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‘Tools of the Employers’ Federation’: The Derry lockout of 1924

From late April to early June 1924, Derry was engulfed by the biggest industrial relations crisis in its history. For those six weeks, it was more afflicted by strikes and lockouts than any other centre of similar size and population in either Britain or Ireland. The crisis highlighted that, despite the deep sectarian divisions which scarred the city, Catholics and Protestants could unite for an extended period when their material interests were at stake. It also underlined how Derry’s labour movement was much more orientated towards Britain and Belfast (which also experienced spikes in labour militancy that year) than to the Irish Free State, the city’s nationalist majority notwithstanding. And it revealed how committed the unionist Northern Ireland Government (NIG) was to a laissez-faire model of political economy and industrial relations. The long-term outcome of the lockout was to solidify the employers’ hegemony in Derry after the partition of Ireland and the establishment of the Northern Ireland state.

Despite its significance, Derry’s 1924 industrial crisis has a scant historiography. Irish labour historiography has concentrated on Dublin and Belfast, especially instances of Catholic-Protestant unity in the latter.[1] This is unsurprising given that Dublin and Belfast were the two largest Irish cities and the economic and political capitals of their respective jurisdictions. The largest city on the island with a population ten times that of Derry in the 1920s, Belfast was Ireland’s principal industrial centre and a major hub of British capitalism. More recently, there

[1] Fintan Lane, ‘Envisaging Labour History: Some Reflections on Irish Historiography and the Working Class’ in Francis Devine, Fintan Lane & Niamh Puirséil (eds.), *Essays in Irish Labour History: A Festschrift for Elizabeth and John W. Boyle* (Dublin, 2008), 9-25; Emmet O’Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917-23* (Cork, 1988); Peter Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London, 1972); Conor Kostick, *Revolution in Ireland: Popular Militancy, 1917-1923* (Cork, 1996).

has been an expansion in labour historiography that takes an all-island approach. This is largely due to the efforts of the Irish Labour History Society and Umiskin Press, whose important series *Left Lives in Twentieth Century Ireland* has added many important biographies of labour activists across the island.[2]

The few labour histories of Derry that currently exist have focussed on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the shirt industry and gender divisions therein. None have analysed the 1924 lockout to any great extent; even Andrew Finlay's excellent and thorough PhD thesis on labour and sectarianism in the Derry shirt industry does not even mention it. Emmet O'Connor's recent *Derry Labour in the age of agitation, 1889-1923* – a two-part booklet to which this article owes a great deal – is a superb overview of labour in Derry. But its analysis ends at 1923, and it makes only a fleeting reference to events the following year.[3] The 1924 crisis is also absent from the few economic histories of Derry thus far published.[4] General histories of the city have been similarly neglectful. Instead, they have focused instead on politics, partition, sectarianism, discrimination against nationalists and the Troubles (especially Bloody Sunday).

This article puts the 1924 crisis in its historical context by outlining how it was shaped by the events that preceded it: labour militancy, partition, the gerrymandering of Derry

[2] Francis Devine & Jack McGinley (eds.), *Left Lives in 20th Century Ireland Vol. 1* (Umiskin Press, 2017); Francis Devine & Jack McGinley (eds.), *Left Lives in 20th Century Ireland Vol. 2* (Umiskin Press, 2019); Francis Devine & Patrick Smylie (eds.), *Left Lives in 20th Century Ireland Vol. 3 – Communist Lives* (Umiskin Press, 2020).

[3] Emmet O'Connor, *Derry Labour in the age of agitation, 1889-1923. 1: New unionism and old, 1889-1906* (Dublin, 2014); Emmet O'Connor, *Derry Labour in the age of agitation, 1889-1923. 2: Larkinism and syndicalism, 1907-1923* (Dublin, 2016); Andrew Finlay, 'Trade unionism and sectarianism among Derry shirt workers 1920-1968: with special reference to the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers', PhD thesis, University of London, 1989; Ruairí Gallagher, ''Smash every Cross-Channel union': Inter trade-union rivalry in Watt's Distilleries Derry, 1920-21, *Saothar*, No. 42, 55-64.

[4] Robert Gavin, William Kelly & Dolores O'Reilly, *Atlantic Gateway: the port and city of Londonderry since 1700* (Dublin, 2009); Brian Mitchell, *The Making of Derry: An Economic History* (Derry, 1992).

Corporation and the ongoing conflict between nationalists and unionists across Northern Ireland. First and foremost, it is a study of class – how inter-class tensions led to an intense spasm of class conflict. It is an empirical 'history from below' which puts workers, rather than trade unions or their leaders, at the heart of scholarly inquiry. In contextualising the lockout, it explores the sectarian and class natures of Derry society and how labour responded to and operated within these social dynamics. It is structured into five subheadings. The first two provide a historical background and describe local working life, organized labour, politics and sectarian and gender divisions. The third details the immediate origins of the disputes, while the fourth narrates the lockout itself. The fifth subheading analyses the lockout in the context of Northern Ireland society and comments upon its short- and long-term significance. This article answers four key questions. How did sectarianism affect Derry labour? Was labour especially militant? Were employers especially intransigent? And what does the NIG's response to the crisis reveal about its own class nature and biases?

In the absence of oral testimony, newspapers accounts were the primary source base with which to answer these questions. They are used extensively throughout to narrate the crisis, its background and aftermath; to examine how sectarian divisions influenced the press's attitudes to labour; and to construct a narrative from the workers' perspective. Police reports and government documents contained in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) are utilised to show how both the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the NIG perceived the situation in Derry. In so doing, this article illuminates the NIG's industrial relations philosophy and how it intended to handle future labour relations crises.

Derry: economy and society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

In the nineteenth century, industrialisation in Ireland proceeded fastest in the Ulster counties of Antrim, Armagh, Derry and Down, but was most impressive in the north-east. These four counties stood out for their industrial and population growth in the context of the steady decline of both in the rest of Ireland. By the early twentieth century, Belfast was one of the world's leading centres of shipbuilding and linen manufacture. Industrialisation was a major factor for the explosion in its population from 75,000 in 1821 to 387,000 in 1911.[5]

Derry followed a similar trajectory, albeit on a much smaller scale. In 1821, it was Ireland's twelfth largest town; by 1911, it had become the country's fourth largest city. Industrialisation was a key reason for the doubling of Derry's population between 1851 and 1911 (from 20,135 to 40,780), as migrants flooded into the city from neighbouring counties seeking employment.[6] By 1905, Derry was so industrialized that a British government report could realistically call it a 'prosperous town.'[7] And it was certainly prosperous for some. In 1919, the city boasted a university college, a beautiful city hall, an opera house, a tramway system, a bustling shipyard, the biggest coachworks in Ulster and a distillery that produced one of the world's most consumed whiskeys. It had a good transport infrastructure, with four railway systems; regular steamship services to Glasgow, Liverpool, Morecambe, Fleetwood and Heysham; and a large coasting trade, especially with Liverpool and Glasgow.[8]

Linen dominated the textile history of Ulster from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, becoming heavily concentrated in the north-east between 1820 and 1914. Although

[5] Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820-1914', in Liam Kennedy & Philip Ollerenshaw (eds.), *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1914* (Manchester, 1985), 62, 86.

