

The Dublin lockout, 1913 - John Dorney



A short history of Ireland's most significant industrial dispute: the mass lockout of 20,000 workers by 400 employers in Dublin from August 1913 to January 1914.

Course of the Lockout

The basic cause of the dispute was the refusal of a consortium of Dublin businessmen, led by William Martin Murphy, to recognize the right of workers to join the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. The ITGWU, led by James Larkin, in response to sackings of their members, called a strike on Murphy's United Tramway Company in August 1913.

What made the dispute much bigger than either that company or the Transport Union was Murphy's response. He organized all but a handful of Dublin's major employers not only to sack all ITGWU members, but to force their employees to sign a pledge never to join the union.

Those who refused to sign were sacked or "locked out". Eventually the numbers on strike reached 20,000.

Violence

Dublin experienced rioting, beatings and even shootings in the streets. On August 31, the Dublin metropolitan Police charged a rally on O'Connell street, injuring hundreds – an event known in the Irish Labour tradition as "Bloody Sunday". Two strikers died from injuries inflicted by the police during the charge; another died from a gunshot wound and at least one strike breaker was beaten to death by strikers.

Employers forced union members to resign from the ITGWU. Those who refused were sacked.

The 'Kiddies' Scheme'

One of the most controversial elements of the lockout was the so-called "Kiddies' Scheme", the brainchild of English socialist Dora Montefiore. Under this scheme, the children of strikers would be looked after in England by other trade unionists until the dispute was over.

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The idea aroused the intense hostility of the Catholic Church – which was engaged in a proselytizing ‘war’ with Protestant Churches in Dublin. It was concerned that Catholic children would be ‘corrupted’ by atheist or Protestant households. William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin also feared that the children would not be able to return to the slums after living in more prosperous surroundings.

The Citizen Army

One legacy of the Lockout was the [Irish Citizen Army](#). Originally this was a street-fighting force intended to take on the police with fists and bats and to protect union demonstrations. But just three years later, mostly on the initiative of James Connolly, it participated, armed, in the nationalist insurrection, the Easter Rising.

The paradox here is that William Martin Murphy was an Irish nationalist, who had represented Dublin as an MP for the Irish Parliamentary Party, while the workers’ principle source of support in 1913 came from British trade unionists.

Conclusion

The battle to try to reverse these sackings took six long and bitter months and ultimately ended in failure. By early 1914, hunger and the withdrawal of funds by the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) meant that the workers were forced to give in and sign the employers’ pledge. Though many never recovered their jobs at all.

Legacy

Historian Padraig Yeates sums up what he feels is the historical importance of the Lockout. Coming from a socialist and secular perspective, he argues that the Lockout represented the defeat of progressive and pluralist ideas, on the eve of Irish independence, by the forces of business, the Catholic Church and conservative nationalism.

Excepted and slightly edited by libcom from a longer article, including interesting audio commentary from Padraig Yeates: <http://www.theirishstory.com/2010/06/07/class-war-in-dublin-the-lockout-of-1913/#.V8VRVpgrLIU>