The history of labour in Limerick in the nineteenth century

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Abstract

While there is an increasing volume of research and publications relating to labour history in Ireland in the recent period, there is still a dearth of local labour histories since Emmet O'Connor published *A Labour History of Waterford* more than thirty years ago. This thesis addresses a gap in this field, focusing on the history of labour in Limerick during the nineteenth century. The general narrative of nineteenth century historiography is one of the struggles of Irish nationalism against British rule. As is seen from this thesis, the reality was that class conflict was a major component part of the history of this period, both in an urban and a rural setting. The thesis is the result of extensive research using archival material as well as national and local primary sources, in conjunction with extensive secondary literature. It demonstrates that the history of Limerick city and county in the nineteenth century was a history of regular conflict between rich and poor, employer and worker, tenant farmer and agricultural labourer, often violent. On many occasions Limerick and the wider Mid-West of the country was the epicentre for mass movements that emerged during the nineteenth century. Often the urban and/or rural working class played a pivotal role in such movements. At the same time, the potential and promise of many of these movements remained unfulfilled as the local and national leaderships of Irish nationalism repeatedly told the working class that 'labour must wait. The findings will demonstrate the necessity to expand the research into the rich and varied history of labour in Ireland.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for the award of a degree at this or any University. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signed:_____

Dominic Haugh

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List of Abbreviations

ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASRS	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
DLF	Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation
DW&WR	Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway
GS&WR	Great Southern & Western Railway
IALU	Irish Agricultural Labourers Union
ILIU	Irish Labour and Industrial Union
ILLA	Irish Land and Labour Association
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers Union
IWMA	International Working Men's Association
LEA	Labour Electoral Association
NL	National League
NSFU	National Sailors' and Firemen's Union
NUDL	National Union of Dock Labourers
RMT	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers
TLL	Trade and Labour League
UIL	United Irish League
UKSC	United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers
W&CR	Waterford and Central Line Railway
W&LR	Waterford and Limerick Railway

Currency
d = pence
s = shillings
£ = pounds
12 pence = 1 shilling
20 shillings = 1 pound

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Introduction

Limerick during the nineteenth century was a city with major social divisions with the social strata comprising of a small Protestant elite, a rising Catholic middle class and the masses of trades and labouring poor. Limerick City had undergone significant change that began in the late eighteenth century with the building of Newtown Pery. Since the construction of King John's Castle and the city walls on King's Island in the thirteenth century, the centre of English rule was based in what was known as 'Englishtown'. Outside the city walls on the south bank of the River Shannon, the native Irish populated the narrow streets of 'Irishtown'. By the middle of the eighteenth century the city walls were bursting at the seams as the population expanded. Narrow streets with slum conditions were the order of the day. In response to the crisis much of the city walls were knocked and a new brick city built on a green field site.[1]

Newtown Perry, unusually for an Irish city, was constructed in a grid pattern. This new Georgian quarter of the city was developed on the back of an expanding merchant trade, which operated primarily in agricultural goods and provisions. The Georgian blocks of commercial and domestic buildings in Newtown Pery were constructed eight blocks long and four blocks wide, each block measuring 100 yards. Flanking these streets on both the river and the country sides, were numerous granaries that served the thriving export trade.[2]

By 1822 a new city comprising of 2,000 houses and 16,000 inhabitants had been established.[3] Included within its boundaries was 'all the wealth and trade of the city'.[4] Side streets around the Georgian centre saw the development of housing for the less well-off merchants and traders. In the area running down to the docks, houses of varying sizes and quality were constructed for those who owned various businesses down to families who employed relatively small numbers in various domestic type industries.[5] With the migration of the English settlers to the Georgian centre, the Irish moved into Englishtown, which, subsequently, became the most run-down part of the city.

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[1] Jim Kemmy, 'An Introduction to Limerick History', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 22 (Christmas 1987), p. 5.
[2] Architecture of Limerick, http://www.irish-architecture.com/buildings_ireland/limerick/limerick/index.html (Accessed on 17/11/2009).
[3] Matthew Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick, The History of Limerick Corporation / City Council 1197-2006*, (Limerick, 2006), p. 264.
[4] Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick Its History and Antiquities*, (Cork, 1991), p. 504.
[5] Jack O'Sullivan, 'The Windmill and District', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 15, (Spring 1984), pp. 5-7.

The town, established by the Vikings, saw rapid economic expansion and ecclesiastical development during the Anglo-Norman period. The fourteenth century saw a continuation of the fortification and building projects initiated by the Anglo-Normans. By the beginning of the sixteenth century Limerick was in a relatively strong position and may have been the third largest town in Ireland, in terms of population. This period had also seen substantial changes in the religious geography of the city. Religious houses were closed by Elizabeth I and by the 1590s parish churches were under the control of the Established Church, while Catholic worship was largely confined to private houses. The war-torn seventeenth-century witnessed major changes to adapt the walls and castle to an age of siege warfare. Following the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the corporation was dominated by the new elite from this period onwards and there is evidence of considerable energy in municipal government. A guild system was established and a steady growth in population was part of a wider recovery of the Irish economy. The destructive aspects of the sieges of 1690 and 1691 had limited impact and shortly after the turn of the century significant progress was seen.

In 1706 hearth money records returned 2,166 houses in the county of the city and the population was estimated at 11,868 and indicating a population of 5,000 within the city boundaries. From this point on the city's population grew steadily. The number of houses in the city and county of the city grew by 46 per cent between 1706 and 1725. Growth in housing was slower between 1725 and 1753, amounting to 16 per cent, but accelerated from mid-century onwards in line with national trends.[6] In terms of population, Limerick grew faster than most of its rivals and by 1792 was estimated at 40,000.[7]

Outside the city there was a sharp contrast between west and east county Limerick. The quality of the land is significantly better in the eastern area, with many parts of west Limerick lacking roads and even bridges as late as the 1820s.[8] Young suggested that the poor living in the more mountainous areas fared better than in the richer farmland as they had more access to land for potatoes and more consistent employment that was lacking in the grazing regions.[9] The growth in agriculture in rural Limerick during the eighteenth century contributed significantly to the economy of the city as large quantities of agricultural produce were exported from the city. This, in turn, gave rise to a Catholic middle-class merchant class, based on the processing and

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[6] Eamon O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas no. 21 Limerick,* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 2-9.
[7] Ibid., p. 12.
[8] Pat Feeley, 'The Rockite Uprising in Co. Limerick – 1821', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 21, (Autumn 1987), p. 36.
[9] Arthur Young, *Arthur Young's Tour in Ireland,1776-1779,* (London, 1892), p. 380.

export of agricultural goods. Limerick, Waterford and Cork prospered as centres of foreign trade, but it was only in Limerick that the upper-class seasonal consumption evident in Dublin was repeated.[10]

The early nineteenth century also saw the decline of the trade guilds as master tradesmen and journeymen came into conflict over wages and conditions. The existence of the guilds dated from the establishment of the city by charter in 1291, with the first significant conflict that has been discovered coming in the middle of the eighteenth century when Catholic tradesmen, excluded from the guilds, challenged the refusal of the Protestant establishment of their right to work in the city. The guilds continued to prevent Catholic membership leading to alternative organisations emerging that were ultimately to lead to the decline of the guilds in the city.[11] McGrath contended that the reason for the decline in the trade guilds was because they buckled under the weight of their own rules by being unable to supply the labour to complete the construction of the expanding city and the manufacturing industries that accompanied it.[12] However, it could be argued that this is a rather simplistic view, given that the trades in the construction sector were but one occupational sector across a whole range of trade guilds that went into decline. This excess demand for labour does not reconcile with the dramatic decline in employment across the trades as the eighteenth century came to a close.

Striving to increase profits the master tradesmen attempted to drive down wages and increase the number of semi-skilled workers and apprentices carrying out the work of tradesmen. When confronted with opposition from the journeymen, the masters attempted to use non-unionised, often migrant labour, to break the emerging local societies of organised journeymen. As a result of the pace of change in manufacturing being brought about by the Industrial Revolution in Britain, large-scale unemployment had emerged among many of the trades in the city at the beginning of 1801. Some trades, mainly in the construction sector, were able to maintain their position in society but the impact of cheap imports from Britain undermined the standing of most of the city's trade.

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[10] David Dickson, 'Town and City', in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, (Cambridge, 2017), p. 118.

[11] See: Robert Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Volume 2, Number 3, (1941), pp. 121-134, Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, Volume 8, Number 30 (September, 1952), pp. 91-114 and Matthew Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick, The History of Limerick Corporation / City Council 1197-2006*, (Limerick, 2006).

[12] John McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Mary Immaculate College / University of Limerick, (2017), p. 59-60.

One of the trades most severely hit was the weaving trade. Almost all the stuff weavers in Limerick were out of work, due to declining demand for textiles resulting from the availability of cheap products from the industrialised mills of England.[13] Cronin argued that the inability to compete with imported goods was directly related to the incapacity of the trade guilds to adapt working methods to meet changing demands.[14] However, local trades operating in such a limited market were never going to be able to compete with mass produced commodities from the industrial heartlands of Britain. Cronin outlined the dramatic impact of industrialisation on the domestic textile trade across Ireland,[15] but doesn't elaborate on the inability of what was largely a cottage industry to compete with the textile mills of Lancashire no matter how much they adapted their methods.

Commenting on unrest in Limerick in 1803, General Morrison noted that the cause was economic grievances as a result of 'the prejudice which has existed in the southern counties for nearly a century, of the lowest labourers, against farmers and stewards who endeavour to introduce task work, and against labourers from other counties who offer work at lower wages than the Limerick people wish to establish'.[16]

For the labouring classes death from fever, hunger and abject poverty was the order of the day. Unemployment and food shortages, overcrowded tenements and outbreaks of fever were the regular occurrences as the nineteenth century dawned and were to continue to be a feature of life right throughout the nineteenth century. In the background was the pull of national aspirations stemming from the 1798 Uprising and developing into Daniel O'Connell's repeal movement in the second quarter of the century.

Local government in Limerick was described by the nineteenth century nationalist historian of the city, Maurice Lenihan as 'Insolent bigotry and exclusive monopoly of the Orange Party inside and outside the Corporation'.[17] O'Connor described a similar situation in Waterford where the city was ruled by a colonial elite in the interests of the British Crown, the merchants,

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[13] Roger Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', Adrian Randall & Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 167-168.
[14] Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?: The politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth Century Cork,* (Cork, 1994), p. 39.
[15] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?:* p. 39.
[16] General Morrison to William Wickham, 6 January 1803, quoted in S. J. Connolly, 'Aftermath and Adjustment', in W. E. Vaughan (ed), *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland Under the Union 1801-1870* (Oxford, 2010), p. 9.
[17] Lenihan, *Limerick Its History and Antiquities,* p. 422.

the Established Church and themselves.[18] In terms of corruption Limerick was worse than most.[19] Limerick Corporation did allow a few Catholics to become freemen in the early nineteenth century, but the vast majority continued to be Protestant until 1841.[20] The manipulation of the electorate allowed the Smyth Verekers to monopolise Limerick's parliamentary representation between 1794 and 1797 and again between 1802 and 1820. In consequence at the beginning of the 19th century Limerick Corporation was probably the most unrepresentative of all the five city governments in Ireland.[21]

However, the wealthier Catholics did find a way to exert their influence. While the Penal Laws had closed nearly all other fields of economic activity to Catholics, they could however be active in trade and, in Limerick, Catholic merchants played a prominent role in the economic activity of the city.[22] The economic expansion was driven by an upsurge in imports to and, particularly, exports from the city. The trade of Limerick port[23] increased by 75 per cent between 1751 and 1775 and doubled again between 1775 and 1800.[24] The economic and spatial transformation between 1750 and 1815 brought a revival of the fortunes of the Catholic elite that had lost political control of the city in the 1650s. By 1830 an estimated 90 per cent of Limerick's middle class was Catholic and most of the remaining 10 per cent were Quakers.[25]

As a result of the Napoleonic Wars a newfound wealth was evident in the city and county. By 1812 this wealth was diffusing among the Catholic farming class and among Catholic traders and merchants.[26] Peace in the war with France was proclaimed in Limerick on 27 June 1814. Prices, which a month previously had been at an unprecedented high, collapsed, ruining many speculators.[27] In an effort to protect their interests, the local business classes formally established the Chamber of Commerce in 1815[28] although there were structured, if informal, arrangements since 1807.[29] Mercantilism was still the driving force behind the economy of

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[18] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* (Waterford, 1989), p. 1.
[19] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick,* p. 183.
[20] Ibid., p. 188.
[21] Ibid., p. 193.
[22] Sarah McNamara, *Development of Limerick by Honan Merchants, The Unfolding of a Hidden History,* (Limerick, 2003), p. 30.
[23] For more information on Limerick Port see – Phil Lovett, 'The Development of the Port of Limerick in the Nineteenth Century', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 10, (Spring 1982), pp. 13-16.
[24] Judith Hill, *The Building of Limerick,* (Dublin, 1997), p. 104.
[25] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick,* p.251. For information on the Quakers in Limerick, see – Phil Lovett, 'Quakers in Limerick', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 37, (Summer 2001), pp. 3-9.
[26] Lenihan, *Limerick Its History and Antiquities,* p. 421.
[27] Ibid., p. 433.
[28] Michael Deegan, 'Merchants and the Economic and Social Development of Limerick c. 1800-35', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 46, (2006), p. 108.
[29] Ibid., Potter suggests that the Chamber dates from 1805 - Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick,* p. 271.

Limerick during this period. Crucial for this was the control of the fixed markets in corn, butter, potatoes[30] and other foodstuffs. The Chamber of Commerce was focused on whatever mechanism would bring them a commercial advantage and there were occasions when infighting broke out between the members as they tried to gain commercial advantage over one another. Deegan goes into detail on the commercial activities of Limerick Chamber of Commerce in its formative years but does not address any of the conflicts or the role of the Chamber in industrial disputes that broke out.[31]

Secondary literature

There is a deep and rich history of working-class struggle in Ireland, a history that is largely ignored in the historiography. O'Connor and McCabe commented that the interaction of Labour and nationalism… as well as the weakness of other aspects of Labour culture are among the great enigmas of Irish Labour history.[32] They outlined the different waves of labour history in the Irish context, and the framework within which this historiography has developed. Noteworthy in this is the development of the Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) and its journal Saothar. O'Connor and McCabe noted that this Society has stronger links to the unions and the left, chiefly the Labour Party, than to the universities.[33] While some academics have been supportive of the ILHS there is still a lack of labour historians in academia. It is not a surprise that new labour historians are, for the most part, university graduates,[34] given the increased level of access to third level education for working class people in recent decades. However, it should be noted that students from a working-class background still face considerable difficulties in accessing third level education and this undoubtedly still impacts on the quantity and quality of labour history that is being researched and produced. Furthermore, it could be argued that the links of the ILHS are more with union officialdom than the union rank and files and the links with the Labour Party are of questionable benefit given its political outlook as a descendant of the now distant twentieth century parties of social democracy.

It is contended that, reflecting their provenance in Irish academia, most new labour historians have ignored the issue of ideology and pursued 'value-free' history.[35] However, it could be

[30] Limerick Chamber of Commerce Meeting 3 January 1817, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820,* p. 104-106, Limerick City Archives.
[31] Deegan, 'Merchants and the Economic and Social Development of Limerick c. 1800-35', pp. 107-113.
[32] Emmet O'Connor & Conor McCabe, 'Ireland', Joan Allen, Alan Campbell & John McIlroy (eds), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives,* (London, 2010), p. 137.
[33] O'Connor & McCabe, 'Ireland', p. 140.
[34] Ibid., p. 141.
[35] Ibid., p. 142.

argued that attempting to adopt such a 'value-free' approach is adopting an ideological view on how history should be researched and written. Attempting to ignore the reality that history cannot sit aloof from the ideological processes that existed within a particular historical epoch, severely limits the interpretation that can be placed on evidence. An example of this limited approach can be seen in the recently completed, unpublished thesis by McGrath on the organised trades in Limerick in the nineteenth century.[36]

To date there have been just two academic works treating the general history of the Irish labour movement. The first of these by John Boyle looked at the development of Irish labour during the nineteenth century[37] and, subsequently, Emmet O'Connor's work which encompassed the entire period of organised labour struggle up until the turn of the current century.[38] Since Boyle first published his work in 1988, therefore, there has only been one further work on the national history of the labour movement. This is despite ongoing and extensive research carried out by labour historians. A much earlier work by J. Dunsmore Clarkson focused on the legal aspects of trade unionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the relationship between the trade unions and Daniel O'Connell.[39]

Several works looking at the local and regional development of the labour movement have proved useful for comparative purposes, including Emmet O'Connor's work on Waterford[40] and Maura Cronin's on the history of craft workers in Cork.[41] For the last decade of the nineteenth century, John Cunningham's work on labour history in the West of Ireland[42] proved beneficial. Marilyn Silverman focused on the historical ethnography and the anthropology of working-class life in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.[43] The scope of this work adopts a different theoretical and historical framework than this thesis and as a result was less useful for comparative purposes.

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[36] John McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899.* This will be discussed later in this introduction.
[37] John W. Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* (Washington, 1988).
[38] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* (Dublin, 2011) and an earlier edition: Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-1960,* (Dublin, 1992).
[39] J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland,* (New York, 1925).
[40] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* (Waterford, 1989).
[41] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?*
[42] John Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland: Working Life and Struggle 1890-1914,* (Belfast, 1995)
[43] Marilyn Silverman, *An Irish Working Class: Explorations in Political Economy and Hegemony, 1800-1950* (Toronto, 2001).

Saothar

Saothar: Journal of Irish Labour History, published annually since 1975, is an important outlet for labour history. While a majority of the articles in *Saothar* deal with labour in the twentieth century, it has published important articles relating to the nineteenth century. For this study the most useful of these related to railway workers, with notable articles by Leckey[44] and Lee[45] proving useful. McCabe's[46] article fell outside the timeframe of this study but was useful in allowing a comparison with earlier disputes, particularly in comparing the response of the leadership of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. McAteer outlined the development of new unionism in Derry[47] during the course of which he raises the point that new unionism in Ireland should not be seen as strictly and extension of new unionism in Britain and to attempt to fit it into such a rigid framework 'obscuring the overall pattern' of development of new unionism in Ireland.[48]

Holohan discussing the conflict between O'Connell and Dublin trade unions in 1837-38[49] and afforded an opportunity to compare O'Connell's relationship between the trades in Dublin and in Limerick. Hill discussed sectarianism and the working class in Dublin,[50] noting the existence of sectarian and non-sectarian unions in the city. There is no evidence of a similar sectarian division in Limerick. An article by Padraig Lane looked at the perceptions of rural labourers after the famine.[51] Lane argued that the decline of the agricultural labour force was market driven rather than the result of structural changes within agriculture between 1850 and 1870, a view in conflict with the general economic view of the period. Moran looked at the impact of the subsistence crisis from 1879 to 1882 on the urban working class, a topic that until then had largely been ignored.[52] He also discussed the impact that the Land League's strategy of withholding rent to landlords had on the urban working class, with towns dependent on landlord spending suffering a significant drop in employment. From Moran's perspective, employment

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[44] Joseph J. Leckey, The Railway Servants Strike in Co. Cork, 1898, *Saothar,* Volume 2, (1976), pp. 39-45. Leckey's article is a narrative of the strike in 1898.
[45] Joseph Lee, "Railway Labour in Ireland, 1833-1856", *Saothar,* Volume 5, (1979), pp. 9-26. This article takes an analytical approach in outlining the building of the railway network and the nature of employment on the railways between 1833 and 1856.
[46] Conor McCabe, 'The context and Course of the Irish Railway Disputes of 1911', *Saothar,* Volume 30, (2005), pp. 21-32.
[47] Shane McAteer, 'The New Unionism in Derry, 1889-1892: A Demonstration of its Inclusive Nature', *Saothar,* Volume 16 (1991), pp. 11-22.
[48] Ibid., p. 11.
[49] Patrick Holohan, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Dublin Trades: A Collision 1837/1838', *Saothar,* Volume 1, (1975), pp. 1-17.
[50] Jacqueline R. Hill, 'Artisans, Sectarianism and Politics in Dublin, 1829-48', *Saothar,* Volume 7, (1981), pp. 12-27.
[51] Padraig G. Lane, 'Perceptions Of Agricultural Labourers After The Great Famine, 1850-1870', *Saothar,* Volume 19, (1994), pp. 14-26.
[52] Gerard Moran, 'The Land War, Urban Destitution And Town Tenant Protests, 1879-1882', *Saothar,* Volume 20, (1995), pp. 17-31.

for urban labourers was dependent on the rural economy and urban workers were the last to benefit from an upturn in agriculture.[53]

A key issue for the rural working class in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was the issue of housing, a topic addressed by McKay.[54] Explaining that this issue had been raised as far back as the Poor Law Inquiry in the 1830s, McKay outlined the development of housing for rural labourers in conjunction with the various parliamentary acts that were intended to address the issue. Indeed, it was not until the turn of the century that significant inroads were made in resolving the rural housing issue.[55]

Rural conflict

Especially useful for this study were articles in a number of publications dealing with different aspects of rural labour throughout the nineteenth century. This literature falls into two categories, the clandestine agrarian outrages of the pre-Famine era and the mass movements of the post-Famine period.

Roberts looked at the Caravat / Shanavest conflict[56] that emerged in 1806 and continued until 1816, going into detail on the origins, extent, activities and class nature of conflict. He adopts the approach that the conflict was class based and, in relation to Limerick, the evidence would seem to confirm this assertion. Donnelly addressed the Rockite Rebellion which took place between 1819 and 1825.[57] In his work Donnelly emphasises the influence of millenarianism and the role of sectarianism in the conflict. This is addressed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The Terry Alt Rebellion 1829-31 was primarily located in County Clare but grew the encompass the entire Mid-West and spread as far north as County Roscommon. This important social movement in the aftermath of the election of Daniel O'Connell in Clare in 1828 has received scant research. Apart from largely passing references in local history publications, the only

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[53] Moran, 'The Land War, Urban Destitution And Town Tenant Protests, 1879-1882', p. 23.
[54] Enda McKay, 'The Housing Of The Rural Labourer, 1883·1916', *Saothar,* Volume 17, (1992), pp. 27-39.
[55] McKay, 'The Housing Of The Rural Labourer, 1883·1916', p. 35
[56] Paul E.W. Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in East Munster 1802-1811', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds) *Irish Peasants Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914,* (Wisconsin, 1986), pp. 64-101.
[57] James S. Donnelly, Jr., *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* (Wisconsin, 2009). Donnelly has also produced other several articles/essays about the Rockite movement and the wider agrarian conflict in Ireland during this period, including: James S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr. (eds.), *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914,* (Wisconsin, 1983), pp. 102-39, and James S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Captain Rock: Ideology and Organization in the Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821-24', *Eire-Ireland,* Volume 42, Number 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2007), pp. 60-103.

focused literature is a short article by Donnelly.[58] Given the impact of this movement and the fact that the much better known topic of the Owenite Ralahine Co-operative emerged as a direct result of this social conflict, the Terry Alt Rebellion deserves to be the subject of a comprehensive work of research.

A series of important writings looked at the rural labourer in the post famine period, particularly from the Land War onwards. These included Fintan Lane's article on P.F. Johnson and the attempt to establish a rural labourers union[59] and his wider examination of rural labourers and politics.[60] While Fintan Lane's article on Johnson primarily looks at the activism and political outlook of this individual, it also addresses the efforts to establishment the Irish Agricultural Labourers' Union (IALU) in Munster, an endeavour that Johnson was intrinsically liked with, and the efforts by nationalist politicians to ensure that it did not threaten their political agenda. In Fintan Lane's work dealing with the Land War, he reinforced the view that historians have understated the potential influence of rural labourers in that conflict.[61] Specifically he argued that general histories of the nineteenth century have tended to view labourers primarily as victims of poor social conditions and are characterised as passive and of little political significance.[62] Fintan Lane went on to argue that, despite its failure, the IALU was a 'crucial milestone for working class politics'.[63]

One topic that warrants and deserves further research is the Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA). Described by O'Connor as the most enduring of the rural labour groups,[64] the literature is largely limited to the role of individuals, primarily nationalist politicians who attempted to marshal rural labour in the nationalist cause[65] or mentioned in passing.[66] Bradley looks at the emergence and development of the ILLA, but focuses on addressing the topic primarily from 1905 onwards, which falls outside the scope of this study.[67] Padraig Lane dealt specifically with

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[58] James S. Donnelly Jr., 'The Terry Alt Movement 1829-31', *History Ireland,* Volume 2, Issue 4, (Winter 1994), pp. 30-35.
[59] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 33, Number 130, (November 2002), pp. 191-208.
[60] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in Fintan Lane & Damien O'Driscoll (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 113-139.
[61] Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 114.
[62] Ibid., p. 115.
[63] Ibid., p. 124.
[64] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 58
[65] Examples of this would be John O'Donovan, 'Daniel Desmond (D. D.) Sheehan and the Rural Labour Question in Cork, 1894–1910', in Brian Casey (ed), *Defying the Law of the Land: Agrarian Radicals in Irish History,* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 220-237, & Fintan Lane, 'William Upton', in Emmet O'Connor and John Cunningham (eds), *Studies in Irish Radical Leadership,* (Manchester, 2016).
[66] As with John W. Boyle, 'A Marginal Figure: The Irish Rural Labourer', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds) *Irish Peasants Violence and Political Unread 1780-1914,* (Wisconsin, 1986), p. 326-327.
[67] Dan Bradley, *Farm Labourers: Irish Struggle 1900-1976,* (Belfast, 1988).

the topic of the ILLA.[68] The article in large part deals with the relationship between the ILLA and constitutional nationalism ad, overall, views the ILLA as a failure. This narrative fits in with questionable view outlined above that many historians view rural labour as being passive and of little political significance.

Food Riots and the 'Moral Economy'

Thompson's work on the 'moral economy'[69] has led to significant debate among historians, as well as discussions about the relevance of the moral economy outlook in relation to Ireland. In this context the view of Rudé[70] that the behaviour of the 'mob' was to a considerable extent determined by rational and social goals, rather than by the basest motives, is relevant in discussing food riots in Limerick. Wells addressed the famine of 1799-1801 in the context of the moral economy and social protest,[71] outlining how local and national government responded to the crisis. He noted the role of media in providing moral economy commentary at this time[72] and that, despite conditions existing that would have been expected to widespread food rioting, apart from some partial riots in a small number of towns, including Limerick, such developments were absent.[73] Wells argued that during this period, the moral economy criteria, aimed at protecting the poor from the worst effects of the crisis, acted as a brake on intensifying unrestricted capitalism, while at the same time facilitating large profit taking by merchants and those involved in food processing.[74]

Maginnis took up the debate on the relevance of the moral economy to Ireland,[75] analysing the food riots of 1756-57 to see how far they conformed to the precepts of Thompson's moral economy. He concluded that paternalistic rhetoric did not prove the existence of an Irish moral economy, but certainly created the space for its existence, arguing for the need for further research on the topic.[76] One of the leading proponent of the moral economy in an Irish context

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[68] Padraig G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society,* Volume 98 (1993), pp. 90-106.
[69] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* (London, 1991) & E. P. Thompson, '*The Moral Eco*nomy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present,* (Number 50, February 1971), pp. 76-136.
[70] George Rudé, *The Crowd in History,* (London 1999).
[71] Roger Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', in Adrian Randall & Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland,* (Liverpool, 1996), pp. 163-193.
[72] Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801', p. 178
[73] Ibid., p. 180
[74] Ibid., p. 192
[75] Eoin Magennis, 'In Search of the "Moral Economy": Food Scarcity in 1756-57 and the Crowd', Peter Jupp & Eoin Magennis (eds), *Crowds in Ireland, c. 1720-1920,* (London, 2000), pp. 189-211.
[76] Ibid., p. 206-207

is Cunningham and he has contributed several works on the topic.[77] In contrast, Kelly has argued against the notion of the moral economy, asserting that the actions of the urban poor were short-lived and inherently conservative.[78] This literature proved vital in navigating the nature of food riots and the extent of their compliance with Thompson's view of the 'moral economy'.

General literature

In order to place this study in the wider political, social and economic context, it is necessary to consider the contribution of literature dealing with each of these topics, including what has been omitted in addressing these topics and their relevance to this study. In general these works placed more emphasis on developments in rural rather than urban Ireland, with a particular focus on landlord-tenant relations and the agricultural economy.

From an economic perspective the substantial study by Ó Gráda[79] provides the foundation for analysing economic developments and their impact on the working class. Complementing this is an earlier economic study by Cullen.[80] From the perspective of social history, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*[81] provided a wide-ranging analysis of social developments during the period under study.

A wide range of literature deal with political developments in the nineteenth century. The works consulted included Lee,[82] Beckett[83] and Foster.[84] Hoppen's work on politics and elections in Ireland[85] assisted in assessing the nature of elections in Limerick in the nineteenth century.

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[77] John Cunningham, 'Popular Protest and the "Moral Economy"', in Francis Devine, Fintan Lane & Niamh Puirséil (eds), *Essays in Irish Labour History: A Festschrift for Elizabeth and John W. Boyle,* (Dublin, 2008), pp. 26-48, John Cunningham, 'Compelled to their bad acts by hunger: Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817–45', *Éire-Ireland,* Volume 45, Numbers 1&2 (Spring/Summer, 2010), pp. 128-151 & John Cunningham, "'Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet': Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847", in Enda Delaney & Brendán Mac Suibhne (eds), *Ireland's Great Famine and Popular Politics,* (London, 2016), pp. 10-33.
[78] James Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd,* (Dublin, 2017), p. 93.
[79] Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939,* (Oxford, 1994). Also consulted: Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after the Famine: Explorations in Economic History, 1800-1925,* (Manchester 1993).
[80] L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660,* (London, 1976).
[81] Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland,* (Cambridge, 2017).
[82] Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848 – 1918,* (Dublin, 1984).
[83] J. C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923,* (London, 1966).
[84] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972,* (London, 1989).
[85] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* (New York, 1984).

Local History Literature

Complementing literature on labour history nationally there is extensive local history material available. The local history journals which provide most insights into developments in Limerick city and county are the *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* and the *Old Limerick Journal.* Other relevant works include two volumes by Lee and Jacobs dealing with industry, trade and commerce in Limerick.[86] Potter[87] and Crossman[88] provide important information relating to the operation of local government in Limerick. Curtin provided an insight into West Limerick in the pre-Famine period,[89] while Fenton outlined the role of Limerick in the Young Ireland rebellion.[90] Finally, Irwin & Ó Tuathaigh edited a collection of essays on Limerick, several of which provided material for this study.[91]

Comparable Labour Histories

The historiography of local labour history in Ireland is limited. Apart from O'Connor, *Waterford*, and Cronin, *Cork,* there are no comprehensive studies on nineteenth century urban and rural labour. This is the case in relation to Limerick where the writings that do exist are generally haphazard, isolated, lacking context and often written from either an anti-labour or uninformed perspective. This is particularly pronounced in the local history journals and exists to a lesser extent in the two volumes edited by Lee and Jacobs. These factors compound the necessity for literature on Limerick labour history during this period that approaches the subject in a comprehensive fashion and views the topic from a working class / labour perspective.

A PhD thesis on Limerick trade unions in the nineteenth century was completed in 2017 by John McGrath.[92] This thesis focuses exclusively on the craft trades in Limerick city and reviews their activity from the perspective of their involvement with constitutional nationalism during the nineteenth century. McGrath specifically stated that he excluded the use of 'Marxist templates of class' on the basis that such templates are 'not applicable to the Celtic fringe'.[93] The author ignores all aspects of labour in rural Limerick, urban semi-skilled and unskilled

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[86] David Lee & Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 1,* (Limerick, 2003), & David Lee & Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 2* (Limerick 2006).
[87] Matthew Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick, The History of Limerick Corporation / City Council 1197-2006,* (Limerick 2006).
[88] Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,* (Belfast, 1994).
[89] Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* (Limerick, 2008).
[90] Laurence Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick,* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2010).
[91] Liam Irwin & Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh (eds), *Limerick: History & Society,* (Dublin, 2009).
[92] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899.*
[93] Ibid., p. 26.

workers, new unionism and the social circumstances facing the urban and rural working class in Limerick city and county. Attempting to adopt a 'value-free' approach, McGrath ends up viewing the topic from a nationalist perspective. His thesis focused primarily on structures and leaders[94] and their interaction with local and national leaders of liberal and nationalist politics, once again conforming to the outline by O'Connor and McCabe.[95] While McGrath's work does complement this study, there is also a clear divergence in approach. By consciously attempting to avoid looking at his topic from a working-class perspective, McGrath tends to over-emphasise the impact and influence of the artisans of Limerick on local politics and nationalist politicians. Furthermore, this leads to a conflicting interpretation of the evidence in comparison to this study.

Primary Sources

There is a range of primary sources for nineteenth century Irish history. For detailed information local and national newspapers are the most valuable. In relation to Limerick the most prominent and consistent source of news was the *Limerick Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* was a Unionist-owned newspaper and operated on a continuous basis from its founding in 1768 until 2018. The *Chronicle* tended to report critically on any issue that was seen as a threat to the Protestant Ascendancy. This critical reporting, particularly in relation to trade union issues, was beneficial in that it presented clear information on disputes, highlighting the employers' position and the outcome of disputes.

Other newspapers appeared from time-to-time in Limerick during the nineteenth century. These were generally nationalist in outlook and tended to applaud any initiative that was regarded as disruptive to the power of Unionism. The most prominent of these was the *Limerick Reporter* which was an avowedly pro-O'Connell and then pro-nationalist paper that operated from 1841 to 1869 although there were periods within that when publication was haphazard. These nationalist newspapers tended to give a fleeting mention to trade union issues, particularly when reporting on strikes directed at the Catholic merchant class who were the backbone of nationalist opinion in the city.

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[94] O'Connor and McCabe discussed this in describing the majority of academic scholarship as being 'doggedly empirical' and guided by a traditional emphasis on documents and focussing on structures and leaders or movements. O'Connor & McCabe, 'Ireland', p. 143.
[95] Ibid., p. 146

The *Limerick Leader* was founded in 1893 and was an overtly nationalist newspaper from its establishment. It tended to applaud any cause that appeared to be promoting the nationalist cause. In particular, the *Leader* was the main media support base for maverick nationalist John Daly and his campaign to win control of Limerick Corporation with the assistance of the Limerick Trades Council. National newspapers including the *Freemans Journal* and the *Irish Times* provide accounts from Limerick, regularly lifted straight from the local newspapers.

Minutes of the meetings of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce provided an insight into the response of business owners in Limerick to industrial disputes and social conflict. A wide variety of state papers assist in research during this period. The Outrage Papers spanning 1835-1852, contained detailed information of many episodes, particularly relating rural conflict in the period. The Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers and State of the Country Papers (1796-1831) also contributed primary material relating to Limerick, though less than was indicated at the outset. While apparently relevant material was located in the index to the Registered Papers, much of this could not be found in the archives. Parliamentary debates afforded consideration of local events from the perspective of the Protestant Ascendancy up to 1840 and the nationalist establishment from the 1830s onwards. There are few local trade union records for the period covered by this thesis and those that do exist tend to be partial and almost exclusively membership and subscription lists.

Parliamentary papers offered a wide range of sources across the nineteenth century. Parliamentary reports, particularly in relation to social conditions and agrarian conflict in the first quarter of the century, provided useful information.[96] The Poor Law investigation 1835 outlined the dire conditions for the poorer classes in Ireland and provided an insight into the experience of poverty.[97] Two reports were also published in 1838 on an inquiry into

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[96] *First Report from the Select Committee On the State of Disease and the Condition of the Labour Poor Ireland,* House of Commons Papers, 1819, (409), viii.457, *Papers Presented by His Majesty's Command, Relative to the Disturbed State of Ireland,* House of Commons Papers, (2), xiv.741, *Papers relating to the state of Ireland: viz. extracts of dispatches from His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, enclosing communications from magistrates and commanding officers in different counties,* House of Commons Papers, 1822, (423), xiv.757,
Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, m ore particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom1 8 February-21 March 1825, House of Commons Papers, 1825, (181), ix.1, *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 24 March--22 June, 1825,* House of Commons Papers, 1825, (521), ix.249.

[97] *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland,* Command Papers, 1836, (43), xxx.1.

Combinations of workmen.[98] Several different types of reports gave an insight into conditions during the famine.[99] For the last two decades of the nineteenth century *Statistical Tables and Report on Trade Unions*,[100] *Report on the Strikes and Lock-Outs*[101] provided statistical

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[98] *First Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix,* House of Commons Papers, 1837-1838, (448), viii.1, & *Second Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix, and index,* House of Commons Papers, 1837-1838, (646), viii.315.

[99] *Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Laws Relating to the Relief of the Destitute Poor and into the Operation of the Medical Charities in Ireland,* House of Commons Papers, 1846, (694, 694-II, 694-III), xi Pt.I.1, xi Pt.II.1.697, *Weekly Scarcity Commission. The weekly reports of the Scarcity Commission, showing the progress of disease in the potatoes, the co mplaints which have been made, and the applications for relief, in the course of the month of March 1846,* House of Commons Papers, 1846, (201), xxxvii.429, *Scarcity Commission. Further return showing the progress of disease in the potatoes, the complaints which have been made, and the application for relief, for the week ending the 4th day of April 1846.* House of Commons Papers, 1846, (213), xxxvii.459, *Digest of evidence taken before Her majesty's commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 1.* House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Fifth Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (148), *Select Committee of House of Lords to inquire into Operation of Irish Poor Law, Fifth and Sixth Reports, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (507, 507-ii), xvi.927, 1019, *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Seventh Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (237), *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Eighth Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (259).

[100] *Labour statistics. Statistical tables and report on trade unions, Command Papers, 1887,* Command Papers, (C.5104), cvii.135, *Labour statistics. Statistical tables and report on trade unions. Second report, 1888,* Command Papers, 1888, (C.5505), lxxxix.715, *Labour statistics. Statistical tables and report on trade unions. Third report, 1889,* Command Papers, 1889, (C.5808), lxxxiv.147, *Labour Statistics, Statistical Tables and Report on Trade Unions, Fourth Report, 1889-1890,* Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6475), xcii.73, *Labour Statistics, Statistical Tables and Report on Trade Unions, Fifth Report, Years 1891,* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6990), cii.85, *Board of Trade (statistics of Trade Unions). Labour Department. Sixth annual report by the chief labour correspondent on Trade Unions (1892) with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1894, (C.7436), xciv.55, *Board of Trade (statistics of Trade Unions). Labour Department. Seventh annual report by the chief labour correspondent on Trade Unions (1893) with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1895, (C.7808), cvii.71, *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Eight report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1894 and 1895; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1896, (C.8232), xciii.277, *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1896; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1897. With comparative statistics for 1892-1896,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1899. With comparative statistics for 1892-1898,* Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601. *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1900. With comparative statistics for 1892-1899,* Command Papers, 1901, (Cd.773), lxxiv.131, *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department) Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1901. With comparative statistics for 1892-1900,* Command Papers, 1902, (Cd. 1348), xcvii.377, *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department), Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1902-04. With comparative statistics for 1895-1904,* Command Papers, 1906, (Cd. 2838), cxiii.1.

[101] *Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1888, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1889, (C.5809), lxx.703, *Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1889, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1890, (C.6176), lxviii.445, *Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1890, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), *lxvviii.689, Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1891, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890*), Board of Trade.—Labour Department. Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1892,* Command Papers, 1894, (C.7403), Board *of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1893,* Command Papers, 1894, (C.7566), *Board of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1894,* Command Papers, 1895, (C.7901), xcii.211, *Board of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1895, Command Papers, 1896, (C.8231), Strikes and lock-outs. (Board of Trade, Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1896. With statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8643), lxxxiv.239, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1897, with statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9012), lxxxviii.423, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1898. With statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9437), xcii.277, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1899. With statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1900,

information in relation to trade union and strike activity. Two reports on agricultural labour also provided statistical information on the conditions for farm labourers in County Limerick.[102]

A number of contemporary writings provided important information, including George Cornewall Lewis who provided an insight into the causes of agrarian conflict in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[103] In terms of general local history the work of Maurice Lenihan gives an insight into Limerick politics in the first half of the nineteenth century from a nationalist perspective.[104]

Approach of this thesis

This thesis will look at the development of the Limerick labour movement, urban and rural, from the perspective of history from below, placing it in the context of the developments of the period and attempts to correct the absence of such literature in the current historiography of the nineteenth century. It will adopt a class analysis of developments throughout the nineteenth century and will focus on the organisation of labour and the class conflict between the urban and rural working class and the other social classes in Limerick society.

The thesis structure will focus on different aspects of the organisation and activity of trade unions and the wider working class including looking at social conditions. In organisation, it is partly thematic and partly chronological. The first chapter will consider the attempts to organise the craft trades and the conflict between the trades and the employers up to the famine. This chapter will also address conflict involving urban labourers. Chapter two will look at social conflict in rural county Limerick and the surrounding area, in particular the Caravat/Shanavest, Rockite and Terry Alt conflicts. Chapter three will address the impact of the regular occurrence of fever and food shortages, how they affected the working class, particularly the unskilled

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(Cd.316), lxxxiii.383, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1900. With statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1901, (Cd. 689), lxxiii.591, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report on strikes and lock-outs in the United Kingdom in 1901, and on conciliation and arbitration boards,* Command Papers, 1902, (Cd. 1236), xcvii.241, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report on strikes and lock-outs in the United Kingdom in 1902, and on conciliation and arbitration boards,* Command Papers, 1903, (Cd. 1623), lxvi.1175, *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report on strikes and lock-outs in the United Kingdom in 1903, and on conciliation and arbitration boards,* Command Papers, 1904, (Cd. 2112), lxxxix.699.

[102] *Report from the Select Committee on Agricultural Labourers (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, and minutes of evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1884-85, (32), vii.599, *& Royal Commission in Labour. The agricultural labourer. Vol. V. Part I. General report by Mr. William C. Little (senior assistant agricultural commissioner),* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6894-xxv).

[103] George Cornewall Lewis, *On local disturbances in Ireland: and on the Irish Church question,* (London, 1836).

[104] Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick It's History and Antiquities,* (Cork, 1991).

workers and their families. The chapter will also explore the response of the working class to these developments.

The relationship between the working class, particularly the craft trades, and politics will be addressed in chapter four. This will include the interaction between the Congregated Trades and O'Connell's repeal movement. This chapter will explore the role of the craft trades in mobilising support for different Unionist candidates, and subsequently their relationship with constitutional nationalism. The chapter will also demonstrate that, at different junctures, this relationship between the trades and O'Connell was to break down as class tensions impacted on their outlook.

Chapter five will focus on the famine. Specifically, it will focus on the social conflict, urban and rural, that occurred from 1845 to 1850. In doing this it will examine the efforts by the working class to struggle through strikes and protests to resist starvation and fever.

The post-famine period saw important developments in attempts by semi-skilled and unskilled workers to organise and the emergence of new unionism towards the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter six will look specifically at the efforts by three groups of workers to organise and maintain their trade unions, the dock labourers, pork butchers and railway workers. The chapter will consider the impact of successes and failures on the attempts by these workers to organise and take strike action. Strike action by workers in other workplaces during the second half of the nineteenth century will also be addressed. Finally, this chapter will look at women workers, the nature of work carried out by women in urban and rural Limerick, and the efforts to organise by a section of these workers.

Chapter seven will address the interaction of the craft trades with the political sphere. This will include considering the efforts by the Congregated Trades to influence constitutional nationalism and the impact of Fenianism on the working class. Furthermore, it will explore the development of the Amnesty Association and how it led to the election of the so-called People's Parliament in the 1899 local elections when a labour majority on the city council saw a major upheaval in the norm of political representation in the city.

While the city trades were attempting to gain a foothold in the political life of the city, rural workers were striving to improve their situation by attempting to impact upon developments

around land agitation. The last chapter will look at the changing outlook of the rural labourer and the conflict in class interests between the tenant farmer and the landless labourer during and after the land war. Additionally, it will address the efforts of farm labourers to organise and the difficulties faced by such efforts in a rural and largely isolated setting. This chapter will also consider the efforts by rural labourers to impact political developments, most notably through their role in organisations such as the Democratic Labour Federation and the Irish Land and Labour Association.

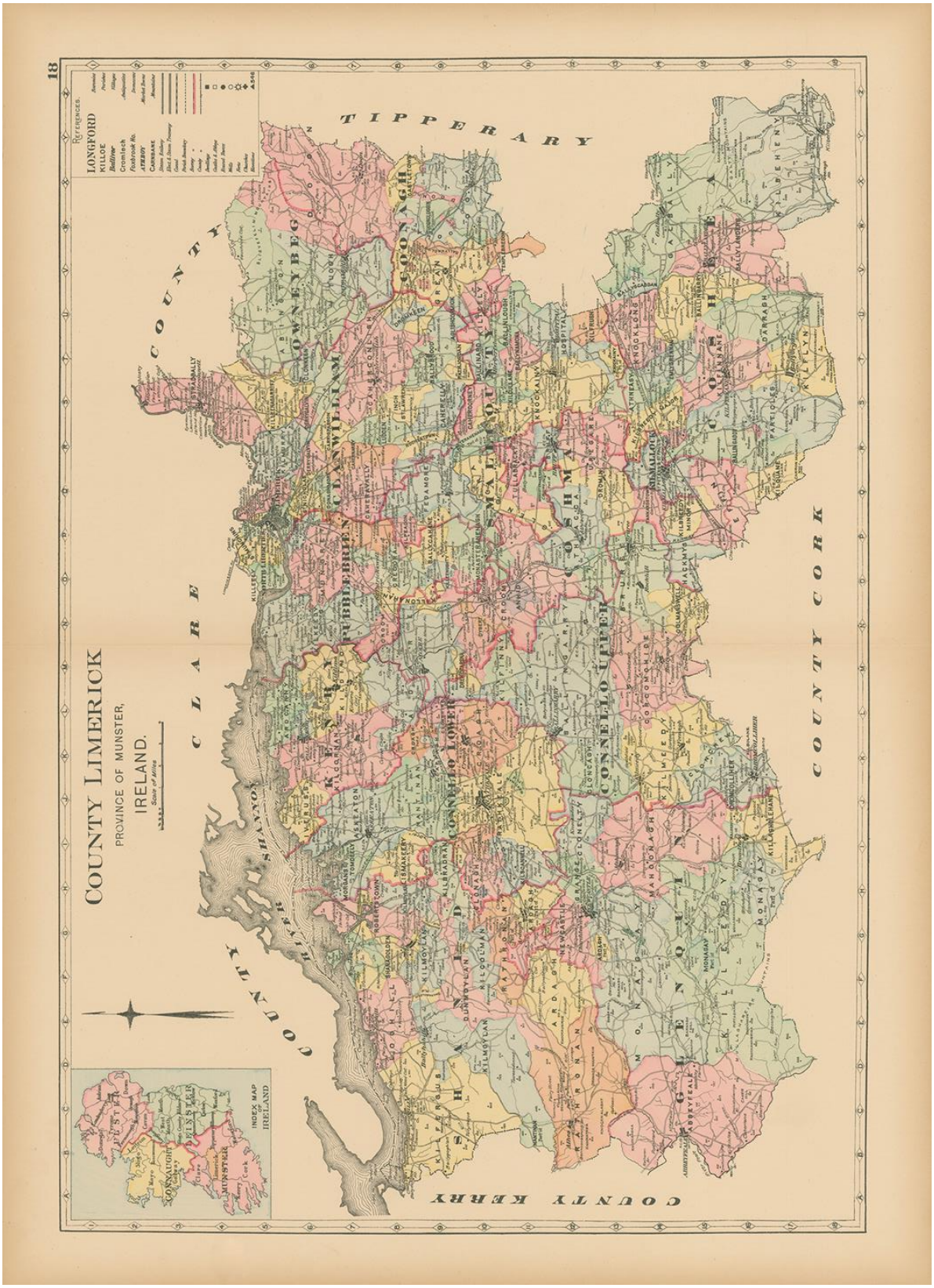
The thesis will look at the nineteenth century in two distinct phases, before and after the famine. The famine was a critical juncture in the changing outlook of the working class, particularly the urban and rural labourers. Specifically, prior to the famine the urban and rural working class tended to act in a clandestine fashion around immediate demands, while in the post-famine period the working-class focus was to shift to open organisation and mass mobilisation.

Though now thirty years old, Emmet O'Connor's book on the labour movement in Waterford marked a noted shift in the writing of local labour history. The focus on trying to understand how labour interacted with other social forces at a local level and what impact, if any, this interaction had in a national sense. It is unfortunate that the historiography of the labour movement is still so lacking in research. The only other substantive literature on nineteenth century local labour history, Cronin's work on Cork, was still almost exclusively focussed on the city's artisans to the exclusion of semi-skilled, unskilled and rural based labour.

This thesis will follow the approach adopted by O'Connor in relation to Waterford, looking at the interaction of Limerick labour with other social forces in the city and county and reviewing what impact these interactions had on a national basis. The thesis will argue that the political, economic and social conditions forced the urban and rural working class to engage in class conflict in order to try and protect and advance living standards against the resistance of the urban elites and the rural landlord and farming classes. It will demonstrate that, at times of severe crisis, the working class were faced with little option but to engage in widespread social unrest, including violence, in an effort to fend off unemployment, abject poverty and starvation.

The thesis will argue that the development of the labour movement in Limerick followed a similar pattern as that in Waterford and in Cork. If anything the class struggle in Limerick was more intense given the corrupt nature of local government and the fact that the Mid-West was

the epicentre for much of the nationalist struggle, both constitutional and militant, during the nineteenth century. It will also attempt to demonstrate that, while the Limerick labour movement was unable to have any significant impact on the Irish nationalist movement during the nineteenth century, this class struggle repeatedly forced the British establishment to engage in repression at the behest of the local elites and forced the nationalist leadership to act on an ongoing basis to prevent the emergence of independent working class organisations, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century.



Map No. 1 – County Limerick (including Baronies) 1900
Source: Memorial Atlas of Ireland (1901)
[http://archives.library.nuigalway.ie/memorial/jpgs/Limerick.jpg]

Chapter One – The urban working class, 1800-1845

Introduction

This chapter will look at the development of trade union organisation among the trades of Limerick in the period between the Act of Union and the famine. It will address the growing divergence in class interests between the master tradesmen and the journeymen tradesmen, including the emergence of a consolidated layer of Catholic tradesmen. In looking at these developments the chapter will consider efforts to organise amongst workers and the rise in industrial conflict, the violent nature of such conflict and the reasons why it adopted such a confrontational character. It will also address the response of the merchant class and the state to these developments.

The content will engage with the ebb and flow of class conflict during this period and look at the political, social and economic developments that impacted on the outlook of the working class and its efforts to organise in trade unions. Finally, the chapter will address situation of the Limerick working class on the eve of the Great Famine, the state of trade union organisation and the difficulties that unions faced as the first half of the nineteenth century came to an end.

The rights of the tradesmen in Limerick to form trade guilds dated from 4 February 1291 when the charter of Edward I given to Limerick stated 'that the citizens of Limerick should have all reasonable guilds as the Burgesses of Bristol had'.[1] All those not resident within the city walls were described as 'foreigners' and their rights restricted.[2] It was the middle of the seventeenth century before these restrictions were relaxed following the introduction of the Act of Explanation in 1665.[3]

By the middle of the eighteenth century not only were Catholic tradesmen excluded from membership of the guilds, they were also forbidden to practice their trades within the city walls and compelled to pay quarterage to the guilds without any of the privileges of membership.[4]

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[1] Patrick Fitzgerald and John James McGregor, *The History, Topography and Antiquities, of the County and City of Limerick*, (Dublin, 1827), p. 393. O'Connor outlines a similar development of the trade guilds in Waterford in Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, (Waterford, 1989), p. xxv, although he does not discuss the impact of the of the quarterage court case in Cork on the trades in Waterford.
[2] John J. Webb, *Municipal Government in Ireland, Medieval & Modern*, (Dublin 1918), p. 52.
[3] Ibid., p. 150.
[4] Robert Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Volume 2, Number 3, (1941), p. 121. Quarterage has been described as a form of medieval insurance that assisted the guilds in fulfilling their obligations. For an outline of the treatment of Catholics by the guilds and the quarterage dispute see: Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the

In 1758 the mayor of Cork imprisoned some Catholic tradesmen for non-payment of quarterage. The tradesmen won a court case and were awarded costs. Resulting from this court case the Catholic tradesmen of Limerick acted, moving out of St. Francis Abbey in great numbers and setting up their businesses in the city proper (the areas under Corporation jurisdiction). The mayor demanded quarterage, but the tradesmen refused to pay it.[5] Two issues came to the fore, firstly, the second class status of Catholics and, secondly the desire to practice a trade without the membership of a guild. Initially Catholics demanded full membership of the guilds but, because this was synonymous with becoming a freeman of the city, to have conceded this would bring about the collapse of Protestant control.[6] Subsequently Catholic tradesmen looked to the right simply to ply their trade without restriction.

Potter stated that by 1778 the issue of quarterage in Limerick had been defeated with Catholic tradesmen able to operate without restriction.[7] Despite this the guilds continued to refuse to admit non-Protestants to their membership. This resulted in the growth of a strong body in opposition to the guilds and was one of the causes of their eventual demise.[8] This coupled with the impact of the industrial revolution accelerated the decline of the guilds. The final straw came when disputes arose between the masters and journeymen over wages and working conditions.[9] By 1810 the guilds were solely concerned with the rights of the masters and by 1833 the Commissioners of Municipal Corporations in Ireland were stating in relation to Limerick: 'There are not…any guilds now in connection with the Corporation'.[10] Boyle suggested that because Catholic tradesmen were excluded from the guilds until 1793, they tended to be more numerous in the provisions and retail trades, rather than in the highly skilled trades.[11]

Prior to 1803, when the British Parliament passed a specific Act dealing with combination in Ireland,[12] the Acts of 1729, 1743 and 1780 passed by the Irish parliament, outlawed

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Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, Volume 8, Number 30 (September, 1952), pp. 91-114.
[5] Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', p. 121.
[6] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick*, p. 261-262.
[7] Ibid., p. 261-262.
[8] Herbert, p. 121.
[9] John W. Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, (Washington, 1988), p. 8.
[10] Herbert, p. 131.
[11] Boyle, p. 20.
[12] Patrick Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1725-1825', *The Irish Jurist*, Volume 14, Number 2 (Winter 1979), p. 355.

combination among workers in Ireland.[13] Park argued that there is no doubt that the combination laws were enforced to some extent in Ireland but described the Acts as being ineffectual.[14] The outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775 led to the Irish Catholic merchant class to demand free trade from the British government which was granted in 1779. Intent on not allowing workers to jeopardise their new found opportunity for profit, the merchants then demanded stricter controls over combinations, leading to the passing of the 1780 Act, which made all combinations illegal and stated as its objective '… to extend throughout this ancient kingdom all the benefits of free trade…'[15] Boyd described the 1780 Act as '… more far reaching than any other labour law then on the statute'.[16] With the passing of the 1780 Act the employers went on the offensive, with Catholic employers making a point of outlining the joint class interests that they had with Protestant business owners in confronting journeymen tradesmen. A strike by journeyman Skinners lasted three month before the workers were forced back to work as a result of starvation.[17] It is also worth noting that the eighteenth century combination laws applied not just to tradesmen, but also to labourers.[18] Clearly the labourers were also engaging in combination at this time.

Clarkson also noted that the 1780 Act signalled the first move away from mercantilism in Ireland, although he does note that this was the result of expediency on behalf of the employers rather than any conscious change in economic policy. Over the following twenty years mercantilism continued to be the mainstay of economic policy in Ireland.[19] This same period saw an expansion of the Irish economy, firstly as a result of the demand for produce as a result of the American War of Independence and later as a result of the conflict between Britain and France in the French Revolutionary period. Rising demand led to increases in wages for workers and well as rising profits for employers.[20] By 1780 Ireland's share of British trade rose to an all-time high of fifteen per cent.[21] Agricultural exports grew considerably during the period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Cereal prices rose by 92% in the thirty-year period from 1780.[22]

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[13] Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1725-1825', p. 344 & 345. Park indicated that an Act outlawing combination was passed in 1726, however, Clarkson indicated 1729 as the year and the 1729 date appears accurate with the legislation being *1729 (3 Geo. 2) c. 14.*
[14] Ibid., p. 346-347.
[15] Ibid., p. 347.
[16] Boyd, *The Rise of Irish Trade Unions, 1729-1970,* (Tralee, 1972), p. 22.
[17] Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland,* p. 47-49.
[18] Ibid., p. 34.
[19] Ibid., p. 50-52.
[20] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 4-5.
[21] Ibid., p. 43
[22] Ibid., p. 28.

Clarkson stated that during the eighteenth century, except for Dublin, combinations were rarely permanent organisations.[23] However, Park pointed out that while specific legislation was introduced to deal with combinations in Dublin in 1777,[24] legislation was also introduced specifically for Cork in 1763 and again in 1771, indicating that permanent or semi-permanent combinations existed in that city also.[25] The British Parliament introduced combination laws in 1799 and 1800, but these Acts did not apply to Ireland. This new Act was to replace the existing Acts that were considered to be inadequate and imposed ore severe penalties than the legislation that applied to Britain.[26] The is no indication that prior to 1800, there existed in Limerick permanent combinations of workers. This, however, was to change as the new century began.

Unlike in Britain where urban workers were part of an expanding economy, from 1815 onwards Irish workers were faced with a contracting or at best a stagnant economy. Regularly, charges were laid against Irish workers that their wage demands, and restrictive practices were responsible for the failures of Irish industry. From the perspective of the emerging Irish capitalist class workers should have been prepared to accept lower wages and poorer working conditions and to submit to the dilution of the skilled workforce through the greater use of apprentices, semi-skilled workers and non-unionised workers.[27] O'Connor outlined that, unlike in Britain, Irish trade unions trying to organise, faced a problem of deindustrialisation in the nineteenth century.[28] Coupled with this was the charge that Irish trade unionists of this period were more than ordinarily addicted to violence and that the decay of Irish industries were attributed to the evil effects of combinations. Boyle addressed this accusation by arguing that Irish workers were deprived of any legal avenue to address their grievances so that it was hardly surprising that they occasionally resorted to violence with deindustrialisation occurring because of the competition from mass production in Britain.[29]

Workers begin to organise

The years between 1792 and 1815 was a period of military conflict in the aftermath of the French Revolution that culminated in the Napoleonic Wars. During this time exports from

[23] Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland,* p. 99.
[24] Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1725-1825', p. 348.
[25] Ibid., p. 350.
[26] Ibid., p. 355.
[27] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 3 & 4.
[28] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. xxii.
[29] Boyle, p. 15 & 16.

Ireland rose by forty percent. Accompanying this the general rise in prices was exceptionally sharp.[30] Prices for farm produce rose more sharply than the general price level with a combination of wartime demand and inflation. Poor harvests of grain and potatoes in 1799 and 1800 resulted in near famine conditions for the labouring classes. At the same time farmers were able to save a rising proportion of their income, reflected by a substantial increase in the size of dowries for marriage within the farming community.[31] Despite the prosperity of the period, grinding poverty continued and a famine in 1800-01 likely contributed to a growing intent to for workers to combine by acting as a reminder of the underlying economic and political inequalities.[32]

1801 saw the first recorded incidents of workers combining in Limerick. On 1 October the porters on the quay protested about the fact that it was 'too much to convey a bag of turf on their shoulders'.[33] During December the *Limerick Chronicle* reported that 'The builders of this city are concerned to find that some evil-disposed persons, mean to introduce rules here in the Sawing Business'.[34]

The first stirrings of industrial conflict among journeymen and labourers were to lead to far more intense class conflict as the decade progressed. Journeymen were looking to preserve their own position rather than to comply with the interests of the master tradesmen. Labourers began to demand set rates of pay and organised both against employers using the large-scale unemployment to try and drive down wages, and against workers willing to work for reduced wages. Coupled with this, the rise in wages for artisans between 1770 and 1810 hard been largely wiped out by the rise in the cost of living.[35] The economic growth generated by the Napoleonic Wars was giving the working classes of Limerick the impetus to fight for better wages and conditions.

Clarkson asserted that combinations of workmen had been illegal in Ireland since the sixteenth century.[36] Throughout the eighteenth-century combinations of workers existed and this can be

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[30] Cullen, *The Economic History of Ireland Since 1660,* p. 100.
[31] Ibid, p. 101.
[32] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 5.
[33] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 October 1800.
[34] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 December 1801.
[35] Ó Gráda, p. 16.
[36] Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland,* p. 33.

attested to by the volume of Acts passed by the Irish Parliament prohibiting combination.[37] Acts were passed in 1727, 1743 and 1780 and in the intervening period amendments were made to try and make the Acts more effective.[38] McGrath contended that the primary influence of the combination laws were their psychological impact,[39] however, if the Acts were such a psychological deterrent then why did the repeatedly need to be passed and amended to make them more effective? O'Connor asserted that the combination laws were no more effective in Waterford than anywhere else.[40] A similar situation can be demonstrated in Dublin and Cork.[41]

The first large-scale strike in Limerick began in early May 1804. By the middle of the month widespread strike action was taking place involving the city's journeymen. The business class responded in a ruthless fashion. The mayor and magistrates were called on 'to inflict heavy and severe punishment' on anyone engaged in combination. In particular, the journeymen carpenters were targeted for being involved in the strike. On 16 May the master carpenters called a meeting in the Exchange 'to consider an effectual means to resist the illegal combination for raising wages'.[42]

On 26 May the 'Master Tailors of the City of Limerick' published a notice in the *Limerick Chronicle* complaining that the journeymen tailors were refusing to work. The notice outlined that the dispute had been ongoing for two years with regular meetings with the magistrates and claimed that the journeymen were among the highest paid tradesmen in the city. It finished by outlining the fact that if anyone gave in to the combinators that such persons would be charged by the magistrates to 'the utmost rigour the Law will allow us to pursue'.[43]

On 30 May four journeymen carpenters were arrested, charged with combination by Sheriff Carroll and subsequently jailed.[44] In November another tradesman, a journeyman shoemaker, John Kean(sic), was tried and sentenced to six months imprisonment 'for an illegal combination with others and turning out with an advance of wages'.[45]

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[37] Patrick Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1727-1825', *Irish Jurist,* Volume 14, Number 2 (Winter 1979), p. 342, & O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 12-14.
[38] Park, p. 345-346.
[39] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 50
[40] O'Connor, p. 12.
[41] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 2-3. Cronin also references combinations of artisans in Cork in the second half of the eighteenth century – see: Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?,* p. 60.
[42] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 May 1804.
[43] *Limerick Chronicle,* 26 May 1804.
[44] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 June 1804.
[45] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 November 1804.

Trade union organisation

The years that followed saw the growth of trade union organisation. O'Connor suggested that the first Trades Council in the country emerged in Cork in 1820. He further contended that Limerick societies mustered as the 'Congregated Trades'[46] from the late 1820s onwards.[47] McGrath claimed that there is no evidence that workers embarked on any city-wide cooperation in 1810 and that the Congregated Trades was formed in 1824.[48] The crest of Limerick Trades Council suggests that a 'Trades Council' was formed in 1810.[49] Certainly by 1812, at the latest, there was a citywide body of workers known as the 'United Trades' representing workers across the city's industries and services.

The best comparable study of the formative years of workers struggle is *A Labour History of Waterford*. As will be seen, there are many similarities in the development of struggle and trade union organisation, but there is also evidence that some divergence did occur over periods of the nineteenth century. O'Connor outlined that some combination violence occurred in Waterford in 1810.[50] In Limerick, violence was a feature of the dispute involving journeymen carpenters in 1805. The violence in this dispute involved extensive damage to a building being constructed by a local contractor who carpenters were demanding a pay increase from and assaults on migrant carpenters for scabbing on the strike.[51]

By 1812 strike activity was a regular occurrence in Limerick and in October a major strike of coopers began for increased wages. The master coopers stated that they were 'determined to put down the spirit of combination which at present exists among the Journeymen of the trade'.[52] The Chamber of Commerce weighed in on the side of the master coopers directing that

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[46] The 'United Trades' emerged in the early 1810s as the first citywide body of craft unions as a growing wave of strike action erupted in the city. The 'United Trades' disintegrated in the early 1820s as the strike wave subsided with defeats and when divisions arose of the scale of violence during strikes. The 'Congregated Trades' seem to have emerged around the time that the Combination Act was passed. It appears to have a had a haphazard existence, drifting in and out of activity, and often being no more than a name associated with its officers. It is also likely that, at times, the master tradesmen exercised influence within the Congregated Trades in the period up to the Great Famine although this is very likely the case. The largely ineffectual and haphazard existence of the Congregated Trades led to it being replaced by a 'Trades Council' in late 1892 or early 1892 and the Limerick United Trades and Labour League (commonly known as the 'Trades Council') was formally launched in October 1893, existing until its dissolution in 1899.
[47] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* (Dublin, 2011), p. 12-13.
[48] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 73.
[49] Frank Prendergast, 'Limerick Council of Trade Unions 1810-2003', in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 1,* (Limerick, 2003), p. 241.
[50] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 15.
[51] Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', p. 130.
[52] Ibid.

'their Master Coopers not to employ any of those journeymen who have turned out…and… to prosecute such of combinators against whom they can substantiate the charge'.[53]

Strike activity continued into the following year and was becoming widespread in the City.[54] Concessions by employers led to a lull in class conflict but the economic depression that began in 1817 led to a renewed upturn in the struggle between capital and labour. The post-war economic downturn began to impact on society. Between 1801 and 1817 the British national debt rose by fifty percent. During the same period the national debt in Ireland rose by five times that amount. This heavy financial burden led to a vast outflow of capital from Ireland which contributed to the crisis.[55] The economic gloom of the late 1810s made the pre-Union and war period seem like a golden age of prosperity.[56]

D'Arcy argued that it was not surprise that skilled workers increasingly sought to organise into trade unions during the economic downturn following the Napoleonic Wars. It was inevitable that attacks on jobs and wages would see stout resistance, with this resistance sometimes involving considerable violence and, in some cases, death. D'Arcy asserted that in the period that followed took on the proportions of a class war similar to what was happening in the countryside.[57] This is in complete contrast to the assertion by McGrath who argued that the violence of the period was strongly influenced by millenarianism and prophecies grounded in pre-industrial folk tradition.[58] Clearly D'Arcy's interpretation has far more validity based on the evidence.

By November 1819 widespread violence during industrial disputes was a common occurrence throughout the county.[59] The level and intensity of strike action continued into 1820. Again, during this time, the evidence suggests that nearly all the tradesmen in Limerick were united in one body.[60] Ongoing violence was a constant feature of industrial conflict with the degree of violence increasing with each passing occurrence. O'Connor recorded similar developments in

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[53] Limerick Chamber of Commerce (LCC) Meeting 9 October 1812, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book May 1807-1813*, p. 340-341, Limerick City Archives.
[54] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 February 1813.
[55] Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923*, p. 289-290.
[56] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, p. 46.
[57] Fergus A. D'Arcy, 'The Irish Trade Union Movement in the Nineteenth Century', in Donal Nevin (ed), *Trade Union Century*, (Dublin, 1994), p. 13.
[58] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 92.
[59] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 November 1819.
[60] T.E. Cliffe Leslie, *Trades Unions and Combination in 1853*, A Paper Read Before The Dublin Statistical Society on Monday, 16 May, 1853, p. 11.

Waterford[61] although it appears to have developed on a more extensive scale with more intense violence in Limerick.

On the night of 10 February 1820, a group describing themselves as the 'United Trades'[62] raided a house belonging to a Mr. Sarsfield, a master cooper. The men were looking for a cooper named Bourke who they claimed was a 'colt'[63] i.e. a non-union worker. Failing to find Bourke, they assaulted his wife, and damaged furniture and broke windows. The group then proceeded to ransack the house of a carpenter named Patrick Neagle in John's Gate.[64]

A month later, in March, a large group of workers attacked several houses in Irishtown and Boherbouy under what the *Chronicle* described as 'the pretence of dictatory laws to Trades people'. Household goods belonging to colts were robbed and several people arrested by the military guard.[65]

Workers in the city and rural labourers began engaging in joint activity against employers and tenant farmers. At the end of April a riot took place in Irishtown and threatening notices were appearing in rural areas in support of striking workers signed with the name of 'Captain Moonlight'.[66] This was followed at the end of May by a large crowd of city labouring classes and rural peasantry parading in a disciplined fashion in support of striking workers in the city.[67]

McGrath put forward the view that the emergence of the United Trades in Limerick was an indication that the artisan population were struggling to establish an identity.[68] He argued that because strikes by the United Trades emerged before the Limerick banking collapse in May 1820, the objectives of the United Trades were not purely economic.[69] This belies the fact that the post-Napoleonic War economic decline had already begun before the banking crisis and in fact was a contributing factor to that crisis. It is clear that the establishment of the United Trades

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[61] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, p. 21.
[62] The self-styled United Trades emerged as an umbrella organisation for journeymen tradesmen. The date of the emergence of the United Trades is not clear, it could have been as early as 1810. It continued in existence during a major strike wave that lasted until 1821.
[63] The term 'colt' was used to describe a worker who was not a member of a trade union. Colts were usually migrant workers who were employed at reduced pay rates.
[64] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 February 1820.
[65] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 March 1820.
[66] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 April 1820.
[67] *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 May 1820.
[68] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 105.
[69] For more information on the banking collapse in 1820 see: Michael Patrick Deegan, *Limerick merchants: a social and economic study of the mercantile and maritime trade in Limerick*, M.A. Thesis, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, (2008), & Rachel Kealy, 'The Munster Banking Crisis', *Limerick Life*, (27 September 2017), pp. 23-25.

was an attempt by journeymen craftsmen to establish some form of citywide union organisation, but it would be incorrect to draw conclusions about their objectives based on the timeline of events.

O'Connor suggested that the main focus of the tradesmen was to limit entry into the trades and that this was more useful than strikes.[70] There is no doubt that this was one focus of the efforts by journeymen to preserve their wages and conditions. However, there is also clear evidence that much of the strike action was also focused on actual wage rates. The master tradesmen hired 'colts' from outside the city in an effort to drive down wages and also to undermine trade union organisation among the journeymen. This led to the main effort of striking workers being placed on preventing the 'colts' from scabbing on strikes.

Cronin went further and argued that the trades were inward looking, conservative and fearful of change, an attitude derived from the artisans' need to defend themselves against outsiders' incursions into the local labour market.[71] However, this assessment regards the trades as one homogenous group whereas, in reality, there were competing class interests in the trades between the masters and the journeymen. Occasionally these class interests aligned, for example, in opposition to cheap imports, but more often than not the conflict over jobs and wages took priority. In contrast, Cliffe Leslie asserted that the journeymen in Limerick did not object to outside labour but sought to ensure that these workers would be brought into the union.[72] Cronin has argued that the exclusion of outside tradesmen was a factor in Cork towards the end of the nineteenth century.[73]

O'Connor asserted that in Dublin and Cork members of one society would engage in acts of violence on behalf of another society to reduce the risk of recognition or conviction.[74] Evidence indicates that this was also a common practice in Limerick. In June 1820 the violence led to the death of Michael O'Shaughnessy, a 'colt' butcher, who died as a result of an attack by a large group of workers. The attack marked a significant escalation of the conflict between the master tradesmen and the journeymen over the employment of colts.[75] Several months later a fisherman

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[70] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 10.
[71] Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?: The politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth Century Cork,* (Cork, 1994), p. 60 & 206.
[72] Cliffe Leslie, *Trades Unions and Combination in 1853,* p. 11.
[73] Cronin, p. 60.
[74] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 12.
[75] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 June 1820.

named Maurice Hartigan surrendered himself to Alderman Watson and was confined to the city jail for the murder of O'Shaughnessy.[76]

As the summer progressed the conflict continued to intensify. On Sunday night, 4 July, a threatening notice was posted on a gate at Mr. Wilson's Nursery on the Roxborough Road demanding 'strangers go home'. Later that night a party of men attacked the house of Michael Carty at the gate of the nursery. The house was pelted by stones and Carty and an assistant retaliated by firing shots at the attacking party. One man named Ryan, who appears to have been an innocent party walking past the location, was wounded during the fracas.[77]

Violence against migrant labour was not confined to the city. On 10 July a riot occurred in Kilmallock, 20 miles south of Limerick city, when a large crowd fought a running battle with 20 policemen.[78] Two days later another riot occurred at Montpelier, 25 miles north of Limerick, and the following morning a party of policemen were attacked near Rathkeale, 20 miles south-west of Limerick,.[79] Throughout the following week trees were cut down blocking roads around the city.[80]

A part resolution was arrived at in the clothing trade on 12 October as a result of a meeting that took place between factory owners, shopkeepers and some journeymen weavers. The meeting resulted in the shopkeepers agreeing 'not to introduce in future any stuffs or other woollen articles for sale into the City from foreign markets, which can be as well wrought therein'.[81]

Evidence demonstrates that local unions were intolerant of any tradesmen who refused to pay the required subscriptions to the local sections of the 'United Trades'. On the night of Wednesday 18 October attacks involving a group of over 200 men took place on the houses of several tradesmen who had not paid their subscriptions. The purpose was to force the smiths and nailers who were attacked to pay a subscription of 18s 9d to 'The United Trades of Smiths in Limerick'. The following day the military raided a pub in Mungret-gate and found a chest

[76] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 March 1821.
[77] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 July 1820.
[78] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 July 1820.
[79] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 July 1820.
[80] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 July 1820.
[81] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 October 1820.

containing 'Rules and Regulations and other documents' that was intended to provide evidence against combinators.[82]

A week later Carew Smyth took up his position as the Recorder[83] in the city. Addressing the Grand Jury, the new judge stated that he was 'aware of the disturbed nature of your city, and of those nocturnal depredations, that disgrace it'. Smyth pledged himself to discharge his duties 'with resolution and impartiality and to inflict the severest punishment, the law allows, upon those persons that shall be convicted of the crimes I allude to'.[84]

The police and military stepped up their efforts to prevent attacks on 'colts' and their employers. On 28 November the shop and house of Ben Russell, a baker in Denmark Street, was attacked by a group of men. The windows were smashed and most of the contents of the shop and house were destroyed. Russell had received several warnings prior to the attack to sack colts from his establishment. A military guard arrived ten minutes after the attack started but refused to act to prevent the attackers ransacking and then systematically demolishing the house because they did not have a City Magistrate or a High constable present.[85]. Later that night a similar attack was carried out on the house of a butcher named Sheahan in Mungret Street. The attacks were attributed to the 'United Trades of the City of Limerick'.[86] A number of the attackers were identified to the magistrates and several high constables and a large detachment of Scots Greys patrolled the streets for some time after to prevent further disturbances.[87]

The following Sunday a full-scale riot broke out in Patrick Street. The incident began in William Street when a party of County Limerick policemen conveying four prisoners to jail were assailed by a group of people. By the time the party reached Patrick Street a policeman opened

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[82] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 October 1820. Michael Halloran, a nailer from Castle Street, was attacked and a forge bellows and other implements belonging to him were smashed. The homes of two smiths, Stephen Bryan and Richard Leonard, were then attacked with Leonard's wife being assaulted and robbed of forty shillings. A military patrol arrived during the attack on Leonard's house. The patrol was subjected to a volley of stones leading to them firing on the crowd. Two smiths, Thomas Cabell and John McDonnell, were arrested and the rest of the attackers ran off. An hour later the same group attacked the house of Thomas Newsom in Cornmarket Row. The group then moved on to attack houses belonging to two chandlers, Edward Parker in Wickham Street and William Joynt in John Street. Along with the two smiths already arrested, a further two smiths named Edward Hall and Patrick Halloran, and a nailer, William Gore, were also jailed for the disturbances.
[83] The Recorder was a magistrate having the highest civil and criminal jurisdiction in the city. Carew Smith replaced Henry D'Esterre who was a cousin of the Verekers, who was removed as Recorder and charged with gross prevarication before a Select Committee of the House of Commons investigating the 1820 General Election in Limerick.
[84] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 October 1820.
[85] Chief Secretary's Office / Registered Papers, *CSO/RP/1820/1097,* National Archive of Ireland. The presence of a magistrate of high constable was necessary to provide a legal basis for the military to act in such situations. Ben Russell's wife died two months later as a consequence of a heart attack she suffered during the attack on her husband's bakery shop.
[86] *CSO/RP/1820/1097.*
[87] *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 November 1820.

fire on the rioters. Two men were wounded and brought to the county hospital for treatment. Order was restored following the arrival of a party of 19th Highlanders from the main guard. After the prisoners were confined to jail, the party of police had to be accompanied by a division of the Scots Greys to the outskirts of the city to prevent further attacks by the rioters.[88]

In discussing the post-1820 class conflict O'Connor suggested that in Waterford class tensions were sharpened over the next decade by continuing economic problems and a rising sectarian consciousness.[89] While there were similar class tensions in Limerick, there is little evidence of a sectarianism being present.

Class Conflict in the 1820s

The conflict between workers and the city's business class and political establishment continued into 1821 with increasing violence and brutality. Conflict also continued in various county towns and villages. On 3 January 1821 the *Limerick Chronicle* reported that an 'immense throng of country people rioted with strong parties of cavalry and infantry'. After some time, the ringleaders were arrested, and the remaining crowds dispersed.[90] During this period rural areas were in the throes of the Rockite rebellion and it is likely that the conflict in rural and urban areas complemented and prompted one another.[91]

Combination violence reached a high point on Monday 15 January 1821. At 8 pm a journeyman tailor named John Roughan was walking home through Denmark Street when he was attacked by a large group of men. During the attack he was hit several times on the head with a butcher's hatchet. A group of tailors were on strike at the time and Roughan had refused to join the strike.[92] Roughan died in agony the following Saturday. Another tailor, John Crowley, was named as his murderer but was never charged.[93]

Two months later Michael McNamara and Michael Woods were brought to the city court to stand trial of the wilful murder of John Roughan. The court heard that Roughan and Woods left the house of a master tailor, William Staunton, shortly before the attack. The father of the

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[88] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 December 1820. The policeman who opened fire was named George Long. The wounded men were Michael Connell and Michael Ryan.
[89] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 21.
[90] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 January 1821.
[91] For the Rockite Rebellion see page 86.
[92] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 January 1821.
[93] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 January 1821.

victim, Michael Roughan, then went into vivid detail about the injuries suffered by his son. Michael Roughan claimed that his son told him that a tailor named McNamara was involved in the attack and Staunton claimed that there was only one tailor named McNamara in Limerick.

The jury retired for two hours after which Michael McNamara was convicted of the murder of John Roughan. McNamara was sentenced to be executed by hanging with the execution to take place the following Saturday. The following day McNamara was given a stay of execution.[94] On 16 May the *Limerick Chronicle* announced that the death sentence handed down to Michael McNamara for the murder of James Roughan was to be commuted to transportation for life.[95] McNamara's solicitor raised doubts about the identification by the victim including pointing out that there were several tailors named McNamara in the city. The Magistrates confirmed the conviction on a vote of seven to five but agreed because of the division among them to commute the sentence to transportation for life.[96]

The death of Roughan, and the ferocity and brutality of the attack on him, provoked a widespread reaction right throughout the city. The master tradesmen of the city issued a notice offering a reward for bring those involved in the killing of Roughan to justice.[97] This was followed by the carpenters in the city withdrawing from the United Trades.[98] The carpenters were later joined by the Slaters Society and the Plasterers Society who also withdrew.[99]

O'Connor contended that it was the difficulty in winning effective public support and the prohibitive cost of strikes that led workers to frequently resort to violence.[100] However, the evidence from Limerick indicates that there was sympathy for the striking workers among large sections of the population of the city. The *Limerick Chronicle* complained 'residents of the parish have stood by as spectators, while some of those illegal acts were performing, without either remonstrating with the operators or in the least degree endeavouring to prevent them'.[101]

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[94] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 March 1821. Michael Woods was acquitted of the charge of murder.
[95] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 May 1821.
[96] Christopher O'Mahony and Valerie Thompson, *Poverty to Promise: The Monteagle Emigrants 1838-1858,* (Darlinghurst, 2010), p. 91-92. McNamara subsequently sent for his wife, Elanor, and both settled in Melbourne where McNamara operated a tailoring and drapery business. Ironically, he was party to a strike and lockout in 1845 when his workers took strike action in a dispute over wages. Several of his workers were jailed and he sacked and locked-out the rest. Several months later the workers returned to work on reduced wages. McNamara received a full pardon in 1849 and subsequently vanished without a trace with the belief that he moved to California.
[97] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 January 1821.
[98] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 January 1821.
[99] Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', p. 130.
[100] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 10.
[101] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 December 1820.

On Tuesday 9 March 1821 a group of tradesmen were acquitted on a charge of combination at the City Sessions. Expressing his displeasure at the decision of the jury to acquit the combinators, the Recorder, Carew Smith, proceeded to make a speech stating 'Combination… has rendered your city a dangerous residence for any Master, Artificer or Manufacturer.[102]

Repeatedly throughout the remainder of the year many workers charged with combination and assault were acquitted.[103] Efforts were also being made to prevent striking workers from holding meetings. At the city sessions on Thursday 18 March, a publican named John Dalton was called before the Recorder to answer a charge 'of having afforded asylum to some of the United Trades'. The Recorder outlined that the magistrates were determined to withdraw the licence of any publican 'who should offend in this particular'.[104]

On Thursday 3 May, James Mulcahy was convicted of combination, riot and assault at the city sessions and sentenced to six months in jail and during that time to be publicly whipped on three occasions. Addressing the defendant, the Recorder again demonstrated his frustration at the inability of the city's authorities to suppress trade union organisation and strike activity in the city and the surrounding countryside, complaining about the fact that the trade unions wanted to create a monopoly that they would control.[105]

The Recorder outlined that like on previous occasions he intended to impose the full rigour of the law against striking workers[106] and proceeded to claim that the strikes in the city had inspired disturbances in rural areas, specifically mentioning actions by rural labourers which, in the Recorder's word imposed on the farmer 'the ruinous burden' of the additional expenses in using the police to suppress the strike action. [107] He finished his rant against the workers in front of him by complaining about the threats issued by union members in forcing non-union workers to join their trade union:

> …you and several others were instigated by a hellish malice against the three brothers, of the name Leonard, for having scornfully disobeyed your

[102] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 March 1821.
[103] *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 March 1821 & 24 March 1821. On 20 March two butchers were convicted for rioting in Mungret Street but a further 19 people were acquitted for the same incident.
[104] *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 March 1821.
[105] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1821.
[106] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1821.
[107] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1821.

> commands to join the Union…your first efforts were directed to the ruin of their trade…Failing in this attempt, you sought to wreak vengeance on their persons and their properties.[108]

By late 1821, with different groups of journeymen tradesmen withdrawing and the strike wave dissipating, the United Trades appeared to disintegrate. The violence of the conflict over the previous period created divisions within the United Trades and a combination of resistance by employers and repression by the local administration saw subsequent strike action becoming more sporadic and confined to individual trades.[109] McGrath contended that after the strike wave of 1819-1821 when subsequent combination occurred among artisans, strikes were peaceful and when violence did occur it tended to be on a small scale, often coinciding with food riots.[110] This was in agreement with the claim by D'Arcy that unions lost any trace of the violence for which they had been noted in the previous two decades, and emerged as 'respectable' backward-looking organisations.[111] While some strike action in Limerick was resolved peacefully, acts of violence were still a part of the majority of strikes involving journeyman tradesmen and in many cases the violence was extensive, including involving riots.

The *Limerick Chronicle* reported on 1 January 1823 that three journeymen coopers were tried for assaulting a fellow cooper for strikebreaking. After two days of deliberation the jury could not agree on a verdict.[112] This again demonstrated the difficulty the authorities had in securing a conviction as a consequence of the sympathy for striking workers among sections of the city's population.

After a period of relative calm there was a further upsurge of strike activity and violence in September 1823. On the night of 13 September, a large group of journeymen tailors scoured the city looking for 'colts'. The journeymen claimed that the 'colts' had been brought in by the master tailors from outside the city to undermine the wages and conditions of tailors. Several

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[108] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 May 1821.
[109] *CSO/RP 1822 2606,* National Archive of Ireland.
[110] John McGrath, 'Organised Labour in Limerick City 1819-1821: Violence and the Struggle for Legitimacy', in Kyle Hughes and Donald M. MacRaild (eds), *Crime, Violence and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century,* (Liverpool, 2017), p. 71-72.
[111] Fergus A. D'Arcy, 'The Trade Unions of Dublin and the Attempted Revival of the Guilds: An Episode in Mid-Nineteenth Century Irish Labour History', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* Volume 101, Number 2 (1971), p. 113.
[112] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 January 1823.

incidents of windows being broken, houses ransacked, and assaults were reported to the police. The attacks appear to have been widespread.[113]

The attacks on the colt tailors prompted further attacks in other trades. On the morning of 22 September, a group of masons went to the North Strand and confronted a number of 'colts' employed on preparatory work for the Bridge Quays.[114] It was claimed that the masons were intent on getting the colts to pay six pence a man in union dues. The employers declared that any man who paid the masons' union would be dismissed from employment.[115]

The Combination Laws

In 1824 the House of Commons repealed the Combination Acts. Among those who campaigned for their repeal were advocates of laissez-faire policies. One of the leading advocates, Thomas Chalmers, argued the availability of unemployed labour would limit the ability of workers to engage in strike action. He outlined how employers in England had consciously recruited Irish workers to break strikes.[116] This attitude was, in part, driven by the realisation that tradesmen could not be denied the right to combination going forward.[117] However the repeal of the previous Acts led to a rash of strikes. As a result the Combination Act of 1825 was passed allowing workers to join a trade union but dramatically restricting the right to strike.[118] The measures introduced in the Combination Act of 1825 were publicised by the *Limerick Chronicle* with the paper arguing that it would lead to a new era of industrial peace.[119] A week later a riot broke out in Irishtown as a group of butchers confronted some colts. The police arrested the leaders of the group only to be attacked by a large crowd that had gathered at Baalsbridge attempting to rescue the prisoners.[120]

O'Connor has shown that by 1825-1826 the masters were on the offensive demanding wage cuts in the conditions of deep recession.[121] Despite the efforts of workers, employers gained the upper hand. The economic depression was biting hard and low-priced imports from Britain were undermining locally produced goods. Mass unemployment led to emigration among

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[113] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 September 1824.
[114] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 September 1824.
[115] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 October 1824.
[116] Thomas Chalmers, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, (New York, 1900), p. 311.
[117] Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1727-1825', p. 356.
[118] A. Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith (eds), *English Historical Documents 1783-1832,* (London, 2000), pp. 758-760.
[119] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 July 1825.
[120] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 August 1825.
[121] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 15.

tradesmen, particularly those in the weaving trade, and a consequential weakening of trade union organisation. By 1826 employers had managed to impose many of the changes that led to the widespread industrial unrest and violence of the previous few years.

O'Connor contended that the conflict generated by the recession confirmed employers in their opposition to trade unionism per se.[122] It could be argued that employers were already determined to oppose trade union organisation, the combination laws of previous centuries are testament to the fact that the wealthy elites used political influence to ensure the implementation and enforcement of legislation against workers organising. If anything, the class conflict of this period demonstrated that employers and the political establishment were having increasing difficulty in preventing workers forming trade unions and taking strike action in support of their interests.

McGrath argued that the expansion of Limerick outside the city' boundaries with the building of Newtown Pery saw a desire by the emerging Catholic merchant class to break the cartels of the old city, including the restrictions of the trade guilds. This would have led to this new business class having little respect for the guild system of old.[123] There is merit in this assertion, but it likely places too much emphasis on the influence the trade guilds had on the running of the city in the previous period.[124]

Some recent comment has suggested that the actions of the United Trades was retrogressive rather than radical in their approach in attempting to re-establish aspects of the guilds.[125] While O'Connor did not argue in relation to Waterford that the approach of the combinators was regressive, he suggested that the early trade unions understood their function to be benefit and protection and that controlling entry to the trade was of vital importance.[126] It is true that the journeymen were attempting to preserve and improve their wages and conditions and it is also true that journeymen were intent on limiting the number of apprentices and preventing the employment of colts. However, the journeymen in Limerick who engaged in combination were excluded from the guilds and were specifically targeting the approach of the master tradesmen who were cutting their wages and working conditions. Park argued that there was no historic

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[122] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 17.
[123] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 61.
[124] See page 138 for an outline of the relationship between the trade guilds and the city's corporation.
[125] John McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick 1820-1900', in William Sheehan and Maura Cronin (eds), *Riotous Assemblies: Rebels, Riots and Revolts in Ireland,* (Cork, 2011), p. 168.
[126] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 31.

continuity between the guilds and the combinations. Indeed he went further in suggesting that as the guilds declined, the combinations came into existence.[127] D'Arcy asserted that in the 1820s the preoccupation of the artisan trade unionists was not with the restoration of rights, but with the establishment and maintenance of their societies, in the course of which they acquired a unique reputation for violence and intimidatory practices.[128] There is evidence to support the assertion that the approach of the journeymen was a class approach based on defending and advancing the interests of journeyman tradesmen rather than an attempt to revert to aspects of the feudal guilds.

In 1853 T.E. Cliffe Leslie delivered an analysis of the emergence of trade unions in Ireland, including their development in Limerick. Cliffe Leslie assessed the emergence of the guilds as the 'necessity…which gave birth to those guilds…was not a recognition of the rights of labour, but simply the necessity…which merchants or manufacturers in towns felt of combining to defend themselves against feudal oppression…'[129] He further argued that the combinations in Limerick in the early 1820s were intent on ensuring that wages rates were preserved and that local union branches had sufficient funds to provide welfare for unemployed and deceased members and their families. According to Cliffe Leslie the objective was not to prevent migrant workers from working in the city, as had been the objective under the guild system, but to ensure that wage rates were maintained for all workers and that migrant workers would join local trade unions. In conclusion he claimed that rising emigration in the 1820s completely undermined the United Trades, removed the best trade union activists and facilitated the defeat of the local trade unions.[130] There is evidence to suggest that unions in Limerick were willing to accept migrant journeymen into membership and didn't object as long as their employment didn't undermine wage rates.