[6] Desmond Murphy, 'Derry and North-West Ulster, 1790-1914', M.Litt. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1980, 37, 381.

[7] Cited in O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 10.

[8] O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 10-11.

linen manufacture died out in the north-west in the 1840s, its use of needlework and cheap (female) labour laid the foundation for what would undoubtedly become the jewel in Derry's industrial crown, its shirt-making industry. By 1900, Derry had become one of the premier shirt-making centres in the world. A quarter of the shirts and ancillary products manufactured in the UK every year were made in Derry, making it the country's chief shirt-making centre. The city's forty-four shirt factories employed more than its other industries combined. During the First World War, several Derry shirt factories secured lucrative War Office contracts, precipitating a boom in the industry; the cessation of these contracts in the early 1920s led to a recession in the UK shirt trade. In Derry, numbers employed tumbled from eight thousand in 1919 to 4,500 by 1924 but partially recovered thereafter. During the inter-war years, three-quarters of the city's labour force worked in the industry and its auxiliaries.[9]

As the industry developed, a system of 'outwork' was established, where thousands of seamstresses in the rural environs of the north-west assembled shirts at outstations or their homes. But as technology improved, work became increasingly centralised in factories and outwork decline as a result. The vast majority of outworkers were women. In 1871, there were over 22,000 outworkers across Derry, Donegal and Tyrone; by 1920, however, very few remained. In common with the outwork of old, over 90 per cent of shirt workers in the factories were women. Women did the low-paid assembly work, while (mainly Protestant) men worked primarily as cutters, a craft elite.[10] This was not unique to Derry: the predominance of women (and as unskilled workers) was also evident in the Belfast linen industry.

[9] Gavin, Kelly & O'Reilly, *Atlantic Gateway*, 190; Andrew Finlay, 'The Cutting Edge: Derry Shirtmakers', in Chris Curtin, Pauline Jackson & Barbara O'Connor (eds.), *Gender in Irish Society* (Galway, 1987), 88.

[10] Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Ireland: Industrial and Agricultural* (Dublin, 1902), 418.

Other significant sources of (mostly male) employment included grain and flour mills; two boot and shoe manufacturers; an iron foundry; bacon cellars; and corset, collar, cuff and underclothing factories (spinoffs from the shirt industry).[11] Recession and the ending of wartime Royal Navy contracts cost Derry its distilleries in October 1921 and its shipyard in October 1924. Both had made a significant contribution to the economy and had helped to rebalance the gender discrepancy. Losing them made Derry even more dependent on shirt-making, which deepened the gender imbalance in the local employment structure. Peripherality remained the city's Achilles heel, as Swan Hunter and the United Distillers' Company Ltd. opted to centralize production in Belfast and Britain respectively.[12]

According to the 1911 census, Derry was 56 per cent Catholic. The division of labour reflected the sectarianism that disfigured every aspect of local life. Catholics made up 70 per cent of builders' labourers but only 40 per cent of foremen in the sector. Most glaringly, they comprised 87 per cent of general labourers and 99 per cent of dockers and carters. While most skilled railwaymen were Catholic, Protestants dominated the shipyard metal trades; foundry and engineering craftwork outside the yard was more evenly divided. At the upper end of the social spectrum, only 10 per cent of doctors and dentists, 12 per cent of shirt factory managers, 20 per cent of accountants and 33 per cent of solicitors were Catholic. Protestants comprised 67 per cent of professionals, 74 per cent of clerks and 82 per cent of bookkeepers. The same divisions existed among women: Catholics dominated factory work while three-quarters of commercial clerks were Protestants.[13]

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[11] O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 10.

[12] O'Connor, *Larkinism and syndicalism*, 51. For a history of whiskey-making in Derry, see Andy Bielenberg, 'The Watt Family and The Distilling Industry in Derry, 1762-1921', *Ulster Folklife*, 40 (1994), 16-25. See also Gerald Hasson, *Thunder & Clatter: The History of Shipbuilding in Derry* (Derry, 2017).

[13] Walter Gallagher, 'People, work, space and social structure in Edwardian Derry, 1901-1911', DPhil thesis, University of Ulster, 1994, 99-104; O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 22-24.

The interplay between class and religion inevitably influenced attitudes towards trade unionism, which was reflected in Derry's three tri-weekly newspapers. Despite their differences on the national question, both nationalist and unionist papers acted as mouthpieces for the local bourgeoisie, Catholic and Protestant alike, on labour issues. The nationalist *Derry Journal*, the city's most widely read paper, was less anti-labour than the unionist *Londonderry Sentinel* and *Derry Standard*, who both regarded trade unionism as tantamount to socialism and a vehicle for 'Catholic beggary of Protestants good enough to give them a job.'[14] That a small minority of Protestant trade unionists were also Home Rulers intensified unionist suspicion that labour was merely a front for nationalism. The *Sentinel* was more likely to attack labour for anything it perceived to be nationalist or anti-Protestant, leading trade unionists to regularly accuse it of fomenting sectarianism among workers. The *Standard* reflected the economic interests of employers in a manner consistent with many contemporary conservative newspapers.[15]

Labour, sectarianism and politics, 1913-24

Though it remained hamstrung by numerical weakness, Derry labour stood on the cusp of seismic change on the eve of the First World War. The 'factory girls', as they were affectionately known, had still not been organized despite several previous attempts to do so. Without them, labour resembled the movements in southern cities: dominated by craftsmen, with its most dynamic sectors in construction and on the railways. One of the most striking features of Derry's pre-war movement was its rejection (even by nationalists) of Jim Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). Derry became Ireland's

[14] O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 24.

[15] O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 24.

premier bastion of anti-Larkinism, and its unions refused to support the ITGWU during the 1913 Dublin lockout.[16] In the south, the ITGWU became the lynchpin of Irish syndicalism from 1917. Syndicalism equipped labour with the ideology and methodology to recover from its crushing defeat in 1913 and make historic gains. Although it dominated the southern movement until 1923, its influence in the north was weak.[17]

There were several reasons why union leaders in Derry opposed the establishment of breakaway Irish unions like the ITGWU. As well as being loyal to their existing (British) unions, they lived in constant fear of the dreaded sectarian split and were anxious that unions remain apolitical. Consequently, British unions like the National Union of Dock Labourers and the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (NAUL) maintained their dominance among the unskilled throughout the Larkinite and syndicalist years. Unions such as these were denominationally integrated and effective in excluding politics from their discourse, despite the growing Catholic desires for Home Rule and resentment at their second-class status. It was easy to keep nationalists and unionists united on matters of wages and conditions if political questions were kept outside the door of union meetings. Unlike Belfast, there is no evidence of sectarianism undermining strikes in Derry before 1919 and there were no workplace expulsions during the Home Rule crises.[18]

The introduction of a trade board for the shirt industry in Ireland in 1911 consolidated the tenuous presence of trade unionism there, as did the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses' (ASTT) decision to admit factory operatives two years later. In 1915, the trade board upheld the employers' argument that the Irish shirt industry should pay lower wages than its British equivalent due to the extra transportation costs incurred. Pay was cut accordingly.

