Soviets and Strikes Labour in Limerick 1917-22

An Online Exhibition
Commissioned by Limerick Museum
Researched and Curated by Rachel West

This exhibition is part of the Limerick City and County Council Decade of Centenaries Programme which is organised by Limerick City and County Library Service and funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2023 initiative

Sóibhéidí agus Stailceanna An Lucht Oibre i Luimneach 1917-22

Taispeántas Ar Líne
Arna choimisiúnú ag Músaem Luimnigh
Taighde agus Coimeád á ndéanamh ag Rachel West

Is cuid de Chlár Chomhairle Cathrach agus Contae Luimnigh maidir le Deich mBliana na gComórtha Céad Bliain í an taispeántas seo. Tá sé arna eagrú ag Seirbhís Leabharlainne Chathair agus Chontae Luimnigh agus arna mhaoiniú ag an Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus na Meán faoi Thionscnamh Deich mBliain na gComóradh Céad Bliain 2012-2023

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City & County Council

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

History of the Irish labour movement
Stair ghluaiseacht lucht oibre na hÉireann

The idea of organised labour came to Ireland at a relatively late stage in comparison to other European countries. Irish trade unions were usually branches of English unions and most represented skilled artisans and craftsmen, as opposed to unskilled and ordinary workers. Many factors contributed to the growth of the Irish labour movement, such as low wages, long hours and poor housing.
The rise of labour in Ireland also created a demand for labour representation in government and on elected bodies. Two of the main figures of the Irish labour movement were James Connolly and James Larkin, both of whom believed that all Irish workers, skilled and unskilled, should be represented by Irish-based trade unions.

In 1909, James Larkin founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) which represented Dublin's unskilled workers. Larkin believed in the idea of Syndicalism – all workers should unite in one great union and use 'sympathetic strikes' to get better working conditions. This idea gathered momentum and by mid-1913, the ITGWU had 10,000 members. It had founded its own weekly newspaper The Irish Worker and secured Liberty Hall as its headquarters. Under Larkin's leadership the ITGWU came into increasing conflict with many employers, headed by William Martin Murphy, who tried to prevent their employees joining. This led to the Dublin Lockout of September 1913 – February 1914.

James Connolly led the ITGWU after Larkin left for America in 1914. Under Connolly's influence, Irish Labour and trade unionism were strongly syndicalist in their policies and attitudes. Connolly believed that the struggle for socialism and national independence went hand in hand. He stated that 'the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour and the cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland'. Connolly regarded Irish nationalism as the essential foundation for social and economic progress and believed that the coming Irish revolution would be socialist as well as nationalist.

Tháinig an smaoineamh maidir le lucht oibre eagraithe níos déanaí go hÉirinn ná i dtíortha eile na hEorpa. Ba bhrainsí de cheardchumainn Shasana den chuid is mó iad ceardchumainn na hÉireann agus ba cheardaithe iad móramh an bhallra, seachas gnáthoibrithe neamhoilte. Chuir go leor tionchair le fás ghluaiseacht lucht oibre na hÉireann, m.sh. pá íseal, uaireanta fada oibre agus drochthithíocht. Chruthaigh méadú an lucht oibre in Éirinn éileamh ar ionadaíocht na n-oibrithe sa rialtas agus ar chomhlachtaí tofa. Beirt de na ceannairí i ngluaiseacht lucht oibre na hÉireann ba ea Séamus Ó Conghaile (James Connolly) agus Séamus Ó Lorcáin (James Larkin), agus chreid an bheirt acu gur cheart ceardchumainn a bhí lonnaithe in Éirinn an ionadaíocht a dhéanamh ar gach oibrí in Éirinn, oilte agus neamhoilte araon.

Sa bhliain 1909, bhunaigh Séamus Ó Lorcáin Ceardchumann Iompair agus Ilsaothar na hÉireann (ITGWU) a rinne ionadaíocht ar oibrithe neamhoilte Bhaile Átha Cliath. Chreid Larkin i smaoineamh an tSiondacachais - ba cheart do gach oibrí aontú in aontas mór amháin agus 'stailceanna báúla' a úsáid chun coinníollacha oibre níos fearr a fháil. Thosaigh fuinneamh na gluaiseachta ag fás go dtí go raibh 10,000 ball ag an ITGWU faoi lár na bliana 1913. Bhunaigh An Lorcánach a nuachtán seachtainiúil féin, The Irish Worker, agus fuair sé seilbh ar Halla na Saoirse mar cheanncheathrú don cheardchumann. Faoina cheannaireacht, tháinig an ITGWU i gcoimhlint le go leor fostóirí, faoi cheannas William Martin Murphy, a rinne iarracht a gcuid fostaithe a chosc ó bheith páirteach sa cheardchumann. Mar thoradh air seo, cuir na fostóiri Frithdhúnadh Bhaile Átha Cliath i bhfeidhm idir mí Meán Fómhair na blianan1913 agus mí Feabhra na bliana 1914.

Tháinig Séamus Ó Conghaile i gceannas ar an ITGWU tar éis don Lorcanach imeacht go Meiriceá sa bhliain 1914. Faoi thionchar An Conghailigh, bhí tionchar mór ag an Siondacachais i mbeartais agus i ndearcadh Páirtí Lucht Oibre na hÉireann agus sa ceardchumannachas. Chreid An Conghaileach go ndeachaigh an comhrac ar son an tsóisialachais agus an neamhspleáchais náisiúnta le chéile. Dúirt sé gurb é 'cúis na hÉireann cúis an Lucht Oibre agus gurb é cúis na Lucht Oibre cúis na hÉireann'. Mheas Connolly náisiúnachas na hÉireann mar bhunús riachtanach le haghaidh an dul chun cinn sóisialta agus eacnamaíoch agus chreid sé go mbeadh bunús sóisialach chomh maith le bunús náisiúnach ag an réabhlóid Éireannach a bhí le teacht.