It is not clear how forcefully the new combination laws were enforced in Limerick, it is likely that the defeats of the strikes over the previous period, the collapse of the United Trades and economic difficulties all combined to have a greater impact on class conflict than the attempt by the new laws to regulate trade union activity. There is some evidence to suggest that the new combination laws were enforced in Limerick. The report from Cliffe Leslie indicated that by 1853 'few trades have a body, the decline of the system having arisen from the resistance of

[127] Patrick Park, 'The Combination Acts in Ireland, 1727-1825', p. 341.
[128] D'Arcy, 'The Trade Unions of Dublin and the Attempted Revival of the Guilds', p. 114.
[129] Cliffe Leslie, *Trades Unions and Combination in 1853*, p. 5.
[130] Ibid., p. 11.

employers, and the protection of the police'. The occupations that were noted as continuing to have trade union organisation were the masons, painters, carpenters, slaters, sawyers, and shipwrights, although, apart from the masons, the major employers in Limerick refused to employ members of trade unions.[131] On the other hand McGrath suggested that it is 'nearly possible to omit the Combination laws as a significant influence in shaping the Irish trade union movement, arguing that in Limerick there were few instances where the legislation was used.[132] This statement about the impact of the combination laws is rather sweeping and it would be appropriate not to ignore legislation that controlled the operation of trade unions for nearly fifty years. McGrath is accurate in asserting that combination laws were rarely used in court cases relating to strike action, but the motivation for this was far more likely to be using legislation that imposed the most severe penalty on the perpetrators than any belief about the ineffectiveness of the combination laws.

There is validity to the assertion that the passing and the enforcement of the combination laws undermine the ability of trade unions to organise in Limerick as well as the claim that emigration deprived the Limerick working class of its best union activists. Certainly, the scale of industrial conflict reduced in the period between 1825 and the famine indicates that it likely had some impact. Over the same period the traditional trades faced with competition from mass production in the factories of industrial Britain, coupled with the post-war economic downturn, faced a significant reduction in employment for tradesmen across a range of industries in Limerick, particularly in the textile industry. This inevitably led to the enforced emigration of many tradesmen, likely including some of those responsible for the efforts to organise trade unions during this period.

In the years leading to the abolition of the Combination Act in 1824 the intense industrial conflict that existed in Limerick forged the foundation of the Limerick trade union movement. It was a birth that emerged from class conflict, driven by economic circumstances and marked by violence between the contending classes and those who supported them. The defeat of the United Trades in the 1820s led to a lull in class conflict and it was more than ten years before sections of skilled workers began to regain their confidence and engage in concerted industrial action. Despite the defeats suffered by the Limerick trade union movement the foundations had

[131] Cliffe Leslie, *Trades Unions and Combination in 1853*, p. 11
[132] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 50.

been laid and the organisations of workers were to play a prominent role in the life of the city in the years that followed.

The new Combination Law meant that workers could now meet legally to discuss wages and hours of work and thus present agreed demands to their employers. They were not however, allowed to enforce any limitation on the proportion of apprentices to journeymen, a matter of considerable importance when the employer tried to cut his wage bill by increasing the number of employees still apprenticed or when the trade in question was stagnant or declining as was frequently the case in Ireland. The provisions against violence and intimidation were stringent and the penalties severe. Efforts to obstruct those at work were forbidden, a clause that could be interpreted to make even peaceful picketing well-nigh impossible.[133]

Not surprisingly the main aspect of the conflict centred around the recruitment of non-union workers in order to undermine wages. Repeatedly workers acted against 'colts' and repeatedly the Magistrates, police and employers used the full force of the state against the workers involved. Despite the changes in the law on Combinations workers in Limerick faced many of the same difficulties post-1825 as they had in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The period from 1825 to 1845 was marked with increasing levels of unemployment for workers as the traditional trades were undermined by cheap imports from the industrial heartlands of England and as a result there was a consistent downward pressure on wages. While trade unions were organised and collecting dues on a weekly basis[134] the new law stymied attempts by the unions to enforce wage rates and conditions on employers in the period following the introduction of the Act. Disputes were few and far between and when they did occur the magistrates were on hand with the police or army to suppress strike action.

So successful were the authorities at suppressing strike action in October 1825 the Recorder addressed the Grand Jury sessions commenting on the absence of 'any outrage resulting from combination', he continued:

> It was…especially gratifying and highly creditable to the character and demeanour of the numerous tradesmen and working classes in this City, that

[133] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 36.
[134] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 October 1824.

> no charge of such nature was preferred against any of that useful body of persons.[135]

However, the City Recorder spoke too soon. Within a few days of his comments the working shoemakers and bootmakers of the City embarked on a strike lasting nearly two months until the employers finally conceded their demands.[136] While this strike met with success, it was the exception rather than the rule.

The Decline of the Traditional Trades

The decline of the traditional trades as a result of cheap imports from Britain and the consequential rising unemployment among Limerick's tradesmen created major social issues in the city. This was coupled with an economic recession in 1825-26 that had a more pronounced impact on manufacturing.[137] O'Connor asserted that outside Dublin many textile operatives were reduced to penury after the 1820s.[138] Certainly by 1830 the linen and cotton trade in the Limerick had all but collapsed. Boyle contended that the collapse of the cotton trade in Belfast was the result of a failed strike in 1825 rather than the implementation of the Combination Act.[139] The textile trade was in a long period of decline as a result of the impact of the industrial revolution in Britain.[140]

On Saturday 27 March 1830 a large meeting took place in the city courthouse to discuss relief for the unemployed weavers in the city. A further meeting of the 'Committee for the Relief of the Distressed and Unemployed Weavers', chaired by the Mayor was held in the Linen Hall on Monday 5 April. The meeting heard that there were 630 weavers unemployed in the city.[141] No capital was being invested in the local industry and wages were continually falling.[142] Thirty

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[135] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 October 1825.
[136] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 December 1825.
[137] Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660,* p. 102
[138] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 8.
[139] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 26.
[140] Ibid, & Cullen, p. 144.
[141] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 April 1830.
[142] Gleeson indicates that the following 'home industries' existed in Limerick as some point. He does not date this list but from the industries quoted it appears to be from the 1830s. Listed are as follows - 7 lace factories, 6 brush factories, 14 breweries, 4 malt houses, 3 foundries, ship building and repairing yards, 22 soap and brush factories, 1 glove factory, 1 cotton factory, 1 linen factory, 2 glass houses, 1 starch and blue factory, 1 oil mill, 3 paper mills, 1 muslin factory, 3 bleach greens, 1 woollen mill, 1 cotton mill, 1 marble works, 4 woollen mills, 1 tuckina mills, 2 tanneries, 1 lead mine, 1 silver mine, 7 pipe factories, 2 slate quarries, 2 salt works. Gleeson asserts the total employed at 13,926 although this seems exaggerated given a total population in Limerick in 1841 of 48,391. He also fails to mention the bacon industry. Mattersons had been established in 1816 and Shaws in 1831. The reference to a lead mine and a silver mine suggests that he is including industries outside the city. A lead, silver and zinc mine was established in Oola in 1854. Unfortunately, Gleeson does not provide any reference for his source. Willie W. Gleeson, 'City of Commerce', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 11, Summer 1982), p. 25. Several lead mines operated at different times during the nineteenth century in Co. Clare. For further information, see – Des

years earlier linen weavers earned £1-£2 per week but by 1830 wages had fallen to 3s-5s per week and 200 linen weavers were unemployed.[143]

By the middle of April weavers were emigrating in droves to Manchester and other parts of England. In a one-week period 102 weavers and their families departed the city.[144] While the relief committee had limited success in raising funds to assist the weavers, they contributed to the cost of passage and also redeemed clothing for the weavers and their families from the city's pawnbrokers.[145]

The relief committee was also to appeal to the master weavers to provide employment for the remaining weavers, 'a class of tradesmen…(known)…for peaceable demeanour and good conduct'. Analysing the numbers that remained, the committee ascertained that there were seventeen pensioners in receipt of public funds while 'twenty nine men were in want of slieds, shuttles, treds, harness, of yarn, all of which were procured'. A further 26 weavers 'stood in need of pecuniary aid'. This exhausted the funds of the relief committee that amounted to £321 4s 2d. The entire focus of the committee's work was based on providing relief for the cotton weavers. The worsted weavers[146] and their families, a total of 144 persons, were ignored completely.[147]

In 1836 Messers Buchanan of Glasgow opened a new cotton factory with the intention of hiring a workforce of 200 young girls at low wages rather than the city's weavers.[148] Buchanan was attempting to emulate the success of the previously established lace factories that were prominent in the city by the mid-1830s. The primary motivation was the ability of the textile employers to profit from low wages and long working hours. Buchanan's workers, using

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Cowman, 'The mid-nineteenth century lead mines of County Clare, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 34, 1992), pp. 67-78.

[143] Kieran Devery, 'Trades and Manufacturing in Limerick 1821-1841' in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds) *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 1* (Limerick 2003) p. 47 & *Limerick Evening Post,* 20 April 1830. For information on the establishment of the Linen Industry in Limerick, see – Patrick J. O'Connor, 'The Promotion of a Limerick Linen Industry 1760-1763', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 26, Winter 1989), pp. 18-20.

[144] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 April 1830.

[145] In 1837 there were eleven licenced pawnbrokers in Limerick as well as one in both Newcastle West and Rathkeale. Illegal moneylending was also rampant in the city throughout the nineteenth century. W. McL., 'Pawnbroking in Limerick', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 13, winter 1982), pp. 16-17.

[146] The worsted weavers were woollen weavers using worsted yarn made from long-staple pasture wool and instead of being carded, was washed, gilled and combed, using heated long-tooth metal combs and then oiled and spun. Worsted yarn was used for making high-quality tailored goods such as suits, in contrast to the use of normal wool for knitting garments.

[147] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 May 1830.

[148] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 February 1836.

handlooms to weave cotton cloth, were paid between 2s and 4s a week for a twelve-hour day during summer and a nine-hour day during wintertime.[149]

In the nine-year period from 1826 to 1834 only one major industrial dispute occurred. In October 1833 a strike broke out at the tannery of Eugene O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan swore an affidavit stating that a group of men[150] had threatened his workforce in order to compel his curriers to leave his workplace.[151] O'Callaghan accused Patrick Toomy in the petty sessions of organising a combination. Toomy claimed that O'Callaghan was using tanners at eight shillings a week to do the work of curriers who were paid eighteen shillings a week. The magistrates ordered the men to return to work or face imprisonment. Toomy stated that they would refuse to work if O'Callaghan insisted on labourers doing tradesmen's work and as a result the seven men were sentenced to one month in jail with hard labour.[152]

Boyle stated that 1834 was a year of intense trade union activity throughout Ireland and of sustained counterattacks by employers.[153] Conflict did occur in Limerick, but it was sporadic. The main trades involved in disputes were the carpenters and sawyers with several disputes taking place involving both groups of tradesmen during 1834. In April John Duggan accused two sawyers and three carpenters of combination. The men had refused to work because 'he employed *colt* sawyers'. The five men were dragged before the courts and the magistrates stated, 'we cannot countenance the vile system of combination'.[154] The following week, three workers were accused of breaking into the premises of Mr. Corbett, a cabinetmaker, and destroying a quantity of goods and some tools. The men were charged with combination[155] and Magistrate Vokes committed Wallace and Troy to the city jail.[156] John Troy accused Corbett of turning away an apprentice without cause. Corbett had accused the apprentice of leaving the employment and drinking with the 'Trades Body' which had broken his furniture. The magistrates ordered the indentures of the apprentices in Corbett's to be cancelled.[157] Two of the

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[149] George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine*, (London, 1921), p. 315.
[150] The men were named in the affidavit as Patrick Toomy, Daniel Callaghan, Dan Riordan, John Ryan, John Kelly, Thomas Jackson and William Hammond
[151] *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 October 1833.
[152] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 October 1833.
[153] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 38. Prosecutions for illegal combination involving attempts to limit apprentices, intimidation, conspiracy, strikes in violations of contract, and even membership of a benefit society took place in Londonderry, Lisburn, County Antrim, Dublin, and Cork.
[154] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 April 1834.
[155] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 April 1834.
[156] *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 May 1834.
[157] *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 May 1834.

Illustration No. 1
Arms of Limerick Society of Tanners
(Watercolour painting)
Date: 1820 – 1900
Source: Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum,
[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/38843]

Illustration No. 2
Arms of Limerick Society of United Journeymen Curriers
(Watercolour painting)
Date: 1820 – 1900
Source: Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum,
[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/38882]

three were found guilty of entering Corbett's workshop, smashing furniture and assaulting Corbett and his men receiving sentences of between two weeks and one month.[158]

During August a strike broke out at Edward Egan Coachmakers. Egan charged William Doyle and Michael Finucane with combination. Mr. Monsell, counsel for the defendants, brought witnesses including some of Mr. Egan's workmen who claimed that Egan started a riot. The magistrates asked Egan if he insisted that the men were engaged in combination to which he responded: 'I certainly do look upon it as a combination; besides my men are in dread of work; they have not worked in three days'. On his word the Magistrates stated, 'We have sufficient evidence to warrant a conviction' and sentenced the workers to three months in jail.[159]

O'Connor asserted that in the 1830s societies were small, local and based on a particular trade or skill.[160] However, Cronin outlined that by the 1830s there was a gradual movement from labour organisations on a purely local basis to involvement with a wider network throughout the British Isles. Cronin expanded on this by suggesting that the emergence of O'Connellite movements would have partly influenced this development through the common political interests of trades in different centres,[161] but the evidence for this is tenuous at best and class interests rather than political interests may have been the overriding factor. D'Arcy outlined that British amalgamated trade unions began recruiting Irish members from the 1820s onwards. Iron moulders in Dublin were recruited in 1821, followed by carpenters in 1827. Coach builders in Cork joined in 1834 and bookbinders in 1835.[162]

The Irish Typographical Union was formed in 1836 and encompassed branches in fifteen centres throughout the island, including Limerick. The union went bankrupt in 1841 following a series of disputes.[163] A later revived union joined with typographical societies in England and Scotland in 1844 to form the National Typographical Association.[164] Carpenters appear to have been organised, at least loosely, on an all-Ireland basis in 1824, with the affairs of the society being conducted by a Council of Five, one representative each from Connacht, Munster and

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[158] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 July 1834.
[159] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 August 1834.
[160] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 46.
[161] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 61-62.
[162] Fergus D'Arcy, 'Irish Trade Unions before Congress', *History Ireland,* Volume 2, Number 2 (Summer, 1994), p. 26.
[163] Arthur Marsh & John B. Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Volume 5,* (London, 2006), p. 85. The branches listed included Belfast, Carlow, Castlebar, Clonmel, Cork, Derry, Dublin, Downpatrick, Enniskillen, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Newry, Sligo and Waterford.
[164] Ibid, p. 9. See also: Brian Donnelly, 'Records of The Irish Graphical Society', *Saothar,* Volume 9 (1983), pp. 111-115.

Ulster and two from Leinster. Calico workers in Belfast were described as being part of a 'Northern Ireland District', while glove makers in Dublin and Cork appear to have been part of one organisation.[165] Cronin outlined that a Birmingham based stonemasons had formal links with masons in Cork, Limerick and five other urban centres in Ireland.[166] Clarkson argued that the difficulty in travelling between Britain and Ireland in the pre-Famine period created more of a likelihood that unions would organise on both islands separately[167]

It is known that coach builders in Limerick were in contact with others in the coachbuilding industry in Ireland and Britain. In 1831 there were 48 coach makers in Limerick as well as many others in the industry (including 104 coach painters). The United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers (UKSC) had 600 members in Ireland, including the Limerick workers. Irish workers contributed £130 to their comrades in Britain during a lock-out of coachmakers in Liverpool and Manchester in 1834. One of the leading members of the UKSC was Limerick man Michael Cooneen who was recognised as a union delegate from Dublin. Cooneen had left Limerick in 1833 and spent six months tramping in Britain before returning to Ireland in early 1834. His membership of the UKSC while in Limerick facilitated his ability to find work through the UKSC in Britain.[168]

Disputes broke out during November 1834 involving journeymen tailors and sawyers. Five journeymen tailors were found guilty 'of assaulting a *colt* named Farrell of the same trade'. They were sentenced to a fine of £5 each or two months hard labour.[169] At the same petty sessions William Gibbs made complaints against six sawyers for combination.[170] Over the following 30 months there were ongoing simmering tensions between the masters and the journeymen carpenters and sawyers that occasionally broke out into sporadic disputes or violence between union members and colts.

In May 1837 the journeymen carpenters attempted to go the legal route in an effort to resolve their grievances. Mr Boyce, representing the carpenters, claimed that they 'suffered from the employment of itinerant and irregular workmen'.[171] A summons by 46 unemployed carpenters

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[165] Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland,* p. 109-110.
[166] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 68.
[167] Clarkson, p. 111.
[168] Bernard Reaney, 'A Limerick Coachmaker and Trade Unionist', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 16, Summer 1834), pp. 26-29.
[169] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 November 1834.
[170] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 November 1834.
[171] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 May 1837.

against a number of colts. The carpenters claimed the colts were 'obstructing them in their lawful trade and calling by working under wages and thereby depriving them of their livelihood'. Magistrate Vokes accepted that the carpenters had 'a reasonable case' and suggested that they should 'consider reducing their demands in order that their employers could accommodate them by employing them'. The advocate for the carpenters argued that the city carpenters had more expenses and unlike the country carpenters had no land for growing food and as a result needed higher wages. Vokes then suggested that the carpenters should put an advertisement in the local paper outlining their grievance.[172] Not surprisingly this attempt at following the legal route came to nothing.

The carpenters were to take a leading role in subsequent industrial battles. Within three weeks of the carpenters claim being rejected by the magistrates, three tradesmen were charged with assaulting John Carmody, an employee of Mr. Russell, accusing him of being a colt.[173] The following day a riot broke out at the building site of the new Thomond Bridge as workers attempted to drive non-union labour off the site.[174]

Disputes involving the carpenters erupted again in September 1838. Bernard O'Farrell accused five carpenters of combination. O'Farrell claimed that the men had intimidated carpenters working on a building site belonging to Edward Costelloe on Sir Harry's Mall because they were not 'body men'. O'Farrell's workers stopped working but when he persuaded the men to resume work the defendants broke in through the windows and beat up the carpenters.[175]

At the same time a prolonged and violent strike began between master carpenter John Fogarty and the city's journeymen carpenters. Fogarty appeared repeatedly before the petty sessions to complain about 'the treatment his workmen were receiving from the Trades'. At the beginning of September John Daly, one of the colts working for Fogarty, was assaulted. Daly was from Cork and had travelled to Limerick to take a job, scabbing on the strike at Fogarty's worksite. At the same sitting of the court Fogarty accused five other carpenters 'of combination and refusing to finish the work they were employed for'. He claimed the rest of his men were in fear for their lives. Each of the accused was sentenced to three months in jail.[176]

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[172] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 May 1837.
[173] *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 June 1837.
[174] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 July 1837.
[175] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 September 1838.
[176] *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 & 5 September 1838.

The dispute involving Fogarty expanded to involved other trades and workplaces. John Kidney, a smith, was sentenced to one month in jail or £1 fine for threatening Mr Fogarty's 'bloody colts'. Michael Dee, a carpenter, was accused of assaulting a colt tailor, John Leary for working in the shop of Mr. Duhan in Roches Street.[177] Harrison Lee accused three smiths of combination, The three men walked out of his employment and prevented others from going to work for him. Lee claimed one worker stated 'I'll not get my brains dashed out for you or your work.[178]

The strike at Fogarty's ended after four weeks. Mr. Boyce, representing Fogarty, requested the release of the workers previously jailed to allow them to return to work 'as they had come to a sense of their duty and expressed regret for what occasioned, promising to return to their employment and not to offend again'. The Magistrates agreed to release prisoners.[179]

The judiciary did decide to exact revenge on the carpenters involved in the strike at Fogarty's. A slew of workers were dragged before the courts and charged with various offences relating to the strike. James Browne and Daniel Hughes were sentenced to transportation for seven years for 'compelling tradesmen to quit their lawful employment'.[180] Further strikes were to erupt with Fogarty in 1841, one of which was ultimately to lead to the collapse of the Limerick Board of Trade.[181]

Journeymen Tailors on Strike

Shortly after the end of the carpenters' strike at Fogarty's in October 1838 the journeymen tailors went on strike. The *Chronicle* reported that the tailors had 'turned out for 18s a week wages, but some of the more industrious "colts"…remain at work for 15s a week'. In an effort to break the strike the master tailors sent their cut garments to Dublin to be finished.[182] Within days the strike was having a major effect on the city with the *Chronicle* commenting that if the strike was not broken within a week the master tailors would have to give in to their demands.[183]

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[177] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 September 1838.
[178] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 September 1838.
[179] *Limerick Chronicle,* 26 September 1838.
[180] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 October 1838.
[181] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 March 1841. The Limerick Board of Trade was established in1841 in part based a strategy by Daniel O'Connell to promote native industry. For further information on the Limerick Board of Trade see page 151.
[182] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 October 1838.
[183] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 October 1838.

The journeymen tailors claimed that the masters would not pay more than 2s 6d a day, the strikers demanded 3s a day. The tailors argued that even with the increase they would still be earning 9½d a day less than other tradesmen and less than tailors in Dublin (£1 7s per week), Cork (£1 4s per week) and Waterford (£1 2s 9d per week).[184] The employers responded by claiming they could not compete with master tailors in Limerick who employ non-union labour at lower rates of pay.[185] The journeymen issued a notice stating that the masters were engaged in a combination in an effort to drive down the wages of their workers, citing that Mr. Nairn went back on his word to increase wages.[186] On 21 November after four weeks of strike action, several of the master tailors caved in and offered the journeymen tailors the wage rates they were demanding.[187]

Two of the master tailors, Thomas G. Nairn and Mr. McKenna, made charges of combination against 24 of the strikers. The charges made by the masters included 'combining' to deprive them of executing their trade in this city – compelling them to adopt the regulations of the 'Body' – compelling them to limit the number of apprentices – and leaving their employment. Advocate for the masters, John Boyce, claimed that the journeymen had a 'House of Call' where a book was kept and 'therein the names of all the *freemen* are registered and one pound is the sum paid as an entrance fee to belong to the "Body"'. A total of 80 journeymen tailors were members of this 'Body'. The masters claimed that they were not allowed employ any tailor not a member of the union and were limited to two apprentices each, who had to be sons of the tailors. Trouble had been brewing since McKenna had arrived in Limerick to open a tailor's shop. McKenna was obliged to hire men as dictated by Carthy (who was named as 'clerk' of the Body). In response one Saturday evening McKenna decided to deduct an amount from wages as a result of faults in their work. The other masters followed suit. The following Monday, Carthy went to each establishment to demand return of the deducted pay. When this was refused the journeymen tailors walked out and went on strike.

McKenna brought a tailor named Byrne from Dublin to work in his establishment and agreed to pay him £1 5s a week (or 4s 2d a day and 2s a day more than the rest of the workforce). The union demanded £1 from Byrne before the other tailors would work with him. When the tailors went on strike for a wage of 18s a week Byrne joined the strike despite the fact that he was

[184] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 October 1838.
[185] *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 October 1838.
[186] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 November 1838.
[187] *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 November 1838.

earning more than what was being demanded. McKenna refused to take Byrne back when he agreed to pay the increased wage, but the rest of his workforce refused to return to work unless Byrne was reinstated. The tailors strike lasted four weeks. The magistrates dismissed all charges against the tailors except for three who they decided to use as an example to the others. Carthy was sentenced to three months and Daly and Corry were sentenced to one month each.[188] Within weeks the master tailors were attempting to take back the gains made by the journeymen. A dispute broke out in February 1841 involving some of the city's tailors with the tailors issuing a public statement condemning a master tailor, Richard Hunt, for locking out his workers in an attempt to use non-union workers on lower rates of pay.[189]

One key feature of strikes by artisans in the pre-Famine era was the ability of the craft unions to sustain strike action for a prolonged period. While there is no clear evidence as to how this was achieved it is still possible to outline possible reasons for this. The traditional craft guilds functioned as benevolent societies with considerable funds to subsidise unemployed members and families of deceased members.[190] It is likely that this tradition was carried over into the newly emerging craft unions leading to a situation where significant funds were available for use during strike action. Subscription fees for craft unions tended to be significant in comparison to labourers' unions or the amalgamated general unions that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is also likely that other craft unions not involved in strike action would have made funds available to striking craft workers, either through donations or loans. If members of other unions were willing to engage in acts of violence to further the aims of striking workers, then it would not be a surprise if they also made funds available to maintain strike action. It is also possible that the wider working class helped to sustain strike action. The political establishment in the city were regularly decrying the support given by working class people to strike action.

Economic depression 1839-1842

A severe slump from 1839 to 1842 led to a major downturn in trade union activity. O'Connor stated that this economic decline was now creating concern among all industrial classes in Southern Ireland, and middle class leaders of nationalism began to join trade societies in appeals

[188] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 December 1838.
[189] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 February 1841.
[190] Zygmunt Bauman, *Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement: A Sociological Study*, (Manchester, 1972), p. 22-23.

to promote native industry.[191] There is no evidence from Limerick of new leaders emerging but certainly there was evidence of close collaboration between the leaders of the Congregated Trades and O'Connell.[192] O'Connell had previously installed his so-called Chief Pacificator, Thomas Steele, as President of the Congregated Trades.[193] The Congregated Trades would regularly mobilise their members to parade in support of O'Connell when he visited the city and on occasions organised an elaborate dinner in his honour.[194]

Sporadic outbreaks of industrial unrest did occur but the trades, at least initially, did put effort into supporting efforts to promote native manufacture and O'Connell's Repeal Association. D'Arcy asserted that the tradesmens' unions in Dublin attempted to re-establish the guild system after the reform of local government in 1840, in an effort to exert influence over the new corporations, although this failed to produce anything like the previous position of the feudal guilds.[195] There is no evidence of a similar development in Limerick.

During 1839 disputes did arise involving workers in tobacco factories and shops[196] and apprentices in Richard Russell's ship building company on the North Strand. The apprentices were sentenced to 28 days for absenting themselves from work and as they were being led off to jail, to cheers from those gathered at the court, they shouted out that they were united and would continue to support their union.[197] Occasional violent assaults on colts continued with the Magistrates expressed their exasperation claiming that they were 'fed up of tradesmen promising not to engage in combination and having repeatedly broken their promise'.[198]

The economic recession was biting hard, particularly among the weavers, but affected all sections of the working class. The city's establishment were concerned that the economic crisis would result in widespread social unrest. Along with efforts to support the weavers a meeting was organised to discuss 'the alarming state of distress which…exists amongst the Operatives

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[191] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 19.
[192] For more information on the distinction between the 'United Trades', the 'Congregated Trades' and the 'Trades Council', see page 38.
[193] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 November 1834.
[194] For more details on O'Connell's relationship with the Congregated Trades see page 156.
[195] D'Arcy, 'The Trade Unions of Dublin and the Attempted Revival of the Guilds', p. 114. D'Arcy suggested that the trade unions acquired many of the guild banners because of this attempt in Dublin to engage with the political process.
[196] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 April 1939 & Andy Bielenberg and David Johnson, 'The Production and Consumption of Tobacco in Ireland 1800-1914', *Irish Economic and Social History,* (Volume XXV, 1998) p. 9. 19 out of 291 tobacco manufacturers in the country operated in Limerick.
[197] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 July 1939. The ten apprentices jailed were all Scottish - Duncan MacLachlan, Moses Lawson, George Duncannon, Alexander Morrison, William Lowry, William G. Tuitt, James Chatty, George Edgar, Archibald McArthur and John Robinson.
[198] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 October 1939.

of Limerick' and called for 'the serious consideration of every lover of social order… the prompt adoption of some measures whereby immediate employment may be afforded or other means necessary for their relief'.

The meeting was packed with unemployed tradesmen and labourers. Worried about the potential for rioting at the meeting the Mayor ordered reinforcements for the police. A statement from the Congregated Trades outlined that, as a result of unemployment among tradesmen, 4,521 people now had no source of income for more than two months. On top of this, a large number of tradesmen and their families had emigrated - a total of 365 tradesmen (1,442 people including their families).[199]

During April and May 1841, a total of 21 ships sailed from Limerick to North America, predominantly to Quebec, carrying a total of 3,207 emigrants.[200] In his analysis of emigration from Limerick, Hewson included the manifest from the *Shelmelere*[201] which sailed from Limerick to New York on 26 May 1841. In total 116 passengers travelled on the ship, 53 adult males, 36 adult women and 27 children under eighteen. Of the adult males, 42 were described as 'labourer', ten tradesmen of various descriptions and one 'gentleman'. The women were predominantly described as 'spinster' or 'wife' although a number were classed as 'labourer' or 'servant'.[202]

A new strike wave that erupted in the city during 1842. The petty sessions heard of threats against J.N. Russell and his family for refusing to use unionised workmen in his establishment.[203] Workers at Russell's went on strike over the hiring of colts. The dispute had started at Russell's Mills in Kilrush and quickly spread to Limerick as Russell recruited non-union bakers to break the strike. During one public altercation in the early stages of the strike George Walsh, a sawyer, threatened to burn Russell's eyes out and bring the trades together to fight him. Walsh was arrested and the magistrates set bail for £80.[204]

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[199] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 May 1841. From just eighteen guilds the following number of tradesmen had emigrated in the previous two months – 13 sawyers, 20 carpenters, 10 coachmakers, 30 nailors, 22 slators, 5 millwrights, 33 masons, 19 stonecutters, 14 coopers, 84 weavers, 15 smiths, 19 tailors, 6 ropemakers, 8 broguemakers, 43 cordwainers, 5 painters, 5 tallow chandlers, 14 cabinetmakers.
[200] Michael Hewson, 'Emigration to the 'North American Colonies' from the Port of Limerick in 1841', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 23, 1981), p. 71.
[201] The *Shelmelere* was a barque ship with three masts that sailed between Scotland/Ireland and America/Canada carrying emigrants across the Atlantic. The ship was built in 1835 in Granville, Nova Scotia, and had a gross tonnage of 253 tons. The *Shelmelere* was abandoned by its crew in mid-Atlantic in October 1843.
[202] List of Passengers, *Shelmelere* 26 May 1841, Limerick to Port of New York, quoted in Hewson, p. 73-76.
[203] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 April 1842.
[204] 3 May 1842, 17/9173, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.

On the 14 May 1842, union notices were put up all over the city condemning Russell for attempting to break the strike by using colts and calling for a city-wide boycott of his produce. Rumours circulated that an attack was planned on Russell's stores in the city and that there was also a plan to break a crane used by the Shannon Commissioners on the docks. Magistrate Vokes called out a company of the military who were then stationed in the police barracks. Vokes also called in police from all the county outposts.[205]

During the month of July there was a major escalation in the ongoing disputes. On 20 July about 400 people gathered in New Street intending to attack business premises (including Russell's) employing 'colts'. Windows were smashed and the police were attacked when they appeared.[206]

Over the following week there were several incidents of colts being attacked by masons and sawyers involved in a dispute in Thomas Street. This occurred after Mr. Burgess had discharged a number of masons and hired several non-union workers to replace them. A series of assaults against the colts occurred, with heavy sentences being handed down to those found guilty of the assaults.[207] On 29 July over 300 protesters congregated outside the workplace in Thomas Street and demanded the re-instatement of the sacked workers. The non-union workers were assaulted, and windows were smashed by volleys of stones. As a result of the protest the sacked workers were re-instated.[208]

Thomondgate was the heart of fishing in Limerick. Local fishermen tenanted every cottage on Barrack Lane and it was described as a mini-Claddagh.[209] Boats also fished out of the Brewery and the Strand.[210] July 1839 also saw the beginning of a major and prolonged industrial and legal dispute between fishermen working on the River Shannon and a leading city merchant, Poole Gabbett. Gabbett purchased the lease to the Lax Weir during the summer of 1839. His plan was to maximise his profit by only allowing his own workmen to fish along large stretches of the River Shannon. On 20 July Gabbett, who was also a sitting Magistrate, charged several fishermen with illegally fishing with nets at the Tervoe. The fishermen claimed they were

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[205] 16 May 1842, 17/8805, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.
[206] 21 July 1842, 17/13639, 17/13655, 17/13970, 17/14245, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.
[207] 25 July 1842, 17/13933, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.
[208] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 July 1842.
[209] Claddagh was a traditional fishing village on the edge of Galway city.
[210] Kevin Hannan, 'The District of Thomondgate', *Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 27, (Autumn 1990), p. 5.

entitled to fish there and requested the Recorder to adjudicate on the legality of their claim. The Magistrates agreed to refer the legal case to the Recorder but also fined the fishermen £5 or one month in jail, 'not to be levied for a week provided the fishermen abstain from drawing nets in the river'.[211]

On several other occasions Gabbett attempted to prevent local fishermen from fishing in various parts of the river. The ongoing dispute resulted in the arrest of Thomas Clancy and Thomas Dwyer on 2 July 1840 near the Lax Weir.[212] The legal case began on 26 July 1841 and continued for six days. The jury failed to reach a verdict and a re-trial was ordered.[213] The re-trial was repeatedly postponed, and the magistrates refused to adjudicate on the case pending legal clarification from the Courts of the Queen's Bench.[214]

The dispute escalated significantly during the autumn of 1842. J. Tobin, an employee of Gabbet, was branded a colt and attacked by a group of fishermen on his way home from work. Two men were charged with malicious assault with one being fined £2 or two-months imprisonment.[215]

On 5 April 1843, a lighter belonging to Poole Gabbett was boarded by a number of fishermen near the Abbey and moored at the North Strand. Gabbett had the fishermen arrested for 'riotous assembly and assault' and of combination.[216] The fishermen were fishing in a location where they had traditionally worked. Gabbett had instructed his men to dump large rocks where the men were fishing in order to damage their nets.

When the fishermen came before the petty sessions Gabbett was on the bench. He was furious when they were found not guilty for 'riotous assembly and assault' and demanded they be charged with common assault.[217] The fishermen, outlining that over 100 families were dependent on being able to fish in that area, claimed that Gabbett had acted illegally in dumping

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[211] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 July 1839. The Lax Weir is located in Corbally. For more information on the Lax Weir fisheries see; J.A. Place, 'History of the Lax Weir', *Journal of the Limerick Field Club,* Volume 3, Number 9, (1905), pp. 25-31 and Robert Herbert, 'The Lax Weir and Fishers Stent of Limerick', North Munster Antiquarian Journal, Volume 5, Number 2-3 (Autumn 1946, Spring 1947), pp. 49-61.
[212] *The Fishery Case, A Report of Poole Gabbett V Thomas Clancy and Thomas Dwyer, Tried Before Mr. Justice Ball and a Special Jury at the Limerick Summer Assizes 1841* (Limerick, 1841) p. 3.
[213] Ibid., p. 103.
[214] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 March 1842.
[215] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 September 1842.
[216] 5 April 1843, 17/5905, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin. A 'lighter' is a type of flat-bottomed barge used for transporting goods and/or passengers to and from moored ships.
[217] 15 April 1843, Copy (no reference), *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin.

rocks in the part of the river where they were fishing. They appealed to the Lord Lieutenant to intervene.[218] Several witnesses gave evidence at the court hearing.[219] The fishermen claimed that Gabbett should not be allowed to rule on the case as he was directly involved. However, the other magistrates supported their fellow 'gentleman' and stated that Gabbett behaved appropriately on the Bench.[220]

Ironically, on the same day the following year, 5 April 1844, another attack took place on a boat belonging to Poole Gabbett. A lighter containing 150 bags of flour was travelling down the river from Corbally Mills when it was surrounded by upwards of 40 fishing cots,[221] manned by Strand men near the mouth of the Abbey River. The fishermen attempted to sink the vessel but instead it floated to the shore at the North Strand. A detachment of police prevented it being plundered by several hundred people who had congregated on the riverbank.[222] Eight men were indicted for engaging in a riot including several of those involved in commandeering the lighter the previous year.[223]

Poole Gabbett died in 1845 and the weirs leased by Gabbett passed on to the Malcolmson family.[224] Disputes between local fishermen and the leaseholders over the fishing rights continued throughout most of the rest of the century. The legal case went back and forth to various courts in London without a concrete decision being made. Local fishermen continued to fish at the weirs into the twentieth century.

In September 1843, a major countrywide strike broke out involving coopers in Cork, Limerick and Waterford who were protesting against the importation of butter firkins from England.[225] Coopering as a trade had been under severe pressure for decades. Cronin outlined how the coopers in Cork had seen their income drop by more than 50 per cent over 20 years from the early 1820s.[226] On 10 October the *Chronicle* reported that the coopers in Sligo had joined the strike.[227] A week later in an effort to break the strike 1000 old firkins from Bristol and 350 new ones from Liverpool were landed at Cork for the butter merchants of that city. The firkins had

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[218] 15 April 1843, 17/6689, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin.
[219] 15 April 1843, no reference, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin.
[220] 15 April 1843, 17/7319, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin.
[221] The cot was a small flat-bottomed boat used primarily in the tidal stretches of rivers for fishing salmon.
[222] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 April 1844.
[223] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 July 1844.
[224] Kevin Hannan, 'The District of Corbally', *Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 26, (Autumn 1989), p. 22.
[225] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 September 1843.
[226] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 35
[227] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 October 1843.

to be unloaded under the protection of the police faced with a large mobilisation of coopers.[228] It appears that this measure broke the strike.[229]

Combination by Labourers

O'Connor asserted that Whiteboy gangs remained active among urban and rural labourers but craft unions were the only formally organised voice of the working class at the time.[230] While combination occurred primarily among skilled workers, there are also indications that efforts were made to form trade unions among labourers and strikes did occur throughout the period.[231]

The legal restrictions coupled with the hand-to-mouth existence of labourers and their families made the taking of strike action a difficult option that could result in being sacked or jailed with the subsequent economic consequences for their families. With the economic downturn after the ending of the Napoleonic Wars the situation was made even worse for the labouring classes. Despite this, strike action among labourers did take place. On 18 September 1817 labourers employed at the navigation works at Courtbridge near Kildimo, ten miles west of Limerick, went on strike. All the striking workers were sacked as a result.[232] A week later the strike was continuing with the engineer having employed labourers from outside the locality. Notices had been posted at the gate of the Court Quarry on 20 September warning that the newly employed labourers should be discharged. The striking labourers had widespread support throughout the locality.[233] On 3 October Mr Trench the Secretary to the Director General of Inland Navigation, arrived from Dublin 'to view the works at Courtbridge'. It is also likely that he was looking at solutions to the labourers' strike as there were no further reports following his visit.[234] Breathnach argued that labourers involved in strike action during this period would, if not involved, at least conscious of the activities of agrarian secret societies and that strikes by labourers in this period would have conformed to the militant traditions of both urban and rural workers.[235]

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[228] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 October 1843.
[229] For information on the cooperage trade in Limerick, see – Morgan McCloskey, 'The Coopers of Limerick: A Craft of the Past', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 36, (Winter 1999), pp. 42-44.
[230] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 8.
[231] *State of the Country Papers,* 4 October 1811, SOC 1277/36, National Archives, Dublin & *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 September 1813.
[232] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 September 1817.
[233] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 September 1817.
[234] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 October 1817.
[235] Colm Breathnach, 'Working-class resistance in pre-Famine County Dublin: the Dalkey quarry strikes of the1820s', *Saothar,* Volume 30, (2005), p. 9.

A general union for labourers emerged in Limerick by the middle of 1819. In early October a group of labourers from outside County Limerick were attacked and beaten up for working below the accustomed rate.[236] This general union possibly continued in existence up until the new 1825 Combination Act.[237] Attempts to organise labourers unsurprisingly brought opposition from the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber minutes for the 22 October 1819 stated that they 'do hereby offer a reward of £50 to any person or persons who will prosecute to conviction within two months from this date any three of the offenders or a proportional sum for a lesser number'. The Chamber of Commerce went on to instruct its members not to employ any salter or labourer who had engaged in combination.[238]

Following the decline of the general union the focus of the labouring classes in the city appears to have been on surviving during times of high food prices and the ongoing threat of fever. However, from 1835 there is evidence of growing organisation among labourers and cooperation between labourers and tradesmen during industrial disputes.

Most of the disputes involving labourers were on large works schemes. Many of these work schemes were established in part to provide employment and prevent social unrest resulting from poverty and unemployment. The primary focus of disputes was attempting to prevent migrant workers from undercutting the wages of local labourers and often resulted in confrontations between the two groups.

The first serious dispute involving labourers occurred at works on the embankment at Coonagh in May 1835. The labourers took strike action over the introduction of workmen from other parts of the country on lower rates of pay and demand that local labour should be employed at the agreed rates. As the potential for a conflict between local and migrant workers grew, a squadron of dragoons was dispatched to prevent a confrontation between the two bodies of men. The striking workers succeeded in maintaining their wages and conditions.[239]

Threatening notices were regularly posted warning employers to pay what was accepted as the normal rate and warning workers not to work at lower rates of pay. On 16 June 1836, a notice was left on the new Barrington's Bridge threatening any person who should work for less than

[236] *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 October 1819.
[237] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 33.
[238] LCC Meeting 22 October 1819, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820*, p. 303-304.
[239] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 May 1835.

1s a day with death. The following day between 40 and 50 labourers refused to work unless they got an increase in wages. Michael Fitzgerald, the strike leader, was arrested and held to bail for having used threatening language towards an overseer.[240]

Another regular form of protest involving labourers was the digging up of ditches that workers had previously completed. When scab labour was used to complete works the strikers would arrive at night and undo all the work that had been carried out. In other instances, the digging up of ditches would occur after a contractor had sacked some of his workers. On the night of 8 August 1836, a large group of men levelled 24 perches of a ditch at Coonagh. This protest was in response to the contractor discharging some of the labourers the previous day.[241]

Unemployment was a constant concern for labourers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century leading to occasional protests. On 6 June 1837 more than 300 labourers demonstrated against unemployment in Limerick city centre.[242] The protest resulted in little action. Three years later, on Thursday 4 June 1840, an estimated 400 labourers protested at the Shannon Navigation Works at Plassey demanding work at 1s 6d per day. The protestors were confronted by a detachment of lancers headed by the mayor. Later that day another confrontation between the protestors and a detachment of troops occurred at Clare Street as the demonstrators returned to the city. This protest was to be a precursor for widespread food rioting that was to occur over the following days.[243] The last major protest involving unemployed labourers before the famine occurred on 20 November 1845 when over 500 labourers staged a protest on the Waterford/Limerick Railway works demanding employment from the contractor, W.H. Owen. Tensions continued to be high around the city during the evening and into the night with 100 extra police drafted in to keep the peace.[244]

Like tradesmen, labourers took direct action against workers who broke strikes or took jobs at lower than accepted rates of pay. On 2 January 1839, several labourers' houses at Coonagh were visited and the occupants told not to work under the stated rate. The labourers were working for Mr. Leyton repairing a bank on the Shannon for 10d per day instead of 1s. They

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[240] 22 June 1836, 17/70, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin. Threatening notices were also posted in 1839 – see: 13 June 1839, 17/4319 & 15 June 1839, 17/4366, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[241] 13 August 1836, 17/102, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[242] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 June 1837.
[243] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 June 1840.
[244] 22 November 1845, 17/23313, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1843,* National Archives, Dublin.

were revisited again on the night of 4 January. The threat worked as when the victimised labourers were brought before the magistrate at the Petty Sessions, they refused to provide any further information about who had intimidated them.[245]

Similar problems arose when the magistrates attempted to take legal action against striking workers who assaulted their supervisors or employers. During August 1841, a dispute arose involving labourers at Arthur's Ferry where 250 workers employed. The labourers were earning 14s a week when a flood broke through a dam where the work was in progress. The men demanded that they be paid at a daily rate until the repair work was completed. During the dispute, the works inspector was assaulted when he threatened to sack the workers unless they returned to work. The Commissioners offered a reward for information leading to the conviction of the attacker but once again attempts to find evidence of the assault failed.[246]

Strike action by labourers at this time tended to be effective, regularly forcing concessions from employers. The intimidation of scab labour served a purpose by ensuring the success of the strike and that cases against labourers in court would fail for lack of evidence.

Conclusion

The period from 1800 to 1845 saw the emergence of union organisation among the journeymen tradesmen in Limerick. By 1812 they had organised on a city-wide basis as the United Trades. After initial sporadic strike action, the journeymen embarked on a major wave of strikes from late 1819 until the middle of 1821. The strikes were often violent and targeted both employers and non-union workers accused on scabbing on disputes or working under agreed wage rates.

The ferocity of the violence during these disputes ultimately led to the brutal killing of John Roughan in 1821. The death of Roughan and particular the brutal nature of the attack caused a major schism among the United Trades with several groups of workers leaving the body. Coupled with increased repression and defeats, this caused demise of the United Trades as an effective force.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century union organisation was more haphazard and industrial action was more sporadic. It followed similar patterns to earlier disputes but was now

[245] 16 January 1839, 17/14, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839*, National Archives, Dublin.
[246] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 August 1841.

being played out in a backdrop of economic recession, declining living standards and mass unemployment, particularly in the textile industry. The traditional crafts could not compete with the mass production of the industrial revolution.

While some strikes did take place, they were largely confined to the construction sector where workers had managed to maintain employment and living standards and the strikes had mixed results in terms of outcomes. The lot of the working class in Limerick was to change dramatically with the onset of the famine after 1845.

It is difficult to assess the impact of the repeal of the combination laws in Limerick. By the time they were repealed the industrial struggles that took place under the umbrella of the United Trades had been defeated. The master tradesmen moved quickly when the laws were repealed to establish the Congregated Trades under their control in an effort to try and mitigate any potential upsurge in industrial struggle. It is unlikely this was necessary as the balance of forces in Limerick had shifted decisively in favour of the employers.

O'Connor outlined that in the period after the introduction of the Combination Act in 1825, craft unions turned to using public pressure and moral force to achieve their objectives.[247] There is no doubt that this did develop in Limerick. The passing of the Combination Act allowed trade unions to organise openly. This facilitated the use of public pressure in a legal fashion and saw an increase in appeals to the general populace to support craft workers during disputes with employers. McGrath went further and claimed that the artisans of Limerick abandoned illegality to follow Daniel O'Connell for 'the good of their country and their creed'.[248] The relationship between O'Connell and the Limerick craft workers is addressed in the next chapter but there is little evidence for this claim by McGrath.

Despite the emerging legality of trade unions, this did not mean that violence was no longer part of industrial disputes. In April 1834, the workshop of a cabinetmaker named Corbett was damaged by striking workers and the following August fighting broke out during a dispute at Egan Coachmakers. In November 1834 five journeymen tailors were jailed for assaulting a colt and over the following months several violent assaults took place between striking carpenters and sawyers and colts scabbing on disputes. Further outbreaks of violence occurred during

[247] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 21.
[248] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 109.

disputes in 1837, 1838, 1840 and 1841.[249] While public pressure and moral force was regularly used, violence was always seen as an option when other tactics had failed, and even on occasions in combination with one another.

Finally, it is necessary to reference the inquiry of a select committee of the House of Commons into combination of workmen that was published in 1838.[250] Surprisingly there is no reference to Limerick in either report, with the situation only being addressed in Belfast, Cork, Drogheda, Dublin and Waterford.

[249] See pages 57-62
[250] *First Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix,* House of Commons Papers, 1837-1838, (448), viii.1, & *Second Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix, and index,* House of Commons Papers, 1837-1838, (646), viii.315.

Chapter Two - Conflict in Rural Limerick, 1800-1845

Introduction

This chapter will look at the nature of clandestine violence in rural Limerick from the Act of Union to the famine. Rural violence occurred in stages and the different periods of conflict will be considered and placed in the wider context of the period. The conflict occurred in three distinct phases. The first, from 1806 to 1816 involved the Caravats and the Shanavests, the second was the Rockite Rebellion from its inception around Newcastle West in 1819 intensely until 1823 and then sporadically for another two years afterwards and finally the Terry Alt movement that emerged in 1831. The character and composition of the various groups engaged in such conflict will be investigated. It will also be necessary to review the impact of sectarianism and if it was a factor in rural violence during this period. This chapter will also review what life was like for the rural poor in the first half of nineteenth century rural Limerick.

Ó Gráda argued that trends in living standards in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century remain elusive[1] but that rural labourers had a wholesome diet (based on potatoes), plentiful, inexpensive fuel in the form of turf, and that these advantages compensated for tattered clothing and rudimentary housing in the period up to the Famine.[2] He goes on to suggest that the labouring poor were better fed, had better heating and were healthier than the bleak, doom-laden picture often portrayed in literature.[3]

Of course, this picture presented by Ó Gráda has to be considered in relative terms. Life expectancy in the pre-Famine era was less than forty years of age.[4] While turf was available for heating, the rudimentary housing Ó Gráda was referencing were largely mud cabins with dirt floors and widespread dampness, lacking proper bedding, household furniture or kitchen utensils.[5] The working hours were long and while the diet was high in calorie content it is questionable how nutritious it was. He could well have been correct that the lot of the labouring poor may not have been 'doom-laden', but it was not too far off it.

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[1] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 13.
[2] Ibid., p. 14.
[3] Ibid., p. 23.
[4] Phelim P. Boyle and Cormac O Grada, 'Fertility Trends, Excess Mortality, and the Great Irish Famine', *Demography,* Volume 23, Number 4 (November 1986), p. 561.
[5] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 15.

Bielenberg and O'Hagan contended that there was a clear dichotomy in the quality of the diet between the top forty percent of the population and the impoverished bottom third of the population, with an intermediate group consuming a wider range of foodstuffs than the more monotonous diet of the poor. Even by the mid-1830s the poor were spending up to seventy-one percent of their household expenditure on food.[6] They do not distinguish which social groups they were talking about except for the reference to the fact that those engaged in commercial farming were enjoying some of the benefits of English mass production by purchasing items such as fine English ceramics.[7] It could be reasonably suggested that the impoverished section were the rural and urban labourers, the middle group being the urban artisans, and smaller tenant farmers and the top groups comprising of larger farmers, master craftsmen, urban and rural merchants and the landed and urban elites.

Ó Gráda provided another example of increasing prosperity, citing the increase in school enrolments in the pre-Famine period as demonstrating increased purchasing power within society.[8] However, he fails to identify which social classes were using their increased purchasing power to provide education for their children. In all likelihood this increased enrolment came from the farming class who were prospering as a result of the wartime boom in the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century.

Landlords and tenant farmers were regarded as surplus maximisers and that research has shown that landlords and tenant farmers had more in common that the traditionally portrayed picture with a stereotyped landlord. The main difference was that landlords were wholesalers rather than retailers of the land, knowing or caring little for the operation of the individual farm.[9] While belonging to different social classes, the landlord and the tenant farmer shared similar class interests. Beginning in 1813 the export demand for salted beef began to decline but it was more than compensated for by the increase in live cattle exports. The decline in pork exports were more than made up for with exports of bacon, ham and live pigs and there was a gradual rise in butter exports up to the Famine, all to the benefit of the farmer.[10] While evictions were common before the Famine they were just as likely to be the work of farmers evicting labourers

[6] Andy Bielenberg & John O'Hagan, 'Consumption and Living conditions, 1750-2016', in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland,* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 199.
[7] Ibid., p. 198.
[8] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 81.
[9] Ibid., p. 29-30.
[10] Ibid., p. 161.

as landlords evicting tenant farmers[11] and the more efficient landlords tended to eschew short term predatory behaviour, focusing on only evicting the lazy, incompetent tenant.[12]

Irish farmers fared well a considerable growth in agricultural exports during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.[13] During this period agriculture was highly commercialised and monetised. Rural labourers tended to be paid in kind, through access to land, with the rent being paid to farmers in labour dues. Migrant labourers were normally paid in money.[14] These contrasts contributed to the tensions between the tenant farmer and the landless labourer.

The Rural Labourer

Ó Gráda accepted that comprehensive continuous data on wage levels is lacking but did reference other studies that he interpreted as showing that ruled out any sharp fall in nominal wages during this period.[15] He used this example to demonstrate the lot of a landless labourer making the following assumptions:

> The labourer's average weekly income, net of rent, was 4s, leaving the labourer with a net yearly income of £11.
>
> £1 would be spent on purchasing fuel
> £6 for purchasing potatoes
> Leaving £4 for sundries such as clothing and schooling.

He also suggested that this income would have been supplemented in some areas by income from spinning and weaving, fishing or seasonal migration to Britain.[16]

While there is a lack of significant data available in relation to the wages of an agricultural labourer in Limerick, one comprehensive and detailed example does exist for comparison purposes. A partially complete diary from a tenant farmer, possibly named Halvey, from Ballybrown, five miles to the west of Limerick city, spanning the period between 1809 and 1853 gives an insight into the lot of the rural poor. The diary contained detailed information on wage rates for farm labourers and servant boys and girls who worked on the farm. It shows that

[11] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, p. 122.
[12] Ibid., p. 29.
[13] Ibid., p. 28.
[14] Ibid., p. 41.
[15] Ibid., p. 83.
[16] Ibid., p. 95.

over the 44-year period up to 60 different women worked as servants on the farm.[17] We do not know the status of this farmer or the size of the farm, but the information included suggests that he was relatively prosperous.

A labourer named John Keane worked on the farm from 1812 until his death in 1817. In 1812 he worked 237 days at eight pence a day, receiving a yearly total of £7 18s. Out of this he rented a garden of three roods, ten and a half perches[18] from his employer at a cost of £5 11s 4d. He paid the farmer £1 19s in order to graze three sheep on the farmer's land and he paid 11s 4½d for a cottage and permission to keep geese and pigs. After he had paid these basic expenses, he owed his employer 3s 8½d. Keane continued to earn the same wages and had the same expenses for subsequent years. He would sell his own livestock to make up the difference and purchase other necessities. For example, in 1814 he was obliged to pay the farmer £2 3s 7d for his supply of milk and butter an expense he could recoup by selling a pig. When John Keane died in 1817 the farmer took the cost of his funeral expenses out of his wages, including providing whiskey to the mourners and payment to the priest to celebrate mass.[19] The diary shows that a house was built for John Keane in 1812. Two masons where paid to build the cottage and spent a total between the two of them of thirteen days on the construction. Other farm labourers were also employed, but on a more sporadic basis.[20]

This evidence would contradict many of the assumptions made by Ó Gráda in his example cited above. While Keane would have had a significant plot of land to grow potatoes, he was reliant on selling his own small quantities of livestock to cover his yearly expenses. His income was insufficient for any of the sundries outlined by Ó Gráda, or even to cover the basic expenses that Ó Gráda outlined.

The relative stability of employment for farm labourers up to 1815 led to increased marriage rates and a rising population. Labourers married young and had large families. This continued even after the economic downturn in the post-Napoleonic era. Feeley quotes Fr. Fitzgerald's comments to the Poor Law Commission that in Askeaton, 15 miles west of Limerick, it was

[17] Extracts from Incomplete Farm Diary, quoted in John Sheehan, *A Corner of Limerick,* (Limerick, 1989), p. 54.
[18] There are four roods in an acre and forty perches in a rood. The area rented by John Keane amounts to just over three-quarters of an acre.
[19] Sheehan, *A Corner of Limerick,* p. 49-50.
[20] Ibid., p. 276-289.

rare to find an old maid or bachelor among the labourers but not among the farmers, because the labourers ‘choose their own wives’ while 'the farmers' marriages are marriages of interest'.[21]

Subsequently Patrick Keane and then John Keane worked as labourers on this farm. Both were likely sons of the deceased man, and John Keane remained in employment for more than 30 years at this location.[22] His rate of pay throughout this entire period was 6½d per day, a near 20 per cent wage cut on what his father earned. Like his father, on a yearly basis John Keane would end up owing the farmer money for the rent of his garden and house. The number of days the labourer worked varied from an average of 227 days per year between 1824 and 1833, up to 281 days between 1834 and 1843 and then 288 days from 1844 to 1853.[23] Unlike the vast majority of farm labourers during this period, John Keane had stable employment on the same farm and survived the famine without any apparent undue distress.

There is also a record of the payment to servants. The first servant girl named in the diary is Margaret Cuddihy who began working for the farmer in 1810 and by mid-1813 was earning 13s per quarter (£2 12s per year) plus room and board. She continued to earn this wage until the beginning of 1816 when it was cut to 11s 4½d per quarter (a loss of 6s 6d per year – a cut of 12.5 per cent). Margaret fell sick of fever in November 1817 and did not receive any pay until she resumed work the following January. She died of fever on 8 March 1819 and the £3 5s 9½d she was due in unpaid wages went to pay for a more elaborate funeral than that received by John Keane, including the hire of a hearse for 13s 6d.[24]

As with John Keane, these entries give an insight into the lives of rural workers in the pre-famine period and their dependence on the relationship that they had with their employer. The interaction and negotiation for work, house, land and animals was ongoing and involved in a sphere that Donnelly described as based essentially on the exchange of land for work.[25] This interaction was to exist until after the famine and was to also provide the catalyst for much of the rural conflict of the period. The distrust and acrimony outlined by Donnelly in relation to Cork is mirrored in the relationship between the rural poor and tenant farmers in Limerick.[26]

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[21] Pat Feeley, ‘Servant boys and girls in Co. Limerick’, *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 1 December 1979), p. 32.
[22] Patrick Keane worked on the farm from 1817 to 1824 and John Keane from 1824 to at least 1853.
[23] Sheehan, p. 51-52.
[24] Sheehan, *A Corner of Limerick,* p. 55-57.
[25] James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Land and People of Nineteenth Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question,* (London, 1975), p. 16. On the evolution of the farm labourer in Limerick during the nineteenth century, see – Pat Feeley, ‘The Agricultural Labourer in County Limerick’, *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 40, (Summer 2004), pp. 35-41.
[26] Donnelly, 17-25.

What Donnelly did not address in this work is the conflict between these social classes that became the focus of attention for the authorities in this period.[27]

Caravats and Shanavests

Sporadic rural violence continued in County Limerick in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion. The primary focus of the violence was conflict between landless labourers and cottiers on one side and tenant farmers on the other over the price of provisions, the level of rent for quarter-ground and wage rates for labourers. Night-time meetings were commonplace. Widespread assaults took place in rural areas 'in order to fix an arbitrary and inadequate Price on the Necessities of Life' with these assaults often ending in murder.[28] The Judge Advocate in the County of Limerick, Ormsby, complained that because the unrest targeted the 'middling and lower ranks' rather than the 'upper ranks and the Gentry' there was little impetus to act to suppress the unrest. Ormsby complained that the farmers were being forced to sell provisions at one third the market price.[29] Similar evidence was given by Bloomfield, a landlord near Newport, ten miles east of Limerick on the Limerick/Tipperary border, who claimed that some of his tenant farmers who purchased produce at a high price in the morning were being forced to sell it at a lower price in the evening.[30]

At the beginning of February 1805, the House of Commons debated the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland in response to ongoing agrarian disturbances. Dr. Duigenan, who was later appointed Privy Counsellor of Ireland, responded to the debate claiming that while the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Waterford, Carlow, Tipperary and Limerick had reduced the incidents of outrage, it had not eliminated them and that nocturnal meetings were frequent in County Limerick.[31] Beckett noted that the British government, just like the previous Irish one, were much more active in dealing with the symptoms of the agrarian disturbances, rather than the causes, and government legislation was directed to the suppression of agrarian outrages rather than the amelioration of the conditions that produced it.[32]

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[27] Donnelly does address this conflict in James S. Donnelly, Jr., *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* (Wisconsin, 2009).
[28] *Second Report from the Committee of Secrecy,* House of Lords Sessional Papers, 1801, (001), p. 20.
[29] Ibid., p. 46.
[30] Ibid., p. 50.
[31] *House of Commons Debates, 15 February 1805, Volume 3, cc522-34.*
[32] Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923,* p. 294.

As 1805 progressed a significant increase in the reports of rural violence and robberies occurred, including mail robberies that resulted in large rewards being offered for information.[33] Violence escalated with the emergence initially of the Caravats in 1806 and then subsequently their rivals the Shanavests. The Caravat/Shanavest conflict seriously disrupted large areas of Waterford, Kilkenny, Cork, Tipperary and Limerick for a number of years.[34] Feeley clearly demonstrates that clandestine groups, self-identified as Caravats and Shanavests, operated in County Limerick and north Tipperary during this period. From at least 1809, if not earlier, both factions were operating around Pallas, Kilteely, Knocklong and Caherchonlish in the eastern part of County Limerick, as well as Newport in north Tipperary, 15 miles east of Limerick city. Individual families were readily identified as belonging to the factions. The Blakes were known as Caravats and the Quaids as Shanavests in east Limerick, while the Murnanes operated as Caravats in the area around Newport in opposition to the Coffeys. Feeley noted that the Quaids were known to be well-off farmers. Similar examples exist from around Athea and Abbeyfeale in west Limerick.[35]

A report on the trial in 1810 of several Caravats charged with a variety of offences outlined the nature of the outrages. During the course of his opening comments, the Solicitor General outlined that the conflict between the Caravats and the Shanavests had stretched through the western part of Limerick county close to the banks of the River Shannon and into Kerry and that the eastern part of the county remained, at that time, partially disturbed. The hope of the British authorities is that the punishment meted out to the defendants would act as a deterrent to further outrages.[36]

The Caravats comprised mainly of agricultural labourers and cottiers[37] and appear to have been motivated by disputes over access to sub-tenancies controlled by the larger farmers and sought by the landless peasants so they could grow potatoes. Over the following two years, in response, the farmers established the Shanavests. Despite being condemned by the Catholic clergy both groups continued to grow. The conflict between the two groups was unusually violent, even by

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[33] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 March 1805.
[34] Paul E.W. Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in East Munster 1802-1811', in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds) *Irish Peasants Violence and Political Unread 1780-1914*, (Wisconsin, 1986), p. 66.
[35] Feeley, 'The Agricultural Labourer in County Limerick', p. 36
[36] Randall Kiernan (compiler), *A Report of the Trials of the Caravats and the Shanavests for the Special Commission for Several Counties of Tipperary, Waterford and Kilkenny*, (Dublin, 1811), p. 11-12.
[37] Edmund Burke (Ed.), *The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics and Literature for the Year 1811*, (London, 1825), p. 21.

Irish standards[38] with both groups operating in an extremely clandestine fashion.[39] O'Connor described the different factions in class terms with the Caravats defining their message as the unity of the poor against the 'middle class', while the Shanavests invoked the vestiges of 1798 nationalism to forge their class unity and legitimate their counter-terror against the Caravats.[40]

O'Connor contended that the Caravats demonstrated a highly class-conscious version of Whiteboyism.[41] This may be overstating the nature of the conflict but there is no denying the class nature of the conflict. Roberts argued that the Caravats were a primitive syndicalist movement with an intense hostility towards the middle class as a result of a heightened class consciousness.[42] The assertion that the Caravats displayed a scathing contempt for the greed of strong farmers and were willing to take up any grievance of the poor[43] is consistent with the evidence from Limerick. The fall-out of this conflict was to become the background for much of the common faction fighting in County Limerick in the later part of the century.

In response to the emergence of the Caravats an Insurrection Act was introduced in the House of Commons on 9 July 1807 by Sir Arthur Wellesley, with a special view to the disturbances in Limerick.[44] Much of the conflict originated in the extreme poverty that existed among the landless labourers and the cottiers. Commenting on the poverty in rural Limerick, Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr. John Milner, contrasted the fertility of the rich soil with the wretchedness of the labourers' cabins, clothes and food, suggesting that this could be considered the cause of the disturbances that prevailed.[45] The impact of this poverty in creating these disturbances was confirmed by Wellesley in a letter to Brigadier General Lee in Limerick on 7 July 1808. Criticising the local military for not taking appropriate action to quell the disturbances, Wellesley commented:

> It is possible that grievances may exist in the County of Limerick; provisions may be too dear, or too high a rent may be demanded for land, and there may

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[38] Ted Margadant, 'Commentary on Charles Tilly's "Social Movements"', *Theory and Society*, Volume 27, Number 4, (August 1998), p. 485-486.
[39] Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in East Munster 1802-1811', p. 94.
[40] Emmet O'Connor, 'Labour and Politics, 1830-1945: Colonisation and Mental Colonisation', in Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945,* (London, 2005) p. 41.
[41] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 24.
[42] Roberts, p. 65-66.
[43] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 25.
[44] *House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1807,* (Hansard, vol 9 cc751-2), and G. Locker Lampson, *A Consideration of the State of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century,* (London, 1907), p. 225. Wellesley is better known as the Duke of Wellington.
[45] Lenihan, *Limerick It's History and Antiquities,* (Cork, 1967), p. 425.

> be no poor-laws, and the magistrates may not do their duty as they ought by the poor...[46]

Cornewall Lewis asserted that the cause of rural conflict was the result of the 'wretched condition of the mass of the Irish peasantry, their inability to obtain employment for hire, and their consequent dependence on land'. Lewis went on to argue that 'The Whiteboy association may be considered as a vast trades' union for the protection of the Irish peasantry'.[47]

Caravatism was a product of the wartime boom. Increased demand for food led to higher prices and farm profits and increased rents. At the same time these increased food prices and rents impacted directly on the landless labourer and the cottier. The objective of the Caravats was to force a reduction in rent and in prices while also demanding that stipulated wage rates were adhered to.[48]

By 1810 the local press were reporting widespread violence occurring in County Limerick with regular rioting between the two groups.[49] There was a parallel upsurge of Whiteboyism and a new style ultraviolent factionism over much of East Limerick and North Cork extending as far west as Croom.[50] Rev. James Hall recounted a pitch battle taking place in the streets of Limerick involving hundreds of people. Women would tie a large stone in a bag or at the corner of their cloak and swing it in an attempt to hit opponents on the head. Hall makes little effort to understand the reasons for such conflict, simply dismissing it in a paternalist fashion as 'barbarity'.[51] In commenting on this conflict Ó Danachair fails to address the causes, merely recounting that the reasons are lost in antiquity.[52]

Beames having failed to even note the conflicting class interests of the Caravats and the Shanavests goes further and amalgamates the two groups into the general milieu of Whiteboy movements. He demonstrates a difficulty in separating the outlook of the labourer and cottier from that of the tenant farmer and distinguishing the economic and social differences that

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[46] *Letter from Arthur Wellesley to Brigadier-General Lee,* Limerick, 7th July 1808, quoted in Lenihan, p. 423-424.
[47] Lewis, *On local disturbances in Ireland: and on the Irish Church question,* p. 90.
[48] Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in East Munster 1802-1811', p. 81-82.
[49] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 July 1810.
[50] Roberts, p. 94-95. Croom is located approximately 13 miles south of Limerick city.
[51] James Hall, *Tour Through Ireland: Particularly the Interior & Least Known Parts, Vol. 1,* (London, 1813), pp. 308-311.
[52] Caoimhin Ó Danachair, 'Faction fighting in County Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 10, Number 1, (1966), p. 53.

impacted that outlook and even seems confused about who he regarded as a 'peasant' in pre-famine Ireland.[53]

While debating the Insurrection Act Continuance Bill in June 1817, Sir Henry Parnell outlined the continuous nature of violence since 1810:

> In the early part of 1813, and during the whole of that year, many daring offences were committed against the public peace in these…counties, the nature of which sufficiently proved, that illegal combinations, and the same systematic violence and disorder, against which the special commission of 1811 had been directed, still existed. In consequence of the continuance and increase of disturbances, in March 1814, the Insurrection act was introduced.[54]

Henry Parnell went on to outline that an application was made by the magistrates to have the Insurrection Act enforced in Clare, Limerick and Meath as a result of the scale of the violence.[55]

The price of provisions was the primary focus of the conflict by 1812. The economic boom generated by the Napoleonic Wars meant that the rural poor could not afford the price being offered to farmers. In May of that year Rev. Richard Stanish reported from Glin, 30 miles west of Limerick near the border with County Kerry, that repeated attacks were occurring on the houses of farmers in the neighbourhood with the inhabitants being threatened with flogging or murder unless they comply with instructions on the price they can charge for provisions.[56] Lieutenant Colonel William Armstrong reported that the high price of potatoes and milk 'had induced these deluded people to post up notices' and threaten farmers. The threats had an impact with the price of potatoes and milk had been reduced as a result.[57] Henry Harding reported that 'insurgents have taken horses of gentlemen and farmers about Glin', that shots were fired in the villages of Glin and Loughill, three miles to the east, that a mason employed in building a church in Loughill was assaulted, as were several farmers 'who had sold potatoes at a high rate'.[58] The ringleaders were named as Mulvihill, Feigh and Barrett.[59]

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[53] Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and Their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland*, (Sussex, 1983), pp. 111-147.
[54] *House of Commons Debates, 24 June 1823, Volume 9, cc1147-203.*
[55] *House of Commons Debates, 24 June 1823, Volume 9, cc1147-203.*
[56] *State of the Country Papers*, 24 May 1812, SOC 1405/5, National Archives, Dublin.
[57] *State of the Country Papers*, 31 May 1812, SOC 1405/6, National Archives, Dublin.
[58] *State of the Country Papers*, 4 June 1812, SOC 1405/7, National Archives, Dublin.
[59] *State of the Country Papers*, 12 September 1812, SOC 1405/10, National Archives, Dublin.

By October attempts were being made to spread the movement throughout County Limerick and into other counties. Philip Brohan made a declaration before the magistrates in Limerick that he was among a group of people sent in different parishes in Limerick, Clare and Tipperary 'in order to organize the people, and then, when they were organized and prepared, they were to upset the present Government… The people were to obey the commands of Anthony Burke as he was to be the commander'.[60]

While efforts were being made countrywide to generate support for a petition in support of Catholic Emancipation it was receiving little echo in Co. Limerick. During 1813 the Lord Lieutenant indicated that 'Roman Catholics in Limerick take no concern in the event of the question of R.C. Emancipation'[61] and that the lower orders feel no concern in the Catholic petition and refuse to sign it at the different chapels – 'where there were one hundred signatures last petition I don't believe there are five now'.[62] The rural poor had more pressing matters on their minds. Reports of regular conflict and acts of violence continued over the following two years with farmers repeatedly acquiescing to the demands of labourers and cottiers.[63]

By 1815 the local political establishment were becoming concerned that the labourers and cottiers were gaining the upper hand. Anxiety was growing because tenant farmers were abandoning their farms following threats from night-time bands of attackers and leaving their landlords with unpaid rents.[64] Local magistrates began encouraging retaliation by tenant farmers and 'recommended and encouraged a spirit of combination and exertion among a better sort of farmers.' This change of strategy resulted in farmers, knowing they had the backing of the local Protestant establishment, becoming more confrontational.[65]

As late as 1816 the Lord Lieutenant was informing the British Parliament that in Limerick 'Nightly meetings of large numbers of the lower orders took place; in one district, in the course of the month of March, seven houses were wilfully burned, and threatening notices were posted up'.[66]

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[60] *State of the Country Papers,* 20 October 1812, SOC 1405/15, National Archives, Dublin.
[61] *State of the Country Papers,* 28 January 1813, SOC 1544/18, National Archives, Dublin.
[62] *State of the Country Papers,* 25 December 1813, SOC 1540/17, National Archives, Dublin.
[63] See *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 April 1813, 15 May 1813, 16 June 1813 and 4 September 1813, plus *State of the Country Papers,* 6 September 1813, SOC 1540/6, 1 October 1813, SOC 1540/10, 13 August 1814, SOC 1556/31, National Archives, Dublin.
[64] *State of the Country Papers,* 4 November 1814, SOC 1556/37, National Archives, Dublin.
[65] *State of the Country Papers,* 3 June 1815, SOC 1717/15, National Archives, Dublin.
[66] *A Statement of the Nature and Extent of the Disturbances Which Have Recently Prevailed in Ireland,* 5 June 1816.

Shortly afterwards the Caravat/Shanavest conflict began to peter out. Police repression as a result of the Insurrection Act was a factor and it is possible that emerging fever, coupled with the scarcities as a result of the 'year with no summer', impacted on the ability, and willingness, of labourers to participate in the conflict. A House of Commons Select Committee Report stated, 'No doubt can exist of its having prevailed in every district of the county of Limerick'.[67]

The underlying causes of the conflict continued, however, and by the beginning of 1817 the plight of the rural poor had once again reached crisis point. Charles Coote of Pallasgreen, 15 miles south-east of Limerick, described what he felt was a 'spirit of dissatisfaction in the minds of the lower classes'. He reported that upwards of 2,000 people assembled on the farm of Mr. Scully on Saturday 4 January 'for the purpose as they alleged of procuring (illegible) to prevent themselves from starving'. Coote urges the immediate deployment of the military[68] which was agreed to by the Lord Lieutenant.[69] On 29 January Major Croker reported on the 'Shocking state of lower orders from want of fuel: country ravaged by tempest: rivers overflow and turf banks under water'.[70] During a debate on the Irish Insurrection Bill in May 1817, Mr Leslie Foster MP declared 'the aggressors and the victims of outrage were all Catholics alike'.[71]

At the beginning of June 1817, while food riots were taking place in Limerick city, Major Croker reported that there were 'people prone to the thefts of provisions' and that the distress in Limerick, Clare and the North Division of Cork was 'unparalleled' with 'potatoes ruined by frost and drought'. The report continued to outline that there was a severe scarcity of food and employment. Croker indicated that the high price of potatoes in rural Limerick places them out of the reach of the labouring classes.[72] Two days later Henry Bevan reported from Bruff, 15 miles south of Limerick, that the neighbourhood was 'in a most disturbed state on acct. of the want of provisions'. Bevan claimed that 'many of the poor are really starving' and 'have assembled in open day to take potatoes by force'. Bevan indicated that some lives were lost and many others wounded. Merchants were charging two guineas for a barrel of potatoes and 'want' had driven 'the people to many acts of desperation'.[73]

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[67] *First Report from the Select Committee On the State of Disease and the Condition of the Labour Poor Ireland,* House of Commons Papers, 1819, (409), viii.457, p. 21.
[68] *State of the Country Papers,* 18 January 1817, SOC 1836/1, National Archives, Dublin.
[69] *State of the Country Papers,* 20 January 1817, SOC 1836/2, National Archives, Dublin.
[70] *State of the Country Papers,* 29 January 1817, SOC 1838/8, National Archives, Dublin.
[71] *House of Commons Debates, 23 May 1817,* (Hansard, vol 36, cc835-42).
[72] *State of the Country Papers,* 29 May 1817, SOC 1838/45, National Archives, Dublin.
[73] *State of the Country Papers,* 1 June 1817, SOC 1836/11, National Archives, Dublin.

The Rockite Rebellion

Donnelly has written in depth about the Rockite Rebellion which originated in west Limerick. The collapse in agricultural prices between 1819 and 1823 fuelled the discontent on which the Rockite movement thrived and grew to maturity.[74] Roberts suggested that the disturbances during this period were of the scale usually associated with a major regional movement.[75] The evidence for Limerick would suggest that this is a correct assertion. For a period, the Rockite Rebellion took on a semi-insurrectional character.

In September 1819, James Delmage, Magistrate, asserted that the scale of riot and insurrection was so great in the neighbourhood of Rathkeale that the magistrates were incapable of quelling it. He indicated that 'meetings of those united men are held in every direction for the purpose of murder and plunder'. Delemege claimed that they were ready to 'commit every act of violence to the utter extinction of every peaceable subject'. He goes on to suggest that the only opposition to the Rockites was from the Palatine Yeomanry Corps.[76] By October 1819 reports of disturbances were being submitted on an ongoing basis. On 7 October, the Knight of Glin claimed that 'the idea of a general Rising...is extremely prevalent among the lower orders' who were 'totally destitute'.[77]

Feely contended that this rural movement was class based and was neither infused by Catholic consciousness nor nationalism but was a major force in the politicisation of the rural poor and reflected the primacy of economic factors. A study of the agrarian activity in Co. Limerick revealed that well over half the outrages involved labourers pitted against farmers. Similar to the Caravat/Shanavest conflict, Rockites were associated with farm labourers while the tenant farmers organised themselves as Whiteboys.[78] Feeley's discussion of agrarian unrest in Limerick is, however, limited, lacking in detail and glosses over the impact on rural society.

Ongoing clandestine conflict continued, on and off, over the entire period. Direct confrontation did occur between these two conflicting social groups on 6 October 1821, culminating in a gun battle which erupted on the racecourse three miles outside Limerick city. Police reports indicate

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[74] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* p. 330.
[75] Roberts, 'Caravats and Shanavests: Whiteboyism and faction fighting in East Munster 1802-1811', p. 95.
[76] *State of the Country Papers,* 25 September 1819, SOC 2082/21, National Archives, Dublin.
[77] *State of the Country Papers,* 7 October 1819, SOC 2082/24, National Archives, Dublin.
[78] Pat Feeley, 'Whiteboys and Ribbonmen', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 4, (September 1980). pp.24 & 26 Feeley's discussion of agrarian unrest in Limerick is limited, lacking in detail and glosses over the impact on rural society.

that thousands had assembled on either side armed with pistols and swords. Four detachments of dragoons were sent and managed to intervene and disperse the crowd.[79]

Rockite notices were commonplace with threats against farmers over the price of provisions, the cost of potato ground and the hiring of migrant labour. The example of a notice posted at Bruff demonstrated this assertion. It stated 'the neighbouring farmers are hereby to take warning to give reasonable abatements to the very poor and distressed labourers having gardens and tithe proctors are also to lessen their enormous bills.[80] Further notices were posted in the locality threatening landholders 'who do not reduce rent of cabbins [sic] and gardens'.[81] And as the writer of still another notice declared, after demanding better treatment from farmers for "the very poor and distressed labou[r]ers…It is not against the king or his constution [sic] that I take arms, but against cruel tyrants".[82]

Police reports from this period demonstrate that the authorities viewed the deteriorating economic conditions as the main factor in the growing unrest. In October 1821 Major Richard Willcocks and Major George Warburton drew the conclusion that the disturbances arose because there was an 'immense unemployed, and consequently a dissatisfied population…' Both men claim the outrages were not based on local circumstances but form part of a general movement against the crown, although they do recognise that local issues had contributed.[83]

The Rockite movement also came to the attention of Ribbonmen in Dublin who attempted to bring the Rockite rebellion to a halt in late 1821 / early 1822. The Ribbonmen ideologically combined populist nationalism with anti-Orange sectarianism.[84] The Ribbonmen are quoted as saying that 'the disturbance in Limerick is disapproved of as nothing of importance will take place until every county and town rises together'. Curtin asserted that Ribbon lodges existed in Limerick city and Tarbert, 35 miles west of Limerick just over the Kerry border, and impacted the outlook of local Rockites.[85] Donnelly argued that if the Ribbonmen had any influence in the Rockite movement than it was modest.[86] If this intervention took place, then it was more likely

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[79] *State of the Country Papers,* 7 October 1821, SOC 431/2296/17, National Archives, Dublin.
[80] *State of the Country Papers,* 28 November 1821, SOC 431/2296/45, National Archives, Dublin.
[81] *State of the Country Papers,* November 1821, SOC 431/2296/47, National Archives, Dublin.
[82] James S. Donnelly, Jr., 'Captain Rock: Ideology and Organization in the Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821–24', *Eire-Ireland,* Volume 42, Number 3&4, (Fall/Winter 2007), p. 63.
[83] *State of the Country Papers,* 31 December 1821, SOC 431/2296/56, National Archives, Dublin.
[84] Donnelly Jr., *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* p. 20-21.
[85] Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* (Limerick, 2008), p. 21.
[86] Donnelly, p. 21.

that the Ribbonmen were intent on undermining any class element of Rockite activities and diverting it in a sectarian direction.

At the beginning of 1822 Major Willcocks was claiming that in Rathkeale 'the distress of the poorer class in this neighbourhood is beyond description'.[87] In a further report from January 1822, Edward Fitzgerald outlined the distress among the poorer classes and the 'unprecedented price of potatoes'. He suggested that the widespread outrages occurring in the parish of Kildimo, were the result of these circumstances.[88] The following month Willcocks stated his belief 'that all the recent outrages have their origin in agrarian disputes'.[89] By the end of February 1822 many of the attacks were directed at the residences of landlords or large farmers and motivated by the hiring of migrant labourers in an effort to combat the activism of local workers. If these attacks were repelled, the insurgents would move to burn the local church.[90] Occasionally attacks would burst out into the open during the day. Two days after Christmas a party of police were travelling through Rathkeale when they were attacked by a large crowd leaving the church. The police were forced to open fire to repel their attackers.[91]

Feeley argued that Willcocks was 'a pioneering policeman' regarding him as cool, objective and detached.[92] It is correct to suggest that Willcocks had little time of the manoeuvrings of the political establishment and the Protestant Ascendancy, he repeatedly criticised them and he objected to the existence of an Orange Lodge within the Limerick police. However, Willcocks was quite ruthless in suppressing agrarian agitation and implemented widespread repression to quell the Rockite conflict. When a decision had to be made Willcocks acted to preserve the existing social order.

On 11 May 1822, a large crowd attacked and confiscated two boats laden with potatoes at Killaloe, 18 miles north-east of Limerick on the banks of the Shannon. The potatoes were sold to the locals at a much-reduced price and the owners were politely told not to interfere. Subsequently police were deployed for protection to prevent a re-occurrence.[93] A bumper corn

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[87] *State of the Country Papers,* 6 January 1822, SOC 2350/7, National Archives, Dublin.
[88] *State of the Country Papers,* 23 January 1822, SOC 2350/27, National Archives, Dublin.
[89] *State of the Country Papers,* 25 February 1822, SOC 2350/82, National Archives, Dublin.
[90] *State of the Country Papers,* 28 February 1822, SOC 2350/94, National Archives, Dublin.
[91] *Papers presented by H.M. Command relative to Disturbed State of Ireland, February 1822,* House of Commons Papers, (2), xiv.741, p. 4.
[92] Pat Feeley, 'A Pioneering Policeman', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 27, (Autumn 1990), p. 11.
[93] Report from Mr. Miller, Chief Constable of Police, *Papers relating to the state of Ireland: viz. extracts of dispatches from His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, enclosing communications from magistrates and commanding officers in different counties,* House of Commons Papers, 1822, (423), xiv.757, p. 21.

harvest in the Autumn of 1822 contributed to the reduced levels of violence as there was a plentiful supply of food and the cost of provisions fell.[94] However, poverty and unemployment persisted. Giving evidence to a Select Committee, the Knight of Kerry, Maurice Fitzgerald, outlined the situation in Limerick, that 'there is nearly a cessation of employment on the part of proprietors' and that some migrant labourers were willing to work for as little as 2d per day.[95]

During a debate on the state of Ireland in the House of Commons in June 1823 the Earl of Liverpool made the following comments:

> It was not a combination against the government, but against property in general, whether in the hands of Protestants or Catholics and he believed, that the exasperation of the people of Ireland against Catholic proprietors was, in many instances, even greater than against Protestant proprietors.[96]

It is possible that the lull in Rockite activity led to some change in the social character of the movement with farmers becoming more influential and the demands changing from local economic issues to broader issues more closely associated with the Ribbonmen.

Pastorini's Prophecies

Donnelly has asserted that the Rockite Rebellion had a sectarian character.[97] O'Connor also argued in a similar fashion suggesting that a heightening sectarian tension stemmed mainly from growing Catholic resentment at political and economic discrimination.[98] Some incidents give credence to this assertion. Tithe-proctors were the focus of violence and several were murdered during September and October 1821.[99] The Rockites did burn down three Protestant churches in quick succession during February 1822. However, Donnelly commented that antipathy towards tithes and clerical co-operation with the authorities were likely the cause rather than anti-Protestant feeling.[100]

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[94] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 August 1822.
[95] *Report from the Select Committee on the Employment of the Poor in Ireland,* House of Commons Papers, 16 July 1823, (561), vi.331, p. 158.
[96] *House of Commons Debates, 19 June 1823, Volume 9, cc1033-72.*
[97] Donnelly, Jr., 'Captain Rock: Ideology and Organization in the Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821–24', p. 61.
[98] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 30.
[99] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 October 1821.
[100] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* p. 79.

Several police reports claimed that the plan was to 'overthrow the Protestant religion'.[101] Local magistrate Vokes claimed that an informant reported that the Rockites had an oath that swore the 'destruction of all Protestants' and to have 'a Roman Catholic king and a French Government'.[102] However, there is a potential motive for the local magistrates promoting the idea that sectarian attacks were taking place and were being threatened against Protestants. Under Peel's Peace Preservation Act if the local magistrates used the Peace Preservation Force to intervene it would cause a heavy tax burden on the local establishment[103] whereas the cost of the deployment of the military to deal with the situation would be borne by Dublin Castle, resulting in constant requests for the military to be deployed.[104] Vokes was particularly vocal in advocating the use of the military[105] and he may have used the threats against Protestants to present the conflict as sectarian rather than social and economic in order to persuade Dublin Castle to deploy the military.

Donnelly has addressed the role of Millenarianism and the 'Pastorini Prophecies' during the Rockite Rebellion. Pastorini's Prophecies were the declarations of English bishop Charles Walmesley who declared in 1771 that the Protestant 'locusts' would all be swept away by about 1825.[106] Donnelly contended that the influence of Pastorini has been underestimated because its influence is dismissed by the wealthier classes.[107]

It must be noted that while Donnelly questioned the accuracy of the evidence from those from the middle and upper classes in dismissing the role of Pastorini in the disturbances, he then used evidence from the same sources to demonstrate the prevalence of influence of Pastorini's prophecies on the rural population. Donnelly argued that one compelling piece is the testimony from King's Counsel Francis Blackburne, who was appointed to administer the Insurrection Act in 1823 to County Limerick and parts of County Clare. Blackburne noted that on 'inspecting every notice and every publication dispersed through the country…I don't think that there has been a single instance…that there was not a distinct allusion to the prophecies of Pastorini and the year 1825.'[108] If this were the case then it would demonstrate that Pastorini did indeed have

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[101] *State of the Country Papers,* 23 October 1821, SOC 431/2296/24, National Archives, Dublin.
[102] *State of the Country Papers,* 15 November 1821, SOC 431/2296/35, National Archives, Dublin.
[103] Galen Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36,* (London, 1970), p. 100.
[104] *State of the Country Papers,* 14 October 1819, SOC 2082/27, National Archives, Dublin.
[105] *State of the Country Papers,* 19 November 1821, SOC 431/2296/42, National Archives, Dublin.
[106] John Molloy, 'Millennialism, Maclise and Matejko', *History Ireland,* Volume 15, Issue 6, (Nov-Dec 2007), p. 8-9.
[107] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* pp. 119-123.
[108] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* p. 127. Primary evidence is from *State of Ireland. Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the disturbances in Ireland, in the last session of Parliament; 13th May--18th June 1824,* House of Commons Papers, 1824, (20), vii.1, p. 7-8.

a wide sphere of influence in County Limerick. When asked 'Will you state in your mind what that ultimate source (of discontent in Ireland) is?', Blackburne indicated

> The extreme misery and wretchedness of the population; the great mass of the population is in a state of poverty, destitute of employment, and, generally speaking, destitute of what would be considered in this country the comforts and necessities of life.[109]

Blackburne went on to argue that the only way of alleviating the crisis is through the provision of employment.[110] Evidence from other witnesses followed a similar vein. Robert De La Cour argued that the disturbances were the result of 'the want of employment, the general poverty and distress of the people'.[111] Furthermore, many notices posted in the region by the Rockites did not refer to Pastorini or contain any religious reference.

Lewis rejected the assertion that there was a sectarian character to rural outrages during this and in later periods arguing that 'In viewing the question generally, without reference to evidence, it would appear a priori improbable that religious bigotry should manifest itself in the form of Whiteboy associations and Whiteboy outrages'.[112] Lewis uses police records to demonstrate his view, citing that out of the 411 crimes reported in Munster in 1833, only two were related to 'religious feeling'.[113]

Feeley also addressed the issue of the Pastorini prophecies[114] and while acknowledging the role of the prophecies in the Rockite movement and the fanaticism of some of the Rockites, suggested that sectarianism was not a major factor during this period. Feeley argued that the reasons for the rebellion were varied and complex but the root cause was the economic conditions faced by the rural labourers and cottiers.[115]

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[109] House of Commons Papers, 1824, (20), vii.1, p. 7-8.
[110] House of Commons Papers, 1824, (20), vii.1, p. 14.
[111] *Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Irelan, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom 18 February-21 March 1825,* House of Commons Papers, 1825, (181), ix.1, p. 535.
[112] Lewis, *On local disturbances in Ireland: and on the Irish Church question,* p. 124.
[113] Ibid., p. 106.
[114] For more information on Pastorini's Prophecies see - Michael Colgan, 'Prophecy Against Reason: Ireland and the Apocalypse', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies,* Volume 8, Issue 2, (September 1985), pp. 209-216. For the impact in Limerick, see: Tom Donovan, 'The Visionary, the Liberator and the Bishop', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 33, (Winter 1996) pp. 9-10.
[115] Pat Feeley, 'The Rockite Uprising in Co. Limerick – 1821', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 21, Autumn 1987), pp. 35-40.

Similarly, Connolly argued for caution when assessing the impact of the Pastorini prophecies on these agrarian disturbances. He asserted that the cause of the Rockite rebellion was not different from the earlier disturbances of the nineteenth century. Connolly suggested that millenarian rhetoric was not important in influencing the cause or content of the Rockite movement, it did give the disturbances an added energy and cohesion. Connolly further asserted that this millenarianism helped labourers, cottiers and farmers forget the real economic conflicts that divided them enabling them to unite in support of the Rockite movement.[116]

One factor must be considered in relation to the Rockite movement is the fluid nature of its social composition. The initial Rockite disturbances dissipated in 1822 as economic conditions improved somewhat. The indications are that the resurgent movement in 1823 was of a somewhat different social character, with tenant farmers playing a more prominent role.[117] It is worth noting, particularly in the earlier period of conflict, that the active Rockites tended to be aged in their 20s and were largely unmarried.[118]

It is worth noting that Catholic and Protestant clergy united in condemning the violence and in getting their congregations to swear allegiance to the British monarchy. Tierney asserted that part of the reason for doing so was to avoid the payments of taxes imposed on owners and occupiers of land by the Police Preservation Bill. Tierney suggested that the intervention of the clergy in Murroe, ten miles east of Limerick, eventually led to a quelling of disturbances,[119] however, the emergence of famine conditions in the locality and the provision of substantial relief could also have had a bearing on the scale of agrarian conflict. Many of the poor could have felt that it would not be a good idea to cut off the hand that was feeding them.