[16] O'Connor, *Larkinism and syndicalism*, 20-23.

[17] For Irish syndicalism, see O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland*.

[18] O'Connor, *New unionism and old*, 57-58.

The board had created a chronic grievance that culminated in a nine-week Irish cutters' strike for pay equalisation from June to August 1920. In mid-July, Derry's shirt manufacturers locked out eight thousand factory girls, transforming the strike into one of the most significant industrial disputes Ireland experienced in this period. A disappointing outcome for the workers led to an exodus from the ASTT to the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW), which became the chief union in the factories.[19]

The strike coincided with the climax of political conflict in Derry during this era. Sectarian tensions, which had always been latent, had been intensifying since the outbreak of the Irish War of Independence in January 1919. While Derry, like the rest of Ulster, had been conspicuously free from violence in the initial stages, the city soon became an electoral battleground for Ireland's future. Unionists were left reeling after losing Derry to Sinn Féin in the 1918 general election and to nationalists and republicans in the January 1920 municipal elections, ensuring the election of the city's first Catholic mayor since 1688.[20]

In April 1920, the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) Derry City Battalion initiated operations after receiving orders from general headquarters in Dublin to burn police barracks and tax offices. IRA activity provoked violent reprisals from the police, military and loyalists alike, further escalating sectarian animosities. Intercommunal rioting began in April and continued throughout May. After loyalist gangs launched co-ordinated attacks against Sinn Féiners and Catholics in June, nationalists responded in kind. Between 18 and 24 June, Derry was devastated by a localized civil war as the IRA and loyalists battled to determine the city's fate. The arrival of hundreds of British troops from 23 June forced the IRA to concede defeat and flee. Although the situation had been brought under control, intercommunal strife persisted. In total, forty people had died between April and June, nineteen of them in what the *Sentinel*

[19] For an account of the strike, see Finlay, 'Trade unionism and sectarianism', 99-117.

[20] Ronan Gallagher, *Violence and Nationalist Politics in Derry City, 1920-1923* (Dublin, 2003).

dubbed 'civil war week.'[21] It was the worst rioting Derry had seen until that point and the worst it would experience until August 1969.

The restoration of order did not signal the end of the malaise for nationalists. Later in 1920, the Government of Ireland Act partitioned the country into the twenty-six-county Southern Ireland (later the Irish Free State) and the six-county Northern Ireland, which included Derry. In October 1922, the NIG abolished proportional representation – which the British government had introduced for the 1920 municipal elections – and gerrymandered the wards of Derry Corporation, ensuring the return of unionist minority rule in January 1923. Nationalists across Northern Ireland, including Derry, boycotted these elections and the resulting local authorities.[22]

Employers were disproportionately represented on the new Derry Corporation and there was major overlap between it, the Employers' Federation and the Chamber of Commerce. John McFarland was a capitalist in the mould of the notorious William Martin Murphy, while H.S. Robinson was the secretary of the Employers' Federation. The new mayor, Maxwell Scott Moore, was a landowner and railway director. Sir Robert Anderson owned hosiery and knitting factories in Derry and Gweedore. Robert Watson was the president of the Chamber of Commerce and John Thompson was its secretary; Frank Gilliland was also a member. All were city councillors, all were Protestant, and many were members of both the Chamber of

[21] Okan Ozseker, *Forging the Border: Donegal and Derry in Times of Revolution, 1911-1925* (Newbridge, 2019), 138-158; Patrick Concannon, 'The Derry Riots of 1920', 29 June 2020, *The Irish Story*, https://www.theirishstory.com/2020/06/29/the-derry-riots-of-1920/?fbclid=IwAR2DSY9bgMvboQUj1Ho3gP6jkDX57jL015PkZuETOlJ7ahJfkNZVxbDP6Lk#.XzQH8ShKjIW (accessed 12 August 2020); Timothy Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910-22* (Manchester, 2007), 190-201, 206; O'Connor, *Larkinism and syndicalism*, 42.

[22] Colm Fox, *The Making of a Minority: Political Developments in Derry and the North, 1912-25* (Derry, 1997), 84-86

Commerce and the Employers' Federation.[23] They joined with their party's working-class adjunct, the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, to institute a policy of preferment in municipal employment to World War One ex-servicemen.[24] Despite their dominance, unionists continued to feel internally and externally threatened. In January 1924, they watched with horror as the Labour Party cobbled together a minority government at Westminster and elected the party's first ever prime minister. Unionists had always distrusted Labour as being sympathetic to Irish republicanism.[25] This, they feared, would be reflected in the upcoming Irish Boundary Commission, hardening the unionist desire to retain power at all costs.

Amid the political developments, market forces were conspiring against workers across the sectarian divide suffered from the early 1920s. The First World War had led to a massive expansion in the world's productive capacity, leading to a crisis of overproduction in mid-1920; by wintertime, a deep recession had begun. Employers sought to shed surplus labour and cut wages to pre-1914 levels in response to plummeting prices and demand. Industrial disputes would increasingly end in defeat for workers as the pendulum of class conflict swung decidedly in favour of the employers, who justified their actions by reference to prices. Weighed at 100 in July 1914, the cost-of-living index peaked at 276 in November 1920 before plunging to 169 by March 1923.[26] Employers in Derry took inspiration from 'Black Friday' of 15 April 1921 – when British labour's triple alliance of miners, railwaymen and dockers collapsed and left the

[23] O'Connor, *Larkinism and syndicalism*, 38

[24] I am grateful to the reviewers of this article for this information.

[25] The Boundary Commission was tasked with finalising the border between the Free State and Northern Ireland. In fact, unionists had little to fear from it as the Labour government was determined to pursue an identical policy to its Liberal-Conservative predecessor. See Ivan Gibbons, 'The First British Labour Government and the Irish Boundary Commission, 1924', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 98, No. 391, 321-333.

[26] James Meenan, *The Irish economy since 1922* (Liverpool, 1970), 66.

miners to fight wage cuts on their own – to launch a general assault on wages and conditions that lasted until 1923.

