			1			1
Greenore NUR				1		1
Kenmare ITGWU					2	2
meeting of Iveragh teachers to support INTO strike					1	1
Totals		8	7	5	4	24

IV. Kerry, 1919-21

A. Number of meetings held in Tralee, Killarney and Listowel

Name of organisation	'19	'19	'20	'21	'19- '21
Listowel ITGWU		4	1	1	6
Co Kerry INTO at Tralee (including committee)		3	2		5
farm labourers meeting at Listowel (ITGWU?)		1			1
teachers against Killanin Cttee report; meeting at Listowel		1			1
N Kerry INTO		3	2		5
TTLIC (Tralee Workers Council)		1	1	2	4
Tralee INTO		3	3	2	8
May Day procession in Listowel		1			1
committee organising "North Kerry Teachers' Dance"		1			1
North Kerry No 2 INTO		2	1		3
Tralee Grocers Assistants Union		1			1

farm labourers march in Tralee	1			1
Tralee branch, Irish Tailors & Tailoresses Union	1			1
Tralee No. 2 INTO	1	2		3
Tralee IADMU	1			1
meeting re: Motor Permits Order at Foresters' Hall (Tralee?)		1		1
"union cottiers" at Listowel ("extra acre")		1		1
procession of "union cottiers" through Listowel & surrounding area		1		1
Kerry NUR members at Tralee		1		1
KTLC (Killarney Workers Council)		5		5
NUR, Tralee branch		1	1	2
Kerry teachers rally against Macpherson Bill at Tralee		1		1
Asylum Workers Union, Killarney branch		1		1
Tralee ITGWU		1	1	2
Railwaymen's Fund, Tralee Joint Committee		1		1
ASCJ (Tralee branch?)		1		1
Co Kerry INTO at Killarney		1		1
Killarney INTO		1		1
County Council discharged road stewards (ITGWU), meeting at Listowel			2	2
railway workers protest against Carrigan Award at Tralee			1	1
Union of Post Office Workers, Tralee			1	1
Totals	25	29	11	65

B. Number of meetings held outside Tralee, Killarney and Listowel

Name of organisation	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19-'21
Kenmare ITGWU (including committee)		11	11	1	23
West Kerry Blacksmiths Association		1			1
Caherciveen ITGWU		3			3
May Day procession in Kenmare		1			1
May Day procession in Newtown		1			1
Waterville ITGWU		1			1
Kilmorna ITGWU		1			1
Dingle ITGWU		2	1		3
procession & rally by striking workers in Dingle		1			1
N Kerry road stewards (venue?)		1			1
marches by striking Castleisland farm labourers		2			2
"Extra Half-Acre" meeting at Ballyduff		1			1
"Extra Acre" meeting at Lixnaw		1			1
"Extra Acre" labourers meeting at Castleisland		1			1
Liselton labourers meeting ("Extra Acre")		1			1
farm labourers at Causeway			1		1
lecture by Neligan at Castleisland (ITGWU)			1		1
"Extra Acre" movement/ITGWU at Lixnaw			1		1
Glenbeigh ITGWU			1		1
Glencar ITGWU			1		1
Killorglin ITGWU			2		2

Rathmore INTO		1		1
lecture by Neligan at Glenbeigh (ITGWU)		1		1
IDAA, Kenmare branch		3		3
IADMU fundraiser, Dingle		1		1
procession by striking motor drivers, Dingle (IADMU)		1		1
"extra acre" mtg at Killorglin (ITGWU)		1		1
"Stewards and Labourers Association" (venue?)		1		1
Abbeydorney ITGWU		1		1
Kilflynn ITGWU		1		1
Ardfert ITGWU		1		1
Killorglin INTO		1	1	2
Castleisland ITGWU		1		1
Tarbert ITGWU			1	1
Killorglin Post Office Workers			1	1
Totals		29	33	66

APPENDIX 3

ANALYSIS OF FARMERS' ACTIVITY 1919-21

I. Number of meetings of farmers' organisations reported per year in County Limerick (branches and venues refer to the Irish Farmers Union unless otherwise noted).

Branch/venue	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19- '21
L&CFA		3			3
Co Limerick IFU		4	3	1	8
meeting at Kildimo agitating for sale of farm		1			1
Galbally		1	1		2
Limerick City (Central branch)		1		2	3
Executive & "standing" committees of Limerick IFU at Limerick City		2	11	12	25
Feenagh		3	2		5
Ahane		1	2		3
Newcastle West			1		1
Fedamore			1		1
Knockea			3	1	4
Kilmallock (& Ballingaddy)			1	1	2
Abbeyfeale			5		5
Ballybricken			2	1	3
Small Landholders Association, Knockea			2		2
"small farmers" meeting at Ahane			1		1
Murroe Small Landholders Union			1		1
Kilteely			1		1
Meanus			1		1
Mountcollins (near Abbeyfeale)			1		1
Hospital			1		1
Cappamore			1	1	2
Doon			2		2
Grange (Kilmallock)			3		3
meetings of West Limerick branches, IFU			1	1	2
Nicker, Pallasgreen			1		1
Knocklong			1		1
Patrickswell			3	1	4
Knockaderry			1	1	2
Ballyhahill (& Loughill)			1	1	2
Glin			2	4	6
Ardagh			2		2
Turraree			1		1
Rockhill			1		1
Askeaton			1		1
Pallaskenry			1		1
Knockainy (Knockaney)			1	1	2
Bruff			1		1
Castleconnell			1		1
Kildimo			2		2
Ballylanders			1		1
Bohermore				2	2