Jim Larkin

Crowd from the 1913 lockout

Members of the Irish Women Workers Union on the steps of Liberty Hall

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City & County Council

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
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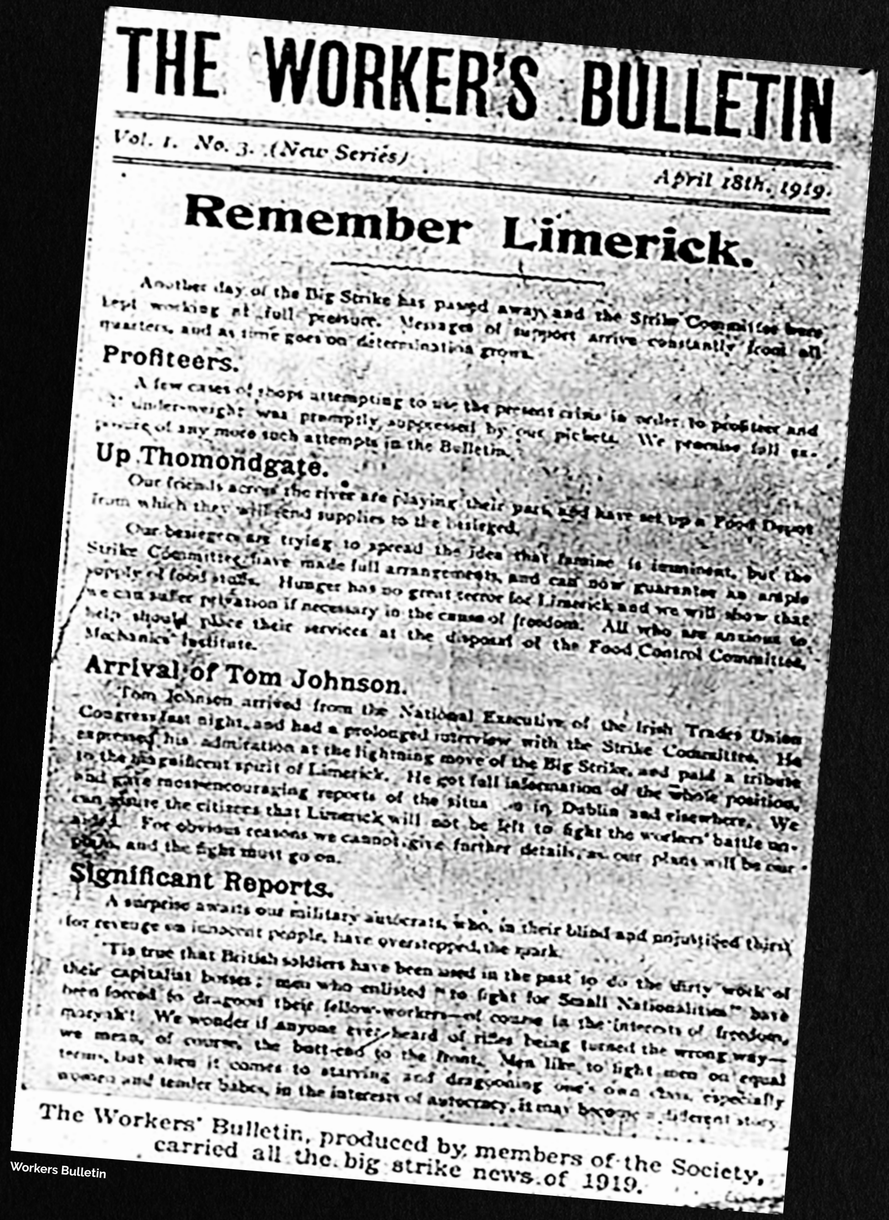
Political Background 1916-20
An Cúlra Polaitíochta 1916-20

The years 1916 to 1919 marked a radical turning point in Ireland's political landscape. It was a period when national independence and socialist revolution seemed to be a genuine possibility. During this period, socialism and revolution was spreading across Europe. The combined effects of the First World War and the Russian Revolution were a threat to European capitalism. In Ireland, trade union membership increased rapidly and the political climate became more extreme. Membership of the ITGWU increased from 5,000 in 1916 to 100,000 in 1919. It is not at all surprising that workers should react in a radical way when the general atmosphere in Ireland was one of defiance and rebellion.

In late 1920, the post-war economic boom gradually gave way to a slump. As a result, social unrest in Ireland gradually turned into struggles against wage cuts imposed by employers and farmers. The careful monitoring by the British authorities of suspicious or Bolshevik-type activities demonstrates how fearful they were that Ireland's working classes might become militant. In March 1918, the Inspector General (national head) of the Royal Irish Constabulary noted that there had been 'widespread political unrest, which showed no sign of abatement'.

Tháinig athrú radacach ar chúrsaí polaitiúla na hÉireann idir na blianta 1916 go 1919. Tréimhse a bhí ann nuair ba chosúil go dtiocfaidh neamhspleáchas na tíre agus an réabhlóid sóisialach i dteannta a chéile. Le linn na tréimhse seo, bhí an sóisialachas agus réabhlóid ag leathadh ar fud na hEorpa. Ba bhagairt do chaipitleachas na hEorpa iad éifeachtaí comhcheangailte an Chéad Chogaidh Dhomhanda agus Réabhlóid na Rúise. In Éirinn, mhéadaigh ballraíocht na gceardchumann go gasta agus d'éirigh an saol pholaitiúil níos antoisceach. D'fhás ballraíocht an ITGWU ó 5,000 sa bhliain 1916 go dtí 100,000 sa bhliain1919. Ní haon ionadh gur fhreagair oibrithe ar bhealach radacach nuair a bhí an lámh in uachtar ag spiorad na réabhlóide i saol na hÉireann.

Ag deireadh na bliana 1920, tháinig laghdú de réir a chéile ar an mborradh eacnamaíochta a tháinig as deireadh an Chéad Cogadh Domhanda. Mar thoradh air sin, d'fhas an corraíl shóisialta de réir a chéile in Éirinn ina chomhrac in aghaidh na gciorruithe pá a chuir fostóirí agus feirmeoirí i bhfeidhm. Léiríonn an faire cúramach a rinne údaráis na Breataine ar ghníomhaíochtaí amhrasacha nó Bolshevik cé chomh faitíosach a bhí siad go dtiocfadh meoin chathach ar lucht oibre na hÉireann. I mí Márta na bliana 1918, thug Ard-Chigire Chonstáblacht Ríoga na hÉireann faoi deara go raibh 'corraíl pholaitiúil fhorleathan ann, agus nach raibh aon chomhartha laghdaithe le feiceáil ina leith'.