Labour, 1923-24: the fightback

By mid-1923, after two years of successfully countering wages gains, employers no longer had any reservations about issuing cuts. This overconfidence led some to overreach themselves. In May, the builders had to withdraw their proposal for a 1d. per hour reduction after a strike by three hundred workers in the trade. Hourly rates would be maintained at 1s. 5d. for craftsmen and a miserly 10d. for labourers until 30 April 1924. Employers had already slashed labourers' wages in Derry to one of the lowest of any Irish city.[27] Wages were also poor by UK standards (see Table 1). Remarkably, against the backdrop of falling pay across Britain and Ireland, some in Derry could obtain increases in 1923. Shipyard blacksmiths and hammermen secured an increase after downing tools in May for the higher Belfast rate. In September, the master bakers conceded a 39s. wage, four days' paid holidays and recognition of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) after vanmen and labourers withdrew their labour.[28]

[27] *Derry Journal* (*DJ*), 21 Mar., 7 May 1923. The cut would have made builders' labourers weekly wages 35s. By comparison, builders' labourers' wages in Cork in 1923 were 66s. 7d. an hour after cuts from employers. By then, shipyard labourers in Derry earned only 37s. 6d. while shopkeepers' labourers and storemen were on 35s. to 37s.
[28] *DJ*, 23 May, 1 June 1923; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 May 1923; trade disputes record book for all industries in the UK in 1923, LAB 34/41, Ministry of Labour records, The National Archives (TNA). The ATGWU was the name given to the Transport and General Workers' Union in Ireland to differentiate it from the ITGWU.

Table 1: Building Trade Wages (in pence) in Belfast, Derry and the UK, 1923

31 Dec. 1923	Belfast	Derry	UK (average)
Bricklayers	19	17	18.8
Carpenters & Joiners	19	17	18.8
Plumbers	19.5	19	18.9
Plasterers	19	17	18.9
Painters	19	17	18.7
Labourers	12	10	14.1

Source: Keith Sydney Isles & Norman Cuthbert, *An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1957), 218.

Overall, however, 1923 was another bad year for workers in Northern Ireland. Wages were cut by an average of 9 per cent, with flourmill workers suffering the steepest reductions (25 per cent).[29] In the Free State, 1923 was labour's annus horribilis. Workers had put up a dogged defence of post-1917 gains from employer efforts to dismantle conditions and slash wages by up to 25 per cent in places. In Northern Ireland, labour's gains in the summer of 1923 gave it a springboard from which it could launch a counteroffensive of its own.

In early 1924, there was a clamour for the restoration of pay lost through earlier cuts across Northern Ireland after prices began to rise again. The first of a plethora of disputes Derry would endure took place in the North of Ireland Shipyard when, on 11 February, three hundred red leaders, stagers and stagers' labourers downed tools for a raise of ½d. per hour and the dismissal of non-union labour. The strike ended twelve days later when the 'nons' agreed to join the NAUL.[30] Between 25 March and 1 April, riveters and heater boys at the yard were on

[29] *Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Years 1923-1924* (Belfast, 1924), 12.

[30] *DJ*, 13-25 Feb. 1924; RUC Inspector General (IG) reports on strikes in the Derry shipyard, 11-29 Feb. 1924, HA/5/1250, Ministry of Home Affairs records, PRONI. To protect metal (from rust, for example), red leaders put

strike after management brought in men from Belfast rather than local unemployed riveters. The Boilermakers' Society persuaded the men to resume work and refer all future grievances to arbitration. Elsewhere, the carters secured a 3s. increase, making wages 57s. a week.[31] Little did the unions realize that their claims would trigger the worst industrial relations crisis in Derry's history.

The summer crisis

In March 1924, the Municipal Employees' Association (MEA) put a claim for a 2s. a week rise for Corporation labourers. Of the many wage demands the unions would serve, this was the most significant. The Corporation rejected it because the 42s. wage paid to municipal workers for a forty-eight-hour week was the highest minimum rate for unskilled labour in the city and the proposed wage would add £800 to the rates. In April, the claim was again refused, but not unanimously. The Ulster Unionist Labour Association councillors supported the demand, revealing the fault lines within a cross-class movement like Ulster unionism. Derrymen were paid less than any municipal employees in Northern Ireland, whose wages typically ranged from 44s. to 48s. for a forty-seven-hour week. The gulf was even more pronounced in Belfast, where Corporation workers earned 8s. to 10s. 6d. more a week than their equivalents in Derry.[32]

oxide paint onto the metal. The oxide's red colour gave this now extinct occupation its name. Stagers erected scaffolds at a shipyard, often with the assistance of labourers.

[31] *DJ*, 14, 31 Mar., 2 Apr. 1924; *Derry People and Donegal News*, 5 Apr. 1924; RUC IG reports on strikes in the Derry shipyard, 31 Mar., 3 Apr. 1924, HA/5/1250, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI. The carters had sought a 6s. increase.

[32] *DJ*, 14 Mar., 23, 25 Apr., 23 May 1924.

Table 2: Labourers employed by Derry Corporation.

Occupation	Number
Street cleaners and ash pit men	120
Park labourers	15
Watermen	3
Cemetery workers	30
Carters	20

Source: RUC IG report on Derry strikes, 17 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

Wage claims were metastasising into a debilitating industrial relations crisis. On 24 April, the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers struck in a dispute regarding their county money allowance (a travel expense for work done outside the city).[33] Seven days later, six hundred more building workers downed tools when employers, who wanted to maintain existing wages for another twelve months, refused to concede increases of 2d. for craftsmen and 6d. for labourers. The NIG's Ministry of Labour involved itself in the disputes to stem the growing tide of discontent. It facilitated a conference between the pork curers (who wanted a 10s. raise) and the Derry Employers' Federation, successfully persuaded the MEA to defer its strike (planned for 1 May) for a week and ended a strike at Madden's mineral water plant after convincing sixteen non-union men to join the ATGWU.[34]

[33] W. Hanaway to Owen Hynes, 3 Mar., 15, 22, 29 Apr. 1924, 1097/29/12; Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers executive committee minutes, 20, 30 Apr., 5 May 1924, 1034/2, both found in National Archives of Ireland (NAI). The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers was a Dublin-based union which traced its origins back to 1670.