One major incident that does lead credence to claims of sectarianism is the attack at Glanisheen (Glenosheen), a Palatine village 30 miles south of Limerick near the border with Co. Cork. Connolly used this attack to demonstrate the sectarian nature of the Rockite conflict.[120] A gun battle between police and Rockites resulted in one Rockite being killed, several wounded and three taken prisoner.[121] In the attack the Rockites succeeded in burning down three cottages and

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[116] S. J. Connolly, 'Mass Politics and Sectarian Conflict, 1823-1830', in W. E. Vaughan (ed), *A New History of Ireland V: Ireland Under the Union 1801-1870,* (Oxford, 2010), p. 81.
[117] Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* (Limerick, 2008), p. 20.
[118] Ibid., p. 26.
[119] Dom Mark Tierney, 'The 1821-1822 Incident in Murroe', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 9, Number 1-2, (1962-63), p. 64-65.
[120] Connolly, 'Mass Politics and Sectarian Conflict, 1823-1830', p. 82.
[121] *State of the Country Papers,* 30 April 1823, SOC 2517/24, National Archives, Dublin.

set fire to four more. A local proprietor claimed that the "object of the rebels was to get possession of the arms and murder the 'Protestant Palatine devils'". The local Palatine schoolmaster, whose dwelling was set on fire, heard them shout that "he was a Protestant devil and that not one should be spared".[122]

The attack appears to have been a carefully planned affair. The raiders, more than 100 strong, came on horseback over the mountains from County Cork[123] and returned there after the attack. The likelihood is that the Cork rebels were invited to attack the village by local Rockites and they would have almost certainly needed local intelligence and possibly local guides to carry out their mission.[124] Part of the motive for the attack was certainly to secure arms from a storehouse used by the Palatine yeomanry and the party of police who were permanently stationed in the village.[125] It is also likely that the attack was a form of payback for the role of the Palatine Yeomanry who viciously suppressed Rockite activity in West Limerick earlier in the conflict.[126] As this attack occurred in 1823 it also formed part of the second wave of Rockite activity and may have been carried out by farmers rather than labourers who tended to have a more sectarian outlook in this period.

Connolly[127] and Curtin[128] both discussed the burning of several Protestant churches in West Limerick in 1822 as an indication of sectarianism. One of the churches burnt down was Killeedy church, 30 miles south-west of Limerick, which was destroyed on the night of 7 February 1822. The church and the glebe house had only been built five years earlier by Rev. Edward Geratty. A police informer later claimed that the destruction of the church was a planned operation by the Rockites. Since the beginning of the Rockite unrest, Geratty had demanded a military crackdown and had fingered local Rockites for prosecution. At least one member of the Rockites was hanged based on information from the clergyman. Following the burning of the church Geratty himself considered it an 'act of vengeance' by the lower orders rather than the result of sectarianism. The following week the Rockites destroyed the Glebe House and Howard

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[122] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* p. 140.
[123] *State of the Country Papers,* 1 May 1823, SOC 2517/25, National Archives, Dublin.
[124] Donnelly, p. 107.
[125] Ibid., p. 278.
[126] *State of the Country Papers,* 25 September 1819, SOC 2082/21, National Archives, Dublin. For more information about the Palatines in Co. Limerick, see: Dr. Richard Hayes, 'The German Colony in Co. Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 1, Number 2, (October 1937), pp. 45-53.
[127] Connolly, 'Mass Politics and Sectarian Conflict, 1823-1830', p. 82.
[128] Gerard Curtin, 'Religion and social conflict during the Protestant Crusade in West Limerick 1822-49', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 39, Winter 2003), p. 46.

asserted that the primary reason for this attack was because of the likelihood that the Glebe House would be used to billet troops who were expected to arrive in the area.[129]

Members of the Catholic hierarchy were not immune from attacks. Priests who spoke out about Rockite activity were subject to retaliation. In November 1918 a parish priest in Bulgaden, near Kilmallock, was shot death by a group of men.[130] A few weeks later another priest survived an assassination attempt. Parish priest of Kildimo, Edmund Connery, was the victim of three separate attacks during December 1821 and January 1822. Some priests played a prominent role in the executions of Rockite prisoners, lecturing the assembled crowd against involvement with the Rockites.[131]

It would be surprising if religion and sectarianism did not play a part in the Rockite Rebellion in County Limerick. Given the demographic make of the county, the control exercised by the Protestant Ascendancy, the imposition of tithes, the fact that many local magistrates were also Protestant clergymen, as well as proselytising by Protestant ministers, it is clear that religion would not be very far from people's minds at a time of crisis. It is possible that elements of sectarianism did emerge during the conflict.

In order to assess the prevalence of millenarianism in the Rockite Rebellion the following question needs to be answered – Without the depressed nature of the economy and the abject poverty of rural labourer and cottiers, would Pastorini's prophecies have gained any traction and resulted in a movement on the scale of the Rockite Rebellion during this period? The evidence from Limerick demonstrates that the over-riding factor was the economic and social conditions faced by the rural poor, the focus of the conflict was the improvement of those economic and social conditions and that millenarianism played, at best, very much an ancillary role in the conflict. Donnelly did acknowledge the crucial role played by the economic crisis and economic conditions in the conflict.[132]

Ultimately the Rockite rebellion was suppressed. The Insurrection Act saw widespread arrests and repression by the British military and the police and the hanging of a number of insurgents.

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[129] Leonard Howard, 'Rev. Edward Geratty and the Building and Burning of Killeedy Church and Glebe House, 1817-1822', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 55, 2015), p. 61 & p. 65-66.
[130] Tom Donovan, 'The Lonesome Death of Reverend John Mulqueen', *Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 49, (Winter 2015), pp. 13-15.
[131] Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* p. 197-198.
[132] Donnelly, *Captain Rock, The Irish Agrarian Rebellion 1821-1824,* pp. 340-342.

The court system was used extensively and somewhere between 300-400 Rockites were transported to Australia for their activities during and in the aftermath of the rebellion.[133]

Life in Rural Limerick 1825-1844

Poverty and unemployment were the key impactors on the life of the rural poor in the two decades before the famine. Wage levels for farm labourers were stagnant at 10d per day for the entire period with considerable downward pressure being placed on wages because of the large numbers of unemployed labourers throughout the county.[134] To demonstrate the scale of unemployment Curtin indicated that in 1836 only 15 out of 118 labourers in Shanagolden were employed.[135] Ó Gráda noted that mass emigration from Ireland predated the Famine[136] and that emigration was dominated by push factors resulting from the downward pressure in workers living standards.[137] Emigration was the order of the day. Hundreds were leaving each district on a yearly basis. The Poor Law Inquiry heard that the emigrants comprised of 'a few large farmers, many small occupiers, and a great many common labourers'. However, emigration had little impact on wage rates or the price of rent for potato ground because of the high level of unemployment.[138]

Efforts were made in the late 1820s by Protestant ministers to convert rural Catholics to Protestantism. A Bible Society was formed in Rathkeale and the initial focus seems to have been on working in West Limerick. Encouraged by a combination of charity and employment, rather than religious persuasion, 36 people did convert. Many later received jobs from local Protestant gentry or businesspeople. But such a basis for conversion was unsustainable and by and large the mass of the poor in West Limerick simply ignored the proselytising.[139]

Rural Limerick during the period 1825-1844 was characterised by low-level conflict between different sections of the rural population that was occasionally punctuated with short periods of more intense violence. This conflict generally broke down along class lines, with disputes between tenant farmers and landlords and, then between landless labourers and cottiers on one

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[133] House of Commons Papers, 1824, (20), vii.1, p. 48-49.
[134] *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland,* Command Papers, 1836, (43), xxx.1. p. 14.
[135] Gerard Curtin, 'The Growth and Development of the Village of Shanagolden', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 56, (2016), p. 112. Shanagolden is located approximately 25 miles west of Limerick city.
[136] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939,* p. 74.
[137] Ibid., 79.
[138] Command Papers, 1836, (43), xxx.1. p. 14.
[139] Curtin, 'Religion and social conflict during the Protestant Crusade in West Limerick 1822-49', p. 44.

side and the tenant farmers on the other. By the 1830s the graziers of Limerick were among the wealthiest Irish farmers in the country.[140] The primary issue between landlords and tenant farmers was the allocation of land to farmers who were not from the locality.[141] Conflict between the labouring class and the tenant farmers was widespread in rural Co. Limerick during this period. The focus of this conflict involved a number of issues, namely farmers cutting wages[142] and using migrant labourers to undermine wage rates in rural areas,[143] exploiting the shortage of potato ground by increasing rent[144] and overcharging for provisions and selling them out of the locality to forestallers.[145] While there was ongoing class conflict throughout the period there were two issues that did occasionally unite the rural population across the classes. These were opposition to the payment of tithes [146] and support for Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Repeal of the Act of Union.

The anti-tithe movement in Limerick began in earnest during the summer of 1831. The village of Doon, 18 miles east of Limerick, and its surrounding hinterland became the focal point of the campaign. The local rector Rev. Charles Coote was noted for his insistence that tithes be paid in the locality. Up until 1831 Coote was known to have a cordial relationship with the local Catholic clergy who were never asked to pay tithes. In the summer of 1831, the local parish priest Fr. Patrick Hickey condemned Coote and called on his parishioners not to pay the tithes, stating that he himself would boycott them. Hickey also had a large farmholding and failed to tell his congregation that Coote had never asked him to pay tithes. Coote reacted angrily to Hickey's condemnation and with military support confiscated Hickey's cow, announcing that it would be sold for the payment of the tithes.

The sale of Fr. Hickey's cow resulted in a full-scale riot in the village. Four companies of Highlanders were dispatched to Doon to provide security during the auction. As soon as the troops left the village on their return to Limerick a full-scale riot erupted. The four lancers who remained in the village were subjected to repeated volleys of stones and several shots were

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[140] Margaret MacCurtain, 'Pre-Famine Peasantry in Ireland: Definition and Theme', *Irish University Review,* Volume 4, Number 2, (Autumn, 1974), p. 193.
[141] *Limerick Chronicle,* 26 February 1825.
[142] *State of the Country Papers,* 16 February 1825, SOC 2728/9, National Archives, Dublin.
[143] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 September 1825.
[144] *State of the Country Papers,* 26 March 1827, SOC 2853/18, National Archives, Dublin.
[145] A forestaller can be described as a person who buys goods from local farmers in anticipation of making a profit from rising prices.
[146] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 17.

fired at the soldiers. They return fire wounding one person. On hearing the shots, the departing troops returned and with the assistance of the local clergy restored order.[147]

Every subsequent attempt by Coote to collect tithes was met with mass opposition. Hundreds of people, many of them armed, would congregate to prevent Coote and the constabulary from confiscating goods in lieu of tithes.[148] Coote was subjected to a boycott by the local community. Farm labourers refused to work on his land and the local population regularly harassed his family and friends when out in the locality. When efforts were made by local Protestants to come to Coote's aid by working his land they were driven off by large crowds of protestors.[149] During this period at least two assassination attempts were made against Coote.[150]

Following the riot in Doon in April 1832 the anti-tithes campaign rapidly expanded. A series of mass meetings took place over the following two months at various locations around the county.[151] John Cousins, rector of Ballycahane Parish, ten miles south of Limerick, had 'little doubt that there is in every barony if not in every parish an organised band for the purpose of intimidating the peaceably disposed and enforcing regulations of the anti-tithe conspiracy'[152]

Riots became common as large crowds attempted to prevent the sale of goods confiscated in lieu of tithes.[153] In April 1834, the Rev. Thomas Locke attempted to collect tithes in the village of Feohanagh, 30 miles south-west of Limerick. A full-scale riot broke out when bailiffs attempted to seize two cows as payment. Over 1,000 people gathered, and Locke's military escort opened fire after being pelted with stones resulting in the deaths of three people and injury to more than twenty.[154]

The final major act of defiance in Limerick prior to the abolition of tithes also centred on the village of Doon and followed the death of John Dwyer in December 1836. Dwyer was from Doon and died in Dublin while serving a sentence for non-payment of tithes. The Trades of

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[147] W.R. Le Fanu, *Seventy Years of Irish Life*, (London, 1893), p. 56-57.
[148] See, for example, 17 September 1835, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1835,* National Archives, Dublin.
[149] Le Fanu, p. 64.
[150] 18 September 1835, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1835,* National Archives, Dublin, and Fanu, p. 65.
[151] Curtin, 'Religion and Social Conflict During the Protestant Crusade in West Limerick 1822-1849', p. 49. Meetings took place at Patrickswell, Crecora, New Kildimo, Kildimo and Newcastle West. The meeting at Newcastle West attracted people from Monagay, Killeedy, Knockaderry, Grange and Abbeyfeale.
[152] Stephen McCormac, 'The Tithe War, Reports by Church of Ireland Clergymen to Dublin Castle', *History Ireland*, Volume 13, Issue 4, (July/August,2005), p. 43.
[153] On 13 March 1834 a riot occurred at the courthouse in Rathkeale attempting to prevent the sale of goods. During the riot six men broke into the courthouse, assaulted a barrister and attempted to destroy evidence of tithe monies that they owed.
[154] Curtin, 'Religion and Social Conflict During the Protestant Crusade in West Limerick 1822-1849', p. 50

Limerick led a large crowd that attended Dwyer's funeral as his body arrived back in Limerick from Dublin. According to Dublin newspapers over 30,000 people attended the funeral but the *Limerick Chronicle* claimed the number was in the region of 1,000.[155] The *Chronicle* reported on the funeral in derogatory terms[156] resulting in a number of trades writing to the newspapers owners to criticise their attitude and demanding a retraction.[157]

The resistance to tithe collection continued right up until the introduction of the Irish Tithe Bill in 1838. The campaign against tithes was driven primarily by Catholic clergy and tenant farmers although the lower classes were willing participants in the campaign.[158] The evidence suggests that the collection of tithes was effectively defeated by 1834. The incidents of violence decreased significantly after that date with the main focus being on resistance to the legal process. Rather than force the collection of tithes many tithe owners applied for relief and secured income from Dublin Castle instead of risking the consequences of forcing payment from locals.[159] While there was some resistance to tithes sporadically in the period prior to the famine the primary focus of rural unrest continued to be the availability of land, employment, wages, the price of provisions and the payment of rent.[160] The fact that these issues continued to dominate the rural landscape indicated an ongoing struggle between landlord, tenant farmer and the cottier and landless labourer.

The Terry Alts and the Repeal Movement

O'Connell's Repeal Movement regularly organised mass meetings throughout the county that attracted large crowds. However, this mass mobilisation never amounted to anything more than acting in an auxiliary role in assisting O'Connell to apply political pressure on the Unionist Ascendancy establishment in the city and county. For the poorest sections of society, the campaigns of O'Connell meant little change. One labourer commented 'Emancipation has done nothing for us. Mr. O'Connell and the rich Catholics go to parliament. We die of starvation just the same.'[161] When the mass of landless poor and cottiers took matters into their own hands and began to agitate on social issues O'Connell and his supporters were quick in moving to attempt

[155] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 December 1836.
[156] *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 December 1836.
[157] *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 December 1836.
[158] Gerard Curtin, 'Opposition to the Payment of Tithes in West Limerick 1821-1838', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 42, (Winter 2006), p. 27.
[159] Any person entitled to tithes might apply to the Lord Lieutenant for relief under Acts 4 Geo. 4, c. 99.
[160] Curtin, p. 28.
[161] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, (Abingdon, 1988), p. 132.

to stamp out such conflict. This is amply demonstrated by the efforts by O'Connell himself and, by his Chief Pacificator, Thomas Steele, to suppress the uprising of the Terry Alts in 1831.

In County Clare the conflict between farmers and labourers, coupled with anti-tithe agitation escalated quite dramatically in November 1830 with the first incidents of serious conflict being reported.[162] O'Connell's election in Clare in 1828 had raised expectations of improvements in the social and economic conditions facing the poorest sections of society. These raised expectations gave rise to simmering tensions. By the beginning of 1831, the Terry Alt rebellion was to escalate into open conflict involving thousands of landless labourers and cottiers. The Terry Alts were initially a clandestine group modelled on other secret societies like the Whiteboys and Rockites. The title 'Terry Alt' was taken from the name of an army veteran who lived in Corofin, 30 miles north-west of Limerick.[163] However, as the movement developed it emerged as a more open and conscious mass movement of the poor involving tens of thousands of landless labourers and cottiers.

Curtin claimed that the Terry Alt movement had a sectarian content.[164] Attempts by evangelical Protestant ministers at proselytising contributed to tensions and the development of a certain anti-Protestant outlook.[165] However the main focus of those involved was the social and economic conditions faced by the labouring classes.[166] The shift from tillage to pasture farming in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars had a profound impact on the position of the agricultural labourer in Irish society. Farmers were intent on cutting jobs and wages and hiring migrant workers in an attempt to force down wage rates. It was this shift from tillage to pasture coupled with the loss of potato land that ignited the Terry Alt rebellion. The most striking feature of this movement was its class composition, almost exclusively from the poorest sections of society.

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[162] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 November 1830.
[163] Flan Enright, *Pre-Famine Clare-Society in Crisis,* [http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/prefamine_clare.htm], (Accessed on 20/02/2010).
[164] Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* (Limerick, 2008), p. 15. Curtin did acknowledge that economic issues were dominant.
[165] Max Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby,* Revised Edition 2005, [http://www.mybrethren.org/bios/framjndw.htm], (Accessed on 05/07/2012).
[166] Michael McMahon. *Agrarian Conflict in Clare 1815-1831 – The Terry Alts and Escalating Violence,* [http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/agrarian_conflict/agrarian_conflict_in_clare_terry_alts.htm], (Accessed on 20/02/2010).

By 1831 there were 80,000 landless labourers and 80,000 cottiers in Co. Clare. Labourers were paid 8d per week for irregular work.[167] The cottiers had too little land to produce enough provisions capable of paying rent.[168] While occasionally involving attacks on the police, arms raids and assaults on migrant labourers and labourers working for prescribed employers, the main focus of the Terry Alts was the digging up of pasture. Emphasising the need for rural employment, hundreds and occasionally thousands of labourers participated in digging up fields and even entire farms rendering them useless for pasture farming. Initially this digging up of pasture land occurred in a clandestine fashion at night time, but as the Terry Alts became more emboldened, participants would march in military fashion in day time with their shovels presented over their shoulders, led by a band and cheered on by hundreds of supporters as they proceeded to dig up the pasture land in defiance of the landlords, farmers, local clergy and the police who were impotent to stop the activities.[169] William Pare, in reference to the activities of the Terry Alts, stated 'the peasantry armed with their farm implements declared war on pasture land'.[170]

Undoubtedly the victory of O'Connell in 1828 had heightened expectations among the population in Clare. Owens argued that after O'Connell's election, different social classes and faction ended their feuds in the belief that they were preparing for a decisive war.[171] As was demonstrated by the upsurge of the Terry Alts this was not the case. Ongoing conflict in rural areas continued to involve struggles between the different social classes. On occasions the tenant farmer, the cottier and the landless labourer would join forces to campaign for a common goal, but it was inevitable that the pre-existing class tensions would continue under the surface and re-emerge as soon as any section of society faced the impact of economic circumstances.

It has been suggested that the Ireland which produced the agrarian disturbances was, considering the widespread poverty in the countryside, remarkably free of theft among the peasantry. Christianson argued that the lower classes displayed a remarkable degree of patience, indeed resignation, to the prevailing economic conditions and accepted almost any adversity

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[167] R.G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain 1825-1845,* (Manchester, 1972), p. 104.
[168] Alf MacLochlain, 'Social Life in County Clare, 1800-1850', *Irish University Review,* Volume 2, Number 1, (1972), p. 60.
[169] James Donnelly Jr, 'The Terry Alt Movement 1829-31', *History Ireland,* Volume 2, Issue 4, (Winter 1994), p. 34.
[170] William Pare, *Co-operative Agriculture: A Solution of the Land Question, As Exemplified in the History of the Ralahine Cooperative Agricultural Association, County Clare, Ireland,* (London, 1870), p. 5.
[171] Gary Owens, 'A Moral Insurrection: Faction Fighters, Popular Demonstrations and the O'Connellite Campaign, 1828', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 30, Number 120, (November 1997), p. 526.

without complaint. Only as a last resort did they attempt to settle their grievances through illegal means.[172]

The main driving force was the reaction to the economic developments and the abject poverty associated with the poorest elements in society. The Terry Alts were just as prone to attack Catholic as Protestant farmers and landowners.[173] Occasionally attacks were even carried out on the clergy and Catholic churches. Following the robbery of a firearm from a policeman in Clarecastle, 20 miles north-west of Limerick, the local parish priest retrieved the gun. A few days later the church was broken into and the pews and seats smashed in a warning to the priest not to interfere with the activities of the Terry Alts.[174]

It was during this period that a band of Terry Alts killed Hastings, the agent of Ralahine landlord John Vandeleur. This was the last straw for Vandeleur and he decided to conduct a cooperative experiment in an effort to secure his landholding and income from rent. Under the supervision of an Englishman named E.T. Craig, the workers on one of Vandeleur's estates formed a commune, rented the land from Vandeleur and farmed a co-operative for two years. In 1833 Vandeleur went bankrupt and his creditors foreclosed on his estate and removed the Ralahine co-operative.[175] Much is made of the Ralahine co-operative in left-wing[176] and republican[177] circles, however reassessments like that of O'Gráda suggest 'that Vandeleur may have milked the labourers for what he could'.[178]

By April 1831, the Terry Alt conflict had spread to parts of Co. Limerick.[179] Terry Alts crossed the River Shannon into West Limerick in an effort to mobilise support. After some initial successes for the Terry Alts the conflict in Limerick petered out after a few weeks.[180] By the middle of 1831 the Terry Alts were in virtual control of the entire of County Clare. Not surprisingly Daniel O'Connell attacked and condemned those involved in the outrages in Co.

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[172] Gale E. Christianson, 'Secret Societies and Agrarian Violence in Ireland 1790-1840', *Agricultural History,* Volume 46, Number 3, (July 1972), p. 383-384.
[173] *The Times,* London, 12 April 1831.
[174] Joe Power, 'Terry Alt and Lady Clare', *The Other Clare,* Volume 10, (March 1986), p. 16.
[175] Flan Enright, *Pre-Famine Clare-Society in Crisis* [http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/prefamine_clare.htm], (Accessed on 20/02/2010).
[176] Peter Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class,* (London, 1996), p. 93.
[177] Robert Allen, 'Food production in Ireland - the colonial legacy', *An Phoblacht,* (29 July 1999).
[178] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Owenite Community at Ralahine, County Clare, 1831-33: A Reassessment', *Irish Economic and Social History,* Volume 1, (1974), pp. 36-48 Ralahine is located 10 miles north-west of Limerick on the road between Sixmilebridge and Newmarket-on-Fergus.
[179] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 April 1831.
[180] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 April 1831.

Clare sending Thomas Steele to attempt to suppress support of the rebellion.[181] Steele declared in posters displayed in Ennis 'Unless you desist, I denounce you as traitors to the cause of liberty in Ireland. I leave you to the Government and the fire and bayonets of the military. Your blood be upon your own souls'.[182] Steele's proclamations and threats had little impact on the ongoing upheaval, but the British authorities saw Steele's intervention as an opportunity to increase repression. At the beginning of May troops opened fire and arrested 30 people engaged in digging up land.[183] Between May and June 1831, a total of 119 prisoners were convicted with 21 sentenced to death and 58 sentenced to transportation.[184] During the course of one of the trials Daniel O'Connell made a dramatic entrance, sitting with the defence, but to no avail. The defendants were convicted by the jury in less than 20 minutes.[185] This intervention by O'Connell was more likely to have been an effort to regain some political authority lost as a result of Steele's statement two months previously.

In county Limerick, beginning in 1825, strikes and protests had taken place over attempts by farmers to cut the wages of farm labourers. In order to suppress opposition, the police were mobilised to protect the tenant farmers.[186] In an effort to drive down wages local farmers in Limerick began to employ migrant labour, primarily from Kerry. Local labourers responded by threatening farmers and migrant workers alike. Threatening notices were posted on farmers' gates or at local churches.[187] Migrant workers were intimidated and assaulted. Action was also taken against farmers who increased the price of quarter-ground, often resulting in the land of the farmer being dug up during the night by large gangs of labourers. [188] There were ongoing threats and intimidation of farmers by labourers whenever farmers attempted to exploit the shortage of potato ground by putting up rent.

Landless labourers and rural poor were demanding that the balance between wages, rent for quarter-ground and the price of provisions be maintained. The focus of the conflict was ensuring that farmers sold provisions locally at a reasonable price while at the same time ensuring that farmers did not undercut normal pay-rates by hiring migrant labour or exploit the shortage of potato ground by increasing rent. Clark goes into detail outlining the nature of class differences

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[181] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 May 1831.
[182] *Ennis Advertiser,* 16 April 1831.
[183] *CSO/RP/OR/1831/1364.*
[184] Donnelly Jr, 'The Terry Alt Movement 1829-31', p. 34.
[185] Michael McMahon, 'Agrarian Conflict in Clare, 1818-1831' in *The Other Clare,* Volume 18, (1994), p. 55.
[186] *State of the Country Papers,* 16 February 1825, SOC 2728/9, National Archives, Dublin.
[187] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 September 1825.
[188] *State of the Country Papers,* 26 March 1827, SOC 2853/18, National Archives, Dublin.

and class antagonisms in rural Ireland and the consequential nature of the conflict in rural areas. The conclusions drawn by Clark are very much confirmed in relation to rural Limerick during the first half of the nineteenth century.[189]

Ongoing Rural Outrage

Following the end of the Terry Alt rebellion and the subsidence of the anti-tithes campaign, tensions and clandestine conflict continued around the same issues for the remainder of the decade. The ongoing and simmering discontent among the landless labourers and cottiers reached highpoints in 1836 and again between 1839 and 1840 as tensions spilled over into large scale violence directed by labourers against tenant farmers and the migrant workers they employed.

During October 1836 significant conflict broke out in the area around Ballylanders and the Galbally area, 25 miles south of Limerick, as local farmers refused to employ labourers who were demanding 6d a week more than the migrant labourers.[190] On the night of 15 October a group of men visited the houses of several farmers 'on account of his having employed strangers to work for him the preceding week'. The farmers were 'ordered to discharge the workmen they have employed'. Police reported that the labourers of Galbally and Ballylanders had combined to prevent strangers from working in those parishes. The following day the police were mobilised as a group of 50 labourers gathered with the intention of confronting migrant workers as they returned to the district from Mitchelstown.[191]

The same night a large group of men attacked the house of a local farmer, Timothy Lee, demolishing his windows and ordering him to discharge strangers in his employment.[192] The attacks were to continue and escalate over the following nights. Police offered £15 reward for information leading to the arrest of those who had carried out attacks on the house of John McGrath of Galbally. [193] The attackers fired two shots into the house and ordered McGrath 'to discharge strangers from his employment'.[194]

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[189] Samuel Clark, 'The Importance of Agrarian Classes: Agrarian Class Structure and Collective Action in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 29, Number 1, (March 1978), pp. 22-40.
[190] 20 October 1836, 17/169, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[191] 17 October 1836, 17/164, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[192] 19 October 1836, 17/167, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[193] 20 October 1836, 17/169, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[194] 20 October 1836, 17/171, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.

At the same time the house of Elizabeth Hayes in the parish of Kilbreedy, in the Costlea barony, was attacked.[195] She was ordered to discharge 'the Kerrymen in her employment' or her house would be burned. Several other farmers were also visited before the group attacked the house of James English, a mile from the Hayes's house. Like with Hayes they threatened to burn down his house if English did not discharge the Kerrymen in his employment. English told them to go ahead and burn the house if they wanted to. The attackers left without carrying out their threat but the Kerrymen employed by English left soon after.[196]

1839 saw a second major escalation in the conflict in rural Limerick this time extending over most of the county. This conflict comprised of all the elements that brought about social tensions during this period. On 13 March, a threatening notice from 'the radicals' was posted on the house of James Kinkead in Galbally. Kinkead had let a field a few days earlier at £10 an acre.

> We the radicals of this district do caution and advise you not to persist in the unjust oppressive system which you are about to introduce namely in asking or demanding the whole Rent of £2-10 in hand a quarter for the field you are about to let… we are determined to root those evils which you are about to plant, by paying you nocturnal visit, and inflicting on you … the most dreadful punishments…
> Signed Always ready, Captain of the True Radicals. [197]

A week later, on 20 March, an acre of land belonging to Patrick Carmody of Pubblebrien was turned-up. His house was attacked, and the windows smashed. Carmody was warned by the attackers to let a field for quarter ground. The police offered £50 reward for information leading to the arrest of the attackers.[198] During these attacks the farmers were forced to swear 'illegal oaths' not to provide information about the attack to the police. The attacks and intimidation of the farmers and migrant labourers rarely led to an arrest and conviction as the victims did not make any complaint to the police or provide information of the attack out of fear of the consequences.[199]

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[195] Kilbreedy Parish is located approximately 25 miles south of Limerick and 2 miles east of Kilmallock.
[196] 22 October 1836, 17/163, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1836,* National Archives, Dublin.
[197] 20 March 1839, 17/2355, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[198] 25 March 1839, 17/1969, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin. Pubblebrien was a barony that covered an area from Limerick city to 5 miles west of the city and as far south as Croom.
[199] 13 May 1839, 17/3494, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.

Time and again throughout the spring and summer of 1839 labourers attempted to force farmers to balance wages, prices and rent. On 13 April a threatening notice was pinned to a tree at the chapel at Kildimo warning farmers not to charge more than 16s for potatoes.[200] The following morning an acre of land belonging to Edward Fitzgerald was turned up and holes dug resembling graves. Fitzgerald was charging between £2-5 per quarter for the sixteen acres he rented from Mrs. Hurst, compared to the £7 per acre that Mrs. Hurst had previously charged, making a significant profit on the transactions. That night a party of men attacked Fitzgerald's house. The attackers launched a volley of stones at the door of the house, but Fitzgerald refused to come out. The men demanded that Fitzgerald let quarter ground to neighbours at £7 per acre and not let any ground to strangers. To drive home the point the attackers fired three shots at the house. As with other attacks, Fitzgerald did not report the incident[201] but when the police became aware of the attack, they offered a £40 reward, again failing to attract anyone willing to claim the reward.[202]

Over the following few days threatening notices were put up at Mungret and Adare over the price of potatoes.[203] On the night of 21 April a group of men attacked Patrick Dempsey in his house in Croagh for overcharging for potatoes. After being assaulted Dempsey was ordered to charge no more than 16s per barrel.[204] The attacks continued into May with a farmer named John Gorman from Kilfinney being assaulted and badly beaten by a group of men dressed in women's clothes. Gorman's attack came about because he was selling potatoes at 40s a barrel. The attackers demanded that he refund 4s per barrel to those he had overcharged.[205]

The same pattern was repeated on a consistent basis.[206] On 2 June a party of 15 men visited several farmers' houses. In each case the farmers were warned not to charge more than 20s for potatoes. No assaults took place in any of these incidents, but several warning shots were fired in each case.[207] The same night shots were fired through the door of a farmer named Michael Steep of Kilfinane nearly hitting his servant. Steep was warned to sell potatoes at a reduced

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[200] 17 April 1839, 17/2656, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[201] 18 April 1839, 17/2717, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[202] 16 April 1839, 17/2606, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[203] 20 April 1839, 17/2792, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin. & 22 April 1839, (no reference), *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin. Adare is 15 miles south-west of Limerick.
[204] 9 May 1839, 17/3326, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[205] 8 May 1839, 17/3302, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin. Kilfinney is 5 miles south-west of Adare.
[206] 13 May 1839, 17/3494, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin, 3 June 1839, 17/3951, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin & 4 June 1839, 17/4007, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[207] 5 June 1839, 17/4038, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.

price.[208] Assaults and the posting of threatening notices[209] continued through the month. By the middle of June, the point of contention shifted to opposition to farmers selling potatoes to forestallers. Farmers being repeatedly warned to sell their potatoes locally and this continued to be the main issue for the rest of the month and into July. [210]

By July unemployment among the landless labourers led to an upsurge of attacks on farmers for using migrant labourers. In most cases the migrant labourers were attacked and intimidated to get them to leave the locality and farmers were threatened not to employ them.[211] On 20 July the Curate of Rathkeale J. H. Bouchier wrote to the *Chronicle* outlining the distress of the poor resulting from unemployment and the scarcity and high price of provisions in Rathkeale. Bouchier claimed that labourers were getting no more work than three days a week and were receiving wages of 2s that the families were forced to survive on. The Poor Relief Committee in Rathkeale had distributed free flour to 1,000 people and sold the flour at half price to another 1,200 inhabitants. The Committee had only enough money to provide relief for one more week.[212] At the end of August further conflict emerged as the labourers in employment were demanding the payment of a harvest bonus. [213]

The entire conflict was repeated in 1840 beginning in March. The police reported that a multitude of peasantry assembled on the lands of Kilcurly near Adare and turned up several acres of ground on the farm of Arundel Hill Esq. This land had been rented out to tenant farmers who were refusing to rent it as potato ground to landless labourers. The following day as Mr. Hill's labourers 'were relaying the sods of earth, a large crowd drove them off by force of arms, firing shots in pursuit'.[214] Part of a field let by David Roche MP was turned up because the tenant farmer would not let it for potato ground. The local farmers were exploiting the shortage of potato ground by letting con-acre for anywhere between £10 and £20 per acre. Police reports indicate that land was being turned up in many parts of the county in protest at the high cost and shortage of available potato ground.[215]

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[208] 6 June 1839, 17/4077, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin. Kilfinane is located two miles east of Kilmallock.
[209] 16 June 1839, 17/4480, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[210] 2 July 1839, 17/4817, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[211] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 July 1939.
[212] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 July 1939.
[213] 23 August 1839, 17/7372, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1839,* National Archives, Dublin.
[214] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 March 1840.
[215] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 April 1840.

By April the issue of selling produce to forestallers also emerged. On 5 April, a notice was posted on the wall of a public house at Bulgaden[216] warning farmers not to sell milk to forestallers and threatening anyone that would take the notice down. The notice was torn down by James Cleary the brother of one of the threatened farmers. That night, in retaliation, forty perches of a field belonging to James Cleary were turned up.[217] The scale and intensity of the assaults and threats on farmers increased during 1840. One of the more serious incidents occurred on 30 April in Kilfinane when several houses belonging to local farmers were set on fire and large quantities of potatoes were stolen.[218]

The situation was repeated over each of the following years although not with the same reported intensity. Conflict generally started over the lack and high cost of potato ground. This was followed during the early part of the summer by intimidation to reduce the high price of potatoes and during the harvest period low wages and the employment of migrant labour was the dominant issue. In 1842, to take advantage of the high price of potatoes, farmers began setting much larger quantities of potato land throughout the county. The change from grazing to tillage greatly increased the demand for labour.[219] This resulted in a major increase in the hiring of migrant labourers and consequential hostility of local workers.

To try and undermine the ongoing regular campaign by the labourers and rural poor against the tenant farmers the police began to increase the size of the rewards to encourage farmers to provide evidence against their attackers. On 30 May 1842, the houses of six farmers were attacked in Kildimo. The attack was carried out by 25 men who warned them 'not to sell potatoes at more than 16s per barrel'. The police offered £40 public reward plus a further £10 private reward. Six men were arrested and charged with the attacks.[220] Two of the farmers who were attacked, Patrick Carroll and Patrick Burns, gave evidence that led to arrests. As a result, they were taken into police protection in Limerick while waiting to receive the reward.[221] Both farmers claimed they were unable to return to their farms for fear of attack. The Magistrates requested a sum of money to allow them to rebuild their houses and protect themselves and recommended to Dublin Castle that each should be given £100 to slate and fortify properties.

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[216] Bulgaden is located just to the north of Kilmallock.
[217] 11 April 1840, 17/6435, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1840,* National Archives, Dublin.
[218] 21 May 1840, 17/9773, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1840,* National Archives, Dublin.
[219] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 April 1842.
[220] 7 July 1842, 17/9859, 17/12809, 17/13459, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.
[221] 12 August 1842, 17/15075, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.

The Magistrates argued that adopting such measures would reduce future outrages as farmers would be more willing to give evidence against their attackers.[222]

A Parliamentary Report dated 1845 stated that 'the practice of letting land to middlemen is now rare'.[223] Dooley asserted that landlords stopped renewing the leases of middlemen from 1815 onwards. However, the role of the middlemen was now taken over by the tenant farmer who exploited the opportunity to rent land from the landlord and then in turn rent out quarter ground and conacre to labourers at significantly higher rates than they paid the landlord.[224] Some landlords did attempt to prohibit sub-letting. In the 1820s Richard Bourke provided three tenant farmers with a 'lease for one life' and a clause forbidding sub-letting and sub-division. When a tenant farmer did break such a prohibition, as with John Boland in 1845, Bourke cancelled his lease and made Boland a tenant at will. He allowed the sub-tenant to retain the land but he was not allowed to live on it.[225]

On 25 November 1843, the *Limerick Chronicle* published a letter that outlined the difficult position facing the labourers in rural areas. The letter claimed that landlords were giving reductions of 20 and 25 per cent in rents to their tenant farmers. The letter claimed that the tenant farmers were refusing to pass the rent reduction on to those renting quarter ground stating and argued that landlords should ensure that when a rent reduction was allowed to the tenant farmers, they be obliged to provide a similar reduction in quarter-ground rent. The letter went on:

> Can it be wondered at that discontent should prevail, where so much misery and just cause for envy and complaint exists? The ill will that labourers in the country entertain towards farmers in general, is testimony enough of the exactions and hardheadedness of the latter.[226]

The letter claimed that the previous year one farmer had demanded 'more than £12 per acre and a pound in hand, from the labourers in his neighbourhood, for potato ground' and a labourer

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[222] 27 July 1842, 17/14173, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick, 1842,* National Archives, Dublin.
[223] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 February 1845 & *Digest of evidence taken before Her majesty's commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 1.* House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 1121.
[224] Terence A. M. Dooley, *Sources for the History of Landed Estates in Ireland,* (Dublin, 2000), p. 5-6.
[225] Margaret Power, 'Sir Richard Bourke and his Tenants 1815-55', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 46, 2006), p. 77. Richard Bourke owned more than 1,000 acres in East Limerick and North Tipperary. His father was an absentee landlord and used agents to run his estate. The estate was in poor financial and agricultural condition when Bourke inherited it in 1795. Bourke continued with being absent as he pursued a career in the military.
[226] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 November 1843.

would have to work for 200 days at 8d per day to pay the rent on half an acre with little possibility of being able to save for a pound 'in hand' to secure the potato ground.[227] These tensions between tenant farmers and labourers were a foretaste of the difficulties that arose during the famine as many farmers continued to exploit the scarcity of food to profit at the expense of labourers and cottiers.

Conclusion

The traditional focus on the issue of land tenure in Ireland overlooks the fact that, rather than insecurity of tenure for farmers, a more serious problem in the pre-Famine era was the plight of the hundreds of thousands of landless and near-landless labourers employed on a system akin to bonded labour. Most of these labourers rented from farmers rather than landlords and the disincentive effects of such a system are surely clear. The pitiful low, and effectively shadow, wages, paid in conacre reflected this. Yet conacre was a crucial cog in pre-famine Irish agriculture and of significant benefit to Irish tenant farmers.[228] Unlike labourers who fell into destitution, farmers may well have suffered in the years of lowest prices but, they were not totally without resources even in the worst years.[229]

The economic circumstances faced by the landless and near-landless labourers was the driving force behind the agrarian conflicts in the pre-Famine era. High rents, high prices for provisions and low wages during a period of economic boom, all contributed to the emergence of the Caravats. The post-war economic downturn, with the added increase in unemployment among labourers as farmers switched from tillage to pasture farming drove the emergence of the Rockites. Similar developments, coupled with rising expectations in the aftermath of O'Connell's election, resulted in the Terry Alts becoming a mass movement of the landless and near-landless.

Much of the literature on each of these episodes attempt to remove them from social circumstances and their basis within the social classes of the period. The Caravat/Shanavest conflict is often portrayed as faction fights resulting from personal feuds.[230] Commentary on the Rockites is regularly addressed as a sectarian conflict.[231] Historically, the Terry Alts were

[227] *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 November 1843.
[228] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History, 1780-1939*, p. 130.
[229] Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660*, p. 112.
[230] Ó Danachair, 'Faction fighting in County Limerick'.
[231] Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p. 295.

associated with anti-tithe agitation.[232] While these may have been aspects in part of each of these conflicts, the over-riding causes were the social and economic conditions faced by the poor.

The pre-Famine agrarian conflict is normally viewed from a nationalist perspective which is forced to fit into a narrative that the conflict of the period in rural Ireland was primarily between tenant and landlord. This topic deserves re-evaluation from the perspective of social class and the conditions faced by the rural poor.

[232] William Tait & Christian Isobel Johnstone (eds), *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine for 1835, Volume 2,* (Edinburgh, 1835), p. 695.

Chapter Three – Social Conditions, Fever and Food Riots

Introduction

Fever and food riots were a common feature of life in Limerick during the first half of the nineteenth century. Both were manifestations of the poverty experienced by the working class and were the direct result of this poverty. Hunger and poor housing were the prime reasons that facilitated the spread of fever. Connolly indicated that any deterioration of living conditions meant that fever, which was never entirely suppressed, flared up into an epidemic. Food shortage was one of the main stimuli of epidemics.[1] There is no direct link between fever and food riots, but food riots did occasionally occur during periods of fever. For example, the fever outbreak in 1817 was followed by severe food rioting. The working class understood the link between hunger and the prevalence of fever and acted to prevent a worse catastrophe. In other situations, food riots were prompted specifically by food shortages and price rises.

This chapter will look at the social conditions in Limerick in the first half of the nineteenth century and will consider the impact of the episodes of fever on the working class of the city. It will also look at the causes, character, and consequences of food riots, including the response of Unionist controlled corporation. The food riots will be considered in the context of Thompson's outlook of the 'moral economy'[2] and whether these episodes in Limerick can be characterised as falling within the outline of Thompson's categorisation.

The social divisions in Limerick were clear to see, from the overcrowded tenements on Kings Island to the Georgian splendour of Newtown Perry. In one of the tenement houses at the rear of where Barrington's Hospital now stands, no less than 176 inhabitants resided, some rooms containing three families. As a result of security being a priority, space was at a premium within the old city walls. The area was a warren of narrow streets and lanes. The disappearance of the city walls made little difference, the old town houses now served a purpose as tenement slums and the structure of the area contributed to the overcrowded unsanitary conditions and the spread of disease.[3]

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[1] Susan Connolly, 'Health Services in Limerick in the Early 19th Century', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 27, (Autumn 1990), p. 5.
[2] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present,* Number 50, (February 1971), pp. 76-136.
[3] Kevin Hannan, 'The Irishtown', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 10, (Spring 1982), p. 5-6.

In the slums the diet consisted mainly of oatmeal, often families shared a single saucepan for cooking. High mortality resulted firstly from malnutrition and its related ailments, and secondly from the spread of infection. The atrocious housing conditions, poor diet and lack of proper sanitary services created an ideal environment for the spread of disease. Generally, the local establishment paid little heed to the plight of the poorer classes until the spread of disease threatened their own wellbeing.[4]

The general medical services were unable to meet the needs of the working classes.[5] The harsh nature of life for the poor is demonstrated by the following observation of living conditions at the beginning of the nineteenth century made by John Geary M.D.

> In the lanes and alleys … fever in general assumes its most virulent appearance…pigs under the beds, a dunghill at the door…the father, mother and perhaps three not unusually four of their unhappy offspring lying on the same bed; add to this almost total privation of wholesome or nutritious food.[6]

Geary was not the only commentator. In 1834 English travel writer Henry David Inglis visited the city outlining that 'I can never forget the scenes of utter and hopeless wretchedness…The inmates, were some of them old, crooked and diseased; some younger, but emaciated, and surrounded by starving children'. Inglis also spoke about the domestic cottage workers he found, stating '…many hand-loom weavers who worked from five in the morning until eight at night, and received…between half a crown and four shillings a week'.[7]

The hand-loom weavers were predominantly based in Thomondgate. From 1770- 1835 home weaving was the main occupation for families in this district. Besides the weavers, an army of workers was engaged in preparing the raw flax and spinning, which included harvesting, washing, scutching and bleaching. By 1835 home weaving in Thomondgate was almost completely wiped out.[8]

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[4] In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the word 'fever' was mostly used to denote typhus, typhoid and cholera. See: J.F. Devane, *A History of St. John's Hospital*, (Dublin, 1970), p. 7, & Connolly, 'Health Services in Limerick in the Early 19th Century', p. 5.

5 Frances Twomey, 'Social Conditions and Medical Services Before 1830', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 24, (Winter 1988), p. 32.

6 J. Geary, *A Historical and Medical Report of the Limerick Fever and Lock Hospital*, (Limerick 1820), p. 24-25. For information about Dr. John Geary, see: M.E. Gleeson, 'Dr. John Geary and Dr. Wm. John Geary, 1779-1853', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 24, (Winter 1988), pp. 25-28.

[7] Henry David Inglis, *Ireland in 1834, A Journey, Volume 1* (London, 1835), p. 302-304.

[8] Kevin Hannan, 'The District of Thomondgate', p. 19.

For the mass of the population the threat of starvation and death from fever was a constant feature right throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Working class people reacted to rising food prices by regularly engaging in food riots in order to force the local establishment to reduce the cost of food and provide some relief from rampant unemployment. At the same time large quantities of food were being exported from Limerick Port. General James Duff commented that 'many rich Individuals' were 'employed in the Monopoly of Grain' at Limerick.[9] Throughout the period 1750-1845 Limerick exported vast amounts of corn and provisions from the fertile hinterland in North Munster.[10]

A House of Industry was established in Limerick in 1774[11] in order to address the issues of vagrancy and mendicity in the city. They were designed to discourage indiscriminate alms-giving by the city's citizens and were highly punitive, to create a narrative of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.[12] In 1805 the magistrates carried out street clearances, shaving the heads of prostitutes before forcing them, along with pick-pockets, into the House of Industry. Similar street clearances occurred in 1809, however, Fleming and Logan note that half of the prostitutes who entered the House of Industry during the period 1774-1793 entered voluntarily.[13] As a consequence, the House of Industry suffered serious overcrowding which in part led to the building of a lunatic asylum for the poor in January 1827 to relieve some of the pressure on resources at the House of Industry.[14]

Fever in Limerick

The most devastating episode of a fever epidemic in Limerick was an outbreak of cholera in 1832, part of the worldwide pandemic that occurred from 1831-1834. Over a 15-month period from the start of 1832 a total of 3,383 cases of cholera were recorded with 1,252 deaths in Limerick City.[15]

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[9] Roger Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, (Liverpool, 1996), p. 178.
[10] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick*, p. 252.
[11] David Fleming and John Logan (eds), *Pauper Limerick, The Register of the Limerick House of Industry, 1774-1793*, (Dublin, 2011), p. xiii.
[12] Catherine Cox, 'Health and Welfare, 1750-2000, in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, (Cambridge, 2017), p. 262.
[13] Fleming and Logan, p. xiv.
[14] Ibid., p. xv.
[15] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'Fever and Public Health in Pre-Famine Ireland', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Volume 103, (1973), p. 32.

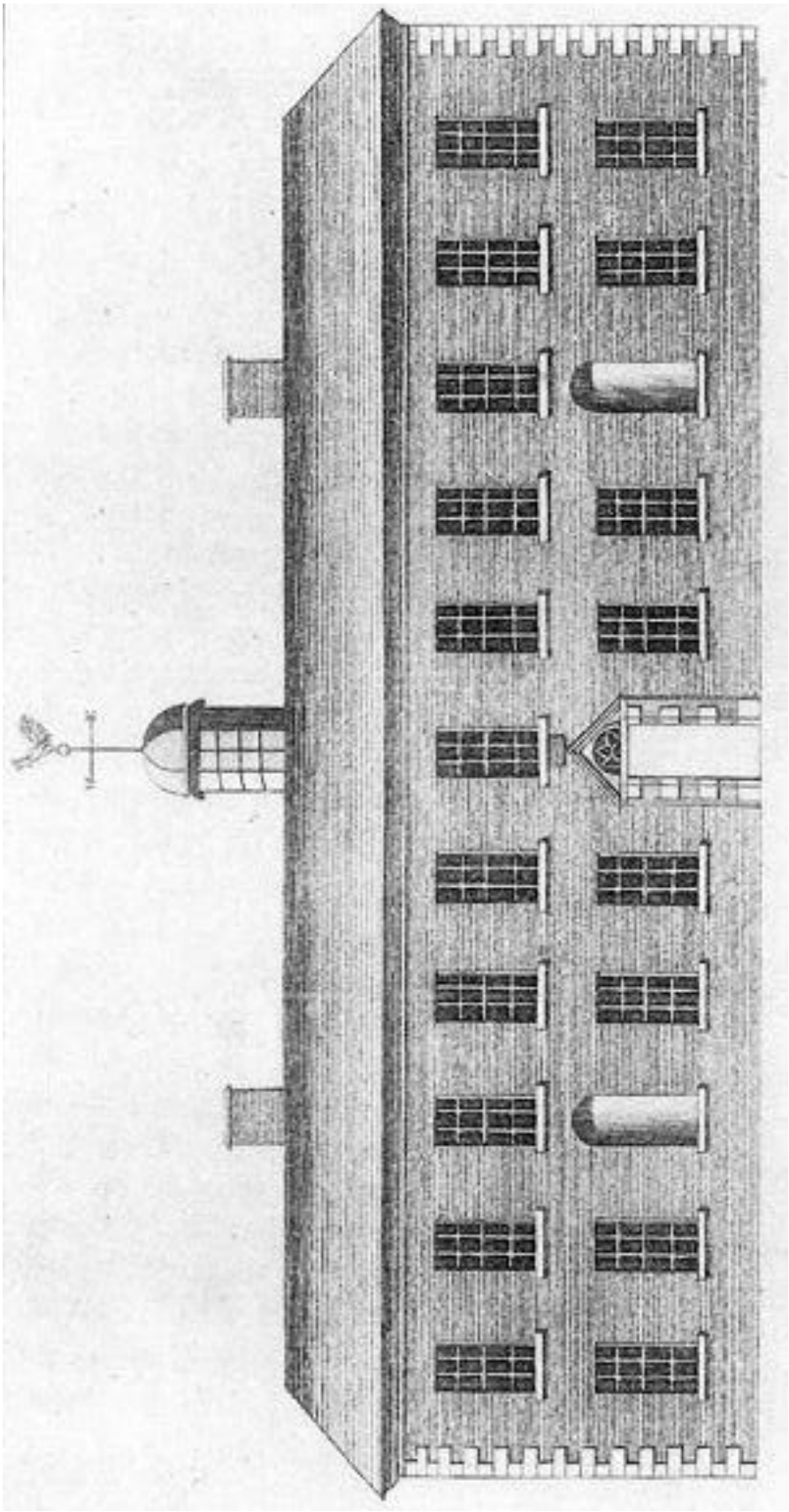

Illustration No. 3 – Limerick House of Industry
Source: Limerick House of Industry, [http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Limerick/]

Smouldering cases of fever were always to be found in the poorer districts of Limerick.[16] The first fever hospitals in Ireland date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were few in number and situated only in some of the larger cities and towns, Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Killarney, Waterford, Kilkenny and Derry. St. John's Hospital was founded in Limerick, in 1780 by Lady Hartstone and other benefactors, as a fever and lock hospital. By the middle of the nineteenth century the fever hospital had room for over five hundred patients.[17] Legislation in 1807 empowered Grand Juries to raise a sum not exceeding £100 for the support of fever hospitals. This sum was hopelessly inadequate and in 1814 the amount was increased to £250 but remained far short of the amount required for a sizeable hospital.[18]

The first significant outbreak of fever occurred in February 1817. The catalyst for this crisis was the 'year without a summer' in 1816 when weather conditions destroyed crops and created the climate for the easy spread of disease. The dramatic alteration of the climate conditions was the result of the eruption of the Mount Tambora volcano in Indonesia during April 1815.[19] The subsistence crisis of 1816-1817 in Europe that resulted from the Tambora eruption was the worst since the famine of 1709-1710. Severe weather patterns coupled with the post-Napoleonic recession combined to cause acute distress in Europe.[20] As fever emerged in Limerick the hospital services were quickly overrun with patients.[21] Over the entire year 2,580 patients were treated at the fever hospital of which 175 died.[22] It was estimated that as many as a quarter of the entire population of the city contracted the fever.[23] Rural parts of Limerick were also badly affected, but with no hospitals located in the rural areas, St John's Hospital became a refuge for large numbers of fever patients from all over the county. As a result of the scale of overcrowding the government allowed the use of a military hospital in the city to take the overflow.[24]

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[16] Devane, *A History of St. John's Hospital*, p.7 & Connolly, 'Health Services in Limerick in the Early 19th Century', p. 19. There was an outbreak of typhus in Limerick in 1800. In 1815 404 patients suffering from fever were admitted to the Fever Hospital with 24 dying. In 1816 there were 625 fever patients.
[17] Lenihan, *Limerick It's History and Antiquities*, p. 370.
[18] O'Neill, 'Fever and Public Health in Pre-Famine Ireland', p. 7.
[19] For information about the eruption of Mount Tambora see: Richar B. Stothers, 'The Great Tambora Eruption in 1815 and Its Aftermath', *Science*, Volume 224, Number 4654, (15 June 1984), pp. 1191-1198.
[20] John D. Post, *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World*, (London, 1977), p. 27.
[21] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 February 1817.
[22] *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 January 1818. Between 6 January and 18 May 1818, 867 people were admitted to the Fever Hospital with 123 dying.
[23] *First Report from the Select Committee On the State of Disease and the Condition of the Labour Poor Ireland*, House of Commons Papers, 1819, (409), viii.457, p. 21.
[24] Ibid., p. 36. Between 6 January 1818 and 6 October 1818 total of 2,663 patients were treated in the military hospital. The military hospital was eventually withdrawn from service on 10 March 1819.

During 1818 of the 3,289 people who were admitted to the Fever Hospital 211 died.[25] In total during the epidemic 6,743 people contracted fever with 427 deaths.[26] O'Connor's outline of the nature of fever in Waterford follows a similar path to developments in Limerick.[27] Further outbreaks of fever occurred in June 1824[28] and again during the summer of 1826 with outbreaks of typhus.[29] One of the major developments in the field of health care occurred in 1830 with the passing of the Limerick Hospital Act by the House of Commons. This Act gave legal status to Barrington's Hospital.[30]

The second cholera pandemic 1827-1835 emerged in India before spreading to the Middle East and then to Russia. By August 1831 cholera spread to Central Europe and by October it had arrived in Sunderland with the first reported cases in Britain.[31] After Irish newspapers reported the emergence of cholera in Sunderland panic set in across Limerick. [32] It dawned on the establishment that if cholera was in Britain it wouldn't be long before it reached Ireland. Contributing to the panic was the lack of understanding of the underlying cause of cholera, its impact on the human body and how the contagion was spread, all of which contributed to widespread disagreement within the medical community.[33] A meeting took place to discuss measures to prevent an outbreak of cholera in the city with, once again, little of consequence decided.[34] Little had changed in the slum conditions since the outbreak of typhus in 1817.[35]

The first case of cholera was notified on 8 May when a labourer named Crowe fell ill in St. Mary's parish. Crowe recovered leading to angry exchanges between doctors over whether he was actually suffering from cholera. The Board of Health declared that it was not a case of Asiatic cholera and the belief emerged that the city had escaped.[36] This belief was shattered on

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[25] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 June 1819.
[26] House of Commons Papers, 1819, (409), viii.457, p. 36.
[27] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 19. Similarly, in relation to housing conditions, O'Connor outlines that the slums of Waterford were breeding grounds for cholera, typhus and typhoid (p. 7).
[28] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 July 1825. 334 people were admitted to the Fever Hospital during the months of June and July 1824 and a further 158 during August. Between January and June 1825, 1,139 people were admitted with fever and 59 died.
[29] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 August 1826.
[30] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 May 1830. For more information on the building of Barrington's Hospital see: Mark Tierney, 'The Origins and Early Years of Barrington's Hospital', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 24, (Winter 1988), pp. 33-40. For information on Matthew Barrington and the Barrington Family see: Mark Tierney, 'Sir Matthew Barrington: 1788-1861: The Real Founder of Barrington's Hospital', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 24, Winter 1988), pp. 11-18, & Dom Hubert Janssens de Varebeke, 'The Barringtons of Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 7, Number 3, (1956), pp. 23-28.
[31] J. N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History,* (California, 2006), p. 211
[32] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 November 1831.
[33] Hays, p. 214
[34] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 November 1831.
[35] Kevin Hannan, 'The 1832 Cholera Epidemic', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Number 24, (Winter 1988), p. 48.
[36] *Historical Records of the Existence and Progress of Cholera During the months of May and June* 1832, Limerick City Library, p. 14-18.

14 May when a corn-broker, Denis Mullane, collapsed in his garden. Mullane died at his home within hours of falling ill.[37]

As the epidemic ravaged the city some efforts were made to mitigate the impact on the population.[38] However, the measures that were introduced had relatively little effect in stemming the tide of infection. The epidemic in the city subsided in late July. The three hospitals utilised during the outbreak treated a total 2,125 cases that resulted in 760 deaths, although the unofficial estimate, including people who died at home, is put at 960.[39]

Those living outside the city also suffered. Cholera ravaged Bruff during Christmas 1832. Twenty cases that resulted in twelve deaths occurred in the village of Toomevara during the first week in January 1833.[40] At the same time disease spread rapidly through Rathkeale, completely disappearing by the beginning of February, only to re-emerge with vengeance in Croom, Herbertstown, Pallasgreen and Caherconlish.[41] During March cholera spread 'with destructive fury' around Knockany, Ballingarry, Kilmallock, Bruree and Fedamore.[42] As late as the middle of March 1834 the *Chronicle* reported that several deaths had occurred as a result of cholera in Patrickswell.[43]

Food riots

Rudé argued that in the transitional period (between the pre-industrial and industrial eras) the typical form of social protest is the food riot, not the strike of the future or the millenarian movement or the peasant jacquerie of the past.[44] In the period prior to the famine Limerick experienced aspects of all three. Along with the upsurge of strike activity in the period from 1810-1823, Limerick experienced regular episodes of food rioting as the 'lower orders' reacted to rising food prices and unemployment. Rudé did recognise that there were aspects of all three forms of protest involved in the transitional period he described[45] however, the evidence

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[37] *Historical Records of the Existence and Progress of Cholera During the months of May and June* 1832, p. 21-22.
[38] Hugh Fenning, 'The Cholera Epidemic in Ireland, 1832-3: Priests, Ministers, Doctors', *Archivium Hibernicum,* (Volume 57, 2003), p. 85-86.
[39] *Historical Records of the Existence and Progress of Cholera During the months of May and June 1832,* p. 71.
[40] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 January 1833.
[41] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 February 1833.
[42] Fenning, 'The Cholera Epidemic in Ireland, 1832-3: Priests, Ministers, Doctors', p. 113-114.
[43] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 March 1834. Another outbreak of fever occurred during the second half of 1838 with the Fever Hospital reporting that 460 had been admitted between July and the first week of October.
[44] George Rudé, *The Crowd in History,* (London 1999), p. 5.
[45] Ibid., p. 6.

suggests that Limerick experienced these protest movements in a more condensed fashion than described by Rudé in pre-revolutionary France and pre-industrial England.

Just as Rudé cautioned about the use of the word 'mob' to described those involved in rioting,[46] Thompson warned against the loose employment of the term 'riot'.[47] He argued in relation to food riots in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

> This was rarely a mere uproar which culminated in the breaking open of barns or the looting of shops. It was legitimised by the assumptions of the old moral economy, which taught the immorality of any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of the people.[48]

While actions by the crowd were triggered off by soaring prices, malpractice among dealers or by hunger[49] the actions of the crowd were far more complex than the arguments by some historians that the crowd were simply responding to economic stimuli.[50] Evidence from Limerick suggests that Thompson's assertion was accurate. One caveat that must be included is the fact that unemployment also played a role in the food riots, particularly in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

In Ireland, as in Britain, market forces exercised a powerful influence over later eighteenth-century agrarian economy. Local marketing systems, with numerous modest market towns drawing foodstuffs from limited hinterlands, were themselves subsumed in a national marketing system that embraced most of the country with the possible exception of the remotest parts of Connaught.[51] Thompson argued that restrictions controlling the markets and protecting the interests of common townspeople broke down in England by the 1770s.[52] In Limerick efforts were made to maintain restrictions on the working of the markets, although it has to be said that these restrictions were designed to benefit the merchant class. The Chamber of Commerce attempted to use fixed markets in the city to control and manipulate the price of produce. Markets existed across the entire food spectrum from potatoes, to milk, to bacon and a corn market, which was introduced in 1816.[53] Penalties were imposed on merchants who failed to

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[46] Rudé, *The Crowd in History,* p. 7.
[47] E. P. Thompson. 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 76.
[48] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* (London, 1991) p. 67.
[49] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 78.
[50] Ibid., p. 76.
[51] Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', p. 163.
[52] Thompson, p. 83.
[53] LCC Meeting 12 December 1816, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820,* p. 104.

use the fixed markets[54] and as the century progressed forestallers increasingly purchased provisions from farmers in the hinterland and to sell to the city markets making a profit. In 1801 General James Duff spoke of 'many rich individuals employed in the monopoly of grain' at Limerick.[55] Many of the leading families in the city were flour millers and merchants and they became the main target of the crowd during episodes of social protest.

Thompson outlined that as the population increased, the resultant increase in consumption resulted in the producers more generally commanding a sellers' market.[56] The bulk of the population were small consumers dependent on a cheap and plentiful supply of bread.[57] The economy of the poor was still local and regional, derivative from a subsistence-economy. They expected that provisions should be consumed in the region it was grown, especially in times of scarcity.[58] However, from the beginning of the nineteenth century the export of provisions from Limerick was a major focal point of class conflict. Regularly, during periods of scarcity, food provisions intended for export were targeted by the crowd.

The high point and most extensive food rioting in Limerick occurred at the beginning of June 1840 when several days of full-scale rioting and the raiding of food stores involved large numbers of the poor of the city. It followed a well-worn pattern of previous years. With the urban and rural poor living on a day-to-day basis any increases in the price of food was generally met with rising social unrest that occasionally spilled out into full-scale rioting and the looting of food stores. The local establishment and food merchants regularly initiated the supply of food at subsidised prices in order to divert social unrest but often it was too little and too late to prevent rioting occurring.

McGrath claimed that the food riots were unplanned and uncoordinated.[59] There is clear evidence that the rioting that occurred was not indiscriminate but planned by the working classes who organised and participated in food rioting en-masse. Mass meetings took place across the city to plan the raiding of merchant stores. The rioters would separate into several different groupings and spread out across the city in order to spread the police as thinly as

[54] LCC Meeting 12 December 1816, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820,* p. 106.
[55] Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', p. 178.
[56] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 93.
[57] Rudé, *The Crowd in History,* p. 36.
[58] Thompson, p. 98.
[59] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 86.

possible and would engage in hit and run tactics on food stores in an effort to loot as much food as possible before police or military arrived.

Thompson comments that farm labourers in England were relatively inactive as a cohort in social protests designed to impose the customs of the moral economy.[60] However, the rural labourers in Limerick played an active role in this period. Conflict in rural areas over high food prices was a regular occurrence. Night-time attacks by roving bands of landless labourers threatened tenant farmers for hoarding food, selling it to forestallers and overcharging for the food they sold to the local labouring poor. Under threats and intimidation, the tenant farmers complied with demands and if they failed to do so the normal result was physical assaults from their attackers and the burning down of farmhouses.[61]

A Regular Occurrence

Food rioting was a regular occurrence in Limerick during the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. The first recorded food riot in Limerick occurred on 12 May 1772 when a starving crowd rioted outside the Lock Mills seeking food. Soldiers opened fire on the crowd killing three men. The following day another large crowd rioted with a further three people being killed. Rudé argued that the food riot was a classic example of the imposition of an unofficial price control by collective action.[62] Thompson asserted that the central action in this pattern is not the sack of the granaries and the pilfering of grain or flour but the action of "setting the price".[63] The 1772 riots and many others that followed conformed to this scenario. The social protest was diffused when charity groups stepped in to provide subsidised food for those involved in the riots.[64]

In January 1786 rioting broke out in order to prevent the export of corn from Limerick docks. The local population were demanding that the food be distributed in the city because of high food prices.[65] Similarly in April 1791 the high price of food in Limerick caused an attack on a ship laden with meal and the crowd then proceeded to break open several stores.[66]

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[60] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 119.
[61] 17 April 1839, 17/2656 & 18 April 1839, 17/2717 & 13 May 1839, 17/3494 *Outrage Papers, County Limerick,* 1839, National Archives, Dublin.
[62] Rudé, *The Crowd in History,* p. 23.
[63] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 108.
[64] Jim Kemmy, 'The Siege of Lock Mills', in Jim Kemmy (ed.), *Limerick Anthology,* (Dublin, 1996), p. 236.
[65] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 January 1786.
[66] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 18.

Secret society intervention aimed to protect the poorest strata from exploitation at the hands of their wealthier neighbours was common in rural districts. The intensification and then continuation of the crisis after the 1800 harvest brought the agrarian changes implemented into even sharper relief. So much land had been converted to permanent pasture for cattle that there was 'little employment' for the poor and then at 'very…low wages'. Employment for local labourers was further impacted by the influx of labourers from west Kerry willing to work at lower rates. Rents in the county were high and rising.[67]

In April 1800 protests occurred at Killaloe where crowds mobilised to 'Swear…People not to sell their Potatoes out of the Parish, nor for a larger Price than Half a Guinea for Eight Bushels' and when efforts went ahead to transport the cargo down the twelve miles of river and canal to Limerick the crowd once again gathered and smashed up the boat sent to carry the cargo. The local yeomanry volunteers participated in the protests, violently attacking farmers who ignored the orders of the protesting crowd and threatening any doctor who treated the wounded.[68]

On 1 December 1800, a large angry crowd complained of starvation while wealthy traders in the City monopolised available supplies for export. In an effort to defuse the ongoing crisis the Corporation tried to create a fund designed to subsidise the cost of food.[69] Small farmers, cottiers and labourers consumed stocks set aside for seed further driving up the price of seed potatoes. As the price of potatoes increased the potato shortage injected significant inflationary pressures into the market for corn.[70] The impact of the rioting was not lost on the Corporation. Thompson argued that, in relation to riot, the benefits that may be gained by the threat of war might be significant – yet the threat carries no terror if the sanction is never used.[71] Clearly the threat of further rioting had the effect of repeatedly prompting the wealthy of Limerick to move to subsidise food prices. From the perspective of the elites, riot was a social calamity, and one to be avoided, even at a high cost.[72]

The Food Riots of 1817

Aside from the rioting in 1840 the most extensive food riot to occur prior to the Famine was in 1817. Cunningham discussed the 1817 food riots in Ireland and, citing other sources, asserted

[67] Wells, 'The Irish Famine of 1799-1801: Market Culture, Moral Economies and Social Protest', p. 183.
[68] Ibid., p. 182.
[69] *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 January 1801.
[70] Wells, p. 165-166.
[71] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 120.
[72] Ibid., p. 126.

that 1817 was the worst year for the Irish poor between the famines of the 1740 and the famine of the 1840s.[73] He described the 1817 riots as large scale and intense, outlining the different nature in Galway where the focus of the riots was on preventing the export of potatoes, while in Limerick and Ennis the target was the relief provisions and how these were being managed.[74]

Coupled with the fever epidemic that broke out in 1816 and continued into the following year, the working classes in Limerick faced rising food prices and potential starvation. Towards the end of 1816 the Chamber of Commerce expressed concern about the structural condition of the Kings' Stores and the possibility that the poor state of the building could lead to the pillage of provisions stored there for local merchants.[75] It was not long before their fears were realised. Rising food prices resulted in food rioting on 24 May 1817. Large crowds broke into several warehouses including the Kings Stores and carried off large quantities of meal and other provisions.[76]

Fearing an escalation, the Chamber of Commerce felt it necessary to attempt to stave off the looming crisis by subsidising the cost of food. A deputation from the Committee of the Poor met with the directors of the Chamber of Commerce on 28 May where:

> It was mutually agreed to be expedient, that the directors should purchase a parcel of Oatmeal to be held over for the Relief of the poor of this City in case of necessity and the Deputation from the Committee of the Poor pledge themselves to hold Five Hundred Pounds of their funds, as an indemnity, for any loss that may be sustained in Consequence of Said purchase.[77]

Two days later when faced with a potentially explosive situation in the city, the Chamber of Commerce purchased over 200 tons of oatmeal for supply to the poor.[78]

The response was not enough to appease the starving population. On the night of Saturday 7 June widespread food rioting broke out in the city. Corn stores and flourmills around the city were ransacked as groups of men and women carried off large quantities of corn and flour.

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[73] John Cunningham, 'Popular Protest and the "Moral Economy"', in Francis Devine, Fintan Lane and Niamh Puirséil (eds), *Essays in Irish Labour History: A Festschrift for Elizabeth and John W. Boyle*, (Dublin, 2008), p. 38.
[74] John Cunningham, 'Compelled to their bad acts by hunger: Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817–45', *Éire-Ireland*, Volume 45, Numbers 1&2 (Spring/Summer, 2010), p. 145.
[75] LCC Meeting 12 November 1813, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book May 1813-1815*, p. 24.
[76] *State of the Country Papers*, 24 May 1817, SOC 1836/10, National Archives, Dublin.
[77] LCC Meeting 28 May 1817, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820*, p. 127-128
[78] *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 May 1817.

Among the premises attacked was Vize's flourmills at Goldenmills where a large crowd carried off between 40 and 50 tons of oatmeal within 30 minutes. When a detachment of soldiers arrived on the scene at Goldenmills they arrested more than 30 people. Subsequently several different groups comprising of large numbers of people were systematically moving around the city making it difficult for the military to contain the situation.

With the authorities losing control, the Mayor called a meeting involving the Magistrates, the General, Lord Viscount Gort and other gentlemen at the Commercial Buildings at three o'clock on Sunday 8 June. The meeting decided to post troops at all food stores, close all public houses and impose a curfew from 9pm onwards. A brigade of artillery was positioned at the top of William Street. Despite these measures the attacks on shops and stores continued throughout the night and into Monday morning. The failure to resolve the crisis through coercion led to a further meeting being held in the Commercial Buildings at 1pm on Monday 9 June. This meeting adopted a carrot and stick approach with the attendees declaring:

> We the undersigned, thinking it possible that the outrageous conduct of the lower orders may have been influenced by real want…do subscribe…to create a Fund to enable the Chamber of Commerce to Sell the Meal which they have purchased for Five Pence a Pottle.

By the evening of Wednesday 11 June, the rioting had subsided, however, the potential for unrest continued. Thomas Pelton commented that the populace 'are however well disposed and anxious for plunder'.[79] The Chamber of Commerce had reduced the price of oatmeal from 6d to 5d a pottle with the aid of the money raised from subscriptions to the fund established the previous Monday.[80] The Mayor and Mr Bruce handed in a census of the poor to the Chamber of Commerce indicating that '14,000 indigent poor are to be supplied with meal at the rate of ½lb to each person at 5d a pottle.[81] An estimated 4,800 people were receiving food on a daily basis from two soup-kitchens established by the Committee for the Relief of the Poor.[82] Continued distress in July and the potential for further conflict led to an agreement between Lord Gort and the Chamber of Commerce to continue selling oatmeal at 5d a pottle for the

[79] *State of the Country Papers*, 10 June 1817, SOC 1836/16, National Archives, Dublin.
[80] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 June 1817.
[81] LCC Meeting 13 June 1817, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820*, p. 131-132
[82] *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 June 1817.

remainder of the week.[83] The reduced rate subsequently continued until September when the sale of oatmeal at a reduced price was discontinued. [84]

Thompson has suggested that the short-term impact of the riot resulted in protestors defeating their own objectives.[85] The 1817 food riot in Limerick demonstrated that the working classes involved in the riot were capable of achieving their objective of 'setting the price'. The city's establishment realised the potential of food rioting occurring and moved to defuse it. However, the protestors pushed home their advantage, organising the systematic plunder of food stores around the city despite being faced with military mobilisation. When the rioting eventually subsided, the continued fear that rioting would re-ignite led the Chamber of Commerce to maintain the provision of subsidised oatmeal for three months. The impact of the riot and the continuing threat of food riots led the city's establishment to regularly take measures to reduce food prices in order to mitigate the possibility of rioting.

Following the economic depression in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars the working classes of Limerick, both urban and rural, were faced with a constant struggle against food shortages, high prices for provisions, unemployment and low wages. Issues of overcrowding and deprivation continued and increased as rural labourers migrated into the city.

Concern at the shortage of food and the high price of potatoes led in April 1822 to the mayor calling a meeting to discuss measures ‘to aid the poor at a time of high potato prices’.[86] The meeting outlined that ‘extreme distress exists in the City…several thousands are totally destitute of the means of subsistence.[87] On 17 July the *Chronicle* reported that the Chamber of Commerce had received £300 from the London Committee and the mayor received £500 from the Lord Lieutenant to employ the poor repairing roads. The Society of the Poor reported that they were running out of money and that 1,500 people were receiving 8d per day to help them survive.[88] At Derrygalvin, to the south-east of the city, the following Wednesday a large number of the peasantry attacked and robbed flour from two cars transporting it to the city. The next

[83] LCC Meeting 13 July 1817, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820*, p. 138
[84] LCC Meeting 5 September 1817, *Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minute Book 23 June 1815-28 April 1820*, p. 144
[85] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 120.
[86] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 April 1822.
[87] *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 May 1822.
[88] *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 July 1822.

day at Loughmore, on the outskirts of the city to the south-west, another car was attacked and robbed of meal and salt.[89]

The threat of food rioting was now a yearly occurrence. At any time, unemployment or rising food prices could provoke the masses of the population into action. Each year the local establishment looked to adopt measures to mitigate against the possibility of rioting and plunder of food stores. However, despite their efforts rioting occurred on several occasions over the twenty-year period from 1820 to 1840. In 1826 there were large-scale protests in Rathkeale[90] and in 1827 protests occurred at Limerick's Potato Market to prevent the export of potatoes from the Market.[91]

Food Riots of 1830

In 1830 price rises resulted in a far more intense crisis. By May conditions in the city deteriorated dramatically. The House of Industry reported that 1,560 people were receiving relief there.[92] At the beginning of June work began on building a new road from Athlunkard Bridge into Co. Clare in order to provide employment as part of a public works programme.[93] But it was too late and much too little to alleviate the crisis. A few days later a full-scale food riot broke out at Baalsbridge. The riot resulted in the death of one woman who was hit in the head with a rock.[94]

The crisis abated for a period until a further food riot occurred in the city on 25 June. The riot began when local merchants increased food. Thompson pointed out that the initiators of the riots very often were the women.[95] The evidence from 1830 confirms this view. The crowd involved in the rioting included men, women and children with women playing a leading role in carrying off provisions. The rioters plundered provisions right throughout the city, fought running battles and played cat and mouse with the police and army for most of the day. During the riot the army opened fire on the protestors. Six people suffered injuries including three with gunshot wounds.

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[89] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 July 1822.
[90] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 August 1826.
[91] *State of the Country Papers*, 26 March 1827, SOC 2853/18, National Archives, Dublin.
[92] *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 May 1830.
[93] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 June 1830.
[94] *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 June 1830.
[95] Thompson. 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 115.

The magistrates imposed a curfew and shut all public houses at 9pm. The following morning all merchants' stores were guarded by police and carts transporting provisions were escorted by a detachment of the military. To try and dissipate the crisis, the Relief Committee opened markets to sell oatmeal at 3d per pottle. Later Russell's flourmills agreed to sell wheatmeal at 2s 2d per stone. [96] Despite these measures sporadic attacks occurred in the city and county over the next few days.[97] A total of 56 people were charged in connection with the food riot[98] with half of them later convicted of various crimes during the riots. The Magistrates were not hesitant in exacting revenge against the ringleaders in rural areas either. In response to rioting in the locality the Bruff Sessions sentenced two men to transportation and eight others to various terms of imprisonment for food rioting in the locality.[99]

Stack, in his discussion of the 1830 food riot in the *Old Limerick Journal*, quoted from a letter written by Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington[100] and asserted that, in the context of starvation causing the food riots, the letter demonstrated that Wellington was more concerned about the misuse of public money than the suffering of the people.[101]

A more objective reading of the letter demonstrates that Wellington was critical of the fact that the Ascendancy establishment in Ireland were well aware of the almost yearly episodes of crisis relating to food shortages after the exhaustion of the previous year's supplies and before the current year's harvest, yet demonstrated that they were incapable of planning for this eventuality.

He went on to complain that when relief was provided out of public money it was not spent on relieving starvation, instead the labourers were being forced to use the income they received to pay off 'the arrears of an exorbitant rent'. Wellington argued that there was an abundance of food in the country that was available at reasonable prices and the way to resolve the yearly episodes of crisis was to ban the practice of 'the payment of labour by letting land to the labourer' and instead to require the labourer 'to pay rent for his garden, but he would receive

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[96] *Limerick Chronicle,* 26 June 1830. Rioting also occurred in Askeaton where a large mob plundered the entire stock of the mills of Mr. Paul Erson.
[97] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 June 1830.
[98] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 July 1830.
[99] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 July 1830.
[100] Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, to the Duke of Northumberland, 7 July 1830, *Wellington Papers,* WP1/1130/21. [http://www.archives.soton.ac.uk/wellington/results.php?count=74] (Accessed on 11/5/2018).
[101] Bernard Stack, 'Limerick Food Riots 1830', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 46, Winter 2012), p. 33. At the time Wellington was Prime Minister and the recipient of the letter, the Duke of Northumberland, was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

Illustration No. 4 – Charlotte's Quay, c. 1830, by Samuel Frederick Brocas
Source: Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum,
[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/8484]

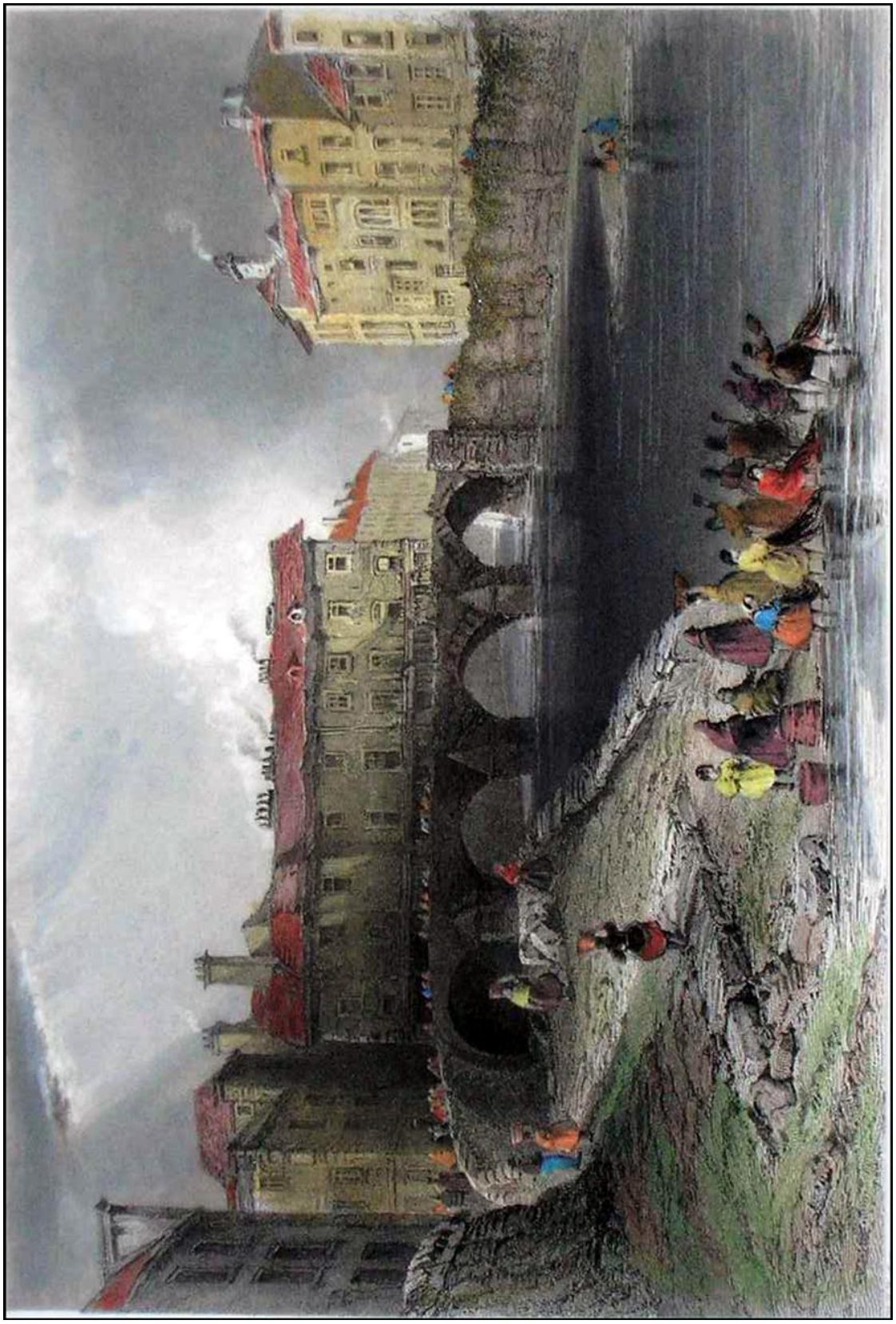

Illustration No. 5 - Old Baal's Bridge, Limerick, c. 1840, by W.H. Bartlett
Source: Sharon Slater, Baal's Bridge – Joining Irishtown and Englishtown, [http://limerickslife.com/baals-bridge/]

something for his labour and with this reward he would have the means of going to market.' He went on to argue for a change to eliminate the ability of farmers to charge exorbitant rent to the labourer and to charge exorbitant interest for advances in provisions. Whether this would have resolved the issue is open to debate, but it would certainly have changed the dynamic of the relationship between labourers and farmers in rural areas.[102]

In 1837 and 1839 the city authorities managed to contain unrest through the rapid subsidising of food. At the beginning of May 1837 several food stores were plundered by rioters. The rioting subsided quickly but on 8 May the police reported that Magistrates were once again worried that the provisions store could be plundered again.[103] On 8 June police reported large crowds gathering with the intention of plundering the provisions store. They converged on the bakery of Mr. Hills demanding bread. Hills handed over a small amount to appease the crowd while the police arrived.[104]

Two days later large crowd surround a baker's shop in Catherine Street demanding bread. Again, in order to avoid conflict the baker handed out a quantity of bread to those assembled. Thompson outlined that there were scores of petty riots outside bread shops and the crowd very often 'set the price' of bread. The baker was, alone of all those who dealt in the people's necessities, in daily contact with the consumer.[105] The police were deployed, and other shops threatened but no violence occurred. At this point the city's establishment were panicked into deploying the military throughout the city and immediately begin providing relief to the poor and destitute in order to stave off a full-scale food riot.[106] The Committee of the Poor Relief Fund sold oatmeal to poor families at half the retail price.[107] The subsidised price of food dissipated the unrest.

At the beginning of July 1839, the magistrates panicked as the price of potatoes hit 7d a stone. Widespread unemployment was compounding the problem and creating the fear among the city's establishment that food riots could break out. The Chief Magistrate, Captain Garrett Hugh Fitzgerald, urged farmers to bypass the forestallers in bringing produce to the market in an effort to reduce the price. As usual the plea had little effect. The Corporation subscribed £100 to a

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[102] Stack gives a detailed account of the 1830 Food Riot and its aftermath in Stack, 'Limerick Food Riots 1830', pp. 33-36.
[103] 8 May 1837, 17/170, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1837, National Archives, Dublin.
[104] 9 June 1837, 17/413, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1837, National Archives, Dublin.
[105] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 106.
[106] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 June 1837.
[107] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 June 1837.

relief fund.[108] A meeting on Thursday 4 July raised a further £340. By the end of the month the Poor Relief Fund was exhausted.[109] At the time 2000 people were dependent each day on Committee of the Poor Relief Fund.[110]

The Food Riots of 1840

By June 1840, the price of potatoes had increased.[111] Forestallers added to the problem by buying up supplies in rural areas.[112] The crisis came to a head at the beginning of June. Lee discussed the 1840 riots but focuses almost exclusively on the events of 2 June 1840 without addressing the wider context relating to these events.[113]

The first reports that emerged were of a riot in Killaloe on 30 May as 500 men carried away a boatload of corn. At seven o'clock on the morning of 1 June a large crowd of labourers, estimated at 1,000, approached men working at the Shannon Works in Plassey. The labourers were demanding work and complaining that the Commissioners responsible for the work had agreed to wages of 9s per week but the contractors on site would only pay 6s. The workers on the site stopped work and joined the demonstration. The protestors then proceeded to tear asunder the building materials on the site and dumped them into the river.

An hour later the labourers' demonstration was arriving back into the city from Plassey. Their numbers had swelled as they reached Baal's Bridge and the demonstration proceeded to George's Quay and the Potato Market. Forestallers with a large number of potato carts were located at the Market. The protestors robbed the potatoes and then tossed the empty carts into the river. The police reported that an assembled crowd 'rushed in overwhelming numbers…upset the carts of potatoes and flung eighteen to twenty carts and the cars over the parapet wall into the river'. From the Market the growing crowd proceeded up George's Street to the mayor's residence. The mayor was absent, but Alderman Crips promised that the mayor would act on their complaints as soon as he returned in a few hours. This appeared to pacify the crowd and it began to disperse.

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[108] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 July 1939.
[109] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 July 1839.
[110] *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 July 1839.
[111] 1 June 1840, 17/10539, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1840, National Archives, Dublin
[112] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 June 1840.
[113] David Lee, 'The Food Riots of 1830 and 1840', in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 1*, (Limerick, 2003), pp. 60-65.

The protests, however, did not stop at that point. Instead the working classes took advantage of the lull in the protests. Police reports state that meetings took place across the city. Thompson contended that the food riot did not require a high degree of organisation.[114] This may well have been the case, but these mass meetings facilitated the organisation of the riot and other actions by the working classes. In an effort to undermine the impact of these meetings Magistrate Vokes approached the Catholic clergy who 'promised to address the population in the different parishes'. However, the populace took little notice of the pleas of the clergy.

By eleven o'clock between 200 and 300 labourers marched from the Poor Law Workhouse[115] to Wellesley Bridge led by three men on horseback followed by three men carrying poles the centre pole topped with bread, 'a most significant emblem to arouse the disorderly'. As the crowd grew, they headed to the stores of a wholesale flour merchant named Caswell in George's Quay. Caswell's workers armed with spades and pitchforks confronted the crowd. This attempt at resisting the demonstration resulted in provoking the protestors into immediate action. A volley of stones smashed the windows and shutters of the premises and then a pitched battle occurred between the protestors and the stores' workers. The police arrived wading into the protestors and eventually those demonstrating abandoned their plans to ransack the stores.

The protestors then headed to the stores of Poole Gabbett on Wilson's Quay. There they launched volley after volley of stones and were overpowering the police when the Assistant Adjutant-General arrived with a detachment of the 17th Lancers. By this time the crowd had swelled in numbers and split into two groups. Women and teenage girls took a leading role in the protests. The *Chronicle* claimed that the women 'inspired the timid and confirmed the wavering by their masculine conduct'. One section of the crowd then attacked a four-horse wagon belonging to David Roche MP. The crowd overpowered the driver and his two assistants and managed to carry off a large quantity of the flour before the arrival of the police.

By two o'clock the 17th Lancers and the Horse Artillery were patrolling the streets with the police and other military guarding different stores around the city. The magistrates assembled at five o'clock 'to swear in…the wealthy part of the people as sub-constables'. The magistrates

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[114] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 119.
[115] The Poor Law Workhouse opened in May 1841. The initial plan was to extend and renovate the House of Industry, but the cost proved inhibitive. For more information on the Limerick Workhouse see – Chris O'Mahony, 'The Poor Law Comes to Limerick', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 6, Spring 1981), pp. 19-21, & P J. Meghen, 'Building the Workhouses', *The Old Limerick Journal,* (Volume 7, Summer 1981), pp. 25-27.

claimed that the protestors attempted to persuade workers at the docks and in other workplaces to down tools and join the protests, but the *Chronicle* indicated that the workers decided not to participate.

The large mobilisation of police and military coupled with promises from the Mayor and Magistrates to take measures to make food available led to the rioters gradually dispersing over the course of the evening. The city was quiet throughout the night and into the following morning.

However, by midday on 2 June a crowd began to congregate in Upper William Street led by a man with a loaf of bread on top of a pole. The crowd were confronted on William Street by the mayor, riding on horseback, and accompanied by a small detachment of troops. In order to undermine the protest, the mayor ordered the arrest of the man carrying the pole. This prompted a violent response from the crowd who showered the mayor and troops with stones in a prolonged and sustained attack. The mayor read the Riot Act and as the troops threatened to fire on the demonstrators the crowd broke up. They began to congregate outside stores and shops confronting the troops who had been deployed there. Slowly the situation calmed down and the crowds began to disperse by three o'clock. [116]

Realising that there was continuing potential for further rioting, the mayor called a meeting to raise a subscription to provide cheap food. Prior to the meeting J.P. Vereker had purchased ten tons of oatmeal from Poole Gabbett and by five o'clock it was being distributed at 2½d a pottle.[117] Merchants agreed to send a ship to Clonakilty, County Cork to purchase potatoes.[118]

Because of the scale of poverty in the city nine out of ten working class people were now receiving subsidised food.[119] The Poor Relief Committee issued tickets to the poor who, on presenting them at the Mendacity Asylum, were provided with a dinner or breakfast of oatmeal, bread and milk.[120]

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[116] 1 June 1840, 17/10539, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1840, National Archives, Dublin & 2 June 1840, 17/10541, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1840, National Archives, Dublin. & 2 June 1840, copy, no reference number, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1840, National Archives, Dublin & *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 June 1840.
[117] *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 June 1840.
[118] 3 June 1840, 17/10543, *Outrage Papers, County Limerick*, 1840, National Archives, Dublin.
[119] *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 June 1840.
[120] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 June 1840.

O'Connor quoted from the *Waterford Mirror* of 14 June 1817, outlining what he viewed as a pattern of food rioting spread across towns from Tralee to Limerick: "the narrative of the week is pretty much the same for all the scenes of disturbance – Riot, danger, subscription [for relief] and tranquillity have everywhere followed in regular succession".[121] In the context of Limerick the evidence suggests that a breakdown of the order of developments could better be described as – rising food prices / unemployment / food shortages, followed by riot, followed by repression, followed by subscription for relief, followed by an uneasy peace as normal social relations resumed.

Conclusion

Some recent comment has suggested that it is difficult to establish a link between 'class identity or perceived interclass tensions' and the origin of the food riots.[122] However it is clear that there is ample evidence that interclass tensions did exist between the urban and rural labouring classes on one side and urban merchants, forestallers and tenant farmers on the other. There is also a clear class identity among those involved in the food riots and with the sections of the city and state establishment used to suppress the riots.