THE WORKER'S BULLETIN

Vol. 1. No. 3. (New Series) April 18th, 1919.

Remember Limerick.

Another day of the Big Strike has passed away and the Strike Committee have kept working at full pressure. Messages of support arrive constantly from all quarters, and as time goes on determination grows.

Profiteers.

A few cases of shops attempting to use the present crisis in order to profiteer and to underweight was promptly suppressed by our pickets. We promise full exposure of any more such attempts in the Bulletin.

Up Thomondgate.

Our friends across the river are playing their part, and have set up a Food Depot from which they will send supplies to the besieged.

Our besiegers are trying to spread the idea that famine is imminent, but the Strike Committee have made full arrangements, and can now guarantee an ample supply of food stuffs. Hunger has no great terror for Limerick and we will show that we can suffer privation if necessary in the cause of freedom. All who are anxious to help should place their services at the disposal of the Food Control Committee, Mechanics' Institute.

Arrival of Tom Johnson.

Tom Johnson arrived from the National Executive of the Irish Trades Union Congress last night, and had a prolonged interview with the Strike Committee. He expressed his admiration at the lightning move of the Big Strike, and paid a tribute to the magnificent spirit of Limerick. He got full information of the whole position, and gave most encouraging reports of the situation in Dublin and elsewhere. We can assure the citizens that Limerick will not be left to fight the workers' battle unaided. For obvious reasons we cannot give further details, as our plans will be carried out, and the fight must go on.

Significant Reports.

A surprise awaits our military autocrats, who, in their blind and unjustified thirst for revenge on innocent people, have overstepped the mark.

'Tis true that British soldiers have been used in the past to do the dirty work of their capitalist bosses; men who enlisted to fight for Small Nationalities have been forced to drag good their fellow-workers—of course in the interests of freedom, mavrak! We wonder if anyone ever heard of rifles being turned the wrong way—we mean, of course, the butt-end to the front. Men like to fight men on equal terms, but when it comes to starving and dragooning one's own class, especially women and tender babes, in the interests of autocracy, it may become a different story.

The Workers' Bulletin, produced by members of the Society, carried all the big strike news of 1919.

Workers Bulletin

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City & County Council

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
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The Limerick Soviet
Sóibhéid Luimnigh

From October 1917, the staid world of Limerick trade unionism was transformed by the arrival of the ITGWU in the city. Within a year, their membership had reached 3,800. Limerick's labour journal The Bottom Dog pointed out that 'labourers had been down in the dust for want of unity and organisation' (3 November 1917).

In 1919, Limerick city was placed under martial law by the British army in response to the killing of a member of the RIC. Checkpoints were set up on all roads into the city, and all persons travelling had to obtain permits from the offices of the local military commander and display them to the soldiers at the checkpoints. In response, the Limerick Trades Council called a general strike, which lasted for two weeks (14-26 April 1919), won universal backing from the city's workforce and became known as the Limerick Soviet. Limerick was governed during this fortnight by the strike committee of the Trades Council (nicknamed the Soviet) which controlled prices, distributed food, organised the provision of essential services, published a newspaper and even printed its own paper money.

Eventually, the Sinn Fein Mayor Alphonsus O'Mara and the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Denis Hallinan brought the conflict to an end, by meeting with the British authorities, who agreed to cancel the imposition of martial law, in return for the ending of the strike. The Soviet achieved its aim of ending British military rule in the city, but in its aftermath, the Labour and trade union movement in Limerick and in Ireland as a whole took a secondary place to the Nationalist and Sinn Fein movement.

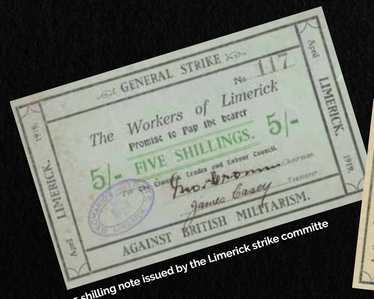
The term 'soviet' which means a workers' council, was borrowed from the Russian Bolshevik Revolution. Not surprisingly, its usage in Limerick city and county was to strike terror into business people and farmers all over Ireland, who feared that Bolshevism might also invade our shores.

Ó mhí Dheireadh Fómhair na bliana 1917, tháinig athrú mór ar shaol ciúin na gceardchumann i Luimneach nuair a tháinig an ITGWU chun na cathrach. Laistigh de bhliain, bhí ballraíocht 3,800 bainte amach acu. Thug iris oibrithe Luimnigh The Bottom Dog le fios go raibh 'na sclábhaithe síos ar an bhfód de dheasca easpa aontachta agus easpa eagraíochta' (3 Samhain 1917).

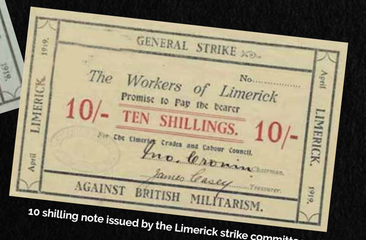
Sa bhliain 1919, chuir Arm na Breataine cathair Luimnigh faoi dhlí airm mar fhreagairt ar mharú ball an CRÉ. Cuireadh seicphointí ar bun ar gach bóthar isteach sa chathair, agus b'éigean do gach éinne a bhí ag taisteal ceadanna a fháil ó oifigí an cheannasaí míleata áitiúil agus á dtaispeáint do na saighdiúirí ag na seicphointí. Mar fhreagra air sin, d'iarr Comhairle Luimnigh na Ceirdeanna stailc ghinearálta, a mhair an dhá sheachtain ón 14 go dtí 26 Aibreán na bliana 1919, a fuair tacaíocht iomlán ó lucht oibre na cathrach agus ar a tugadh Sóibhéad Luimnigh. Bhí Luimneach á rialú i rith na coicíse seo ag coiste stailce Comhairle na gCeirdeanna ('An tSóibhéad' a bhí mar leasainm uirthi) a rinne rialú ar phraghsanna, a dháil bia, a d'eagraigh soláthar na seirbhísí riachtanacha, a d'fhoilsigh nuachtán agus a phriontáil a cuid airgead páipéir féin fiú amháin.