Murroe			1	1
Bridgetown			1	1
Effin (&Garrienderk)			2	2
Donoughmore			1	1
Broadford			1	1
Feohanagh (Belleville)			1	1
Killeedy			2	2
Tournafulla			1	1
Herbertstown			1	1
Kilmeedy			1	1
Kibane			1	1
Bulgaden			2	2
Manister			1	1
Ballingarry			1	1
Monaleen			1	1
Totals	16	68	48	132

Other meetings in County Limerick, 1919-2:

Limerick Dairymen's Assoc: 1920 - 1 meeting.
meeting of Cleeves' suppliers (i.e. farmers) @ Hospital: 1922 - 1 meeting.

II. Number of meetings of farmers' organisations reported in the local press per year in County Kerry (branches and venues refer to the Irish Farmers Union unless otherwise noted).

Branch/venue	'19	'19	'20	'21'	'19- '21
North Kerry		4			4
Co Kerry IFU at Tralee		2		4	6
Duagh		1			1
Tralee		1		1	2
South & East Kerry		2			2
Killarney Co-operative Soc		1			1
Newtown			1		1
Lixnaw			1		1
Listowel			1		1
Ballylongford			2	1	3
Co Kerry Exec at Tralee			1		1
Dingle			1		1
Ballyduff			1		1
Asdee			1		1
Knockanure				1	1
Rathea				1	1
unpurchased tenants at Killarney				1	1
Totals		11	9	9	29

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THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN KERRY AND LIMERICK, 1914-21

by Thomas Neilan Crean

This thesis is an investigation of the economic and political role of the labour movement in Counties Kerry and Limerick during the years 1914-21. Topics discussed include: 1) economic and social conditions, especially wage and price movements; 2) industrial relations, including disputes and conciliation mechanisms; 3) trade union organisation; 4) labour's intervention on social and political issues, including its relationship to the British state; the competing wings of Irish nationalism; as well as the Catholic hierarchy; 5) the rural labour movement. The Limerick sections also include a discussion of the role of women in the local labour movement. The most important source used is local newspapers. Other primary sources include trade union and official records, the latter comprising both the records of the British administration as well as local authority minutes.

The two counties chosen, while economically part of a broader southwestern entity, allow one to study the activities of the labour movement in several different "micro-economies", thus revealing a number of striking contrasts. In particular, the Limerick City labour movement, better organised from an earlier date, was dominated by craft unions of "skilled" workers whose representatives entrenched themselves as a type of "labour establishment". This establishment, characterised by a conservative worldview and a particularly close relationship with the local Catholic hierarchy, maintained control of the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council even after the arrival of the radical Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1917 and the latter's massive expansion among the city's "unskilled" workforce, both male and female. By contrast with Limerick City, the lack of an entrenched craft union "aristocracy" in Tralee facilitated the ITGWU's earlier breakthrough in 1915-16 when it led the town's labour movement into a de facto alliance with local republicans.

Rural workers in County Limerick operated in a more "developed" economic situation than their Kerry counterparts, with a large layer of strong farmers sitting atop a polarised social order. Rural organisation in Limerick was extensive in 1914 and was heavily integrated with the Redmondite political machine. The ITGWU established a firmer base among farm and creamery workers in the county during 1917-21 than in Kerry where demands focused more on land redistribution. Sabotage became an established part of rural labour conflict in both counties after 1918 but the most socially explosive episode was the agitation for an "extra acre" in North Kerry during 1919-20.

Despite these contrasts both counties conformed to the national pattern of wage militancy beginning in the latter half of the First World War in response to the ravages of inflation and resulting in an exponential growth in strike activity. Overall, local wage data seems to accord with the thesis that, since the mid-19th century, Irish wages, particularly for unskilled males, have "converged" with those in Britain. It must be noted, however, that wage rates in the two islands appeared to diverge during the First World War before a sharp convergence occurred in 1919-20. By 1921, in the context of deflation, many groups achieved significant, if temporary increases, in real wages despite widespread unemployment.

The political experience of the local labour movement also conformed to broad national political patterns. A generally close relationship with constitutional nationalist politicians gave way after the Easter Rising to a political axis with the republican movement. This was reflected in the municipal and rural elections of 1920 and the subsequent work of the newly-elected Sinn Féin/Labour local authorities. It would be false, however, to present this alliance simply in terms of the "subordination" of labour's aims to those of militant nationalism as this would cancel the radicalisation which permeated large sections of the labour movement during 1918-21, expressed in the flourishing of local labour journalism and "soviets". Rather, labour activists sought to use the alliance to achieve at least part of their ends and hoped that their movement would become a key player in the "Gaelic State".