The instances of food rioting in Limerick and some rural county towns indicate that the working classes were unwilling to accept rising food prices as an economic imperative. Their objective was to ensure that wages and food prices were complementary and when price rises or unemployment upset the balance, they invoked the traditions and customs for dealing with such an eventuality. Food rioting was not haphazard but clearly organised with mass meetings taking place in the poorer areas of the city to plan how the riot would be conducted and how to achieve their objective of 'setting the price'. As Thompson outlined, the grievances of the working classes operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking etc and grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations.[123] The establishment attempted to combat the riots using repression but generally ended by complying with the expected norms through the sale of subsidised food. The rioting normally subsided when subsidised prices were introduced which resulted in the wages/prices balance being restored. The expectations of the moral economy continued right up to the Famine.

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[121] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 9. O'Connor also discussed the 1817 food riots in Waterford but does not specifically address any other incidents. See: O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 18.
[122] McGrath, 'Riots in Limerick 1820-1900', p. 158.
[123] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 79.

In assessing the application of the moral economy to the situation in Ireland, Kelly asserted that the actions of the urban poor were short-lived and inherently conservative.[124] Kelly's assertion of a conservative moral impulse can be challenged. Engaging in social protest to protect the accepted social norms is not inherently conservative. From the perspective of those who engaged in riot, they were operating on the basis of what was beneficial to their interests. As Thompson stated, 'the poor knew that the one way to make the rich yield was to twist their arms'.[125] Thompson argued that the years of shortage were exploited for profit by the tenant farming class.[126] Again there is evidence to back up this claim.

Rudé pointed out that the lower orders had no political rights and had no way to address grievances except through riot.[127] Thompson argued that the inevitable change in social forces and political economy is apparent today but at the time of riot the perspectives for change were not necessarily as clear-cut.[128] What is clear is that the riot had widespread community consensus and support.[129] Furthermore, as Thompson argued, this consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference.[130] Those engaged in riot were willing to face repression and the consequences of their actions in order to secure what they regarded as their legitimate rights.

The assertion that these actions were short-lived is correct, they operated until concessions were made by the political establishment and business interests. However, this fails to note the highly organised nature of the food riot. The calling of mass meetings in poor districts, the coordinated approach to engaging in the riot and the subsequent distribution of food to the wider community. It demonstrated the ability of those who engaged in the riot to force the hand of those who were held responsible for resolving the crisis.

This is not to say that issues have not been raised on Thompson's approach, particularly in how it relates to Ireland. Magennis raised questions about the evidence for the existence of a 'moral economy' in Ireland, claiming that paternalistic rhetoric does not prove the existence of an Irish

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[124] James Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd*, (Dublin, 2017), p. 93.
[125] Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', p. 115.
[126] Ibid., p. 93.
[127] Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, p. 34.
[128] Thompson, p. 86.
[129] Ibid., p. 112.
[130] Ibid., p. 78.

'moral economy' but does accept that there appears to have been a political space where the mass of the poor could exert pressure on the establishment.[131] Magennis further asserted that there is the temptation to conclude that those involved in the riot acted without 'elite sponsorship'.[132] There is clear evidence from Limerick that this is the case, and, that even without this 'elite sponsorship' there is evidence that the riot was highly organised. Magennis posed the question on whether the crowd consisted of participants from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds.[133] While there is no direct evidence as to the religious affiliation of the rioters in relation to Limerick, given that up to one in five inmates in the House of Industry from 1774 to 1793 were Protestants,[134] it is reasonable to conclude that some of those who participated in riots were from a Protestant background.

Cunningham stated that crowds seeking to regulate food prices and food supply observed a 'protocol of riot', not engaging in widespread theft and plunder and limiting the scale of violence.[135] He argued that when the Galway working class engaged in food riots they were more observant of the 'protocol of riot' than was the case in Limerick. Cunningham suggested that this may have been as a result of the leading role played by the Claddagh fishermen in organising the Galway riots.[136]

It is clear that the food riots in Limerick were highly organised with initially the planning of the riots and, later, the distribution of the plundered supplies taking place in an organised fashion. However, there is no evidence of a specific section or body of the working class taking on a leadership role in the riots. As a result, Cunningham's assertion that this could have led to more extensive plunder in the Limerick, compared to Galway, could be accurate.

One important issue raised by Magennis is the difficulty created by the way Thompson's idea of the 'moral economy' is applied.[137] Giving the example of clandestine rural groups who imposed pricing on the rural properties class, Magennis argued that such actions establish a

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[131] Eoin Magennis, 'In Search of the "Moral Economy": Food Scarcity in 1756-57 and the Crowd', Peter Jubb and Eoin Magennis (eds), *Crowds in Ireland, c. 1720-1920,* (London, 2000), p. 206.
[132] Ibid., p. 207.
[133] Magennis, 'In Search of the "Moral Economy": Food Scarcity in 1756-57 and the Crowd', p. 207.
[134] Fleming and Logan (eds), *Pauper Limerick, The Register of the Limerick House of Industry, 1774-1793,* p. xix.
[135] John Cunningham, 'Compelled to their bad acts by hunger: Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817–45', p. 130.
[136] Ibid., p. 151.
[137] Magennis, p. 190.

legitimate reason for action that Thompson identified as part of the 'moral economy', these actions do not, of themselves, demonstrate the existence of a 'moral economy'.[138]

Given the nature of Irish society during this period it is necessary to consider whether the 'moral economy' applies in relation to the food riots in Limerick city and county. If you were to view this question strictly based on the criteria outlined by Thompson, then you would have to answer the question in relation to Limerick in the negative. Elements of the 'moral economy' as outlined by Thompson were most certainly at play. The mob were attempting to force the city's establishment and business interests to act in alleviating the crisis caused by price rises and impending food shortages. A moral force was being applied and violence was used as a mechanism to force action on behave of those with power and wealth.

It could be argued that the business and propertied class were acting in a paternalistic fashion by being acquiescent to the demands of the mob to provide food at affordable prices. However, if also served their class interests to act in this fashion. It was there property that was being plundered, their profits and wealth that were impacted, and they risked the situation getting completely out of control if concessions were not made. There objective was to use a combination of repression and sufficient concessions to undermine the protest movement. While the traditional ascendency establishment could have held a certain paternalistic outlook, it is unlikely that the newly emerged merchant class would have held the same traditional views.

One further question is posed, did this 'moral economy' outlook imply that the working class accepted the existing social order? First, the assertion by Kelly that the mob were inherently conservative can be rejected. Acting to defend one's existing circumstances and conditions from deterioration is not an inherently conservative act. On the broader question, an acceptance of the existing social order is based on the nature and extent of class consciousness. When a social class becomes aware of its situation in society and acts as a class to change that situation, it acts in a class-conscious manner.

A subjugated class accepting concessions that have been forced from the ruling establishment does not automatically mean that this social class is accepting of the social order. During the food riots of the pre-Famine period, the working class were acting in a conscious manner, as a

[138] Magennis, 'In Search of the "Moral Economy": Food Scarcity in 1756-57 and the Crowd', p. 194.

group, to force concessions from other dominant social classes. Furthermore, class consciousness does not develop and progress in a linear fashion. Depending on specific circumstances it can take a leap forward or be forced back.

The argument that the existence of a ‘moral economy’ implies an acceptance of the social order undermines that theory. It would imply that class consciousness does not develop or change through any historical epoch which is clearly not the case. Pre-Famine Ireland was a society of competing social classes. On occasions the class interests of some of these competing social classes aligned together, on other occasions they did not. The social force of unionism and nationalism also interacted in this sphere, impacting on class outlook.

The evidence from Limerick is that the mob who engaged in food riots were not accepting of the existing social order. The working class constantly attempted to defend and/or advance their social situation in an almost constant state of class conflict. The level of class consciousness experienced by the Limerick working class fluctuated throughout the nineteenth century, often leading to social conflict where the working class acted in a class conscious fashion without ever reaching the point of acting to change the existing social order. This, however, does not mean that they exhibited an acceptance of the existing social order.

Chapter Four – Politics and the working class, 1800-1850

Introduction

The background to political developments at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the Act of Union. Foster asserted that, apart from the absence of the old Irish Parliament in College Green in Dublin, the Union brought ostensibly minimal political changes. He suggested that this implied the minimal nature of the old Irish Parliament itself.[1] Beckett argued that the Catholic hierarchy supported the Act of Union because they believed that it would be followed by Catholic emancipation.[2] It would take almost thirty years for O'Connell's election to lead to Catholic emancipation and this coincided with the Catholic middle-class coming into its own as a social force.[3] The political proving ground for new Catholic money were the unreformed town corporations. They became battlegrounds for patronage and local power in which the Catholic merchant class were to play their part. From the 1820s the language of sectarianism dominated corporation politics.[4]

In the period after Catholic emancipation political action turned towards the attempt to repeal the Act of Union. The emergence of the Repeal Association provided a focus for Catholic political action right up to the Famine. O'Higgins contended that tradesmen did not play much part in the movement for Catholic emancipation since it did not benefit them directly, but they actively supported Repeal, arousing public opinion in favour of the measure and supporting the election of Repealers to parliament.[5]

McGrath argued that the attitude of the artisans up to 1820 was marked by extremely low expectations and there is no evidence that they attempted to influence the candidates or set the political agenda.[6] He also contended that trade interests were more important than politics to the Limerick artisan in the nineteenth century.[7] However, the trade guilds did have some influence on political life of the city. The fact that the guilds in Limerick did not have the same rights to representation as in other cities was likely down to the corrupt nature of local politics

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[1] Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972,* p. 289.
[2] Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923,* p. 288.
[3] Foster, p. 297.
[4] Ibid., p. 305.
[5] Rachel O'Higgins, 'Irish Trade Unions and Politics, 1830-1850', *The Historical Journal,* Volume 4, Number 2, (1961), p. 211.
[6] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 33.
[7] Ibid., p. 37.

in the city and also the likely acquiescence of the Protestant masters who dominated the guilds. The trades were courted by all those who were involved in, or seeking, public office. In 1756 the Mayor spent £118 15s entertaining the guilds to celebrate peace with France.[8] This chapter will assess the role, influence and impact of the Limerick working class on political life in the city up to the end of the Famine. It will look at the influence of Daniel O'Connell and his campaign for Repeal of the Act of Union and will consider the attempts by the trades to become influential players in the Repeal movement. Finally, it will look at the response of the trades in the emergence of the Young Irelanders in the 1840s.

Election violence in Limerick

The trades regularly paraded in support of the political establishment in the city, sometimes varying their allegiance, and actively supported individuals in their candidacy for elected office. When 1st Viscount Gort died in May 1817 the Trades of Limerick with scarves and banners took part in the procession at the funeral.[9] However, when John Vereker, Viscount Gort's grandson, stood as a candidate for parliament in 1817, his opponent John Tuthill received the active support of the guilds.[10] This chapter will consider the interaction between the trades in Limerick and the political sphere. It will look at the involvement of the trades with candidates of various Unionist outlook during election campaigns and, in the second quarter of the century the interaction of the trades with O'Connell's Repeal Association.[11]

Cronin described nineteenth century Cork as a small and intimate society where, in public matters, personalities were frequently more important than policies. Election time was the lower classes' opportunity to voice their support or dislike for a local politician.[12] Limerick would have been of a similar character with political conflict in Limerick during this period including what Thompson described as 'the deliberate use of the crowd as an instrument of pressure, by persons 'above' or apart from the crowd'.[13] Regularly during elections rioting broke out involving different sections of the Limerick working class. Rioters were often paid by people acting on behalf of candidates. It was commonplace that election candidates were expected to have a mob and they had a readymade supply of recruits with the large numbers of unemployed

[8] Herbert, 'The Trade Guilds of Limerick', p. 125.
[9] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 June 1817.
[10] R.G. Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820,* (London, 1986), p. 669.
[11] For more information on the Repeal Association see: J. H. Whyte, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Party', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 11, Number 44 (September 1959), pp. 297-316.
[12] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 6.
[13] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* p. 67.

paupers available. Hoppen commented that while the mob would act in return for cash payment, some mobs, including in Limerick, could engage in riots on a spontaneous basis without the necessity for bribery.[14]

One example in Limerick occurred during the 1818 parliamentary election. On the night of 2 July fighting broke out between the tradesmen weavers and butchers' boys, during different parades in support of parliamentary candidates. The disturbances continued for some time and stones were also thrown through the windows of several houses. The following day a parade by weavers was attacked by a party of butcher boys carrying hatchets, cleavers and knives. The *Limerick Chronicle* described the butcher boys as acting with the 'ferocity of savages'. Several people were injured including one man who received a blow of a hatchet to the face leading to him being carried away 'appearing lifeless'. Order was restored by the arrival of Alderman Wilkinson and Sheriff Brereton with detachments from the 12th and 96th Regiments.[15] Vereker proved victorious over Thomas Spring Rice in the election.[16]

The 1820 Election saw a major political crisis in the city. Vereker defeated the Whig candidate Thomas Spring Rice by 720 votes to 560. The election result provoked major controversy and its aftermath had significant fallout. The election result was overturned with Vereker removed and Spring Rice being declared parliamentary representative in his place. Vereker's cousin, Henry D'Esterre, the Recorder for Limerick City, was arrested and charged with lying to the House of Commons Select Committee investigating the election result and the Unionist control of parliamentary representation through the Vereker family was broken.[17] For his triumphant return to Limerick from Dublin on 24 July a victory procession took place through the city and included the participation of '15 Guilds of United Tradesmen'. The event was memorialised by English painter William Turner de Lond in the painting 'The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice'. De Lond was travelling in Ireland at the time and was in Limerick when the procession took place.[18] McGrath asserted that the participation of the guilds in the procession for Spring

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[14] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* (New York, 1984), p. 401. For further information about violence during elections see Hoppen's chapter on 'electoral violence', pp. 388-407.
[15] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 July 1818.
[16] R.G. Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820,* (London, 1986), p. 669.
[17] *Report from the Select Committee on the Limerick Election,* 3 July 1820. McGrath goes into detail about how the Vereker-Smiths manipulated the voting system in Limerick and maintained a tight grip of control over the politics of the city. See: McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 32-35.
[18] The painting is exhibited in the offices of Limerick Chamber of Commerce. It can be viewed online [Available at: https://www.irishartsreview.com/on-parade/]. For details of the procession and the painting, including a description of the trade banners depicted in the painting see: Robert Herbert, 'The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 4, Number 4, (Autumn, 1945), pp. 133-142.

Rice indicated that a large number of artisans were willing to support constitutional politics.[19] It is clear that in subsequent elections the artisans strived to play a role, but this assertion fails to distinguish between the difference between the masters and the journeyman tradesmen and also fails to recognise the nature of the elections during the nineteenth century and the fact that violence was commonplace during elections into the 1860s.

O'Connell, Emancipation and Repeal

Describing Catholic emancipation in simple terms, O'Ferrall outlined the objective as restoring the rights of Catholics in Britain and Ireland to sit in the House of Commons and to be eligible for the highest offices in the state.[20] In terms of those who could vote Cronin suggested that in Cork there was socially varied electorate with a considerable number of artisans and labourers who, as freemen and forty-shilling freeholders, were entitled to vote.[21] While some of the artisans in Limerick did have voting rights, this socially varied electorate does not seem as marked in Limerick. The high level of corruption in Limerick politics likely was a factor in this. It is worth noting, as Boyle pointed out, that at the time of the Act of Union, British Prime Minister William Pitt intended to grant emancipation to Catholics in order to smooth the process of implementing the Act of Union, an intent that led to the Catholic Hierarchy supporting the Union while the Orange Order opposed it.[22]

Cronin noted the link between the mercantile interest and the increasingly politicised population who were excluded from the electoral process.[23] The mass participation around the election of Thomas Spring Rice in Limerick would demonstrate this growing involvement of the populace. Cronin also suggested that, along with the rising tide of rural disturbances, the efficient organising of the collection of the Catholic rent would have contributed to this growing confidence to the point that in October 1830 Daniel O'Connell was warning the middle-class of Cork that if they didn't actively take the lead in politics the populace would march on and leave them behind.[24]

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[19] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 113.
[20] Fergus O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy, 1820-1830,* (Dublin, 1985), p. 3.
[21] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 95.
[22] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 24.
[23] Cronin, p. 95.
[24] Ibid., p. 96.

O'Connor argued that the struggle for Catholic Emancipation introduced the working classes to electoral politics.[25] There is little evidence of the involvement of workers, either collectively or on an individual basis, in the emancipation campaign in Limerick or the election in Clare in 1828. Similarly, Cronin pointed out that organisations in Cork which could be considered exclusively working class in composition did not appear to have become involved in the rival campaigns concerning emancipation.[26]

D'Arcy outlined that the Dublin Trades Political Union was founded in August 1931 before changing its name to the National Trades Political Union in November[27] and O'Connor indicated that a Waterford Trades Political Union was formed in November 1831.[28] There is no evidence of a similar body being created in Limerick, although the Congregated Trades were to play a significant part in the Repeal Association that campaigned for Repeal of the Act of Union. The master tradesmen were most prominent and while the journeymen most certainly did play a role in Repeal campaign, they lacked the influence of the masters. However, the labouring classes and the poor played little more than an auxiliary role in the campaign being occasionally mobilised for mass meetings.

The relationship between the trade guilds and the corporation was very limited, largely resulting from the corrupt nature of Limerick corporation during this period. In 1835 a parliamentary report indicated that there were 21 trade guilds still meeting and with masters and wardens.[29] However, only two of the guilds were able to produce their charters that gave them the right to operate in the city.[30] Not that this mattered as the Unionist establishment did everything in its power to limit the number of freemen in the city and the exclusion of Catholic tradesmen from the guilds contributed to this situation.

There were 441 freemen in Limerick in 1820 and, despite changes resulting from the Limerick Regulation Act 1823, only 89 new freemen were admitted in the subsequent 15 years. By 1830 the parliamentary report was stating that the guilds had no relationship or role with the

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[25] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 17.
[26] Cronin, p. 96-97.
[27] F. A. D'Arcy, 'The Artisans of Dublin and Daniel O'Connell, 1830-47: An Unquiet Liaison', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 17, Number 66 (September 1970), pp. 223-224.
[28] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 51.
[29] The 21 guilds listed were Ropemakers, Tobacconists, Tailors, Painters, Coopers, Slaters, Sawyers, Smiths, Nailers, Stonecutters, Cordwainers, Founderers, Millwrights, Shipwrights, Carpenters, Bakers, Masons, Broguemakers, Coachbuilders, Hatters, Linen weavers.
[30] The two guilds able to produce their charters, dating from 1688, were the Slaters and the Broguemakers.

corporation, had declined in importance, and attempts to restore 'the company of merchants of the staple',[31] one of the intended outcomes of the Limerick Regulation Act, had proven unsuccessful.[32]

O'Connor asserted that it was Repeal and the expectation of an Irish government would protect native industry, rather than nationalism that swung the trade union movement behind O'Connell.[33] When political tensions rose, they rallied in support of nationalist organisations. When workers did press their own legitimate claims too vigorously, they were told that the cause of Ireland was more important and holier than their own sectional class interests.[34] This generalised assessment is mirrored locally by the actions of the trades in Limerick.

Daniel O'Connell had an effective argument that the collapse of employment for tradesmen was the direct result of the Act of Union. The Act of Union also coincided with the ongoing industrial revolution but reference to this did not fit into O'Connell's political objectives. O'Connell's arguments received an echo across the country including in Limerick. McGrath contended that the nationalism of the trades was, to some extent, born out of self-interest.[35] While there is validity in this assertion, he then goes on to claim that the support for Repeal by the trades was driven by a yearning for pre-capitalist guild ideals.[36] This claim is much more dubious and there is little if any evidence to support it.

In 1830 a meeting took place in St. Mary's parish to agitate for Repeal of the Union. The meeting declared that the Act of Union resulted in 'so many heaps of ruins, and every other branch of industry so decayed as to consign thousands of the working class to poverty, emigration or despair – all produced by the Union'.[37] O'Connor suggested that the failure by workers to make advances on the wages front made political action all the more urgent.[38] In Limerick the primary focus for the trades appears to have been unemployment rather than wages. Employment in trades in Limerick had collapsed in the forty years between 1801 and

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[31] The Merchants of the Staple were mercantile corporations dating from 1282 and were responsible for managing the supply of textiles. Their influence declined dramatically with the industrial revolution.
[32] *First report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the municipal corporations in Ireland,* Command Papers, 1835, (23, 24, 25, 27, 28), xxvii.1, 51, 79, 199, xxviii.1, p. 343, 348-349 & 408.
[33] O'Connor, p. 33.
[34] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 4.
[35] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 190.
[36] Ibid., p. 160.
[37] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 December 1830.
[38] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 51.

1841. In 1841 the *Freeman's Journal* carried a full-page advertisement from the 'Trades of Limerick' outlining the collapse in employment in the trades.[39]

As Limerick entered the second quarter of the nineteenth century a changing outlook was beginning to develop among certain sections of the working classes in the city. Unlike other borough corporations the guilds of Limerick never formed part of the civic constitution and never had the right to return members to the common council, although some of them did entertain such pretensions from time to time. Nevertheless, they did play an important role in the political life of the city. Ambitious politicians used the guilds to marshal support for their electoral campaigns.[40] By 1830 the Catholic tradesmen appear to have accommodated themselves to the guild system and to have been admitted to full membership in most cases.[41] McGrath claimed that the Catholic artisans gradually infiltrated the traditional guild system and that even though these bodies were becoming impotent they saw it as a way of organising and representing themselves.[42] He does not distinguish between masters and the journeyman tradesmen and it is likely it was the former who acted in this way, given their role as employers they had similar class interests with the Protestant master craftsmen. It was this section of Limerick society, as well as the Catholic merchants of Limerick, that O'Connell organised to further his political aims. Despite their nationalist inclination the Congregated Trades regularly attempted to ingratiate themselves with all strands of political opinion in the city often engaging in pomp and ceremony.

In August 1835, the Trades welcomed the Vice-Regal Party on a visit to the city. The *Chronicle* reported that:

> …the different trades have just passed from the Linen Hall round by Bank Place into Rutland Street up Patrick Street to meet the Vice-Regal Party. The labourers preceded the Trades with an immense flag surmounted by a gilt plough and then came a forest of colours descriptive of various mechanic professions...[43]

This was not the first or last time the Congregated Trades offered support to the Unionist Ascendancy or the British establishment. In June 1837 the Masters and Wardens of the

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[39] A list of the numbers employed in each trade in 1841 can be found in Appendix I.
[40] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick,* p. 210.
[41] Ibid., p. 211.
[42] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 62-63.
[43] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 August 1835.

Congregated Trades supported the re-election of Unionist John Vereker as Mayor.[44] The following year the Trades welcomed the return of Lieutenant General Richard Bourke from Australia.[45] Cronin noted that the banners of the trades in Cork demonstrated a proud loyalty to the crown.[46] While it is clear that the guilds did engage in expressions of loyalty, there doesn't have been the same reverence to the monarchy in the trades banners in Limerick.[47]

During this period, it is not possible to be precise about the relationship between the craft guilds and the Congregated Trades. If, like McGrath, you ignore the fact that there existed master craftsmen and journeymen with competing interests then it is possible to make certain assertions about this relationship. He asserted that the master guilds completely absorbed the 'rebellious journeymen who were formally represented by the United Trades'. He extrapolats this from the fact that there was an 'abstention from violent combination' during this period.[48] There is little, if any evidence for this assertion and, as has been shown in chapter two, violence did occur during strikes of this period. What McGrath ignored in his assessment is that there was a significant change in the balance of class forces between the employers and the journeymen following the defeat of the United Trades and this was the primarily mitigating factor against large-scale strike action in Limerick, particularly in the 1830s. McGrath goes further by claiming that the alignment of the Congregated Trades with O'Connell was marked by an almost total abandonment of violence and that this elicited a degree of tolerance from the politicised middle-class and Catholic clergy that grew up over time.[49] Again, this is a misreading of the situation and a reflection of the fact that the Congregated Trades were, in all likelihood, dominated by the master employers and that union organisation among the journeymen occurred outside this structure.

However, from 1830 onwards the focus of the political activity of the Congregated Trades was O'Connell's Repeal Association.[50] The main base of support for the Repeal Association was the master tradesmen. Occasionally journeymen, like the journeymen bakers, declared independent support[51] but in most circumstances the declaration of support were in the form

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[44] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 June 1837. Despite being defeated for the parliamentary seat by Thomas Spring Rice in 1820, Vereker continued to maintain a vice-like grip on the Corporation up until its abolition in 1840.
[45] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 September 1838.
[46] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 131.
[47] Herbert, 'The Chairing of Thomas Spring Rice', pp. 138-140.
[48] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 108.
[49] Ibid., p. 158.
[50] Among the initial supporters of O'Connell were the Guilds of Cordwainers, Coopers, House Painters, Masons and Bricklayers, Tailors and Shoemakers.
[51] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 November 1830.

made by the Coachbuilders who declared that their petition included 'not only the employers but the operatives as well'.[52] Cronin argued that ever since the first calls for Repeal in 1830 the trades' pro-Repeal motivation was largely materialist and that the experience of economic distress was probably the greatest incentive of all towards political involvement and, for Cork, the impetus towards political participation by the artisans was almost entirely economic.[53] From the perspective of the trades they bought into the rhetoric from O'Connell that their economic plight was down to the evils of the Act of Union and Repeal was the panacea.

The emergence of O'Connell as a force in politics coincided with the emergence of social upheaval in the region. This social conflict centred around the Terry Alt rebellion in Co. Clare. The upheaval also manifested itself in episodes in Limerick city, primarily in the form of industrial unrest and food riots. In response to rising social tensions Daniel O'Connell regularly addressed the 'labourers, artisans and other operative classes'.[54] The objective of these meetings was to ensure control over the working classes by O'Connell and his entourage. O'Connell himself condemned any acts of violence associated with the industrial or social unrest and his followers regularly adopted intimidation as a tactic in dealing with political opponents.

Two incidents demonstrated the outlook of O'Connell and his supporters. The first of these was the Poor Law Report and the introduction of the Poor Law and the second, the repeal of the Corn Laws. O'Connell and his supporters worked fervently to prevent any movement that could offer a potential alternative getting a foothold in the city and they were very effective at undermining the efforts of others they could not control.

Hoppen asserted that O'Connell could never make his mind up about the sort of electorate he wanted. He could complain loudly about the fate of the 40s freeholders only to then speak about his belief that £10 was a more rational and, for him, politically advantageous point of exclusion. When it came to the crunch O'Connell was crucial to the passing of the 1832 Act that restricted the franchise to £10 freeholders., but then his concern for the 'operative classes' led him to allying himself with the Duke of Wellington to rescue freeman voters from the ministerial axe. The 1832 Act did not work as intended, admitting 'smellies' and 'shabbies' leaving no section of the establishment satisfied. Tories and Whigs complained about the presence of the great

[52] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 December 1830.
[53] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?,* p. 128 & 129.
[54] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 January 1831.

unwashed on the electoral register. O'Connell argued that marginal men could be open to bribery and that 'comfortable-looking' Repealers were being excluded to make room for the helots of the aristocracy'.[55] There is no evidence that a National Trades Political Union of the character that existed in Dublin being active in Limerick. A short-lived Limerick Political Union existed until O'Connell established the Precursor Society in 1838.[56]

D'Arcy outlined that in September 1834, English Radical M.P. William Cobbett visited Dublin and became the focus of the Dublin tradesmen's expression of discontent with O'Connell, specifically on O'Connell's delaying tactics on repeal agitation.[57] Cobbett intent was to campaign against the introduction of the Poor Law.[58] In October Corbett visited Limerick as part of a speaking tour of Ireland. But in this case the supporters of O'Connell were to ensure that he would not become the focus for any discontent. He was welcomed on his arrival by the Congregated Trades with flags and banners. Almost immediately Catholic priests surrounded Cobbett delaying his address to the assembled crowd until heavy rain resulted in the crowd becoming impatient and the address was postponed.[59] Over the following few days Cobbett's lectures were repeatedly postponed and eventually he declared that 'he had quitted the City of Limerick forever!'.[60] O'Connell's supporters in the city had engineered the repeated postponements. Other prominent radicals Henry Hunt, John Gale Jones, Richard Carlyle and Robert Taylor wrote to the local press complaining about the treatment received by Cobbett during his visit to the city.[61]

At the same time O'Connell was supporting the introduction of the Poor Law he was backing the Whigs in their opposition to trade unions campaigning for a ten-hour day.[62] The Congregated Trades were ardent supporters of O'Connell although it is unclear how much influence the masters were exerting within the Congregated Trades at this time. In October 1835 the Congregated Trades participated in a public dinner in honour of Daniel O'Connell in

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[55] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* p. 3, 10 & 15.
[56] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 277. The Precursor Society was founded by O'Connell with the intention of winning concessions for Ireland though parliamentary agitation as a precursor for campaigning for Repeal.
[57] F. A. D'Arcy, 'The Artisans of Dublin and Daniel O'Connell, 1830-47: An Unquiet Liaison', p. 228.
[58] E. I. Carlyle, *William Cobbett, A study in his Life as shown in his Writings,* (London, 1904), p. 285.
[59] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 October 1834.
[60] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 October 1834.
[61] *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 October 1834.
[62] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p.44. O'Connell was later to oppose the Irish Poor Law claiming it would 'tend to diminish self-reliance, to paralyse industry, to decrease economy…'

Limerick where O'Connell's lieutenant Thomas Steele thanked 'The Trades of Limerick, who have ever been zealous and consistent patriots'.[63]

Steele, a Protestant landlord from Cullane in Co. Clare,[64] was O'Connell's right-hand man. O'Connell appointed him his Chief Pacificator of Ireland with the instruction to end divisions among the social classes that could disrupt O'Connell's Repeal Movement. Steele was educated in Cambridge and had participated in the Spanish insurrection.[65] During his period as Chief Pacificator Steele was able to command enormous moral authority over large sections of the Catholic population, an authority he wielded with zeal.[66]

Following O'Connell's election in 1828, Steele established the Limerick Independent Club. This club was predominantly made up of Catholic merchants who had a vested interest in the expansion of Catholic political power. Two of the eleven rules of the Club demonstrate the effort of Steele to develop a cross-class alliance dominated by the merchant class:

> 3d. That the Club be also bound to discountenance and prevent the existence, in this district, of all Secret and Illegal Societies whatever,
> 4d. That the next objective be to put an end to Feuds and Factions amongst the People, and to prevent Riots or breaches of the Peace.[67]

The Congregated Trades acted as one element of public pressure in persuading Thomas Spring Rice not to stand in the 1832 general election to leave the field open for two Repeal candidates, William Roche and David Roche.[68] In order to ensure that the Congregated Trades were kept in line O'Connell arranged in November 1834 for Thomas Steele to be appointed President of the Congregated Trades in Limerick. Steele used the fact that he was a member of the London

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[63] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 October 1835.
[64] Clare Library, 'Thomas Steele (1788-1848)', [http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/people/tomsteele.htm], (Accessed on 20/11/2009).
[65] William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Ireland and Her Agitators,* (Dublin, 1845) p. 319. The Spanish Insurrection was an uprising in Madrid against occupation by French troops as part of an attempt to restore King Ferdinand to the throne as an absolute monarch.
[66] Ibid., p. 331.
[67] Limerick Independent Club, quoted in P.J. Lynch, 'Tom Steele: A Sketch', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 1, Number 4, January 1911), p. 250. Lynch writes in glowing terms about Steele.
[68] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 249. Spring Rice had been elected MP for Limerick in 1831. David Roche was a landlord with a large estate at Carass (or Caherass), located between Adare and Croom, 15 miles south-west of Limerick city. See: John Debrett, *The Baronetage of England,* (London, 1838), p. 472. William Roche was a wealthy merchant and banker in Limerick city. Roche's bank was the only Limerick bank to survive the banking collapse in 1820. See: Sharon Slater, Who Was William Roche, [Available online at: https://limerickslife.com/william-roche/]. David Roche became embroiled in controversy in 1840 over his treatment of labourers on his estate and was subjected to open criticism by craftsmen in Limerick, which played a role in forcing him to withdraw from the 1841 election.

Institute of Engineers to join the Congregated Trades.[69] There is no evidence that the trades made any public response to the Lichfield House Compact.

O'Connor outlined that class interests created deep tension between labour and the Repeal Movement. After November 1837 O'Connell condemned trade unionism as practiced in Ireland,[70] declaring 'against secret and illegal combinations to regulate trade'.[71] The *Limerick Chronicle* supported O'Connell's efforts to 'crush' combinations in this country.[72] Later in January 1838 O'Connell attempted to manipulate workers into abandoning efforts to organise. He stated to cheers at a meeting in Cork that 'he could not continue as their representative if the system of combination continues'.[73]

The downfall of the corrupt Ascendancy corporation on 10 August 1840 was met with a huge procession through the city.[74] The British government had been under significant pressure to reform local government, having initially reformed local government in England in 1835. It took a further five years to introduce reform into Ireland. The reforms introduced in Ireland were more restrictive than in England but, nonetheless, represented a major change in the administration of local government in Ireland. Municipal corporations were to become fully elected, with the franchise based on £10 rateable valuation for property. In order to preserve some element of 'balance' freemen, who were almost exclusively Protestant, retained their municipal vote. Daniel O'Connell supported the measure, which he regarded as important for symbolic as much as practical reasons. The new corporations had much more restricted power than those previous, but it was regarded as a new era in local government in Ireland.[75]

By November 1840 the following trades in Limerick had declared support for the National Repeal Association – Bricklayers, Ropemakers, Nailors, Broguemakers, Carpenters, Bakers, Fishermen, Tobacconists and Pipemakers, Iron founders, Coachmakers, Slators, Millwrights, Sandmen, Victuallers, Woodcombers, Masons and Weavers.[76]

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[69] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 November 1834.
[70] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 23.
[71] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 November 1837. At this time O'Connell was facing opposition from trade unions in Dublin, see: Patrick Holohan, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Dublin Trades: A Collision 1837/1838', *Saothar,* Volume 1, (1975), pp. 1-17.
[72] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 January 1838.
[73] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 January 1838.
[74] Potter, *The Government and the People of Limerick,* p. 300.
[75] Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,* (Belfast, 1994), pp. 77-79.
[76] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 October 1840.

Unlike in Cork where there was no report of Chartist activity,[77] the Unionist Ascendancy in the Limerick as well as O'Connell and his supporters were terrified of the Chartists gaining a base of support in the city. O'Connell did not hold back in his attacks on the Chartists whom he repeatedly condemned[78] and Cronin argued that the general failure of Chartism was down in part to the trenchant opposition from O'Connell.[79] The first indication of Chartist intervention in Limerick occurred on 4 January 1840 when the *Chronicle* reported:

> a well dressed Englishman… drew a crowd of near 200 persons about him at the head of Bridge Street, by addressing them on the depression of trade and the grievances of the working classes. The Mayor promptly imposed his authority and told the itinerant orator that unless he desist immediately and left the city… his worship would feel it his duty to take him into custody… The present alarming discontent of the labouring classes in England, may be ascribed to the mischievous tampering of such persons.[80]

The event that demonstrated the open hostility of O'Connell and Steele to Chartism occurred around a series of Anti-Corn Law Agitation meetings that began on Monday 9 November 1840. This time Steele took the leading role in suppressing these meetings with the active support of the city magistrates.

The initial meeting took place at the Northumberland Rooms in Henry Street and was addressed by Mr. Murray of the Anti-Corn Law National League from England. The *Chronicle* claimed that Murray was a member of the Chartists and that he was 'under the pretence of delivering anti-corn law lectures, but in reality, it was believed, for the purpose of disseminating Chartist or insurrectionary principles'. [81] Over 150 people attended the meeting. As Murray was recalling the difficulties faced by working class people during the economic recession in 1822 the mayor stepped forward and declared the meeting an illegal assembly. The police moved to force those in attendance to leave. Local magistrate Mr. Vokes shouted down Murray condemning the Chartists for the Monmouth rebellion of 1839. The police then cleared the rest of the room and Murray remained on his own to complete the lecture. The following evening Murray attempted to organise a further meeting. This time Tom Steele packed the meeting with

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[77] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 182.
[78] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 November 1839.
[79] Cronin, p. 182.
[80] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 January 1840.
[81] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 November 1840.

supporters of O'Connell. As Murray started to speak, Steele stood up and attacked Murray, calling on everyone present to leave. Those in the crowd who did not following this instruction were intimidated and removed by Thomas Steele and his 'gang'. As the crowd left the mayor instructed the police not to allow anyone else to enter the meeting room.[82]

On Saturday 21 November, the second of two further meetings were held to agitate opposing the Corn Law. For both meetings Mr. Ackland, another representative of the Anti-Corn Law Movement, joined Murray. The meeting rooms were packed with 'persons of the lower classes'. Steele had received assurances from Ackland that neither he nor Murray were Chartists and gave his acquiescence for them to go ahead with the meeting. The mayor also giving assurances not to interfere.[83] This time the meetings went ahead without incident. The episode demonstrated the fact that Steele was willing to act against any political initiative that threatened the dominance of O'Connell's political leadership in the city. It was also a reflection of O'Connell's open hostility to the Chartists and his determination to make sure they did not gain a foothold in Ireland.[84]

Limerick Board of Trade

Another strategy adopted by O'Connell was the organising of Boards of Trade around the country. These Boards were ostensibly to promote goods of Irish manufacture and promote the purchase of Irish goods among the population of the country. However, the real purpose was to undermine working class organisation and divert the anger among workers from their employers to being focussed on the lack of a manufacturing base in Ireland and the need of all classes to work together to develop such manufacturing. At a meeting at the Corn Market in Dublin he outlined his view that part of the reason for the lack of manufacturing was down to the existence of combination among the trades. O'Connell instructed Steele 'to organise a meeting with the operatives of Limerick on the 17 December'.[85] O'Connell and David Roche M. P. attended the meeting.[86] O'Connell played to his audience with The *Chronicle* reporting:

> …this was no political meeting whatever…it was not for sect or party purposes they had assembled, but for the common good of the country… He (O'Connell) said 'he appeared in Limerick for the first time not as a politician or a repealer, but as a

[82] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 November 1840.
[83] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 November & 25 November 1840.
[84] Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'The Challenge of Chartism: Daniel O'Connell's Ideological War', *American Journal of Irish Studies,* Volume 15, (2019), pp. 113-132.
[85] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 December 1840.
[86] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 December 1840.

> member of the Congregated Trades, clothed in frize of Irish manufacture… a fellow labourer, to commence the good work that would give employment to the artisan and the manufacturer'.[87]

The first meeting of the Board of Trade was held in the Mechanics Institute on Thursday 21 January 1841.[88] The secretary read a letter from Thomas Steele in his capacity as President of the Congregated Trades proposing Charles Walker for the position of Board President. Steele argued that as an Englishman and a Protestant it would demonstrate that 'the Irish do not plunder and murder and maim'.[89] The arguments put forward by the business interests were clear. Caleb Powell promoted the view that gentlemen would consider establishing manufacturing enterprises in Limerick because labour was cheap and he cited the case of Charles Walker who owned a large lace-making factory in the city and had 'enlarged his own fortune…while…he is at the same time affording employment to hundreds for whom no other field of labour was open'.[90]

Within weeks the Board of Trade ran into trouble. On 10 February, the journeymen tailors of the city claimed a master tailor had sacked his workers and replaced them with unqualified workers at significantly lower rates of pay. Despite requests from the workers the Board of Trade failed to act.[91] This was followed at the end of March with a petition from the guild of carpenters to the Board of Trade over a dispute that broke out between the carpenters and John Fogarty, 'praying that the Board would interfere to adjust a difference between them and Mr. John Fogarty'.[92] Fogarty's had been the focus of a prolonged period of industrial disputes during this period. The Board fudged the issue and failed to take any action on the dispute. From this point on the influence of the Board of Trade declined. Devery points the finger of blame at the carpenters in this dispute accusing them of insularity and protectiveness in their hostility to rural tradesmen, while ignoring the attempt by Fogarty to cut wages and break the union.[93]

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[87] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 December 1840.
[88] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 January 1841.
[89] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 January 1841. Walker employed several hundred young girls in his lace-making factory. Among other things, Walker was repeatedly bringing his workers to court for absenting themselves from work resulting in his bonded employees being thrown into jail.
[90] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 January 1841.
[91] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 February 1841.
[92] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 March 1841.
[93] Kieran Devery, 'Profit or Patriotism: The Limerick Board of Trade of 1841', in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds) *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trades and Commerce, Volume 2* (Limerick 2006), p. 104.

The Congregated Trades expressed their dissatisfaction that Thomas Steele did not participate in the Board of Trade at any point. They had fully supported the establishment of the Board, but the business classes, manufactures and merchants were conspicuous by their lack of engagement. A meeting was called on 11 August and following a 'long and animated discussion' it was proposed to dissolve the Board. It was ultimately decided that 'so great an apathy prevailed in the public with the movement' that the Board should be considered dissolved.[94] John Alton, Secretary of the Limerick Board of Trade, outlined the one success the Board had during its eight-month existence, stating that the Board 'had acted as a safety valve to throw off popular steam of a great explosion, which excessive suffering and destitution might have caused'.[95]

The collapse of the Board of Trade undermined O'Connell's standing among the working classes in the city and this was demonstrated the following week when a meeting of the Repeal Association, which normally attracted large crowds, was attended by only four members of the Congregated Trades and four members of the Citizens Club. O'Connor contended that the lack of investment sent the Dublin Board of Trade into abrupt decline in 1843.[96] In Limerick the evidence suggests that it was the lack of any engagement by the business classes that led to the Board of Trade being moribund from the outset and its demise occurred more rapidly as a result. The reality is that class interests tore it apart. From the employers' perspectives the Board has served its purpose, undermining and diffusing the potential for social unrest. For the Congregated Trades it was a major defeat. They had invested so much by participating in the Board, and its downfall led to rising tensions with O'Connell in its aftermath.

O'Connell's relationship with the Congregated Trades also ran into further difficulty over his attitude towards candidates for the 1841 general election. In Limerick a row broke out between the Trades and the Repeal Association over who should be nominated as candidate for the election. The Trades wanted a repeal candidate nominated by the Citizens Club where they had influence. Instead O'Connell and Steele attacked the Citizens Club and supported a non-Repealer in the election. As a result, the Trades announced that they would not participate in any activity connected to the Repeal Association until Steele justified his and O'Connell's actions. A Repeal Association representative from Dublin, Reynolds, who received the

[94] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 August 1841.
[95] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 May 1841.
[96] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 19.

statement from the Trades promised that on his return to Dublin he would charge O'Connell and Steele as the persons who injured the Repeal cause in Limerick. He criticised Steele for attacking the Citizens Club while designating himself as 'Permanent President of the Trades'.[97]

Tension between Steele and the Trades continued to grow and finally reached breaking point when Steele intervened to attempt to break a strike by 'stevedores' on the docks in October 1844.[98] During the first week in October the captains of four vessels containing grain dispensed with the services of local workers and hired cheap labour to unload the grain. A large demonstration developed forcing those working for the lower rate off the ships. That night the four vessels had holes bored in their sides with augurs.[99]

Thomas Steele intervened and publicly demanded that several stevedores be arrested. Following their arrest, Steele gave evidence at the trial claiming that the stevedores had refused to work for less than 1s 8d per day and the ships' captains were intention only paying 1s 3d. All the other witnesses called refused to give evidence. The case was adjourned with eight of those accused held in prison. While the court was sitting a large crowd protested on the quayside. Captain William Davis of the *Harmony,* claimed the crowd shouted that he would be killed, and his vessel sunk.[100]

Steele was determined to break the stevedores' strike. He demanded immediate action from the local police and gave them a deadline of one week to arrest all of those involved in the dispute otherwise he would contact 'Lloyd's of London' and have them send members of the Detective Metropolitan Police to deal with the situation. Steele also accused William Bernard, a clerk on the docks, of refusing to cooperate leading to Bernard being brought into court.[101] At this point Steele became irrational and began to drag everyone he thought might have information in front of the magistrates. Repeatedly he was forced to apologise to people he thought were involved but who were subsequently shown to have no connection with the dispute. The court cases collapsed and the docks subsequently returned to normal with stevedores carrying out their

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[97] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 August 1841.
[98] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 October 1844, 9 October 1844, 12 October 1844, 16 October 1844, 23 October 1844 & 30 October 1844.
[99] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 October 1844. In this incident it appears that the 'stevedores' may have been dock labourers. The normal rate of pay for unloading a ship was 1s 8d per day. The captain of the Harmony offered to pay 1s 3d per day to unload the cargo and the other captains followed suit.
[100] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 October 1844.
[101] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 October 1844.

regular work.[102] The entire episode completely undermined Steele's position among the working classes in Limerick and compounded the damage already done to the standing of O'Connell's Repeal Association by the collapse of the Board of Trade and the debacle around the 1841 election.

By the time of O'Connell's death in 1847 Steele was isolated and penniless. In June 1848 he attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself Waterloo Bridge in London. Despite being rescued from the river, Thomas Steele died a few days later and was buried in Glasnevin cemetery beside O'Connell.[103]

The Young Irelanders

The trades suffered financially during the famine and their traditional role of welfare provision for members and their families was extremely difficult to fulfil. By 1847 many of the 'guilds' were making public appeals for charitable support.[104] This tended to undermine any potential influence the Congregated Trades had in terms of politics.

Fractures emerged within the Congregated Trades in the mid-1840s, partly as a result of the role being played by Thomas Steele. These were largely played out within the branches of the Citizens Club, with the Richmond Ward club becoming the bastion of opposition to the Old Irelanders. This is not to say that tradesmen were dominant in this club, it was largely still dominated by some of the more radical nationalist employers. McGrath contended that the divisions within the trades were largely down to local perceptions and economic conditions rather than national events and developments.[105] This is a reasonable interpretation of the available evidence and further advanced by the claims made by Steele that he was losing control of the Congregated Trades.[106] By the mid-1840s many within the trades were suffering from Repeal-fatigue and this contributed to internal divisions.[107]

By 1848 the Congregated Trades were largely welded to the more conservative layers of the nationalist movement. Cronin and Murphy argued that the growing militancy among the Cork's

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[102] *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 October 1844.
[103] Clare Library, 'Thomas Steele (1788-1848)', [http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/people/tomsteele.htm], (Accessed on 20/11/2009).
[104] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 256.
[105] Ibid., p. 178. McGrath goes into some detail of all the machinations within the political clubs in Limerick during this period. See; pp. 178-188.
[106] Ibid., p. 180.
[107] Ibid., p. 176.

workers could be linked to the proliferation of Confederate Clubs supporting the Irish Confederation of John Mitchel, with the skilled artisans being drawn along with the growing expectations of rebellion.[108] In contrast the Young Ireland movement appeared to gain little traction in Limerick, particularly among the working classes. Fenton commented that the people of Limerick had more vital issues on their minds, like the provision of food and shelter. Coupled with this Limerick was exposed to the most conservative element of the Young Ireland movement under the influence of William Smith O'Brien.[109] Some references were made to the revolutionary upheavals in Europe, but as a rule the contributions from the Young Ireland element were banal and predictable.[110] Without the radicalism seen elsewhere they posed little attraction for most working class people.

The Congregated Trades were, in the main, staunch Old Irelanders.[111] This was demonstrated by the enthusiastic reception for the arrival of John O'Connell MP into the city on New Year's Day 1848.[112] Over the following few weeks the Congregated Trades made repeated efforts to get William Smith O'Brien to negotiate a reunion with the Repeal Association.[113] Smith O'Brien agreed to meet the Trades but dismissed their efforts out of hand claiming the Repealers were wrong to support the Whigs and too many 'got fat off the enthusiasm of the people'.[114] The lack of influence of the Trades is demonstrated by the discussion by Davis of the 1848 election in Limerick, where the Trades fail to warrant even a mention.[115]

At a joint Old Irelanders / Young Irelanders parade on St. Patrick's Day 1848, the Trades with banners marched with the Old Irelanders.[116] The *Limerick Chronicle* noted that the Congregated Trades were completely tied to the Repeal Association and supported all their declarations.[117]

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[108] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p.103 & Maura Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork Trades 1860-1900', *Saothar,* Volume 5, (May 1979), p. 27.
[109] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 183
[110] Ibid., p. 188
[111] Laurence Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick,* (Dublin, 2010), p. 59 & p. 63.
[112] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 January 1848. John O'Connell was one of four sons of Daniel O'Connell who were Members of Parliament. He was elected in a series of different constituencies, including Limerick from 1847-1851. He was the dominant force in the Repeal Association during the declining years of Daniel O'Connell. John O'Connell was forced to resign from Parliament by nationalists in Limerick after he played a role in the collapse of the Whig government in 1851. He subsequently served as MP for Clonmel from 1853-1857 before taking a position as Clerk of the Crown and Hanaper at Dublin Castle, a job that had little work or responsibility.
[113] *Limerick Chronicle* 12 January 1848.
[114] *The Nation,* 15 January 1848.
[115] Richard Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement,* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 132-138.
[116] Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick,* p. 65.
[117] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 March 1848.

Repeatedly the Trades pleaded for unity between nationalists, promoting John O'Connell as the leader of this move, but repeatedly their pleas fell on deaf ears.[118]

The Confederation Clubs did seem to generate some support among young labourers and introduced them to politics, but control of the Young Ireland movement in Limerick was firmly in the hands of the professional classes.[119] The local magistrate in Bruff commented that when prominent Young Irelander, Richard O'Gorman, passed through the area agitating for rebellion the landless labourers were in 'a great state of excitement' but the tenant farmers were 'panic struck' and would take 'no part whatever' in the Young Irelanders plans for rebellion.[120] A heavy police presence in Limerick City in the aftermath of the conflict at Ballingarry[121] and the arrest of rebellion leader Smith O'Brien resulted in 'no excitement' in the city.[122] As the famine ended, the Congregated Trades pledged support in the election to no candidate 'but a pledged Repealer' and declared their support for John O'Connell in 1850.[123]

Cronin argued that after the fiasco of 1848, a period of political apathy existed in Cork among the trades and that the elections of the 1850s were fought out on issues of local rivalries rather than on the issues of land and religion.[124] The situation in Limerick was different with the elections of the 1850s being periods of intense conflict, with regular outbreaks of violence which often resulted in deaths.

Conclusion

The corrupt nature of the local corporation limited the political influence of the traditional craft guilds in Limerick. While they could muster a certain number of individual votes for elections they were deprived of local political representation. The sectarian nature of the exclusion of Catholic tradesmen from membership resulted in the Protestant dominated guilds being welded to the Unionist corporation until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As the nineteenth century dawned the trades provided mobs for hire for election candidates as violence and intimidation were a common theme for decades to come. The trades showed little

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[118] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 June 1848.
[119] Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick*, p. 114-115.
[120] Ibid., p. 124.
[121] A failed rebellion of Young Irelanders took place in Ballingarry on 29 July 1848. A group of rebels surrounded a house containing police and fought a gun-battle for several hours before fleeing on the arrival of police reinforcements.
[122] Fenton, p. 146.
[123] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 January 1850.
[124] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 104-105.

interest in the campaign for Catholic emancipation, given that it was of little relevance to their lives. However, they wholeheartedly supported the campaign for repeal of the Act of Union launched by Daniel O'Connell, buying into the narrative that the Union had precipitated the demise of the traditional craft trades.

The nature of the commitment of the trades to O'Connell's objective is open to question. The Congregated Trades that gave fulsome support to O'Connell and the Repeal movement were likely representing the interests of the master tradesmen who formed a section of the business class in Limerick. Their class interests lay in supporting Repeal and the establishment of an Irish parliament that would offer some form of protection from the mass-produced goods of industrial Britain.

McGrath argued that the commitment of the trades to Repeal was largely motivated by economic self-interest, rather than to the nationalist cause. There is evidence to support such a contention. He goes further and claims that their outlook could be termed a form of economic nationalism. However, this perspective assumes that the masters and the journeymen had the same objective. While both would have supported some form of protection for native manufacture, they would have done so from differing points of view and the unity on this issue would inevitably break down when their individual class interests came into conflict. Ultimately these competing class interests limited the influence and impact the trades were to have on political development.

The balance of class forces in Limerick, linked to the defeats of strike action in the early 1840s, resulted in the conservative layer dominating the Congregated Trades. This led to their support for the Old Irelanders as divisions emerged in the nationalist movement. While the Young Islanders may have gained the ear of a small section of the working class in Limerick, the conservatism of those in positions of influence was to dominate the approach throughout the period of the Famine.

Chapter Five – Famine 1845-1850

Introduction

Many articles have been written about the course of the famine and its impact on Limerick city and county. What is noticeable about this commentary is the lack of reference to social struggle during this period. Limerick Corporation produced a *Famine Commemorative Edition* pamphlet in 1997 that only mentions the resistance of the masses in passing and does so in the context of 'crime'.[1] *The Old Limerick Journal* produced a Famine Edition in 1995.[2] The title of the editorial, 'Blight, Starvation and Flight'[3] was to demonstrate the approach of the journal to the topic.[4] Where conflict and struggle is mentioned it is only as something that was of little consequence. This chapter will primarily focus on the struggle of the working class, urban and rural, to survive the famine with consideration of the impact of strikes and food riots. It will also look at the impact of the famine on a class basis.

Some commentators have expressed surprise that social conflict took place. Seoighe, for example, expressed surprise that food riots took place in Shanagolden and Hospital despite the fact that Lord Monteagle (Thomas Spring Rice) was 'one of the best' landlords in Ireland and one of the most sympathetic to the poor.[5] In fact sympathetic and complementary articles about landlords are common.[6] With the exception of Eiriksson,[7] what is noticeably absent from discussion on the famine in Limerick is the relationship between tenant farmers and the landless labourers and cottiers.

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[1] Limerick Corporation Commemorative Edition, *Limerick City and The Great Hunger,* (Limerick 1997) p. 54.
[2] *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995).
[3] Ibid., p. 3.
[4] Thomas P. O'Neill, 'The Great Irish Famine 1845-1852', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995) pp. 16-20, Kevin Hannan, 'The Famine in Limerick, *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995) pp. 21-24, Mark Tierney, 'The Great Famine in Murroe', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), pp. 75-83.
[5] Mainchín Seoighe, 'Aspects of the Famine in Limerick', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 49, 2009), p. 77. Seoighe also looks at the famine period in Kilmallock in: Mainchín Seoighe, *The Story of Kilmallock,* (Limerick, 1988), pp. 191-199. Hospital is located 20 miles south-east of Limerick, not far to the east of Kilmallock.
[6] For example, Charlotte Murphy, 'Baron Monteagle of Brandon and the Famine, 1845-1848', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 33, 1991), pp. 85-93, Matthew Potter, 'The First Baron Emly of Tervoe', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995) pp. 58-63, Patrick J. O'Connor, 'Emigration and Famine, The Evidence of Francis Spaight, July 1847', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), pp. 141-144, Dr. Desmond North, 'The Limerick Estate of Sargent Warren during the Great Famine', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 43, 2003), pp. 75-83.
[7] Andrés Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', Cormac Ó Gráda (ed), *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series,* (Dublin 1997) pp. 67-94.

McMahon argued against the notion that there was widespread conflict between labourers and tenant farmers over conacre. He pointed to the lack of lethal assaults in the run up to and during the famine as evidence for this, citing that most lethal assaults were between farmers or within faming families.[8] It could be argued that the reason for the lack of lethal assaults on farmers by the labouring classes was because the attacks inflicted were designed to enforce a change of approach in relation to the provision of conacre, employment and the provision of food among the farmers, whereas the inter-farmer conflict and the inter-family conflict was of a personalised nature in disputes over land. Eiriksson argued that the labourers organised a system of intimidation and violence, the purpose of which was to force the sale of provisions locally and at a price the poor could afford.[9] The evidence from Limerick would confirm this assertion.

Parliamentary reports demonstrated that before the famine there was far more hostility between labourer and tenant farmer than between tenant farmer and landlord.[10] Rural labourers in the immediate period before the famine could generally be divided into three categories – unmarried farm servants who reside with their employers – cottiers who held, in addition to their cabin, a small lot of ground at a fixed rate, generally payable in labour – and those who had only a cabin and who depended for their subsistence chiefly on potatoes, raised on land, taken in con-acre. The farm servants seem to be much the most fortunate in that they had stable employment. The other two categories in general held their tenements from the farmers, who usually received rent in labour, calculated at the lowest rate of wages payable in the district.[11]

In west Limerick farmers were catagorised in three groups at this time. Farmers holding between five and 15 acres accounted for 34 per cent of all farmers, while 26 per cent of farmers held between 15 and 30 acres. The largest group were the larger farmers who had holdings of over 30 acres and were 39 per cent of all farmers. The large farmers were described as prosperous and comfortable. Many of these farmers held their land on long leases from local landlords.[12]

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[8] Richard McMahon, *Homicide in Pre-Famine and Famine Ireland,* (Liverpool, 2003) p. 103.
[9] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 73 & 74.
[10] *Digest of evidence taken before Her majesty's commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part 1.* House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 492.
[11] Ibid., p. 473-474.
[12] Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest and Society, 1820-1845,* (Limerick, 2008), p. 45 & 48.

Many labourers were paying farmers up to £2 10s rent for a hovel without any land.[13] Up to three-quarters of the labourers in County Limerick were unemployed or under-employed[14] with labourers getting a maximum of five months' work a year.[15] The supply of labour was so great that farmers were able to set the wages they would pay at 'the lowest amount which will support life'.[16]

1845 began with a spate of clandestine attacks in rural areas. During January tenant farmers met in Toomevara to demand action by the police to suppress the night-time attacks on farmers in East Limerick and North Tipperary.[17] Landless labourers were attempting to prevent rising rents for conacre potato ground. *The Landlord and Tenant Commission* had previously put the blame for rising conacre rent firmly on the tenant farmers, claiming that the practice of landlords renting to middlemen was now non-existent with their role of renting conacre to landless labourers being taken up by tenant farmers.[18] The clandestine attacks were followed by agricultural labourers demanding wage rises to compensate for the rising conacre rent.[19]

Eiriksson made an important observation that the campaigns to retain provisions locally and control prices did not occur during the periods of greatest scarcity in late June and July, but in the period leading up to expected scarcity.[20] Along with Cunningham[21] he rejected the notion that these conflicts were 'rebellions of the belly' and argued that they were carefully planned and calculated operations based on a knowledge of local supplies and an understanding of the market and price movement.[22] Again, evidence from Limerick would support this assertion.

Eiriksson divided the conflict during the famine into distinct phases. In the first phase protest focused on attempts to secure employment and protect wages on the relief schemes. Such actions began in the summer of 1846 and peaked in October and November of the same year. The second phase saw attacks and riots to prevent the export of grain and lower the price of meal. This phase began in the autumn of 1846 and continued until January 1847. The

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[13] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 858-859.
[14] Ibid., p. 491.
[15] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 483.
[16] Ibid., p. 474.
[17] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 January 1845.
[18] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 1100 & *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 February 1845.
[19] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 May 1845.
[20] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 75.
[21] John Cunningham, "'Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet': Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847", in Enda Delaney and Brendán Mac Suibhne (eds), *Ireland's Great Famine and Popular Politics,* (London, 2016), p. 13.
[22] Eiriksson, p. 75.

government decision to close the public works schemes in the spring of 1847 saw a determined and violent resistance from the labouring classes and signalled the third phase of protest. This resistance was also partly directed against the soup kitchens which in the beginning were opposed by a large proportion of the of the poor. Finally, the fourth phase occurred in May and June 1847, when the soup kitchens had been established and accepted. Now the food riots focused on influencing the management of the kitchens and on securing larger and better rations.[23] The remainder of this chapter will consider if the evidence from Limerick conforms to this outline of the development of protest during the famine.

Social Conflict

In early June 1845, Limerick was experiencing a spate of strikes involving building workers and fishermen. The craftsmen in the building sector struck for a wage increase and to prevent the employment of non-union staff.[24] The workers complained that contractors who secured public contracts were undermining the ability of the union to fund sick members and the burial of members who died by employing non-union workers. The unions threatened city-wide strike action if union members weren't employed on public contracts.[25] Rioting occurred over several nights at the beginning of July when 20 fishermen were arrested for fishing at the Lax Weir.[26] Throughout the year there were ongoing tensions in the city's lace factories with the factory owners regularly bringing workers subjected to bonded labour to court to be jailed for absenting themselves from work.[27]

The second half of the year saw a major upsurge in struggle by labourers in response to increasing food prices. Notices were posted around Castleconnell, seven miles north-east of Limerick, warning labourers not to work for less than 1s per day.[28] A week later labourers working in the city's corn stores struck demanding wages of 9s a week.[29] Mass protests by hundreds of labourers forced the contractors constructing the Waterford-Limerick railway line to immediately employ 75 workers with promises that more would be employed in the

[23] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 77.
[24] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 June 1845.
[25] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 August 1845.
[26] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 June, 2 & 5 July 1845.
[27] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 January, 23 April & 9 August 1845.
[28] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 October 1845.
[29] *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 October 1845.

immediate future.[30] When the contractor reneged on his promise the Mayor mobilised 100 police from rural areas to confront the demonstrators. The stand-off lasted for several days.[31]

Cunningham asserted that the protests around conacre demonstrated that the landless labourers were engaging in a conscious measure of collective action, rather than acts that were simply a unconscious response to the growing crisis.[32] In rural Limerick there is evidence that there was a coordinated campaign of clandestine attacks taking advantage of the situation that existed in various localities.

In November 1845 there was an upsurge of clandestine 'whiteboy' attacks designed to force tenant farmers to cut the price of conacre in line with reductions already implemented by landlords.[33] These attacks were facilitated by the re-deployment of the police from rural areas. The attacks escalated in response to tenant farmers evicting labourers from conacre. The failure of the potato crop resulted in labourers not being able to pay the conacre rent. The attacks prompt landowners and tenant farmers to meet in Doonass to plan a response to the night-time raids and to demand for the deployment of extra police.[34]

In the run-up to Christmas the attacks continued, grain stores of farmers were raided, and the local clergy joined with the tenant farmers in condemning the labourers for the 'whiteboy' activities.[35] One incident demonstrated the attitude of the tenant farmers. In early December a landlord in Sixmilebridge, David Wilson, distributed some land on his estate to labourers who had been evicted by his tenants. In response the farmers threatened Wilson, forcing him to withdraw the offer to the evicted labourers and to distribute any available land to the tenant farmers.[36]

The problem was compounded by the fact that farmers would illegally demand the labourer's potato crop as security and confiscate it if rent for conacre was not paid in full. When farmers were prevented from doing this they would demand full payment of the rent upfront.[37] Out of desperation many labourers took the conacre at inflated rent in order to secure employment to

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[30] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 November 1845.
[31] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 November 1845.
[32] Cunningham, "'Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet': Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847", p. 13.
[33] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12, 19, 26 & 29 November 1845.
[34] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 December 1845.
[35] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13, 17 & 20 December 1845.
[36] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 December 1845.
[37] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 520-521.

part pay the rent, but it was not uncommon for the farmer to keep the land, hoard the produce, and drive up the price as the situation deteriorated.[38]

Ongoing unrest continued into 1846 to prevent payment for conacre and prevent the employment of migrant labour at lower wages. The *Chronicle* commented that the industrious farmer who had ten acres was equally perturbed about the outrages as the gentleman with 100 acres. The paper argued that there was a 'deep plot' against the payment of rents on ground with black potatoes and 'it will ripen fast into a more formidable confederacy to usurp the land and dispossess the inheritors of the soil'.[39] The outrages focussed on three specific issues: to make farmers give out conacre; to prevent farmers from holding up potatoes for higher prices in the spring; to prevent competition between labourers that would drive up conacre rent.[40]

Parliamentary reports from this period demonstrate that the issue was not lack of a supply of food, rather it was lack of employment and the ability to pay for the food. In Castleconnell it was reported that 'hundreds will be found destitute… should much time elapse before the commencement of works of relief'.[41] This was replicated in a report from Pubblebrien which stated 'that the people will be in a state of actual starvation by the end of March, unless employment is immediately provided'.[42] This message was repeated in subsequent reports.[43]

Mass protest did force concessions. On 14 January 1846, a mass mobilisation of up to 1,500 people occupied 49 houses on the estate Sir Capel Molyneaux at Castleconnell to prevent the eviction of farm labourers. Thousands more gathered on the surrounding hills in support. The military commander read the Riot Act on several occasions but backed off open confrontation with the assembled crowd. After the threat of the evictions was lifted the crowd dispersed.[44] The mass mobilisation to prevent the evictions rapidly led to escalating violence with widespread attacks taking place in the district around Castleconnell. Threats were made against landlords' stewards ordering them not to employ migrant labour and against workers for

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[38] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 521.
[39] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 January 1846.
[40] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 534.
[41] *Scarcity Commission. The weekly reports of the Scarcity Commission, showing the progress of disease in the potatoes, the c omplaints which have been made, and the applications for relief, in the course of the month of March 1846,* House of Commons Papers, 1846, (201), xxxvii.429, p. 9.
[42] Ibid.
[43] *Scarcity Commission. Further return showing the progress of disease in the potatoes, the complaints which have been made, and the application for relief, for the week ending the 4th day of April 1846.* House of Commons Papers, 1846, (213), xxxvii.459.
[44] *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 January 1846.

working for less than the expected wage rate.[45] It is clear that in the early period of the famine the focus of protest was the securing of employment and the maintenance of wages.

The impact of protest was also demonstrated when on 15 March 1846 a notice was posted in Birdhill, 15 miles north-east of Limerick, calling for a protest on the lands of Major Going. Going met with a deputation of 50 labourers and 'sent them away with hope'. He then cut the rent for conacre that he was charging his labourer tenants from £8 to 40s, a cut of 75 per cent.[46] This encouraged further protests in other areas.

Violence erupted on the outskirts of the city when rural labourers were employed to scab on a strike by workers constructing the Waterford-Limerick railway line. Large numbers of police were deployed to protect the scabs.[47] Subsequently two strike leaders were arrested and charged with inciting a strike and rioting on the railway line.[48] At the same time a series of demonstrations took place between Limerick and Cratloe demanding employment.[49]

The *Chronicle* reported an attack on Sir David Roche[50] who was shot at for hoarding of food, with the *Chronicle* commenting that 'no man is safe when an intimate friend of O'Connell can be attacked'.[51] The attack on Roche led to utter panic among the local establishment. Within days meetings were held in city and county areas to discuss an expansion of public works and the purchase of Indian meal.[52] As moves to alleviate the growing crisis were being mooted food prices were rising rapidly.[53]

The local clergy condemned labourers in Adare and Croom who attempted to organise mass meetings against unemployment.[54] Three days later a meeting of more than 2,000 labourers took place in defiance of the clergy. The assembled labourers chanted 'all we want is work, we can't starve' as the Rev. James O'Shea demanded that the assembled crowd 'respect their

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[45] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 January 1846.
[46] House of Commons Papers, 1846, (201), xxxvii.429, p. 10.
[47] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 February 1846.
[48] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 March 1846. The two arrested strike leaders were John Cavanagh and Thomas Bourke.
[49] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 February 1846.
[50] The Roche Baronetcy of Carass (Caherass), near Croom, Co. Limerick was created for David Roche on 8th August 1838. Roche owned land around Mungret and in Co. Clare. Roche's grandfather had been mayor of Limerick in 1749. His mother was a member of the Maunsell family, who had a large estate near Rathkeale and he married a member of the Vandeleur family, prominent landlords in Co. Clare. Roche was elected MP for Limerick in 1832 as a candidate for O'Connell's Repeal Association and served until 1838. See, John Debrett, *The Baronetage of England*, (London, 1839), p. 472.
[51] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 March 1846.
[52] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14, 18, 21 March & 1 April 1846.
[53] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 March & 1 April 1846.
[54] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 April 1846.

clergy' and only assemble when it was lawful to do so. O'Shea was drowned out by chants of 'we want work' when he pleaded with the labourers not to 'disconnect from their clergy or from the tenant farmers' and he claimed the landlords were doing all they could. After repeated pleas and promises that he knew the government would act within days the crowd agreed to disperse.[55] Seoighe argued that the willingness of the crowd to disperse showed how 'docile' the masses were and how willing they were to be led by a priest they held in high esteem, that their spirit had been broken by hunger.[56] However, the evidence suggests that this is a misinterpretation of the developing situation.

Within hours of the crowd dispersing from the mass meeting the situation threatened to explode. Sir David Roche threatened the labourers on his estate with eviction to try and prevent them from attending any more mass meetings.[57] Local tenant farmers then mobilised to support Roche and condemn the actions of the labourers. Realising the potential for further conflict Rev O'Shea, while condemned the 'unlawful' assemblies, called on farmers to provide food and work for the labourers to diffuse tensions. The pleas of O'Shea to the tenant farmers fell on deaf ears.[58]

Complaints emerged about the way employment was being distributed on the schemes with it being claimed that the contractors 'generally employ their own families and servants'.[59] Eiriksson outlined that much of the violence on public works schemes was directed against senior staff on the schemes.[60] He argued that the objective of this violence was to keep up wages and prevent undue supervision and harassment of workers. The violence was rarely life-threatening, taking things too far could result in temporary or permanent discharges from the scheme. Many protests occurred in anticipation of workers being discharged and to prevent discharges taking place.[61] To lose you place on an outdoor relief scheme meant that you didn't have money for food.

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[55] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 April 1846.
[56] Seoighe, 'Aspects of the Famine in Limerick', p. 78.
[57] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 April 1846.
[58] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 April 1846.
[59] House of Commons Papers, 1846, (213), xxxvii.459, p. 7.
[60] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 77.
[61] Ibid., p. 78.

In the space of six weeks up to the end of April 1846 the price of potatoes had increased by 50 per cent at the Limerick market from 5d per stone[62] to 7½d per stone.[63] At the same time farmers were complaining about the shortage of labourers because of extensive employment on public workers schemes and on the construction of the railways. They cited the example of 500 labourers being employed by the Limerick Turnpike Board. Farmers were being forced to increase wages paid to labourers from 1s 3d per day to 1s 6d. per day.[64] As a result of pressure from landlords and farmers, the Relief Schemes cut wages from 1s per day to 10d per day in an attempt to force down wages for farm labourers.

In response the labourers on the Relief Schemes staged a one-day strike.[65] The Relief Schemes did not directly cause the scarcity of labour as the farmers had claimed. May 1846 was the end a three-month period that saw the largest number ever to emigrate from Limerick with a total of 3,857 people, mostly farm labourers and cottiers, leaving Limerick for the USA and Canada.[66]

Occasionally an employer did increase the wages of his workers to compensate for rising prices. Bianconi implemented wage increases of between 10%-20% for his employees during May 1846.[67] However, this was very much the exception rather than the rule. In contrast it was asserted that the objective of the farmer was to keep the cottier and labourer in debt through using the scarcity of conacre and lack of employment to control the actions of the rural poor and create profit for the farmer.[68]

The beginning of June 1846 saw an intensification of conflict in rural areas. Several protests each involving hundreds of labourers, broke out across rural Limerick. At Caherconlish a local landowner, Samuel Maunsell, stated that the labourers claimed that 'Unless they (the labourers) got immediate employment they should, in self-defence, be obliged to resort to violence to procure food'. Maunsell pleaded with the demonstrators to trust the authorities and return to their homes. Instead they tore up part of a road between Caherconlish and Herbertstown, then

[62] *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 March 1846.
[63] *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 April 1846.
[64] *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 May 1846.
[65] *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 May 1846.
[66] *Limerick Chronicle*, 30 May 1846.
[67] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 May 1846.
[68] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 552.

proceeded to dig up several fields that local farmers had turned to pasture. Similar protests occurred across the county from Rathkeale to Adare and Croom.[69]

The issue of 'task-work'[70] came to the fore in Patrickswell, five miles south-west of Limerick. Threatening notices were posted warning labourers not to break stones by task-work for the contractor Hamilton Langley.[71] Opposition was also growing to the provision of Indian meal. Riots broke out in Limerick Prison when the inmates were fed Indian meal rather than porridge. The riots resulted in the prisoners being locked in their cells.[72]

The social unrest that now prevailed across the entire city and country was manifest in a parade organised to welcome the nationalist politician, William Smith O'Brien.[73] On 13 June 1846 more than 30,000 people attended a demonstration organised by the Trades Council.[74] Demonstrations of such size were not unusual, particularly when Daniel O'Connell was in attendance, but this demonstration was of a different social character. The *Chronicle* noted that the participants were exclusively made up of the working classes.[75] Deep class divisions had emerged in Limerick over the response to the crisis. While the working classes were demanding jobs and foods, the farmers, merchants and establishment were exploiting the crisis for financial gain. There was uproar when the Chamber of Commerce demanded an end to the importation of Indian meal because it was depressing prices in the city.[76]

The expectation in the city was that the price of potatoes would drop when the new crop arrived in the city. The opposite happened, the price of potatoes accelerated from 8½d per stone on 1 July[77] to 10d per stone by the middle of the month.[78] The price only began to drop when it became clear that the potatoes arriving at the market were riddled with disease.[79]

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[69] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 June 1846. Caherconlish is 10 miles south-west of Limerick and Herbertstown a further five miles in the same direction.
[70] According to Steinfeld (Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century,* (Cambridge, 2001), p.128-129. Task-work was where the labourers agreed to work exclusively for the employer until the task was completed. To agree to work exclusively for a single employer was considered an act of self-alienation. The Liberal government introduced task-work as part of their policy change in the implementation of public relief schemes under the Labour Rate Act.
[71] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 June 1846.
[72] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 June 1846.
[73] Conflict between the Young and Old Irelanders was reaching a climax and heading towards a split. Smith O'Brien, being a leading figure in the Young Irelanders, attracted much support from the labouring classes at this time.
[74] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 June 1846.
[75] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 June 1846.
[76] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 June 1846.
[77] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 July 1846.
[78] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 July 1846.
[79] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 & 26 August 1846.

Social unrest was now widespread with regular demonstrations demanding employment,[80] warning notices threatening workers for working for low wages[81] and widespread clandestine attacks to force farmers to drop the price of provisions and pay increased wages.[82] While the middle and upper classes had the opinion that the relief schemes had the undesirable effects of increasing labour militancy and social unrest,[83] there was deep divisions among the wealthier classes over how outdoor relief was to be funded. The urban and rural Guardians fought over who was responsible for the plight of the destitute with each blaming the other for the lack of assistance provided. Reports of landlords and farmers indiscriminately evicting labourers and then tearing down their cottages to force them into the city were common.[84]

Mobilisations began to occur to prevent the transportation of food out of rural districts. Thousands of labourers and their families mobilised to blockade a bridge at Ferrybank to prevent local farmers sending food to the market in Limerick. A combination of police action, threats from the authorities and promises of relief eventually succeed in getting the blockade lifted.[85] Constant police patrols are maintained, with the military are kept on stand-by. Sporting and other events that would attract large crowds were postponed in order to avoid the mobilisation of large numbers and the consequent potential for disorder to occur.[86] Police were placed on guard at food stores in the city and in several rural towns to prevent plunder by the starving masses.[87]

By the end of September 1846 protests continued to escalate. From the perspective of the establishment these protests were getting out of control. Carloads of provisions on their way to markets in Limerick were attacked and plundered, mass meetings of unemployed labourers took place and demands for employment grew. The local Catholic clergy continued to condemn the protests and the plunder of provisions. On the last Sunday in September Thomas Steele, O'Connell's Chief Pacificator, used the pulpit at mass at Bridgetown to warn labourers not to

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[80] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 July 1846.
[81] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 August 1846.
[82] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 July 1846.
[83] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 89.
[84] *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Eighth Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (259), p. 50-53. Ó Gráda presented this as the farmers having little option and that they 'tended to let workers go' – see: Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 194.
[85] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 September 1846.
[86] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 & 16 September 1846.
[87] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 September 1846.

‘join any confederacy against the laws’. Steele went on to defend the local millers who had been hiking the price of flour.[88]

In a state of panic, the magistrates met in Ballingarry, 20 miles south-west of Limerick, to discuss ongoing relief schemes. Large crowds protested at the lack of work while the meeting was taking place. At a similar magistrates’ session in Kilfinane a large crowd invade the meeting house, threatened the magistrates with sticks, and that they would demolish the building, unless they provided with employment. One farmer who had some of his land taken for the new road claimed compensation at the session leading the crowd to beat him up as his compensation claim would reduce the amount available to pay wages. At Hospital the magistrates were faced with large crowds demanding an increase in wages and the end of task-work.[89] Cunningham outlined that large protests targeted relief committees and presentment sessions[90] and the evidence suggests that this is an accurate assessment of developments in Limerick. The opposition to task-work was not just based on the potential impact on earnings, but also on the grounds of equity.[91] Stronger fitter workers earning more money had a negative impact on the wages received by weaker workers.

Within days of the confrontations over the relief schemes in May 1846, there was a widespread deployment of troops. Despite the presence of soldiers, carloads of corn destined for the Limerick corn market were surrounded by a large crowd at Sheehan’s Cross and turned back. The local landlord later secured transport of the corn on the promise of immediate relief work in the locality.

While the urban working classes and the rural poor continued to starve, other sections of society were benefitting from the crisis. The *Chronicle* commented on the fact that the local banks had never been as busy handling deposits from local farmers who were making significant profits from the scarcity of food.[92]

Eiriksson asserted that by October 1846 food riots were adopted as a method of protest.[93] The evidence from Limerick suggests that the large scale us of food riots did indeed come to the

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[88] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 September 1846.
[89] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 September 1846.
[90] Cunningham, “‘Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet’: Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847”, p. 26.
[91] Ibid., p. 27.
[92] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 October 1846.
[93] Eiriksson, ‘Food Supplies and Food Riots’, p. 82.

fore at that time. By October in Limerick city, the plunder of provisions took on an organised and systematic fashion, with a network existing in the working-class tenements to distribute the plundered food. In what was to be an astonishing assertion, magistrates claimed that there is no danger of anyone dying of hunger because of the availability of relief schemes, low priced Indian meal and an open door at the workhouse for those suffering the greatest destitution. When a new relief scheme opened based on task-work, it provoked widespread protests. Labourers resorted to digging up roads to force the local magistrates to increase the number of relief schemes.[94]

It is asserted that the line between food riots and the collective plunder of provisions became less clear.[95] Cunningham claimed that the distinction between acts related to the moral economy and acts of theft and plunder were not clear cut.[96] As late as October 1846 the emphasis was certainly on trying to compel the availability of employment, with sufficient wages, coupled with an intent on ensuring food supplies were affordable. In relation to Limerick, the clear impression is that the masses engaged in whatever tactic was to prove the most beneficial in forcing concessions from the ruling establishment at the time. Cunningham also argued that the evidence suggested that crowds exercised moral restraint when stealing food.[97] This may well have been the case, but it is also possible that the crowd engaged in restraint on a practical level. Wiping out all the food supplies in one go could have led to a combination of merchants simply opting out of storing food in places that could be robbed and the establishment abandoning any efforts to provide charity.

As the month progressed the protests became increasingly violent. Those plundering carloads of supplies resorted to shooting the horses to prevent the drivers galloping off. The frequency of shooting incidents increased, and relief scheme workers regularly supported the plunder of provisions by forming a cordon to stop police and troops who were trying to prevent the food supplies being carried off. Protestors were now acting in open defiance of the clergy and the Repeal politicians. There was a dramatic drop in attendance at Repeal Association meetings as O'Connell and his allies condemned the protests.[98]

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[94] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 October 1846.
[95] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 82.
[96] Cunningham, "'Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet': Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847", p. 21.
[97] Ibid.
[98] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 October 1846.

To add to the crisis, the local millers were making substantial profits from the exportation of flour. During the first week of November, J.N. Russell's exported 993 tons of flour out of a total production of 1227 tons.[99] Flour was travelling the opposite direction as well. Two weeks later the *Chronicle* reported that a local miller imported a cargo of flour from Manchester and sold it at a 20 per cent profit.[100]

The Closure of Public Works Schemes

The initial response of the Conservative government in London to the famine was a combination of providing Indian corn and temporary public relief schemes.[101] When the Liberals replaced the Conservatives in government[102] there was a change in policy in terms of how the public relief schemes were implemented. The Labour Rate Act was introduced, public works schemes could be introduced but would operate under the control of the Board of Works. The newly appointed chairman of the Board of Works, Lieutenant Colonel Jones, withdrew from the local bodies the right to grant relief tickets to the destitute people. Jones argued that the lack of control over the schemes meant that those most in need were not benefitting and that the schemes as operated impacted on public order.[103] . By the third week of November 1846 there were 18,238 workers in Limerick employed on relief schemes.[104] The relief schemes were also used for the benefit of the private sector. Trevelyan showed how the relief aid given to the Great Southern and Western Railway allowed for the completion of the building of the railway line significantly ahead of schedule.[105]

Eiriksson asserted that the public works schemes served as a platform for organisation by workers. He argued that protest against the export of food was almost always planned by labourers on public works who took time off to riot. The same workers fought the closure of public works schemes[106] and the establishment of the soup kitchens.[107] In contrast Cronin and O'Callaghan asserted that the reason for abandoning the schemes was because they simply

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[99] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 November1846.
[100] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 November 1846.
[101] Mohamed Salah Harzallah, 'The Great Irish Famine: Public Works Relief During the Liberal Administration', *Nordic Irish Studies,* Volume 8 (2009), p. 83.
[102] The Liberals took power in July 1846 after the Conservatives split over an attempt by Prime Minister Robert Peel to repeal the Corn Laws.
[103] Harzallah, 'The Great Irish Famine: Public Works Relief During the Liberal Administration', p. 85.
[104] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 November 1846.
[105] Charles Edward Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis,* (London 1848), p. 182. Trevelyan was assistant secretary to HM Treasury and was responsible for administering the public relief schemes in Ireland during the famine.
[106] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 88.
[107] Ibid., p. 89.

weren't working, that the scale of the crisis was too great for the schemes to be a solution.[108] There is evidence from Limerick that workers on public work schemes played a pivotal role in protests and food riots.

During the first week in May 1847 major protests took place in Limerick against the threatened closure of public works and the establishment of soup kitchens. *The Chronicle* reported that 'Despite the availability of the workhouse and soup kitchens the crowds were determined to demonstrate their intent on demanding work'.[109] The protests rapidly spread to rural towns. More than 1,000 labourers protested in Ballingarry, 150 troops were sent to Rathkeale to suppress rioting and 400 people attacked the local police station after one of the protest leaders was arrested. The attack lasted several hours until a large detachment of troops arrived from the city to disperse the crowd.[110]

A further factor that played a role in the demise of the public relief schemes were the demands of farmers, who had repeatedly called for an end to the relief schemes or a major cut in the wages on the schemes in order to force labourers to accept lower wages working on farms. At the same time farmers were exploiting the relief schemes by providing horses and carts for hauling materials at more than double the wages of the labourers.[111] The farmers were also accused of piggy-backing on the destitution of labourers by intimidating landlords into cutting rent for tenant farmers.[112] In other instances, farmers were intimidating other tenant farmers in an effort to drive them off their land and take it over.[113] Some farmers exploited the destitute masses by forcing their labourers to engage in violence and intimidation against competing farmers.[114]

The year ended with the crisis continuing unabated. After nearly two years the crisis was taking its toll on the working class. By the end of the year the numbers participating in protests,

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[108] Mike Cronin & Liam O'Callaghan, *A History of Ireland,* (London, 2015), p. 218.
[109] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 May 1847.
[110] *Limerick Chronicle,* 12 May 1847.
[111] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 November 1846.
[112] House of Commons Papers, 1847, (002), [House of Lords] xxxv.1, p. 534.
[113] Ibid., p. 534. *Davis* recounts one specific land-grabbing case during the famine in: Richard Davis, 'William Freman: Limerick's Famine Scapegoat', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 35, (Winter, 1998) pp. 6-9. Moss reviews the literature on whether pre-famine rural conflict was inter-class violence or an intra-class conflict, although she doesn't draw any conclusions from her review. There is evidence that rural conflict encompassed elements of both, conflict between the labour and cottier against the farmer, the farmer against the landlord and intra-class conflict between farmers in efforts to get control of farmland. See: Cindy Moss, 'Robin Hood or Al Capone? Debating Rural Unrest in Pre-famine Ireland', *Cultural and Social History,* Volume 3, Number 2, (01 April 2006), p. 229-236.
[114] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 January 1847.

intimidation and raids of food supplies was in decline.[115] Despite previous efforts, the localisation of the struggle and the inability of the working class to decisively force the establishment to introduce enough relief measures led to the widespread devastation for the rural and urban poor.

By April 1847 most of the public works schemes had ended.[116] The elimination of outdoor relief limited the ability of labourers to organise effective protest and many labourers were now isolated working on individual farms forced to accept whatever the farmer was willing to offer. It also had a significant impact on the lives, not just of the labourers, but their dependants as well. A worker earning 6s per week on a scheme struggled to feed a family of six because of the high price of Indian meal.[117]

1847 dawned with the price of potatoes increasing to 1s 5d per stone. Flour prices had increased by more than 20 per cent on the same time the previous year. Oatmeal increased by 50 per cent.[118] Increased importation of food supplies had little effect on food prices.[119] Certain sections of the working class were able to maintain their meagre living standards. Moulders in the city's foundries were earning 5s per day, Francis Spaight increased the wages of his labourers from 7s 6d per to 9s per week. Spaight did not do this for some altruistic reason but in order to meet his need for a secure labour force to maintain his import and export business.

Apart from sporadic periods of organised protest, food riots and attempts at plunder continued in a more haphazard and disorganised fashion. The increased disorganisation and destitution among the poor allowed the ruling elites to deal with opposition with greater repression. The military were capable of dispersing rioters with greater efficiency while the destitution and starvation of the poor led to a dramatic rise in vagrancy and begging.[120] During the first week of 1847 two soldiers were injured in Croom during an attack on food carts. In response the magistrates sacked 120 labourers on the relief scheme.[121]

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[115] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 December 1846.
[116] Harzallah, 'The Great Irish Famine: Public Works Relief During the Liberal Administration', p. 88.
[117] Ibid., p. 88-89.
[118] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 January 1847.
[119] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 January 1847.
[120] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 January 1847.
[121] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 January 1847.

Overcrowding and starvation in the workhouse led to regular confrontations that resulted in inmates being expelled onto the streets.[122] The inmates rioted against a cut in rations from 1lb of bread in the morning and 8ozs of stirabout in the evening, to 8ozs of bread and 7ozs of stirabout. The riot forced an increase in rations to 12ozs of bread.[123] Sales of guns increased dramatically as the urban middle classes and the rural landlords and farmers sought to protect themselves from the growing chaos.[124]

Within the working classes there is also a growing divergence. Within certain trades, particularly in textiles, craftsmen were pauperised. The guild of weavers applied for aid from the Quakers who were providing charity in the city. The Quakers responded by refusing their application on the grounds that they could not help individual groups, but allocated charity on the basis of need.[125] Other craftsmen were able to maintain their normal existence, at least for periods during the crisis. A major contributing factor was the ongoing construction of the Waterford to Limerick Railway line. At the beginning of 1847 more than 600 craftsmen were employed building a seven-mile stretch of railway.[126]

When the work on the railway declined in May there was a further upsurge in plundering of food supplies. Numbers employed dropped from 654 to 170 men.[127] At the same time the price of provisions increased significantly. In response food carts were plundered throughout the city. The plunder spread to many county areas with attacks on food convoys and flourmills. Nightly theft of livestock was common in rural areas.[128]

There was an expectation that the new agriculture season would bring some relief to the condition of the poor masses. Mass meetings of landless labourers and cottiers continued. On the morning of 4 May crowds from the hinterland around Ballingarry and Croom began to

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[122] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 January 1847.
[123] Ciarán Ó Murchadha, 'Limerick Union Workhouse During the Famine', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995) pp. 39-40. A short, more general article on the Limerick Workhouse was also produced in this volume, Kevin Hannan, 'The Workhouse', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), pp. 44-45. *The Old Limerick Journal* reproduced an extract from a *Times* correspondent who visited Limerick in 1850 and compared the working of the Limerick workhouse with other workhouses in the West of Ireland, S. Godolphin Osborne, 'Gleanings of Limerick, 1850', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), pp. 165-168. Sean Kelly outlines the history of the Newcastle West Workhouse in Sean Kelly, 'The Newcastle West Workhouse', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), pp. 151-152.
[124] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 January & 3 March 1847.
[125] Minutes, 6 July 1847, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), *Limerick Papers, Relief Committee Minutes, 1847,* (MM/IX/P3), 14 April 1847 - 6 July 1847, Jim Kemmy Museum, Limerick, Archives.
[126] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 April 1847.
[127] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 April 1847 & 5 May 1847.
[128] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 May 1847.

gather at Knockfierna Hill. By noon the crowd had swelled to over 1,000 and marched to Ballingarry picking up more people along route. Workers on the local drainage schemes downed tools and joined the demonstration, which rose in number to 3,000 by the time it reached Ballingarry. The *Chronicle* commented that the demonstration 'denoted symptoms of a general rising of the peasantry'.[129] Another large demonstration took place in Askeaton and more than 2,000 demonstrated in Ennis. Repeatedly the clergy intervened to try and disperse the crowds.[130]

A mass meeting of farmers of O'Brien's Bridge and Killaloe, organised and addressed by local clergy, condemned the ongoing 'outrages against property' in the district and called for increased action by the police to combat the violence. The police were now on constant alert, patrolling the streets of Limerick and county towns on a continuous basis.[131] At this time the demonstrations were taking on a more aggressive tone. The masses of the poor were now rejecting offers of charity and demanded work. Those working regularly downed tools to take part in the ongoing demonstrations. Alongside the daytime demonstrations, nightly attacks occurred against local tenant farmers in arms raids and demanding a reduction in the price of provisions. Occasionally the attacks resulted in the murder of the farmer.[132]

In response to the rising protest movement the establishment responded with widespread repression. Large detachments of the army were deployed to suppress the protests and those leading the protest were arrested. Following the arrest of Patrick Griffen in Ardnacrusha, five miles north of Limerick, a crowd of 400 attacked the local police station where he was being held. The station was peppered for several hours by rocks and stones with the police responding by firing volleys of shots. The siege of the police station was finally lifted after several hours following the arrival of an army detachment from the Strand Barracks in Limerick and the subsequent shooting and wounding of two of the protestors.[133] Throughout the rest of May there were ongoing attacks on cars carrying provisions despite being guarded by troops. Large numbers of rural labourers flooded into the city and blockaded the markets to prevent food being exported to England.[134] Eiriksson asserted that protests in opposition to the export of food

[129] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1847.
[130] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1847.
[131] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 May 1847. O'Briensbridge is 5 miles south-west of Killaloe, towards Limerick.
[132] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 May 1847.
[133] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 May 1847.
[134] *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 May 1847.

was short-lived and largely confined to small areas in September 1846.[135] While the protests against food export in Limerick was short-lived, the protest was substantial in scale and occurred months later than indicated by Eiriksson.