[34] *Irish Independent*, 1 May 1924; RUC IG's reports on the strike in the building trade and threatened strikes in Derry, 2 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

But discontent continued to spread rapidly. On 2 May, thirty piecework riveters and heater boys came out for an additional 10s. 6d., an extra 1s. 6d. per every hundred rivets driven; after only a few days, however, the men conceded defeat.[35] The bread-servers agitated for 15s. more and the abolition of the requirement of a security deposit of up to £30. The pork curers, who had turned down arbitration, lessened their demand to 5s., which three firms not attached to the Employers' Federation agreed to pay. Likewise, non-Federation building firms also gave increases.[36] The next to strike were skilled and semiskilled workers at the Gaslight Company, who went out for wage increases in solidarity with their comrades in the building trade.[37]

On 6 May, the Derry Chamber of Commerce proposed compulsory arbitration as a solution to industrial crises. Strikes, it argued, should be outlawed until an industrial court could make a definitive, binding decision. But a solution could not come fast enough to save Derry from a calamity. Two days later, over one hundred municipal employees struck after the Corporation refused to budge on the MEA's claim and snubbed the union's proposal of arbitration.[38] 'Of all the strikers', declared the *Sentinel*, the gravediggers were 'the class for whom there is absolutely no public sympathy.' Despite the stoppage, the city's water and power supplies remained constant. While the MEA had a presence at the Electric Light Station, most staff there belonged to the Electrical Trades Union and the Electrical Power Engineers' Association, neither of which featured in the dispute. On 9 May, the pork curers went out after negotiations failed. More significantly, the NUTGW put in a request for the long-desired wage

[35] RUC IG reports on strike of riveters in the Derry shipyard, 2, 6, 9 May 1924, HA/5/1250, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

[36] *DJ*, 5 May 1924; *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1924.

[37] Londonderry Gas Co. minutes, 4 Apr., 2 May, 6 June 1924, D3806/1/4, PRONI; *DJ*, 7, 23 May 1924. The semiskilled men obtained increases of 4s. and labourers 3s., giving firemen an 80s. wage.

[38] *DJ*, 7, 9 May 1924. Those on strike included street sweepers, water supply men, ash pit cleaners and cemetery workers.

equalisation with Britain in the staple industry.[39] As many as fifteen hundred workers were now out. A strike was, however, avoided in the egg packing trade when counters and packers accepted minimum rates of 38s. and 44s. respectively.[40]

Realising that a municipal stoppage was inevitable, the Corporation decided to advertise for blacklegs on 13 May. Two days later, the situation did indeed become catastrophic when the MEA called out its twenty-three members at the Electric Light Station on sympathetic strike. The withdrawal of the lamplighters plunged the city into darkness. The closure of the station threatened to devastate the local economy, especially the shirt industry. All but the six largest shirt factories were totally dependent on the station for electricity as they had no backup generators of their own. But much to the relief of the Shirt Manufacturers' Federation (SMF), the police intervened by protecting scabs who kept the station in operation.[41]

The crisis was devastating public life. The streets became filthy as Corporation cleaners remained out, and thousands were without employment. When torrential rain hit, the uncleaned, mud-encased gully-traps were unable to prevent flooding. A rumour circulated that thousands more would soon be thrown out of work because the SMF was about to lockout the operatives, many of whom were the wives and/or daughters of municipal workers. The SMF hoped that this additional loss of income would starve the MEA into submission and compel the NUTGW to withdraw its wage claim. A police report of an SMF meeting held on 19 May confirmed the existence of such a Machiavellian plot:

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[39] *Derry News and Donegal People*, 3 May 1924; *DJ*, 9, 12 May 1924; *Londonderry Sentinel* (*LS*), 15 May 1924; NAUL executive committee minutes, 9 May 1924, TU/GENERALC/2/31, Working Class Movement Library.

[40] *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1924.

[41] *DJ*, 14, 16 May 1924; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 May 1924; *Irish Independent*, 24 May 1924. Factories capable of producing their own electricity included Tillie & Henderson; Welsh, Margetson & Co; Hogg & Mitchell; McIntyre, Hogg & Marsh; and Young & Rochester. See *LS*, 24 May 1924.

> These employers anticipate that by working at the Electric Light Station they will influence the workers in the shirt factories to go on strike in sympathy with the municipal employees, and by this action they will render themselves ineligible to receive the unemployment donation at the Labour Exchange. These workers recently submitted a demand for increased pay, and the employers hope that a few weeks' unemployment without Government assistance may help to bring about a change of feeling, and that the workers may be willing to postpone their demands or perhaps assent to a reduced wage on returning to work.[42]

The SMF resolved that all members should offer their services as 'voluntary workers' at the Electric Light Station, an appeal for whom had been published in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 17 May.[43] Twelve heeded the call, all of whom were either members or part proprietors of city firms or their sons.[44] When dockers blacklisted factories that offered scabs to the station, the SMF issued a week's notice of a lockout to begin on 30 May.[45] To further protect blacklegs, the RUC offered to bring in extra policemen from outside if necessary.[46]

This was a labour relations crisis born in Derry. Inevitably, it became enmeshed with the political struggle between nationalists and unionists for control of the city. The *Derry Journal* placed blame squarely on the unionist Corporation. 'Why not arbitration?' it asked on 23 May, its first editorial on the strike. 'In declining to accept this proposal [arbitration] the Municipal Authority … behaved unreasonably… fair minded citizens can have no sympathy with a public body which persists in such a stubborn attitude, with consequences so appalling.' 'On the other hand,' it opined, 'there can be no sympathy with any section of workers who

[42] RUC IG's report on the strikes in Derry, 21 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

[43] *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 May 1924.

[44] *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1924.

[45] *DJ*, 16, 19, 21 May 1924; *Irish Independent*, 24 May 1924.

[46] RUC IG's reports on the strikes in Derry, 17, 23 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

refuse arbitration, as we understand, some of those at present on strike in Derry have done.'[47] Three days later, it took a harder line. 'We wonder how far this failure is to be attributed to the obstinate attitude of the Corporation. It is undeniable that by their obduracy … the members of the Council have precipitated the crisis.'[48] The paper's position subsequently evolved to one of mild sympathy for the municipal workers who, it argued, 'were not unreasonable in the position they took.'[49]

Unsurprisingly, the unionist press gave unconditional support to the Corporation, with the *Sentinel* leading the charge:

> Londonderry has the distinction … to bear the burden of a larger number of strikes than probably any other centre … throughout the Kingdom… The actions of the Cemetery grave-diggers in following into idleness those aristocrats amongst unskilled workers, the municipal employees, in compelling sorrowing relatives to dig their graves to receive the bodies of their dead friends… the declaration of a strike is to be held sufficient to justify conduct upon which the plain man looks with horror … We do not suppose what such a contingency must entail to the population and the injury it must inflict upon the city would greatly trouble the gentlemen – usually from a distance – who order these strikes … Whatever happens … the excellent salaries of the strike leaders goes on.[50]

[47] *DJ*, 23 May 1924.

[48] *DJ*, 26 May 1924.

[49] *DJ*, 2 June 1924.

[50] *LS*, 10 May 1924.