Faoi dheireadh, chuir Méara Shinn Féin na Cathrach Alfonsas Ó Meára agus Easpag Caitliceach Luimnigh, an Dr. Donncha Ó hAilleacháin an coimhlint chun críche tar éis chruinniú le húdaráis na Breataine, a d'aontaigh forchur an dlí airm a chealú mar chúiteamh ar éirí as an stailc. D'éirigh leis na Sóivéadaigh a n-aidhm maidir le deireadh a chur le riail mhíleata na Breataine sa chathair, ach ina dhiaidh sin, ghlac gluaiseacht an Lucht Oibre agus na gceardchumann i Luimneach agus in Éirinn uile áit thánaisteach sa ghluaiseacht Náisiúnach faoi cheannas Sinn Féin.

Tháinig an téarma 'sóibhéid', a chiallaíonn comhairle na oibrithe, ón Réabhlóid Boilséiveach sa Rúis bliain go leith roimhe sin. Ní nach ionadh, chuir úsáid na téarma i gcathair agus i gcontae Luimnigh ná sceimhle ar lucht gnó agus ar fheirmeoirí ar fud na tíre, a raibh eagla orthu go bhféadfadh an Boilséiveachas ionradh a dhéanamh ar Éirinn chomh maith.

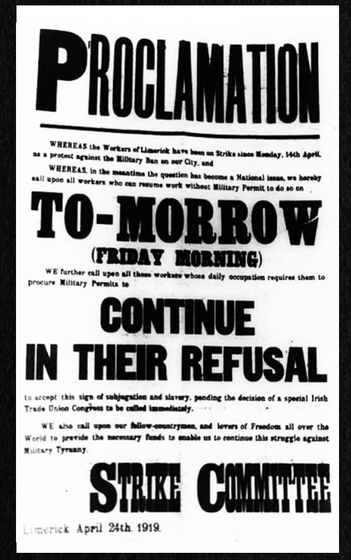


5 shilling note issued by the Limerick strike committe



10 shilling note issued by the Limerick strike committee

Funeral of Robert Byrne Limerick Leader


PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS the Workers of Limerick have been on Strike since Monday, 14th April, as a protest against the Military Ban on our City, and

WHEREAS, in the meantime the question has become a National issue, we hereby call upon all workers who can resume work without Military Permit to do so on

TO-MORROW
(FRIDAY MORNING)

WE further call upon all those workers whose daily occupation requires them to procure Military Permits to

CONTINUE
IN THEIR REFUSAL

to accept this sign of subjugation and slavery, pending the decision of a special Irish Trade Union Congress to be called immediately.

WE also call upon our fellow-countrymen, and lovers of Freedom all over the World to provide the necessary funds to enable us to continue this struggle against Military Tyranny.

STRIKE COMMITTEE

Limerick April 24th. 1919.

Proclamation from the strike committee during the Limerick Soviet

The Limerick Strike Committee

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City & County Council

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Some other labour disputes in Limerick 1919
Roinnt aighnis oibre eile i Luimneach sa bhliain 1919

The Limerick Soviet was not an isolated event. Below is a list of some other labour disputes in Limerick city and county in the same year. Note that this is only some of the disputes, NOT all of them.

Ní eachtra ar leith a bhí i Sóibhéad Luimnigh. Seo thíos liosta de roinnt aighnis oibre eile i gcathair agus i gcontae Luimnigh le linn na bliana chéanna. Tabhair faoi deara nach bhfuil anseo ach cuid de na haighnis, NÍL gach ceann acu sa liosta.

Model Laundry Limerick – January	Neachtlann Model, Luimneach – mí Eanáir
Lax Weir Limerick – February	Cora na mBradán, Luimneach – mí Feabhra
S.B Walsh and Sons Kilmallock – February	S.B Walsh and Sons, Cill Mocheallóg – mí Feabhra
Askeaton Carbide Works- March	Monarcha Carbide, Eas Géitine – mí Márta
Gubbin's farm Kilfrush-March	Feirm Mhic Giobúin, Cill Frois – mí Márta
Meenahela Creamery Templelantine-March	Uachtarlann Mín na Geimhleach, Teamplall an Ghleanntáin – mí Márta
T.A Walsh's Kilmallock-March	T.A Walsh's, Cill Mocheallóg – mí Márta
Mount Coote near Kilmallock-March	Cnoc Dabhóc, gar do Chill Mocheallóg – mí Márta
Clouncagh Co-operative Creamery near Newcastle West-March	Uachtarlann Cluian Cath, gar do Chaislean Nua Thiar – mí Márta
Drombanna Creamery – March	Uachtarlann Drom Baine – mí Márta
O'Callaghan's Tannery, Limerick – June	Súdarlann O'Callaghan's, Luimneach – mí Iúil
Spaight's timber yard – July	Clós Adhmaid Spaight's, Luimneach – mí Iúil
Model Laundry Limerick-July	Neachtlann Model, Luimneach – mí Iúil
McMahon's Limerick- July	McMahon's, Luimneach – mí Iúil
Feenagh – August	Fíodhnach – mí Lúnasa
Dunraven Estate, Adare – September	Eastáit Dunraven, Adare – mí Meán Fómhair
O'Shaughnessy's Sawmills Newcastle West- November	Muileann Sábhadóireacht O'Shaughnessy's, An Caisleán Nua Thiar – mí na Samhna
Abbey Tannery Athlunkard, Limerick- November	Súdarlann Abbey. Áth an Longphoirt, Luimneach – mí na Samhna
Limerick City Dock Strike – December	Duganna Luimnigh – mí na Nollag

Kilmallock c 1920

Limerick Docks, c 1920

Steamboat Quay, c 1920

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Cleeve's Family Business (1883-1923): Catalyst for County Limerick's Soviets