These events coincided with a significant increase in the numbers being struck down by fever, with Bruff and Hospital being particularly badly affected.[136] The poor suffering from fever sought shelter in the ruins of the old Dominican priory so as not to infect members of their families.[137] A local doctor, Morgan O'Connell, noted that this was '…particularly a poor man's question… His health is his property – and health gone, house and land, income and credit, tools, furniture, clothing and independence and, too often, honesty, all follow and go with it'.[138]

The violence experienced in May continued sporadically for the rest of the year. Police records show that in November more than 40 per cent of all the armed robberies in the country took place in Co. Limerick.[139] The government responded by passing a Bill for the 'Better Prevention of Outrage'.[140] The situation for the masses was desperate. In August 1847 a total of 49,930 food rations were being given out daily in the area based on the Limerick Poor Law Union. In the Killmallock Union the distribution of food rations amount to 28,461.[141] However, by 15 August the provision of food rations had been stopped.[142]

Eiriksson suggested that the riots over soup kitchens lasted until June 1847 and that once the poor law unions and the workhouses took over relief the rioting ended.[143] He argued that the change in social status of the labourer, from worker to pauper and beggar after the ending of the relief schemes was the main reason for the cessation of popular protest rather than increased hunger and disease.[144] However, it could be said that the implementation of the Better Prevention of Outrage Act also played a role in bringing the riots to an end through the increased

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[135] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 82.
[136] *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 May 1847.
[137] Seoighe, 'Aspects of the Famine in Limerick', p. 81.
[138] *Minute Book of the Kilmallock Union,* quoted in Seoighe, p. 81.
[139] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 December 1847.
[140] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 December 1847.
[141] *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Fifth Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (148), p. 8.
[142] *Select Committee of House of Lords to inquire into Operation of Irish Poor Law, Fifth and Sixth Reports, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (507, 507-ii), xvi.927, 1019, p. 9.
[143] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 88.
[144] Ibid., p. 90.

use of repression. From the perspective of the labourer, popular protest was no longer a sensible tactic in the struggle for survival.[145]

Escaping the crisis

1848 and 1849 saw a major subsidence of social conflict with the outrage that did occur being largely confined to petty crime.[146] Many turned their attention to escaping the crisis through emigration. During 1848 a total of 9,401 people emigrated on ships from Limerick.[147] The one thing that the Guardians were willing, even enthusiastic, to do was subsidise the cost of emigration. Their objective was to solve the problem of feeding the destitute by getting them out of the city through emigration,[148] particularly as a result of the dramatic increase in refugees from rural areas.[149]

Leading Limerick merchant, Francis Spaight, took advantage the famine crisis to use the increased emigration to accrue financial benefits to himself. Spaight imported large quantities of timber from North America. His cargo on the outward journey from Ireland were emigrants. Normally the cost of passage to America was between £2 and £3 per person. However, at the height of the famine demand was so great that Spaight was able to charge up to five guineas for passage to Quebec.[150] Spaight also took advantage of the famine to clear his estate. He purchased 3,000 acres near Ballina, Co. Tipperary, in 1844 for £40,000. The estate was in a rundown condition as a result of being controlled by the Court of Chancery[151] and was home to 1,201 people, almost exclusively cottiers and their families. Having an advantage of owning ships that were transporting emigrants, Spaight offered free passage to his tenants. However, Spaight implemented one rule in his offer, he would not transport individual family members, the entire family would have to travel. All prospective emigrants had to give up possession of the land for which no payment was made in return. As soon as the family left the estate, Spaight flattened the houses they lived in and began amalgamating the land into larger farm lots. By 1851 the population on the estate was down to 459. O'Connor outlined that without the famine

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[145] Eiriksson, 'Food Supplies and Food Riots', p. 91.
[146] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 February 1849.
[147] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 January 1849.
[148] *Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland), Eighth Report, Minutes of Evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1849, (259), p. 74.
[149] Ibid., p. 53.
[150] Patrick J. O'Connor, 'Emigration and Famine, The Evidence of Francis Spaight, July 1847', *The Old Limerick Journal Famine Edition,* (Volume 32, Winter 1995), p. 142.
[151] The court of Chancery was a court of equity with specific remit for dealing with trusts and land law among other matters relating to ownership and control of land. It had wide ranging power and could overrule common law courts on issues it was responsible for. Ballina is located directly across the Shannon from Killaloe, both towns are connected by a bridge.

Spaight would have had significant difficulty clearing his estate, but the push factor of starvation and the pull factor of glowing recommendations from emigrants to those left behind meant that Spaight's approach achieved its objective.[152] One of the most ardent supporters of emigration was Thomas Spring Rice. He regarded Ireland as being over-populated and thought that this posed a threat to 'the whole body politic', arguing that an Irish Land Tax should be imposed to fund mass emigration.[153]

It is worth noting that the clearances of estates were more noticeable in the central and eastern parts of the county with the better-quality land. Seoighe outlined that Ballingarry parish saw the largest drop in population with the numbers living in the townland down by 50 per cent. In some localised areas the population drop was over 80 per cent. In contrast, the population drop in Abbeyfeale parish, an area with poorer quality land, was 'only' 24 per cent.[154]

The Workhouses

For those that remained the workhouse became the mainstay for survival. In December 1847 the workhouse gates were mobbed by large crowds attempting to escape the worst effects of the winter, with several dying on the road during thunderstorms and driving rain. The crowd was so great that access to the workhouse was not possible and after three days a large force of police was dispatched to clear the crowd.[155] On 10 February 1849 there were 6,500 inmates in the Limerick workhouse[156] and it became a breeding ground for disease. The city suffered significantly from an outbreak of Asiatic cholera in March 1849.[157]

Rioting in the workhouses as a result of the conditions or a lack of food was an occasional occurrence from 1847 onwards. The first such occurrence on 15 January 1847 when a large crowd attacked the workhouse hurling rocks at the building in retaliation to the master refusing readmission to a group of inmates expelled for 'misconduct'.[158] Later that year, in October, a large mob attacked the workhouse in Rathkeale and attempted to 'demolish' the building.[159] On

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[152] O'Connor, 'Emigration and Famine, The Evidence of Francis Spaight, July 1847', pp. 141-144.
[153] Charlotte Murphy, 'Baron Monteagle of Brandon and the Famine, 1845-1848', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 33, 1991), pp. 91-92.
[154] Seoighe, 'Aspects of the Famine in Limerick', p. 83.
[155] Ó Murchadha, 'Limerick Union Workhouse During the Famine', p. 40.
[156] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 February 1849. This number included the auxiliary workhouses.
[157] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 March, 14 March, 17 March & 14 April 1849.
[158] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 January 1847.
[159] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 October 1847.

at least one occasion gender discrimination caused a riot when in June 1848 women in the city workhouse rioted because they were receiving less food than the men.[160]

Breakouts from the workhouse occurred at times of desperation. In June 1848 a breakout occurred from the Boherboy Auxiliary Workhouse and the inmates proceeded to protest through the streets.[161] In January 1849 another brake out occurred from the same institution in protest at being fed insufficient stirabout and the inmates proceeded to beg through the streets.[162] Reduced rations cause a further riot in Boherbouy in May of the same year. with some inmates being expelled to roam the streets as a result.[163]

Even in the later stages of the famine confrontation occurred over conditions that continued to prevail in the workhouses. On the 14 February 1850 and extensive riot occurred at the Limerick workhouse when the master only readmitted 14 out of 240 inmates. The crowd rioting at the workhouse marched into the city and were joined by others along the way chanting 'Bread or Blood'. The crowd then marched from Kings Island to the Crescent and Catherine Street plundering every bread shop along the way. The riot was repeated on Thursday morning by a smaller group of around 90 protestors but grew again on Thursday night when more shops were plundered. Graffiti of 'Bread or Blood' was chalked all over the city. On Friday morning more shops were surrounded, and the shop owners handed out bread to the crowd in the hope they wouldn't plunder their shops.[164]

The most intense period of workhouse riots occurred in June and July 1850. More than 4,000 inmates from the city's workhouses rioted through the streets on 1 June after tensions between the inmates and the administrators of the workhouses boiled over into open confrontation. During the course of the riot a 12-year-old boy repeatedly beat the master of the workhouse with a window frame. He was subsequently sentenced to 21 days hard labour for the assault. When police confronted the rioters, they were pelted with volleys of stones. More than 100 people were arrested as the police suppressed the disturbances.[165]

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[160] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 June 1848.
[161] Ó Murchadha, 'Limerick Union Workhouse During the Famine', p. 42.
[162] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 January 1849.
[163] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 May 1849.
[164] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 February 1850.
[165] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 June 1850.

At the end of June, a riot broke out involving teenagers at the Mount Kenneth Workhouse when they arrived to see reduced rations for breakfast. The 12-16-year-old boys went on a rampage of destruction through the workhouse.[166] Several other small-scale riots occurred throughout the month of July.[167] As economic conditions improved and the impact of the famine reduced the workhouse violence dissipated. Two further incidents occurred in 1853. During a riot in the workhouse in March the master of the workhouse was stabbed by two of the inmates[168] and in April the boys in Boherbouy attempted to burn down the building.[169]

When a proposal emerged in April 1849 to transfer the Limerick Society House of the Philosophical and Literary Institute to the Poor Law Guardians for use as a workhouse the wealthy in the city created uproar on the basis that such a move would have a detrimental effect on property values in the vicinity of the building.[170] By now the total number of reported deaths from fever in the city reached 3,900.[171] Over 80 per cent of the deaths were amongst the poorest and most destitute sections of the population.[172] The city's establishment complained that nine-tenths of the paupers in the city were not natives and that petty crime and mendicity were reaching epidemic proportions.[173] The authorities took to using flogging as a punishment because of the overcrowded prison.[174]

There was the occasional occurrence of organised action by workers, but by now it was sheer desperation that was the driving motive. In May the labourers in Shanagolden attacked a migrant worker employed on the estate of Lord Monteagle.[175] In response Monteagle sacked all his labourers which lead to the labourers rioting and ransacking his estate.[176] Despite being regarded as 'one of the best' landlords,[177] Monteagle persuaded the Shanagolden Relief Committee to increase the price they were selling Indian meal to the starving masses by 50 per cent (from 1s to 1s 6d per stone) in order to encourage private capital to import and sell Indian

[166] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 June 1850.
[167] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 July 1850.
[168] *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 March 1853.
[169] *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 April 1853.
[170] *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 April 1849.
[171] *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 April 1849.
[172] House of Commons Papers, 1849, (259), p. 59.
[173] *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 April 1849.
[174] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 May 1849.
[175] Lord Monteagle was prominent businessman Thomas Spring Rice.
[176] *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 May 1849.
[177] Seoighe, 'Aspects of the Famine in Limerick', p. 77.

meal and prevent an increased rate burden, arguing that 'in assisting the class below them we should not inflict a wrong on the other occupiers of land'.[178]

The easing of the crisis did lead to some renewal of social conflict. As outlined previously, in February 1850 a series of street protests involving hundreds of workhouse inmates marched through the city streets chanting 'Bread or Blood' and resulted in the plunder of food stores.[179] Several mass protests by labourers demanding employment occurred at road works on Ashbourne Road leading to confrontations with the local police.[180] In May there is an outbreak of fighting between soldiers and locals in the city.[181] By September the *Chronicle* was reporting that the city was "gutted with foreign breadstuffs".[182]

Conclusion

After five years of famine some semblance of normality was returning to the city and county. The death, disease and emigration had led to a drop in population in the city and county from 330,029 in 1841 to 262,132 in 1851.[183] Given the estimated increases of the pre-famine period[184] it is likely that the population of Limerick at the start of the famine was significantly higher than the 1841 figure.[185] Even taking the 1841 figure there was still a drop of more than one in five of the population.[186]

Ó Gráda claimed that resistance during the famine was, for the most part, spontaneous and disorganised.[187] The evidence would suggest that the contrary was the case. Kelly focused on the incidence of food riots and food plunder during the famine and attempted to extrapolate these specific types of resistance to interpret the scale and pace of protest as a whole.[188] However, by disregarding other forms of protests his interpretation does not present a comprehensive picture of resistance by the masses of the urban and rural poor during the Famine.

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[178] Charlotte Murphy, 'Baron Monteagle of Brandon and the Famine, 1845-1848', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* (Volume 33, 1991), p. 88.
[179] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 February 1850.
[180] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 April 1850.
[181] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 May 1850.
[182] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 September 1850.
[183] Limerick's Life, *Limerick Population Changes* [http://limerickslife.com/limerick-population/], (Accessed on 4/4/2015).
[184] The percentage increase from 1831-1841 was 4.65%.
[185] Tom Ryan, 'The 1841 Census', *Old Limerick Journal* (Winter Edition 1996), p. 25.
[186] Limerick's Life, *Limerick Population Changes* [http://limerickslife.com/limerick-population/], (Accessed on 4/4/2015).
[187] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History,* p. 202.
[188] Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd,* pp. 62-92.

Cunningham pointed out that in the often dehumanising conditions of the masses asserted not only their right to existence, but also their right to their humanity.[189] The period should not be viewed as one of acceptance of their circumstances but of resistance to the crisis, not a period where the masses were welcoming of charity but of the demand for employment. Cunningham also quoted Badiou in characterising the protest movements as 'interesting failures'.[190] While the protest movements failed to prevent the devastation of the famine, it could be argued that without these protests movements that took place against various aspects of policy, the devastation could have been far greater on the labouring poor. At various stages protest did force the establishment to act to mitigate the worst impact of the crisis.

As was often the case in relation to nineteenth century historiography, the focus of much of the literature is around the nexus of landlord / tenant relation and completely ignore the plight of the poorest sections of the rural community during the Famine. For example, Daly discussed the eviction of 'small' tenant farmers[191] but fails to mention the eviction of labourers, with landlords and tenants tearing down their cottages to prevent them from being re-occupied.

The period of the famine was indicative of the resistance and combativity of the masses to poverty that was common since the beginning of the century. The abolition of relief schemes impeded the ability of the labourers to organise. It was only as a result of the increase of repression and then sheer exhaustion from the effects of famine and disease that the resistance subsided to any degree in the later years of the famine.

Kelly asserted that, among the casualties of the Great Famine, purposeful food rioting was dealt a terminal blow. He argued that this was the result of an emerging new orthodoxy that prized respectability over custom, and for classical liberalism who expected those who sought relief to forsake direct action in return for its provision. He stated that the authorities were not bluffing when they signalled their readiness to suspend relief when they encountered food protest rather than accede to the pressure of the mob. He concluded that, deprived of its space to function, the

[189] Cunningham, "'Tis Hard to Argue Starvation into the Quiet': Protest ad Resistance 1846-1847", p. 28.
[190] Ibid., p. 13.
[191] Mary E. Daly, 'Famine and Famine Relief, 1740-2000', in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland,* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 44-45

food riot was forced out. [192] While there is some merit in this assertion, it is also the case that the method and focus of struggle of the working class was evolving, with a greater emphasis on union organisation and on wages and working conditions in the post-Famine period, particularly among semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The Famine may have forced the food riot out as a method of action, but it was also superseded by more structured forms of working-class organisation.

[192] Kelly, *Food Rioting in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The 'Moral Economy' and the Irish Crowd*, p. 91-92

Chapter Six - Union organisation among the urban working class, 1850-1899

Introduction

Boyle has pointed out that the early history of organised labour is characterised by the existence of short-lived bodies. He was specifically talking about trades councils, which in Limerick did have a haphazard existence. The same point, however, might be made about labourers in the city who repeatedly attempted to establish trade union structures from 1860 onwards in their constant battle with employer. Labourers' unions would face a haphazard existence emerging during disputes, disintegrating when suffering defeats and struggling to re-establish organised structures again. By the 1890s labourers were establishing more sustainable union organisations, but it really wasn't until the establishment of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in Limerick in 1917 that their existence was assured as the ITGWU took the various labour bodies into the fold of the 'one big union'. This chapter will look at the attempts by semi-skilled and unskilled workers to establish and maintain trade unions. It will specifically look at three different groups of workers, dock labourers, railway workers and pork butchers, their struggle for union organisation and the outcome of these struggles. The chapter will also look at the nature of work for women workers, urban and rural, and the first efforts by women workers in Limerick to organise.

Boyle argued that the 1850s were 'comparatively uneventful', impacted by a gradual rise in living standards, and it was not until 1859 with the emergence of the bakers campaign in Dublin for the abolition of night-work that trade union activity re-emerged.[1] The campaign for the abolition of night-work and the use of public campaigning rather than strike action by the bakers supports O'Connor's contention that labour protest by urban workers during the 1850s kept within the bounds of 'moral force' trade unionism and concerned itself mainly with the reduction of hours.[2]

However, some evidence from Limerick does somewhat contradict these assertions. While strikes were few and far between in the 1850s[3] they were almost exclusively concerned with

[1] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 54-55.
[2] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000*, p. 33.
[3] A strike by shipwrights occurred in January 1853. Stonemasons working on the construction of the new floating dock struck in July 1853. Labourers constructing the new railway line between Limerick and Ennis struck on three occasions in late 1853 and early 1854. A strike by masons and bricklayers in the city occurred in April 1854. All of these strikes involved demands for increased wages and all were successful in their objectives.

pay rates rather than working hours. The only exception was the campaign by the bakers in 1860, during which some small scale violence did emerge and the failure of the campaign resulted in the collapse of the bakers' union.

On the industrial front the post famine period in Limerick was characterised by attempts by workers to organise initially into local trade unions and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century the emergence of national unions to which Limerick workers affiliated. The most important component of this struggle was the emergence of local unions for semi-skilled and unskilled workers, dock labourers, carters, corporation road sweepers, sandmen, building labourers and later railway workers.

Limerick Dock Labourers' Society

One of the most prominent groups of workers in Limerick who struggled for the right to establish, organise and have their union recognised were the dock labourers. The Limerick Dock Labourers Union was established in 1863[4] with its first recorded strike action in 1866. The basis of the strike was a demand for a weekly wage for the dock workers rather than a daily rate. The dock labourers rejected a day rate of three shillings instead demanding a weekly wage of twelve shillings.[5] The dock labourers were day-labourers who did not know if they would have work from one day to the next. This issue of a weekly wage was to be one of the main motivating factors in subsequent efforts to build union organisation among the dock workers and the main source of confrontation in future years. While strikes were fought out over pay rates, the notion of dock workers being permanently employed on a weekly wage was always in the background of any dispute.

The dock labourers regularly engaged in strike action from the 1860s onwards. The strikes oscillated between offensive actions over wages and defensive actions against wage cuts or the use of non-union labour at lower rates of pay. There was a constant to and fro struggle between the dock workers and the employers during this period. O'Connor contended that strikes for higher wages by unskilled workers like dock labourers were usually not successful.[6] The

[4] John B. Smethurst and Peter Carter, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Volume 6,* (Farnham, 2009), p.170 – Keenan asserts that the Limerick Dock Labourers Union dates from 1860 (Desmond Keenan, *Ireland Within the Union 1800-1921,* (Indiana, 2008) p.141). Prendergast contends that the Dock Labourers Society wasn't established until 1871 - Frank Prendergast, 'The Decline of Traditional Limerick Industries', p. 20 – but there is clear evidence that some unionised structure existed before this date. Andrew Boyd dates the establishment to 1860 – Boyd, *The Rise of the Irish Trade Unions 1729-1970,* p. 48. Boyle asserts that the dock labourers organised in 1863 and had over 200 members in 1896

[5] *Freemans Journal,* 17 August 1866.

[6] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 53.

evidence from Limerick relating to the dock labourers, and indeed to other labourers, would tend to contradict this.[7] Of the fourteen recorded strikes between 1850 and 1900 by labourers outside of the docks where a result is recorded, twelve were recorded in favour of a pay increase for the labourers. Strike action occurred with regularity on the docks with the labourers being successful or suffering defeat on different occasions. Strike action occurred on the docks for a variety of reasons. Of the twelve recorded strikes specifically about wages by dock labourers between 1863 and 1900, nine are recorded as achieving pay increases while three are recorded as defeats for the workers.

A month long strike beginning in February 1868 forced the concession of a weekly wage of ten shillings for a ten hour day.[8] Another major strike erupted on the docks in July 1870 which resulted in the employers agreeing to pay labourers a day rate of three shillings per day or a weekly rate of twelve shillings.[9] Up to 1868 the dock labourers were employed on a day-to-day basis. This agreement resulted in the first indication of labourers on the docks being employed on a weekly basis rather than as day labourers. The employment of dock labourers on a weekly basis with a weekly wage irrespective of the work available was to be an ongoing issue throughout the remainder of the century. It is not clear how many workers were to be employed on this basis as a result of the 1868 dispute, but the employers were resistant to this development and its implementation largely relied on the comparable strength of social force that the labourers could exercise over the employers at any given time.

Trouble erupted again three months later when the merchants reneged on agreed pay rates. The merchants claimed that the shipping companies were refusing to transport goods to and from Limerick because of the high costs and industrial unrest. In response the dock labourers demanded the same rate of five shillings per day as coal labourers were receiving for working on coal boats. In response the head of the Harbour Board, James Spaight, held a private meeting with city merchants to draw up plans to break the dock labourers' union. The merchants demanded that the magistrates station a large force of police at the docks 'for the preservation

[7] Few strikes are recorded involving labourers outside of the docks. Labourers working on the Limerick -Ennis railway struck successfully for wage increases on three occasions in 1853 & 1854. In 1866 a strike by labourers working on the Corcanree Embankment over wages was successful. Labourers at the Locomotive Works won a pay increase after a strike in 1870. Straight afterwards a general strike of labourers occurred in the city winning pay increases across the city. In 1876 labourers working for the Corporation won a pay increase after a strike. A similar successful strike occurred in 1890 and again in 1891. In 1890 strikes by labourers on relief works broke out. Some labourers secured pay increases while others were sacked and replaced by workers at the previous rate. In 1895 building labourers struck successfully for a pay increase. Labourers in Spaight's timber yard won a pay increase after a strike in 1899.
[8] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 & 18 February & 10 March 1868.
[9] *Freemans Journal*, 22 July 1870.

of order'. The result of the dispute was that the employers agreed to the establishment of a permanent workforce of labourers employed by the Harbour Board at wage rates of fifteen shillings per week when discharging vessels and twelve shillings per week when engaged in other work.[10]

Regular strike action continued whenever the merchants attempted to employ non-union labour. Among these strikes was that of December 1871 when all the dock labourers working on the docks struck in response to James Spaight hiring non-union labour to unload a boat load of grain.[11]

In 1883 a concerted effort was made by the Harbour Board and the merchants to break the union. In March a day labourer on the docks died in the workhouse. A number of dock labourers asked for permission to attend the funeral, but when the employers refused all 250 dock labourers walked off the job, attended the funeral and then refused to return to work. The *Freeman's Journal* condemned the action of the dock labourers claiming it cost the merchants and ship owners several hundred pounds because of the delays caused by the strike and it was one of a series of strikes by the dock labourers that was disrupting the trade of the city.[12]

In a direct challenge to the dock labourers union, the merchants provoked a strike in May 1885. Bannatyne hired non-union labour to unload corn from the 'Palmerston' inciting a walk-out by the dock labourers. The workers were then locked-out and a large force of police used to protect the scabs. The two most prominent merchants in the city at the time, Russell and Spaight, then declared that they would use scab labour to unload ships under police protection. At this point it became obvious that the strategy of the employers was to break the union to facilitate the introduction of steam-powered winches to unload the ships.[13]

A week into the strike a mass meeting of the dock labourers was addressed by Rev. Ambrose. Ambrose argued that their strike was 'hastily entered into' and they should return to work without insisting on their demands. Ambrose told the men that he would inform Bishop Edward O'Dwyer, who was due to meet the merchants, that the dock labourers were willing to return

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[10] *Irish Times*, 12 October 1870. Chairman of the Harbour Board for much of this period was James Spaight who had extensive business interest in Limerick, including shipping and timber importation. Spaight was also chairman of the Waterford and Limerick Railway company.
[11] *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 December 1871.
[12] *Freemans Journal*, 28 March 1883.
[13] *Irish Times*, 20 & 22 May 1885.

to work on the merchants' terms.[14] However, the workers rejected the intervention from the clergy and continued with their strike action. Assaults on scabs began[15] but within two days the workers agreed to return to work after accepting the employer's demands.[16]

The merchants now went for the jugular and resolved to no longer recognise the Dock Labourers' Union, re-igniting the dispute. The employers subsequently claimed that a number of the dock labourers had left the union and returned to work. By 1 June the strikers had agreed to return to work and to work alongside non-union labour on the docks.[17] They did however, wring concessions from the employers, securing a full day's pay for any portion of the day worked, shorter working hours, and the end of the use of steam winches. The agreed working day was 6 am - 5 pm with a 7 am start during winter months.[18] Violence was not a one-way street of striking workers intimidating and attacking scabs. Subsequent to this strike three of the labourers who scabbed during the dispute were charged with stabbing two of the strikers in a pub in Mungret Street.[19]

Strike action broke out on the docks during the following year. On 3 November 1886 the dock labourers walked off the job at 6 pm when a stevedore refused to pay overtime for working after the agreed finishing time of 5 pm. The stevedore then used steam winches to unload the cargo of barley for Walker's Distillery. The following morning the dock labourers demanded two shillings each for the extra hour they worked the previous evening. When confronted by a large force of police a riot ensued and one of the strikers was subsequently fined for assault. Walker's threatened to dock their ships in Waterford in future and transfer the barley by rail to Limerick.[20] The issue of the use of steam winches was to repeatedly prove to be the catalyst for industrial unrest over the following years.

Not surprisingly a further strike broke out in July 1887. Once again the use of steam winches was the catalyst for the strike. On 26 July the dock labourers went on strike when steam winches were used to unload the *Ardnamult*.[21] The Harbour Board had formed a sub-committee charged

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[14] *Freemans Journal,* 26 May 1885.
[15] *Irish Times,* 27 May 1885.
[16] *Freemans Journal,* 28 May 1885.
[17] *Irish Times,* 29 May & 1 June 1885.
[18] *Irish Times,* 3 November 1886.
[19] *Irish Times,* 19 June 1885.
[20] *Irish Times,* 3 & 6 November 1886.
[21] *Irish Times,* 27 July & 1 August 1887. The Ardnamult was a cargo ship, built in North Shields on Tyneside in the north-east of England and launched in 1883. The ship was owned by the Waterford Steamship Company and was hired by the Limerick Steamship Company to operate between Liverpool and Limerick. The ship sank in 1904 following a collision with

with the task of drawing up a strategy to break the union by hiring scabs. The intent was to bring scabs in from Scotland and house them on board ships in the docks under police protection.[22] Initially scabs were brought in from Tralee and Waterford and on the night of 27 July the striking dock labourers rushed the police cordon at the dock gates and broke through leading to a full-scale riot on the docks. Showers of stones were pelted at the police as they baton charged the striking workers. Several policemen were injured, including two seriously, and four of the strikers also ended up in hospital. Seven strikers in total were arrested for rioting. Subsequent to the riot the magistrates held a private meeting and requested the intervention of the military to break the strike.[23]

The dock labourers were receiving widespread support across the city. The magistrates appealed for the redeployment of an extra 200 police to Limerick and banned the playing of marching bands on demonstrations through the streets of the city at night for the duration of the strike. The newly deployed police promptly arrived and heavy police patrols were organised on the docks and the streets of Limerick. A scab was attacked and beaten up on Patrick Street and when the police arrested his attacker a large crowd surrounded the police demanding his release. Under pressure from the growing crowd the police released their prisoner who was promptly spirited away by the crowd.

The strike was proving effective. The crew of the Ardnamult abandoned their ship when asked to unload the cargo and joined the strike and the scab labour from Tralee and Waterford also joined the strike.[24] As the strike continued the Harbour Board sent those workers home to Tralee and Waterford to avoid a situation where they became active participants in the dispute. Coal merchants were now exploiting the strike by raising the price of coal by three shillings per ton. Further ships were diverted to Waterford and the cargo sent by rail to Limerick.[25]

The Harbour Board once again attempted to use scabs to unload cargo on the docks. Under police protection 25 labourers were brought in from Waterford to unload the Arranmore. In opposition a large demonstration, including a band and pushing a lighted tar barrel, arrived at

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a Dutch vessel while on a voyage from Hamburg to Limerick. See: *Tyne Built Ships, A history of Tyne shipbuilders and the ships that they built, [*http://www.tynebuiltships.co.uk/A-Ships/ardnamult1883.html], (Accessed on 26/10/2019) & R.J. Scott, 'Limerick Steam: A History of the Limerick Steamship Company 1893-1970', *Ships Monthly,* (March/April/May 1982), pp. 28-35.

[22] *Freemans Journal,* 27 July 1887.

[23] *Irish Times,* 30 July 1887.

[24] *Freemans Journal,* 27 July 1887.

[25] *Irish Times,* 1 August 1887.

the docks where the ship was tied up. As the protestors arrived they began to shower the police lines with stones forcing them inside the dock gates. The demonstrators now launched a full scale attack on the dock gate on St. Alphonsus Street. Several of the policemen climbed up on the wall but were driven off by showers of stones. At this point the workers on the Arranmore walked off and joined the protest. Rocks, stones, bottles and other debris were flung in volleys over the wall into the docks. The blazing tar barrel that had been rolled to the dock gates was also thrown over the wall. The windows of the Clyde Shipping Company offices were smashed and some of the protestors managed to break through the gates but were surrounded by the police who managed to force the rest of the crowd back. Several striking workers were arrested and charged with riotous assembly and assaulting the police.[26]

As the strike continued into a fifth week the Harbour Board was coming under increasing pressure from the merchants and shipping companies to sack the striking workers from that point forward to use the steam winches to unload ships at the docks.[27] The strike ended when the workers agreed to the use of winches to unload coal but not any other products.[28]

The industrial peace didn't last long. On 19 September the dock labourers went on strike when the employers failed to pay the agreed rates.[29] Workers were brought in by train from Waterford to scab on the strike. The scabs, protected by a detatchment of armed police were met by a large demonstration who jostled and heckled the scabs. At one point the crowd threatended to overwhelm the police until they fixed bayonets and threatened to open fire on the demonstrators.[30] The *Examiner* reported on 23 September that a settlement was near as the different establishment interests fought over who should bear to cost of the police redeployment to Limerick. The strike ended the following day with the dock labourers agreeing to work machinery and to being paid by the hour. The pay rates were not specified but the strike clearly ended in defeat for the workers.[31]

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[26] *Irish Times,* 15 August 1887.
[27] *Freemans Journal,* 29 August 1887.
[28] *Irish Times,* 2 October 1887.
[29] *Freemans Journal,* 20 September 1887.
[30] *Irish Times,* 20 September 1887.
[31] *Cork Examiner,* 23 & 26 September 1887.

The National Union of Dock Labourers

The term 'new unionism' emerged in relation to the development of large general unions in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century, with union membership and strike activity increasing rapidly and extending to many groups of workers not previously involved in collective mobilisation.[32] The impetus for new unionism is given as the London dock strike of 1889.

Pollard argued that the role of the dock strike in the rise of new unionism is largely mythical, arguing that the National Agricultural Labour Union (1871) and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (1872), both predate the dock strike. He claimed that both these unions and the subsequent dock strike were dependent on middle-class and other outside support and that the nucleus of the dock strike came from the Amalgamated Stetedores Society which was formed in 1871.[33] While these details may be accurate, Hobsbawn outlined the importance of the 1889 dock strike, stating that it marked a qualitative transformation of the British labour movement and its industrial relations. Between then and World War One Britain experienced nationwide disputes and the first central govenrment interventions in idnustrial disputes. The counter-attacks from employers from 1890 onwards largely destroyed new unionism and made a second wave of union expansion inevitable.[34]

Three strikes are recorded on the docks in Limerick during 1890.[35] It is clear that the impetus for these developments, and the strikes in other ports around the country, came from the successful strike by dock workers in London the previous year.[36] This period was an intense period of class conflict in Ireland. O'Connor estimated that 30 unions were formed between 1889-1891 many catering for semi-skilled and unskilled workers.[37] Among the most prominent of these was the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), formed in Glasgow in 1889.[38]

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[32] Richard Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society,* (London, 2004), p. 81.
[33] Sidney Pollard, 'The New Unionism in Britain: It's Economic Background', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen & Hans-Gerhard Husung (eds), *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880-1914,* (London, 1985), p. 34
[34] Eric Hobsbawm, 'The "New Unionism" reconsidered', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen, & Hans-Gerhard Husung (eds), *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880-1914, (*London, 1985), p. 16-19.
[35] *Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1890, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 14.
[36] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 November 1890 – The London dock strike 1889 was one of the pivotal struggles in the establishment of the trade union movement in Britain and ended in complete victory for the dock workers and the establishment of a strong Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union.
[37] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 51-52.
[38] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 107-108. For information on the formation of the NUDL and the Irish influence in the formation of the union see: William Kenefick, 'Irish Dockers and Trade Unionism on Clydeside', *Irish Studies Review,* Volume 5, Number 19, (1997), pp. 22-29. For information on the history of the NUDL, see: Eric Taplin, *The Dockers' Union: A Study of the National Union of Dock Labourers, 1889-1922,* (Leicester, 1986).

The first Irish branch of the NUDL was established in Belfast in July 1891 following the arrival of Michael McKeown from Liverpool.[39] McKeown did not confine his activities to Belfast. In early August 1890 he travelled to Wexford to organise dock workers in the town.[40] By the end of the year the NUDL had established 14 branches around the country.[41] In Derry the dock labourers were organised in the St. Columb's Quay Labourers Society and by 1892 the NDUL had a branch in the city.[42]

The Dublin dock labourers were organised as the Quay Labourers' union in the 1870s. They took part in the O'Connell commemoration in 1875 but disappear from the scene afterwards.[43] Greaves indicated that the NUDL spread from Belfast, to Drogheda and Newry and then to Dublin.[44] Records show that dock labourers in Drogheda struck on 9 July 1890 with the employers recognising the NUDL.[45] In Newry 200 hundred dock labourers joined the NUDL.[46]

O'Connor indicated that the NUDL was established in Waterford in 1889. There were 12 industrial disputes in Waterford in 1890 with most of the unrest featuring dock labourers, seamen, railway labourers, coalporters and carters.[47] Solidarity action was a feature of disputes.[48] Disputes on the docks were prone to violence and one of the leaders of the NUDL, Richard McGhee, advocated sabotage in Waterford.[49] The determination of the employers in other locations to break the NUDL was replicated in Waterford. In November 1890 over 100 dock workers and sailors were sacked for striking in support of a dismissed collegue.[50] This strike took place in conjunction with a dock strike in Limerick and one in Cork. It appears that

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[39] John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin & the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907,* (Belfast, 1985), p. 24. McKeown was originally from Drumintee, Co. Antrim, before emigrating to Birkenhead. He joined the NUDL and was Birkenhead branch secretary during the Liverpool dock strike in 1889.
[40] Laurence Marley, 'Michael McKeown', Emmet O'Connor and John Cunningham (eds), *Studies in Irish Radical Leadership,* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 74.
[41] Gray, p. 24. O'Connor and Boyle stated that the NUDL was organised in fifteen ports with 2,000 members by mid-1891.
[42] Shane McAteer, 'The New Unionism in Derry, 1889-1892: A Demonstration of its Inclusive Nature', *Saothar,* Volume 16 (1991), p. 19.
[43] C. Desmond Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers Union: The Formative Years, 1909-1923,* (Dublin, 1982), p. 3. Greaves suggested that the economic slump of 1879 caused the disintegration of the union.
[44] Ibid., p. 5.
[45] Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 85.
[46] Ibid., p. 352.
[47] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 90.
[48] Ibid., p. 92 & Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 88.
[49] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 92. Richard Magee was the first president of the National Union of Dock Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland when it was established in Glasgow in 1889.
[50] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 93. It was later reported that some of the striking workers were later rehired.

the Waterford and Cork disputes were an extension of the Limerick strike.[51] The *Waterford Citizen* embarked on a campaign against the striking workers calling the union a

> blood sucking union which in order to support its own ignorant and reckless agitators greedily grasp the weekly subscriptions of deluded workmen and finally dooms him to misery and semi-starvation by calling periodical strikes.[52]

The NUDL established a branch in Cork sometime in mid-1890, drawing its membership from the Steam Packet Company's employees and absorbing the Quay Labourers' Society. Cronin argued that the 'new unions' catered for clearly defined classes of workers, workers like pork butchers or dock labourers who had considerable skill, and they did not attempt to recruit among the unskilled or lowest paid workers.[53] While Cork Trades Council was willing to support the unionisation of semi-skilled, workers like the dock labourers, it was openly hostile to the notion of unionising general labourers.[54] Cronin did assert that the new unions did, briefly, shake the narrow localism of Cork labour. She asserted that the unskilled labour unrest spred like a bushfire, beginning in one business concern and spreading from there to a multiplicity of areas.[55] Records show that the dock labourers struck on 29 March 1890, but the strike collapsed in under a week as the strikers were replaced by scabs from other ports. A second strike occurred three weeks later and a third in October 1890, both also ending in defeat for the dock labourers.[56]

In March 1890 dock workers in Sligo formed themselves into a 'Mutual Protection Association'. By August the workers had merged with the NUDL and when Michael McKeown arrived in the town he found the dock workers on strike. The NUDL succeeded in recruiting the workers in Rosses Point and by the year the membership of the union had grown to over 400 members. The growth of the NUDL dove-tailed with the emergence of a Trades Council in Sligo and despite the generally accpeted suspicion of the craft unions towards the new unions, a NUDL representative took the position of Assistant Secretary.[57]

The Galway Labourers' Society was formed on 11 September 1890 and by 7am the following morning the dock labourers were on strike. By 9.30am the employers had begun to concede the

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[51] *Freemans Journal,* 15 November 1890 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 November 1890.
[52] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 November 1890 & *Irish Times,* 24 November 1890.
[53] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 66-67. Cronin did state that building labourers and railwaymen were recruited from this unskilled layer.
[54] Ibid., p. 190.
[55] Ibid., p. 67.
[56] Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, pp. 88-92.
[57] John Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland: Working Life and Struggle 1890-1914,* (Belfast, 1995), p. 20.

union's wage demands. It wasn't long before the union got embroiled in controversy with Richard McDonagh, President of the union, taking the anti-Parnell side in the split in Irish nationalism and his Vice-President, William McNulty, going with the Parnellites. The Galway Labourers Society never became part of the expansion of the NUDL. Cunningham suggested that this was due to lack of opportunity than anything else.[58]

Greaves asserted that the NUDL established a branch in Limerick in 1890. He made the same assertion about Galway.[59] While there is a lack of clear evidence it is possible this is the case. 'New Unionism' did spread to several Limerick workplaces. For Example, in January 1891 workers at the Condensed Milk Factory in Landsdowne joined the London based Gas Workers and General Labourers' Society[60] and staged a strike for union recognition.[61] However, like in Galway, there is no evidence that the Limerick dock labourers joined the NUDL. This may have been down to the lack of opportunity like in Galway, or it may have been the result of the fact that the dock labourers in Limerick had a long history of struggle to build their union and force recognition from employers.

Ongoing conflict at Limerick docks

Workers on the docks in Limerick launched a concerted effort in 1890 to force concessions from the Harbour Board and the merchants who operated on the quays. In August, during the course of the widespread railway strike, the carters on the docks struck against the employment of non-union labour hired to cart coal from a steamer, owned by Mullocks, on the docks.[62] Attacks occurred on the scabs with one, Michael Hehir, being badly beaten with a shovel and ending up in Barrington's Hospital. A carter named Carroll was charged with the assault.[63] As the strike continued the dock labours came out in early September in support of the carters.[64] The solidarity of the dock labourers forced the hand of the merchants bringing the dispute to an end.

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[58] Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland: Working Life and Struggle 1890-1914,* p. 26 & 28.
[59] Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers Union: The Formative Years, 1909-1923,* p. 5.
[60] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 January 1891.
[61] *Strikes and lock-outs. Report on the strikes and lock-outs of 1891, by the labour correspondent to the Board of Trade,* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890), p. 168. The strike lasted from 19 January-15 February 1891. Many of the striking workers were replaced and attempts to gain union recognition failed.
[62] Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 90, *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 August 1890 & *Freemans Journal,* 15 August 1890.
[63] *Freemans Journal,* 22 August 1890.
[64] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 September 1890 & *Freemans Journal,* 12 September 1890.

The following month the dock labourers again went on strike, this time in a dispute over wages for unloading the *Ardnamult*. The labourers organised a general meeting to plan their response to the rumours that their employers planned to bring in scabs from Portlaw to break the dispute. The following day, with the arrival of a ship-load of grain onboard the Rascilla for the Distillery, the dock labourers demanded an increase in wages of one shilling per day – seven shillings for the workers in the hold and six shillings for the workers on the quay. The strike ended when the merchants agree to the increase. Furthermore, the employers were also forced to pay the labourers for the time they were on strike. The *Limerick Chronicle* argued that the employers were completely at the mercy of the dock labourers' demands because of the volume of ships trading in the port. The dock workers responded by stating that they lived in poverty day-to-day and when the opportunity arose they would get what they needed to survive. The *Chronicle* accused the labourers of being drunks and demanded the ship owners use the crane recently purchased to break the hold of the dock workers' union.[65]

In the aftermath of the strike a mass meeting of workers on the docks discussed their working conditions and drew up a list of demands. The *Limerick Chronicle* carried two statements relating to this meeting. The first statement published was in the name of Daniel Bourke as Secretary of the Limerick Dock Labourers' Society. The second statement was published two days later in the next edition of the *Chronicle* and was in the name of James Doyle as Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Dock Labourers and Tally Clerks. It appears that this amalgamated society was an attempt to bring all the unskilled and semi-skilled workers on the docks under the umbrella of a single union organisation. The demands of the workers included a ban on non-union workers from the docks, an increase in wages to seven shillings per day and the implementation of a closed shop, where another member of the Society must replace any worker who was suspended or dismissed for being drunk.[66]

The Limerick Steamship Company refused to accept the demands of the dock labourers and ordered the *Ardnamult* to berth at Fenit planning to transfer the goods to the railway for transport to Limerick. On arrival in Limerick the railway workers refuse to handle the blacked goods. Posters were distributed to carmen and draymen calling on them not to aid or assist the Limerick Steamship Company in transporting goods from the railway station. That evening the

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[65] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11, 14 & 16 October 1890 & Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 91.
[66] *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 & 6 November 1890. The Board of Trade Report indicated that the strike started on 1 November and lasted until an unspecified date in February 1891, see: Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 92.

police were sent out to tear down the posters. The strike was now coinciding with a similar dispute in Cork as dock workers struck in support of seamen while the employers attempted to break their newly formed trade union.[67]

The Steamship Company responded by attempting to use scabs. Labourers brought up from Waterford were 'got at' by the striking workers and refused to work. The company then offered 6s per day but the dock labourers rejected this offer unless it was accompanied with a reduction in the working day from ten to eight hours. Local merchants called for volunteers among the business class to scab on the strike. A small number of scabs from Portlaw along with local merchants unloaded the *Ardnamult*, but the unloading was by then several days behind schedule and taking place behind a large cordon of police drafted in to protect the scabs.[68] After a delay of more than two weeks the *Ardnamult* was eventually unloaded but much of the cargo was still blacked by workers at the railway station. At the same time strike action had spread to Waterford where dock workers and seamen were on strike.

In an effort to break the union the Harbour Board agreed to allow the Steamship Company to construct a crane at the docks on condition that all merchants could use the facility, while Rev. Bourke of the Arch Confraternity attempted to get the dock workers to moderate their demands. When the *Ardnamult* returned with another cargo, 50 scabs were drafted in under the protection of 40 police armed with rifles. Proposals to erect the crane brought charges of corruption as some councillors accused James Spaight of using his position on the Harbour Board to promote the erection of the crane because he was due to sign the contract for the construction of the rails needed to mount the crane. At the same time Spaight was at the centre of a new dispute that broke out among railway workers on the Waterford and Limerick Railway.[69]

The number of scabs working on the docks then increased to 70 and despite the deployment of large numbers of police several fights had broken out between the striking workers and the scabs.[70] Strikes began to spread to other industries. Workers at the Condensed Milk Company staged a strike for union recognition.[71] A few days later Corporation sweepers, carters and stone

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[67] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 & 13 November 1890 & Francis Devine, *Irish Seafarers & Trade Union Organisation And The Struggle To Defend An Irish Merchant Fleet* (2002) [Available at http://www.irishships.com/irish_seafarers__trade_union_or.html] (Accessed on 30/10/2014].
[68] *Freemans Journal,* 15 & 17 November 1890 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 13, 15 & 18 November 1890.
[69] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 & 25 November 1890 & 5, 9, 16, 18, 23 & 27 December 1890.
[70] *Freemans Journal,* 8 January 1891.
[71] Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890), p. 168. This was a strike for recognition of the branch of the Gas Workers and General Labourers Society that the workers had established.

breakers struck.[72] The Corporation discussed forcing paupers in the Workhouse to scab on the strike.[73]

The crisis on the docks took a major turn on 17 February 1891. Three men attacked a scab from Dublin named Thomas Doyle on his way home from work. He was badly beaten and thrown into the river where he drowned. John Bourke, a dock labourer, was arrested and charged with his murder. [74] During the murder trial the Lord Chief Justice condemned the 'very lawless and truculent spirit on the part of a class of employees in the city'.[75]

Eventually the dock workers drifted back to work. Despite this the employers had again failed in their objective of eliminating the union. Occasional assaults continued[76] and tensions also existed between the employers. In August the Harbour Board reject a claim from the Limerick Steamship Company for compensation to pay for police guarding the scabs during the strike. The Harbour Board asserted that the Limerick Steamship Company chose to use the police so they should be responsible for paying them.[77]

The dock workers union in Limerick appears to have weathered the attacks on union organisation significantly better than similar bodies in other cities and towns. Membership of the Limerick Dock Labourers' Union is recorded at 120 in 1892 with an increase to 150 for 1893 and 1894.[78] In June 1894 they staged a successful strike against the use of non-union labour on the docks.[79] The outcome of this strike indicated that the dock labourers were implementing a closed shop. There is no indication of how this closed shop operated or how long it lasted.

Dock workers also engaged in solidarity action with other striking workers. In 1894 when firemen and enginemen struck at Bannatyne's, there was a walk-out by the entire workforce. [80] In solidarity wth the striking workers at Bannatyne's, the dock labourers refused to unload six

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[72] Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890), p. 168. *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 January 1891. The sweepers, carters and stone breakers won a pay increase of between one shilling and three shillings a week.
[73] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 January 1891.
[74] *Irish Times,* 18 February 1891.
[75] *Freemans Journal,* 7 March 1891.
[76] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 March 1891.
[77] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 & 18 August 1891.
[78] *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1896; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, p. 99.
[79] *Board of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1894,* Command Papers, 1895, (C.7901), xcii.211, p. 170-171.
[80] *Irish Times,* 20 August 1894.

ships full for grain for the company. The dock workers then demanded an increase of 1s per day on their return to work after the resolution of the Bannatyne strike.[81] The dock workers now faced a new challenge in the form of the Shipping Federation. This organisation was formed in England in 1890 with the stated aim 'to counter the strike weapon, and make no secret of the fact'. The company boasted that they had a permant force of workers and depot ships to accommodate them when acting as strike-breakers.[82] The Shipping Federation received permission from the Harbour Commissioners to erect shedding accommodation to house 200 scabs they intend to hire from England. Police were drafted into the city to protect the scabs. The Bannatyne strike again brought up the ongoing issue with the use of steam winches for unloading ships on the docks. The strike at Bannatyne's ended following the intervention of the Mayor[83] and the dock workers won their demand for an increase of 1s per day and returned to work.[84] The owners of one ship refuse to pay the increase and that ship remained unloaded.[85]

The success of the two strikes in 1894 led to a significant increase to 260 in membership of the union during the following year.[86] A series of strikes broke out on the docks in 1895 over the use of steam winches. In April dock labourers struck before returning to work. The Board of Trade Report indicated that the workers agreed to the use of winches.[87] However, the *Chronicle* reported they continued to refuse to unload the Lorton where the winches had been used.[88]

Another strike broke out in October when Herriott's ordered the use of steam winches on the vessel to unload his cargo of 1,200 tons of coal.[89] The labourers and carters protested through the city and a large detachment of police were mobilised and placed on duty at the docks. A number of non-union men continued to work after the dock labourers walked off but they joined the strike a short time later. When the crew on the vessel was put to work unloading the ship the carters joined the strike. The owners of the ship, Greenholland and Company threaten to

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[81] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21, 23 & 25 August 1894.
[82] John Lynch, *A Tale of Three Cities: Comparative Studies in Working-Class Life,* (London, 1998), p. 81-82. See also: Leslie Hughes Powell, *The Shipping Federation: a history of the first sixty years, 1890-1950,* (London, 1950). The Shipping Federation was also used to break strikes on the railways in Britain.
[83] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 August 1894.
[84] Command Papers, 1895, (C.7901), xcii.211, p. 172.
[85] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 August 1894.
[86] Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, p. 99 & *Trade Unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1897. With comparative statistics for 1892-1896,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, p. 75. Another 40 workers are recorded as members of the Limerick Harbour Employees union. It is likely that this is the union later styled as the Steam Labourers Society.
[87] *Board of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1895,* Command Papers, 1896, (C.8231), p. 162-163.
[88] *Freemans Journal,* 2 April 1895.
[89] Command Papers, 1896, (C.8231), p. 162-163. The Report indicated that the strike lasted a day and the workers returned agreeing to work the steam winches. Newspaper reports contradict this.

hire the Shipping Federation to provide scabs to unload the vessel.[90] The *Limerick Leader* condemned the 'constantly reoccurring and uncalled for strikes are causing the most serious injury to the port.'[91] The strike ended after a week when the dock labourers demands were conceded by the shipping company.[92]

Throughout this period the employers attempted to maintain a non-union group of casual workers to limit the influence of the Dock Labourers' Society. As with the strike in October 1895, these non-union workers occasionally joined the dockers when they went on strike. In late 1896 these non-union workers attempted to fomalise their situation by establishing the Steam Labourers' Society. McGrath attempted to portray this society as a split from the Dock Labourers' Society,[93] but it is clear that these were non-union workers who were used by the employers to undermine union organisation on the docks.[94] One dspute erupted between the two groups in November 1896 whe the Dock Labourers' Society accused the Steam Labourers' Society of undercutting wages for unloading a coalboat. The Dock Labourers' Society claimed that the other group were breaking an agreement on payrates for unloading coal.[95] It is likely that the Steam Labourers' Society was very short-lived as there is no reference to it in later material.

Records showed that the membership of the Dock Labourers' Union was 200 in 1896[96] and 150 in 1897.[97] In 1897 Labourers refused to use steam winches to unload a cargo of grain for Martin McGuire leading to police being deployed to the docks.[98] The membership of the Limerick Dock Labourers' Union in 1898 is indicated at 200,[99] while in 1899 it is recorded at 120.[100] In 1899 Justice O'Brien criticised the dock labourers for regularly going on strike at the Assizes warning them that local merchants would not bring their ships to Limerick in future.[101]

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[90] *Freemans Journal,* 1 October 1895.
[91] *Limerick Leader,* 2 October 1895.
[92] *Nenagh Guardian,* 9 October 1895.
[93] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 310.
[94] *Limerick Leader,* 30 November 1896.
[95] *Limerick Leader,* 25 November 1896.
[96] Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, p. 99.
[97] Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, p. 75.
[98] *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 May 1897.
[99] *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, p. 73.
[100] *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1899. With comparative statistics for 1892-1898,* Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601, p. 77.
[101] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 March 1899.

The 'Labour Party' under the leadership of maverick Fenian, John Day, won a stunning victory in the 1899 municipal elections. The Labour dominated council was known as the 'People's Parliament'. The Local Government Act 1898 had led to working class people being entitled to vote in municipal elections and they exercised their franchise by engaging in a massive clear out of the business interests who had run the Corporation over the previous sixty years. The dock labourers used their influence to gain concessions from the council. They held a meeting with Daly and several labour councillors who agreed to propose to the gas committee that any coal contracts would only be given to merchants who employed union labour and used hand winches instead of steam winches to unload their coal.[102]

In May 1900, 200 dock labourers went on strike demanding a 50 per cent pay increase from five shillings per day to seven shillings and six pence per day. Two coal merchants conceded the demands. The same pay demands were then made by labourers employed by Mullock's for the unloading of a coal boat. The demands were rejected leading to the dockers refusing to unload a grain boat for Bannatyne's. When Bannatyne's attempted to get their storemen to unload the ship, they joined the strike. A subsequent meeting of merchants rejected the dockers claim for a pay increase. However, the following day the merchants offered an increase of one shilling per day which was rejected out of hand by the strikers. The carters working for Russell's next joined the strike, demanding a two shillings per week pay rise. The company granted a one shilling pay rise with the possibility of a further one shilling per week bonus. Subsequently Russell's passed on the increase given to the carters to the millers and storemen. The strike lasted two months until the dock labourers return to work on the old rates. This led to the coal merchants attempting to withdraw the increase they had paid to their labourers. Within a week the dock labourers were back out on strike. This time the merchants agreed to an increase to seven shillings per day and the labourers accepted the increase only to then demand one shilling per hour for night work.[103]

Along with the railway workers, the dock workers of Limerick proved to be the backbone of the Limerick labour movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They fought an ongoing battle with employers for union recognition with decent rates of pay and working conditions. On a regular basis they faced attempts to break their union and undermine union solidarity on the docks. Occasionally they suffered setbacks, but regularly returned to strike

[102] *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 March 1899.
[103] *Freemans Journal*, 16, 17 & 18 May, 2 & 11 July 1900.

action when conditions favoured their cause to regain any concessions they gave. The dock workers were regularly confronted by the use of the state forces during industrial disputes. Violence was a common feature of strikes on the docks, with riots breaking out, attacks on scabs and court cases. The traditions laid down by the dock workers were to continue into the twentieth century. The Dock Labourers Society affiliated to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union at the beginning of 1918[104] and provided the backbone for the development of the IT&GWU in Limerick in subsequent years.

Limerick Pork Butchers' Society

The Limerick Pork Butchers' Society was one of the traditional craft societies dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The pig market in Limerick was one of the larger markets and several bacon merchants were among the dominant merchants in Limerick following the Act of Union. As the century progressed the pork butchers were locked in a constant struggle with the merchants to prevent the deskilling of their trade. It was a struggle that continued over the last three decades of the nineteenth century and resulted in the pork butchers losing their standing as a traditional craft trade.[105]

From 1870 onwards the Limerick pork butchers were noted for seeking out and engaging in solidarity action with other pork butchers societies, in particular with Cork and Waterford. This was likely the result of the fact that the bacon merchants in Limerick also had bacon factories in both other cities. Not surprisingly this resulted in the formation of an amalgamated union involving the pork butchers societies in all three cities in 1890. From the establishment of the first bacon curing house in the 1816[106], these houses quickly became large industrial-type plants.[107] Based in Roche's Street, by 1866 Matterson's employed 150 staff in its bacon factory, 100 in its sausage department, 150 in its canning department, with 12 workers dealing with meat and bone-meal waste.[108] In 1892 Shaw's were listed as the second largest bacon curing

[104] Haugh, 'The ITGWU in Limerick 1917-1922', p. 29.
[105] Guiry dated the Pork Butchers Society from 1890 but it is clear that the pork butchers were organised as early as 1870 and possibly earlier. See: Ruth Guiry, *Pigtown – A History of Limerick's Bacon Industry,* (Limerick, 2016), p. 87.
[106] Paddy Lysaght, 'Limerick's Bacon Factories', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 15 (Spring 1984), p. 10. Prendergast dated of the founding of Matterson's as 1820, Shaw's opened their bacon factory in Limerick in 1831. In 1892 Shaw's processed 150,000 pigs. O'Mara's started sometime prior to 1839 when they moved to a factory in Roches Street. O'Connor dates Denny's establishment of their first bacon factory in Waterford to 1824, and Denny's purchased a factory in Limerick in 1872 and in Cork in 1888. Guiry dated the establishment of the first bacon factory at 1810. See: Guiry, p. 3.
[107] Andy Bielenberg, *Cork's Industrial Revolution 1780-1880: Development or Decline?,* (Cork, 1991), p. 3. Bielenberg listed the emergence of the bacon industry in Cork to the 1830s.
[108] Prendergast, 'The Decline of Traditional Limerick Industries', p. 7.

establishment in Europe.[109] Within the bacon factories, women worked in the sausage making section, earning between 6s and 12s per week. The workplace was described as 'clean, cool and airy' because of the nature of the produce, but the women worked in wet conditions with a smell that was regarded as 'extremely disagreeable, but not unwholesome'.[110]

The bacon factories in Limerick are regarded as the first industry that operate on a factory system with a production line.[111] As with other sectors of the Limerick economy the bacon factories strived to undermine the traditional craft guilds in an effort to drive down costs. The bacon industry was an obvious target for such deskilling during this period. The first major strike in the Limerick bacon factories broke out in November 1871. Pork butchers across the city's bacon factories struck against the employment of non-union labour.[112] In total between 300-500 workers were on strike in Matterson's, Shaw's and Oak's.

The bacon merchants responded by appointing a 'negotiator', a representative of Matterson's from England who stated his determination to break the strike. Over 700 pigs were sent to Waterford to be butchered but the pork butchers in Waterford refused to handle the blacked goods. The 'negotiator' ultimately sent the pigs to England for slaughtering.

Local nationalist politicians attempted to mediate in the dispute arranging a number of meetings but the talks broke down when the employers insisted they wouldn't be dictated to by the union as to who they should or should not employ.[113] There is no record as to how the dispute was finally resolved but later events suggest that the employers made concessions to the union. Throughout the remainder of the 1870s the Pork Butchers' Society managed to maintain their presence in the bacon factories of Limerick.

The pork butchers went on the offensive in October 1883 when they threatened strike action over the payment of 'pig money'. The union demanded a payment of one penny per pig slaughtered and processed, with the cost to be borne by a levy on the pig farmers supplying the factories. In response the bacon merchants met and planned a lock-out of all the bacon factory

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[109] Lysaght, 'Limerick's Bacon Factories', p. 11. The pig market was located in Cathedral Place. Denny's and Shaw's were located adjacent to the pig market, with O'Mara's located close to Matterson's in nearby Roches Street.
[110] *Royal Commission on Labour. The employment of women. Reports on the conditions of work in various industries in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland,* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6894-xxiii), p. 326.
[111] Guiry, *Pigtown – A History of Limerick's Bacon Industry,* p. 16. The second major industry to adopt the factory system was Tait's Army Clothing Factory.
[112] *Freemans Journal*, 16 November 1871.
[113] *Freemans Journal,* 17, 18, 20 & 21 November 1871.

workers in the city. The workers held a mass meeting attended by 400 butchers, with the vast majority wanting an all-out strike across the city's bacon factories.[114] Sporadic strike action followed but the employers held the line against the workers demands.

Within a year a major strike developed. In September 1884, an estimated 160 workers at Denny's went on strike. When reporting on the strike the *Chronicle* claimed that there was a 'rapid growth of a turbulent and dictatorial Communistic spirit in our midst'. That evening a boy who scabbed on the strike was badly beaten by a striking worker. The strike was quickly settled, but when the man who had assaulted the boy was sacked, all the workers again walked out. This time the strike rapidly spread throughout the city's bacon factories and the employers retaliated by sacking all the bacon workers and initiating a lock-out.

The pig buyers were instructed not to purchase any of the 1,200 pigs at the local pig market.[115] The strike, known locally as the 'Black-toe strike' after one of the scabs,[116] spread rapidly and the following day bacon workers in Rathkeale were also locked-out.[117] The *Chronicle* reported that 40 people were engaged in scabbing to clear the pigs who were already in the bacon factories. These included a small number of pork butchers, clerks from the offices of the bacon factories, and pig buyers who volunteered to scab in an effort to break the strike. Scabs were also brought to Limerick from Portlaw, Co. Waterford.[118] The employers claimed that some of those engaged in scabbing were assaulted after leaving the bacon factories in the evening and the police were mobilised to protect the scabs and the bacon factories from attacks by striking workers.

Denny's claimed that the strike was part of a planned campaign of retaliation for the defeat of the workers' demands for 'pig money' the previous year, and also an effort to force the employers to recognise the union. The strikers were demanding a reduction in the working day from 13 hours to 10 hours a day. *The Irish Times* argued that the workers could not sustain a strike because of their 'slender resources', while the *Freemans Journal* claimed that the bacon merchants had a large reserve of cash to fight the strike and would not budge until they broke the union. The *Irish Times* continued by claiming that 'irrespective of the losses to the

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[114] *Irish Times,* 30 October & 1 November 1883 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 November 1883.
[115] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 September 1884 & *Irish Times,* 17 September 1884.
[116] Gerry Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', *Féile Pádraig Annual* (1957), p. 79.
[117] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 September 1884.
[118] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 79. Ryan dated the strike as 1885, but primary sources indicate that it was 1884.

companies they cannot afford to let the strikers win'. The newspaper reported that the employers were planning to extend the lock-out to the women workers in the sausage making and soup making sections of the factories.

However, the nationalist establishment in the city became increasingly concerned that the city's bacon factories would lose their markets to competition from American and European suppliers of pigs. They initiated mediation under the direction of the local Catholic curate of St. John's Parish, Fr. Ambrose. An agreement was reached that included an outline of shifts, extra pay for late work and overtime payments. The employers also agreed to recognise the Pork Butchers' Society as the trade union representing workers in the industry and agreed to conduct all negotiations on the wages and conditions of the workers through the trade union. The agreement concluded with a non-victimisation agreement.[119] The strike resulted in a major success for the workers, including winning concessions on the payment of 'pig money'.[120]

The 1890 Strike

The issue of 'pig money' erupted again in 1890 leading to a major strike in bacon factories across Munster. Both the workers and the employers were conscious of the growing tensions between them. Boyle referenced the pork butchers as the most prominent of the local societies connected with the provisions trade, with the emergence of an amalgamated society in Limerick and Waterford.[121] Ryan claimed that representatives from the Pork Butchers Societies in Limerick, Cork and Waterford began meeting regularly in Limerick Junction in 1885 before amalgamating in 1889 into one union.[122] The *Limerick Chroncile* reported that it was at a meeting in late January 1890 that the representatives of the Pork Butchers Societies in Limerick, Cork and Waterford formed an amalgamated union.[123] O'Connor dated the meeting as having occurred in at the Pork Butchers Society's rooms in Limerick on 17 January. He suggested that the adoption of the name 'Amalgamated Society of Pork Burchers' encompassed elements of old and new unionism, with the pork butchers asserting their claim to craft status, while their militancy incorporated new unionism, with its spirit of self-reliance and class solidarity.[124] A

[119] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 September 1884, *Freemans Journal,* 18 September 1884 & *Irish Times,* 17, 18 & 20 September 1884.
[120] Men secured 3s, boys 2s and 'heads of gangs' received a tradesman's wage of 32s a week.
[121] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 99.
[122] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 79.
[123] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 January 1890.
[124] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 91.

few days later, on 23 January, the bacon merchants met in Limerick Junction to plan a widespread lockout of the bacon workers in each city.

The strike began on 25 January when workers struck in Denny's in Limerick and Waterford. The workers were demanding 'pig money' that would result in a pay increase of 3s per week, and a reduction in working hours. The merchants responded by attempting to divide the workers. Shaw's offered concessions to their workers in Limerick but refused to accept any of the claims of their workers in Waterford.

The lock-out of the workers began in Waterford when the paymasters at Denny's, Richardsons and Matterson's announced to workers as they received their pay that they were being dismissed. The companies targeted the main union activists with 30 men each being dismissed in Denny's and Richardson's and 10 workers being dismissed in Matterson's. The remaining workers struck in support of the dismissed men. The locked-out workers joined the Federated Trade and Labour Union and organised strike committees.[125] The following morning Denny's requested 50 men to process 230 pigs that they had on hand but the workers refused. Shortly afterwards a cart load of bacon was transported to the quays for loading onto a GW&R steamer but the dock labourers refused to handle the strikebound goods and the cart driver returned to the factory with his load.

The lockout was extended to Limerick on the Friday with Denny's, Shaw's and Matterson's locking out 600 men and 200 women. A further 200 pig jobbers are also without work because of the lock-out. In Cork, the employers followed the same pattern as in Waterford. Denny's dismissed 25 men provoking a walk-out at the bacon factories across the city. The following day delegates from Limerick and Waterford arrived in Cork for a meeting in the rooms of the Pork Butchers Society. The strike delegates declared that they would resist the employers' efforts to destroy their trade union.[126]

The determination of the workers to hold the line across the three cities saw cracks appearing among the merchants. Rumours about concessions from the employers began to circulate. Shaw's broke ranks and offered major concessions to their workers on 'pig money' payments.

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[125] The Federated Trade and Labour Union was established in Waterford in 1889 and supported new unionism in the city. See: O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, pp. 95-99.
[126] *Irish Times*, 25 & 27 January 1890 & *Freemans Journal*, 28 January 1890.

The remaining employers exerted enormous pressure on Shaw's to maintain the employers' intent to break the union and Shaw's withdrew their offer. The workers responded by establishing strike funds and appealing for support from workers in each city.[127] House-to-house collections for the strike fund took place and jarveys transported strikers to country towns to collect money.[128]

Other workers then began engaging in solidarity action in support of the strike. In Waterford firemen and sailors refuse to put to sea unless a cargo of strike-bound bacon was removed from their ship. The police had previously guarded the loading of the cargo. Hundreds of workers had gathered on the quays to protest at the shipment. Under pressure from the protest the police organised the removal of the bacon from the ship and there was a massive cheer as the ship sailed without the cargo. In Limerick, the chairman of the Waterford & Limerick Railway condemned the railway porters for refusing to handle bacon products bound for Waterford port by train. Railway porters in Waterford informed their employers that they would refuse to handle the strike-bound bacon.[129] On the first day of the strike in Waterford female operatives were prevented from passing the picketline. When workers were brought to Waterford from Wales to load the ships, the sailors refused to set sail until the blacked cargo was removed from the hold. When the crew were sacked the NSFU threatened strike action.[130]

Three days later a train containing bacon from Limerick arrived in Waterford for shipment to London. Railway and dock workers in Waterford refuse to handle the bacon and it was sent back to Limerick. The same day car-loads of bacon being driven to the docks by factory clerks and managers were confronted by a large demonstration of striking workers and their supporters. Police armed with rifles forced back hundreds of workers attempting to block the loading of the ship. The police forced a gap through the protestors to allow the carts to pass to the ship, which was loaded by a scab crew brought in overnight from England. Mr. S. Farrell of the Federated Trades Club travelled to Milford in an attempt to get the shipment blacked when it arrived. In Cork three car-loads of bacon from a strike bound Denny's factory were sent to the docks for shipment to England. The shipment was being loaded until the dock labourers realised it was strike-bound produce and refused to complete the loading. The shipment was

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[127] *Irish Times,* 3 February 1890.
[128] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 79.
[129] *Irish Times,* 5 February 1890.
[130] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 91. NSFU was the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union. The NSFU is now known as the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT).

then brought to the train station for transport to Waterford but the railway workers refused to handle it.

The Catholic hierarchy then intervened with Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick meeting with the merchants in Limerick and Cork. The workers in the two cities rejected out of hand concessions proposed by O'Dwyer. Two days later a mass meeting of strikers in Limerick issued a statement that 'no one, neither lay nor cleric had the authority to arbitrate on their behalf', but they indicated that they would not object to anyone working voluntarily to find a solution. The workers again discussed the proposals from the Bishop, again rejecting them. The workers also rejected proposals for an increase in the number of apprentices.

On 13 February, 600 workers packed into the courthouse in Limerick where the court was to decide on the legality of Denny's decision to dismiss two workers without notice. The courtroom erupted into uproar when the Mayor claimed that he didn't have any jurisdiction to adjudicate on the case. Again the following day the strikers rejected new proposals from the merchants. The pressure was clearly telling on the employers as new proposals were put forward regularly only to be rejected by the workers.[131]

On 2 March the workers in Limerick rejected arbitration on the question of 'pig money' but did state that they were willing to accept arbitration on the issue of wages. They voted unanimously to remain on strike until they succeeded in winning their demand for 'pig money'. At the same time in Cork 200 workers blockaded Shaw's in an attempt to prevent a small number of scabs going to work, provoking a major confrontation with police. Some workers had returned to work a few day before as the impact of the strike had begun to take a toll on some of the strikers. During the stand-off a woman passing the confrontation threw a cup of tea into the face of one of the scabs. A further confrontation occurred between the mass picket and 50 policemen as the scabs were leaving work. One of the pickets was arrested and the police threatened to arrest the strike leaders if the mass picket continued into the following day. That evening a meeting took place between the strikers and those who had returned to work and scabbed on the strike. The meeting resulted in the scabs rejoining the strike. The following morning the mass picket was once again mounted and there were rousing cheers as the workers in Shaw's walked off the job and rejoined the picket line.

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[131] *Irish Times*, 8, 11, 13, 14 & 19 February 1890.

As the stand-off between the workers and the employers progressed into a second month the workers began looking for a resolution. The nationalist mayors of the three cities pleaded with workers to end the strike and on 4 March, while solidarity action took place in Limerick, the workers in Limerick and Cork agreed to submit their claim to arbitration. The workers proposed Bishop O'Dwyer as arbitrator and Michael Davitt as an umpire of arbitration.

Two days later O'Dwyer addressed a mass meeting of workers in Limerick. The Bishop demanded the authority to conclude a binding agreement with the employers. This provoked consternation among the strikers with Michael Sheehan, President of the Pork Butchers Society, objecting, arguing the Davitt should have that authority as he was the agreed umpire on behalf of the workers. The meeting erupted into uproar with shouting across the floor between those supporting the Bishop and those supporting Sheehan. The meeting finally agreed to give the Bishop full authority to sign an agreement and in response Sheehan, and 100 of the strikers stormed out of the meeting. The vote was swung by the fact that the workers in Shaw's and Matterson's would have their wages increased to the level of the workers in Denny's.

At a mass meeting in Mulgrave Street the following day, strike leader Michael Sheehan called on assembled workers to remain on strike. Bishop O'Dwyer and a number of local priests attended, criticised Sheehan, and called on workers to resume work and trust in the Bishop's arbitration. The workforce split with about 80 workers leaving the scene to engage in flying pickets around the city. While the mass meeting was going on other priests had already attended the bacon factories to ensure a resumption of work. In total about two-thirds of the workers resumed work while a third remained on strike and demonstrated throughout the city during the day. A mass meeting that night decided in favour of a resumption of work. Terms agreed for a resumption of work in Cork that went some way towards the workers demands with the full terms of the settlement to be decided by arbitration impacted on the decision to return to work. At the same time the Bishop of Waterford concluded an agreement between workers and employers that would see the workers get a pay increase to compensate for the loss of 'pig money'.

A number of days later the strike threatened to re-ignite when Shaw's in Limerick refused to re-employ 13 strike leaders, including Michael Sheehan. The bacon merchants in the city responded by threatening to lock-out all the bacon factory workers in the city if there wasn't a

full return to work the following day.[132] Sheehan subsequently emigrated to America with several other black-listed workers.[133] Guiry noted that the role of Sheehan, 'the forgotten hero of the 1890 lock-out' had been written out of the history of the Pork Butchers Society, while O'Dwyer's role is venerated.[134]

O'Connor claimed that the strike in Waterford was 'the biggest and most successful struggle of trade unionism that anyone could remember'. He asserted that the Federated Trades and Labour Union in Waterford whole-heartedly supported the strike with a sustained campaign of fundraising that provided eight shillings per week in strike pay.[135]

Cronin only mentioned the strike in passing, stating that 'the outcome for the union was not entirely successful' but that solidarity from other unions ensured that the settlement was to some extent in their favour.[136] The *Irish Times* reported that the conservative President of Cork Trades Council, Eugene Crean, was seen as selling out the strike in his role as arbitrator. Crean was to play a similar role during a strike by rail workers the following month, attempting to prevent solidarity action by other trade unions in Cork.[137]

In Limerick the fall-out from the strike was to significantly impact on the outlook of the Pork Butchers Society. The strike saw increasing division between the pork butchers and the traditional craft trades. In Limerick the Trades Council played little or no role in solidarity action with the striking workers. It was left to the dock labourers and railway workers to play the leading role in supporting the strike.

There is conflicting evidence as to the impact of the intervention of the Catholic Bishop, Edward O'Dwyer, during the dispute. It is clear that a significant section of the workforce objected to his role. Yet others appear to have thanked him for his intervention. During the subsequent railway strike O'Dwyer attempted once again to involve himself in trying to set up arbitration. This resulted in widespread condemnation by the strike leaders and claims that 'the pork butchers would have been much better off if they had rejected the Bishop's involvement in their

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[132] *Irish Times,* 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 & 13 March 1890.
[133] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 81. Ryan stated that Sheehan emigrated to America on 5 April 1890 but failed to mention that Sheehan and others were black-listed after the strike.
[134] Guiry, *Pigtown – A History of Limerick's Bacon Industry,* p. 92.
[135] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 91-92.
[136] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 66.
[137] *Irish Times,* 24 April 1890.

dispute'.[138] Much to the consternation of the Bishop the pork butchers were to play a leading role in the Amnesty Association in Limerick, including leading a major demonstration only days after the end of their strike, calling for the release of John Daly from prison.[139]

The solidarity action by railway workers during the pork butchers strike was to significantly increase their confidence to take action. In their half yearly report the Athenry & Limerick Railway Company commented that the strike had paralysed all the railway connections to Limerick.[140] The impact of the solidarity action and the blacking of strike bound goods during the pork butchers strike was to be repeated in many disputes over the following period.

For the pork butchers it is difficult to assess the impact of the strike. They had secured concessions. Workers in Shaw's and Matterson's secured wage increases to bring their pay to the level of the workers in Denny's. One bank holiday on full pay was secured – St. Patrick's Day – and the pork butchers also took an unpaid day off on 'Our Lady's Day'.[141] The *Report on Strikes* for 1890 recorded the dispute as being 'successful' for the workers.[142] The one major success was that the bacon factory owners agreed to accept a closed-shop in return for the union agreeing to submit all disputes to arbitration before any strike action.[143]

However, subsequent developments outside Limerick suggest that the Amalgamated Pork Butchers Society had gone from a position of strength and unity to one of division with limited success in defending their wages and conditions. For example, during the subsequent railway strike the bacon merchants in Cork took advantage of the crisis by threatening to lock-out the pork butchers to force concessions, as the railway strike impacted on the ability of the bacon merchants to transport their goods.[144]

Over the following years several attempts were made by the bacon merchants to break the closed shop created by the Pork Butchers Society. The workers in Matterson's struck when the company kept a youth who was not a member of the union in employment while letting society

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[138] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 August 1890 & *Irish Times,* 8 August 1890.
[139] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 March 1890.
[140] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 April 1890.
[141] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 81. Joe Hayes stated that the reason why 15 August was taken as a day off was because the 1890 strike was settled on that day – the primary source evidence indicates that this is not the case. Interview with Joe Hayes, *Pigtown Oral History Archive,* 2016 [Available at: https://www.limerick.ie/pigtown-oral-history-archive] (Accessed on 21 August 2018). Our Lady's Day was 15 August.
[142] Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6476), lxvviii.689, p. 84.
[143] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 79.
[144] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 May 1890.

men go due to a lack of work. The other bacon merchants offered to support Matterson's if they locked-out the strikers but the issue was resolved when the youth left the employment of his own accord.[145] In 1895 the pork butchers in Waterford struck when seven non-union workers were employed. The Limerick workers at a mass meeting decided to engage in solidarity strike action in support of their Waterford comrades. After a few days the strike was resolved, again, by the non-union workers joining the Pork Butchers Society.[146]

For the pork butchers there was some element of payback towards the pig buyers who had consciously scabbed on their dispute twelve years previously. In 1896 the bacon companies decided to dispense with the services of the pig buyers and purchase pigs directly from farmers. The pig buyers attempted to get the pork butchers to refuse to process pigs bought directly from farmers but the pork butchers responded that it was none of their business how the pigs were bought and sold.[147]

The membership of the Pork Butchers Society gives some indication of the fortunes of this union in the 1890s. The union was listed as the Amalgamated Society of Pork Butchers, Limerick and Waterford.

Table 1 – Membership of Amalgamated Society of Pork Butchers, Limerick and Waterford.

Year	Membership
1892	560
1893	662
1894	720
1895	735
1896	519
1897	349
1898	318
1899	315

Source: *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1896; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1897. With comparative statistics for 1892-1896,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade*

[145] Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890), p. 168, *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 November 1891. The *Chronicle* stated that the company hired a non-union worker and the issue was resolved when he joined the union.
[146] *Freemans Journal*, 12 & 22 October 1895.
[147] *Irish Times*, 7 December 1896.

unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897, Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1899. With comparative statistics for 1892-1898,* Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601.

It is worth noting that Cork was not listed in the title of the union. There is no indication why this is the case or when Cork ceased to form part of the amalgamated society.[148] The growth up to 1895 was likely a reflection of the fact that the pork butchers managed to operate a closed shop in the main bacon curing establishments. The decline coincided with the pig buyers dispute in 1896 and is likely a reflection of the impact of the defeat of the action by the Waterford pork butchers in that dispute.[149] Marsh and Smethurst suggested that the significant drop in 1897 could have been attributed to the loss of the Waterford branch from the union.[150] This appears to be a valid assessment of developments.

After 1890 there was a clear relationship between the Limerick pork butchers and the local Catholic hierarchy. Prengergast claimed that in thanks for O'Dwyer's role in settling the dispute that the Limerick Pork Butchers paid for a new altar in St. John's Cathedral and its subsequent periodic refurbishment.[151] However, the *Limerick Socialist* asserted that the new altar was provided, not in the aftermath of the strike, but in the early 1950s at a cost of £7,000.[152] Ryan stated that O'Dwyer was made Honorary President of the Pork Butchers' Society and his picture hung in the Society's rooms for many years.

The Limerick pork butchers were noted for giving financial assistance to other workers. Jim Larkin praised the pork butchers for their contributions during the Dublin Lock-out.[153] However, the *Limerick Socialist* commented that after independence the pork butchers shifted their emphasis from helping fellow workers to helping the Catholic Church.[154] De Clair asserted that the participation of the pork butchers in other religious activities, in particular, public activites of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Family demonstrated a continuity between the devotional rituals and a loyalty to the Catholic Church.[155]

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[148] Guiry suggested that Cork disaffiliated from the amalgamated society in 1912 – but the indications are that this happened much earlier. See: Guiry, *Pigtown – A History of Limerick's Bacon Industry,* p. 93.
[149] For information on the pig buyers dispute in Waterford, see: O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* pp. 103-107.
[150] Marsh & Smethurst, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions,* p. 205.
[151] Prendergast, 'The Decline of Traditional Limerick Industries', p. 9.
[152] 'Closure of Clover', *Limerick Socialist,* November 1972.
[153] Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 80.
[154] *Limerick Socialist,* November 1972.
[155] Síle de Cléir, *Popular Catholicism in 20th-Century Ireland: Locality, Identity and Culture,* (London, 2017), p. 35.

Corr noted that the members of the Limerick Pork Butchers Society were noted as much for their piety as they were for their negotiating skills.[156] Guiry indicated that in the early 1940s, when the Catholic Church were raising fears about socialism and communism, Bishop Keane complemented the piety of the pork butchers, stating that while the pork butchers formed the backbone of Limerick workers there was 'no danger of 'isms' infecting Limerick.[157] In 1950 when the Limerick Pork Butchers celebrated their diamond jubilee, the then Bishop of Limerick, Patrick O'Neill, an honorary Vice President of the Society stated 'In their first great battle the Society's members placed themselves under the guidance of the Mother of God. As thanksgiving for the successful outcome, they manifested their gratitude to Our Lady ever since'.[158]

The Limerick Pork Butchers' Society maintained their closed-shop right up until the bacon factories faced closure as a result of increased international competition following Ireland's membership of the European Economic Community in 1973.[159] However, it appears that their close relationship to the local Catholic hierarchy, coupled with was called their 'clannish' attitude to other workers in the city, isolated the Limerick Pork Butchers from the wider labour movement in Limerick, leading to a lack of solidarity towards the pork butchers union.[160] The pork butchers were highly critical of the lack of support from the Limerick trade union movement in their efforts to prevent the closure of the bacon factories from the late 1970s onwards.[161]

The pivotal event in the history of the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society was the 1890 strike. The outcome of the strike led to the black-listing of the most radical elements of the union who refused to accept the intervention of Bishop O'Dwyer. It is worth considering how the union would have developed if Michael Sheehan and his supporters accepted the decision of a majority of the union to return to work on the basis of the negotiated compromse. Having a group of radical workers so implacibly opposed to a relationship with the local hierarchy possibly could have seen the Limerick Pork Butchers Society develop in a different way.

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[156] Frank Corr, 'City of Pigs', *Limerick Association Yearbook,* (1991), p. 25.
[157] Guiry, *Pigtown – A History of Limerick's Bacon Industry,* p. 92.
[158] Quoted in Ryan, 'Limerick Pork Butchers', p. 83.
[159] Interview with Joe Hayes, Hayes attributes the demise of the bacon industry in Limerick to competition from Denmark.
[160] *Limerick Socialist,* November 1972.
[161] Interview with Jim O'Brien and Ollie O'Brien, *Pigtown Oral History Archive,* 2016 [Available at: https://www.limerick.ie/pigtown-oral-history-archive] (Accessed on 21 August 2018).

Railway Workers

One of the first nationwide campaigns by workers in Ireland developed on the railways. The moves to build a national organisation across the railway companies did not begin consciously, the railway workers instinctively began engaging in solidarity strike action and the blacking of strikebound goods across the railways. The drive to build a national union was the logical extension of their situation.

By 1855 there were 5,672 men employed across 21 separate railway companies. In 1856 the Great Southern & Western Railway line (GS&WR) which ran several lines into Limerick was the largest employer on the railways with 1,749 employees. At the same time the Waterford and Limerick Railway Company (W&LR) employed 414 workers, largely based in Limerick.

Irish railway companies were hesitant about employing skilled workers and kept the recruits to a minimum. By comparison to England there was a large gap between the pay of skilled workers and unskilled workers. From the famine onwards. Outside of the railways, there were few alternative employment opportunities for outdoor workers that could maintain wage rates somewhat comparable with workers in England.[162]

Job opportunities on the railways offered security and a regular wage. The railways offered pay rates above those of agricultural labourers and were, therefore, attractive to men living in rural communities along the railway line.[163] Some workers on the early-established railway lines had opportunities to jump to the newer established railways thereby securing higher wages by removing the need for training. As expansion ceased so did this opening to secure better terms and conditions. On the railways white-collar staff enjoyed far better working conditions than manual workers. Clerks worked an eight-hour day while outdoor manual staff could work up to double that time. Eighteen-hour shifts were common among engine drivers, although the job did attract significantly higher wages than clerical work.[164]

Lee pointed out that there was no cohesive or serious trade union activity during the early years of the railway. This would appear to be confirmed by the lack of any strike activity in Limerick up until 1877. In the two confirmed incidents in Limerick before the 1877 strike, the W&LR

[162] Joseph Lee, 'Railway Labour in Ireland, 1833-1856', *Saothar,* Volume 5, (1979), pp. 13-17.
[163] Joseph J. Leckey, 'The Railway Servants Strike in Co. Cork, 1898', *Saothar,* Volume 9, (1983), p. 39.
[164] Lee, 'Railway Labour in Ireland, 1833-1856', p. 19-20.

threatened the dismissal of an engineman for organising a drivers' petition and in 1850 the company also compelled clerks to pledge in writing not to seek salary increases.[165]

Leckey outlines that the first attempts to form trade unions among railwaymen involved workers in individual grades. Of the dozen or so railway strikes recorded before 1871, all involved individual single grades and were of short duration.[166]

The first major strike on the railway network occurred in September 1877. The strike was started by milesmen who carried out repairs on the GS&WR. Beginning in Cork, within two days the strike encompassed Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Carlow and Kilkenny and spread along the line to Dublin involving more than 700 workers. Starting in Charleville 80 men marched along the line to Limerick with all the workers along the way joining the march. The workers held a mass meeting in Limerick station to organise the strike action.

The strike had immediate effect and the company reacted by employing in every tactic at their disposal. Taking advantage of the communication difficulties of the period the Board of the GS&WR began circulating rumours that a deal had been done and used a well-known retired engineer named Browne in an attempt to undermine the strike. Browne was highly respected among the workforce and travelled to each station on the network telling striking workers that the rest of the workforce had agreed to end their strike and to submit their claim to arbitration if all the workers along the line agreed to do so.

An *Irish Times* reporter joined Browne in Ballybrophy and at Templemore he wrote that Browne was 'warmly received with respect'. At this point a spokesman for the 50 striking workers in Templemore, Dan Peters, came forward to tell Browne that if he didn't have an offer from the Board he should leave.

The initial successes led to a growing confidence among the workers. The Waterford and Central Line Rail Company (W&CR) agreed to the strikers' wage demands. In order to avoid being dragged into the strike action the W&LR issued a statement that they would not accept bookings for passengers or goods for transfer to other companies and would only accept bookings for their own line on the basis that they would not be held responsible for any delays.

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[165] Lee, 'Railway Labour in Ireland, 1833-1856', p. 22.
[166] Leckey, 'The Railway Servants Strike in Co. Cork, 1898', p. 39.

Local strike committees sent delegates to at least two national meetings in Thurles. These meetings were one of the first indications that the workers were looking for wider union organisation than their own local societies. Strike committee delegates travelled up and down the line to keep the local strikers informed of developments.[167] The *Freemans Journal* reported that while no national organisation of striking workers has been established yet, strike committees were set up on every line with the headquarters for the strike in Templemore. The strike also received significant support from the local communities. A strike fund was established but the strikers made a point of rejecting donations from local businesses.[168]

Police were redeployed from rural Clare into Limerick for the duration of the strike. They patrolled the line on a 24-hour basis and trains were running intermittently manned by scab crews. Police were also drafted in from England to assist with the police operation, with police resources very stretched because of the strike. The refusal of the employers to make an offer increased support for the strikers.

During October many of the striking workers engaged in harvest work in order to feed their families and when the harvest work dried up many modified their demands. Workers on some of the smaller branch lines and in Dublin began drifting back to work. On 13 October 1877 a closed meeting of the representatives of the strike committees in the fourth, fifth and sixth divisions of the Railway company was held in Thurles. The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution proposed by John Dunphy and seconded by Dan Peters

> that in view of the stolid and studied indifference of the directors to the consequences which must inevitably arise from their inaction, do deem it their (the workers) duty to avow their fixed determination to continue the struggle until all their reasonable demands are conceded.

The meeting decided to circulate the resolution to all workers on the main and branch lines. The delegates called on the employers to enter immediate negotiations.

A delegation of 40 striking workers led by Dan Peters met the employers in the Boardroom at Kingsbridge. The delegation consisted of gangers and milesmen from the Limerick Junction

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[167] *Irish Times*, 20, 22, 25, 26 & 28 September 1877 & 13 October 1877.
[168] *Freemans Journal*, 27 September 1877.

district. The workers from this district were selected because the company considered that the strike had its roots in this region. The Chairman, Colville, said the Board suggested that the men should resume work and show 'that they could be trusted' and the Board would do its best to address their grievances. He finished by threatening to sack the workers and replace them with unemployed men if they did not accept the company's position. Peters responded by saying they came to the meeting expecting something from the company that would help the situation but in his view the Chairman had made the situation a whole lot worse. Colville stated that to try and coerce the company into acceding the wage demands was not the appropriate way to do business, to which Peters replied, 'that is the meaning of the word "strike"'. Peters continued saying that 'we meant to coerce'. At this point Colville pleaded that it was not the intention of the company to coerce the workers to which Peters replied, 'I maintain that the men who struck meant to coerce you'.

However, despite the efforts of Peters and the other strike leaders, the strike was crumbling. With no prospect of compromise offer from the company workers in Tullamore, around Roscrea, on the GS&WR south of Limerick Junction, at Newbridge and on the Athlone and Portarlington branch lines all abandoned the strike.[169]

Despite the collapse of the strike, it laid the foundations for the future building of a nationally organised trade union among railway workers. It was to take many years before a national organisation for railway workers came into existence and it was to face resistance from other sections of the trade union movement, but the 1877 strike on the GS&WR provide the framework for the struggle to build national trade union structures.

Railway workers organise

December 1889 was to see the first of a series of strikes that would fundamentally shape future union organisation on the railways. Beginning on the GS&WR, the strike lasted for five weeks. Workers in Cork drew up demands for a wage increase of 2s 6d per week and a reduction in the working day to 12 hours a day. At a general meeting of 120 workers a memorial was drawn up with the demands and signed by all in attendance. The company rejected the demands and, in an effort to undermine union organisation, stated they would look favourably on any requests from workers on an individual basis.

[169] *Irish Times*, 25 & 28 September & 3, 11 & 20 October 1877.

On Monday 9 December the workers went on strike. The threat of strike action spread to other networks.[170] A week later workers on the W&LR in Limerick struck demanding pay increases leading to the Chairman of the W&LR, James Spaight, agreeing to the workers' demands.[171] The strike was settled when workers at Waterford, Clonmel, Limerick Junction, Newcastle West and Ennis threatened to go on strike in sympathy with the Limerick workers. These workers had previously accepted an increase of 1s 6d per week.[172] Similarly workers on the Northern Railway and the Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway (DW&WR) secured pay increases and shortly afterwards the GS&WR caved into the workers' demands. On the back of this dispute the British based Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS)[173] began extending their base among the railway workers. Having established a branch in Belfast in 1885,[174] after the 1889 strike the union succeeded in establishing a branch in Dublin.[175] The success of the workers demonstrated the effectiveness of solidarity action with the threat of cross-network strikes.

Following the ending of the strike industrial peace did not last. In April 1890, a strike began at two flour millers in Cork. When two railway workers refused to handle strikebound goods, brought by scabs to Cork railway station, they were sacked. The strike spread rapidly as did solidarity action. GS&WR workers in Limerick went on strike after receiving a telegram from the Cork strike committee and the workers on the W&LR in Limerick refused to handle any diverted goods. In Cork 150 dock workers went on strike in solidarity with the railwaymen. Workers on the DW&WR were locked out when they engaged in a solidarity strike.