It knew exactly who to blame for the disaster that had befallen Derry. 'It is known that in more than one of the affected industries there was a strong minority opposed to the extreme step of going out. But, as frequently happens … it is the extremists who sway policy.'[51]

> Public opinion is so definitely opposed to the actions of the municipal employees … that the Corporation are being assured of support in resisting dictation regarding what wages must be paid … Unfortunately the promoters are for the most part strangers. It is hardly surprising that the fact of a number of strikes taking place in Londonderry, all of them sanctioned by committees in Dublin, London, or elsewhere, has given rise to the impression that the movement is being deliberately directed by interests not identified with the city's prosperity.[52]

The *Derry Standard* similarly cheered on the Corporation and urged it to lay down a marker:

> The position of the Corporation is perfectly plain. Certain classes of their workers made a demand for an increase of wages. The Council in their wisdom refused the application … if they abandon the right to conclude satisfactory arrangements with their own workers, they must concede the dangerous principle that they are to have no control over their own workers but must grant whatever they demand on threat of all of the municipal services being brought to a standstill. To concede that principle would mean that there would be little necessity for a Corporation at all, for their functions would in effect be exercised by the Derry Trades and Labour Council, whose puppets the Corporation would become.[53]

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[51] *LS*, 20 May 1924.

[52] *LS*, 24 May 1924. As well as the MEA, the *Sentinel* also held the ATGWU responsible for situation in Derry. See *LS*, 31 May 1924.

[53] *Derry Standard*, 26 May 1924.

It was equally supportive of the Employers' Federation:

> The employers in the various industries in the city are adopting an attitude of firmness and cooperation which was perhaps not expected by the strike agitators. In the past these agitators had only to stir up trouble and enforce a strike for a few days to have their way… employers … have found themselves subjected to victimisation, they have been involved in disputes and stoppages with which they had little or no concern … It is quite possible that the great bulk of workers who are now idle … have little sympathy with the methods of the strike leaders, who … seem to regard the unfortunate workers as so much industrial 'cannon fodder.' A great and weighty responsibility rests upon these strike agitators. They have declared this industrial warfare in Derry, and … men and women … follow their order to the fray.[54]

Despite the press invectives, workers continued to revolt. On 22 May, 350 carters struck when colleagues were dismissed for refusing to transport goods to a firm providing scabs to the Electric Light Station. The same day, the Employers' Federation declared its support for the Corporation's war against the MEA. But the most serious development took place at the Electric Station. By then, intimidation of blacklegs there had led many of them to stop working. Alarmed, the Corporation decided to cut off the electrical current from 6am to 6pm each day. Workers at thirty shirt factories, the laundries, the shipyard (which employed nine hundred) and several other establishments were instantly made idle, adding more than six thousand to the number of unemployed. However, the six major shirt factories had their own internal power generating facilities and could produce their own power. As a result, they vowed to stay open for another week.[55] Further unrest threatened to spread to the docks, the box factories and the

[54] *Derry Standard*, 4 June 1924.

[55] *Irish Independent*, 24 May, 2 June 1924.

bakeries. The ATGWU tried to bring out the gas workers but failed as they were divided on whether they should support the strikes. Derry was spared a strike of bread-servers from 24 May when they came to an arrangement with the master bakers. Having watered down their claim to 10s., the ATGWU obtained 4s. for packers and bread-servers and 3s. for labourers.[56] On 5 June, the wholesale houses, which employed 150 carters and drivers, closed, affecting retailers in both Derry and across Co. Donegal.[57]

By the end of May, the RUC had fulfilled its previous promise of supplying extra officers: fifty-six had been brought into the city to protect blacklegs, banks, post offices and Corporation property. When railwaymen were suspended for not handling tainted goods, RUC intervention forced them back to work.[58] The authorities were alarmed at what had become of Northern Ireland's second city. On 23 May, Richard Dawson Bates – the NIG's hard-line anti-Catholic Minister for Home Affairs – mandated a curfew in Derry between 11pm and 5am. That same day, Charles Wickham, the RUC's English-born inspector general, visited the city to investigate the crisis. The Derry curfew was the same as had been imposed across Northern Ireland in May 1922, but which had been relaxed in April 1923.[59]

William Logue and Sam Bradley, the NAUL's Irish secretary, met J. M. Andrews, Northern Ireland's Minister for Labour, in Belfast to discuss how to resolve the crisis, but the talks made little progress. A NAUL organizer and one of Derry's foremost labour activists, Logue was also a member of the Asylum Board, the Port Sanitary Authority and the vice-

[56] *DJ*, 26 May 1924; RUC IG reports on the Derry strikes, 9, 10, 17, 21, 23 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs, PRONI. Even summer fishing at Buncrana was affected by the crisis in Derry.

[57] *DJ*, 2 June 1924; *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1924; *LS*, 5 June 1924.

[58] RUC memo on Derry strikes, 27 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI; *DJ*, 26, 30 May 1924.

[59] *DJ*, 26 May, 2 June 1924; ministerial order of curfew, 23 May 1924, HA/5/937, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI. Bates issued these curfews under the authority granted to him by the infamous Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act 1922.

chairman of the City and County Infirmary. He was the only nationalist to take his seat after the 1923 municipal elections, doing so on the grounds that, as a labour man, he represented no political party, only the working class.[60] He personified the conservative 'labour nationalist' brand of trade unionism that had been eclipsed by republican syndicalism in the south during the revolutionary years. Unusually, he had been a peripheral figure throughout the 1924 crisis. But even a moderate such as Logue had been disgusted by the Corporation's obstinacy. On 26 May, after the Corporation opted to close the abattoir and to not supply pork curers with electricity (thus prohibiting them from clearing stock), Logue declared that councillors were 'simply tools of the Employers' Federation … carrying on class warfare by supporting one section of the community against another.'[61] Trade unionists and the public alike widely shared his view. Both he and the *Journal* endorsed the idea put forward by the Chamber of Commerce: the formation of an industrial court representing capital and labour to arbitrate any dispute between the two.[62]

A series of events at the end of the month deepened the workers' woes. On 29 May, the Employers' Federation once again refused arbitration. The next day, the SMF followed through with the seven-day notice it had issued, adding another two to three thousand – mainly women – to the army of unemployed.[63] On 31 May, a 'Court of Referees' appointed by the NIG's Ministry of Labour ruled that only five hundred – those employed by firms not affiliated to the SMF or the Employers' Federation – were entitled to unemployment benefit. A few days later, an umpire upheld this verdict.[64] The unions were furious and immediately resolved to contest

[60] *Irish Independent*, 26 Aug. 1925.

[61] *DJ*, 28 May 1924.

[62] *DJ*, 30 May 1924.

[63] *LS*, 27 May-5 June 1924.