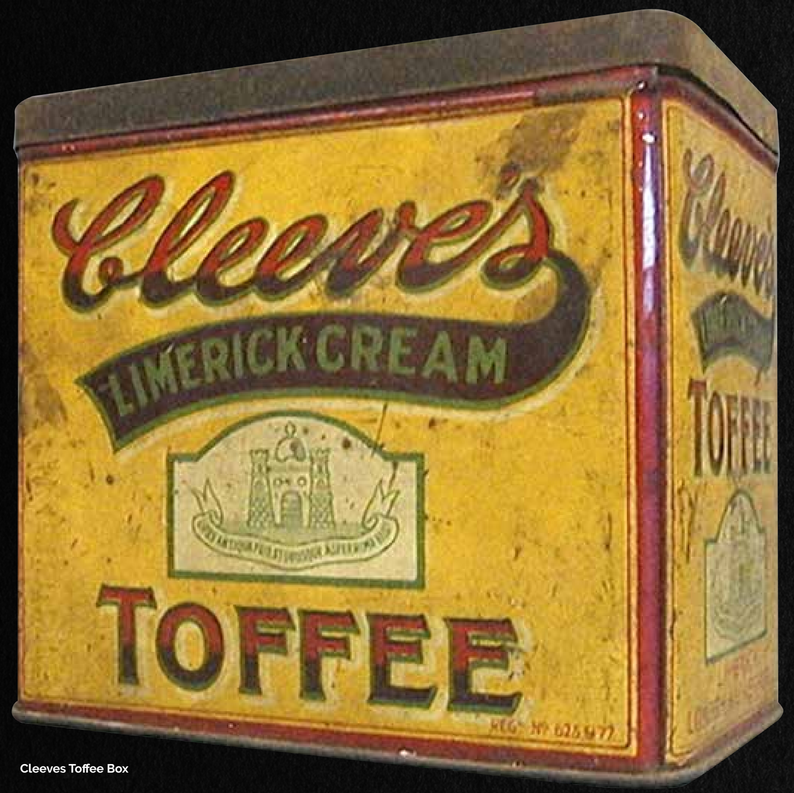
Gnó Teaghlaigh Cleeve (1883-1923): An Catalíoc do Shóibhéidí Chontae Luimnigh

The Cleeves business empire was founded by Canadian Sir Thomas Cleeve (1844-1908), who moved to Limerick in 1864 to work in his uncle's business, which he later expanded. In 1883, Cleeve established the Condensed Milk Co. of Ireland in the former Lansdowne flax spinning and linen weaving factory on the North Circular Road, in association with two others. Subsequently, the business grew rapidly, and within ten years, it consisted of a string of creameries and nineteen factories all over Munster, employing a total of some 3,000, of whom 600 worked in the Lansdowne plant. The company processed milk supplied by more than 5000 farmers. The family conglomerate was made up of three companies: the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland, which produced butter, condensed milk, cocoa, chocolate, caramel, and sweets; Cleeve Brothers, which distributed the dairy products; and J. P. Evans and Company, which supplied agricultural machinery and dairy engineering services.

The Cleeves were an extremely wealthy family and were staunchly unionist. Their companies had a reputation for poor working conditions and the wages paid to their unskilled workers were some of the lowest in the country. Not surprisingly, they attracted the ire of the labour movement and many of the most dramatic and bitter labour disputes in Limerick at this period occurred in their businesses. Cleeves' unionism, combined with their bad pay and conditions, inspired a number of Soviets in Knocklong, Bruree and elsewhere. Besides Cleeves, other businesses and farmers had their own Soviets. This wave of Soviets is less well known that that of Limerick city, but just as dramatic.

Bhunaigh Sir Thomas Cleeve (1844-1908) impireacht ghnó Cleeves, tar éis dó teacht go Luimneach sa bhliain 1864 chun obair i ngnó a uncail a mhéadaigh sé é ina dhiaidh sin. Sa bhliain 1883, bhunaigh Cleeve Cuideachta Bainne Comhdlúite na hÉireann (Condensed Milk Co. of Ireland) i sean-mhonarcha sníomh lín agus fíodóireachta lín Lansdún ar an gCuarbhóthar Thuaidh, i gcomhar le beirt eile. Ina dhiaidh sin, d'fhás an gnó go tapa, agus laistigh de dheich mbliain, bhí tacar uachtarlainne agus naoi monarchan déag ar fud na Mumhan ag an gcuideachta agus thart ar 3,000 duine fostaithe aici san iomlán, 600 acu ag obair i monarchan Lansdún. Phróiseál an chuideachta bainne a chuir níos mó ná 5,000 feirmeoir ar fáil. Bhí trí chuideachta sa ghnó teaghlaigh: Cuideachta Comhdhlúite Bainne na hÉireann, a tháirg im, bainne comhdhlúite, cócó, seacláid, caramal, agus milseáin; Deartháireacha Cleeve, a dháil na táirgí déiríochta; agus J. P. Evans & Co., a chuir innealra talmhaíochta agus seirbhísí innealtóireachta déiríochta ar fáil.

Teaghlach thar a bheith saibhir a bhí sna Cleeves agus ba aontachtachtóirí láidir iad. Bhí droch-cáil ar a gcuid cuideachtaí as na coinníollacha oibre a bhí iontu agus bhí an pá a íocadh lena n-oibrithe neamhoilte ar chuid den tuarastal is ísle sa tír. Ní nach ionadh, mheall siad an ghluaiseacht saothair agus tharla go leor de na haighnis oibre is drámatúla agus is géire i Luimneach le linn na tréimhse seo ina gcuid gnólachtaí. Spreag aontachtachas muintir Cleeve, in éineacht lena ndrochphá agus a gcoinníollacha oibre, roinnt sóibhéidí i gCnoc Long, Brú Rí agus in áiteanna eile. Seachas Cleeves, bhí a gcuid sóibhéidí féin ag gnólachtaí agus feirmeoirí eile. Níl an méid clú ag an tonn sóibhéideach sa Chontae agus a bhfuil ag tonn na Cathrach, ach bhí sí gach pioc chomh drámatúil léi mar sin féin.



Cleeves Toffee Box

Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Luimnigh
Limerick City & County Council

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Knocklong Soviet
Sóibhéid Cnoc Loinge

Cleeves Creamery was occupied by workers on 16 May 1920. Along with the main creamery, twelve auxiliary creameries were also seized. The takeover was led by Sean O'Hagan, an ITGWU activist who took over as manager. The main grievance of the Knocklong creamery workers was that their wages had lagged behind their colleagues in other branches of the company who had improved their position through strikes and local wage bargaining.

One of the first actions of the workers was the removal of the Cleeves name plate from the main entrance and from all packaging. The workers also hung a banner over the entrance which read 'Knocklong Soviet Creamery: We make butter not profits.'

At that time such workplace occupations in Ireland were almost unknown and it was quite a radical development in a conservative, predominately rural country. Throughout the five- day occupation local farmers continued to supply milk to the creamery and work continued as normal, with the company's products – cheese, butter and condensed milk – being produced and delivered to regular customers.