At a meeting of the Cork United Trades Association on 23 April, the President, Eugene Crean, called on all workers not directly involved in the dispute to return to work. He argued that solidarity action was only making mischief and injuring the trade of Cork. A telegram was read from Michael Davitt backing the view of the President and asking the workers to issue a legal strike notice and not to precipitate a further general strike on the GS&WR. Other speakers went

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[170] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 December 1889.
[171] *Irish Times,* 18 & 26 December 1889 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 December 1889.
[172] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 January 1890.
[173] The ASRS had emerged in England in 1871 following a controversy over the working conditions of railwaymen. There was widespread public sympathy for the railwaymen and Michael Thomas Bass, MP, encouraged the formation of the ASRS. By 1873 the ASRS had grown to 17,000 members, The ASRS was generally opposed to strike action and did not establish a strike fund until 1880. The hesitancy of the leadership of the ASRS to sanction strike action and distance itself from unofficial action when it occurred was to be a feature of the emergence of the trade union in Ireland.
[174] Leckey, 'The Railway Servants Strike in Co. Cork, 1898', p. 40.
[175] *Limerick Chronicle,* 31 December 1889.

on to condemn the dock workers for going on strike in support of the railway workers. The media reported that it was Davitt's intervention that appeared to have swung the views of those at the meeting and, with the exception of the dock workers, the delegates agreed not to engage in solidarity action.

The *Freemans' Journal* now began a campaign of vilification against the strikers and played the nationalist card. The paper claimed that the workers were playing into the hands of 'the Englishmen' running the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in disrupting trade in Ireland. They argued that Irish workers should show 'sufficient backbone to offer stern resistance to any English emissaries to wreck the few remaining industries in this country' and that the strike was 'part of a well conceived plan to crush out of life any nascent commerce in the country'.

On 25 April, a mass meeting of striking workers in Dublin was held at the Workingmen's Club in Wellington Quay. Michael Davitt was enthusiastically received when he stood to address the meeting. As in Cork, Davitt was looking for conciliation rather than calling for support for the striking workers. He stated that while he understood the grievances of the workers he 'wished to see (the) interests (of the country) protected.' The intervention by Davitt didn't have the same impact as in Cork and his offer to arbitrate was politely ignored by the workers.

The entire establishment was now being wheeled out in an attempt to undermine the strike. On the same day as the Dublin meeting a mass meeting of striking workers in Cork was addressed by Canon Sheehan. Sheehan condemned the actions of English agitators in Dublin. He wanted the Cork men 'not (to) be ruled in their action by any English secretary' claiming that 'if the men of the Great Southern and Western line were not able to manage their own affairs, they would not be able to take part in building up a native government in this country'.

Shop supplies in Cork city and surrounding towns were diminishing at an alarming rate and retail coal prices rose from 25s to 32s per ton. During the last week of April, a strike broke out among canal boat workers on the Grand Canal further disrupting the distribution of goods around the country. At this stage transport on the entire southern half of the island was in a state of paralysis. The strike had spread as far as Westmeath as the governmental authorities proved incapable of confronting the strike wave.

On 1 May Cork Harbour Commissioners issue a statement blaming the railway company for the stand-off and claiming that it was causing 'deplorable results not only in the city and the port, but in the whole of Ireland'. At this point the merchants in Limerick met with Spaight and forced him to agree to the demands of the W&LR workers. Subsequently shareholders in the GS&WR circulated a demand for a shareholders' meeting to force the Board to accept recognition of the ASRS.

The same day William Walsh, the Archbishop of Dublin, got involved in negotiations with the company and the company agreed to allow the workers join the union but would not formally recognise the ASRS. The workers in Dublin accepted the compromise and the strike was called off. Even though the GS&WR would not formally recognise the union all future negotiations took place through the union structures. When the strike ended in Cork more than 200 workers marched to the Glanmire Terminus to return to work being cheered on by large crowds of onlookers along the way.

On Sunday 4 May a mass meeting of workers took place in Cork to hear the outcome of negotiations. The meeting demonstrated the intransigence of some union representatives to the need for national representation for workers. Murphy from Cork UTA stated that he objected to the attempt by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants to get recognition on the railways, arguing that negotiations with the company should be done through local societies.[176]

On 16 June William Foreman,[177] an organiser for the ASRS, addressed a meeting of railway porters in Cork. Foreman claimed at the meeting that 90 per cent of the GS&WR employees had already joined the ASRS around the country. At the end of the meeting 50 workers joined the ASRS.[178]

A week later Forman addressed a similar meeting of GS&WR workers in Limerick. Forman adopted an approach that was common for the rest of his time as Irish Secretary of the ASRS when he denied that the union was responsible for the recent strike on the GS&WR in Dublin. He warned that the union would offer little help in a strike situation, stating that the ASRS was

[176] *Irish Times,* 23, 24 & 29 April 1890 & 5 May & *Freeman's Journal,* 23, 26 & 26 April 1890 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 & 3 May 1890.
[177] Foreman was a former sub-editor of the ASRS journal before he became the Irish secretary of ASRS. He died in Dublin on 12 December 1892 at the age of thirty-seven of 'congestion of the lungs'.
[178] *Irish Times,* 16 June 1890.

democratic and each section of the union had a right to take strike action on its own. Foreman outlined that the 'society' would only come to their aid in emergency situations. Despite the lack of commitment by Foreman to support workers in struggle, the workers demonstrated their instincts for the necessity for national organisation and unanimously accepted a proposal to establish a branch of the ASRS in Limerick.[179] By the end of June 1890 the ASRS was making significant inroads in recruiting workers.

Class Struggle on the Railways

Three further strikes were to impact on union organisation on the railways, which were to lead to significant delays in consolidating the nationwide union structures.

At the end of July 1890 about 250 fitters, smiths, carpenters, engineers and labourers at the newly-constructed locomotive workshops in Limerick, members of the Waterford and Limerick Railway Company's Engine Drivers and Firemen's Trade Union[180] and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), went in strike. After four workers scabbed on the strike a meeting of the workers demanded that all the scabs should be sacked and reiterated their demand of 2s per week increase. Activists claimed that they are being paid significantly below the accepted rates for the job. The workers were owed back pay and after the meeting they marched to the company offices to receive it. The porters, guards and other members of the recently formed ASRS branch met and committed to striking in solidarity with the locomotive works strikers if the company hired people to scab on the strike.

On the following Monday, a further mass meeting was held with the two people who had broken the strike in attendance. Both workers had gone into work to fix damage to the Limerick-Ennis line when the station manager couldn't find a fitter in an outside company to do the work for him. The first of the men George Fitzgerald re-joined the strike to loud applause. The second man, named Stritch, stated that as he had been promoted to fireman, he was not bound by the decision to strike. When he refused to join the strike, he was physically removed of the meeting.

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[179] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 June 1890.

[180] The membership of the Waterford and Limerick Railway Company's Engine Drivers and Firemen's Trade Union in 1890 is recoded at 59. See: *Labour Statistics, Statistical Tables and Report on Trade Unions, Fourth Report, Years 1889 and 1890,* Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6475), xcii.73, p. 18. This is a drop from 64 members recorded in 1887. See: *Labour statistics. Statistical tables and report on trade unions. Third report, 1889,* Command Papers, 1889, (C.5808), lxxxiv.147, p. 262. In 1884 the Waterford and Limerick Railway Company's Engine Drivers and Firemen's Trade Union charged 10s. to join the union and then 1s. per week subscription. The Union provided 10s per week strike pay for six months and if a worker was victimised after a strike the union provided 5s per week for 20 weeks or £3 to assist the worker in emigrating. See: *Royal Commission on Labour Fifth and Final Report; Secretary's Report on Work of Office, Summaries of Evidence (with Index), Appendices,* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.7421 C.7421-i), xxxv.9, 263, p. 225.

Following a further meeting with W&LR chairman, James Spaight, the strike committee were told that the company had no plans to hire scabs but if the strike continued they would shut the works plant altogether, sack all the workers and buy the necessary supplies from outside companies. During the meeting Spaight let slip that the company was planning redundancies anyway and the workers learned that the company had compiled a list of all workers with their ages, wages, and length of service. The strike committee understood that the plan was to dismiss the more experienced, higher paid workers.

While the workers at the Limerick locomotive works were on strike, the ASRS in Dublin issued strike notice on the DW&WR over the dismissal of two workers. After four weeks on strike ASRS representative, D'Alton, proposed to a mass meeting of striking workers to submit their claim to arbitration. The workers rejected his intervention.

After a week of strike action in Limerick the strike committee of the locomotive works held a private meeting with Bishop O'Dwyer. Conflict emerged within the strike committee over the involvement of the Bishop. O'Dwyer held a meeting with Spaight before attending a mass meeting of the workers. At the meeting one of the strike committee members, D'Arcy, objected to O'Dwyer's involvement and argued that the workers should walk out if he interfered any further. O'Connor, the strike committee chairman, condemned the comments but D'Arcy was supported by others who claimed that the Limerick pork butchers would have been much better off if they had rejected the Bishop's involvement in their recent dispute. An angry O'Connor said he would not allow the Bishop to be insulted and then argued that the workers should abandon their strike and return to work on the old terms and conditions. The attempt by O'Connor and O'Dwyer to get the workers to return to work was derailed when a local newspaper reported that Spaight had not agreed to the terms outlined by O'Dwyer to the striking workers. This led to the members of the ASRS appealing to the Waterford and Limerick Railway Trade Union to call all their members out on strike to force the company's hand.[181]

When William Foreman arrived in Limerick on 26 August to address a meeting of the striking workers he was met by a large demonstration and escorted to the Town Hall behind a local

[181] *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 July 1890 & 2 & 7 August 1890 & *Irish Times*, 28 & 29 July 1890 & 2, 7, 8 & 9 August 1890.

band. Foreman advised the workers to submit their claims to arbitration and outside of verbal support he offered nothing to assist the workers in winning their demands.

Four days later Spaight addressed the half-yearly meeting of the shareholders of the W&LR claiming that the workers at the locomotive works were forced out on strike by their union, that the strike was caused by an outside agitator who had only recently arrived in Limerick stating that what was happening was not a strike but 'trade unionism run mad'. However, Spaight was coming under pressure from local businesses. At a meeting of the Harbour Board, Alderman O'Mara complained that the strike at the locomotive works was affecting his business. He criticised the company's rejection of the offer of arbitration and claims the directors said they wanted to starve the workers into submission.

While the strike in Limerick continued the management of the DW&WR sacked the 250 workers they had locked out. The company succeeded in getting services running by hiring scabs. Outside of condemnation and some fundraising, Foreman took no action to impact on the dispute, despite the widespread support for the workers locked-out by the DW&WR.[182] It took a number of years before the ASRS were again able to recruit on the DW&WR.

The tensions on the strike committee in Limerick were now impacting on the dispute and shortly afterwards the strike ended based on the proposals discussed by Spaight and O'Dwyer. The agreement granted nothing more than a small increase to the lowest paid workers, but it did force a reversal of the plan by the company for redundancies. Foreman returned to Limerick following the settlement and claimed the resolution of the dispute as a 'great victory'. He then went on to call on the men to form a branch of a national trade union to assist them in organising in the future, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.[183]

Industrial peace did not last long. In December platform porters and storemen at Limerick Station went on strike over the appointment of a new superintendent in the storeroom. Within hours corporation members attempted to get the local manager to withdraw the appointment in order not to impact on Christmas trade. The following day W&LR workers in Ennis and Clonmel joined the strike.

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[182] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 August 1890 & *Freemans Journal,* 28 August & 5 September 1890 & *Irish Times,* 30 August & 8 September 1890.
[183] *Freemans Journal,* 20 September 1890 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 September 1890.

The striking workers attempt to spread the strike throughout the entire W&LR network. Traders contacted the *Chronicle* to criticise the W&LR for not agreeing to the request to withdraw the appointment of the superintendent. The Board of Directors responded by indicating that they were intent on sacking the striking workers and immediately issued notices to hire scab labour. Under armed police protection eight men from Galway arrived to scab on the strike.

William Foreman of the ASRS wrote to Spaight and offered his services as a mediator. Speight rejected the offer and accused the ASRS of being involved in organising the strike. A shareholder of the company wrote to the *Chronicle* calling on all businesses and traders to support the company and prevent a situation in Limerick where the 'striker rules supreme', leading to the city's establishment rallying around the company and expressing determination to break the union organisation on the W&LR.

When Foreman arrived in Limerick he again wrote to Spaight asking for a meeting, claiming that the issues involved could be easily resolved but Spaight rejected Foreman's request out of hand.[184] The W&LR hired 80 scabs[185] and it later emerged that some of scabs hired were workers on the DW&WR who had been locked out during the dispute in that company.[186]

More than 200 porters, guards and signalmen in Limerick were now locked out. The company had the upper-hand with Spaight stating that the company would maintain the scabs in employment and selectively re-employ some of the striking workers as and when needed. Spaight rejected an approach from the Mayor, the High Sheriff and 'concerned citizens' to end the lock-out, claiming that they had enough scabs to keep passenger and goods trains in operation, leading to the *Irish Times* predicting defeat for the combination.[187]

With the strike causing widespread disruption all along the railway line violence broke out between striking workers and scabs. The W&LR also sought the eviction of two workers who lived in accommodation rented from the company. The strike also caused major disruption to the trade of the city with the merchants condemning both sides in the dispute expressed by the

[184] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16, 18, 23 & 27 December 1890 & *Freemans Journal,* 18 December 1890.
[185] *Irish Times, 3* January 1891.
[186] *Freemans Journal,* 6 March 1897.
[187] *Irish Times,* 5 January 1891 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 January 1891.

Irish Times as calling down 'a plague on both your houses'. Violence spread outside Limerick with scabs attacked in Newcastle West and their homes damaged.[188]

Limerick Board of Guardians passed a resolution demanding that the directors end the strike because of the damage it was doing to the trade of the city. Merchants and traders subsequently held a large meeting to discuss the impact of the railway lock-out on the trade of the city. Spaight was condemned as 'outrageous' for refusing to meet a delegation of traders and further criticism of Spaight followed at a meeting of Limerick Corporation.[189]

On 28 January the Board of Directors of the W&LR met and decided to continue the lock-out, confirming that there was no intention of re-employing any of the locked-out workers. The decision led to widespread reaction from all sections of the establishment in the city. Bishop O'Dwyer condemned the 'deplorable' actions of the W&LR saying the company 'have got the upper hand now, and are determined to show no mercy'. The business sector was also concerned that the railway lock-out could increase the desire among workers in the city to build trade unions as the only way of protecting their interests in the face of intransigent employers. The South of Ireland Butter Merchants Association initially condemned the workers for their 'hasty action' but now blamed the Board for not settling the strike. Complaints emerged of that mail deliveries on the W&LR being delayed and the issue is raised in the House of Commons. This led the company to admit that the scabs were unable to marshal and shunt the trains as quickly as those locked-out.[190]

The next confrontation occurred when Bishop O'Dwyer attended the half-yearly meeting of W&LR shareholders. At the meeting O'Dwyer claimed that the workers only struck because of the work of 'paid agitators'. He said he did not blame the directors for the firm stand they took but the workers had expressed 'serious regret at being misled'. O'Dwyer asked that locked-out workers would be re-employed as vacancies became available. The Bishop then read a statement from the traders of Limerick pleading for an end to the lock-out. Cadogen from Waterford rebuked the Bishop telling him he was at the meeting as an ordinary shareholder and had no right to dictate to the directors how to run the company. He went on to point out that

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[188] *Freemans Journal,* 6 January 1891 & *Irish Times,* 8 & 9 January 1891 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 January 1891 & *Skibbereen Eagle,* 17 January 1891. The court subsequently granted 14-day eviction notices against the two workers.
[189] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 & 22 January 1891 & *Freemans Journal,* 22 & 23 January 1891.
[190] *Limerick Chronicle,* 29 January 1891 & 3 & 14 February 1891 & *Freemans Journal,* 2, 19 & 24 February 1891.

O'Dwyer had given a £10 donation to a fund for the locked-out workers and demanded that the Bishop should decide where his loyalties should lie.[191]

After the attack by Cadogen on the Bishop at the shareholders meeting, Spaight appeared to soften his position. He claimed that he had repeatedly asked the Board to reconsider their decision to lock-out the workers, but he stated that the Board had adopted their course 'to save the public from the inconvenience of these strikes'. The W&LR now began to suffer from companies using other methods to transport their products. Limerick pig buyers of 300 swine in Tipperary diverted transportation of pigs from W&LR to GS&W because of the continuing lock-out in Limerick. This led to a public meeting called by city's merchants and traders to discuss 'the unsatisfactory nature of the service on the W&LR and the continuing lock-out by the company'. Traders at the meeting claimed that the directors of the railway company were 'deliberately striving to ruin the trade of Limerick for their own selfish ends'. The meeting ended with demands that the government act to end the 'shameless mismanagement' of the railway.[192]

The formal lock-out of the workforce continued for several months more with the company slowly regaining lost business as opposition petered out. In January 1892 the company began to selectively re-employ former strikers. The *Irish Times* commented that 'there is no expectation of a strike for many years to come'.[193]

It was 1893 before the ASRS was established in Limerick. Peter Tevenan,[194] the society's new Irish Secretary, stated that he 'did not know a body of men that needed combination more than the men of the Waterford and Limerick Railway'. Tevenan argued that if the workers had been members of the ASRS then the strike in 1891 would not have needed to have taken place and the workers would have achieved their demands. Within a few days 50 had joined the ASRS.[195] Due to the hostility between the workers who scabbed during the W&LR lock-out and the

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[191] *Irish Times*, 27 February 1891.
[192] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3, 12 & 14 March 1891 & *Irish Times*, 10 March 1891.
[193] *Irish Times*, 8 January 1892.
[194] Peter Tevenan was born in Co. Galway. He came to prominence in Hull through his involvement in two strikes in 1890 and 1892. After returning to Ireland as secretary for the ASRS, Tevenan played a prominent role in the establishment of the Irish Trade Union Congress, serving as treasurer in 1900 and 1901. He subsequently worked as an insurance clerk before becoming an organiser with National Association of County Authority Employees in Britain in 1905. Tevenan was elected general secretary in 1913 and the union grew to a membership of 70,000 under his leadership. In 1924 after a series of mergers the union became part of National Union of General and Municipal Workers (now the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union) with Tevenan as Assistant General Secretary. He retired in 1932 and died in 1943.
[195] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 August 1893 & *Freemans Journal*, 15 August 1893.

workers on the GS&WR two separate branches were ultimately set up. It took more than ten years and a process of amalgamating the W&LR and the GS&WR before the workers became part of the same union branch.

Subsequently, Trevenan repeatedly promised to support railway workers in Limerick and issued statements containing scathing attacks on the management of the GS&WR in particular. Each time Trevenan threatened strike action, he withdrew the threats, leading to the company rejecting any proposal for arbitration.[196] In 1894 Trevenan claimed that he was responsible for the fact that there has been no industrial unrest on the railways in Limerick for more than a year.[197]

Railway workers in Limerick repeatedly demonstrate the determination to defend their jobs and working conditions. The workers understood the need for being part of a national organisation and the importance of engaging in solidarity action with other workers engaged in strike action. Repeatedly the workers were promised support by the ASRS which failed to emerge. When they did engage in strike action, despite winning some victories, the railway workers in Limerick went down to significant defeats. Despite this, the workers did maintain their intent to organise and ultimately became part of a union organised across the railway network and the different railway companies and reinforced their intent to defend their interests when necessary.

Women workers

In the post famine period women workers were mainly confined to the textile industry and domestic service. Domestic service provided the most consistent employment for females in Limerick city during the later period of the ninseteenth century. In 1871 a total of 2,500 women were employed in domestic service in a variety of capacities.[198] By 1891 the numbers employed had dropped by almost 20 per cent to 2,021[199] but despite this decline domestic service still provided the most prominent area of employment for females.

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[196] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 & 29 November 1894, *Nenagh Guardian*, 24 November 1894.
[197] *Freemans Journal*, 11 March 1897.
[198] *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 630-631. For a breakdown of female employment in Limerick city according to the 1871 census see Appendix II.
[199] *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 628-632. For a breakdown of female employment in Limerick city according to the 1891 census see Appendix III.

During this period domestic servants tended to be young, unmarried women who left paid work when they got married. Most servants lived in single servant households working for middle-class families. Employers preferred younger women because they were stronger, were easily trained in new routines and could be paid less.[200] One of the main attractions to domestic service was the rate of pay, compared to outside employment and the consistency of work. When room and board were taken into account, the wages of domestic servants were comparable with those of unskilled male labourers.[201] Along with this were generally decent living condtions compared to the slum tenaments that predominated accommodation for the labouring classes.

O'Connor asserted that women workers in Derry preferred factory work to domestic service.[202] A similar siutation may have existed in Limerick but there is not any direct evidence that would confirm such an assertion. Certainly in the period up to and immediately after the famine the lace factories would have held little attraction for women workers. The lace factories predominantly employed teenage girls as bonded labour on low wages.

In the period immediately after the famine, the lace factories continued to be the main workplaces where women participated in industrial style production. Daly argued that the peak of employment in the lace industry in Limerick was in the 1840s.[203] However, primary sources indicate that the high point of the lace industry occurred in the early 1850s. It is estimated that there was a total of more than 2,200 women working in four lace factories in the city.

Table 2 – Numbers employed in lace factories in Limerick circa. 1851-1853

Factory	Workforce
Mrs Leycester Greaves, Patrick Street	over 1,000
Bury & Lambert, Mount Kenneth	600[204]
Mr. Forrest, Abbeycourt	420
Mr. McClure, Clare Street	over 200

Source: *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 February 1850, 18 June 1851, & 22 June 1853.

[200] Maria Luddy, 'Women and Work in Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Ireland', in Bernadette Whelan (ed.), *Women and Paid Work in Ireland, 1500-1930,* (Dublin, 2000), p. 52.
[201] Luddy, 'Women and Work in Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Ireland', p. 53.
[202] O'Connor, *Derry Labour in the Age of Agitation, 1889-1923,* p. 13.
[203] Mary E. Daly, *Women and Work in Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), p. 26. Potter also asserted that the lace industry was in decline by the beginning of the famine.
[204] Bury & Lambert took over Walker's lace factory in 1841.

The workforce continued to be predominantly low paid indentured workers. Bury & Lambert claimed to be the highest paying employer with their 'expert workers' earning a potential 7s per week. Most of the workers earned significantly less than this. Cronin asserted that by 1850, the lace industry operated a combination of factory labour and domestic outwork.[205]

Intense rivalry existed between the different lace factories coupled with deep friction between employers and workers.[206] Workers were poached by employers often resulting in workers being caught in the middle and suffering the consequences of this rivalry. In 1851, a clerk from the Greaves factory named Thomas Ryan, set up on his own and enticed 25 apprentices from the Greaves factory to join him. Mrs. Greaves went to court demanding the return of the indentured workers. In order to set an example, the court jailed three of the women for two months and ordered the remainder to return to complete their indenture with Greaves.[207]

When a group of 40 workers sued their employer for non-payment of wages and threatened strike action in 1854, they were ordered by the magistrates to return to work. While the company was instructed to pay the rate outlined in the indenture, the workers didn't succeed in their case.[208] Ultimately, the availability of machine-manufactured lace undermined the lace industry in Limerick and the intrduction of machinery in Limerick was used, in part, to undermine any militancy and create a docile and compliant workforce.[209]

The religious orders did maintain the manufacture of lace by opening up lace operations for 'destitute girls' in various convents throughout the city. Smaller quantities of hand made lace continued to be manufactured in some of the city's department stores right up until independence.[210] The number of lace workers dropped from 760 in 1861[211], to 192 in 1871[212] and then down to just 97 in 1891.[213] The Limerick Lace-training Society attempted to revive lace-making in the city in 1890 but with little success.[214]

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[205] Maura Cronin, The Female Industrial Movement 1845-1852, in Bernadette Whelan (ed), *Women and Paid Work in Ireland, 1500-1930,* (Dublin, 2000), p. 71.
[206] Cronin, p. 77.
[207] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 June 1851.
[208] *Limerick Chronicle,* 17 July 1854.
[209] Cronin, p. 77.
[210] *The Workers Dreadnought*, (Reproduced in) Women Workers in Monster Houses, in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick, History of Industries, Trade and Commerce, Volume 1*, (Limerick, 2003), p. 39. Women in Cannocks were working for as little as 8s per week. Daly cited wage rates for Limerick lace workers in 1910 at 4s-7s per week.
[211] Matthew Potter, *Amazing Lace: A History of the Limerick Lace Industry,* (Limerick, 2014), p. 117.
[212] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 630-631.
[213] Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 628-632.
[214] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 January 1890.

One of the most prominent employers in the second half of the nineteenth century was the Limerick Clothing Factory. The origins of the factory were in 1850 when a Scottish businessman Peter Tait opened up a small business in a rented room with a number of seamstresses making shirts and caps.[215]

Tait took advantage of the invention of new sewing machines and targeted the manufacture of British army uniforms, which up until this point were handmade by tailors in the hometown of each regiment. After initially getting a contract for a year to supply one regiment in the British Army, the contract proved so successful for Tait that within a short period he was given the contract to supply the entire British Army from a central depot in London. This contract led Tait to establish the first ready-made clothing factory in the world.[216]

The workforce in the factory was predominantly female, women and girls working in the sewing department. Men, including journeymen tailors,[217] and boys, were also employed predominately in the cutting department. Tait operated a production line system training his sewing staff to carry out single jobs on each item of clothing[218] and regularly updated his factory with new machinery. The factory itself was capable of accommodating up to 1,500 workers.[219]

There were jobs in the machine room for a number of catagories of workers including basters, machinists, button-hole makers, finishers and pressers. The workers in the factory were paid by piece work and a total of 36 different payments were made for various aspects of the production of the uniforms. As a result, pay rates varied depending on orders secured and the ability of the workers to complete their tasks.

The Army Clothing Factory was noted for working conditions comparable with those experienced by the journeymen tailors. The factory was well ventilated and Tait provided a canteen with seating for 200 that supplied breakfast, dinner and supper to his workforce at 'minimum cost'. The factory also contained a section that could be fitted out as a theatre with seating for up to 400 people, as well as games and reading rooms for the workers.

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[215] Kevin Hannan, 'Great Scot… Peter Tait', *Limerick Leader,* 30 September 1989.
[216] Unknown, 'The Story of the LCF, 1850-1950', *Limerick Association Yearbook* (1983), p. 69.
[217] John E. Waite, 'Industrial Unrest', *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 July 2006.
[218] Kevin Hannan, 'Sir Peter Tait', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 31, (Winter 1994), p. 26.
[219] 'The Story of the LCF, 1850-1950', p. 69.

As a demonstration of the more developed approach Tait took towards his workforce, he also established a co-operative store which was funded by a contribution from the entire workforce in the factory on a pro-rata basis from their wages. Half of the profits from the store were used to capitalise a benefit fund to be used for pensions and sick pay for the factory's workers, with the other half being used to repay the subscriptions. The benefit fund also provided a death benefit to the family of any worker who died.[220]

Not surprisingly Tait had a high profile in the city leading, at one point, to his election as mayor. However, he was also ruthless when confronted by trade union action. In 1866 journeymen tailors struck in Limerick. Following the end of the strike Tait refused to employ any tailors who were members of the Tailors Society.[221]

Tait's rapid expansion was helped by orders to supply uniforms for the British Amry during the Crimean War.[222] Profits were also to be made by running the blockade of the Southern states to supply the Confederate Army with uniforms during the American Civil War. Tait's ships supplied uniforms and carried cotton on their return journeys.[223]

After Tait began engaging in politics[224] the running of the business passed to his son Robert. However, a combination of competition from English companies who copied his methods of production and declining demand for uniforms led to the factory closing in 1875. At that point more than 600 workers lost their jobs.

The renamed Limerick Clothing Factory reopened in 1877 under new management.[225] The new company was run by a board that comprised of many of the city's leading merchants.[226] In the hard-nose competitive textile sector the local merchants were determined to make a profit. The

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[220] Stratten and Stratten, *Dublin, Cork, and South of Ireland: A Literary, Commercial and Social Review Past and Present, with a Description of Leading Mercantile Houses and Commercial Enterprises,* (London, 1892), p. 286-288.
[221] Waite, 'Industrial Unrest'.
[222] 'The Story of the LCF, 1850-1950', p. 70.
[223] Colm Ward, 'Limerick Connection to the American Civil War', *Limerick Leader,* 13 August 2011 & David C. Burt, *Peter Tait: An Overview of the Man The Company and The Uniforms* [Available at: https://acws.co.uk/archives-military-petertait] (Accessed on: 22 September 2018).
[224] Tait stood unsuccessfully as a Tory candidate in Limerick in 1867, 1871 and 1874.
[225] Hannan, 'Sir Peter Tait', p. 30.
[226] Aidan Corr, 'The Draper Who Gave Employment and Much More to Generations', *Limerick Christmas Gazette,* (1983), p. 10.

company was revived, securing contracts from many parts of the world.[227] By 1892 the workforce was almost 1,000.[228]

Women workers in the factory engaged in several disputes towards the end of the nineteenth century. When the company attempted to impose a 10 per cent paycut in 1894, 600 women workers walked out and protested through the streets. The women workers had been earning wages of between 15 shillings and £1 per week eighteen months previously, but at the time of the strike the average wage had dropped to 9 shillings a week. It was argued that the factory was competing with similar enterprises in England who were paying their workers 30 per cent less than in Limerick. The following day the women offered to accept a cut of 5 per cent but this was rejected by the company. The Trades Council offered to arbitrate in the dispute but after three days the women returned to work.[229]

A year later 500 women workers at the factory went on strike after a worker was suspended. After a short strike lasting a number of days the worker was redeployed to a different department.[230] Finally in 1902, more than 800 women went on strike over the attempt by the company to introduce machinery to sew button-holes. The women protested through the streets throughout the day.[231] There is no record as to how the dispute ended.

Another large employer of women workers was the Condensed Milk Factory in Landsdowne owned by the Cleeves family. Taken over by the Cleeves' brothers in 1883, by 1898 the company was employing 2,000 workers between the factory and the rural creameries who were supplying it,[232] including the 400 workers in the toffee factory located at Charlotte Quay.[233]

The first recorded dispute at the Condensed Milk Factory took place in January 1891 when 300 men and women workers struck after the company sacked 20 workers claiming a downturn in trade. The striking workers established a union and affiliated to the London based Gas Workers and General Labourers Society. The workers claimed that since the factory had been taken over by Cleeve's their wages had been cut by half and that owners had sacked the main union

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[227] Corr, 'The Draper Who Gave Employment and Much More to Generations', p. 11.
[228] Stratten and Stratten, *Dublin, Cork, and South of Ireland,* p. 288.
[229] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 May 1894. & *Freemans Journal,* 29 & 31 May 1894.
[230] *Freemans Journal,* 23 July 1895 & *Limerick Chronicle* 23 July 1895 & *Southern Star,* 27 July 1895.
[231] *Irish Times,* 12 November 1902.
[232] Unknown, *The Condensed Milk Company of Ireland, Limited (Cleeve Brothers),* (Limerick, 1898), p. 2.
[233] P.J. Ryan. 'Some Local Industries', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 8, (Autumn 1981), p. 4.

organisers in the plant. The workers also claimed that the company had offered them a pay rise in return for the workers giving up their union cards. As soon as the strike started the company immediately began looking for scabs to replace the striking workers. Workers in other workplaces owned by the company declared their support for the strikers at the Condensed Milk Factory.

On 21 January 1891, a meeting of the workers was addressed by Adolphus Shields, an Organiser with the Gasworkers Union in Dublin, and by Hartigan, the local branch president. Shields claimed that women who do the same work as men were entitled to be paid the same wage and called for support from local farmers supplying the company who had benefited from the support of labourers in getting their rents reduced. He went on to condemn the notion from the establishment, that the interests of the employer and the employee were the same and finished by calling on all labourers to join the union. A notice from the strike committee outlining the conditions in the factory and giving the reasons why the union was established was circulated under the names of Joseph O'Keeffe, Chairman and James O'Brien, Secretary.

Two days later Whelan and Shields brought back an offer from Cleeve to rehire as many hands as they felt were needed at the moment. Shields recommended acceptance of the offer but it was rejected by the workers.[234] However, it is likely this was later accepted as there are no further reports of the dispute.

It is commonplace to note that it was difficult for women workers to organise. The traditional areas of women's employment, domestic service and agriculture, offerd solitary or seasonal employment that did not easily lend themselves to unionisation. Family responsibilities meant that women had less time to devote to union activism. Women were often less able to pay union dues because of lower pay in comparison men and the nature of the low paid employment that women took part in.[235] Indeed this issue continued into the twentieth century. In recognition of the lower wages paid to women, when the ITGWU began recruiting women workers in Limerick in 1918 they paid reduced union subscriptions compared to men. As a result the leadership of the Trades Council under the control of elements of the craft unions, refused to recognise the ITGWU's women's branch as entitled to delegate rights on the Trades Council.

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[234] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20, 22 & 24 January 1891 & *Irish Times*, 20 January 1891.
[235] Maria Luddy, 'Working Women, Trade Unionism and Politics in Ireland, 1830–1945', in Fintan Lane & Damien O'Driscoll (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 49.

This was to lead to an ongoing dispute between the ITGWU and the leadership of Limerick Trades Council culminating in the withdrawal of the ITGWU from the Trades Council in 1920.[236]

Women workers in Rural Limerick

Outside the city, two types of employment predominated for women, domestic service and farm servants. In 1871 10,037 women were employed in domestic service[237] Twenty years later there were 7,421 domestic servants[238] a drop of 26 per cent. Domestic service was to continue to be the dominant form of employment for women in rural Limerick despite the drop in numbers between 1871-1891. While O'Connor outlined that domestic service continued to be a major employment for women workers in Waterford, he does not provide any statistics to demonstrate the changes in this sector.[239]

The decline in domestic service can largely be attributed to the changing nature of land ownership in the latter stages of the nineteenth century. The decline in the Protestant ascendancy coupled with the weak and limited nature of the Catholic middle-class led to a reduced demand for domestic servants. Daly asserted that many women who would have considered going into domestic service instead opted to emigrate.[240]

In 1871 a total of 2,991 women were employed as indoor farm servants, with a further 603 as agricultural labourers.[241] In comparison with the domestic servants, there was an even more dramatic drop. The number of farm servants dropped to 1,046, a fall of 65 per cent, while the number of agricultural labourers dropped to 368, a fall of 39 per cent.[242]

Bourke outlined that over 30 per cent of rural women doing housework were paid. The number of women in paid housework had dropped to 18 per cent in 1891. The indications from the census is that the drop in County Limerick was even more significant that that outlined above.

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[236] Dominic Haugh, *Limerick Soviet 1919: The Revolt of the Bottom Dog,* (Shannon, 2019), p. 79.
[237] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 608-609.
[238] Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 608.
[239] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 65.
[240] Daly, *Women and Work in Ireland,* p. 32.
[241] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 619.
[242] Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 619.

In assessing why this drop took place Bourke put forward a number of possibilities. Economic progress changed aspirations but also changed the material nature and labour of households. Increased consumption required increased production in the home. Bourke discussed the impact of the Labourers Act and the higher rate of construction of labourers cottages in Leinster and Munster compared to Ulster and Connaught. This would tend to support an assertion that the improved quality of housing for labourers could have led to women spending more time in the home rather than doing paid housework.

Bourke also outlined the inadequacies of the new cottages and, in particular, the fact that the poor design and construction led to an increased workload for women in the home. Items as simple as kitchen grates being too narrow for pots were cited as creating diffculties.[243]

As a result of increased wages for labourers and the substitution of live-in servants for casual labourers, farmers were ensuring that male labourers were doing the work previously carried out by paid female servants in order to maximise their return for the wages they paid. This was the case throughout the farming sector, particularly dairying. The range of farm tasks carried out by women narrowed after the famine with the advent of creameries brought a major change to the nature of female farm work. [244]

Rather than having insufficient work for a full-time dairymaid, the farmer ustilised the availablity of a male labourer to carry out the necessary work.[245] A second contributing factor in this development was increasing farm sizes which required the hiring of labourers.[246] Daly asserted that most female work on smaller farms was conducted by family members, wives and daughters, with hired labourers largely confined to larger farms.[247]

There is no direct evidence from Limerick that these issues were factors that led to the decline of paid housework by women workers in rural areas. However, these assertions certainly are plausable. The one factor that Bourke did not assess was the impact of economic developments on employment in rural areas.

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[243] Joanna Bourke, 'Working Women: The Domestic Labor Market in Rural Ireland, 1890-1914', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* Volume 21, Number 3 (Winter, 1991), pp. 484-488.
[244] Daly, *Women and Work in Ireland,* p. 22 & 24.
[245] Joanna Bourke, 'Dairywomen and Affectionate Wives: Women in the Irish Dairy Industry, 1890-1914', *The Agricultural History Review,* Volume 38, Number 2 (1990), p. 151.
[246] Ibid., p. 160.
[247] Daly, p. 23.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at union organisation among semi-skilled and unskilled workers, focusing on three specific groups of workers, dock labourers, pork butchers and railway workers. The emergence of the Dock Labourers Society predated the other unions. Over the subsequent four decades the dock workers faced an ongoing struggle for union recognition and to improve their wages and working conditions. In particular, the dock workers were constantly striving against the casual nature of the employment. The dock labourers were also noted for engaging in solidarity with other workers.

The Pork Butchers Society operated in a business that saw the first factory system operating in Limerick, a business that was based in three cities. The emergence of the Limerick Pork Butchers Society in 1870 saw the first examples of struggle for recognition and to prevent the erosion of wages and conditions. By 1890 the pork butchers were part of an amalgamated society with other bacon factory workers in Cork and Waterford. This was partly driven by the fact that factories in the three cities were owned by the same company. Following the defeat of the druing the pig-buyers dispute in 1896, the amalgamated society declined with the Cork and Workers leaving the union. From this point on the pork butchers in Limerick became more inward looking, operating on a localised basis and turning to conservatism and support for the the Catholic hierarchy in the city.

Railway workers in Ireland operated across a range of private companies in Ireland from the building of the railway network in the middle of the nineteenth century. This facilitated cooperation among workers in different locations, as they were confronted by the actions of the individual company owners. Instincitively during a dispute that broke out in 1877 the railway workers acted to bring strikers from different locations together. The strike was ultimately defeated but the seed of national union organsiation was sown at that time.

The railway workers became synonimous with new unionism. By 1889 railway workers had begun to join the british-based ASRS and over the following period a series of strike ultimately led to nationwide base for the ASRS, including in Limerick. While the ASRS didn’t promote or encourage strike action, the reality is that the railways became the initial focus for national union organisation and new unionism in Ireland. By the end of the nineteenth century the ASRS

had made significant inroads into the recruitment of railway workers in Ireland and the establishment of a nationwide union for railway workers.[248]

This chapter also considered the role of women in work in Limerick. The two main sectors of work for women were in the textile industry and the dairy industry. Large numbers of textile workers were initially employed in the lace factories of Limerick and later in the Army Clothing Factory. The lace industry went into rapid decline in the late 1850s faced with competition from factory made lace in Britain. The Army Clothing Factory was a major employer in the city reacing a high point of over 1,000 workers. Operating on a production line basis, factory owner Tait made significant profits supplying uniforms to armies around the world. Tait's company was regarded as the most progressive employment in the city, providing a canteen and theatre for staff as well as facilitating a cooperative shop as well as sick and death ebenfits for the workers. Despite his progressive image, Tait was notoriously anti-union and then tailors struck across Limerick, Tait refused to employ any members of the society. Tait's company went out of business in 1875 and was reopened under the management of several city merchants in 1877. The new management were intent on cutting costs to boost profits, leading to direct confrontation with workers leading to several disputes towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.

Women workers in the Condensed Milk Factory were also to the fore during this period. Women were a majority of the Cleeves workforce in the city at this time. Taking on board the emergence of new unionism, women workers in this plant and its sister factory, the toffee factory, were part of the workforce who joined the British based Gas Workers and General Labourers Society during a dispute in 1891. Throughout this period the most significant form of employment for women workers was in domestic service. Despite declining numbers employed between 1871 and 1891 there were still over 2,000 female domestic servants in the city during the last decade of the nineteenth century. In rural areas the drop was dramatic in the same 20 year period with a collapse of more than 60 per cent in employment as domestic servants and agricultural labourers in rural county Limerick. In 1891 there were still over 1,000 female domestic servants in rural areas.

[248] For details on the building of the ASRS and its role in the early twentieth century see: Conor McCabe, *The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and the National Union of Railwaymen in Ireland, 1911-1923,* PhD thesis, University of Ulster, (2006).

O'Conner asserted that new unionism represented the first serious attempt to modernisse the labour movement in Ireland and it set questions later taken up by Larkinite and syndicalist militancy, namely, how to organise unskilled workers, how to develop political consciousness and whether the path of progress for irish workers lay in building an indigenous trade union movement or joining with the substantially larger trade unions based in Britain.[249] The emergence of new unionism led to a wave of strike action across the country, with many of the strikes going down to significant defeat. O'Connor outlined that new unionism was undermined fatally by the reverses suffered in 1891.[250] In relation to Cork, Conin commented that strikes by new unions proved unsuccessful and the activsts were either permanently replaced by strike breakers or eventually returedn to work on the employers terms.[251]

McAteer took a more optimistic view, arguing that new unionism in ireland took a different course in Ireland than it did in Britain because of the different circumstances that if faced. He went further and claimed that, assisted by greater economic prosperity, trade unions broke free from the conservatism of the old craft unions and aspired to be a mass movement. The craft unions saw an influx of new members with new ideas and attitudes and, for a period, the artisan renounced his position as the 'landlord of Labour' to join the unskilled labourer in a united and class conscious movement.[252]

In relation to Limerick, the reality of the situation probably lay somewhere between these divergent views. Undoubtedly the unskilled workers in Limerick, particularly the railway workers and the pork butchers, went down to defeats. However, the foundations were laid for the structures of trade unions among semi-skilled and unskilled workers and the desire to look beyond local circumstances was enforced. A certain radicalisation of layers of craft workers did occur during the last decade of the nineteenth century, driven in part by the emergence of new unionism and also by the radicalisation around the emerging challenge by labour in local politics.

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[249] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 51
[250] Ibid., p. 53.
[251] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?:* p. 23.
[252] McAteer, 'The New Unionism in Derry, 1889-1892: A Demonstration of its Inclusive Nature', p. 15-16.

Chapter Seven – Struggle, Politics and the Congregated Trades, 1850-1900

Introduction

During the last half of the nineteenth century the trades of Limerick were not noted for their militancy. The close relationship that the trades had with the conservative nationalist establishment in the city mitigated against any serious militancy apart from a small number of disputes. This chapter will look at the evolution of the traditional craft trades into a form of labour aristocracy, strikes involving the trades and the efforts by the Congregated Trades to influence nationalist political opinion in the city. The chapter will look in depth at the role of the Congregated Trades in the Amnesty campaign, culminating in the election of a labour majority on Limerick Corporation in 1899 orientated around eccentric Fenian, John Daly.

The census returns for 1871 and 1891 give a general indication of the decline of the trades.[1] There was a general decline across the building trades with the total number of workers employed droping from 676 to 604, a decline of approximately 10 per cent. The singificant decline in other trades was offset by the increase in the number of carpenters.[2] O'Connor noted that, in relation to Waterford, by virtue of the relative stability in employment, it was the building trades that were the core of trade unionism in that city.[3]

Table 3 – Changes in the numbers employed in the building and associated trades 1871-1891

Occupation	1871	1891
Carpenter, Joiner	253	272
Mason	125	81
Slater, tiler	43	22
Plasterer, Whitewasher	37	42
Plumber, Painter, Glazier	131	109
Cabinet-maker, Upholsterer	87	78
Sawyer	50	37
Wood-turner	11	5

[1] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873) & Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1.
[2] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), pp. 626-627 & Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, pp. 621-622.
[3] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford*, p. 65.

Blacksmith	157	111
Nail Manufacturer	59	10

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 626, *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, pp. 624-625.

The textile and clothing sector saw a major decline in the number of craftsmen. There were 18 weavers in 1871 but 20 years later there was not a single worker returned as a weaver in the census. The number of tailors dropped by almost a third and the number of shoe and boot makers dropped by almost 60 per cent. These decreases are a direct indication of the impact of mass production from the textile industry in Britain.

Table 4 – Changes in the number of male craftsmen employed in the textile industry 1871-1891

Weaver	18	2
Tailor	302	210
Shoemaker, bootmaker	464	194

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 625, *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 626.

Another sector of the economy that saw a decline was in the provision of transport, although not as marked as the textile trade. The number of coach-makers and saddle / harness / whip makers declined by roughly 10 per cent while there was a drop of the number of wheelwrights from nine to two. Unlike in Limerick, O'Connor noted the growth in the number of saddle makers in Waterford between 1851 and 1881 although he does not consider the situation in 1891. In other trades the decline in Limerick was mirrored by a similar decline in Waterford.[4]

Table 5 – Changes in the number of male craftsmen employed in the transport industry 1871-1891

Coach-maker	75	68
Wheelwright	9	2
Saddle, Harness, Whip-maker	59	48

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 624, *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations,*

[4] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 65.

birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster, Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 625.

Other occupations that showed declining numbers included fishermen, tobacco / cigar / snuff manufacturers, tanners, tallow chandlers and brush makers. Along with the carpenters, the other trades that showed an increase were the bakers and printers. While there was a marked decline in the trades, the number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers increased across the board.[5]

The Bakers' Society

The most militant of the craft unions in Limerick were the bakers. Cunningham asserted that the bakers had specific grievences relating to their own working conditions.[6] This, in part, was dictated by the efforts of employers to introduce machinery into the industry and deskill the workforce. More often than not strikes occurred in individual bakeries, but occasionally the strikes did develop into citywide conflict. The use of scabs was commonplace during disputes involving bakers and violence was a constant feature.

A citywide strike of bakers erupted in 1859. Several of the cities bakeries agreed to the strikers' demands but a small number resisted the strike. The main establishment involved in the dispute was Lyons' bakery where 35 workers were engaged in strike action. Dawson's in Brunswick Street was also involved in the dispute but an assault on the manager of Dawson's by striking workers while he was walking in Roche's Street brought the dispute to an end. Millers' clerks scabbed on the strike resulting in several assaults on the clerks by striking bakers.[7]

The same year bakers in Dublin launched a campaign to eliminate night-work.[8] In May 1860 the Limerick Guild of Bakers joined the campaign. The Bakers Guild outlined that they were working on average 12 hours a day with regular examples of up to 48 hours shifts. They argued that the working hours and poor working conditions were are major contributing factor in illness among workers, with more than 10 per cent of the bakers were regularly off work as a result. At the beginning of June a mass meeting took place in Limerick where the bakers outlined their reasons for ending night-work. Two months later the campaign turned violent when three bakers assaulted a journeyman from Ennis who went into work in Russell's on a Sunday night.[9] The

[5] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), pp. 626-627 & Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, pp. 621-622. For a full breakdown of the census returns for the different occupations for 1871 see Appendix IV, and for 1891 see Appendix V.
[6] Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland:* pp. 54.
[7] *Freeman's Journal*, 15 September 1859. Brunswick Street is now known as Sarsfield Street.
[8] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 55.
[9] *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 May & 2 June & 1 August 1860.

campaign petered out and the indications were that the Bakers Guild collapsed in the process, not being re-established until 1864.[10]

Five years later in 1869 bakery workers struck demanding a pay increase and an end to Sunday working. The local bakeries brought scabs in from Dublin but to little effect. The scabs claimed that they were forced to work, eat and sleep in the bakery for fear of intimidation and violence. When the dispute ended in a partial victory for the strikers the city bakeries sacked the scabs. As a parting shot the strikers assaulted the scabs at the railway station as they were buying tickets for their return to Dublin.[11]

In 1879 Harris' bakery attempted to implement a pay cut and re-introduce night-work for bakers. Night-work had been abolished in 1872 despite significant resistance from the bakeries. Harris implemented a lock-out with the expectation that if he succeeded in defeating the workers then the other employers would follow suit. The bakery was under police protection and the scabs were escorted to and from work. Russell's bakery also attempted to introduce night work and when the bakers refused to report for duty, Russell imposed a lock-out. Violence was widespread during the dispute. One of the strikers was stabbed by a scab and seriously injured. Several cases of assault were brought before the petty sessions. In another incident two scabs were attacked when going to work with bottles and stones thrown at them. They boarded themselves into a public house with their attackers smashing all the windows in the pub and were attempting to smash down the door when the police arrived. The strike lasted four weeks and ended with concessions being made by both sides.[12]

In November 1884 the Trades called for workers to boycott a strikebound bakery belonging to Sir John Arnott. Arnott had opened a new bakery just over two weeks earlier with wages significantly lower than the norm in other bakeries in Limerick. Scabs were hired from Cork and Dublin and Arnott gave away bread for two days. After calling for a boycott, the Congregated Trades held a meeting with the National League in Limerick and called on the League to support the striking bakers. The nationalists responded dismissively, stating that the bakers should compromise with the other bakeries, reduce their wages to the levels being paid

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[10] *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Eight report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1894 and 1895; with statistical tables*. Command Papers, 1896, (C.8232), xciii.277, p. 96.
[11] *Irish Times*, 22 September 1869 & *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 September 1869.
[12] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11, 14, 16, 18 & 21 October & 8 November 1879 & *Freemans Journal*, 14 & 31 October 1879.

by Arnott, and work nights. When the Trades pressed the issue the National League simply claimed that the issue was outside their remit.[13]

Cunningham noted the emergence of the Irish National Bakers Federal Trade Union in 1889.[14] While the workers in Limerick were organised, there is no indication that they formed part of this fairly loose national federation. Cronin outlined the failure of the bakers to resist the demands of the master bakers in Cork in 1883 and again in 1890, despite efforts by the trades council to intervene on behalf of the bakers.[15]

The most serious dispute involving bakery workers occurred in 1891. For a period of over two and a half years workers at Croom Flour Mills were locked-out in a planned action to force the introduction of machinery and job cuts.[16] The *Report on Strikes and Lock-outs* for 1891 records the dispute as being unsuccessful with the workers being replaced by scabs and ultimately finding other employment.[17] The workers who replaced the strikers in 1891 subsequently joined the bakers union and struck for a wage increase to the standard wages in the industry. These workers were also sacked.[18] The Mills were under constant police protection as bakers mounted mass pickets on an almost daily basis. Violence was widespread and involved large numbers of workers. Boycotts of Limerick bakeries supplied by the Croom Mills were organised with the city's authorities jailing several of those engaged in the boycott.[19] The dispute finally ended in January 1895 in defeat for the workers.[20] However, there was a steady increase in the membership of the Guild of Bakers throughout the 1890s.

Table 6 – Membership of the Limerick Guild of Bakers 1892-1899

Year	Membership
1892	84
1893	96

[13] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11, 15 & 27 November & 16 December 1884. Arnott was offering 30s/week for day operatives – 33s/week for night operatives – 36s/week for foreman bakers.
[14] Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland:* p. 55. Marsh and Smethurst list the union as being named the Irish National Federal Union of Bakers.
[15] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 224.
[16] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 November 1891.
[17] Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6890), p. 134.
[18] *Board of Trade.—Labour Department. Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1892*, Command Papers, 1894, (C.7403), p. 38.
[19] *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 July 1894. The magistrates attempted to use examples harsh sentences in order try and break the boycott. In July 1894 Ellen McNamara was jailed for three months hard labour for participating in the boycott.
[20] *Skibbereen Eagle*, 12 January 1895.

1894	99
1895	102
1896	112
1897	115
1898	129
1899	113

Source: *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1896; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, p. 103, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1897. With comparative statistics for 1892-1896,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, p. 100, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, p. 97, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1899. With comparative statistics for 1892-1898,* Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601, p. 103.

The last recorded dispute involving bakers occurred in 1903 when a dispute erupted at Tubridy's bakery when the employer attempted to force the bakers to work nights. Mass picketing of the bakery was organised and the strikers organised a boycott of shops selling bread from Tubridy. Farmers supplying Tubridy were turned away by the pickets and he suffered a major loss in business. Tubridy went to court in an attempt to break the boycott and the blockade of his bakery. He complained about the fact that the Vanmen's Society threatened to expel from their union anyone who delivered bread for Tubridy and his scabs were assaulted.

The legal representative for the strikers stated that they had not 'touched one hair on the head of the imported men'. He claimed that they were being prosecuted when there was no police evidence against them for any criminal act. Watching someone was not illegal and there was no intimidation, molestation or violence. He finished by claiming that neither Tubridy nor any of the shops he supplied had produced any books to substantiate their claims of losses.

In giving his instructions to the jury Judge Adams said that the men were guilty of 'grossly illegal acts, which were accompanied by serious damage to Mr Tubridy' and the only issue for them as jurors was how much damages they would award to Tubridy. He criticised the authorities for not taking action to end these 'illegal acts' and suggested that the police had 'hot and cold fits'. He said he hoped the jury would find in favour of 'Limerick and liberty'. The jury awarded Tubridy £5 in damages resulting in the judge losing his temper, criticising the judgement and stating that he would request the Attorney General to order an inquiry.[21]

[21] *Freeman's Journal,* 6 June 1903.

The following day one of the boycotted shopkeepers, Mrs Kiely and a vanman named James Larkin brought charges against the striking bakers. This time Judge Adams dispensed with the jury and adjudicated on the case himself. He claimed that Mrs Kiely was assaulted by several of the wives of the striking bakers as she left the courthouse after giving evidence the previous day. Adams awarded Kiely a total of £10 plus costs with a guarantee from the secretary of the Bakers Society, that the strikers would not 'give further annoyance to the plaintiff'. The Bakers Society denied that the Society had anything to do with 'molesting the woman'.

Adams then heard a charge from James Larkin against the Bakers Vanmen Society for depriving him of the benefits of the Society by expelling him for scabbing on the bakers strike. Larkin had originally sued the Society for a refund of his subscription but Adams amended the action to 'wrongful expulsion from the Society'. Adams pronounced 'to expel a man from his society and deprive him of his benefits for no other reason, save that he would not desert his employer in his hour of danger was one of the most monstrous instances of popular tyranny he had ever heard of'. The Judge awarded Larkin £10 and £3 legal costs. Adams said that if the police brought charges against the strikers he 'would not for one moment hesitate to give them two years imprisonment' if they were found guilty. Adams demanded that the law be changed to facilitate criminal prosecutions in such cases and said he would draw 'the attention of the Attorney General' to the case.[22] The previous February the unions had launched a campaign against new laws on picketing and resisting efforts to allow unions to be sued for loss of business. Attending a meeting of the Trades Council, local landlord and county councillor, Lord Emly, stated that by implementing the new laws 'capital was seeking to throttle labour.'[23]

Building workers

The only major dispute in the building trade occurred in 1875 as a result of demands by the tradesmen to finish work at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon and to receive their pay at that time.[24] The strike lasted until September despite the combined efforts of the nationalist city council and the master builders to break it. At the beginning of September the employers conceded the workers' demands resulting in the working week being reduced to 58 hours a week. The agreement collapsed when the employers attempted to blacklist the strike leaders.

[22] *Freeman's Journal*, 8 June 1903.
[23] *Freeman's Journal*, 21 February 1903.
[24] *Freeman's Journal*, 24 June 1875.

Two days later the master builders signed an agreement with the workers. Under the terms of the agreement the union reserved the right to veto any tradesman brought in from outside the city when there was a shortage of tradesmen in the city. All striking workers were to return to their employers at the time of the strike and all striking workers agreed to work with the scabs who did not join the strike. In a later addendum the master builders also agreed to dismiss any outside tradesman if a member of the society became unemployed.[25]

A small number of disputes occurred involving carpenters. The same employer, John Hayes Contractors, was the focus of two of the four recorded disputes during this period. Hayes was notorious for the employment of non-union labour. In 1889 McBirney's awarded a contract to Hayes for work in their premises prompting protests from the Carpenters Union. At the end of September more than 500 participated in a mass protest against McBirney's and Hayes leading to the deployment of large numbers of police in the city. The United Trades made public statements demanding the withdrawal of the contract but gave little practical support to the protests.[26]

There is a recorded dispute involving carpenters in 1893 against the importation by an employer of ready-made doors from Belgium and Norway. The Trades Council intervened and negotiated an agreement that the employer would desist from the importation of ready-made doors and wouldn't hire any non-union workers.[27]

Hayes was also a major figure in a dispute beginning in October 1901, when he led the employers in a campaign to break the Carpenters' Union. Scabs were hired in Glasgow and housed in property owned by Hayes at Reeves Path.[28] Violence broke out on several occasions during the dispute. The strike lasted for seven months with ten builders and four contractors ultimately accepting the carpenters demands for a wage increase and all of the striking workers guaranteed employment.[29] There is no indication that the Limerick carpenters became part of an amalgamated society.

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[25] *Freemans Journal,* 3, 6, 8 & 18 September 1875.
[26] *Freemans Journal,* 1 October 1889.
[27] *Board of Trade.--Strikes and lock-outs. (Labour Department.) Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1893,* Command Papers, 1894, (C.7566), p. 65 & p. 241.
[28] *Irish Times,* 31 October 1900 & *Nenagh Guardian,* 2 November 1900.
[29] *Freemans Journal,* 7 May 1901.

Amalgamated Society of Tailors

O'Connor discussed the emergence of 'new model' trade unionism citing the emergence of the ASE in 1851. Entrance fees and benefits were high, strikes were discouraged and the protection of the trade was based on control of apprenticeships and enforcement of restrictive practices.[30] Hyman outlined that the ASE chieved sustained growth, consolidated substantial funds and, by the standards of the time, developed a highly professional adminstration. They pursued and achieved a status as a respectable social institution that was imitated by craft societies in other industries. The focus of these new model unions was primarily on employment regulation and their aims were to be achieved as far as possible through peacful means and to the exclusion of the involvement of political radicalism. Hyman argued that this led to a retreat of craft unionism from politics with some unions banning political discussions at their branch meetings.[31]

Boyle went into some detail of the emergence of the amalgamated unions for the skilled trades in the period after the Famine in Ireland. He regarded the success of British trade unions in enrolling Irish members of skilled trades as the most important development in the Irish labour movement in the second half of the nineteenth century.[32]

A small number of the craft unions in Limerick became part of larger British based unions. The Limerick Society of Coopers was listed as an affiliated branch of Mutual Association of Journeymen Coopers of Great Britain and Ireland.[33] The Limerick Ship Riggers Society was a constituent union of the Federated Ship Riggers' Association.[34] Limerick Operative Plumbers Society joined the United Operative Plumbers Association of Great Britain and Ireland in 1900.[35] At the time the Limerick Operative Plumbers society had 12 members.[36] There were 12 members of the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers of Great Britain and Ireland between Cork, Limerick and Waterford.[37] Limerick tailors were members of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses.[38] Boyle regarded the AST as one of the most successful of the amalgamated unions at this time.[39]

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[30] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 47.
[31] Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society,* p. 75-76.
[32] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 92.
[33] Command Papers, 1896, (C.8232), xciii.277, p. 413.
[34] Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, p. 42.
[35] Smethurst and Peter Carter, Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Volume 6, p. 15.
[36] Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601, p. 5.
[37] Command Papers, 1896, (C.8232), xciii.277, p. 142.
[38] There is no indication when the Limerick tailors joined the AST&T but it was before 1879 as the tailors strike in 1879 is reported as having involved the Amalgamated Tailors.
[39] Boyle, p. 97

The tailors were particularly vulnerable to foreign competition.[40] Cronin outlined that, in the case of Cork, solidarity both within and between trades was as durable as economic conditions and sectional rivalries permitted. She pointed out that working men, skilled and unskilled, were the greatest patrons of the cheap clothing establishments, even in times of conflict in the textile trade.[41] Cronin ultimately argued that within each of the craft unions the sense of artisan identity was rooted in the workplace rather than in the trade union.[42] While similar pleas of solidarity from the tailors, and the bakers, were a regular occurance in Limerick, there is little indication whether these pleas for support were effective. Similarly, there is little evidence from Limerick to confirm or reject the assertion made by Cronin about artisan identity. It is possible that the significantly smaller population in the city and the smaller numbr of tradesmen resulted in the necessity for extending identity beyond the individual workplace.

Tailors in the Limerick engaged in a small number of industrial disputes, suffering defeats in 1866,[43] 1879[44] and 1887.[45] The wage of tailors in Limerick is recorded at 4 pence per hour in 1889.[46] A long-running dispute for a pay increase involving the tailors broke out in mid-1898 and last six months. The employers attempted to hire scabs to break the strike. On one occasion when four scabs arrived in Limerick they were protected by a detachment of 50 police and confronted by a hostile crowd of several hundred. Stones were thrown at the wagon carrying the scabs and mass picketing continued for the rest of the day.[47] The days before and after this event were the most intense of the dispute. An agreement was finally reached in December but when the employers published a copy of the agreement in the local papers the striking tailors disputed the content of the document leading to a new walk-out of the workers and a threatened lock-out by employers.[48] The employers ultimately stepped back from the brink ending the dispute. The strike is recorded as being partially successful. The initial demand of the tailors was an increase of a halfpenny per hour. The employers agreed to a compromse of half the demand, an increase of one farthing per hour for the tailors[49] Apart from financial support from

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[40] Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland:* pp. 61.
[41] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p.223.
[42] Ibid., p. 226.
[43] *Irish Times,* 9 April 1866.
[44] *Freemans Journal,* 8 November 1879.
[45] *Freemans Journal,* 21 March 1887.
[46] Command Papers, 1890-91, (C.6475), xcii.73, p. 518.
[47] *Freemans Journal,* 31 October 1898 & *Nenagh Guardian,* 29 October 1898.
[48] *Freemans Journal,* 14 December 1898.
[49] *Strikes and lock-outs. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent on the strikes and lock-outs of 1898. With statistical tables,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9437), xcii.277, p. 70-71. For more information on the 1898 tailors strike see: Liam Irwin, 'The Log, the Hour and the Halfpenny: A Case Study of a 19th Century Limerick

the AST&T there is no indication that membership of the amalgamated society directly impacted on the running or outcome of these disputes.

The role of the Congregated Trades

It could be argued that in the post-famine period in Limerick, many if not most of the trades guilds / societies and the tradesmen who made up the membership of these bodies adopted an attitude of what could loosely be described as a 'labour aristocracy'. The struggle to organise and gain recognition had largely been fought in the pre-famine period. The dramatic loss of jobs among the trades as a result of the provision of cheap factory goods as a consequence of the industrial revolution had largely stabilised. The trades generally survived the famine without the same difficulty as the mass of the poor and rarely participated in the social unrest during the period. In certain ways they were becoming what Engels outlined as an 'aristocracy among the working class'[50] that benefited from a growing economy in the period after the famine. While periods of industrial conflict did erupt it was not nearly on the same scale as industrial unrest among unskilled and semi-skilled workers and when strike action did take place it was often resolved quickly, usually through the intervention of local politicians or of the Catholic hierarchy.

Among others, Hobsbawm and Moorhouse have addressed the issue of a labour aristocracy.[51] McGrath dismissed the theory claiming that it has been debunked by a number of scholars and that it was difficut to apply to Limerick in any case.[52] However, the source he cited, MacRaild & Martin, actually stated that the term had its place when discussing elements of the skilled working class between 1830-1914.[53] McGrath went on to use examples of individuals to demonstrate the difficulty of applying the theory to Limerick, Richard Raleigh, a tobacco manufacture, and John Godsell, a publican.[54]

Industrial Dispute', in David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Made in Limerick History of Industries, Trade and Commerce, Volume 1,* (Limerick, 2003), pp. 265-285.

[50] Fredrick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (London, 1987), p. 42.

[51] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Lenin and the "Aristocracy of Labor"', *Monthly Review,* Volume 64, Number 7, (December 2012), pp. 26-34, & H. F. Moorhouse, 'The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy', *Social History,* Volume 3, Number 1 (January 1978), pp. 61-82

[52] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899.* p. 284.

[53] Donald M. MacRaild & David E. Martin, *Labour in British Society, 1830-1914,* (London, 2000), p. 23-24.

[54] McGrath, p. 284

Rarely did the Congregated Trades interest themselves in supporting or defending strike action by labourers and when they did it was usually to try and persuade the striking workers to engage in arbitration[55] or because the strike was directly impacting on the tradesmen themselves.[56]

The Congregated Trades as an organisation had a haphazard existence. While it was active sporadically it also appears to have had long periods when it was moribund. It is difficult to trace the thread of development because newspaper coverage of the activities of the Congregated Trades was inconsistent and there is a dearth of other primary sources relating to the trades in Limerick. Often the periods of activity occurred when the nationalist movement was engaged in various campaigns.

Election campaigns in the 1850s

In analysing the elections in Limerick during the 1850s McGrath fails to comment on the violence that accompanied elections during this decade.[57] The evidence demonstrates that violence was part and parcel of elections at this time. McGrath claimed that the trades emerged from the Famine as an economically weakened group with no clear idea as to where their political loyalties should lie.[58] He contended that the local political class abandoned Repeal in 1849 and when the Congregated trades failed to generate support in their call to arms on the issue of Repeal in 1852 they appeared bereft of political ideology for the remainder of the decade.[59] However, the attempted intervention by the Congregated Trades in the 1851 election demonstrated that they were already abandoning Repeal themsleves at that point. Again, it is unclear at this point who the Congregated Trades represented and how active anc coherent a body there were.

During the 1851 election the Congregated Trades assembled with bands and banners before the committee rooms of Lord Arundel and accompanied the candidate and his supporters to polling. On route they burned an effigy of rival candidate Lord Russell.[60] Both were unionists but Arundel was regarded as 'a friend of the trades' whereas Russell was more known as an

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[55] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 August 1890. The local Trades argued that striking railway workers should submit to arbitration – this was rejected by a mass meeting of workers.
[56] In September 1875, the Trades supported the labourers in demanding a finishing time of 3pm for Saturday work. The Trades were engaged in a similar dispute with the employers in the building trade.
[57] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* pp. 250-265.
[58] Ibid., p. 190.
[59] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 167.
[60] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 August 1851. Lord Arundel was Henry Fitzalan Howard, Duke of Norfolk and a Catholic. He was elected as MP for Limerick City 1851-52.

unscrupulous employer. However, the Trades were far from united and many of the guilds supported Russell. Hoppen pointed out that for every time the trades held a march on an issue of principle there could be a hundred demonstrations paid for in cash by wealthy parliamentary candidates.[61] Cunningham outlined that in 1857 tradesmen voters in Galway were a major target for bribes.[62] The 1851 election in Limerick, and future elections in the 1850s, fitted into this narrative.

Following his election, the Congregated Trades escorted Arundel through the streets with banners and bands. A major controversy did emerge during the election. As the Congregated Trades promoted Arundel's candidacy they encouraged the labouring classes to demonstrate in support of his candidacy. The labourers at the floating dock walked off the job and joined the demonstration in support of the candidate. Aware that the Trades had already been paid for their support for Arundel, they then demanded to be paid by the committee to elect Arundel at a rate of 20s per man for 250 men.[63] This dispute caused deep tensions between the tradesmen and the labourers in the city.

The 1851 election was marked by the first direct involvement of the Catholic hierarchy in an election in Limerick. The primary reason for this involvement was the proposed Ecclesiastical Titles Assumption Bill[64] going through parliament. The Catholic hierarchy regarded the Bill as an assault on the Catholic religion and they were intent on defending their faith.[65]

The intervention of 'hired and armed mobs' was seen as a recognised feature of all elections in Limerick.[66] In one comment of note, Captian Fitzmaurice in giving evidence to the *Select Committee on Outrages in Ireland* in 1852, was asked if he had seen 'any sectarian feeling to prevail among the lower orders?' to which he replied that he had not.[67]

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[61] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* p. 49.
[62] John Cunningham, *A town tormented by the sea: Galway 1790-1914,* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 206-212.
[63] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 & 6 August 1851.
[64] The Ecclesiastical Titles Act 1851 was a political response to the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy of dioceses in England and Wales by Pope Pius XI. The Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 forbade the use of old ecclesiastical titles except by the clergy of the established Protestant Church. Seen as an anti-Catholic measure, the implementation of the Act provoked anti-Catholic riots in many parts of Britain from 1850-1852. For more see: D. G. Paz, 'Another Look at Lord John Russell and the Papal Aggression, 1850', *The Historian,* Volume 45, Number 1 (November 1982), pp. 47-64.
[65] *House of Lords Debates, 29 July 1851,* (Hansard, vol 118 cc1637-76).
[66] *House of Lords Debates, 16 March 1870,* (Hansard, vol 200 cc10-60).
[67] *Report from the Select Committee on Outrages (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, minutes of evidence, appendix and index,* House of Commons Papers, 1852, (438), xiv.1, p. 46.

Following criticism from the local nationalist establishment and the church hierarchy, the Trades adopted a much more circumspect approach in 1852. Morrissey asserted that from 1852 onwards the Catholic hierarchy was determined that the clergy would exercise their influence over their 'flock' to agitate in favour of pro-Catholic candidates.[68] At the beginning of April, in the run up to the 1852 election, the Congregated Trades informed the election committee for Lord Arundel that the Trades would not support any candidate whose 'political creed is not identical to theirs'.[69] Shortly afterwards a representative of the Trades seconded a resolution repudiating support for Sergeant James O'Brien[70] claiming that the trades would not 'be duped by a clique'.[71] Whether this was an attempt to wrestle more money from one of the candidates is not known.

The Trades continued to refuse to give open support to any candidate[72] until the sectarian Stockport riots in July 1852 dramatically altered their approach. At a Congregated Trades meeting on 6 July the Trades declared their support for James O'Brien and Richard Potter.[73] However, several trades 'expressed a firm determination to sustain Mr. Russell … and avowed they would accompany him to the hustings with their banners'. The same evening election riots broke out in Englishtown and Irishtown and supporters of Russell were attacked.[74] Widespread rioting continued on a regular basis over the following two weeks culminating in the killing by soldiers of seven men during the course of a protest while polling was being carried out in Sixmilebridge.[75]

The 1858 election saw the trades embroiled in renewed controversy. Local clergy declared their support for John Ball[76], who was opposed by the Liberal candidate Major George Gavin[77], and called on all Catholics to support him. The Congregated Trades had a fractious meeting that

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[68] Thomas J. Morrissey, *Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer of Limerick, 1842-1917,* (Dublin 2003), p. 27.
[69] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 April 1852.
[70] James O'Brien was a barrister originally from Co. Longford. He was a brother of retiring Repeal MP John O'Brien. James O'Brien was elected in 1854 and re-elected in 1857. He was appointed a judge of the Court of the Queen's Bench (Ireland) in 1858, a post he held until his death in 1882. O'Brien was a Sergeant (or Serjeant) – a lucrative official position in the British judicial system that dated back to the thirteenth century.
[71] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 April 1852.
[72] *Limerick Chronicle,* 24 April 1852.
[73] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 July 1852. Robert Potter was the city's first law agent and served as MP from 1852-54.
[74] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 July 1852.
[75] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14, 17, 24 & 28 July 1852. For a detailed analysis of the 1852 election in Limerick and the shootings in Sixmilebridge see: Dominic Haugh, 'Massacre in Sixmilebridge 1852', *The Other Clare,* Volume 35 (2011), pp. 50-55. Sixmilebridge is located six miles north-west of Limerick city.
[76] John Ball was well-known glaciologist from Dublin. He had been elected as a Liberal MP in Carlow in 1852. In 1855 he was appointed Under-Secretary for the Colonies by British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerstown.
[77] Gavin was a landlord who purchased an estate at Kilpeacon near Croom in the early 1850s. He served as Liberal MP for Limerick from 1859-1874.

descended into chaos before breaking up without agreement on which candidate to support. The following evening a large crowd smashed the windows of the committee rooms for Ball resulting in extra police and military reinforcements being drafted into the city along with extra magistrates. Gavin won the subsequent election, beating Ball by 782 votes to 733 votes.

During mass on the following Sunday priests criticised the members of their 'flock' who did not vote as instructed, instructing them to 'do penance for their sins'. The admonishment did not go down well with some of the 'flock' as one of the priests was pelted with stones after the mass.[78] Subsequently, the election was overturned as a result of accusations of bribery.[79]

In the re-run election prominent Unionist James Spaight opposed Ball for the seat. Immediately the local magistrates requested the deployment of 600 infantry, 500 police and six troops of dragoons for the election. At the same time local bishop John Ryan and the parish priests issued a statement calling for people to vote for Ball.[80] Accusations were flying around that John O'Donnell, a solicitor and a prominent member of the Sarsfield Club in 1848, was orchestrating mob violence to disrupt the election as part of his role as election agent for Spaight.[81] On the days leading up to the election widespread rioting occurred throughout the city. Violence escalated to such a degree that on 22 May James Ball withdrew from the election allowing Spaight to be elected unopposed.[82]

The events around the 1858 election were replicated in 1859, except in a more intense fashion. Three candidates, James Spaight, Major Gavin and Francis Russell, a relative of the prominent local flour merchant, were standing for two seats. The divisions of the previous year among the trades had not healed, but this time the divisions spread to the clergy. The local clergy held a meeting to discuss the election that involved much rancour leading Bishop Ryan to declare:

> as you have failed in arranging your political differences so as to be able to act together for the Catholic cause… I … call upon you all, to withdraw from further interference direct or indirect in the upcoming election in the city.

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[78] *Limerick Chronicle,* 30 January & 6, 10 & 17 February 1858.
[79] *House of Commons Debates, 10 May 1858,* (Hansard, vol 150 c332) & *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 May 1858. Gavin's agent was accused of using bribery to win the election.
[80] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 May 1858.
[81] Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick,* p. 181.
[82] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 & 22 May 1858.

The *Chronicle* commented that 'implicit obedience was at once yielded by all to the Bishop's mandate'.[83] All candidates attempted to use their influence to gain support and neither political nor social divisions counted for little when this influence was being exercised. This was demonstrated in Limerick where Spaight used his commercial connections to get merchants to issue instructions to their employees on which candidate to vote for. The local Church of Ireland was not immune from attempting to exercise influence either, instructing choristers and vergers to vote for Gavin.[84]

John O'Donnell was once again accused of inciting the mob but this time he had switched allegiance from Spaight to Gavin.[85] Rioting began in Irishtown on 13 May when large crowds attacked the houses of voters who declared for Spaight.[86] The ensuing riot involved 1,500 people and was concentrated in and around Broad Street. The rioters were confronted by several detachments of police, four companies of foot soldiers, numbering about 300 troops, and two troops of cavalry.[87] Giving evidence to a Parliamentary Inquiry, Captain William Burden described how he repeatedly attempted to move crowds from Matthew Bridge only to be repeatedly beaten back by volleys of stones.[88] Burden asserted that women played the leading role in the rioting. The police repeatedly bayonet-charged the crowd only to be repulsed by the sheer volume of stones from the rioters. Giving evidence Police Sub-Inspector Warburton claimed that the violence directed at the police and the military was the worst he had experienced during an election in Ireland. Before the end of polling the Riot Act was read.[89] As the police were being scattered they opened fire with two volleys of shots, killing three men and wounding a large number of people in the process.[90]

The Trades did take an active role in the municipal elections in 1855 with candidates making appeals directly to them for support.[91] With 150 votes in their cohort, the Trades commanded approximately 10 per cent of the entire electorate. It was common for the trades to try to ingratiate themselves with the prevailing political leadership. On an almost annual basis the

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[83] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 April 1859.
[84] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* p. 59 & 61. Choristers were members of the church choir and vergers were lay assistants for the clergy.
[85] Fenton, *The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick,* p. 182.
[86] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 May 1859.
[87] *Limerick city election. Minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee on Limerick City Election Petition; with the proceedings of the committee. (1859),* House of Commons Papers, 1859, (147), iv.237, p. 6 & p. 23.
[88] House of Commons Papers, 1859, (147), iv.237, p. 3.
[89] House of Commons Papers, 1859, (147), iv.237, pp. 4, 6, 8 & 16.
[90] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 May 1859 & House of Commons Papers, 1859, (147), iv.237, p. 109.
[91] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 December 1855.

Trades paraded for the inauguration of the new mayor[92] or in connection with regular soirees for the mayor.[93]

Nationalism and Catholicism

The Trades took a prominent role in the drive for the building of the O'Connell Monument, raising significant funds for the project. At the same they came into conflict with the political establishment after they refused to parade with banners to church with Daniel O'Connell's son John for a mass to commemorate his father.[94] This led to Michael O'Regan, President of the Congregated Trades, writing to the City Council threatening to pay tribute, independent of military and civil authorities, to the 'memory of the Illustrious Liberator…'[95] The row between the Trades and the nationalist establishment in the city was to continue for years. In 1861 the then secretary of the Congregated Trades, Charles Carrick, stated that the Trades would not subscribe as a body but individual unions could make their own decision on the matter.[96]

In 1858 the Irish Republican Bortherhood, more commonly known as the Fenians, was founded. The Fenians were largely a conspiritorial organisation who expoused a narrow nationalist moral authority.[97] Murphy outlined that when the Cork Trades did re-enter politics in 1861, it was in open sympathy with the militant separatism of the Fenians. She noted that while the artisans filled the ranks there was little evidence that the trade societies became actively involved in Fenianism. Certainly, in the case of Limerick, there was little prospect of the Trades supporting Fenianism given their close association with establishment nationalism, but, like in Cork there is evidence that some artisans did actively participate in the Fenians. Murphy made an interesting assessment of the possible reason for the lack of involvement of the Trades. From the perspective of the Fenians, access to workplaces, where workers were congregated for several hours a day, was far more likely to yield support than a trade society that met, at most, once a week and would be consumed with internal trade matters. Murphy argued that the trade society was in decline as a unit of political organisation and expression.[98]

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[92] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 January 1855 – for example, the *Chronicle* reported that the Trades paraded with full banners and regalia for the inauguration of Nationalist mayor Henry O'Shea.
[93] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 October 1854.
[94] *Limerick Chronicle,* 6 September 1855. The likely reason for this refusal is that the Trades felt slighted that O'Connell had abandoned them when he resigned from Parliament in 1851.
[95] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 October 1855.
[96] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 October 1861.
[97] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972,* (London, 1989), p. 390-391.
[98] Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork Trades 1860-1900', p. 28.

Along with expressing their nationalist outlook, the Trades also embraced opportunities to prove their commitment to Catholicism. When the Irish Brigade returned to Limerick from fighting in Italy the Trades organised a 'soiree' in their honour. The importance that the Congregated Trades attributed to the banquet can be seen from the invitations issued to Archbishop Cullen, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Wiseman and the commander of the Battalion of St. Patrick, Major Myles O'Reilly.[99] It did not take long for the event to be shrouded in controversy. Local priests were accused of trying to get the banquet cancelled. The city's magistrates refused to attend, with the exception of the mayor-elect John McSheehy.[100] Even apparent innocuous events demonstrated the peripheral nature of the Congregated Trades to politics in the post-famine period. A simple congratulatory event saw controversy emerge, resulting in the situation being taken out of the control of the Trades.

The Trades and the Rise of Fenianism

Despite the fact that many of the most prominent individuals were from strong-farming or merchant backgrounds, Marx and Engels followed the activites of the Fenians closely, expressing broad support for the movement, while still criticisng the narrow nationalism and conspiritorial approach of the Fenian leaders.[101] Foster argued that the most important impact of the Fenians was the creation of a broad, open amnesty campaign for the release of Fenian prisoners that drew in elements of Irish nationalism that couldn't support the approach of the Fenians.[102]

In the case of Cork, Cronin asserted that it was not until the 1860s that the artisans, both individually and as part of their societies, took an active role in local politics. Cronin argued that the Trades were drawn in by militant republicanism and an anti-English sentiment in the city.[103] There is little indication of a rising anti-English sentiment in Limerick. Being a unionist newspaper, the *Limerick Chronicle* was not shy about highlighting anti-English feelings when they did emerge, but such pronouncements were noticeable by their absence during the period preceding the Fenian rebellion.

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[99] *Limerick Chronicle*, 7, 14 & 21 November 1860, for more information on the Irish Brigade see Robert Doyle, 'The Pope's Irish Battalion', *History Ireland*, Volume 16, Issue 5, (September/October 2010), pp. 26-29.
[100] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 December 1860.
[101] Chandana Mathur and Dermot Dix, 'The Irish Question in Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's Writings on Capitalism and Empire', in Séamas Ó Síocháin (Ed.), *Social Thought on Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, (Dublin 2009), pp. 103-105
[102] Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p. 395.
[103] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 105.

Illustration No. 7 - Arthur's Quay, Limerick, c. 1860, by Charles Mills
Source: Jim Kemmy Municipal Mueum
[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/4620]

Rising poverty and a growing discontent among the labouring classes marked the early 1860s. The *Chronicle* reported in February 1861 that more than 13,000 people in the city were in receipt of some form of charity. A subsequent hastily arranged meeting of the corporation, called to discuss the impact of widespread unemployment among the city's labourers, broke up in chaos when some of the councillors refused to sign a guarantee that a public works programme would be established because the Board of Works would not guarantee the funds needed.[104] A breakdown of the numbers in the workhouse on 25th March, 1861 showed the following:

Table 7 – Outline of inmates of the Limerick Workhouse 1861

	Healthy	Infirmed	Sick
Men	96	113	153
Women	384	201	275
Boys under 15	90		31
Girls under 15	92		39
Boys between 5-9	24		16
Girls between 5-9	13		21
Children 2-5	72		72
Infants under 2	92		34

Source: *Select Committee to inquire into Administration of Relief of Poor in Ireland. Report, Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix, Index,* House of Commons Papers, 1861, (408, 408-i), x.1, 647, p. 127.

The Select Committee heard of the impact of scrofula which Dr. Townsend claimed was affecting 56 per cent of the children in the workhouse.[105] Catholics accounted for 1,654 of the inmates, 18 were Protestants.[106]

There was a dramatic rise in the number of inmates in the city's workhouse from 2,468 in 1861 to 3,297 in 1862.[107] The Board of Guardians regularly threw people they considered able-bodied out of the workhouse and told them to find work. When outdoor relief was established in February 1865 more than 1,000 labourers applied for work in the first two days. The wages

[104] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 & 20 February 1861.
[105] House of Commons Papers, 1861, (408, 408-i), x.1, 647, p. 127. Scrofula is an infection of the lymph nodes causing swelling in the neck. It was probably caused by tuberculosis.
[106] Ibid., p. 550.
[107] *Limerick Chronicle,* 11 June 1863.

offered for the relief work was 6d per day.[108] Occasional strikes broke out involving labourers. Corporation carters struck after the corporation cut their wages. The council responded by sacking all the workers.[109]

During 1865 the situation continued to deteriorate. The Board of Guardians forced young girls in the workhouse into employment as servants, with the Poor Law Union paying for their upkeep,[110] and dozens of labourers were expelled from the workhouse in June.[111] Large numbers were emigrating, 500 people left the city in one week alone in April.[112]

The Catholic church was openly hostile to Fenians, resulting in open criticism of the clergy that occasionally broke out into violence. In March 1865 two priests were attacked at a meeting in Kilcornan, pelted with stones and then badly beaten. Further attacks on priests occurred in late March and early April.[113] This was the backdrop for the surge in support for Fenianism in the city and county. In rural areas there was a particular enthusiasm for Fenianism among small farmers and labourers.[114] Already Fenians had targeted farmers houses for arms raids.[115]

By June 1865 the grinding poverty had led to widespread rioting and increasing numbers joined the Fenians. Rioting broke out in the city in late June that lasted several days and saw running street battles between the soldiers, supported by the militia, and the poorer classes.[116] The June rioting merged into rioting that occurred during the election in July. In particular the rioters targeted supporters of the unionist, James Spaight. However, the attacks appear to have been prompted by the role of Spaight as a magistrate and his poor treatment of labourers rather than his unionist outlook. During one riot the Committee Rooms of Spaight were attacked and banners belonging to the Congregated Trades hanging from the windows in support of Spaight were torn down and destroyed. The rioting continued throughout the election campaign with houses being ransacked and windows regularly smashed with volleys of stones.[117]

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[108] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 & 23 February 1865.
[109] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 January 1863.
[110] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 April 1865.
[111] *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 June 1865.
[112] *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 April 1865.
[113] *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 & 28 March & 1 April 1865.
[114] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, p. 465.
[115] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 May 1864.
[116] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 February 1865.
[117] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 & 15 July 1865.

In response to the rising support for Fenianism, the Catholic hierarchy in the city set up a 'county club' to manage their congregation and 'ensure the election of Roman Catholic liberals to Parliament'.[118] By September widespread arrests were taking place and trials began in West Limerick.[119] The *Chronicle* condemned Fenianism and claimed that the membership of the Fenians was 'confined chiefly to labourers, idlers and wanderers of a low degree'.[120] Fenianism was also impacting the economy. Fears of incresing violence led to a run on the Limerick banks as farmers withdrew their deposits and demanded their deposits be returned in gold.[121]

As Fenian attacks continued around County Limerick in February 1866 and the police were engaged in ongoing arrests. Many of these attacks were, like in the previous period, focused on farmers and designed to secure arms.[122] At the same time there was an increase in strike action by labourers with strikes by street sweepers, labourers at the Corcanree Embankment, quay porters and dock labourers occurring in succession.[123] By December Limerick city and county was proclaimed which allowed for widespread searches to be carried out looking for arms and information. These developments occurred against a continuing and deepening hardship being experienced by the labouring classes in the city.[124]

The Catholic hierarchy increased their condemnation of Fenianism and warned their 'flock' that membership of or support for the Fenians was a 'sin'.[125] Indeed the Catholic hierarchy was regularly praised for their opposition to Fenianism and their support for law and order. Occasionally a priest broke ranks but this was the exception rather than the rule.[126]

O'Connor suggested that revolutionary Fenianism interacted less openly with trade unions. Throughout 1866 there is no indication of the Congregated Trades in Limerick, as a body, engaging with Fenianism.[127] The fact that the Fenians were illegal would have led to the trades

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[118] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 August 1865. Priests were accused of paying people to riot during the 1868 election in Limerick. See: Gerard Moran, 'The Emergence of Popular Politics in County Limerick, 1868-1874', in Liam Irwin, and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, (eds), *Limerick: History & Society,* (Dublin, 2009), p. 463.
[119] Trials took place in Newcastle West and in Rathkeale, *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 September & 26 & 28 October 1865
[120] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 September 1865.
[121] *Limerick Chronicle,* 10 October 1865.
[122] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8, 20 & 22 February 1866.
[123] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 May 1866 & 7 August 1866.
[124] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 & 11 December 1866.
[125] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 December 1866.
[126] *House of Lords Debates, 12 July 1869,* (Hansard, vol 197 cc1595-661) & *18 March 1869,* (Hansard, 194 cc1618-52). In 1869, Fr. Sheehan whipped up a frenzy at a meeting in Limerick organised to raise funds for convicted Fenians by claiming that, even though he was not a Fenian, he would be regarded as a Fenian because he supported Ireland for the Irish if 'we are able to govern ourselves as a people', and then suggested that this was the feeling of the vast majority of the Catholic clergy.
[127] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 63.

publicly distancing themselves from the movement. Their sole focus appears to have been directed at attempting to get the city's establishment to settle a 10 week long strike by tailors in the city.[128] The Congregated Trades did parade as usual for the inauguration of the new mayor. However, the Tailors Society refused to participate as a result of the fallout from their dispute.[129]

O'Connor asserted that trade unions did not display the same revolutionary fervour in 1867 as they did in 1848. He stated that workers were no longer so aggressively class conscious or as brutalised by social conditions, their unions were becoming more conscious of distinct organisational interests, separate from politics, and were being drawn into the values of social consensus and moderation.[130] This poses an important question. Is class consciousness determined by how brutal the social conditions are for working class people? Certainly the conservative nature of the Congregated Trades would support the view outlined by O'Connor, but there is little evidence in Limerick that this carried through to the mass of the working class. Engels rasied the issue of the 'embourgeoisiement' of sections of the British working class in the context of Britain's exceptional economic position in the nineteenth century. Only because of this national economic supremacy was it possible for a section of the British working class to enjoy living standards which were such as to encourage their bourgeois aspirations.[131]

In the local economy of Limerick artisans had the realistic prospect of moving from being an employee to the status of employer. However, this was only a realistic prospect for a small number of artisans. Unlike Britain, the embourgeoisiement of the Limerick working class could be regarded as remote. The related issue of class consciousness and the impact of economic crisis on industrial struggle was addressed by Trotsky, who explained that ecomonic collapse can have a demoralising and devitalising impact on the working class. It was the transition period from boom to slump, depending on the pace of decline, that can lead the working class to act in defence of living stanrds, or the transition from slump to economic growth that can reinvigorate the working class and lead to an upsurge in industrial struggle.[132]

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[128] *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 April 1866 & 5 & 19 May 1866.
[129] *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 January 1867.
[130] O'Connor, p. 79.
[131] John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer & Jennifer Platt, 'The Affluent Workers and the Theory of Embourgeoisiement: Some Preliminary Research Findings', *Sociology*, Volume 1, Number 1 (January 1967), p. 12.
[132] Leon Trotsky, 'The interaction between booms, slumps and strikes', *The First Five Years of the Communist International, Volume 1*, (London, 1973), pp. 259–63.

Cronin in discussing Cork contended that while there was active support for the Fenians it was never as enthusiastic as during O'Connell's Repeal Campaign.[133] This was also the case in Limerick. However, there was a distinctly different character between O'Connell's Repeal Movement and Fenianism in Limerick city and county. The Repeal Movement was dominated by the wealthy Catholic merchant class and received the active support of the Congregated Trades who viewed the Act of Union at the primary reason for the decline of the trades in the city and the subsequent reduction in employment for tradesmen. The labouring classes played a peripheral role in being mobilised for the monster meetings but had no influence in the direction of Repeal. In contrast, the urban and rural labouring classes took an active role in the Fenians. Despite individual tradesmen being active, the Congregated Trades, as a body, played a much smaller role in the rise of Fenianism in Limerick.

In considering the Fenian movement in Limerick, Ó Concubhair does not discuss the social composition of the Fenians. However, his list of Fenian suspects and those committed to trial give a clear indication of the social base of Fenianism in Limerick. Of the 196 suspects, 64 were listed as tradesmen of various descriptions, 43 as labourers, 25 as clerks, shop assitants, servants or other similar employments, nine as farmers and 26 as farmers sons. The suspects were predominantly from areas outside Limerick city.[134]

One other notable feature was the age-profile of those involved. Keane listed Fenian activists from the Crown Solicitor's brief. Details of the 24 men charged with a Fenian attack in Ardagh on 5 March 1867 are outlined below - 16 of the 24 were aged 22 or under:

Table 8 – Age profile of Fenians arrested after an attack in Ardagh in 1867

Age	Number
17	2
18	7
19	2
20	1
21	2
22	2

[133] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 108.
[134] Pádraig Ó Concubhair, *The Fenians were Dreadful Men: The 1867 Rising,* (Cork 2011), pp. 218-244. For a full breakdown of the occupations of the listed Fenian suspects see Appendix VI.