[64] *DJ*, 30 May, 2 June 1924; *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1924. Section 8(1) of the Unemployment Insurance Act 1920 allowed for the creation of 'courts of referees' to determine who was eligible to unemployment benefit in

the ruling in the Northern Ireland High Court.[65] The *Irish News*, a Belfast-based nationalist daily, believed that the Ministry of Labour had 'signally failed' in what was its first major test since it was established because it was 'afraid to antagonize the members of the Corporation, whom the Government expect in the near future to support them at the polls.' Reluctance to perturb the employers may explain why Andrews was so slow to intervene when he clearly realized the severity of the situation in Derry. On 3 June, in an address to the Belfast Rotary Club, he called it the most serious crisis Northern Ireland had experienced since its foundation. By then, fourteen to fifteen thousand were without work.[66]

The unions had contended from the start that the employers were using the strike as a pretext to smash trade unionism. And they were right, as one employer made clear in an interview with the *Irish Independent*: 'the employers are fed up with strikes, which have become almost monthly occurrences in the city for years past, and they are determined to bring this thing through to a finish.' The Federation supported the Corporation because of the principle involved and the dangerous precedent an MEA victory would set. Should the MEA succeed, he claimed, the Corporation's position would be weakened and there would be demands for wage increases across the economy as a result. The paper concluded that the Federation was 'determined to teach labour a severe lesson.'[67]

From 5 June, peace finally became a realistic prospect when negotiations between the Trades Council and the Employers' Federation began under the auspices of the mayor. Despite its involvement in the talks, the Trades Council had been remarkably quiet since the strikes began, which had not gone unnoticed. 'Never in its history has Derry faced such a crisis as we

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specific, contentious cases. Court decisions could then be referred to an umpire whose ruling was final. See *LS*, 27 May 1924.

[65] *LS*, 3 June 1924.

[66] *Irish News*, 26 May 1924; *DJ*, 28, 30 May, 4 June 1924.

[67] *Irish Independent*, 3 June 1924.

are passing through at the present time', an 'Observer' had commented in the *Journal*. 'We are supposed to have a Trades Council in our midst. So far as the average public is aware this body has been dumb.'[68] Nonetheless, the RUC kept a close eye on it. The mistrust was mutual. The Trades Council feared that the B-Specials – the RUC's quasi-military, entirely Protestant reserve force – would be used as strike-breakers. While negotiations were arduous and nearly collapsed several times, they had succeeded in settling most of the strikes by 10 June. Building trade workers were given 1d. per hour from 1 September until 30 April 1925; plumbers, however, were not included as they already had the 1s. 7d. rate and therefore did not feature in the strike.[69]

A general return to work was now contingent on the resolution of the municipal strike. To bring this about, separate talks were taking place between the MEA and a special Corporation subcommittee. After weeks of the Corporation rejecting the idea, the subcommittee reluctantly agreed to submit the 2s. claim to arbitration – but J. Malcolm, the MEA's Belfast-based Irish district secretary, turned down the offer. The subcommittee subsequently offered a 1s. increase, which Malcolm could accept provided it was made retrospective to 1 January 1924. The Corporation refused, but it was only a minor setback. On 11 June, after further prolonged conferences, settlements were finally reached in this as well as the remining disputes. The labour war was finally over, and there was a general resumption of work the following day. The municipal employees were given an extra 1s. a week until 31 March 1925. The MEA, not the Corporation, would meet the retrospective payment to 1 January 1924. The union accepted this because it was anxious to end the suffering of those in the private sector who had been made idle by the reduction in the supply of electricity. The

[68] *DJ*, 2 June 1924.

[69] *DJ*, 6, 9, 11 June 1924; RUC IG report on the Derry strikes, 23 May 1924, HA/5/1352, Min. of Labour records, PRONI; NAUL executive committee minutes, 20 June 1924, TU/GENERALC/2/31, Working Class Movement Library.

pork curers also obtained a 1s. increase, making wages 50s. For both, a sliding scale of 1s. for every corresponding rise or fall in cost of living would dictate future wage movements. The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers' country money dispute also ended in compromise. There would be no victimisation. On 13 June 1924, Bates, who had been impressed by the RUC's handling of the crisis, reinstated the less draconian 1923 curfew.[70]

Although they were supported by the General Federation of Trade Unions, the labour war had exerted a huge financial toll on the unions in Derry. The court of referees' 31 May verdict meant that union strike pay was the only financial support the luckless factory girls would receive.[71] The NUTGW had ensured that no work from Derry was undertaken by its British members. Moreover, its 1924 annual conference, held in London on 8 June, passed a resolution strongly condemning the court of referees. Although the union gave £2,000 to the struggle, about two thousand shirt operatives were still not organized and thus received no strike pay.[72] Thankfully for them, the court's decision was reversed in late June and by early July, £2,000 worth of unemployment benefit had been paid out to 1,600 women.[73]

The disputes had immiserated life in Derry. The indignity of citizens having to dig their own graves to bury the dead and the filthy, flooded streets were stark reminders of what had become of their city. Working-class families across the sectarian divide had experienced extraordinary hardship. The *Journal* estimated that over £45,000 in wages had been lost. Children from the Strand Road were forced to collect water from a well after a main burst with

[70] *Freeman's Journal*, 12, 13 June 1924; trade disputes record book for 1924, LAB 34/42, Min. of Labour records, TNA; *Labour Gazette*, Jan., May, Aug. 1925. Ministerial order of curfew, 13 June 1924, HA/5/937, Min. of Home Affairs records, PRONI; various memos contained in HA/5/1352, Min of Home Affairs records, PRONI.

[71] The (British) Trades Union Congress had founded the General Federation of Trade Unions in 1899 to coordinate a strike fund that could be drawn upon by affiliated unions.

[72] *DJ*, 11, 13 June 1924; *Irish Independent*, 3 June 1924; General Federation of Trade Unions management subcommittee minutes, 28 May, 11, 25 June 1924, GFTU/2/84, Bishopsgate Institute.

[73] *DJ*, 30 June, 7 July 1924.

nobody available to repair it. Merchants who had allowed the locked-out workers to pay for supplies on credit stopped doing so for fear that they would never be repaid. Gangs of imposters had resorted to begging from the public by pretending that the money was for the strikers.[74]

The unionist press was in no doubt about what the ordeal had revealed about the nature of organized labour. The *Sentinel* told the 'dupes' of the 'agitators' that 'the lessons of the strike will not be entirely missed if they should bring home … to trade unionists … a sense of the mischievous activities of their representatives on the look-out for notoriety.'[75] It condemned the MEA for holding the city to ransom for its own 'selfish ends' and hoped that 'those whose business it is to work up the agitations … will pause before attempting again to make Londonderry the scene of one of their expensive experiments.'[76] The beleaguered employers, it asserted, had been the real peacemakers:

> It was said in the usual talk of the agitators that the Corporation … were 'fighting the battle of the Capitalists' … The truth is that the Corporation conceded the advance mainly owing to the pressure put on them by the 'Capitalists', who were more anxious to see the factory workers again earning money than the strikers.[77]

Though less vituperative, the *Standard* sympathized with its competitor:

> The wiser trade union leaders … realize that the strike weapon is a double-edged sword, which often injures more severely those who wield it than those against whom it is directed, and

[74] *Belfast Newsletter*, 26, 28 May 1924; *DJ*, 13 June 1924; *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1924.