Eventually Cleeves conceded a wage increase backdated to the previous March and the creamery was handed back to the owners. Other concessions included the introduction of a 48-hour week, 14 days holidays between 1 June and 1 October and a promise of a better ventilation system for the creamery. This victory greatly increased the prestige of the ITGWU.

Ghabh na hoibrithe seilbh ar Uachtarlann Cleeves ar an 16 Bealtaine 1920 i dteannta dhá uachtarlann chúnta faoi cheannaireacht Seán Ó hÁgáin, gníomhaí de chuid an ITGWU a ceapadh mar bhainisteoir. Ba é príomh-ghearán oibrithe uachtarlann Cnoc Loinge ná go raibh a gcuid pá tar éis titim taobh thiar dá gcomhghleacaithe i mbrainsí eile den chuideachta, iad a chuir feabhas ar a seasamh trí stailceanna agus margáil áitiúil an phá.

Ba cheann de na chéad ghníomhartha a rinne na hoibrithe ná lógó Cleeves a bhaint den phríomhbhealach isteach agus ó phacáistiú uile na huachtarlainne. Chuir na hoibrithe bratach os cionn an bhealaigh isteach a léigh 'Uachtarlann Sóibhéadach Cnoc Loinge: Déanaimid im, ní brabús.'

Ní raibh a leithéid eachtraí ar eolas in ionaid oibre in Éirinn ag an am sin agus ba fhorbairt radacach í i dtír choimeádach tuaithe den chuid is mó. Le linn na gabhála cúig lá, lean feirmeoirí na háite ag soláthar a gcuid bainne don uachtarlann agus leanadh den obair mar ba ghnáth, agus táirgeadh agus seachadadh táirgí na cuideachta - cáis, im agus bainne comhdhlúite - dá cuid gnáth-chustaiméirí.

Faoi dheireadh bhronn Cleeves méadú pá siardhátaithe go dtí an Márta roimhe sin agus tugadh an uachtarlann ar ais do na húinéirí. I measc na gcúiteamh eile bhí seachtain 48 uair an chloig, 14 lá saoire idir an 1 Meitheamh agus an 1 Deireadh Fómhair agus gealltanas go mbeadh córas aerála níos fearr ann san uachtarlann. Mhéadaigh an bua seo gradam an ITGWU go mór.

Knocklong garage

Knocklong village

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Bruree Soviet
Sóibhéid Brú Rí

Another Soviet occupation in East Limerick took place on 26 August 1921 at a mill and bakery in Bruree, also owned by the Cleeve family. It is believed that the dispute originated in the sacking of one, possible more, workers in November 1920. The ITGWU demanded in Feb 1921 that the dismissed employee(s) be reinstated with their wages paid for time spent out of work.

Management refused the demand and the grievance festered until the following August when John (Jack) Dowling and John McGrath (both of whom had been prominent in the Knocklong Soviet) led the workers in a seizure of the mill and bakery. A notice appeared in the national newspapers stating

Bruree Mills and Bakery are now the property of the workers. The mill and shop are open for the sale of bread, flour and meal. It is hoped to reduce prices and do away with profiteering within a day. By order of the workers.

The workers at Bruree Mill and Bakery also hung a banner from the door, stating 'Bruree Soviet Mills, we make bread not profits.' They awarded themselves a pay increase and claimed to have increased productivity.

Following talks in Liberty Hall, Dublin, the dispute ended and the workers returned the premises to Cleeves. It is unclear under what terms they returned to work, although it was rumoured that Constance Markievicz, Minister for Labour in the Dáil Cabinet, had threatened to use the IRA to forcibly end the Soviet.

Tharla gabháil sóibhéide eile in Oirthear Luimnigh ar an 26 Lúnasa 1921 i muileann agus bácús i mBrú Rí, ar leo an teaghlach Cleeve iad freisin. Creidtear gur díbríodh oibrí amháin, nó b'fhéidir a thuilleadh, i mí Samhain na bliana 1920. D'éiligh an ITGWU i mí Feabhra na bliana 1921 go gcuirfí an fostaí/na fostaithe, a bhí dífhostaithe ag an am, ar ais chomh maith lena gcuid pá a íoc dóibh i leith na hama a caitheadh as obair iad.

Dhiúltaigh an bhainistíocht an t-éileamh agus chuaigh an casaoid i méid go dtí an Lúnasa ina dhiaidh sin nuair a ghabh na hoibrithe seilbh ar an muileann agus ar an mbácús faoi cheannaireacht Seán Ó Dúlaing (Jack Dowling) agus Seán Mac Craith, beirt a bhí go mór le feiceáil i sóibhéid Cnoc Loinge. Eisíodh fógra sna nuachtáin náisiúnta ag rá:

Is le hoibrithe anois iad Bácús agus Muileann Brú Rí. Tá an muileann agus an siopa ar oscailt chun arán, plúr agus min a dhíol. Táimíd ag súil le praghsanna a laghdú agus deireadh a chur le brabús laistigh de lá amháin. Arna ordú ag na hoibrithe.

Croch na hoibrithe ag Bácús agus Muileann Brú Rí meirge ón doras freisin, ag rá 'Muileann Sóibhéide Brú Rí, déanaimid arán, ní brabús.' Bhronn siad ardú pá orthu féin agus mhaígh siad go raibh an táirgiúlacht méadaithe acu.
Tar éis cainteanna i Halla na Saoirse, Baile Átha Cliath, tháinig deireadh leis an aighneas agus thug na hoibrithe an muileann ar ais do mhuintir Cleeves. Níl sé soiléir cé arbh iad na téarmaí faoinar fhill siad ar an obair, cé go raibh ráfla ann gur bhagair Constance Markievicz, an tAire Saothair i gComh-Aireachta na Dála, an IRA a úsáid chun deireadh a chur leis an sóibhéid le lann is lasair.

Strikers at the Bruree Mills

WORKERS SEIZE FLOURMILL AND BAKERY.

By Telegraph—Press Association—Copyright Australian and N.Z. Press Association.

LONDON, September 1.

The "Morning Post's" Dublin correspondent reports that transport union officials and members, in consequence of the firm's non-payment of claims made by the union on behalf of dismissed employees, seized Messrs Cleeve's flourmill and bakery business in Bruree, near Limerick, from which they are now selling flour, meal, bread and coal below normal prices.