Source: Edward Keane, 'Active Fenians in Co. Limerick as listed in the Crown Solicitor's brief', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 10, Number 2, (1967), pp. 169-170.

There was a similar age profile for those charged with the Fenian attack in Kilmallock on the same day, where 40 men were arrested and charged. The youngest was John O'Dwyer, was aged fifteen. Of the 40 charged, 33 were aged 25 or under.[135]

Table 9 – Age profile of Fenians arrested after an attack in Kilmallock in 1867

Age	Number
15	1
16	0
17	1
18	2
19	8
20	5
21	2
22	5
23	3
24	2
25	4

Source: Edward Keane, 'Active Fenians in Co. Limerick as listed in the Crown Solicitor's brief', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 10, Number 2, (1967), p. 171.

In December 1867 a large demonstration took place in Limerick in rememberence of the Manchester Martyrs. Out of an estimated crowd of 3,000, one third were considered as being from the city. Police identified 437 individuals and listed their names, addresses and occupations. Out of this number the police indicated that there were 34 known Fenians in their ranks. The list shows that the demonstraters from the city were predominatently tradesmen with clerks and drapers' assistants also represented.[136]

[135] Edward Keane, 'Active Fenians in Co. Limerick as listed in the Crown Solicitor's brief', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 10, Number 2, (1967), pp. 169-171.
[136] Breandán Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the Martyrs, A Study of a Demonstration in Limerick City, 8.12.1867', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 22, (Christmas 1987) pp. 29-44. For a breakdown of the trades listed in attendance at the protest see Appendix VII.

Fenian assaults began in Limerick in March 1867 with attacks in Kilmallock, Cappamore, Kilteely and Ardagh. A further attack occurred on 5 April on Ardagh barracks. The attacks led to widespread arrests. Fenian defendants before the Limerick Quarter Sessions were condemned for involving 'foolish young men and boys, servants, who had been misled and duped by those miscreants, who have gone about the country, and who were induced or coerced by persuasion, or force to join the Fenian conspiracy'.[137]

An underlying current of discontent continued throughout the rest of the year, coming to a head in October. A labourer from Pennywell named Kelly, who had been jailed as a Fenian, died as a result of his incarceration. His funeral attracted an attendance of more than 2,000, mostly members of the labouring classes.[138] A major demonstration followed a few weeks later in support of the Manchester Martyrs, again with the poorer classes the most prominent. The Congregated Trades responded to these developments through the Mechanics Institute by asking Bishop Butler to order the clergy to have 'an office and high mass' celebrated in St. John's Cathedral for the Manchester Martyrs.[139]

In an attempt to deflect the prevailaing sentiments, the Catholic hierarchy organised a meeting in the George Hotel to establish a 'New Repeal Movement', however, their initiative gained little traction. The Unionist establishment also responded to the threat of Fenianism by organising a branch of the Protestant Defence Association in the city.[140] However, the influence of Fenianism declined as the working classes returned their focus to addressing issues such as jobs, wages and working conditions with a series of strikes breaking out during 1868.

The Trades and the Archconfraternity of the Holy Family

The Redemptorists[141] established the Archconfraternity of the Holy Family in late December 1867 invoking images of religious domination by Britain to tap into the anti-British mood in the aftermath of the Fenian rebellion. They declared that they were standing up to the 'ruthless

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[137] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 March & 6 & 11 April 1867. For a detailed description of the Fenian attack in Kilmallock see, Mainchín Seoighe, 'The Fenian Attack on Kilmallock Police Barracks', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal,* Volume 10, Number 2, (1967), pp. 157-168.
[138] *Limerick Chronicle,* 8 October 1867.
[139] *Limerick Chronicle,* 7 & 17 December 1867.
[140] *Limerick Chronicle,* 21 January & 29 February 1868.
[141] The Redemptorists, officially known as the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, are a society of missionary priests founded in Italy in 1732. The arrival of the Redemptorists in Ireland dates from 1843, when an English province of the society was established incorporating Ireland as part of its remit. The Irish province was established in 1898. See; J. Wuest, 'Redemptorists'. *The Catholic Encyclopaedia,* (New York, 1911) [Available at: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12683a.htm], (Accessed on 22 March 2020).

hand of the Puritan' from times past to generate support.[142] Following its establishment the confraternity reached a membership of 4,200 by 1880.[143]

Religious imagery was the order of the day and the Redemptorists took every opportunity to display the religious devotion of the populace. When the Drapers' Assistants collected £27 to purchase a memorial for the Redemptorist mission it was used to purchase a large bronze crucifix with the inscription 'This Crucifix was presented by the Drapers' Assistants, as a memorial of the mission to men preached in this church, January 1868'.[144] The mass display of banners, marching bands, religious symbols with marching men and boys at specific events cemented the confraternity within the public sphere of the city. These displays of evangelical devotion showed that they controlled the public space, a space which the hierarchy considered to be Catholic.[145]

The confraternity was organised along military lines. There were 50 sections and each section contained about 30 members. Each section had a Prefect and Sub-Prefect appointed to manage the men in their section. In 1891 following a request from Bishop O'Dwyer, who wished to see something done for the 'working boys of the city', a Boys Division was formed.[146]

Attendances at confraternity events were compulsory, excuses were checked and recorded. Social pressure was exerted to boost attendance.[147] All members were expected to receive Holy Communion at least once a month with the Prefect of each section marking their attendance. Failure to receive communion for more than three months meant exclusion from the confraternity.

The confraternity was controlled by the Spiritual Director who was appointed by the Provincial of the Redemptorists in Ireland. Apart from preparing and delivering his sermons, he was obliged to visit the sick, both those at home and in hospital. However, in terms of control, the most important role of the Spiritual Director was to visit those who were 'backsliders' whose attendance was considered 'unsatisfactory'.

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[142] *Golden Jubilee of the Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family,* Pastoral Letters, p. 3.
[143] Ibid., p. 1.
[144] Mount Saint Alphonsus Monastery, *Fifty years at Mount Saint Alphonsus, Limerick, 1853-1903,* (Limerick, 1903), p. 50.
[145] Thomas Keane, *Class, Religion and Society in Limerick City, 1922-1939,* PhD Thesis, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick (2015), p. 143.
[146] Keane, *Class, Religion and Society in Limerick City, 1922-1939,* p. 142.
[147] Sean Spellissy, *Limerick: The Rich Land,* (Ennis, 1989), p. 56.

The spiritual director also provided letters of recommendation for those looking for a job and, given the ongoing levels of unemployment in the city, this gave the director enormous influence over working class people to compel them to participate in the activities of the confraternity.

Many of the men also went to the director for confession thereby giving him an intimate knowledge of their private as well as their public lives. The appointment of prefects was the sole reserve of the Director facilitating the appointment of those who would exercise his demands without question. With military precision these men were picked and trained.

Expulsion from the confraternity was a weapon which the director as 'the knife with which the withered branches are cut away'. This weapon according to a former director was so useful that 'the more he cut away from the confraternity, the more it grew and prospered'. Given the control exercised by the director over all aspects of the lives of confraternity members, expulsion was used to drive the remaining members to even more religious zeal. Expulsion from the confraternity was 'regarded in the light of a curse by the great body of men' and the men were expected to believe that those who were expelled 'came to no good end'.

The director of the confraternity also took action against the 'evils' of striking workers and was regarded as instrumental in solving industrial problems mainly due to his influence over members of the confraternity.[148]

Nationalism and Labour

The International Working Mens Association was an international organisation established to bring together a variety of left-wing socialist and communist organisations. It was commonly known as the First International and Karl Marx played a prominent role in the body.[149] The first branches of International Working Men's Association (IWMA) in Ireland in 1871. At a meeting in Belfast on 30 June 1872 it was claimed that the IWMA in Belfast had 753 members and asserted that in Cork, Derry, Dublin and Limerick the International was in a thriving condition.[150] However, there is no concrete evidence that any branch of the IWMA was established in Limerick. In April 1872 John McDonnell, the Irish representative on the General

[148] Keane, *Class, Religion and Society in Limerick City, 1922-1939,* p. 145.
[149] See: Sean Daly, *Ireland and the First International,* (Cork, 1984).
[150] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 89.

Council of the IWMA, received offers from a man named McCarthy from Ennis to form branches of the IWMA in Limerick and Ennis.[151] A report in the *Freeman's Journal* states that plans for the formation of the branch in Limerick had been postponed because of hostility of prominent nationalists to the establishment of the IWMA in the country.[152] Daly stated that nothing came of the plans to establish the Limerick branch and there is no evidence to suggest otherwise.[153]

Cronin asserted that by 1872 the Trades of Cork were closely identified with the underground republican movement, outlining that within two years of its establishment, the Mechanics' Hall had become almost totally identified with Fenianism.[154] The same could not be said about Limerick. The Congregated Trades became recognisably identified with Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Movement following Butt's election as MP for Limerick in 1871.[155] McGrath claimed that Butt's election committee was dominated by the Irish Working Men's Assication,[156] but both Hoppen, Moran and Cahir demonstrated that Butt had been elected unopposed, thanks in large part to lobbying by the Limerick Farmers Club who were disgruntled by the measures introduced by Glandstone's Land Act 1870.[157] Boyle outlined that the Trades were never hesitant about taking part in parades supporting Butt and Home Rule.[158] McCaffrey asserted that Butt's attitude was that Irish Catholics, influenced by their church to reject radical democratic ideologies, under normal circumstance would follow a conservative leadership.[159]

This conservative undercurrent was evident among the Trades apart from occasional episodes that caused a breakdown in the nexus between the Trades, the Catholic hierarchy and the Home Rulers. The local clergy had initially opposed Butt's candidacy for Parliament[160] only to swing around to support the Home Rule Movement when Butt endorsed the demand for an endowed

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[151] Daly, *Ireland and the First International*, p. 103.
[152] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 87.
[153] Daly, p. 103
[154] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 109-110.
[155] For more information on the election of Isaac Butt in the 1871 by-election in Limerick see: Brendan Cahir, 'Isaac Butt and the Limerick By-election of 1871', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Volume 10, Number 1, (1966), pp. 56-66. Butt was re-elected in 1874, for information on the 1874 election see: Edward P. O'Callaghan, 'Fr. Edward Thomas O'Dwyer and the General Election of 1874', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Volume 21, (1979), pp. 31-38.
[156] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 229. Butt had established the Irish Working Men's Association in 1869. See: Daly, *Ireland and the First International*, p. 13.
[157] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1855*, p. 469, Moran, 'The Emergence of Popular Politics in County Limerick, 1868-1874', p. 466 and Cahir, p. 58.
[158] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 64 & *History of the Boherbouy Band* [Available online at: http://www.boherbuoyband.com/#!history] (Accessed on 5/1/2016).
[159] Lawrence J. McCaffrey, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Movement: A Study in Conservative Nationalism', *The Review in Politics*, Volume 22, Number 1 (January 1960), p. 79.
[160] Ibid., p. 82.

Catholic University.[161] As had been the case over the previous two decades, the Congregated Trades were very much on the periphery in terms of influence among the Home Rulers throughout the 1870s.

During the 1880's Fenianism in Limerick became readily identified with John Daly, a maverick Fenian who was noted for provoking controversy. Daly was from Pennywell, the son of a semi-skilled timber yard worker. Tradition has it that Daly was an active participant in the Fenian Rising, after which he was forced to flee to the USA, but there is no evidence that he actually took part in any of the Fenian actions in County Limerick.[162] When Daly returned he developed a group of supporters around him by engaging in confrontational agitation. In 1876 the Congregated Trades, in conjunction with other conservative nationalist forces, organised a Tenants Rights meeting in Limerick to be addressed by Isaac Butt. Daly and his supporters stormed the platform objecting to the meeting because the issue of amnesty for republican prisoners was not on the agenda. A full-scale riot ensued with Daly's supporters actively fermenting it. Daly and his brother Edward were later tried for their part in the riot.[163] The Trades looked with disdain on the antics of Daly, regarding him as a disruption to the consensus.

The Congregated Trades did have success on some issues. For example, in 1879 they launched a public campaign to force the Corporation to reverse a decision to withdraw a yearly grant of £400 to Barrington's Hospital. The Trades attacked the council for representing the interests of the rate payers while ignoring the interests of the working classes. On 8 February thousands demonstrated in the city behind the banners and bands of the Congregated Trades demanding the Corporation support Barrington's and the demonstration turned into a celebration as the Corporation caved into to public pressure to reverse its decision.[164]

However, the euphoria within the Trades following the success around Barrington's was short-lived. In April John Godsell, the President of the Congregated Trades, announced that the Trades were unanimous in their opposition to the Sunday Closing Bill. This led to a deep split within the Congregated Trades with the Bakers, Masons, Stonecutters, Boatmakers, Tailors, Millers and possibly others, declaring they would demonstrate in support of Sunday closing.

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[161] McCaffrey, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Movement: A Study in Conservative Nationalism', p. 76.
[162] Robert Herbert, 'The Fenian Movement in Co. Limerick', *Limerick Leader,* 25 June 1949.
[163] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 July 1876.
[164] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 January & 1 & 8 February 1879. For more information on the threatened closure of Barrington's Hospital in 1879 see: Richard Ahern, 'When Hospital Closure Threatened, 1879', *The Old Limerick Journal, Barrington's Edition,* Volume 24, (Winter 1988), pp. 74-79.

The local Vintners asked the Trades not to participate in the demonstration and after a rancorous meeting the Trades voted to remain neutral on the issue. The result was a demonstration based around the local Temperance Society and promoted by the Catholic hierarchy.[165]

Parnellism

O'Connor asserted that there was a renewed labour endorsement of nationalist politics in the 1880s.[166] Cronin contended that by the 1880s, the organised artisans of both Cork and Limerick saw themselves as a distinct politico-economic group, the mainstay of local Parnellism. This sense of superiority, however, far from acting as a unifying element in local popular politics, actually brought unionised artisans into conflict with other Parnellite elements.[167] Murphy argued that the Cork Trades had an inflated sense of their own dignity insisting on their right to a prominent role in all public events in support of Parnell.[168] While the Trades of Limerick would certainly have seen themselves as a 'distinct politico-economic group', their impact on the nationalist movement, despite their best efforts, was largely peripheral during the period. While they did occasionally come into conflict with other Parnellite elements, they were unable to exercise any influence in these disputes. The fact that the Congregated Trades was not a regularly functioning and coherently organised body would partly explain this lack of influence and impact, but their willingness to tail the nationalist movement of the period without exercising any independent voice undoubtedly also contributed to their peripheral role.

Just as they had been enthusiastic in their support for Isaac Butt, the Trades also rowed in behind Parnell's movement. John Godsell represented the trades on the Parnell Reception Committee in October 1880. The Trades took part in a major demonstration in support of Parnell that was initiated by Irish National Land League but that was quickly taken over by the local Catholic hierarchy. The order of the demonstration outlined the position of the various social classes. Local priests led the demonstration, later chairing the meeting. The clergy were followed, in order, by prominent local nationalists, thousands of farmers, then the labourers' societies. Tailing the demonstration were the Congregated Trades with their banners and bands.[169] Murphy raised the issue of whether the participation of the Trades in demonstrations was a

[165] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 & 22 April 1879.
[166] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 63.
[167] Maura Cronin, 'Parnellism and Workers: The Experience of Cork and Limerick', in Fintan Lane and Donal O'Driscoll (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945,* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 143.
[168] Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork Trades 1860-1900', p. 30.
[169] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 October & 16 November 1880.

signal of their commitment to nationalism or was it because of the excitement and colour of the event.[170] In the Limerick context, the same issue might legitimately be raised.

In 1881 the Congregated Trades initiated a demonstration against the Coercion Bill. While the Trades comprised the main part of the demonstration, the Catholic hierarchy dominated the proceeding, controlling the speakers and what they said.[171] The willingness of the Congregated Trades to submit itself to the nationalist movement was again demonstrated in 1883 when the Trades committed to full support for Parnell's National League.[172] For the remainder of the decade the Congregated Trades had little or no influence on political developments in the city. Apart from occasional public statements the Trades were ineffective in their political involvement and even in taking any action in support of workers. Only on two occasions did the Congregated Trades actively intervene in industrial disputes.

In November 1884 the Trades called for workers to boycott a bakery belonging to Sir John Arnott that was strikebound by the local Bakers Society.[173] The only other occasion that the Congregated Trades intervened in an industrial dispute at this time was in 1889 when they organised a demonstration of 500 people in support of striking carpenters and against John Hayes Contractors. Subsequently the Trades allowed the local clergy to arbitrate in the dispute.[174]

The lack of activity from the Congregated Trades, in both politics and on the industrial front, suggests that the Trades did not function in any kind of a regular or consistent fashion. However, this was to change in November 1889 when a branch of the Amnesty Association was established in Limerick.

Politics and the Congregated Trades 1889-1900

The Limerick Amnesty Association was formed in 1889[175] and from the start the Congregated Trades took an active part in the movement. The fact that the Amnesty campaign was legal facilitated this involvement. The amnesty campaign had a particular local focus on the

[170] Murphy, 'Fenianism, Parnellism and the Cork Trades 1860-1900', p. 32.
[171] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 March 1881.
[172] *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 May 1883.
[173] *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 November 1884.
[174] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 November 1884.
[175] Timothy Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism 1898-1918: Change and Continuity*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2010), p. 30 & M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916*, (Suffolk, 2006), p. 78

imprisonment of prominent Limerick Fenian, John Daly. Despite their earlier hostility to Daly, the Trades enthusiastically participated in the Association. Daly had been arrested in Britain on charges of possessing explosives and was sentenced to life imprisonment. His antipathy towards constitutional nationalism angered the nationalist establishment in the city who attempted to isolate him within nationalist circles.

John Daly also antagonised many leading Fenians. O'Donovan Rossa came to detest Daly and used the *United Irishman* newspaper to attack him . Demanding an apology Daly challenged O'Donovan Rossa to a duel which the leading Fenian agreed to. The duel was arranged for New Jersey on 11 January 1884 but Daly left for England shortly before that date leaving O'Donovan Rossa standing in a field near Fort Lee waiting for him.[176]

The antagonism towards Daly displayed by the nationalist establishment in Limerick coupled with the focus of the amnesty campaign being around the release of Daly from prison meant that the constitutional nationalists refused to participate in the Amnesty Association. This left the field open for the Congregated Trades to play a central role in the campaign. Furthermore, the participation of the Trades in the amnesty campaign drew the leading figures of the Trades closer to Fenianism. This was a major development as the Congregated Trades had traditionally supported conservative constitutional nationalist politics.

At this stage it appears that the Congregated Trades was not a functioning body but the 'officers', to portray a semblance of authority, used the title. In March 1890 there was a major demonstration calling for Daly's release from prison led by the Pork Butchers Society and followed by other trades.[177] At the time the pork butchers were involved in a major and long running strike with the bacon factory owners, a strike that encompassed the bacon industry in Limerick, Cork and Waterford.[178]

McGrath claimed that the unions of the 1890s were, to some extent, the same bodies as the guilds of the previous century.[179] While the craft unions may have demonstrated a conservativeness and a willingness to play a subordinate role to the nationalist establishment in the city, it is clear that they bore no relation to the trade guilds of the eighteenth century which

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[176] Shane Kenna, *Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa: Unrepentant Fenian,* (Kildare, 2015) p. 194-195.
[177] *Limerick Chronicle*, 18 March 1890.
[178] See p. 206.
[179] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 45.

were dominated by Protestant master tradesmen. The trade guilds had undergone a major transformation as a result of the industrial struggles of 1810-1825, the introduction of the Combination Act, 1825, and the changing economic environment in both the pre- and the post-famine period. McGrath made a futher claim that, post-1825, the Congregated trades were peaceful and respectable.[180] However, the evidence clearly demonstrated that industrial disputes involving the trades did involve violence and that members of the trades were also involved in violence during election campaigns.

Reorganisation of the Congregated Trades appears to have started at then end of 1892 or very early in 1893. The new body was formally launched in October 1893 with the establishment of the Limerick United Trades and Labour League and became known as the Trades Council. The meeting called on 'the workingmen of Limerick to unite under the United Trades and Labour League and encourage any effort that would give employment, urging the citizens of the great necessity of giving their work to those firms who employ the regular tradesmen'.[181] At the same time a General Labourers Union was established in the city.[182] Though there is no direct evidence to confirm it, the likelihood is that the emergence of unions of semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the city prompted the craft unions to initiate the new Trades Council. Their objective would have been to control the development of these new unions, and ensure that they set the agenda for labour in the city.

The *Board of Trade Reports* indicated membership of Limerick Trades Council as follows:

Table 10 – Membership of the Limerick Trades Council 1894-1898

Year	Number of affiliated trade unions	Total membership of affiliated trade unions
1894	19	1,112
1895	20	1,700[183]
1896	18	1,277
1897	12	940
1898	10	850

[180] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 113.
[181] *Freemans Journal,* 14 October 1893.
[182] In July 1891 a delegate from the Limerick General Labourers Union attended a national conference of labour unions in Dublin. *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 July 1891. In 1898 a Limerick Building Labourers Union is recorded as having 250 members. See: *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, p. 12-13.
[183] Report indicates that these numbers are an estimate.

Source: *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Eight report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1894 and 1895; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1896, (C.8232), xciii.277, p. 420, *Statistics of trade unions. Board of Trade, Labour Department of Trade, Labour Department. Ninth report by the chief labour correspondent on trade unions, 1896; with statistical tables.* Command Papers, 1897, (C.8644), xcix.275, pp. 250-251, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1897. With comparative statistics for 1892-1896,* Command Papers, 1898, (C.9013), ciii.107, p. 251, *Trade unions. Board of Trade (Labour Department). Report by the chief labour correspondent of the Board of Trade on trade unions 1898. With comparative statistics for 1892-1897,* Command Papers, 1899, (C.9443), xcii.493, p. 205.

The 1899 report stated that the Trades Council had been dissolved.[184]

At a meeting of the Trades Council in February 1894 it was stated that the Trades Council had been in existence a little over a year and 'had 2000 members already'.[185] The growth of the Trades Council coincided with a new strike wave that had begun to hit the city. The Trades Council was now actively recruiting workers and attempting to organise workplaces.[186] In May the *Chronicle* expressed concern about the growing independence of the working classes and carried an article attacking the formation of the Independent Labour Party in Britain and warning the Limerick working classes not to cause division in the city.[187] Again, this was likely a reflection of the unionisation of general labour in the city. The local establishment would have been expressing concern about the potential for labour acting independently in the political sphere, something that was to move towards fruition over the following years.

In part, these new developments were being prompted by an increase in poverty in the city. Within St. John's Parish there were a total of 1,494 families, totalling 7,370 people, and out of this number, 1,094 families were in need of relief. The *Chronicle* criticised the wealthy families for not offering enough subscriptions to charities and warned that if they did not become more proactive it could cause confrontation between the classes.[188]

Throughout 1894 a series of large demonstrations took place calling for the release of John Daly from prison.[189] The pressure of the Amnesty Association mounted on the nationalist establishment who were growing increasingly concerned at developments and the prominent role the working classes were taking in this movement. In an effort to cut across these developments the local National League branch proposed Daly as the nationalist parliamentary

[184] Command Papers, 1900, (Cd.442), lxxxiii.601, p. 217.
[185] *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 February 1894.
[186] In July 1894 the Trades Council held a meeting for the workers in the mineral water stores in the city to organise a union in their workplaces. *Limerick Chronicle*, 31 July 1894.
[187] *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 May 1894.
[188] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 January 1894.
[189] The largest meeting took place on 6 April at the O'Connell Monument. *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 April 1894.

candidate in Limerick. The Trades Council took up this proposal with enthusiasm and began to campaign for Daly's nomination.[190]

Initially the anti-Parnellites opposed the nomination claiming that it would not be appropriate to nominate a 'convicted felon' because he would not be allowed to retain his seat. They put forward their own candidate, the city's incumbent MP, Francis O'Keeffe. However, a row broke out among the anti-Parnellites over election expenses resulting in the withdrawal of O'Keeffe's nomination. The two nationalist factions papered over their divisions and marched on pro-Daly demonstrations in the city. Daly was elected unopposed to the British parliament but removed a month later. The subsequent by-election tore any semblance of unity between the factions apart as both nominated their own candidates. The election resulted in a major schism within nationalism in the city with allegations and rancour being hurled from both sides.[191]

John Daly and Limerick Trades Council

In the meantime the Trades Council continued their efforts within the Amnesty Association to secure Daly's release.[192] John Daly was eventually released from prison on 20 August 1896 after serving over 12 years and immediately threw himself into local politics in the city.[193] The release of Daly led to a flurry of political activity. Without a support base within the nationalist movement in the city, Daly courted the Trades Council. His anti-establishment approach and his maverick nature won him support from the city's working classes. Daly engaged in widespread manipulation to ensure his personal supporters were in a position to wield greater influence within the Trades Council. During a strike by Corporation street sweepers and carters Daly addressed a large demonstration at the Mechanics Institute, making a speech in support of the strikers and then leading a demonstration through the city headed by four pipe bands. John Redmond was in Limerick to address a meeting and local nationalists promoted him as a mediator in the strike in an attempt to undermine Daly. The nationalist meeting ended in chaos as fighting broke out among the various factions.[194]

Hoppen asserted that after Parnell's death nationalist politics degeneraged into localised squabbling and led to increased clerical influence in politics.[195] As has been demonstrated, in

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[190] *Limerick Chronicle*, 1 May & 14 July 1894.
[191] Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism 1898-1918: Change and Continuity*, p. 14-16.
[192] Helen Litton. *Edward Daly: 16 Lives*, (Dublin, 2013), p. 31.
[193] Moloney, p. 29.
[194] *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 & 17 May 1897.
[195] K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*, (New York, 1989), p. 129.

Limerick this squabbling was common, however, the emergence of Daly as an anti-establishment figure undermined the power of the clergy to exert political influence.

Daly engaged in populist rhetoric to mobilise working class support for his candidacy for the local council. In August 1897 he was nominated as a candidate for the Irishtown Ward but was ruled ineligible, as his name was not listed on the Burgess Roll. Subsequently, a prominent Fenian and supporter of Daly, William Whelan, was nominated to stand with the stated intent that he would resign in favour of Daly when Daly became eligible. Thomas Dillon, a candidate for the Ratepayers Association, defeated Whelan by 25 votes to 19. A large working class crowd assembled and after the count the crowd paraded through the city behind a pipe band.[196]

More consternation occurred in September when the Sarsfield branch of the National League nominated Michael Donnelly for mayor. The meetings of the '98 Centenary Committee become fractious and several splits occured. A local councillor, Denis Nelson, claimed that the '98 Centenary Committee was 'not a *bona fide* committee but purely a John Daly Election Committee'.[197] Daly orchestrated a split from the National League which led to the formation of the Independent League. At this stage there were four, possibly five, different organisations in the city claiming the mantle of Irish nationalism.

Regular demonstrations took place, almost exclusively populated by working class people, against the city's establishment and focussed around their attempts to prevent Daly being nominated for the city council. In an effort to quell the demonstrations the Mayor attempted to ban bands parading in the city after six o'clock in the evening. In response Daly organised a demonstration in defiance of the mayor.

The National League attempted to regain some influence among the Trades, asking them to reconsider their support for Daly and consider what Donnelly 'has done in the cause of Trade Unionism'. The appeal caused disagreement on the Trades Council which voted by seven votes to five to withdraw its support for Daly and remain neutral in the mayoral election. Daly was

[196] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10, 17 & 19 August 1897.
[197] Moloney, *Limerick Constitutional Nationalism 1898-1918: Change and Continuity*, p. 34.

ultimately ruled out as a candidate after being struck off the Burgess Roll for failing the residency rule.[198] Shortly after this John Daly left for America on a fundraising tour.[199]

Preparing the Labour Challenge

During 1898 there was a series of strikes in the city that deepened divisions between the nationalists and the working classes. In particular a bitter strike by tailors that lasted several months caused considerable conflict. The employers made repeated attempts to recruit scabs, including one particular attempt to recruit members of the Manchester Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers Trade Union. The advance was rebuked with the secretary, Maurice Zeitlin, who publicised the efforts by the employers and lead a major campaign against the recruitment of scabs in England. Repeated demonstrations and rioting took place as groups of scabs arrived from London to try and break the tailors strike.[200] As the year drew to a close the anti-establishment populist rhetoric of Daly was getting a significant echo among the city's working class. The prospect of 'labour' candidates caused consternation amongst the city's establishment.

The Local Government Act 1898 democratised municipal and Poor Law administration by extending their previously restricted franchises to all householders and occupants of a portion of a house, including women, for the first time. In addition, the property qualifications for municipal councillors were abolished, thus facilitating the emergence of working-class councillors.[201] The change in the voting franchise caused a dramatic rise in the number of electors in Limerick. When the Burgess Rolls were revised, the electorate increased from 709 to 5,521 voters.[202]

For the first time many among the working class received the right to vote in local elections. This led to a realistic prospect of labour candidates winning seats on the Corporation. In the run-up to the election the *Limerick Leader* became the cheerleader for Daly and the labour

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[198] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 September & 5, 9 & 26 October 1897. To be eligible for the Burgess Roll you had to be resident for one year in the city. Daly was struck off after it was claimed he had only been resident in Limerick for fifty weeks following his release from prison.
[199] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 December 1897. When Daly returned, he used some of the money to open a business.
[200] *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 October, 27 October 1898 & 29 October 1898, *Freemans Journal*, 31 October 1898, *Nenagh Guardian,* 29 October 1898.
[201] Matthew Potter, The Rise and Fall of Local Democracy, *History Ireland,* Volume 19, Issue 2, (March/April 2011), p. 42.
[202] *Limerick Chronicle,* 20 December 1898.

challenge. The paper openly promoted the labour candidates and called for the working classes to elect them.[203]

In September a meeting took place in the Mechanics' Institute to establish a committee to organise the labour vote. It was agreed that a committee of 11 would be elected with representatives from the Trades Council as well as the tailors, masons, corporation employees, painters, porkbutchers and cabinet-makers. Later that month a manifesto was issued 'to the workingmen of Limerick' that focused on organising the vote and offering help to choose candidates. Unusual for elections in the nineteenth century, there was no public appeal to businesses for election donations on the basis that the labour challenge was 'solely a workingman's movement' which would rely 'entirely' on 'the workers themselves'.[204]

A series of labour meetings took place through October and early November[205] with speeches condemning the city's establishment, and nationalist politicians in particular, as 'trying to use the workers for their own ends'. A representative of the coopers' union, James Kett, condemned the three classes who made up the outgoing council, 'the publican, the pawnbroker and the landlord', for taking money from workers.[206]

The *Chronicle* reported that a meeting of 'Labour delegates' selected 32 candidates to stand in the election. Daly stressed the independence of the labour candidates rejecting any affiliation to the various nationalist factions – Dillonites, Redmondites and Healyites. Given Daly's involvement it was not a surprise that home rule figured prominently in the election, but the labour candidates stressed the social and economic conditions facing the working classes.[207] Fenians who supported Daly coupled with leading figures on the Trades Council dominated the list of candidates. The prospect of a clear anti-establishment list of candidates being elected generated significant enthusiasm throughout the city.

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[203] Enda McKay, 'The Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 36, (Winter 1999), p. 9.
[204] *Limerick Leader*, 16 & 29 September 1898.
[205] McKay, 'The Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', p. 4.
[206] *Limerick Leader*, 14 October 1898.
[207] *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 & 24 November 1898.

Many historians, including Hoppen, have argued that the reunification of the Home Rule factions primarily came about as a result of the emergence of the United Irish League.[208] It could be argued, however, that the primary motivation for this reunification in Limerick was the threat being posed by Daly's populism and the list of labour candidates. Not only did the nationalist factions come together to fight the election, they united with unionist elements in the city to confront the labour challenge. There was widespread enthusiasm for the Labour Party running in the election. Daly led the way making radical election promises on issues like housing, opposing the abolition of the night-watch, the provision of public works to reduce unemployment etc.

Two weeks after the Labour Party candidates were announced a major meeting of the city's merchants and traders took place, along with some of the outgoing councillors. Alderman Hall said the 'the great employers of labour had been successful in trade and these were the men they wanted on the Corporation'. Some disagreement emerged when a small number of nationalists stated that all candidates representing the business interests should support home rule. The dominant attitude of those in attendance was that there are more important issues to address than home rule, namely the threat posed by the Labour Party to the political domination of the Corporation by business interests. Repeatedly it was stated that 'politics' should not enter into the selection of merchant candidates. Mr Goodbody argued that the meeting needed to select candidates based on representing merchants, traders and rate payers to avoid a three-cornered fight between unionist, nationalist and labour. Alderman Hall proposed selecting two candidates for each ward with the objective of getting both elected. The Mayor, Michael Cusack, stated that this was the beginning of a 'new era' with those 'of wealth and high ability' taking part in the administration.

The merchant candidates attempted to downplay the conflict between them and labour repeatedly stating they have 'no spirit of antagonism or hostility against labour candidates' and they supported the 'reasonable representation of the working class'. The Board of Guardians had a long discussion about the need for unity between the two factions of the Nationalist Party. Alderman O'Mara said that all nationalists should be fighting a common enemy. O'Mara did not outline who the 'common enemy' of the nationalists was.

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[208] Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*, (New York, 1989), p. 130, F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, (Suffolk, 1979), p. 260, Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p. 427, Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918*, (Dublin, 1984), p. 122.

In response the labour candidates reacted with hostility, with John O'Brien, a labourer standing in the Abbey Ward, calling the merchants hypocrites and claiming that 'the large employers of the city were dragged together to hold secret conclave to intimidate the working man'. O'Brien stressed the point that 'it was the first time in 700 years that the working class had got the privilege of citizenship'.[209] A month before the election the RIC were predicting that the labour candidates would win 15 of the 40 seats on the council.[210]

The Municipal Elections 1899

It was not only in Limerick that significant numbers of labour candidates were nominated. The *Chronicle* reported that the workingmen of Ennis meet in the Workmen's Room and selected three labour candidates for each ward for the Urban Council.[211] Another report spoke about the Election campaign in Kilrush predominantly between labour candidates on one side and candidates nominated by the local parish priest, Fr Malone and the merchants on the other.[212]

Looking at a wider context, Boyle pointed out that, at the second congress of the Irish Trade Union Congress, its president, J. H. Jolley, argued that 'The congress as such is of no party in politics'. This non-political approach was to be maintained for several years with notions of protectionism based around the nationalist movement dominating with all except the Belfast delegates. Those from Belfast welcomed this non-political approach as they did not want to be part of a body that supported the nationalist movement. Direct labour representation was considered to be primarily the responsibility of the trades councils. This was despite a resulution being passed at the Cork Congress in 1895 to establish a Parliamentary Committee which would sponsor an election fund. The resolution was never implemnted.[213]

The expansion of the electoral franchise immediately resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of candidates describing themselves as labour candidates. *Boyle* noted that prior to the expansion of the franchise, those labour candidates who had been elected gave the establishment no cause for alarm.[214] The election of labour representatives in the 1899

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[209] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8, 12 & 15 December 1898 & *Limerick Leader*, 9 December 1898.
[210] McKay, 'The Limerick Municipal Elections', January 1899, p. 5.
[211] *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 December 1898.
[212] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 January 1899.
[213] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 153 & 155.
[214] Ibid., p. 166. In 1897 in Belfast six labour candidates were elected. The *Belfast Newsletter* paid tribute to them for ensuring an absence of strikes in the city.

municipal election did impact on the nationalist movement. Boyle asserted that Nationalist M.Ps were now far more sympathetic to trade union requests and meetings were more available.[215] Unfortunately, little effort was made to forge an independent class position on the local councils.

The Dublin Labour Electoral Association (LEA) selected eleven candidates and seven were elected, including three aldermen.[216] In Cork the Labour Party won nine of the 59 seats on the corporation but nationalist candidates still managed to secure seats in wards with a sizeable working class population.[217] In Waterford the labour challenge did not even manage to reach the stage of independent action. The Federated Trades and Labour Union was integrally linked to Parnellite politics in the city.[218] In Galway the local LEA selected nine candidates at a packed meeting in December 1898, three in each of the urban wards. The LEA adopted a similar programme of the labour candidates in other urban areas. Four of the nine candidates were elected out of a total of 26 councillors.[219]

O'Connor described the 1899 elections as an election that 'whisked a candyfloss of popular power', with 'Labour' recording spectacular successes only to soon bring disillusionment.[220] James Connolly made some sharper political points when he commented stating that 'All over the island the candidates of the working class swept to victory – in Dublin, in Cork, in Limerick, down to the smallest agricultural districts, practically every bona-fide labour man showed up well in the ballotting, sweeping the old political parties into confusion.' Then he went on to discuss the fallout from the election victories

> But with victory came demoralisation… instead of forming a distinct and independent party of their own in the various councils, they allied themselves to one or other of the factions of the capitalist parties, and became labour tails of the capitalist political kites.[221]

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[215] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 222.
[216] Seamus Cody, John O'Dowd, Peter Rigney, *The Parliament of Labour: 100 Years of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions,* (Dublin, 1986), p. 41.
[217] Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 242.
[218] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 97.
[219] Cunningham, *Labour in the West of Ireland: Working Life and Struggle 1890-1914,* p. 67-68.
[220] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 67.
[221] James Connolly, 'Labour and Politics in Ireland', *The Harp,* April 1910.

Housing and the Municipal Elections in Limerick

In Limerick a total of 84 candidates were nominated for 40 seats.[222] Merchants candidates were clearly pressurised to respond to the enthusiasm for the labour party. They claimed that the provision of housing as their number one priority, then economy in the expenditure of city funds, fair wages for Corporation employees, and the expansion of local businesses by sourcing materials, etc., from local merchants and traders.

The trades did agitate on issues such as housing and sanitary conditions but this normally occurred through the existing relationship that the trades had with nationalist politicians and even sometimes unionist representatives as well.[223] Most of the accommodation in the city comprised of dwellings with multiple occupancy. In 1871 there were just 92 buildings classed as fourth-class housing yet a total of 2,189 families were classed as living in fourth-class circumstances. Out of the 5,518 houses in the city, 4,073 were single occupancy dwellings. The remaining 1,445 dwellings housed 4,649 families.[224]

A *Parliamentary Report* outlined that, by 1885 the conditions for the working class in Limerick were still dire. The tenement areas had no water supply. Few of the tenements had a backyard and those that did were small. None of the tenements had a toilet and sewerage was deposited in the laneways outside the tenement buildings. Many buildings had leaking roofs and rooms without any furniture.[225] The report noted that Limerick Corporation had the authority to issue by-laws to improve conditions but had failed to do so.[226] This was hardly a surprise given that most of the members of the Corporation were tenement landlords.[227]

In 1887 the Corporation constructed 18 houses in the area around Sir Harry's Mall and a further six houses in Athlunkard Street. A total of £2,400, repayable over 40 years was borrowed from

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[222] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 January 1899.
[223] *Limerick Chronicle*, 16 August 1879. One of many examples where the Congregated Trades called a public meeting to discuss the lack of proper sanitation in the city but limited their demands to appealing to the mayor to ask Parliament to act to resolve the issue.
[224] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 599. A fourth-class dwelling was considered a one room cabin with one window, built from brick, stone or mud. Fourth-class housing comprised of all fourth-class dwellings, third class dwellings with more than one family, second-class dwellings with four or more families and first-class dwellings with six or more families. 840 families lived in tenements located in 109 buildings considered first-class houses.
[225] *Third report of Her Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the housing of the working classes Ireland,* Command Papers, 1884-85, (C.4547, C.4547-I, C.4402-iii), xxxi.187, 203, 313, p. ix, & Frank Cullen, 'The Provision of Working- and Lower-Middle-Class Housing in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature,* Volume 111C, Special Issue: Domestic life in Ireland (2011), p. 243.
[226] Command Papers, 1884-85, (C.4547, C.4547-I, C.4402-iii), xxxi.187, 203, 313, p. ix.
[227] Cathal O'Connell, *The State and Housing in Ireland: Ideology, Policy and Practice,* (New York, 2007), p. 9.

the Board of Works to pay for these schemes. This total of 24 houses built in the 1880s was a very modest one[228] and things did not improve much in the 1890s.

The Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890) enabled local authorities to directly fund and, for the first time, build new dwellings on virgin lands that had been previously undeveloped, but these schemes had little impact in the overall housing situation.[229] This gave Limerick Corporation access to highly subsidised public loans of £1,100 and £2,000 at low interest to be repaid over a sixty-year period from the Board of Works to build these schemes. [230] This enabled the construction of seven houses in Mary Street in 1894 and a further 13 houses in Nolan's Cottages in 1895.[231] Not surprisingly, the Corporation's efforts had little impact on the overall situation and Limerick Corporation built no further social housing until 1911.[232]

Private efforts were somewhat more effective. The Labouring Classes (Lodging Houses and Dwelling) Act 1866, enabled the Irish Board of Works to provide public loans to private companies at a rate of 4 per cent over 40 years. This enabled such companies to offer attractive dividends to potential investors. In 1874, the Limerick Labourers Dwelling Company was established by Fr. Edward O'Dwyer.[233] O'Dwyer, who was soon to become bishop, promoted the enterprise as an investment opportunity capable of making a profitable return. Members of the city's business elite invested in the venture that built 50 labourers houses in Watergate, [234] although the company later faced significant criticism for the poor quality of their constructions.[235]

The Cross Act of 1879 permitted local authorities to clear slum areas, and then to sell or lease these lands to third parties for the provision of housing for the working classes. Bishop O'Dwyer once again used the potential of a return on investment to persuade sections of the business class to invest in his Limerick Artisan's Dwellings Company. The intention was to clear slum areas in John Street and Nicholas Street and build houses as replacement. However,

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[228] Matthew Potter, 'Limerick Corporation and the Provision of Social Housing, 1887-2005', *History Studies,* Volume 6 (2005), p. 93. In the same decade Waterford Corporation built 42 houses, Kilkenny Urban District Council built 37, Sligo UDC 28, Wexford UDC 26, New Ross Town Council 26 and Cavan UDC 20.
[229] Jim Kemmy, 'Housing and Social Conditions: 1830-1940', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 24, (Winter 1988), p. 72 & Matthew Potter and Lorcan Byrne, 'Social Housing in Limerick', in Limerick City Council & Eileen Humphries, *Limerick Regeneration: Implementation Framework Plan,* (Limerick, 2013), p. 472.
[230] Potter, 'Limerick Corporation and the Provision of Social Housing, 1887-2005', p. 93.
[231] Potter and Byrne, 'Social Housing in Limerick', p. 472.
[232] Potter, p. 93.
[233] Potter and Byrne, p. 472.
[234] Potter, p. 92.
[235] Potter and Byrne, 'Social Housing in Limerick', p. 472.

the compensation cost for clearing the tenements was prohibitive so the houses were built in vacant lots between the tenement buildings. Limerick Corporation spent 1,500 pounds clearing sites in Nicholas Street which it then sold to the Thomond Company and the latter built 70 units of social housing there.[236] Rushe claimed that 'hundreds' of workmen were supplied 'with comfortable houses.[237] The reality is that by 1904 the company had built a total of 70 houses in the area around Bishop Street.[238] The impact made on Limerick's housing problem was very slight both by virtue of the tiny number of houses built and because the rents charged were comparatively high. The weekly rents ranged from 3 shillings to 4 shillings and 6 pence and could only be afforded by the more prosperous element in the working classes.[239] Despite the intervention of the bishop, Fraser asserted that the Catholic hierarchy preferred to deal with the moral and temperance issues relating to the labouring poor rather than concrete social issues.[240]

There is no doubt that an improvement occurred in housing in the period from 1871-1891. The reasons for this improvement are less clear. The impact of population on the condition of housing can be demonstrated from the census statistics. In the twenty-year period from 1871-1891 there was a decline of 1,359 (15.4 per cent) in the number of families in the city. At the same time there was a much smaller decline in the number of houses – a drop of 83 houses (1.5 per cent). The result of the declining population was that the number of families living in fourth-class housing dropped by more than half and the decline in the number of families living in third-class accommodation dropped by approximately one-third. The major impact of the declining population was a reduction in overcrowding which led to a raising of the standard of housing for most sections of the population in the city. Despite these developments, the housing situation was dire. Labour candidates agitated to compel landlords to keep rented houses in proper condition.

The Election Campaign

The labour candidates described their movement as non-political[241] and emphasised the necessity that the Labour Party should have a majority on the council. The *Chronicle* commented that there was little difference between the two programmes and the only issue is

[236] Potter, 'Limerick Corporation and the Provision of Social Housing, 1887-2005', p. 92.
[237] John Rushe, 'Rev. Edward O'Dwyer and the Artisan's Dwelling: The Election of 1874', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 9 (Winter, 1981), p. 11.
[238] Potter and Byrne, p. 472.
[239] Potter, p. 94.
[240] Murray Fraser, *John Bull's Other Homes: State Housing and British Policy in Ireland, 1883-1922,* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 68-69.
[241] Non-political in the sense of not taking sides in the factional dispute among nationalists.

which group of men are more capable of carrying out the programme.[242] The reality was that it was not a case of who was more 'capable' of implementing a programme but that the working classes now had an opportunity to vote for candidates that did not represent the business interests in the city. This was demonstrated by the different demands for dealing with the housing crisis. The merchants' emphasis on building new houses fell on deaf ears while the demands of labour for the maintenance of rented properties struck a chord. The working classes recognised that, despite legislation, little or nothing was done by nationalists on the Poor Law Guardians to provide housing. At the same time the burning issue for the poorest sections of society was the conditions of the tenements where they wewre forced to live.

As the election approached clerical opposition to the Labour challenge grew with the RIC reporting that Labour and the 'extreme Nationalists' were opposed by 'representatives of the merchants and large ratepayers backed up by clerical sympathy'. The Redemptorists, according to the RIC, 'cautioned a congregation of some 3,000 men to see that Daly and his followers would be left severely alone' in the election.

By election day, as a result of withdrawals there were 79 candidates, 34 of the candidates stood under the Labour banner, 27 were outgoing councillors supported by the merchants and the Ratepayers Association and the remaining candidates were catagorised as 'merchants' or 'large ratepayers'.[243]

The election result was a stunning success for the Labour Party. Labour won 24 seats on the new council. Only 11 of the 25 outgoing councillors were returned. Among those to lose their seat was the outgoing mayor Michael Cusack. Just five of the merchants' candidates were successful.[244] The *Chronicle* also claimed that several of the sitting councillors that were returned should be regarded as 'labour' candidates because their success was the result of being supported by Daly.[245]

An RIC report claimed that 21 of the elected councillors were members of the IRB with all bar six of the Labour councillors classed as IRB men. The report has to be viewed with a fair degree

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[242] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 January 1899.
[243] McKay, 'The Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', pp. 5-7.
[244] *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 January 1899 – For the election results and a list of the occupations of candidates see: Appendix VIII.
[245] *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 January 1899.

of scepticism as it clearly demonstrates a class bias. There is no doubt that many of the councillors were committed fenians but it is not possible to determine exactly how many were members of the IRB.[246]

Reaction ranged across the spectrum. Local Catholic Bishop, Edward O'Dwyer, described the Labour Corporation as 'uneducated unenlightened working men', while Scottish socialist, Keir Hardie hailed the councillors as 'harbingers of social change.[247]

The first sitting of the new council elected John Daly as mayor. The *Limerick Leader* report of the council meeting was headlined 'A PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT': First Meeting of the New Corporation, An Epoch in Limerick Municipal History'. In proposing Daly, James Kett announced that '…the working classes would now have an opportunity of showing that they were proud of every true Irishman'. Kett declared this was 'the first meeting of the democratic Corporation' and Daly was elected unopposed. Daly proposed that the corporation declare that nothing short of absolute self-government would satisfy the people. He cancelled the customary dinner following his election, instead donating £20 to improve the Mechanics Institute so that 'he could meet the electors and develop their legislative faculties without the influence of champagne and turtle soup'.[248]

The election of the Labour controlled council and of Daly as mayor created enormous expectations among the working classes in the city. Huge numbers attended council meetings in the expectation that the labour councillors would introduce policies to alleviate the plight of the poor. In particular the crowds concentrated on the issues of jobs and housing.

Almost immediately a row broke out over the nominations for High Sheriff when divisions emerged within the Labour group. The issue of the proposed amalgamation of the GS&WR and WL&WR also caused division. Daly attempted to block discussion of the amalgamation of the railways stating that he and the Labour Party had met the company and supported the amalgamation but other Labour representatives opposed the amalgamation on the grounds that it would create a monopoly.

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[246] McKay, 'The Limerick Municipal Elections, January 1899', p. 7.
[247] Potter, *The Government and People of Limerick*, p. 355.
[248] *Limerick Leader*, 23 & 24 January 1899.

Illustration No. 8 – Labour Party Group, Limerick Corporation, 1899
Source: Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum,
[http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/8400]

This division within the Labour group was to become a regular feature of the new council. Daly vacillated regularly on issues and provoked consternation among the working class supporters of the Labour council. In part this was a reflection of the fact that the Labour group was made up of trade unionists and ardent nationalists who often had competing outlooks on different issues. Furthermore, the Labour councillors isolated themselves from their support base. There was no democratic control exercised over the Labour group by the Trades Council or the working class in general and the Labour group met only among themselves to decide their approach to corporation matters, often resulting in division among the councillors and all the while ignoring the attitude of the working class. As the Labour group became increasingly divided, the merchants exploited the conflict and the working classes became increasingly frustrated.

The council lurched from crisis to crisis. The workers with the WL&WR were determined to fight the amalgamation 'tooth and nail' to protect the four hundred jobs in the Locomotive Works and stated:

> The employees of the Locomotive, Carriage and Wagon Departments of the Waterford, Limerick and Western Railway call upon the Corporation of Limerick to oppose by every means in their power the contemplated amalgamation… as we believe the amalgamation would prove disastrous to the trade of the city of Limerick at large.

Daly met representatives of the WL&WR and claimed a deal to retain the locomotive works in Limerick for 15 years has been reached with the company. The workers at the locomotive works immediately attacked the deal because Daly had not received any commitment on the number of workers to be employed. Labour councillors denied that any deal was done to withdraw opposition to the amalgamation if the Locomotive Works were guaranteed, with the clear implication that Daly was operating without any reference to the Labour group.[249] The management of the WL&WR escalated the crisis by threatening to take disciplinary action against the workers in the Locomotive Works for opposing the decision of the shareholders to the amalgamation.[250]

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[249] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 & 28 January 1899.
[250] *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 February 1899.

Meetings to discuss the amalgamation saw large-scale protests by workers. As the crowds became increasingly hostile Daly and other Labour councillors reacted with indignation. At one meeting Daly shouted at the protesters that he would call the police to restore order resulting in the crowd heckling him. As Daly adjourned the meeting he was heckled and hissed moving through the crowd. A voice was heard shouting that the old Corporation 'never turned us out' and it was some time before the crowd dispersed with supporters of Daly confronting the large crowd of the workers in attendance.

A reconvened meeting of the council was called by Daly the following day without any public notice. As the word spread crowds began to gather, but Daly's supporters acting as 'stewards' limited the attendance in the public gallery and were selective as to who they admitted. At the meeting there was an about turn by Daly and some of the Labour councillors. Daly informed the council that the Labour members would have a free vote on the amalgamation proposal. Labour Alderman Prendergast stated that the councillors

> … had now sufficient time to consider the matter. There were other interests concerned besides those of the labourers. They had to take the commercial interests into account and believing that the amalgamation would be detrimental to the city he would propose that the Corporation oppose the Bill for amalgamation and that the necessary expenditure be incurred for the purpose of such opposition.

A mass meeting was subsequently held in the Theatre Royal. The *Chronicle* reported that it was attended by 'all classes and creeds' with 'the merchants and traders… strongly represented'. When Labour councillor and President of the Trades Council, John Godsell, attempted to question why there were no workers representatives among the speakers he was shouted down by Daly. As the meeting concluded there was lots of praise for Daly from the merchants that he had 'worked for the benefit of the community' and that Daly was a 'worthy representative' of the working men.[251]

No sooner had the railway amalgamation controversy been settled than the Labour group was embroiled in another controversy, this time involving the sacking of workers at the Clareville Waterworks on a proposal from John Daly. Eventually the council voted by nineteen votes to

[251] *Limerick Chronicle*, 2, 4 & 16 February 1899.

six to ratify the dismissals with five Labour councillors voting against and a further five abstaining.

The controversy did not end there. At a subsequent meeting of the Water Committee a letter was received from one of the sacked workers, Michael Connors. Connors claimed that he had left the employment nine weeks previously of Anthony Mackey, a local nationalist county councillor, and close confidant of Daly. Connors told the committee that Mackey boasted to Connors that he would get Connors sacked from his new job with the corporation.

At the committee meeting Daly confirmed that Mackey came to him and told him that Connors left his employment at 9s a week plus accommodation. Daly stated that he did not think 'it would be in accordance with the wishes of the committee that that such a man should be employed, as it was understood that men in want of employment should be engaged'. This provoked a row among the Labour representatives on the Water Committee with Barry objecting saying 'that the man should not be blamed for trying to better himself and should not have been sacked'. Two of the Labour representatives proposed that Connors be reinstated. Daly refused to put the proposal to a vote and this led to protesters in the public gallery chanting 'put the resolution'. The row concluded when Daly agreed to reinstate Connors pending a review in two weeks.[252]

One of the last acts of the old Corporation was to abolish the Night watch in Limerick.[253] From 31 December 1898 the Night watch was disbanded. However, the Night watchmen refused to accept their compensation which would have accepted their abolition, instead chosing to keep working. The Labour Party had campaigned during the election on the basis of reinstating the Night watch and it was implied that the Night watchmen would receive backpay once the reinstatement was passed by the Corporation.[254] The Corporation made a decision to seek a bank loan and continue to pay the Night watchmen until a final decision was made on whether to reinstate the Night watch. The controversy dragged on for nearly two months before a final decision was made to agree reinstatement. However, the controversy did not end there. Following the re-establishment of the Night watch many of the old Night watchmen were not

[252] *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 & 18 May 1899.
[253] The Night watch in Limerick date from 1807 when they patrolled the streets of Newtown Perry during night-time hours. They were primarily responsible for ensuring buildings were secure and dealing with anti-social behaviour. For a history of the Nightwatch in Limerick, see: Chris O'Mahony, 'Limerick Nightwatch 1807-1853', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 21, (Autumn 1987), pp. 9-12.
[254] *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 January 1899.

re-employed. Newly recruited Night watchmen were employed on higher wages than those who had been retained from the old disbanded Night watch. Furthermore, there were allegations that the new Night watchmen were supporters of Daly and they were recruited to act as personal security for Daly. Repeatedly Daly was to rely on the Night watchmen as his popularity declined and the frustration of the working classes boiled over.[255]

Another commitment given by the Labour candidates during the election was to oppose the establishment of a tram system in the city to protect the employment of jarveys, carmen and carters. In May 1899 the hackney drivers formed a trade union in an attempt to protect their jobs. Subsequently the city's carmen meet with Daly to remind him that he and the labour candidates had promised before the election to do everything in their power to keep trams out of Limerick. The proposal for a tramway system split the trade unions. The guild of masons supported the proposal because of the employment the masons would receive from its construction. In October labourers held a series of protests in support of the tramway project. Hostility broke out between the labourers and the carmen during one of the protests when a number of jarveys attacked the crowd.

Large crowds assembled when the council was debating the tramway scheme with the Night watch deployed to control the crowd. Fighting broke out in the public gallery between supporters and opponents of the tramway and abuse was hurled at the councillors. The watchmen used batons to drive back the crowd outside the council chamber. Rioting broke out in Patrick Street and Rutland Street until the police eventually dispersed the crowd.

The labour group was now split three ways with a group supporting the introduction of a full tram system, a group supporting passenger trams but opposed to freight trams and finally a group opposed to the entire project. When the Labour group met to discuss the issue in the Town Hall a large demonstration met them. Daly demanded that the group should vote for or against the scheme as a split on the issue 'might result in very serious consequences'. A majority supported the project but there was no agreement.

At a private meeting of the Corporation's Tramway Committee the solicitor for the tramway company read out a series of guarantees from the company. These included that haulage would

[255] For more information see: Larry Walsh, 'The Abolition and Reinstatement of the Night Watch, 1898-1899', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 36, (Winter 1999), pp. 48-54.

be from the railway station to the docks and quays, carmen made redundant as a result of the scheme would receive preference in employment with the tramway and carmen who did not receive employment would be compensated. The committee voted to adopt the guarantees and bring them before the full council.[256]

These and a series of other controversies undermined the support for the Labour group on the Corporation among the working class. The open enthusiasm and expectations of workers for the council they had elected was replaced by cynicism and despair. The Labour group was riven with divisions with councillors being expelled and others resigning from the group. By the end of the year the Labour group was fractured and many Labour councillors were operating as independents. In 1900 one of the Labour councillors, Michael Joyce, became nationalist MP for Limerick, holding his seat with the support of the Irish Party until 1918.[257]

The enthusiastic support for Daly also dwindled. He was no longer seen as the radical, anti-establishment figure that led to his election as mayor. During November 1899 he attended a meeting in Limerick hosted for a speaker from the Fabian Society in London. Daly received an openly hostile reception from the workers who attended the lecture.[258] Within two years only eight of the Labour councillors elected in 1899 (including Michael Joyce MP) were still sitting on the council.[259] Daly was elected mayor for three consecutive years but, aside from 1899, he needed the support of merchant councillors to retain the position.

Conservatism re-established within the Trades

The collapse of support for the Labour group on the Corporation was in part the result that the Labour councillors became increasingly identified with the nationalist movement and were completely enmeshed in the workings of the Corporation and the interests of the city's merchants. The conservativism demonstrated by the Trades in their approach to building the labour movement and an independent labour voice for the working classes repeatedly undermined any political advances for the working class. The conservative approach of the Trades Council, coupled with the demise of the labour city council, contributed to a rise in

[256] *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 May & 7 & 21 September & 5, 24 & 26 October 1899.
[257] For more information on Michael Joyce see: Brian Donnelly, 'Michael Joyce: Squarerigger, Shannon Pilot and M.P.', *Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 27 (Autumn 1990), pp. 42-44.
[258] *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 November 1899.
[259] David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds), *Limerick Municipal Elections 1841-2009*, (Limerick, 2009), p. 76.

reaction in the city. This led to reactionary episodes like the pogrom against the Jewish community in 1904.[260]

This conservatism was also demonstrated on several occasions by the actions of Limerick delegates at conferences of the Irish Trade Union Congress. O'Connor contended that when Dublin Trades Council, following consultation with other Trades Councils, convened the Irish Trade Union Congress in April 1894 the departure took a more conservative and apolitical form than any of its forerunners.[261] For example, Limerick delegates opposed a motion from William Walker who proposed that the education system should be free from denominational control. The opposition appears to have been based on the fact that this was part of British Labour's programme.[262]

In 1906 when John Murphy moved a Belfast motion recommending affiliation of the ITUC to the Labour Representation Committee. P. Hayes from Limerick arguing against stated that 'the Irish Party is everything that labour requires… National Unity was the primary consideration…'[263] Boyle commented that, at the time, the neglect by the craft trades for the plight of labourers emphasised the weakness of organisation among labourers and the unrepresentative nature of Congress.[264] The fact that the craft unions were willing to act as appendages for the IPP mitigated against the potential for the development of an independent labour voice in politics. This coupled with the fact that the labour councillors who had been elected in 1899 and in subsequent elections were now part of the establishment on the Corporations accepting the privilages of office with open arms.

As always there were contrasting views within among the Limerick delegates. At the same conference in 1906 a prominent activist from the Bakers Union in Limerick, Ben Dineen made an unequivocal socialist address to Congress calling on all delegates to 'come join in the only battle'.[265] Dineen was to become one of the most prominent socialist advocates within the Limerick trade union movement, establishing the *Bottom Dog* as a workers' newspaper and

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[260] For more information on the Jewish pogrom 1904 see: Pat Feeley, 'Davitt and the Limerick Jews', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 14, (Spring 1985), p. 38, Des Ryan, 'The Jews of Limerick', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 17 & 18, (Winter 1984 & Winter 1985), pp. 27-30, Des Ryan, 'The Jews, Fr. Creagh and the Mayor's Court of Conscience', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 38, (Winter 2002), pp. 49-52, Kevin Haddick Flynn, 'The Limerick Pogrom 1904', *History Ireland,* Volume 12, Number 2, (Summer 2004), pp. 31-33.
[261] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-1960,* p. 57.
[262] Boyle, *The Irish Labour Movement in the Nineteenth Century,* p. 238.
[263] Ibid., p. 234-235.
[264] Ibid., p. 239.
[265] Ibid., p. 221.

assisting with the establishment of the ITGWU in 1917. Unfortunately Dineen's life was cut short when he died during the flu pandemic that swept through Europe at the end of 1918, just as the Limerick working class were entering the stage of history.

The political outlook of the leaders of the Congregated Trades was rooted in a nationalist outlook. This was a reflection of a conservative approach to politics and a desire to influence nationalist opinion. This conservative approach led to a rejection of the idea of an independent approach by labour towards politics. It was not until mass pressure from below forced the leadership of the Trades to act that they mobilised in opposition to the nationalist establishment. However, this tended to take the form of limiting the independent political demands of the labour movement and subverting them to nationalist forces. Pockets of radical opposition did exist with Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party having a small support base in Limerick by 1900[266] and radical socialists like Ben Dineen did emerge after the turn of the century.

Occasional workers struggles emerged after the turn of the century. A bitter carpenters strike occurred in 1901 which led to violent conflict when the employers hired scab carpenters from Scotland.[267] A strike and protest by 800 women workers at the Limerick Clothing Factory against the introduction of machinery for sewing buttonholes occurred in 1902.[268] A railway strike on the GS&WR in 1903 involved upwards of 400 men on the line from Limerick Junction, through Mallow and onto Kerry.[269] A strike by printers in 1907 resulted in the workers winning a pay increase,[270] but gas workers suffered a serious defeat when they were forced back to work on the employers terms.[271] However, in 1909 the gas workers were successful when the electric light workers struck in sympathy shutting down the entire city for several hours.[272]

The first major upsurge in strike activity in the twentieth century occurred in 1911 when a series of strikes broke out in August. The first group to strike were the women workers at the Limerick Clothing Factory who struck following the employment of 50 non-union members. It is clear that the employers hired the non-union workers in order to provoke the strike in an effort to break the union. As the scabs left the factory the striking workers pelted them with rocks leading

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[266] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-1960,* p. 64.
[267] *Irish Times,* 30 October 1901 & 2 November 1901.
[268] *Irish Times,* 12 November 1902.
[269] *Irish Times,* 5 September 1903.
[270] *Irish Times,* 7 September 1907.
[271] *Irish Times,* 24 July 1907.
[272] *Irish Times,* 31 July 1909.

to the arrest of several strikers. In response the employers shut the factory and locked-out the workers.[273] At the same time machinists and sawyers at Spaights timber yard struck for a wage increase. On 9 August the dock labourers struck demanding a pay increase for unloading coal from ships on the basis of receiving pay parity with labourers working for the city's coal merchants. After six weeks the strike at Spaights was settled with the employers conceding a pay rise. The strike had a knock-on effect of forcing Bannatynes Flour Merchants to grant a pay rise to their workers on the threat of strike action.[274]

During a railway strike, workers in Limerick blacked goods intended for strikebound depots in Dublin. The strike spread rapidly and by 19 September most of the Limerick railway workers were out, paralysing trade into and out of the city. Within days the impact of the strike resulted in workers being laid off and prices for provisions in the city increase. Police were deployed y the striking workers blockaded the railway stores to prevent the removal of any goods from the station. Troops were moved to Limerick Junction to keep the network open. Within days the strike collapsed and the workers returned to work.[275]

Dock labourers struck in 1913 with the strike being settled by arbitration after three weeks.[276] The dock workers were out again in June 1914 when they struck following the sacking of four workers who refused to work with a non-union carter. The strike was settled after two days when the men were reinstated.[277]

The one noticable feature of all of these strikes is that with the exception of the strike in Spaights in 1911, none of the strikes involved craftsmen. This is an indication of the conservative nature of the craft unions during this period. The mantle of trade union militancy was now firmly in the arms of semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

It was not until the emergence of the ITGWU in 1917 that a political radicalisation of the Limerick working class was reflected in attitudes like support for the Russian Revolution during the Mayday demonstration in 1918, the Limerick Soviet in 1919 and the subsequent emergence of workplaces soviets. Even during this period the leaders of the craft unions were to play a

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[273] *Irish Times,* 1 & 2 August 1911.
[274] *Irish Times,* 2 & 11 August & 11 September 1911.
[275] *Irish Times,* 16, 19, 21, 26 & 27 September & 5 October 1911. For more information on the 1911 railway strike see: Conor McCabe, 'The context and Course of the Irish Railway Disputes of 1911', *Saothar,* Volume 30, (2005), pp. 21-32.
[276] *Irish Times,* 15 February 1913.
[277] *Irish Times,* 5 June 1914.

conservative role and were to repeatedly attempt to derail the emergence of an independent voice for labour in Limerick.

Conclusion

There was a general decline in the number of craft workers in Limerick over the course of the last half of the nineteenth century. At the same time there was a general conservatism among the leadership of the artisans, typified by the role of the Congregated Trades during the period. Within this conservative milieux there were some examples of radicalism and determination to resist deteriorating wages and conditions, for example the Bakers Society. The general decline in the trades was compounded by the ending of the world wide economic boom in 1874. When the boom ended British manufactures flooded the Irish market and prices fell. The railway network transported these cheap products to towns all over the country.[278] At the same time the economic crisis in America cut off that avenue of emigration.[279] The emergence of new model unionism in Britain was reflcted in the association of local craft unions with British based amalgamated unions, the Amalgamated Society of Tailors being the prime example.

Lee contended that the Fenians were the first nationwide lay secular society and was uniqque in that no other movement in the nineteenth century relied on so little clerical support.[280] The Catholic hierarchy certainly displayed outright opposition to the Fenians in Limerick. While the Congregated Trades kept a conspicious distance from the Fenians, it is clear that the movement had the support of many artisans and labourers in the city and county. McGrath claimed that the Congregated Trades were a lerger and more powerful body than Fenianism in Limerick and the trades lent assistance on their own terms.[281] While this may have been the case in nominal terms, it is debatable how active the Congregated Trades were at this point in time and there is relatively little evidence of the Congregated Trades giving assistance to the Fenians.

Initially the Congregated Trades refused to support the election campaign of Iaasc Butt in 1870, but following his election they shifted their allegiance and supported him and Home Rule.[282] Beckett argued that Butt won the election in Limerick mainly on the question of tenant-right,

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[278] Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660,* p. 144-146.
[279] Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918,* (Dublin, 1984), p. 66.
[280] Ibid., p. 57.
[281] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 202.
[282] Ibid., p. 206-207.

demonstrating that the Home Rule movement could win elections, but that it needed to broaden its programme and take on issues of more immediate interest to the public before it made rapid headway.[283]

By 1880 the city's artisans had unequivocally aligned themselves with Parnell.[284] As national issues dominated the politics of Parnell's party, local roots became somewhat less significant as a springboard to political power. Many nationalist candidates were virtually unknown in their constituencies before their selection. The local organisation generally accepted the nominees of the national party, which restricted the influence of the local clergy in choosing candidates.[285] The expansion of the electoral franchise in 1885 signalled a major change in approach from Parnell. Using his position in the National League he controlled the selection of candidates.[286] Parnell also accepted Catholic church claims for control over educational matters, winning his party public approval from the Catholic hierarchy.[287] Parnell could not have risked the expanded franchise and an extra almost half a millin voters who would have come from the lower ranks in society, exercising any control over party candidates if he wanted to ensure that his party maintained its role of representing upper and middle-class nationalism and the famring community.

McGrath makes a curious assessment of the role of the Congregated Trades in the Amnesty Association, claiming that while it was fully supported by the trades, the trades acted as more of a moral sympathiser than an active participant.[288] However, there is clear evidence that the trades played an active organising role in the Amnesty campaign, particularly with the nationalist establishment in Limerick giving the campaign a wide berth owning to the focus of the campaign being the release of the maverick Fenian, John Daly. The decline of interest in the Home Rule campaign in the aftermath of the Parnellite split created an element of a political vacuum[289] that facilitated the role of the Congregated Trades in the Amnesty Association.

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[283] Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923,* p. 379-380.
[284] McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* p. 199.
[285] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918,* p. 108
[286] Brian Walker, 'The 1885 and 1886 General Elections in Ireland', *History Ireland,* Volume 13, Number 6 (Nov-Dec. 2005), p. 37. The Franchise Act 1884 expanded the electoral franchise from 225,999 in 1884 to 737,965 in 1885. McGrath comments on both the expansion of the franchise and the control exercised by Parnell over the election of candidates but fails to make a connection between the two. See: McGrath, p. 289.
[287] Walker, p. 37.
[288] McGrath, p. 202-203.
[289] Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland, 1603-1923,* p. 415.

The resultant release of Daly and his joint campaign with the Congregated Trades led to the labour challenge in the 1899 municipal elections. Though part of a nationwide movement that saw labour candidates standing in a large number of urban areas throughout the country, the nature of the campaign in Limerick catapulted the labour candidates into a position where they won a sweeping victory on the corporation. Unfortunately, the promise of the victory and the expectations of the working class in Limerick would see a fundamental change in how the corporation operated were to be dashed. Daly could not break with his nationalist outlook and his compromises with the nationalist establishment in the city tore the labour group on the corporation apart. The nationalist leaders in the city facilitated the demise in the labour group by exploiting the divisions that emerged.

Chapter Eight - Politics and rural labour, 1850-1899

Introduction

This chapter will look at the efforts of farm labourers to organise and the obstacles that they faced. The chapter will also consider the attempts by farm labourers to build independent political representations and the efforts by nationalist politicians to neutralise these organisations and bring them under nationalist control.

Fintan Lane has asserted that the first serious attempt to mobilise in the interest of the labourers came from the milieu of the Fenian-influenced amnesty agitation.[1] This agitation led to the emergence of the Irish Agricultural Labourers Union (IALU) in August 1873. From the outset the main mover of this union, P.F. Johnson from Kanturk, used his influence to ensure the participation of Isaac Butt and another prominent nationalist M.P., P.J. Smyth. Delegates attended the founding meeting in Kanturk from Cork city, the Munster counties of Limerick, Kerry, Tipperary and Clare, and from Queen's County in Leinster.[2] However, Horn suggested that the IALU was in trouble from the beginning with Fenian influence rejecting any association with a British based union, something that the British National Agricultural Labourers Union's leadership acknowledged.[3] During 1873 and 1874 the IALU had some limited success in forming branches in Munster and Leinster, but it never became a truly national union and by 1875 it had all but disappeared.[4] Apart from what appear to be some initial meetings in villages in Co. Limerick there is no evidence that the IALU made any impact among Limerick labourers.[5]

It was clear from the start that Johnson, while wanting to improve the lot of the rural labourer, was intent on ensuring that the IALU remained under the control of leading nationalist politicians. From the perspective of the nationalists, they did not want an independent organisation of labour operating in competition with their nationalist agenda, and if it could

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[1] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 33, Number 130, (November 2002), p. 195. As background to the developments of the period from 1873, see: Padraig G. Lane, 'Perceptions Of Agricultural Labourers After The Great Famine, 1850-1870', *Saothar,* Volume 19, (1994), pp. 14-26.
[2] Fintan Lane, p. 200.
[3] Pamela L. R. Horn, 'The National Agricultural Labourers' Union in Ireland, 1873-9', *Irish Historical Studies,* Volume 17, Number 67 (March 1971), p. 348.
[4] Fintan Lane, p. 202-203.
[5] Horn, 'The National Agricultural Labourers' Union in Ireland, 1873-9', p. 351.

prove a useful mobilising force at election time then it would serve a beneficial purpose from their point of view.

The first recorded meeting of farmers in Limerick in the period of the Land War occurred in September 1879. Addressing the meeting the Catholic priest chairing stated that he hoped they:

> would be able to effect a reformation or a modification of the land laws so that no tenant farmer should be deprived of the results of their labour…they did not want anything at all connected with Communism or with international societies, the principles of which were repugnant to the Catholic people of Ireland.

Almost immediately tensions arose between farmers and labourers. Labourers criticised the farmers for ignoring the plight of the labourers, bringing an angry response from farmers who claimed that the criticisms were an attempt by agitators to create 'disunity between the labourers and their best friends the farmers'.[6] These tensions between the labourers and farmers in Limerick were to be a constant feature of the Land War.[7] Hoppen referenced a claim that a former chairman of the Limerick Farmers' Club was prepared to defend labourers' intrests.[8] While it might have been the case in relation to this individual, it was certainly not the general view held by farmers during this period.

The Labourers' League

A land meeting in Ardagh on 3 October 1880 saw the labourers to the fore with demands for 'the land for the landless people' and declarations proposed by P.F. Johnson deploring 'the present conditions of the agrilabourers'.[9] The Clare and Limerick Farmers Club responded by establishing a branch of the Land League at a meeting in Slattery's, Thomas Street, Limerick. A discussion took place on the plight of labourers and the necessity for the provision of a cottage and a potato plot – but when it came to giving commitments on these suggestions nobody at the meeting was willing to propose the farmers should back the proposals. In response, a week later a Labourers' League was formed in Ardagh on the basis that the labourers rejected the argument that the farmers' problems had to be settled first. Numerous labourers complained about the

[6] *Limerick Chronicle,* 2 & 6 September 1879.
[7] For a detailed look at the Land War in East Limerick from a British perspective see, Charles Dalton Clifford Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League: a narrative of personal experience,* (London, 1892).
[8] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885,* p. 474.
[9] *Limerick Chronicle,* 5 October 1880.

rent for conacre giving examples of labourers paying farmers £10 - £13 per acre while the farmer was paying the landlord as little as £2 - £3 per acre.[10]

Demonstrating the competing interests, Matthew Harris, a prominent Land League organiser, commented after a visit to Limerick: 'Throughout Limerick I found wealthy graziers joined the cause. I found these men with heavy bank accounts and comfort quite as much in favour of this land movement as their humblest neighbours.'[11] Moran noted that the urban / rural relationship of the Land League was between the rural farmer and the urban merchant.[12]

In an effort to win over the labourers, Parnell proposed that the Land League should discourage the seasonal letting of lighter grazing land that had been cleared at the time of the famine to facilitate small farmers and labourers to get access to a less rich class of grazing land. The Limerick Farmers' Club accepted the proposal as politically necessary to get the labourers onside, recognising it could take years to implement.[13] Moody suggested that this proposal from Parnell served to avert a 'threatened rift' between labourers and farmers.[14] If that was the case the pause in conflict did not last long.

Throughout 1881 the competing interests of labourers and farmers were a constant feature at public meetings, gatherings and demonstrations. In April at a Land League meeting in Ardagh, several local Labourers' League branches attended, calling for a rejection of the Land Bill because it 'did nothing to assist the labouring classes'. A few days later a spate of agrarian outrages lasting more than a week occurred in Abbeyfeale when the homes of tenant farmers were attacked and the farmers warned to reduce the rent for conacre. A Land League conference in Limerick on 21 April rejected any discussion about the plight of labourers.

On 2 May a large meeting of labourers took place in Feenagh. The secretary of the Labourers' League wrote a report on the meeting outlining that while the Labourers' League supported the objectives of the Land League, the meeting stressed the necessity for the Labourers' League to remain separate and distinct from the Land League to represent the interests of labourers. On the same day a meeting of the Land League in Athea rejected any debate on the plight of the

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[10] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 & 23 October 1880.
[11] Quoted in, Paul Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82,* (New Jersey, 1979), p. 135.
[12] Gerard Moran, 'The Land War, Urban Destitution And Town Tenant Protests, 1879-1882', *Saothar,* Volume 20, (1995), p. 17.
[13] Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82,* p. 143.
[14] T.W. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution, 1846-1882,* (Oxford, 1982), p. 424.

labourers. There followed a night of attacks on farmers' houses in the area around Newcastle West.

Nationalist interests began pressurising the Labourers' League groups to abandon their campaign. Some of the more progressive elements within the Land League held a meeting in Thomas Street, Limerick, to push the cause of the labourers, which they claimed had been 'hitherto all but neglected'. However, the nationalist interests and the clergy decided it was time to act to prevent this development. At a Land League meeting in Limerick on 16 May a decision was taken to send a Land League delegation to a planned Labourers' Convention on 19 May. The delegation was to carry a message from Fr. Ryan who stated that the labourers should be guided by advice from the Land League delegation and condemning them for organising separately from the Land League. Ryan warned the Land League that allowing the labourers to organise separately could result in the labourers' organisations being 'a source of trouble in the future'.[15]

Over 300 delegates representing Labourers' League branches from Clare and Limerick attended the Labourers' Convention in the Town Hall in Limerick. The Convention led to the establishment of the Munster Labour League.[16] Several members of the local clergy attended and attempted to dictate the agenda of the Convention. Delegates made widespread criticism of the treatment of labourers by tenant farmers with numerous examples of exploitation being outlined. A proposal was put to the convention not to accept any land reform that did not address the concerns of labourers. The clergy opposed the resolution and argued that labourers should support land reform and then, when that was achieved, agitate for labourers' rights. Rev. Maher of Newport condemned labourers' agitation because he claimed it was driving capital out of the country and causing divisions between labourers and farmers. Maher said that the labourers could enjoy 'prosperity and comfort' like the peasantry in France if only they backed up the farmers. He went on to criticise the idea of nationalising land saying that free trade in land was in the interests of the labourer. Despite this the delegates unanimously adopted the resolution.

A further resolution condemning Limerick Corporation for the failure to build labourers' cottages was unanimously adopted, as was one calling for the electoral franchise to be expanded to labourers. One resolution of note was accepted expressing support for the idea of working

[15] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19, 21, 23 & 26 April 1881 & 3, 5 & 17 May 1881.
[16] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 205.

class unity north and south with support being offered for 'orangemen' who faced similar problems to labourers in Limerick. The final resolution debated at the convention called for the establishment of a National Labour League with delegates stating that they 'would no more entrust a labourer to the power of the farmer than…into that of Old Nick'. Rev. Sheedy of Kilmallock attacked the resolution and called for unity between farmer and labourer but the delegates carried the resolution.[17] Fintan Lane contended that from the outset the Munster Labour League was clear about its strong support for the Land League while acting as a pressure group to ensure that the nationalist movement did something for rural labourers.[18] While it may have been the case that the leaders of this new body were committed Land Leaguers, there is little evidence from the reporting of the Convention that there was any overt support for the Land League from the delegates who attended.

A similar pattern was repeated over the following weeks. At a Land League meeting in Abbeyfeale, Daniel Hishon of the Shanagolden Labourers' League warned that there would be 'no settlement of the land question from a government that refuses their (labourers') rights'. At a Land League meeting in Shanagolden, the Labourers' League paraded with a banner inscribed 'we demand our rights and happy homes'. When Rev. Mulqueen stated that the 'interests of farmers and labourers…are identical', McCoy, the Vice-President of the Labourers' League responded: 'landlords' labourers are better paid, fed and housed than farmers' labourers'. At a labourers' meeting in Ballingarry in July the chair gave the apologies of the parish priest who was unable to attend, the crowd by heckling and cat-calls and shouts of 'we don't want him'. The meeting called for the establishment of a nationwide organisation of labour.[19]

At this stage farmers began resorting to violence. Widespread intimidation of labourers occurred to enforce the boycott of landlords. Labourers were attacked in Birdhill and Ardagh for breaking the boycott. The discontent among the labourers boiled over when threatening notices against labourers were posted around the city. The *Chronicle* commented that 'the lower strata…have assumed a markedly offensive and violent attitude'. A full-scale riot erupted in the city after a confrontation between local labourers and some troops from the Scots Greys near the railway station. Large numbers of police and military were mobilised including artillery. The riot ended when the police opened fire on the rioters, wounding 20 people.

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[17] *Limerick Chronicle,* 19 May 1881.
[18] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 205.
[19] *Limerick Chronicle,* 28 May & 7 June & 26 July 1881.

However, the pressure on the leaders of the Labourers' League was starting to have an impact. A number of labourers' delegations attended the National Land League Convention in Limerick on 17 September. At the Convention the labourers' delegates agreed to abide by the Land League's instructions concerning labourers' rights. This provoked a further backlash from many labourers. Groups of protesters carried out coordinated attacks on several churches during Sunday mass, soldiers were assaulted on George's Street by a large mob and sporadic attacks occurred on soldiers during the following few days.[20]

The scale of the violence prompted Dublin Castle to act. The military banned a meeting planned for the Mechanics Institute to discuss the fallout from the riot. To enforce the ban 235 military personnel were despatched from Dublin. On Sunday 16 October another riot broke out near City Hall. Troops opened fire, wounding one man and dispersing the crowd. The military imposed martial law and cleared the streets. At dusk the crowds began to re-assemble and engage in running battles with police for several hours before the latter cleared the streets using considerable violence. The following day large crowds assembled while those arrested the previous day were brought to court. Rioting broke out again as prisoners were transferred to the city gaol, with troops opening fire on rioters. The local clergy walked through the streets appealing for calm while the police were given orders to open fire on anyone who threw a stone or in the direction that a stone was thrown from.[21]

The following day the President of the Congregated Trades, John Godsell was arrested under the Coercion Act. Sporadic rioting continued for the remainder of the year with outbreaks in Bruff, at the Munster Assizes, after a court case which convicted some of the rioters, and in Doon. A planned labourers meeting in Doon was abandoned after widespread intimidation by the military and local farmers.[22]

Fintan Lane contended that support among Fenians for the labourers probably derived from both a class-based empathy and a suspicion of the farmers, who had shown no great interest in the separatist movement.[23] Certainly some of the leading advocates for the rights of labourers like Daniel Hishon and William Upton were prominent local Fenians. It is likely that the social

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[20] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 & 13 August & 6, 17, 20 & 27 September 1881 & 4, 8 & 11 October 1881.
[21] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 October 1881.
[22] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1, 13, 22 & 29 December 1881.
[23] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 196.

composition of the Fenians impacted on the outlook of the local Fenian leadership, given the growing level of support for Fenianism among the labouring classes.

Tenant farmers were firmly behind the Home Rule Party, while the labourers were in constant conflict with the tenant farmers and they viewed the Home Rule Party and the Land League as ignoring the rights of labourers. This outlook was compounded in the period between 1879 and 1881 by poor economic conditions which further alienated the labourers from constitutional nationalism. Fintan Lane pointed out that the economic conditions of the period resulted in inability of the leadership of the Munster Labour League to hold the line in supporting the Land League and prevent open conflict between labourers and tenant farmers.[24]

These events do pose the question as to why labourers were unable to assume leadership roles in their own organisations and why the labourers were unable to maintain an independent labourers organisation. Fintan Lane outlined a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, labourers were also hampered by the nature of their work from sunrise to sunset six days a week, limiting their interaction with other workers. Moreover, labourers did not work in large groups, many farmers employed just one or two labourers, thereby limiting their ability to discuss how to approach the issues and how to organise their opposition. Labourers subsisted on low incomes and did not have the resources to undertake travel and organising work, which resulted in people of more substantial means taking on the organising role. Lastly an employer could evict the labourer from his cottage if he engaged in political activity.[25]

There are other possible reasons that created difficulties for the labourers. Cronin argued that there was fierce resistance in Cork to new general unionism where the United Trades waged an all-out campaign against the South of Ireland Labour Union.[26] While there does not appear to have been the same 'fierce resistance' on the part of the Limerick Congregated Trades to the labourers organising, there was, at best, ambivalence to any such developments. A more active approach from the Congregated Trades could have assisted the labourers. However, given the intent of the Trades to actively support the Parnellite movement it was inevitable when this came into conflict with the demands of the labourers, the Congregated Trades ended up sitting on the fence.

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[24] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 206.
[25] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in Fintan Lane and Donal O'Driscoll (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945*, (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 116.
[26] Cronin, 'Parnellism and Workers: The Experience of Cork and Limerick', p. 143.

The wealthier classes dominated the nationalist movement, and the focus of the leadership was on the rights of tenant farmers. Inevitably when class conflict erupted between labourers and farmers, the nationalist leadership did their best to sideline and placate the labourers. This can be demonstrated by the actions of Parnell when he tried to stem the rising tide of conflict by promising to campaign for legislative provisions for the labourer, with regard to housing and a half-acre, and agreeing to the inclusion of a labourers' representative on the executive of the League. Father O'Kennedy, a County Limerick curate, was selected as the labour representative.[27] Not surprisingly, this had little impact on the attitude of the leadership of the Land League. When placating the labourers did not work, the nationalist leadership moved to actively undermine the organisations of the labourers' movement.

Parnell and the National League

Following the suppression of the Land League Parnell's strategy was to launch a new movement to replace the Land League that would appeal to the rural and urban middle-classes. The existance of the Labourers' League offered an opportunity for using its structures. Many of the local leaders of the Land League turned their attention to the Labourers' League branches. Moves were made to create a national labourers' organisation that would be more firmly under the control of the Land Leaguers.[28]

There was, not surprisingly, stiff resistance from the labourers to this development. Despite the suppression of the Land League, the Labourers' League continued and grew. By the summer of 1882 Labourers' League and herds associations had spread throughout Munster, Leinster and into significant parts of Connacht. Parnell moved to use this growth by the establishment of the Irish Labour and Industrial Union (ILIU). With Parnell as president, the ILIU adopted more extensive labourers' demands, facilitating control of the labour agitation that was now widespread in the country. Fintan Lane asserted that if the rural labour movement was allowed to continued to grow it had the potential to cause a severe split along class lines in nationalist Ireland.

An executive of the ILIU was appointed which was almost exclusively composed of members of the Land League. There was not a single labourers' representative on the executive and none

[27] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 206 & 207.
[28] Ibid., p. 207.

of the members had any track record on labour issues. While Parnell struggled to bring the Labourers' League under the control of the ILIU, the Labourers' League continued to grow. By late September it had as many as 120 branches with the herds' associations operating independently, increasing its reach.

The National League (NL) was formed in October and proved to be the death knell of the ILIU. Branches of the ILIU were instructed to transform into NL branches which most did. The rural labour movement was subsumed by the Parnellites and effectively neutralised.[29] After the incorporation of the rural labour movement into the National League, the remaining labourers' groups lacking any sense of national cohesion.[30] The Parnellites were intent on ensuring that they had control over any movement that could have potential to impact the political landscape and for those sections they could not subsume they would ensure they were marginalised.

Limerick was not isolated from these developments, despite the best efforts of some labour activists. On Sunday night 25 June 1882 thousands of farm labourers attend a mass meeting at Bruff. Different localities brought banners as they marched to the meeting. At the meeting a tenant farmer named Hartigan was proposed as chair and the speakers included several Poor Law Guardians. Hartigan said that he was always on the side of the labourer and, even though there were few farmers at the meeting, the best of farmers would always support the labourers' cause. This resulted in loud heckling from the assembled labourers.

The meeting passed a resolution that all tenant farmers with 30 acres or more would provide a half an acre for the labourer at the same rent paid by the farmer to the landlord and the labourer should pay the landlord and not the farmer. Many of the labourers demonstrated their hostility to the farmers by heckling that they would not pay rent to the farmers. Labour activist Patrick Osborne asked what happens to 'the farmer who does not give half an acre of land' – the crowd shouted he's 'a dead man'.[31] A similar meeting in Kilteely a week later was attended by 5,000 and the reports of the meeting indicate widespread heckling of any speaker supporting farmers and condemnation of the farmers throughout the meeting.[32]

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[29] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 131-132.
[30] Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers, 1869-82', p. 207.
[31] *Freemans Journal,* 26 June 1882 & *Limerick Chronicle,* 27 June 1882. The *Chronicle* recorded the attendance at 10,000 and noted that only one priest was in attendance.
[32] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 July 1882.

As 1882 came to a close the nationalist movement and the farmers were gaining ground. By constantly promising the labourers that they would address their concerns they attempted to reclaim the initiative. In October a labour meeting in Croom was addressed by Parnellites and farmers and in November a large labour meeting in Patrickswell was promised that 'the farmer' would 'do everything in their power to aid and assist the cause of the Irish labourers'. The National League branch in Bruff launched a campaign to promote the 'unity between farmers and labourers' and the branch in Rathkeale called for 'farmers to erect suitable houses and give half an acre to their brothers, the labourers'.[33]

Working Class Housing and the Labourers Act

In 1883 the Gladstone government passed the Labourers (Ireland) Act. The advances made by tenant farmers through the Land Act 1881 shone a spotlight on the predicament of the rural labourer. The objective of the Labourers Act was to provide suitable labourers' dwellings in any rural sanitary district where they did not exist. Funds were to be advanced by the Board of Works to rural sanitary districts on the security of the district rates. The housing was confined to labourers who worked solely in agriculture and the rent was fixed at 1s per week.[34]

Aalen asserted that the provision of a Labourers Act for Ireland was not directly the result of pressure from Ireland and the Land War. He argued that they were, at least in part, the result of the wave of social reform occurring in Britain during the 1880s. An extended debate took place on the role of government in ameliorating the health and housing problems of the poor that resulted in Royal Commissions recommending a raft of new social legislation. It had become increasingly clear that attempting to induce landlords and farmers to provide better housing for labourers had failed and that public initiatives and controls were needed.[35]

Numerous factors contributed to the passing of the Labourers Act 1883. The Land Act 1870 and, particularly, Land Act 1881 profoundly affected the structure of rural society with far-reaching reforms for tenant farmers. The scale of the change created a situation that, in comparison, the modest demands of labourers could not be ignored.[36] This was coupled with

[33] *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 October & 28 November & 5 December & 2 January 1883.
[34] A rural sanitary district being equivalent to a rural poor law union and administered by the poor law guardians.
[35] Frederick H.A. Aalen, 'The Rehousing of Rural Labourers in Ireland under the Labourers (Ireland) Acts, 1883–1919', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Volume 12, Issue 3, (July 1986), p. 291-293.
[36] Ibid., 290.

the widespread protests involving farm labourers that forced Parnell to come out openly in support housing for labourers with the establishment of the ILIU.