[75] *LS*, 3 June 1924.

[76] *LS*, 14 June 1924.

[77] *LS*, 14 June 1924.

> accordingly they hesitate to lift it unless as desperate last remedy. In Derry the strike weapon seems to have been taken up without any attempt to count the cost or the consequences. But if the experiences now gained … are taken to heart the city may be saved an outbreak of strikes and sympathetic action for a long number of years to come.[78]

Labour after the lockout

Major lockouts in the Derry shirt industry were not unprecedented, having previously occurred in 1913 and 1920.[79] What was novel about the 1924 lockout was how the SMF weaponized it to intimidate other workers, most notably the municipal employees. Though Derry was no stronghold of Larkinism, its employers may well have been disciples of William Martin Murphy and may well have learned some valuable lessons from the 1913 Dublin lockout. The tumult Derry suffered in 1924 undermines the argument that post-war labour militancy in Ireland on peaked in 1923. It also reinforces the fact that, like Belfast, Derry's economy and labour movement were more aligned to Britain than the Free State. Above all, the crisis revealed how the Irish revolution and partition had put northern workers on a different trajectory to the rest of the island.

Who could claim 'victory' from the summer crisis? The result is best described as a draw in the immediate aftermath. Labour had obtained a portion of its demands and had shown courage and resolve throughout. But something more tangible also emerged from the crisis. In 1925, after 'the hatchet was buried between Orange and Green',[80] the trades council sponsored the Derry branch of the Northern Ireland Labour Party which contested every ward in the 1926

[78] *Derry Standard*, 13 June 1924.

[79] Emmet O'Connor, ''Keep Working, Keep Working': Derry and Big Jim Larkin, 1907-1914', *The Spark*, No. 26, Summer 2013, 8.

[80] *Irishman*, 12 May 1928, cited in Finlay, 'Trade Unionism and Sectarianism', 60.

local elections.[81] Nevertheless, the employers were the long-term victors of the crisis. While they had not crushed trade unionism as they had hoped, they had disempowered it by brute force. Derry labour had suffered a huge setback and was neither as confident nor as assertive over the subsequent years. With the government's tacit support, employer hegemony was assured in Northern Ireland. Working-class interests, especially for nationalists, would receive nothing but hostility from the reactionary unionist parliament over the coming decades, which is not surprising given its class composition. Of the forty unionist MPs elected to the Northern Ireland House of Commons in 1921, three were landowners, twenty were employers or merchants, ten were professionals and only four were working class.[82] Most employers were staunch unionists and therefore supported the NIG. This support gave the new state some desperately needed legitimacy – crucial given that one-third of Northern Ireland's population did not recognize it – and created a solid nexus of interests between employers and the government.

In 1918, Logue had publicly defended Ulster labour from ITGWU criticisms. Far from being conservative and parochial, unions in the north of Ireland had 'in a large measure succeeded', having secured a standard of living that compared 'favourably with any part of the United Kingdom.' He believed that northern class consciousness was strong and that both nationalists and unionists would soon 'fully realize' their 'strength' as a result.[83] The employer counterattack between 1920 and 1923 exposed this optimism as wildly misplaced because wage militancy did not easily translate into class consciousness in divided Ulster, although it

[81] Sixteen Labour candidates were elected. Those in the mainly Catholic wards were returned unopposed, but none were elected in the predominantly Protestant wards. See Graham Walker, 'The Northern Ireland Labour Party in the 1920s', *Saothar*, Vol. 10, 1984, 19-30.

[82] Neil C. Fleming, 'Leadership, the Middle Classes and Ulster Unionism since the Late Nineteenth Century', in Fintan Lane (ed.), *Politics, Society and the Middle Class in Modern Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2010), 212-229.

[83] Cited in O'Connor, *Larkinism and Syndicalism*, 41. See *Voice of Labour*, 31 Aug. 1918 for the article on Ulster labour that prompted Logue's response.

did have some impact. This study of the 1924 crisis supports O'Connor's conclusions about the relationship between labour, the economy and sectarianism in Derry. It is notable that overt displays of sectarianism among workers were not features of the lockout. There were no sectarian splits or allegations of religious or political discrimination. Unlike the 1920 cutters' strike, the Ulster Unionist Labour Association never publicly denounced the 1924 stoppages as a subversive republican conspiracy. This should not be surprising. What was remarkable about trade unionism in Northern Ireland was how little, not how much, it was coloured by sectarianism:

> Ulster had a fractured society, tormented by religion and politics … These diversities were pressed together into a single economy with, for the most part, mixed workforces… people coped with the density of difference by compartmentalizing their mentalities and adjusting the response code in each. That learned behaviour made it easier to detach the trade unions from sectarianism, though the separation could never be complete. In a society in which religion mattered ubiquitously, including in the workplace and the unions themselves, sectarianism invariably curbed solidarity… behaviour was determined simply by an instinct for survival.[84]

British unions dominated most of these workplaces and their attempts to avoid sectarianism detached them from politics, ensuring that militancy was less likely to mature into radicalism than in the south or in Britain. For them, it was enough that nationalists and unionists could unite on wages and conditions because 'with one economy and so many mixed workforces … solidarity was not only the norm, it was an operational necessity.'[85] Irish unions were too tainted by their republicanism to compete in Northern Ireland and unionism too

[84] O'Connor, *Larkinism and Syndicalism*, 53.

[85] O'Connor, *Larkinism and Syndicalism*, 53.

conservative an ideology to produce a labour movement of worth, the Ulster Unionist Labour Association being a case in point. Unlike their republican or loyalist equivalents, British unions offered an enduring resolution to the sectarian conundrum: wage militancy while conveniently avoiding the Ulster question. Some left-wing Irish radicals recognized the Ulster Protestant's ability to be simultaneously wage militant and politically conservative. They were convinced that the only way to win loyalists over to the cause of the Irish Republic was to make it a workers' republic: only socialism could transform class consciousness into class unity and anti-imperialism.[86] But their argument failed to recognize the rational basis for cross-class unionist homogeneity. In the short-term, working-class Protestants had more to gain from embracing sectarian, rather than class, politics because doing so maintained an economic dominance over Catholics that reinforced a psychological feeling of ethnic superiority.[87] The unions were happy to uphold this inequality. The result was a tenuous unity across the sectarian divide masked by the veneer of class rhetoric: a provincial, insular movement whose foremost goal was to track cross-channel wages.[88] After the 1924 lockout, Derry labour entered another period of quiescence as the employers cemented their authority with the blessing of the unionist state. This time, however, there would be no revival of fortunes.

[86] O'Connor, *Larkinism and Syndicalism*, 53.

[87] Joseph Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), 5.

[88] O'Connor, *Larkinism and syndicalism*, 53.