Over the entrance to the premises appears the notification:—"Bruree Soviet Workers' Mills.—We make bread, not profits. The mills and bakery now are the property of the workers. It is hoped that prices will be reduced. Profiteering abolished within a day.—By order of the workers."

Both the Red and Sinn Fein flags fly over the building. The union claims that since it took over control it has doubled the bakery output and intends increasing the staff to cope with customers' demands.

News report on the strike

Bruree strikers with a poster of their famous slogan

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Castleconnell Soviet
Sóibhéid Caisleán Uí Chonaill

A few months later another takeover took place at the fishery in Castleconnell. This dispute began when the owner (Anthony Mackey, a cousin of the hurler Mick Mackey) agreed to a wage increase for the workers but turned down requests for a 54-hour working week and overtime paid at time and a half. Six months later, Mackey agreed to submit the case for arbitration but refused to accept the decision when the arbitrator found in favour of the workers

In Nov 1921 Mackey's employees went on strike over the issue of money owed to them and when this failed, they seized control of the business. By mid-December the dispute was over and negotiations took place under the threat of forcible eviction of the workers by the IRA.

The settlement proved satisfactory to the workers. Mackey agreed to pay the back money as well as decent wages and better working conditions. It was further stated that there would be no victimisation when the fishery was handed back. The workers had been successful but the threat of IRA involvement foreshadowed the later collapse of the Soviets.

Cúpla mí ina dhiaidh sin tharla ghabháil eile ag an iascach i gCaisleán Uí Chonaill. Cuireadh tús leis an aighneas seo nuair a ghéill an t-úinéir (Antóin Mac Aodha, col ceathrar leis an iománaí Michéal Mac Aodha) ardú pá do na hoibrithe ach dhiúltaigh sé an iarratas ar sheachtain oibre 54 uair an chloig agus ragobair a íocadh ag am go leith. Sé mhí ina dhiaidh sin, d'aontaigh Mackey an cás a chur isteach le haghaidh eadrána ach dhiúltaigh sé glacadh leis an gcinneadh nuair a fuair an t-eadránaí i bhfabhar na n-oibrithe

Chuaigh fostaithe Mhic Aodha ar stailc i mí Samhain na bliana 1921 faoi cheist an airgid a bhí dlite dóibh agus nuair a theip air seo, ghabh siad seilbh ar an iascach. Faoi lár mhí na Nollag bhí an aighneas thart agus thosaigh an idirbheartaíocht ina leith faoi bagairt ón IRA go gcaithfeadh siad na hoibrithe amach le lann is lasair dá mbeadh gá leis.

Ba shásúil é an socrú do na hoibrithe. Ghlac Mac Aodha leis an aisairgead a íoc chomh maith le pá réasúnta agus coinníollacha feabhsaithe na hoibre. Dúradh freisin nach ndéanfaí aon íospairt nuair a tugadh an t-iascach ar ais. D'éirigh go maith leis na hoibrithe sa chás seo ach rinne bagairt an IRA páirt i dtitim na sóibhéidai níos déanaí.

Castleconnell village

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Bulgaden Dispute

In Bulgaden, near Kilmallock, farm labourers went on strike in late 1921 to obtain a £4 harvest bonus from the local farmers for whom they worked. Workers at the local creameries refused to accept milk from the farmers, and the IRA arrested four of the strikers. In response, the ITGWU called a general strike in Kilmallock and 300 workers marched through the town behind a red flag demanding the release of the strikers, which happened the next day.

After a number of other incidents, the Irish Farmers Union demanded government intervention and 200 IRA men poured into the Bulgaden area. It was reported that Donncha O'Hannigan, Commandant of the East Limerick Brigade of the IRA, had declared martial law. The IRA protected the farmers and patrolled the streets of Kilmallock. Widespread destruction of property followed, amounting to almost £7,000 worth of damage. At the beginning of 1922, both sides submitted to arbitration which produced a decisive victory for the farmers. Clearly the tide was turning against the labour movement.

Aighneas Builgidín

I mBuilgidín, gar do Chill Mocheallóg, chuaigh oibrithe feirme ar stailc go déanach sa bhliain 1921 chun bónas fómhair £4 a fháil ó fheirmeoirí na háite. Dhiúltaigh na hoibrithe sna huachtarlanna áitiúla glacadh le bainne ó na feirmeoirí, agus ghabh an IRA ceathrar de na stailceoirí. Mar fhreagra air sin, ghlaoigh an ITGWU ollstailc i gCill Mocheallóg agus mháirseáil 300 oibrí tríd an mbaile taobh thiar den bhratach dhearg ag éileamh go scaoilfí na stailceoirí, rud a tharla an lá dar gcionn.

Tar éis roinnt eachtraí eile, d'éiligh Aontas Feirmeoirí na hÉireann idirghabháil an rialtais agus cuireadh 200 fear ón IRA isteach i gceantar Builgidín. Tuairiscíodh go raibh dlí airm fógartha ag Donncha Ó hAannagáin, Ceannasaí Bhriogáid Thoir Luimnigh den IRA. Rinne an IRA cosaint ar na feirmeoirí agus rinne siad patróil ar shráideanna Chill Mocheallóg. Scriosadh maoin go forleathan ina dhiaidh sin, ar luach beagnach £7,000 damáiste. Ag tús na bliana 1922, chuir an dá thaobh faoi eadráin a thug bua cinntitheach do na feirmeoirí. Ba léir ansin go raibh an taoide ag dul i gcoinne ghluaiseacht an lucht oibre

Donnchadh O'Hannigan who commanded the forces at Dromkeen, and acted as an intermediary in disputes around Kilmallock

Advert for 'Free State' tinned milk and cream.

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The Final Battle: The Cleeves Dispute 1922
An Cath Deiridh: Aighneas Cleeves 1922

In December 1921 Cleeves sought lay-offs and wage cuts for almost one third of their workforce in Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford and Cork. The workers unanimously rejected these proposed cuts. After talks broke down, a strike broke out at the Cleeves plant in Landsdowne, Limerick city on 13 April 1922. In May, the workers occupied the Cleeves plants in Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Kilmallock and Knocklong. However, an attempt to occupy Landowne was foiled when the pro-Treaty government ordered it to be garrisoned by troops. At the same time, machinery worth £3,000 was destroyed at the Cleeves creamery in Grange, while the Oakleigh Creamery at Caherconlish was burnt down.