Housing in rural areas during this period was significantly poorer than in the city. Approximately one quarter of all families in the city lived in fourth-class accommodation while in the county it was in the region of one-third of families. Furthermore, the poor accommodation in the city was the result of overcrowding in tenements while in the county the poorest houses were mud hovels.[37] Giving evidence to the Royal commission on Agricultural Labourers, Limerick M.P. William O'Sullivan stated that 'in the county Limerick there are a great number of mud-walled and very badly thatched cottages'.[38]

The population in County Limerick saw an even more marked decline than in the city with a drop of 20 per cent in rural areas between 1871 and 1891[39] Depopulation in Ireland was primarily a rural affair, as it was elsewhere in Europe. Ireland's depopulation reflects a demographic regime that combined three elements, each of which was unusual but not unique in western Europe at the time: the decline of marriage, continued very large families for those who did marry, and heavy emigration. Post-Famine Irish marriage patterns were an extreme example of a long European tradition. For centuries young people in western Europe had delayed their marriages more than elsewhere, with women rarely marrying before their early twenties, and in most populations some 10-20 per cent of adults never married at all. Marriage in post-Famine Ireland declined in popularity to the point where, in 1911, about one-quarter of all adults in their forties had never married. A second feature of Ireland's distinctive demographic conditions reflects a pace of change that was, relative to other European countries, very slow. Emigration from Ireland increased during the Famine and remained extensive afterwards. The rate of emigration from Ireland was often higher than for any other European country during the second half of the nineteenth century. In sum, the fewer and fewer marriages in Ireland did not produce enough children to offset the numbers who chose to spend their lives overseas, resulting in an ever-smaller Irish population.[40]

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[37] Command Papers, 1873, (C.873), p. 599. For a breakdown of housing distribution in the 1871 census see Appendix IX, for the 1891 census see Appendix X.
[38] *Report from the Select Committee on Agricultural Labourers (Ireland); together with the proceedings of the committee, and minutes of evidence,* House of Commons Papers, 1884-85, (32), vii.599, p. 9.
[39] Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1, p. 543 & p. 999.
[40] Timothy W. Guinnane, 'The Vanishing Irish: Ireland's population from the Great Famine to the Great War', *History Ireland,* Volume 5, Issue 2 (Summer 1997), p. 33.

Emigration was by far the principal cause of this decline. Surveying evidence on post-Famine demographics, Guinnane showed that the Irish birth rate during this period was unremarkable by European standards. While this unremarkable birth-rate was achieved with the unusual combination of large families but low marriage rates, this still cannot take away from the primacy of emigration as the cause of depopulation.[41]

The priority given by Irish public authorities to rural housing over urban reflected the overwhelmingly rural character of the country and the acute economic and social problems of the agricultural population. Aalen stated that the earliness and relative effectiveness of public initiatives resulted from the exceptional political circumstances of the country. The massive transfer of land ownership could only be achieved by substantial state funding, and extension of the same principle into the sphere of housing for the poor was more readily conceded than in Britain. However, it is still necessary to consider the impact of these initiatives on the housing conditions of rural labourers in County Limerick.

The social composition of the countryside was varied and complex, and in most counties sharp local contrasts occurred. However, it is clear that in many areas a considerable social gulf existed between farmers and labourers and their economic relations were often strained and antagonistic. Labourers made their arrangements with and were entirely dependent on the tenant farmers not the landlords. When a farm changed hands, the new tenant was not bound by any existing arrangements with the labourers who often had to go. Much of the oppression and eviction which looms large in nineteenth-century Irish history was not of tenant by landlord but of labourer by farmer.

Aalen acknowledged that cabins were reduced in number mainly through sustained emigration and movement to towns by the labouring class and the housing problem to which the Labourers' Acts were addressed at the end of the nineteenth century, while still acute, was essentially residual and diminishing naturally. Moreover, before the Acts had an effect, the condition of labourers' houses was not uniformly bad. Housing provided by farmers was almost everywhere poor. Landlords built houses of better quality, usually on the edge of their demesnes or in estate villages. Aalen went on to assert that with so much far-reaching reform in the interest of tenants

[41] Timothy W. Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914,* (New Jersey, 1997), p. 7, & Karl Whelan, 'Economic Geography and the Long-run Effects of the Great Irish Famine', *Economic and Social Review*, Volume 30, Issue 1 (January, 1999), p. 4.

the very modest demands of the labourers could scarcely be ignored. While it was expedient for all major political groups to express support for improvements in labourers' living conditions, the matter was not a major preoccupation with any group.[42]

O'Connor asserted that in October 1882 labourers' demands were included in the National League programme and Parnell focused on housing. He suggested that the 'Parnell cottages' (or 'Davitt cottages' in anti-Parnell areas) built under the 1883 Labourers Act did nothing to tackle underemployment, low wages or the persistence of demeaning hiring fairs – but they offered rural labour a better return for its nationalism than urban workers received.[43] However, despite the Act facilitating the building of labourers cottages, the rural labourer had to struggle to force the building of cottages and the farming classes stubbornly resisted abiding by the terms of the Labourers Act.

The passing of the Labourers Act brought all the old conflicts back to the fore again. From September 1883 onwards a series of meetings demonstrated the antagonisms that both sides displayed towards one another. On 2 September Michael Davitt addressed a meeting of the National League in Cappamore attended by more than 5,000, mainly labourers who demanded support for the Labourers Act. Two weeks later a large meeting was called by the Labourers Society in the city to attempt to force the National League support the demands of the labourers, now that 'the farmers had been taken care of'. At an election meeting the Mayor claimed that 'it is evident that the National League is not popular amongst the working men and artisans of the city.

Developments in Rathkeale demonstrated the difficulties. By October 1883 the Poor Law Guardians had to address the implications of the Labourers Act. Over 1,000 labourers had applied to the Board of Guardians for housing when applications opened. Labourers complained to Rathkeale Poor Law Union that farmers were evicting them to avoid having to comply with the Act. The Rural Sanitary Board agreed to build 32 houses for labourers but postponed any other plans to future years.[44] Like most Victorian social legislation the 1883 act was cautious,

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[42] Frederick H. A. Aalen, 'The rehousing of Rural Labourers in Ireland', pp. 288-291.
[43] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 45. For a comprehensive look at the impact of the Labourers Act 1883 see: Enda McKay, 'The Housing Of The Rural Labourer, 1883·1916', *Saothar,* Volume 17, (1992), pp. 27-39.
[44] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4, 18 & 25 September & 4, 20 & 25 October 1883. The clerk of Kilmallock Poor Law Union stated that there were 1,000 labouring families in overcrowded conditions in the area, see: John Logan, 'Frugal Comfort: Housing Limerick's Labourers and Artisans, 1841-1946', in Liam Irwin & Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, (eds), *Limerick: History & Society,* (Dublin, 2009), p. 559.

cumbersome and costly in execution. The Act imposed limits on rate increases. The rent was insufficient to meet the interest on the loans to build the cottages and with the ratepayer having to meet the deficit. As a result the implementation of the Act immediately ran into difficulty and hostility from ratepayers.[45]

On 30 October a meeting of 100 labourers in Rathkeale formed the Rathkeale Workmen's League. At the meeting the local National League branch was accused of getting money from the labourers under false pretences. The labourers employed a solicitor named Mulcair to represent their interests at the Board of Guardians. A meeting of the Rathkeale Workmen's League the following week was attended by 200 labourers, as well as by representatives of the National League. When the nationalists attempted to intervene they were loudly booed and heckled until they agreed to hand back the disputed money. They were then removed from the meeting. The Rural Sanitary Board accused the farmers of 'doing everything in their power to obstruct the operation of the (Labourers) Act'.[46]

However, the efforts of the Rathkeale Workmen's League came to nothing. The nationalists and the farmers rode out the hostility and created widespread disillusionment among the labourers. The following January the Workmen's League appealed to the Rathkeale PLG to provide public works for impoverished labourers in the district. The Guardians replied that they did not have the money for a public works scheme and the League meekly accepted the response.[47] The Rathkeale Workmen's League appears to have disintegrated following this capitulation.

Throughout 1884 the pattern in Rathkeale was repeated with tit-for-tat actions by labourers and farmers in different parts of rural Limerick. A mass meeting of labourers was held in Croom on Sunday 2 March 1884. The meeting was to agitate for employment and the implementation of the Labourers Act. A large contingent attended from Bruff under the leadership of prominent labour advocate Patrick Osborne. Those in attendance condemned the landlords and tenant farmers in equal measure for acting against the interests of the labourers. When a solitary farmer attempted to address the crowd he was thrown off the platform by angry labourers with shouts of 'we want no farmers here… they gave us nothing'. Osborne attacked the failure to implement

[45] Aalen, 'The Rehousing of Rural Labourers in Ireland', p. 293.
[46] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1, 6 & 15 November 1883.
[47] *Limerick Chronicle,* 22 January 1884.

the Labourers Act and criticised Parnell and 'his little band of patriots' for their failure to defend the interests of labourers in the House of Commons. The local clergy were not invited to the meeting and were described as the 'friends of the landlords'.[48]

Two weeks later another labourers meeting was held in Bruree with an increased attendance. The *Limerick Chronicle* commented that the plight of the labourers was finding little support among the local Catholic clergy. The paper quoted Rev. Enright who stated that it was the first time since his arrival in Bruree that he 'was not at the head of his flock'. Addressing the labourers meeting, Maurice Murphy stated that even though they did not have the support of the farmers or the clergy, they had the support of millions of labourers in England and across the Atlantic. Murphy called for all labourers to 'bond themselves together'. Patrick Osborne claimed that Parnell was ignoring the plight of labourers and demanded that he call on the farmers of Ireland to support the rights of the labourers. Several speakers, including Mr. McCarthy, Secretary of the United Trades Association of Cork called on all labourers to unite and not to regard the farmers as their allies. Further meetings were planned for Kilmallock, Bruff, Hospital and Askeaton.

Subsequently the Secretary of the Labourers League, J. Holey, issued a statement that stated labourers were:

> banding together to resist petty tyranny. The farmers seem to have become their most implacable enemies. They fancy they have cheated them in a good many cases out of their cottages…They are trying by the most infamous means to drive local gentlemen who are no tyrants…spending their fortune on trade and labour, from amongst them by poisoning hounds etc.

On 25 March the *Chronicle* reported that a Labourers League had been established in Bruff and four days later that farmers had established a branch of the National League in the district.[49] At subsequent National League meetings the antagonisms were clearly evident. At a National League meeting in Broadford local farmers criticised the Labourers Act leading to labourers at the meeting heckling the farmers. This was repeated at a similar meeting in Patrickswell a few

[48] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3 March 1884.
[49] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18, 20, 25 & 29 March 1884.

days later and also at Stonehall where the labourers rejected overtures from farmers to settle their differences.[50]

Throughout the remainder of 1884 the National League and the farmers wore down the labourers' opposition. The Rural Sanitary Board received reports of farmers putting up the rent for labourers cottages in an attempt to get the labourers off their land.[51] Farmers were avoiding employing labourers in order to demoralise them and widespread unemployment of farm labourers was evident by the end of 1884.[52] The *Chronicle* reported that poverty and unemployment among labourers was forcing many to join the British army.[53] By the turn of 1885 the National League no longer felt the need to address labourers' issues and a meeting of the National League in Nicker was a back-slapping exercise praising the beneficial nature of the National League for the interests of tenant farmers.[54]

In the following years there were occasional discussions about the plight of the labourers, but such concerns were dismissed out of hand. When labourers complained of high rents the National League simply stated that their only concern was the 'national question'.[55]

As can be seen progress on the provision of housing was slow. By 1892 a total of 8,899 were built throughout the country, with the vast majority in Munster (5,521 houses) and Leinster (3,206).[56] Within that Cork and Limerick topped the counties in terms of house building, followed by Tipperary, Meath and Wexford.[57]

It is necessary to briefly discuss why there were so many houses build in Munster and particularly in Cork and Limerick. Matheson demonstrated that counties in Munster dominated the housing that was considered fourth-class in character. Kerry had more than 30 per cent of the housing in this category, Limerick, Tipperary and Cork, along with Mayo and Meath, had between 20 per cent and 30 per cent in the fourth class category.[58] It can been seen that the

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[50] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14, 17 & 24 June 1884.
[51] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 October 1884.
[52] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 November 1884.
[53] *Limerick Chronicle,* 1 January 1885.
[54] *Limerick Chronicle,* 13 January 1885. For the impact of the National League in Limerick in the 1885 Election see: James Doherty, 'Limerick in the General Election 1885', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 18, (Winter 1985), pp. 19-23.
[55] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 January 1886.
[56] Aalen, 'The Rehousing of Rural Labourers in Ireland', p. 294.
[57] McKay, 'The Housing Of The Rural Labourer, 1883·1916', p. 28.
[58] Robert E. Matheson, 'The housing of the people of Ireland during the period 1841-1901'. *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland,* Volume 9, Number 83, (1902/1903), P. 204. These percentages were based on census numbers from 1861.

counties with the largest per centage of fourth-class housing saw the largest number of cottages built under the 1883 Act. Aalen outlined that housing was considerably better in east Ulster than in the rest of the country, while west Ulster and Connacht had landholding so poor that they didn't employ agriicualtural labourers. Poor housing in these regions were addressed by the Congested Districts Board after its establishment in 1891.[59] Furthermore, it could be argued that Cork and Limerick were counties where agricultural labourers were better organised than in other regions and were tenacious in demonstrating in support of housing after the passing of the Act. Despite some improvement it must be noted that, on the scale of what was required, comparitavely few houses were built.[60] A parliamentary report indicated that by 1891 Limerick was still the second worst county in the country for fourth class housing at 6 per cent and the second highest number of families in the lowest class at 7.5 per cent.[61]

The Irish Democratic Labour Federation

It was not until 1890 that there was some movement towards the re-emergence of militancy by labourers. Undoubtedly influenced by new unionism and the rash of strike taking place involving semi-skilled and unskilled workers, rural labourers once again moved to engage in independnet action. At the same time leading nationalists were ensuring that they maintained an element of control over the direction of the labourers movement. The Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation (DLF) was initiated in Kanturk and promoted by Michael Davitt in Cork.[62] This new movement was led predominantly by leading nationalists, including D.D. Sheehan.[63]

Following the Federation's founding convention in Cork it spread throughout Munster. The first reports of DLF branches in Limerick date from August 1890 with a meeting in Bruff. The meeting was attended by large numbers of labourers from the town and surrounding area and there were several bands present. The burning issue at the meeting was an outbreak of potato blight that was causing severe hardship locally and the meeting called on the PLG to implement a programme of public works. Speakers called on all working classes to join together in the Federation and 'pressurise the Irish Party to ensure labourers cottages are built'. Mr. P.J. Neilan,

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[59] Aalen, 'The Rehousing of Rural Labourers in Ireland', p. 295.
[60] Daniel Desmond Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell,* (London, 1921), P. 111.
[61] *Royal Commission on Labour. The agricultural labourer. Vol. V. Part I. General report by Mr. William C. Little (senior assistant agricultural commissioner),* Command Papers, 1893-94, (C.6894-xxv), p. 28.
[62] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 133.
[63] Daniel Desmond Sheehan was born near Kanturk and the son of a tenant farmer and prominent Fenian. He was correspondence secretary of the Kanturk Trade and Labour Council which led him into activity on labour affairs. Sheehan was elected MP for Mid-Cork in a by-election in 1901 for the IPP.

Kanturk, stated 'if the federation hated landlordism much, it hated the landgrabber more.' Michael Austin, Secretary of the DLF stated:

> their movement … was in no way antagonistic to the national movement in the country…the two movements would work hand in hand with objects which were for the common good of all…the Land Purchase Bill should be denounced as antagonistic to the labourers of this country.[64]

It was clear from the meeting that the leaders of the Democratic Labour Federation were intent on ensuring that it was subservient to the nationalist movement.

By October the DLF had spread to Clare and a large demonstration as held in Kildysert. Banners with the messages 'Labour, being the producer of the wealth of nations, must be respected' and 'We only ask reward proportioned to our labour' were displayed in the town. The meeting declared support for Parnell and John Daly and then demanded the government provide employment in order to alleviate distress from the failure of the potato crop.[65] The support for Daly is an indication of some Fenian influence in the demonstration.

At the beginnning of November local MPs attended a massive DLF meeting in Kilfinane. The MPs made platitudes about the rights of labour and attempted to steer the discussion into support of the Irish Party. However, the labourers in attendance wanted a more radical approach and endorsed the demands of the Kildysert meeting the previous month.[66] The new movement, now growing rapidly, faced a new crisis with the Parnellite split resulting in the same divisions that was faced by both nationalist and labour organisations.[67] The potential of the DLF dissipated in the Parnellite feuding after 1890. It took another four years before the next initiative managed to gain a foothold with the founding of the Irish Land and Labour Association.

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[64] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 August 1890 & *Freemans Journal,* 16 August 1890.
[65] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14 October 1890. The meeting also demanded changes to the voting laws to allow labourers vote in elections to the Poor Law Unions and other Boards on the basis of 'one man, one vote'. Further resolutions demanding that the British government and the Irish Party implement free education for children were passed. Mr Jordan MP addressing the meeting said he 'always thought the Labour Federation was a revolutionary movement, but after hearing the resolutions he always supported these measures'. Jordan called on the farmers to give charity to the priests to distribute to the labourers.
[66] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 November 1890.
[67] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 133.

The Irish Land and Labour Association

The Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA) was established on 15 August 1894 at Limerick Junction, 22 miles south east of Limerick City and three miles from Tipperary town. O'Connor commented that the it was run by Nationalist politicians D.D. Sheehan and J.J. O'Shee[68] as a labour lobby within the national movement and it would prove to be the most enduring of the rural labour groups.[69] However, at least in the initial stages, the ILLA presented a more radical and class based political outlook, particularly when compared to the labour group that was later to emerge around John Daly in the city.

O'Connor argued that rural workers were quick to grasp the potential of local democracy in agitating for plots, cottages and direct labour on council road works leading to the rapid growth of branches of the ILLA.[70] However, the evidence suggests that the intent of rural labour in organising was much broader than these few demands.

The drive for the establishment of the ILLA came from a number of different labourers' organisations from around Munster and parts of Leinster. Fintan Lane contended that during this period labourers moved from political isolation to one where they had the occasional attention of mainstream nationalism. He argued that in an attempt to win influence within the nationalist movement they had to subscribe to the belief that class interests were less important than the 'national interest' and this clearly acted as a brake on labour militancy.[71]

However, the indications are that, at least initially, the ILLA attempted to break this stereotype and demonstrate that it was a radical independent voice for rural labourers. While it did eventually succumb to a significant element of control by nationalist politicians that neutered its militancy, this did not happen before a prolonged battle between the class interests of the labourers and the representatives of nationalist Ireland.

A number of Nationalist MPs attended the founding conference of the ILLA and were clearly shocked at the radical nature of the political programme debated at the conference. The stated

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[68] James John O'Shee was a prominent nationalist that ran his own law practice in Clonmel. In contrast to the pro-Parnellite Sheehan, O'Shee was elected as an anti-Parnellite candidate in West Waterford in 1895.
[69] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824-2000,* p. 58.
[70] Ibid., p. 68.
[71] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 135.

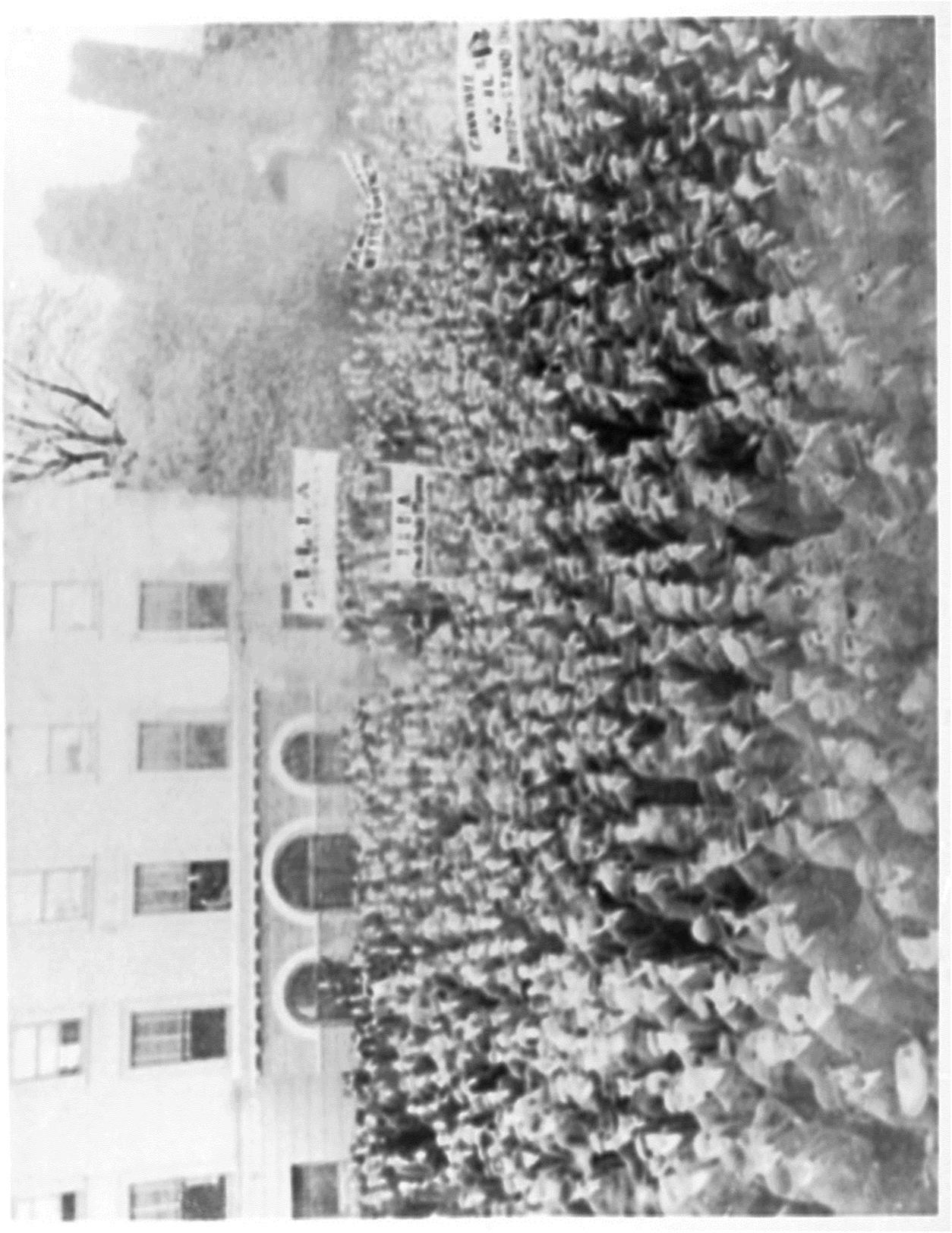

Illustration No. 10 – ILLA Protest in Macroom, c. 1894.
Source: Unknown
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Land_and_Labour_Association#/media/File:Macroom_Protest_Meeting_1894.jpg]

objective of the conference was to consider the best means of 'securing to the labourer the just rewards of his labour'. The conference condemned the exclusion of labourers from voting in local government as a 'scandalous injustice'. Delegates continued by claiming that until this 'corrupt and fraudulent system' was fixed, labourers would continue to protest 'against any measures dealing with Irish labour interests being entrusted to Grand Juries, Presentment Sessions or Poor Law Boards'.[72]

The political establishment, both nationalist and unionist were clearly shocked that labourers would debate such a radical programme. The *Chronicle* criticised the conference claiming that the proposals will 'not carry much weight with careful persons' and that the labour delegates should 'confine their deliberations to labour questions'.[73]

Padraig Lane contended that the development of the United Irish League (UIL) from 1898[74] promised to create a national forum into which the ILLA could step in order to achieve its social and economic aims.[75] O'Connor asserted that in Waterford the ILLA became substantially incorporated within the UIL.[76] However, there are few indications that the ILLA branches in Limerick were focussed on involvement within the UIL. The initial focus of the ILLA was the implementation of the Labourers Acts and the conflict with the PLGs over the allocation of labourers' cottages. Protests were organised often in the hundreds and sometimes, involving thousands, to compel the Boards of Guardians to build labourers cottages. In an effort to diffuse the conflict the PLG's would set up inquiries, but meetings of these inquiries did nothing more than provide another focus for demonstrations and protests. Of particular contention was the fact that the local councils were hiving off the building of labourers' cottages to private interests through the establishment of 'development companies' funded by private subscriptions to build the cottages and repay the subscriptions through the rent collected.[77]

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[72] The proposals put before the founding conference of the Irish Land and Labour Association can be found in Appendix XI.
[73] *Limerick Chronicle,* 16 August 1894.
[74] The United Irish League was formed in 1898 by prominent Irish nationalist MP William O'Brien in an effort to break the log-jam of the Parnellite controversy on the nationalist movement. The UIL grew rapidly throughout the country as it was seen as an alternative to the incessant feuding between the factions of the nationalist movement. For more information on the United Irish League see: Joseph V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics 1881-1918,* (London, 1976), pp. 107-125.
[75] Padraig G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, Volume 98 (1993), p. 91.
[76] O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford,* p. 95.
[77] In 1893 the Limerick Labourers Dwellings Company report a profit of £10 16s 2d for the year after paying off £38 15s of the loan. *Limerick Chronicle,* 25 September 1894.

Within days of the founding conference of the ILLA a protest involving hundreds of labourers took place at an inquiry into the building of labourers' cottages in Newcastle West.[78] Increasing employment and some movement on the issue of labourers' cottages led to an easing of tensions during the middle of the 1890s. Nationalist politicians worked tirelessly to bring the ILLA under their control. The nature of local government before the reforms of 1898 mitigated against the development of the ILLA. Any influence on local councils was nullified by the continued domination of farmers and landowners on local councils. In rural Limerick this was particularly pronounced as nationalist politician Anthony Mackey, a political maverick motivated by self-interest, was determined to maintain his power base by emasculating the ILLA.[79]

In late 1897 the *Chronicle* reported that there was an almost total failure of the potato crop in West Limerick.[80] The destitution caused by this crisis led to renewed conflict between the labourers and local councillors as demands for relief works emerged.[81] Local labourers in rural Limerick were now focused on organising outside the ILLA through their pre-existing Trade and Labour League (TLL). At a meeting of the TLL in Kilmallock Nationalist MP and ILLA secretary, J.J. O'Shee attacked the TLL for not affiliating to the ILLA. His criticisms were met with rebuke by TLL Chairperson, O'Keeffe, who stated that the ILLA had made little progress and was operating for electioneering purposes for nationalist politicians. O'Keeffe continued asking why the labourers should 'allow themselves to be used by Members of Parliament who were forever squabbling between themselves'. O'Keeffe argued against affiliating to the ILLA which he regarded as just an appendage of one wing of the nationalist movement and the meeting decided against affiliation.[82]

The passing of the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 made significant changes to the conduct of local government in Ireland.[83] From the perspective of the working class the most important development was the extension of the francise to include labourers. Contrary to the expectation that the rural labourers would provide a voting base for nationalist politicians, the labourers moved to demonstrate that they wouldn't automatically vote according to expectations.

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[78] *Limerick Chronicle,* 23 August 1894.
[79] Padraig G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914', p. 91-92.
[80] *Limerick Chronicle,* 9 & 11 September 1897.
[81] *Freemans Journal,* 12 November 1897.
[82] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 October 1898.
[83] See: John J. Clancy, *A handbook of local government in Ireland: containing an explanatory introduction to the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898,* (Dublin, 1899).

Local Elections 1899

Within months an opportunity emerged for the ILLA to express an independent voice during the local elections in January 1899. However, after the emergence of a labour challenge in Limerick city, both factions of the nationalist movement were determined to prevent any labour candidates in the county council election. The newly elected Mayor John Daly called a meeting to discuss the elections but the meeting was controlled by J.J. O'Shee who ensured, with the support of Daly, that no labour candidates would stand for the county council.[84]

The move by O'Shee backfired as the labourers abandoned the nationalist movement and backed landlord candidates in the election. From the perspective of the labourers the landlords had treated them far better than the tenant farmers who formed the backbone of the nationalist movement in rural Limerick. Landlords provided more consistent employment at higher rates of pay than the farmers and were more open to the provision of labourers' cottages on their land. The landlords also exploited the conflict between the labourers and nationalists by highlighting how nationalism was exploiting the electoral power of the labouring class while being hostile to labour interests. Lord Dunraven[85] was particularly vocal during the election campaign in response the Catholic hierarchy and nationalist politicians attempted to whip up sectarianism against the landlord candidates.[86] The labourers ignored these attempts and openly supported the landlords, several of whom were elected to the county council. Hostility to the clergy and nationalist politicians continued after the election and was demonstrated by what became known as the Bruff Scandal when the Christian Brothers withdrew from their school in the town, leading to a long conflict between the rural poor in and around Bruff and Bishop O'Dwyer.[87]

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[84] *Limerick Chronicle,* 18 February 1899.

[85] Windham Wyndham-Quin, 4th Earl of Dunraven and Mount-Earl, owned the extensive Adare Manor estate. He sat in the House of Lords from 1871 until his death in 1926, serving in two Conservative governments between 1885 and 1887. Dunraven was regarded as a progressive landlord and he chaired the Land Conference in 1902 which led to the passing of the Wyndham Land Act, 1903, which facilitated the purchase of land from landlords by tenants on favourable terms. For more information see: Michael V. Spillane, *The 4th Earl of Dunraven, 1841–1926: A Study of His Contribution to the Emerging Ireland at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2003.

[86] *Limerick Chronicle,* 14, 16 & 18 February 1899.

[87] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 May & 6 May 1899. The Bruff Scandal involved a dispute between Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Edward O'Dwyer and the Christian Brothers who ran a school in Bruff. The dispute involved a desire by O'Dwyer to shut the Christian Brothers school that provided free tuition to the poor, in order that a school attached to a seminary that was under his control could charge fees for education in order to help fund the seminary. The scandal erupted when the Christian Brothers arbitrarily withdrew from Bruff without warning and against the wishes of the local populace. For more information see Dermot Ryan, 'Scandal at Bruff ', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volumes 4-8, (September 1980, December 1980, Spring 1981, Summer 1981, Autumn 1981), and Pius J.A. Browne, 'The Bruff Agitation, A Brief History, 1897-1907', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 11, (Summer 1982), pp. 13-16.

Following the local elections labourers continued to pressure local nationalist councillors through organisations like the Newcastle West Trade and Labour Association and the Rathkeale Democratic Labour Federation. The *Chronicle* commented that, given the increased number of labourers entitled to vote,

> … a great new-begotten zeal for the working man has in certain quarters manifested itself of late. Eloquent speeches, filled with vague generalities, have… been delivered… but the labourers will hardly be content with eloquence, they want practical results.

The pressure to maintain some element of independence of the nationalist movement increased on the ILLA. At a meeting in Limerick the ILLA decided against amalgamating with the UIL. Meetings of labourers around the county were increasingly critical of nationalist county councillors for abandoning them now that they were elected. Resolutions at the meetings called them 'renegade' councillors and threatened that the councillors would be 'taught a lesson or two ' when they appeared again in front of the labourers.[88]

In August 1899 an ILLA Convention was held in Tipperary. The meeting heard that there were 22 branches of the ILLA in Limerick, 21 in Tipperary, 17 in Cork, four in Waterford and two in Kilkenny. However, it was noteworthy that there were 16 labourers' bodies in Limerick who had not affiliated to the ILLA. As strikes broke out between labourers and farmers, hostility from the nationalist movement increased. A strike in Patrickswell resulted in the landlords accepting the labourers' demands while the farmers fought the labourers' strike. This hostility resulted in the local President of the ILLA, Mr. Hickey, being elected as a rate collector much to the annoyance of the local nationalist movement. The strike was eventually settled through the intervention of a local landlord councillor, Lord Clarina.[89] Labourers were by then threatening to boycott rates when the Limerick Rural District Council debated a proposal from the Local Government Board to impose rates on the occupier of labourers' cottages. The nationalist councillors responded by threatening to engage in the mass eviction of labourers.[90]

Increasing hostility developed between the UIL and the ILLA. Labourers were excluded from UIL meetings and when the ILLA clashed with middle-class interests it was excluded from all

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[88] *Limerick Chronicle,* 3, 6, 8 & 20 June 1899.
[89] *Limerick Chronicle,* 15 & 22 August 1899. Lord Clarina was a Protestant landlord, Lionel Edward Massey.
[90] *Limerick Chronicle,* 4 November 1899.

effective political action. William O'Brien, Redmond and Dillon all considered the ILLA as a divisive force in national affairs while the National Federation considered the ILLA as a rival.[91] Nationalist politicians were determined to use the ILLA as voting fodder while rejecting any independent role for the ILLA in representing the interests of labourers.[92]

It was common practice for local councils to use private contractors, predominantly farmers, on public road works. In March 1900, not for the first time, this led to tensions between the ILLA and nationalist politicians. The ILLA condemned the hiring of local farmers on 'excessive wages', claiming that the farmers then cut the wages of labourers to make higher profits. At a mass meeting in Kilfinane, Lord Emly, another local landlord councillor, received a rousing reception when he condemned the actions of nationalist councillors. Emly called for the establishment of 'trade union and trade combinations'. Nationalist newspapers rounded on Lord Emly, describing his speech as 'flowery, frothy and foolery' and criticising him for coming 'down from his lofty position to right the wrongs of labour'.[93]

Lord Emly continued his criticisms at a meeting of the ILLA in Cork, stating:

> It is injustice to take these roads from the starving labourers. It is injustice to refuse them cottages. It is injustice to refuse them their acre. It is injustice to exclude them from direct representation in the District Council, in the County council and in Parliament. It is damnable injustice to try and prevent them from holding their meetings, to intrigue against them and yet pretend to be friends with them, to refuse to employ them, and to try and ruin them if they prominently identify themselves with the labour movement.[94]

Padraig Lane showed that when the ILLA supported William O'Brien it faced the full venom of Redmond and the IPP. O'Brien split from the UIL and the home rule movement over their attacks on the Wyndham Act in 1903. The ILLA secretary J.J. O'Shee – a Redmond loyalist – disaffiliated all the dissident ILLA branches to prevent them attending the conventions to select candidates. This action confirmed the denial of the right of labour to hold an independent

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[91] The National Federation was an anti-Parnellite organisation that folded into the United Irish League after its foundation in 1898.
[92] Padraig G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914', p. 92.
[93] *Skibbereen Eagle*, 3 March 1900. Thomas William Gaston Monsell, 2nd Baron Emly. For more information see 'Lord Emly 1858-1932', *Mungret Annual*, Volume 8, Number 3 (August 1933), pp. 329-330.
[94] *Southern Star*, 1 September 1900.

view.[95] Padraig Lane contended that the ILLA was fatally subjected to political exploitation and a question mark hung over its ability to see clearly what social and economic objectives it should pursue.[96] There is clear evidence to support this view.

Conclusion

Between 1850 and 1870 cattle, mutton, pork and butter prices all increased by fifty percent. Tenant farmers were being carried into prosperity on the back of a boom in the agricultural sector and this prosperity created the context for the drive towards peasant proprietorship.[97] While there were stretches of poor years, Irish agriculture faced no long-term depression and Ó Gráda contended that the post-Famine period was one of innovation by irish farmers, increased regional specialisation, rising potato yields and buoyant butter and livestock exports.[98] Lee argued that while wages for agricultural labourers rose from 5s per week in 1845 to 7s per week by 1870, the rise in the labourer's standard of living did not match the rise in his aspirations.[99] What should be noted here is that the wage of 5s per week in 1845 was a paltry wage that had the labourer in poverty and that, while the living standards of the labourer did rise, it was still lagging behind the increased prosperity for the farmer. To demonstrate the difficulty facing the labourer, Ó Gráda outlined that with a rise in potato prices and a scarcity of potato ground, the labourer was forced to purchase more expensive sitrabout meal, absorbing some of his increased wage.[100]

The downturn experienced in 1879-1880 caused a crisis for smallholders and led them into participating with the larger tenant farmers in providing a social basis for a powerful political movement that was brought together and organised by the Land League.[101] Lee argued that it was the decline in the number of agricultural labourers was particularly relevant to the Land War. He suggested that the class hostility between the farmers and the labourers in the pre-Famine era could have been replicated if the same proportion of tenant farmers to labourers had existed in 1880 as had been the case before the Famine and that this hostility could have derailed the agenda being pursued by the tenant farmers and the nationalist movement. He noted that

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[95] Padraig G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914', p. 93-94.
[96] Ibid., p. 101.
[97] Paul Rouse, 'The Farmers Since 1850', in Eugenio F. Biagini & Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, (Cambridge, 2017), p. 131-132.
[98] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, p. 256-257.
[99] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848 – 1918*, p. 8.
[100] Ó Gráda, p. 237.
[101] Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660*, p. 149.

even with the much reduced numbers there was still considerable difficulties between farmers and laburers during the Land War.[102]

Ultimately the nationalist leadership derailed the attempts by the rural albourers to establish independent labour organisations and largely sidelined the demands of the labourers with the promise that, if they supported the tenant farmer, their interests would be addressed in due course. This, of course failed to happen.

The ILLA may have been, as O'Connor contended, the most enduring of all the organisations of rural labour, but its influence was clearly undermined by the actions of the nationalist movement. The fact that many labourers, particularly in Limerick, attempted to maintain independent organisations outside the control of the nationalist movement, and supported landlords who were seen as less hostile to the interests of labour, demonstrated the conflicting outlook of the labouring class. Fintan Lane contended that the political history of the nineteenth century rural labourer is one of class conflict and social resistance.[103] This would appear to be an apt summation of the situation regarding rural labour in Limerick during this period.

The inability of the working class to forge an independent political platform meant that organisations were susceptible to the being dominated by the political outlook of the nationalist movement, not matter how fractious it was. The ILLA may have endured right up to the revolutionary period in Ireland, but in Limerick it had little impact after the turn of the century and ultimately succumbed to the radicalisation of the period when the ITGWU emerged and the ILLA branches, one after another, dissolved in to the ITGWU as it rapidly expanded into rural Limerick in 1918 and 1919.[104]

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[102] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848 – 1918,* p. 92.
[103] Fintan Lane, 'Rural Labourers, Social Change and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 117.
[104] For more details see: Haugh, 'The ITGWU in Limerick 1917-1922', pp. 33-34.

Conclusion

For working class people Limerick city and county were different places in 1900 compared to the situation 100 years earlier. The economy of the region underwent significant transformation, with the emergence of a wealthy Catholic merchant class and the decline in the traditional trades. Faced with competition from industrialised Britain, the trades were unable to sustain their situation, particularly in the textile sector. Other trades like in the building sector, while declining, were largely able to maintain their position, except during periods of economic downturn. The economy was dominated by the export of agricultural produce and susceptible to the cyclical nature of nineteenth century capitalism.

Factory production was limited to just three sectors in the city during the nineteenth century. First established in 1816, the bacon curing sector operated on a production line basis. Textiles also provided production line factory work with the Army Clothing Factory, founded in 1850, providing work for up to 1,000 workers. However, with competition from Britain, coupled with poor management and a difficult economy, the workforce declined until the factory's demise in 1890. Reopened under new management, it never reached the same prosperity as previously and the workforce faced poorer wages and working conditions. The third major employment was the Condensed Milk Factory, opened in 1883. Growing to a workforce of 600 by the end of World War One, the factory went into decline in the post-war depression before being taken into public ownership in 1927 and continuing with a much-reduced workforce. To demonstrate the lack of industry in the city, Ó Gráda barely gives Limerick a passing mention in two chapters reviewing industrial development in Ireland in the nineteenth century.[1]

McGrath commented that the nineteenth century saw the emergence of an entrepreneurial drive that came to define the city and that this development was diametrically opposed to the outlook of the city corporation and social clique associated with it.[2] While there is validity in this assertion, in reality it represented two sections of the business class, one whose interests relied on a continuance of the policy of mercantilism and the other who needed the opening up of the local economy to facilitate meeting the export demand for agricultural goods. When it came to responding to the upsurge in industrial conflict their class interests aligned, and they worked to

[1] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, pp. 273-348.
[2] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, p. 60.

defeat the efforts of craft workers to organise and to defend their interests. This dynamic also played out in other urban areas during this period.

For semi-skilled and unskilled workers, the nineteenth century was a period of prolonged struggle with poverty, unemployment, and emigration a constant feature. Except for the railways in the second half of the century, work for labourers tended to be causal and haphazard. Food shortages and fever were commonplace, particularly in the pre-famine period. This situation was very much replicated for rural labourers who faced a constant uphill struggle for survival throughout the period. Despite rapidly declining numbers in the post-famine period, the rural labourers saw changing agricultural ownership and practices undermine any potential for economic stability.

This work looked at the emergence of the labour movement in Limerick city and county and its development during the nineteenth century. This period encapsulated the formative years of the struggle for union organisation in Limerick. The first half of the century saw the craft unions engage in struggle to preserve jobs, wages and working conditions in the face of opposition from the employers and competition from mass factory production in Britain. It also saw a period of widespread agrarian conflict, including several significant movements borne from the direct economic and social conditions. During the second half of the century the craft unions attempted to exert political influence, largely unsuccessfully, concluding with the successful municipal election campaign in 1899, a success that left the expectations of the working class in the city largely unfulfilled. At the same time semi-skilled and unskilled workers entered directly into the arena of industrial struggle as successive groups of workers fought a prolonged battle to organise. By the end of the century these workers were embracing ‘new unionism’, with many moving to build trade unions and some affiliating to the newly emerging general unions in Britain.

This thesis set out to look at the developments during the nineteenth century from the perspective of the working class. To this end it analysed the nature and objectives of industrial conflict by craft tradesmen and by labourers. It also looked at the character of the rural clandestine groups who engaged in ‘outrage’ during the first half of the century. This thesis also considered the political outlook of the working class and the effort made to influence political developments during the century.

The nineteenth century saw significant changes in nature of the traditional craft trades in Limerick. Division emerged between the master craftsmen and the journeymen as economic circumstances and changing economic outlook brought both groups into conflict. As the craft workers strived for recognition, industrial disputes often involved violence. This occurred against a backdrop of the changing nature of industrial production under capitalism, with the most intense period of industrial conflict occurring as the economy moved into deep recession following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. O'Connor outlined that violence was a significant factor in Waterford and consideration is given to the similarities with Limerick during this period.[3]

Following the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 and the passing of the Combination of Workmen Act, 1825, the craft unions were able to organise openly, but with continuing competition from Britain eroding the traditional craft led economy, the crafts continue to decline, leading to large scale emigration of craft workers and their families, particularly in the textile industry. The craft unions faced continuing battles to preserve jobs and wages as employers looked to reduce costs by employing 'colts', non-unionised workers, at lower rates of pay. These developments are discussed in chapter one.

With an economic downturn beginning in 1839 the craft unions turned to working with nationalist politicians in promoting native industry through the newly established Board of Trade. While the trades threw in significant effort, the employers are were less enthusiastic. As strikes and disputes continued, the Board of Trade went into decline, with the secretary announcing that it had served its purpose by undermining strike action in the city. These matters were addressed in chapter one of this thesis. McGrath claimed that throughout the nineteenth century the organised workers in Limerick, crafts and labourers, held an insular outlook based on localism.[4] It is possible to make this claim if viewing the interaction of the working class with the local political and business class from a certain perspective, but it is a claim that is largely disproved by evidence.

As well as striving for union organisation and the protection of jobs and conditions, the working class also engaged with the political sphere in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the early part of the nineteenth century the primary influencing factor in political life would have

[3] See p. 38.
[4] McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899*, pp. 123, 136, 137 & 141.

been the personalities involved. Violence was common and, in many cases, sections of the working class made themselves available for hire to carry out acts of violence against the supporters of opposing candidates. While there is little evidence of any involvement by workers in the campaign for Catholic emancipation, the election of Daniel O'Connell and the emergence of the repeal movement was to set the back-drop of political involvement by the working class in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The findings of O'Connor in relation to Waterford and Cronin in relation to Cork on the issue of the impact of the campaign for Catholic emancipation were compared to developments in Limerick.[5]

The Repeal movement was particularly attractive to the tradesmen in Limerick as it resonated with the decline in the traditional craft trades following the Act of Union. The Congregated Trades took an active role in supporting O'Connell and the repeal movement, but more often than not, were confined to playing an auxiliary role in the wider campaign. O'Connor's findings in relation to the repeal movement in Waterford are compared to developments in Limerick.[6] Chapter four looked at how this situation unfolded and how effective the trades were in attempting to influence political developments, local and national.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the declining influence of the craft trades. The limited number of industrial disputes were primarily confined to crafts that were in decline like the baking and tailoring trades. The emergence of new model unionism was a feature of this period and led to the affiliation of sections of Limerick craft workers with British based amalgamated unions. During this period, the crafts became a sort of labour aristocracy, largely ignoring the plight of the labourers and attempting to influence nationalist opinion in the city. Cronin indicated that the trades in Cork played an active role in the Young Ireland movement, whereas in Limerick a majority of the trades were supporters of the Old Irelanders.[7] Similarly, Cronin argued that the trades were the mainstay of Parnellism in Cork, while, in relation to Waterford, O'Connor argued that the rise of Parnell saw a renewed endorsement of nationalism by the trades.[8] However, as was the case in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Congregated Trades in Limerick were largely on the periphery of the nationalist movement. They opposed the nomination of Isaac Butt as a parliamentary candidate in Limerick before later switching to support the Home Rule Movement. It was not until the foundation of the

[5] See p. 142.
[6] See p. 143.
[7] See p. 252.
[8] See p. 270 for the development of this point.

Amnesty Association in Limerick that the trades were able to exercise any real political influence. Given that the focal point of the amnesty campaign in Limerick was the release of maverick Fenian, John Daly, all strands of nationalist opinion were reluctant to get involved and this paved the way for the trades to have an influence in political life they previously were unable to attain. The backdrop for this development was the emergence of new unionism in Britain and an increased militancy on the part of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The amnesty campaign benefited from the active participation of this section of the working class on protests and at public meetings.

Following the release of Daly, the Congregated Trades threw themselves into supporting Daly's efforts to secure his election to the city council. Again, the existence of new unionism resulted in the active involvement of the labourers in the developing labour challenge in the 1899 Municipal elections. As the Municipal elections of 1899 neared Daly took the opportunity to work with the Congregated Trades to build a political powerbase for himself in Limerick. With an extended franchise that for the first time allowed the vote for labourers, Daly and the Trades Council selected a slate of labour candidates for the election. The election results proved to be a stunning success with the labour candidates winning a majority and forming what became known as the 'People's Parliament'. This development was part of a significantly wider movement of labour candidates standing for election across the country. In many areas these labour candidates scored successes, but the scale of the victory in Limerick was by far the most significant outcome of the election.

The success of the labour candidates raised expectations among the city's working class that the 'People's Parliament' would represent a fundamental break with the conservative nationalist politics of previous decades. However, before long the labour group became embroiled in controversy after controversy. Within weeks there was a revolt from below with the labour hierarchy being criticised for lacking democracy and being out of touch with the people who voted for them.[9] The expectations of with working class went unfulfilled and support of the labour council quickly dissipated.

The dominant outlook of the historiography of the nineteenth century is the relationship between tenant farmer and landlord. The reality is that the history of rural Ireland during this

[9] See also McGrath, *Organised Labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899,* pp. 313-325.

period was much deeper and more complex. Agrarian outrage was common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Chapter two analysed the nature of the conflict involving the Caravats, the Rockites and the Terry Alts. The class nature, tactics and influence of sectarianism were considered in the context of these movements, including the characterisation of these conflicts by O'Connor.[10] Clark made a crucial point in relation to these conflicts, stating that it was important not to overstate the impact of the impact of religion on rural violence. He asserted that to do so could obscure a crucial difference between rural secret societies and some of the more religiously based movements like the Defenders at the end of the eighteenth century.[11] These movements emerged against a background of widespread unemployment, poverty and deprivation, and it was these economic conditions that were the main driving force in the agrarian conflict of the period. The situation that faced the rural labourers is considered in the second chapter.

The emergence of the National Agricultural Labourers Union in Britain in 1872 was to have a significant impact on the outlook of rural labourers. From the 1870s onwards rural labourers attempted to form labour unions and labour leagues in an attempt to gain representation. Protests were commonplace as labourers began demanding that their interests be placed front and centre on the national agenda. These developments were played out against a backdrop of the emergence of Parnellism and the pushing of the issue of peasant proprietorship to the forefront of the political agenda. While Parnell was prepared to contemplate peasant proprietorship, he was not a social revolutionary and had little desire to initiate agrarian agitation.[12]

As the nationalist leadership focussed on the rights of tenant farmers during the Land War, labourers strived to maintain independent organisations to give them a voice. Repeatedly the local and national leaders of nationalism fought to bring these organisations of labourers under their control. A focal point for the agitation by labourers was the struggle around housing and the need to build labourers cottages.

The most enduring of the organisations for labourers was the Irish Land and Labour Association. This initiative was an extension of the development of new unionism and the

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[10] See p. 80 & p. 89.
[11] Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 78.
[12] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848 – 1918*, p. 73.

struggles of semi-skilled and unskilled workers over the previous number of years. Formed in 1894 with a radical programme, it was ultimately brought under the control by politicians from the Irish Parliamentary Party. This point is developed by O'Connor and analysed in relation to Limerick.[13] The ILLA was to continue without ever fulfilling the radical potential at its foundation until the Irish Transport and General Workers Union began organising rural labourers in Limerick in 1918. Seeing their organisations turned into vehicles for the advancement of nationalist politicians, many labourers turned to supporting landlord candidates in the 1899 elections, as they treated their labourers better than the farming class who used every mechanism at their disposal to avoid their responsibilities in legislation as the century closed. These developments were looked at in chapter eight.

When looking at the struggle of the working class it is necessary to take account of the social conditions facing working class people in Limerick in the period prior to the famine. Consideration was also given to O'Connor's description of social conditions in Waterford during this period.[14] The slum tenements combined with widespread poverty, were breeding grounds for fever, with the infrastructure of the city incapable of prevent the spread of disease or the adequate treatment of the victims. Food shortages and rising prices also contributed to social unrest. Food riots were a common occurrence and took place in an organised and planned manner.

Thompson's work on the 'moral economy'[15] was considered in the context of food rioting in Limerick. In the context of the food riot, there was evidence that interclass tensions existed between the urban and rural labouring classes on one side and urban merchants, forestallers and tenant farmers on the other. The working class rejected the notion that rising food prices were an economic imperative and worked to force the local business class to subsidised food supplies. Unlike food riots in other locations, there was no indication of a specific sector of the working class taking a leading role in the planning and the conduct of food riots. Furthermore, and possibility because of the lack of a clear and concrete leadership, food plunder was also more extensive during the food riots than in other locations. Chapter three investigated this social struggle and its emergence as a result of the social conditions that existed in Limerick at this time.

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[13] See p. 321.
[14] See p. 115.
[15] E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy and the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, Number 50, (February 1971), pp. 76-136.

In the context of the outlook of the working class, the famine formed a nexus between the first half and the second half of the nineteenth century. Ó Gráda argued that there is a tendency to remove the famine from centre stage of nineteenth century history.[16] From the perspective of the rural working class there is a clear divergence between the pre-Famine period and developments post-Famine. Most significant is the change in strategy from clandestine secret societies to openly attempting to organise trade unions and independent labour organisations.

In the initial stages of the famine the working class engaged in widespread struggle in an attempt to mitigate the impact of the famine. As the famine progressed it resulted in a major reduction in population, particularly among the poorest sections of the population, the urban and rural labourers and their families, but also impacted on craft workers, particularly those in trades like textiles. The reduction in population led to land clearances, the decline of the landless labourer and the cottier, and a new economic situation as the second half of the century began. The impact of the famine and the struggle of working-class people to survive is examined in chapter four of this thesis.

The second half of the nineteenth century emerged as a period of struggle by semi-skilled and unskilled workers for union organisation. The emergence of new unionism was a crucial factor in this development. The early initiatives of new unionism come from the NALU and the ASRS in the early 1870s with the London dock strike of 1889 proving the most significant development. In the context of Limerick three key sections of workers, the dock labourers, the pork butchers and the railway workers played a particularly important role in these developments. Using O'Connor's findings, comparisons were made with developments in Waterford and the interaction of workers in both locations.[17] The dock labourers fought relentlessly to build and maintain their local union from the middle of the 1860s. They engaged in a constant battle with the employers on the docks that ebbed and flowed for the rest of the century, as they fought against poor wages, poor working conditions and the constant threat to their livelihood resulting from the prevalence of casual labour. The pork butchers saw their standing as a traditional craft decline as bacon factories came to play a dominant role in the economy of the city. As they struggled to preserve their wages and conditions, the pork butchers combined in an amalgamated union with pork butchers in Waterford and Cork working for the

[16] Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, p. 176.
[17] See p. 194 & p. 207.

same employers in those cities. Ultimately the pork butchers were to go down to defeat, becoming conservative and insular in outlook as the twentieth century dawned. The railway workers began attempting to organise in the latter half of the 1870s. Employed by railway companies that stretched in various directions across the country, it was evident that the railway workers needed some form of national organisation in order to prevent being isolated in their home locations alone the railway network. The struggle for union organisation on the railways dove-tailed, and was facilitated by, 'new unionism' as the British based Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants became the primary organisational focus of the railway workers. This struggle for union organisation among semi-skilled and unskilled workers is considered in depth in chapter six.

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the initial efforts by women workers to organise. The nature of work for women workers in urban and rural Limerick was investigated, with a review of the similarities with Waterford using O'Connor's findings,[18] as well as the efforts by women factory workers to organise within trade unions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was reviewed. Women workers were largely confined to textiles, dairy processing and domestic service in the city. In rural areas domestic service and farm work dominated. Despite declining opportunities, work as domestic and farm servants continued to be the dominant employment for rural women at the end of the century. Luddy was referenced on the difficulties faced by women in attempting to organise.[19] These matters were also reviewed in chapter six of this thesis.

This thesis is the result of extensive research. It used a significant number of primary and secondary sources to develop a concrete analysis of the development of the labour movement in Limerick in the nineteenth century. Adopting an approach of viewing developments on a class basis and taking a working-class perspective to the events and processes of the period, the thesis has adopted a class analysis in its interpretation of this period. Gaps exist in the research as a result of the inability to access relevant material in the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers for the second half of the century. Similarly, the lack of primary source material relating to the trade unions, like local minute books, mitigated against a more comprehensive approach. Those that do exist are largely in poor condition and of limited use. However, extensive reviews

[18] See p. 236.
[19] Luddy, 'Women and Work in Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Ireland', p. 53.

of secondary material place the thesis comprehensively in the position of filling current gaps in the research into local labour histories.

In 1848 Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels wrote: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'.[20] The research conducted for this thesis has shown that the evidence would demonstrate that the nineteenth century was a period where class conflict was a common, and at times, intense feature of the social, political and economic landscape of Limerick city and county. This class conflict was driven by the social and economic conditions faced by the urban and rural working class. Widespread social unrest, including violence, erupted at times when the economic situation was transitioning from boom to slump, as in the case of the economic downturn that developed after the Napoleonic Wars leading to economic depression in 1820. Speaking of the 1810s D'Arcy noted that it was no surprise that workers would seek to organise unions, that they would offer stout resistance, and that this resistance in some cases resulted in considerable violence. He asserted that, given the circumstances they faced, the survival of the unions was not an inconsiderable achievement. The same adage could also be applied for the remainder of the century.

At other times class conflict occurred as the country was heading into severe crisis, as with the intense period of conflict in the early stages of the Famine. In 1890 the emergence of new unionism saw a strike wave developing as economic growth began to emerge after the depression of the 1880s. Similarly in rural areas, the Caravat movement was driven by rising prices as a result of the wartime boom, the Rockites emerged as the economy was heading into the depression of 1820 and the Terry Alts in response to the shift in agriculture from tillage to pasture farming. The new unionism that prompted the emergence of first the NALU and then the ASRS followed a similar pattern as the economy headed into an economic downturn in the 1870s, while the efforts to develop independent labour organisations during the Land War were a response to the drive for peasant proprietorship that was ignoring the plight of landless labourer.

The development of the labour movement in nineteenth century Limerick follows a similar pattern to Waterford and Cork. The evidence would suggest that struggle in Limerick largely dove-tailed the other urban areas with some minor exceptions. At times, the scale of the social

[20] Karl Marx & Fredrick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, (Moscow, 1977), p. 36.

conflict was more intense in Limerick, demonstrated by the prominent position of the Mid-West in all three upsurges of rural agrarian conflict in the pre-Famine period. Similarly, the election of Daniel O'Connell in Clare in 1828, while not directly impacting on the poorest layers in society, significantly raised expectations among the urban and rural poor. The Mid-West was also the nexus of both the Young Ireland and the Fenian uprising. On a regular basis the social conflict that emerged forced the local and British establishment to respond, sometimes with repression, sometimes with concessions and always to preserve the existing social order. At other times the nationalist leadership were forced, at the very least, to verbally acknowledge the situation faced by the poorest layers in society, while attempting to bring emerging labour organisations under their control in case they threatened the nationalist agenda.

This thesis is the first comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the history of the labour movement in urban and rural Limerick in the nineteenth century. It encompasses a more comprehensive approach to the labour movement than the recently submitted thesis by McGrath which focuses almost exclusively on the history of the political outlook and involvement of the craft trades in Limerick City.[21] The thesis is comparable to the work of O'Connor in relation to Waterford[22] and more comprehensive in terms of its scope than Cronin's work in relation to Cork.[23] It complements the previously published national labour histories of O'Connor[24] and Boyle.[25] This thesis also forms the basis for future research into the history of the labour movement in Limerick in the twentieth century.

[21] John McGrath, *Organised labour in Limerick City, 1810-1899.*
[22] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford.*
[23] Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?.*
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Appendix I – Number of members of the Limerick crafts guilds affiliated to the Repeal Association 1841.

Occupation	Number
Guild of Smiths	40
Guild of Ropemakers	20
Guild of Nailers	40
Guild of Broguemakers	26
Guild of Carpenters	80
Guild of Bakers	58
Guild of Slaters and Plasterers	40
Guild of Millwrights	16
Limerick Stonecutters	34
Sandman's Society	20
Limerick Victuallers	34
Guild of Masons	66
Guild of Weavers	65
Limerick branch of Ironfounders	40
Painters of Limerick	25
Guild of Coachmakers	34
Guild of Coopers	72
Guild of Chandlers	15
Guild of Hatters	32
Fishermen of St. Francis Abbey	36
Guild of Tobacconists	37
Guild of Pipemakers	8
Union of Cabinetmakers	59

Source: *Freeman's Journal,* 21 October 1840

Appendix II – breakdown of occupation of females in Limerick City 1871

Occupation	Number		Occupation	Number
Wife of innkeeper	49		Book seller / publisher	2
Wife of lodging house keeper	8		Bookbinder	3
Wife of shopkeeper	78			
Wife of farmer	60		Fishing tackle maker	9
Wife of shoemaker	179			
Wife of butcher	84		Cutter	2
Wife unspecified occupation	876		Saddle / harness maker	2
Innkeeper	27			
Lodging house keeper	36		House proprietor	10
Institution service	45			
			Cabinet maker / upholsterer	12
Domestic servant	1,782			
Housekeeper	506		Dyer /scourer	6
Cook	113			
Housemaid	99		Manufacturer woollen cloth	12
Nurse	99		Wool spinner	5
Laundry maid	76		Manufacturer silk / satin	1
Hotel servant	12		Manufacturer linen	23
Charwoman	41		Manufacturer lace	192
Saleswoman	2		Weaver	32
Commercial clerk	2		Factory worker – textiles	7
			Draper	35
Pawnbroker	5		Manufacturer fancy goods	85
Shopkeeper	281		Embroiderer	1
Huckster	115			
Hawker	18		Hatter	1
			Furrier	1
Coach owner	1		Tailor / vest maker	79
Warehouse woman	11		Milliner / dress maker	634
Messenger / porter	13		Shirt maker / seamstress	618
			Corset maker	2
Land proprietor	11		Manufacturer hosiery	9
Farmer / grazier	3		Leather glove maker	1
Farmer’s daughter / relative	24		Shoemaker	78
Agricultural labourer	60		Laundry keeper	240
Farm Servant	13			
Fisherwoman	1			

Rope maker	1		Manufacturer earthenware	5
Net maker	3		Pipe maker	9
Sack maker	3		Glass dealer	3
			Tin plate worker	4
Cow keeper	40		Burnisher	1
Cheesemonger	20			
Butcher	35		Manufacturer iron	1
Provision curer	27		Ironmonger	5
Poulterer	6			
Fishmonger	15		General labourer	66
			Factory labourer	261
Flour merchant	1		Shop assistant	29
Baker	1		Machine worker	27
Confectioner				
Greengrocer	109		Independent gentlewoman	161
Wine / spirit merchant	3		Vagrant	78
Grocer	16			
Tobacconist	2			
Tallow chandler	1			
Comb maker	5			
Leather case maker / dealer	1			
Feather dresser / dealer	11			
Brush maker	20			
French polisher	1			
Cooper	1			
Basket maker	4			
Rag gatherer / dealer	40			
Coal merchant	2			
Coal labourer	1			

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1873, (C.873).

Appendix III – Breakdown of female occupations in Limerick City 1891

Occupation	Number		Occupation	Number
Civil service	11		Book seller / publisher	3
			Bookbinder	10
Nun	224		Newspaper vendor	1
Midwife	14		Undertaker	1
Subordinate medical service	8		Saddle / harness maker	1
Innkeeper	59			
Lodging house keeper	53			
Coffee house keeper	1			
			Cabinet maker / upholsterer	8
Domestic servant	2,021			
			Manufacturer woollen cloth	9
Hospital / institutional service	55		Manufacturer cotton goods	3
Washing / bathing service	293		Manufacturer lace	97
Hotel servant	26		Flannel dealer	1
Charwoman	24		Cloth dealer	3
Saleswoman	2		Manufacturer carpet / rug	1
Commercial clerk	17			
Merchant / broker	3		Draper	48
Accountant	11			
Shopkeeper	294		Embroiderer	1
Huckster / street seller	24			
Pawnbroker	5		Goldsmith / jeweller	1
			Weaver	1
			Tailoress	182
Telegraph service	1		Milliner / dress maker	871
Messenger / porter	3		Shirt maker / seamstress	478
			Wig maker / hairdresser	2
			Manufacturer hosiery	1
Farmer / grazier	19		Leather glove maker	1
			Shoemaker	27
Agricultural labourer	9		Umbrella maker	6
Nursery woman	1			
Animal dealer	2			

Mat maker	1		Earthenware dealer	9
Net maker	4		Timber merchant	1
Sack maker	8		Charcoal dealer	1
			Tin plate dealer	9
Milk seller	52			
Cheesemonger	9			
Butcher	5		Forge keeper	1
Provision curer	89		Ironmonger	2
Poulterer	11			
Fishmonger	20		General labourer	41
			Factory labourer	93
Flour merchant	4		Apprentice / assistant	6
Baker	5		Machine worker	48
Confectioner	46			
Greengrocer	55			
Wine / spirit merchant	6			
Grocer	35			
Tobacconist	15			
Stationer	5			
Comb maker	3			
Leather goods maker /dealer	3			
Feather dresser / dealer	9			
Brush maker	9			
French polisher	2			
Cooper	3			
Wood turner / box maker	2			
Basket maker	8			
Rag gatherer / dealer	4			

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1.

Appendix IV – breakdown of occupation of males Limerick City 1871

Occupation	Number		Occupation	Number
Publican / Inn keeper	85		Seaman	190
Beer seller	1		Pilot	20
Boarding house keeper	14		Boatman	14
Eating house keeper	1		Dock worker	241
Institution service	14			
Domestic servants	142		Storekeeper	184
Coachman	52		Weigher	12
Groom	22		Messenger / porter	227
Gardener	20			
Inn / Hotel servant	21		Land proprietor	19
			Farmer / Grazier	103
			Farmer's son / relation	13
Merchant	40		Farm bailiff	1
Banker	7		Agricultural labourer	207
Bank service	30		Farm Servant	16
Insurance service	3		Land surveyor / steward	17
Broker	48		Nurseryman	4
Salesman	3		Gardener	32
Auctioneer	7			
Accountant	98		Horse dealer	3
Commercial clerk	290		Horse breaker	11
Commercial traveller	28		Horse keeper / jockey	5
Pawnbroker	35		Farrier / Vet	3
Shopkeeper	142		Animal salesman	85
Huckster	14		Drover	5
Hawker / peddler	13		Fisherman	126
Engine driver / stoker	28		Bookseller / Publisher	11
Railway officer	26		Bookbinder	4
Railway attendant	82		Printer	59
			Newspaper vendor	19
Coach owner	5			
Coachman	37		Musical instrument maker	5
Carman / carter	244		Lithographer	1
Bargeman	2			
Ship owner	1		Fishing tackle maker	4
Steam navigation service	6		Pattern designer	2

Watch / clockmaker	22		Woolstapler	3
			Manufacturer cloth	14
Gunsmiths	6			
			Manufacturer linen	6
Engine maker / dealer	86		Manufacturer lace	3
Millwright	9			
Cutler	3		Weaver	18
			Draper	260
Coachmaker	75		Manufacturer fancy goods	3
Wheelwright	9		Manufacturer trimmings	2
Saddle / harness maker	9		Hairdresser / wig maker	16
			Hatter	17
Ship builder/wright	59		Furrier	1
Sailmaker	8		Tailor	302
			Manufacturer hosiery	2
House proprietor	7		Glove maker	1
Architect	7		Shoemaker	464
Builder	24		Clog maker	7
Carpenter / joiner	253		Umbrella maker	4
Bricklayer	3			
Marble mason	3		Mat maker	3
Mason - pavior	117		Rope maker	29
Slater / tiler	43		Manufacturer canvas	2
Plasterer	37			
Paperhanger	1		Cowkeeper	3
Plumber/painter/glazier	131		Cheesemonger	22
			Butcher	186
Cabinetmaker/upholsterer	87		Provision curer	43
Undertaker	1		Poulterer	2
Carver / gilder	6		Fishmonger	23
Furniture dealer	1			
			Flour merchant	87
Manufacturer dye/colour	1		Miller	64
Dyer / scourer	12		Baker	159
			Confectioner	11
Manufacturer carpet	1		Greengrocer	5

Maltster	17		Stone quarrier	8
Brewer	19		Stone merchant / polisher	71
Wine / spirit merchant	8		Slate quarrier	1
Cellar man	4		Limestone quarrier	2
Manufacturer soda water	8		Brick maker	1
Grocer	180		Railway labourer	3
Tobacconist	111		Road labourer	10
			Scavenger	7
Soap dealer	10			
Tallow chandler	34		Manufacturer earthenware	4
Comb maker	4		Tobacco pipe maker	25
			Glass dealer	3
Tanner	32			
Currier	8		Manufacturer glass	1
Leather case dealer	3		Manufacturer salt	4
			Pipe sinker	4
Brush maker	29			
Oil and colourman	5		Goldsmith / jeweller	18
French polisher	5		Manufacturer copper	2
			Coppersmith	2
Timber merchant	7		Tin plate worker	47
Sawyer	50		Tinker	1
Wood turner	11			
Box maker	1		Manufacturer brass	11
Cooper	154		Locksmith	6
			Gas fitter	13
Cork cutter	20		Wire maker	3
Basket maker	20		General labourer	1,549
Hay / Straw dealer	5			
Thatcher	3		Artisan mechanic	9
			Engine driver	3
Rag gatherer / dealer	15		Factory labourer	5
Stationer	3		Shop Assistant	128
			Apprentice	6
Coal merchant	1			
Coal labourer	3		Independent gentleman	47
Chimney sweep	28			
Gas works service	22		Vagrant	12

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1873, (C.873).

Appendix V – Breakdown of male occupation in Limerick City 1891

Occupation	Number		Occupation	Number
Publican / Inn keeper	66		Seaman	239
Eating house keeper	1		Pilot	17
Boarding house keeper	9		Boatman	14
			Dock worker	329
Institution service	4			
Domestic servants	93		Warehouseman	7
Coachman /groom	126		Weigher	1
			Messenger / porter	293
Gardener	59		Telegraph service	5
Inn / Hotel servant	23			
			Farmer / Grazier	61
Merchant	30		Farmer's son / relation	29
Banker	6		Farm bailiff	4
Bank service	39		Farm Servant	10
Insurance service	8		Agricultural labourer	80
Broker	64		Nurseryman	7
Salesman	2		Gardener	3
Auctioneer	14			
Accountant	110		Horse dealer	13
Commercial clerk	444		Horse breaker	5
Commercial traveller	38		Game / animal keeper	3
Pawnbroker	24		Farrier / Vet	16
Shopkeeper	158		Animal salesman	136
Huckster / street seller	15		Drover	34
			Fisherman	111
Engine driver / stoker	33		Bookseller / Publisher	9
Railway guard	9		Bookbinder	15
Railway official / servant	183		Printer	84
			Newspaper vendor	2
Coach owner	23			
Coachman	144		Musical instrument maker	4
Carman / carter	112			
			Lithographer	5
Bargeman	5			
Ship steward / cook	16			

Watch / clockmaker	25		Woolstapler	6
			Manufacturer woollen cloth	7
Gunsmiths	2			
			Flax dealer	1
Engine maker / dealer	40			
Millwright	5		Dyer / scourer	3
Cutler / scissors maker	2		Weaver	2
			Draper	338
Coachmaker	63		Trimmings dealer	1
Wheelwright	2		Manufacturer trimmings	1
Railway carriage maker	3			
Saddle / harness maker	48		Hairdresser / wig maker	35
Bicycle maker	5		Hatter	4
Ship builder	4		Furrier	3
Shipwright	19		Tailor	210
Ship rigger	1		Manufacturer hosiery	3
Sail maker	5		Feather dresser / dealer	5
			Shoemaker	194
Builder	26			
Carpenter / joiner	272		Blacksmith	114
Bricklayer	9			
			Mat maker	3
Mason	81		Rope maker	29
Slater / tiler	22		Manufacturer canvas	2
Plasterer	42			
Plumber	39		Dairyman	13
Painter/glazier	109		Cheesemonger	25
			Butcher	333
Cabinetmaker/upholsterer	78		Provision curer	109
Undertaker	2		Poulterer	2
Carver / gilder	6		Fishmonger	3
Furniture dealer	2			
			Flour merchant	100
Fireworks maker	1		Miller	78
			Baker	165
Chemist / druggist	30		Confectioner	25
			Greengrocer	4

Maltster	11		Stone quarrier	13
Brewer	2		Stone merchant / polisher	50
Wine / spirit merchant	20		Paviour	3
			Limestone quarrier	1
Manufacturer soda water	11		Road contractor	1
Grocer	227		Railway labourer	10
Tobacconist	39		Road labourer	22
			Plate layer	4
Chimney sweep	20			
Scavenger	5		Manufacturer earthenware	3
Rag gatherer / dealer	3		Tobacco pipe maker	9
Tanner	21			
Currier	7		Manufacturer glass	1
Leather goods dealer	10		Manufacturer salt	5
Brush maker	14		Goldsmith / jeweller	10
Oil and colourman	6			
French polisher	6		Manufacturer copper	2
			Manufacturer iron goods	38
Timber merchant	11		Tin plate worker	50
Sawyer	37		Manufacturer	13
Wood turner / box maker	5		Ironmonger	37
			Manufacturer brass	4
Cooper	129		Locksmith	6
			Gas fitter	10
Cork cutter	15		Wire maker	4
Basket maker	18		General labourer	1,883
Hay / Straw dealer	4			
Thatcher	2		Artisan mechanic	58
Paper box maker	1		Engine driver / stoker	66
Label writer	1		Factory labourer	63
Stationer	12		Manufacturer nails	10
			Apprentice	11
Coal merchant	2			
Coal labourer	10			
Charcoal dealer	1		Persons without occupation	6,198
Gas works service	17			

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster,* Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1.

Appendix VI - Occupation of Fenian suspects from Limerick returned for trial.

Occupation	Number		Occupation	Number
Baker	4		Manager	1
Blacksmith	6		Mason	2
Book-keeper	1		Master Weaver	1
Car owner	2		Mechanic	1
Carpenter	3		Millwright	1
Clerk	7		Nailer	3
Cork cutter	1		Painter	2
Farmer	9		Publican	1
Farmer's son	14		Sawyer	1
Gardener	1		Servant	1
Harness maker	2		Shoemaker	6
Horse trainer	1		Shop Assistant	6
Ironmonger dealer	1		Slater	1
Labourer	27		Storekeeper	2
Leather cutter	1		Tailor	4
			Weaver	3

Pádraig Ó Concubhair, *The Fenians were Dreadful Men: The 1867 Rising*, (Cork 2011), pp. 218-244.

Appendix VII - Numbers of members of the Congregated Trades who attended the demonstration in support of the Manchester Martyrs in Limerick on 8 December 1867.

Occupation	Number
Coopers	200
Tailors	250
Painters	180
Bootmakers	200
Carpenters	200
Plasterers	180
Sawyers	100
Bakers	200
Cabinet makers	200
Corkcutters	200
Deapers's Assistants, Shop Assistants, Shopkeepers, Clerks	1000
Labourers and country people	1000

The following trades also participated but no numbers are indicated – masons, tobacconists and tobacco spinners, printers, smiths, fishermen, butter buyers, saddlers, butchers, victuallers, provision dealers,

Source: Breandán Mac Giolla Choille, 'Mourning the Martyrs, A Study of a Demonstration in Limerick City, 8.12.1867', *The Old Limerick Journal,* Volume 22, (Christmas 1987) pp. 29-44.

Appendix VIII – Municipal Election Results – Limerick City 1899

Dock Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Edward Cleeve	Merchant	Merchant	475
R.P. O'Connor	Compositor	Labour	423
John Hayes	Builder	Outgoing	411
William Whelan	Engine fitter	Labour	363
John Dalton	Sawyer	Labour	345
Defeated			
John Daly	Shopkeeper	Labour	320
Eugene Long	Merchant	Merchant	299
Thomas Creagh	Engine fitter	Labour	284
Peter Maguire	Hay Merchant	Outgoing	262
R. Willoughby Switzer	Accountant	Merchant	121

Shannon Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Stephen O'Mara	Bacon Merchant	Outgoing	253
James Moran	Solicitor	Labour	222
Patrick Herbert	Bootmaker	Outgoing	197
John Godsell	Baker	Labour	196
Michael Spain	Bacon Merchant	Outgoing	187
Defeated			
James Bourke	Tailor	Labour	168
Gerard Goodbody	Merchant	Merchant	166
Thomas Savage	Cabinet maker	Labour	163
George McCarthy	Solicitor's Clerk	Labour	154
James Roche	Merchant	Merchant	153

Market Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Patrick McDonnell	Grocer	Outgoing	282
William Stokes	Butter Merchant	Merchant	193
David Begley	Merchant	Outgoing	185
Patrick O'Malley	Merchant	Outgoing	156
John Clune	Tobacconist	Outgoing	152
Defeated			
Jeremiah Anglim	Merchant	Outgoing	124
Patrick Cleary	Commercial Agent	Labour	121
John Madden	Saddler	Labour	121
John McCormack	Carpenter	Labour	112
John Sheehan	Printer	Labour	83

Castle Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
David Gilligan	Pig buyer	Labour	345
James Hassett	Grocer	Labour	325
James Connery	Fisherman	Labour	312
John Vaughan	Carpenter	Labour	311
Thomas Donnellan	Farmer	Outgoing	290
Defeated			
Ambrose Hall		Outgoing	231
Ralph Nash	Solicitor	Outgoing	156
William O'Connell	Victualler	Outgoing	131
William McDonnell	Merchant	Merchant	82
James Moloney	Baker	Labour	80

Irishtown Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
John Daly	Shopkeeper	Labour	598
Michael Donnelly	Publican	Outgoing	503
Michael Prendergast	Baker	Labour	390
John O'Brien	Cooper	Labour	381
Thomas Gough	Bookkeeper	Labour	364
Defeated			
John Hickey	Grocer	Outgoing	325
Alexander Shaw	Bacon Merchant	Merchant	260
Eugene O'Callaghan	Merchant	Merchant	162
Samuel Lee	Iron founder	Merchant	93

Customhouse Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Michael Joyce	River pilot	Labour	276
James Kett	Cooper	Labour	264
Thomas Cleeve	Merchant	Merchant	225
Stephen Quinn	Merchant	Merchant	224
Laurence Carr	Tobacconist	Outgoing	198
Defeated			
P. Moloney		Labour	184
John O'Neill	Clerk	Labour	172
Richard Gleeson	Builder	Outgoing	102
William Frost	Grocer	Outgoing	72
David Nelson	Seed merchant	Outgoing	68
John McMahon		Independent	30

Glentworth Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Thomas Prendergast	Baker	Labour	293
James Barry	Horse Dealer	Labour	292
James Coffey	Solicitor	Labour	277
Jeremiah O'Brien	Sawyer	Labour	277
John Slattery	Shop Porter	Labour	250
Defeated			
John Guinane	Land Agent	Merchant	167
James Gaffeny	Solicitor	Outgoing	155
F.G.M. Kennedy	Company director	Merchant	135
M. Cusack (Mayor)	Painter	Outgoing	126
Joseph Matterson	Bacon Merchant	Merchant	122
James Hayes	Builder	Outgoing	112
Joseph O'Malley	Engineer	Outgoing	67
William Counihan	Solicitor	Outgoing	35

Abbey Ward

Elected			
Name	**Occupation**	**Ticket**	**Vote**
Michael McDonnell	Grocer	Outgoing	403
William Fitzgerald	Plasterer	Labour	356
John O'Brien		Labour	342
Michael Murphy	Tailor	Labour	332
Patrick Mooney		Labour	324
Defeated			
Joseph Cleary		Outgoing	205
John Kivelehan		Outgoing	179
William Holliday	Merchant	Merchant	80
John Power	Merchant	Merchant	56

Source: *Limerick Chronicle*, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14 & 17 January 1899.

Appendix IX – Housing returns from 1871 Census

TABLE VIII. A.—Showing, by CLASSES, the number of HOUSES in the City of LIMERICK, having one or more FAMILIES residing in them, and the Number of FAMILIES which occupy each CLASS of ACCOMMODATION.

NOTE.—For an explanation of the Classification, see NOTE at foot.

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 1st Class Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	703	703	703	1st class.
2	121	242	392	2nd „
3	50	150		
4	50	200	395	3rd „
5	39	195		
6	38	228		
7	26	182		
8	22	176		
9	6	54		
10	6	60		

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 1st Class Houses —continued.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
11	6	66	840	4th class.
12	1	12		
13	1	13		
14	1	14		
15	1	15		
20	1	20		
Total,	1,072	2,330	2,330	

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 2nd Class Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation
1	2,392	2,392	2,392	2nd class.
2	551	1,102	1,762	3rd „
3	220	660		
4	104	416	1,058	4th „
5	62	310		
6	30	180		
7	11	77		
8	6	48		
9	3	27		
Total,	3,379	5,212	5,212	

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 3rd Class Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	889	889	889	3rd class.
2	72	144	196	4th „
3	8	24		
4	4	16		
5	1	5		
7	1	7		
Total,	975	1,085	1,085	

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 4th Class Houses. A.	B.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	71	18	89	95	4th class.
2	3	.	6		
Total,	74	18	95	95	

SUMMARY.—NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHICH OCCUPY EACH CLASS OF ACCOMMODATION.

In Houses of the	Number of Families occupying: 1st Class Accommodation.	2nd Class Accommodation.	3rd Class Accommodation.	4th Class Accommodation.	Total. Families	Houses
1st Class, .	703	392	395	840	2,330	1,072
2nd „ .	.	2,392	1,762	1,058	5,212	3,379
3rd „ .	.	.	889	196	1,085	975
4th Built of brick or stone.	.	.	.	77	77	92
4th Mud Cabins.	.	.	.	18	18	
Total, .	703	2,784	3,046	2,189	8,722	5,518

TABLE VIII.—SHOWING, by CLASSES, the Number of HOUSES in the County of LIMERICK (exclusive of the City) having one or more FAMILIES residing in them, and the Number of FAMILIES which occupy each CLASS of ACCOMMODATION.

NOTE.—The fourth class Houses marked **A**, are built of Brick or Stone; those marked **B** are Mud Cabins. For an explanation of the Classification, see NOTE at foot of Table VIII. A., p. 599.

Number of Families in each House.	1st Class Houses. Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	896	106	1,002	1,002	1,002	1st class.
2	36	4	40	80	110	2nd „
3	9	1	10	30		
4	2	.	2	8	23	3rd „
5	2	1	3	15		
6	3	.	3	18	53	4th „
12	1	.	1	12		
(b) 23	1	.	1	23		
Total, .	950	112	1,062	1,188	1,188	

Number of Families in each House.	2nd Class Houses. Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	7,932	271	8,203	8,203	8,203	2nd class.
2	387	18	405	810	1,026	3rd „
3	64	8	72	216		
4	23	4	27	108	186	4th „
5	9	.	9	45		
6	4	.	4	21		
9	1	.	1	9		
Total, .	8,420	301	8,721	9,415	9,415	

Number of Families in each House.	3rd Class Houses. Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	8,622	285	8,907	8,907	8,907	3rd class.
2	403	24	427	854	1,098	4th „
3	43	17	60	180		
4	9	3	12	48		
5	2	.	2	10		
6	1	.	1	6		
Total, .	9,080	329	9,409	10,005	10,005	

Number of Families in each House.	4th Class Houses. Number of Houses. Rural Districts. A.	B.	Civic (a) Districts. A.	B.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	2,900	3,711	106	61	6,778	6,778	7,565	4th class.
2	150	173	10	7	340	680		
3	17	12	3	1	33	99		
4	.	2	.	.	2	8		
Total, .	3,067	3,898	119	69	7,153	7,565	7,565	

(a) The Civic Districts comprise the township of Rathkeale and town of Newcastle.
(b) Limerick Workhouse.

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1873, (C.873).

Appendix X – Housing returns 1891 Census

TABLE VIIIA.—Showing, by CLASSES, the Number of HOUSES in the City of LIMERICK, having one or more FAMILIES residing in them, and the Number of FAMILIES which occupy each CLASS of ACCOMMODATION.

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 1st Class Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.	Number of Families in each House.	No. of 1st Class Houses *continued.*	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.	Number of Families in each House.	No. of 2nd Class Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	830	830	830	1st class.	10	2	20	549	4th class.	1	3,229	3,229	3,229	2nd class.
2	92	181	367	2nd „	11	1	11			2	367	734	1,055	3rd „
3	61	183			12	1	12			3	107	321		
4	47	188	383	3rd „	14	2	28			4	64	256		
5	39	195			(a) 18	1	18			5	19	95	406	4th „
6	35	210			(b) 41	1	41			6	8	48		
7	18	126								7	1	7		
8	7	56												
9	3	27			Total, .	1,140	2,129	2,129		Total, .	3,795	4,690	4,690	

Number of Families in each House.	No. of 3rd Class Houses	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.	Number of Families in each House.	No. of 4th Class Houses	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	491	491	491	3rd class.	1	8	8	8	4th class.
2	18	36	45	4th „					
3	3	9							
Total, .	512	536	536		Total, .	8	8	8	

SUMMARY.—NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHICH OCCUPY EACH CLASS OF ACCOMMODATION.

In Houses of the	Number of Families occupying				Total.	
	1st Class Accommodation.	2nd Class Accommodation.	3rd Class Accommodation.	4th Class Accommodation.	Families.	Houses.
1st Class, .	830	367	383	549	2,129	1,140
2nd „ .	.	3,229	1,055	406	4,690	3,795
3rd „ .	.	.	491	45	536	512
4th „ .	.	.	.	8	8	8
Total, .	830	3,596	1,929	1,008	7,363	5,455

TABLE VIII.—Showing, by CLASSES, the NUMBER of HOUSES in the County of LIMERICK, having one or more FAMILIES residing in them, and the Number of FAMILIES which occupy each CLASS of ACCOMMODATION.

1st Class Houses.

Number of Families in each House.	Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	1,055	92	1,147	1,147	1,147	1st class.
2	51	6	57	114	141	2nd „
3	8	1	9	27		
4	1	.	1	4	19	3rd „
5	3	.	3	15		
8	1	.	1	8	18	4th „
10	1	.	1	10		
Total, .	1,120	99	1,219	1,325	1,325	

2nd Class Houses.

Number of Families in each House.	Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	10,113	394	10,507	10,507	10,507	2nd class.
2	157	22	179	358	445	3rd „
3	22	7	29	87		
4	4	1	5	20	55	4th „
5	3	.	3	15		
6	1	1	2	12		
8	.	1	1	8		
Total, .	10,300	426	10,726	11,007	11,007	

3rd Class Houses.

Number of Families in each House.	Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	8,278	304	8,582	8,582	8,582	3rd class.
2	109	14	123	246	301	4th „
3	9	4	13	39		
4	1	1	2	8		
5	.	1	1	5		
6	.	1	1	6		
Total, .	8,397	325	8,722	8,886	8,886	

4th Class Houses.

Number of Families in each House.	Number of Houses. Rural Districts.	Civic (a) Districts.	Total of Houses.	Total Number of Families.	Total Number of Families in each Class of Accommodation.	Class of Accommodation.
1	1,281	20	1,301	1,301	1,323	4th class.
2	10	1	11	22		
Total,	1,291	21	1,312	1,323	1,323	

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1891. Part I. Area, houses, and population; also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. II. Province of Munster*, Command Papers, 1892, (C.6567), xci.1.

Appendix XI – Resolutions debated by the founding conference of the Irish Land and Labour Association, Ryan's Hotel, Limerick Junction, Co. Tipperary, 15 August 1894.

1) That this representative conference of Irish labour emphatically declares that the exclusion of Irish workers in country towns and rural districts from all share in Irish Local Government is a scandalous injustice that does working people manifold and grievous wrong by (1) depriving them of their rights as Irish citizens, in appropriating to a privileged few the powers that should belong to all: and (2) by conducing to the systematic abuse and perversion of all Acts passed by the legislature for the ostensible benefit of Irish workers, and that until this corrupt and fraudulent system is radically reformed, we protest against any measures dealing with Irish labour interests being entrusted to the grand juries, presentment sessions or poor law boards. That the administration of law in Ireland is tainted by the way in which petty-sessions courts and juries are without exception constituted, so as not to include a single labour representative and that this dangerous anomaly exposes working people to grave injustices from which they should be safeguarded by the establishment of a system under which magistrates should be elected by the people, and jurors drawn from the people, without distinction, and paid for their service. (after objections from W. Field, Irish Parliamentary Party MP, everything after 'safeguard' was amended to 'until the law is properly reformed and codified).

2) That al public work, such as the making and repairing of roads, the building of bridges, schools, houses etc, should be carried out by public officials directly employing competent workmen on the 'Fair Wage and Fair Time' principle, as experience has proved that the contracting out of work, besides involving wasteful and extravagant expenditure of public money, also promotes wholesale sweating, and thus robs the labourers and tradesmen employed of the just hire for their labour.

3) That the growing scarcity of employment among rural labourers and country tradesmen and the necessity for a wider distribution of land amongst the people render it vitally important that legislative effect should be forthwith given to the resolution passed in the House of Commons on the 13th of last April in favour of at once extending to Ireland the same facilities for getting land as exists in England, and thus enabling Irish labourers, tradesmen and small landholders, and others to obtain allotments on reasonable terms. That the working people in country districts in Ireland are sorely in need of improved house accommodation; and that the Labourers Acts 1883-1892 should be immediately amended (1) so as to provide for better administration of the Acts and simpler methods, and (2) so as to allow for the extension of their provisions to all classes of labourers and artisans and fishermen in country places. That we strongly recommend the establishment of an agricultural board for Ireland, with large powers to promote the migration of small cultivators from the barren to the fertile lands; to apply as far as their experience and the circumstances of the country will warrant, a scheme for the founding in Ireland of cooperative colonies of working agriculturalists; and to instruct and encourage the holders of land in the practices of the best and most profitable methods of working their holdings. That in all legislation on the Irish land question, due regard should be paid to the paramount right of people residing in Ireland in and to the soil of Ireland.

4) That the laws regarding tenure of land and local taxation in Ireland require to be amended without delay so as to secure absolutely to the occupiers of both town holdings and agricultural holdings the improvements made by them, and entirely exempt the product of their labour from rent as well as from all local charges, such as county cess, poor rates, and town taxes, which should eb levied exclusively on the valuation of land apart from buildings and other improvements, and should be paid by the owners of land, tenants in occupation being enabled to deduct the entire amount of local rates from the rents payable by them.

5) That this Convention of Workers highly approves of the scheme of the Irish Industrial League for putting labourers back on the land in companies of 100 men on farms 2,000 acres, the state to compulsorily hire the land and advance money to the labourers to cultivate it.

6) That we think the time has come when the landlords of all holdings in Ireland of £20 valuation and under should be compulsorily expropriated, by which means hundreds of thousands of occupying labourers would be freed from the incubus of landlordism.

7) That this conference declares itself in favour of – Manhood suffrage and 'one man one vote' at all elections, the payment of members and election expenses by the State, State pensions for the old, fair wages and the eight hour day principle, the abolition of the house of Lords and septennial Parliaments; and that we sympathise and will cordially cooperate with our working brethren in Irish cities and with the working people of other lands in their efforts to secure fair treatment for themselves, and to assert the rightful position of labour.

8) That this conference of workers of the land and in the towns believe that the only method of improving the position of all workers is by opening 'Nature's Workshop' – the land – and allowing the labourers free access to the rich land for the purpose of cultivation and that this can only be achieved by a sharp tax on all uncultivated land, we therefore call on the Government to impose a tax of £1 per acre on all uncultivated land; and we call on all workers to reject candidates for parliament who will not pledge themselves to support this demand. (after a heated debate the resolution was remitted by a majority vote after W. Field, MP, appealed for the conference not to pass it)

9) That it is the duty of the Government (a) To open State municipal workshops and maintain lands for cultivation so that no man or woman willing to work for a wage shall be compelled to live in idleness on the labour of others, (b) To appropriate all existing railways, so that some may be worked for the benefit of the community, not for the benefit of individuals, (c) to enforce Compulsory Education, and to provide a substantial meal for children attending State schools; hungry children being incapable of benefitting by education, (d) to compel all able bodies idlers, whether aristocratic or plebeian – under heavy penalties – to engage in reproductive work, for, as in the very act of living, there must be consumption of some of the fruits of labour, it is inequitable that a member of a community should enjoy what is produced by others without contributing by his labour to the wealth of the community, (e) That in order to provide funds to carry into effect the foregoing suggestions, it is the duty of the Government to repudiate the National Debt, which was incurred without any sanction of the people, and to appropriate all idle lands to be cultivated for the benefit of the people. (a, b and c were adopted and after discussion d and e were remitted on the basis that some delegates were unsure of the implications of implementing them).

Source: *Skibbereen Eagle*, 18 August 1894