However, the farmers, with the backing of the government, refused to supply milk to the occupied creameries. Faced with the stubbornness of Cleeves, the hostility of the government and the reluctance of the ITGWU leadership to support the strikers, it was decided to end the strike in June. It was a decisive defeat for the workers.

The outbreak of the Civil War in June 1922 put an end to the Soviets. As pro-Treaty troops advanced into Munster, they crushed any remaining soviets and arrest their leaders. The anti-Treaty side was equally unsympathetic. Contrary to the expectations of James Connolly, the Irish Revolution had proved to be a very socially conservative one.

I mí Nollaig na bliana 1921, lorg muintir Cleeves asleagan agus ciorruithe pá do bheagnach trian dá lucht saothair i Luimneach, Tiobraid Árann, Port Láirge agus Corcaigh. Dhiúltaigh na hoibrithe d'aon ghuth na ciorruithe a bhí beartaithe. Tar éis na cainteanna a bhriseadh síos, bhris stailc amach i monarcha Cleeves i Lansdún i cathair Luimnigh ar an 13 Aibreán 1922. I mí na Bealtaine, ghlac na hoibrithe seilbh ar ionaid Cleeves i gCluain Meala, Carraig na Siúire, Cill Mocheallóg agus Cnoc Loinge. Scriosadh an iarracht ar Lansdún a ghabháil, áfach, nuair a d'ordaigh Rialtas an Saorstáit go ndéanfadh a chuid trúpaí an monarcha a gharastún. Ag an am céanna, scriosadh innealra ar fiú £3,000 é ag uachtarlann Cleeves sa Ghráinsigh, agus dódh Uachtarlann Oakleigh i gCathair Cinn Lis.

Le tacaíocht an rialtais, áfach, dhiúltaigh na feirmeoirí, bainne a sholáthar do na huachtarlanna gafa. Agus iad ag tabhairt aghaidh ar ghéire muintir Cleeves, naimhdeas an rialtais agus drogall cheannaireacht an ITGWU tacú leo, shocraigh na stailceoirí, deireadh a chur leis an aighneas i mí Meithimh. Cliseadh cinntitheach do na hoibrithe a bhí ann.

Chuir tús an Chogaidh Chathartha i Meitheamh 1922 deireadh leis na sóibhéidi. De réir mar a chuaigh Arm an Saorstáit ar aghaidh go Cúige Mumhan, bhrúigh siad aon sóibhéid a bhí fágtha agus ghabh siad a gcuid ceannairí. Bhí an dearcadh céanna ag an taobh frithchonartha orthu. Murab ionann agus ionchais Shéamuis Uí Chonghaile, bhí Réabhlóid na hÉireann an-choimeádach maidir le cúrsaí sóisialta.

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Conclusion

The Soviets destroyed the Cleeves business empire only forty years after its foundation. They pushed the Cleeve conglomerate into bankruptcy in 1923 and in 1927-28, it was taken over by a semi-state body called the Dairy Disposal Company.

Nevertheless, despite some local victories, the strikes and soviets in Limerick between 1919 and 1922 ended in the defeat of the workers. The execution of James Connolly in 1916 and the long absence of James Larkin in the USA (1914-23) had deprived Irish labour of its most dynamic leaders. The intense social conservatism of Sinn Féin and the IRA, the fear of atheistic communism and the increasing caution of the Irish trade union leadership were all factors influencing this outcome.

More fundamentally, Ireland outside Ulster did not have a large industrial workforce, while political issues, such as the Treaty, took precedence over social and economic issues. Although Ireland was to have a high rate of union membership in the twentieth century, both the trade union movement and the Labour Party were conservative by European standards.

Nevertheless, the Limerick labour agitation of 1917 to 1922 was one of the most interesting, heroic and unusual events in the history of modern Ireland. It deserves to be better remembered and its noble slogan 'we make bread/butter not profits' respected and cherished.

Tuairim deiridh

Scrios na sóibhéidí impireacht ghnó Cleeves gan ach daichead bliain tar éis a bunú. Bhrúigh siad an cuideachta Cleeve i bhféimheacht sa bhliai 1923 agus sna blianta 1927-28, ghlac comhlacht stáit darb ainm an Chuideachta Diúscairte Déiríochta (Dairy Disposal Company) seilbh uirthi.

Mar sin féin, d'ainneoin roinnt bua áitiúil, tháinig deireadh leis na stailceanna agus na sóibhéidí i Luimneach idir na blianta 1919 agus 1922 nuair a bhuadh ar na hoibrithe. Ghoid cur chun báis Shéamúis Uí Chonghaile i ndiaidh Éirí Amach 1916 agus deoraíocht fada Shéamuis Uí Lorcáin i Meiriceá (1914-23) a gcuid ceannairí ba bríomhara ó oibrithe na hÉireann. Bhí tionchar ag coimeádachas dian sóisialta dian Shinn Féin agus an IRA, an eagla roimh an gcumannachas aindiach agus an gcáiréis méadaithe i measc ceannaireacht cheardchumann na hÉireann ar an toradh seo.

Go bunúsach, ní raibh lucht oibre tionsclaíoch mór in Éirinn lasmuigh de Chúige Uladh, agus bhí an tosaíocht ag ceisteanna polaitiúla, mar an Conradh, ar cheisteanna sóisialta agus eacnamaíocha. Cé go raibh ráta ard ballraíochta ag na ceardchumainn in Éirinn le linn na fhichiú aoise, bhí gluaiseacht na gceardchumann agus Páirtí an Lucht Oibre coimeádach de réir chaighdeáin tíortha eile na hEorpa.

Mar sin féin, bhí aighneas na hoibre i Luimnigh idir na blianta 1917 go 1922 ar cheann de na himeachtaí ba spéisiúla, ba ghaisciúla agus ba neamhghnáiche i stair nua-aimseartha na hÉireann. Ní mór cuimhneamh níos fearr air agus meas a thabhairt don mhana uasal 'déanaimid arán/ im, ní brabús'.

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Foinsí

Príomh-fhoinsí

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Íomhánna le cead

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