The Strike in Irish and
Scottish History

Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies

Cover image: 'James Connolly, Irish Revolutionary, Executed 1916' by Jim FitzPatrick 2015. Copyright Jim FitzPatrick. Image reproduced by kind permission of the Artist.

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Introduction

Chloe Alexander

The following articles stem from the conference, 'The "Strike" in Scottish and Irish Labour History', held in November 2013 at the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen. The event was born out of a two-fold discussion with my then PhD supervisor, Professor Michael Brown. This centred on a desire for the Institute itself to hold a conference where a subject or theme shared by both Scotland and Ireland could be examined, with both comparatives and differences discussed. From a broad perspective, it is clear that Ireland and Scotland are much more than simply close geographical neighbours: they share much history in common, together with cultural, religious, linguistic and economic connections. Secondly, the conference was inspired by Ireland's celebrated 'Decade of Centenaries' and the centenary of the First World War, with its associated social unrest in Scotland as well as Ireland on the home front, most notably that of Red Clydeside, together with the rise of the Labour Party during this period. Drawing on these thoughts, it was decided to hold a conference on the topic of 'The "Strike" in Scottish and Irish Labour History'. The aim of the conference, and subsequently these articles, was to examine more broadly the role of labour and class in Scottish and Irish history. Hence, papers were not restricted to the time-period of the 'Decade of Centenaries'. The conference was very successful, with more than thirty delegates, ranging from PhD students to professional academics, attending. There were lively and engaging discussions throughout both days which continued at the conference dinner and in the pub later on.

The conference was opened with a welcome from Professor Michael Brown (Acting Director of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies) and a few words from myself. Professor Arthur McIvor (University of Strathclyde) provided the opening key note address, 'Oral History, Strikes and the Body'. This paper discussed the issue of occupational health and safety as a strike issue. A variety of themes and subjects centring on attitudes towards threats to health in the workplace were explored, namely workers with asbestos-related disease, working conditions in the mines and offshore safety conditions. The

inaugural session focused on nineteenth-century Scottish and Irish labour history. Dr John Cunningham (NUI Galway) presented on "'Better to die by the sword than to die of starvation": Popular Protest and Resistance to Famine in Ireland and Scotland, 1846–1847'. Against the background of the failure of the potato crop during the mid-1840s, Dr Cunningham examined the shared popular ideology informing the Irish and Scottish mobilisations of 1846 and 1847, comparing the repertoires of protest, and discussing connections between them. The next speaker, Shaun Kavanagh (University of Glasgow), investigated 'The Irish Migrants' Experience in Nineteenth-Century Greenock: Poverty, Strikes and Disturbance'. Here two central questions were discussed in detail: how unified were the Irish working class 'community' in Greenock, and what relationship did Irish workers have with other ethnic groups in Greenock, namely Highland and Lowland Scots?

The second day began with early twentieth-century Scottish and Irish labour history. Leah Hunnewell (Trinity College Dublin) addressed 'Transatlantic Socialism and the Crisis of Faith in Scotland and Ireland, 1889–1914'. This paper explored the relationship between socialist party rhetoric and religious identity during the Second International. Meanwhile James Curry (Moore Institute, NUI Galway) spoke on '*The Worker* (1914–15): James Connolly's short-lived "Organ of the Irish Working Class"'. Curry examined the background to the founding of *The Worker* (the weekly paper of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union), its journalistic style, the difficulties encountered by Connolly in having his paper printed in Scotland, and analysed the reasons for its suppression after Dublin Castle and the War Office had initially adopted a tolerant approach towards the publication. The third session focused on the decade of revolution in Scottish and Irish labour history. Dr William Kenefick (University of Dundee) assessed "'The dear little, sweet little, Shamrock of Ireland!" The Lochee Irish and Female Strike Activity in Dundee, 1911–1912'. Investigating a strike wave that historians have rather neglected during the past twenty years, this paper, through examining strike activity in the Dundee textile industry and comparing it with the actions and activities of workers in other textile districts, discussed an intensive and prolonged period of strike activity between 1911 and 1912 from the perspective of the Irish female spinners of Lochee. I then offered a paper examining 'Scottish Responses to the 1913 Dublin Lock-out and the 1916 Easter Rising'.[1] With Scottish cities home to

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[1] This paper has subsequently been published in Saothar: Chloe Alexander, 'Scottish responses to the 1913 Dublin Lock-out and the 1916 Easter Rising', *Saothar,* 41 (2016), 269–77.

considerable sections of the Irish working classes during this period, and with figures, such as James Connolly, possessing direct links with the labour movement in both Scotland and Ireland, the Lock-out and the Rising drew a significant reaction in Scotland. This general response was explored, with particular emphasis given to the evolving views of the Socialist, John Maclean. His reaction to both events was significant as although he and Connolly shared many ideological parallels, the former did not initially empathise with Connolly's embracing of the Irish question. During these years however, Maclean's opinions gradually evolved and he began to put the national struggle in Ireland at the forefront of his propagandising.

After lunch, the conference moved further into the twentieth century, focusing on Scottish and Irish labour history during the 1970s. Dr Ewan Gibbs (then of the University of Glasgow, and now of the University of the West of Scotland) presented on 'Community Mobilisation and Historical Tradition: The Anti-Poll Tax Movement on Clydeside, 1988–1990'. This contemporaneous paper generated extensive discussion, particularly owing to comparisons with the backlash against the 'Bedroom Tax' and general austerity measures introduced by the then Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. The next speaker, Dr Liam Cullinane (University College Cork) spoke on '168 Days: The Irish Steel Strike of 1977'. This paper examined the steel plant strike of 1977 in Cobh, County Cork in the context of contemporary militancy and semi-state industrial relations. The impact of the strike on the Great Island area of East Cork, where the majority of the plant's workforce lived was also considered.

The conference concluded with Dr Emmet O'Connor's (University of Ulster) closing key note address on 'Scotland and Ireland, 1889–1941: Labour Directions and Radical Connections'. He was unfortunately unable to make the conference due to a last minute injury, but John Cunningham kindly agreed to read this paper on his behalf. The paper addressed many aspects of Scotland and Ireland's shared labour history, drawing on comparisons and disparities. These aspects included labour and industrial relations, trade unionism and contacts between radicals who were active in both contexts. Overall the conference was characterised by energetic levels of discussions and informed questions from the floor. Many friends were made and networks generated. It is hoped that such a fruitful collaboration can be repeated in the future, bringing together aspects of Scottish and Irish history.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed, to Professor Michael Brown for his support and expertise, and to the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies for facilitating the initial conference and this subsequent publication. Thanks must also be extended to the Scottish Labour History Society for their generous sponsorship and support.

The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* are therefore the culmination of some of the papers delivered at the conference in November 2013, accompanied by a selection of other relevant works. In addition, Terry Brotherstone has contributed an excellent and very thought-provoking 'Reflections on Labour History in Irish-Scottish Studies'. Whilst the conference occurred early on in the 'Decade of Centenaries', it will not go unnoticed that this subsequent publication arrives in 2017, at a time when we are arguably in the aftermath of the highpoint of this period: the events in 2016 to commemorate the 1916 Easter Rising cannot be surpassed. The intervening years have witnessed some numerous and very successful events, public gatherings and academic symposiums which have highlighted Scotland and Ireland's shared history, and most significantly Scotland's role in the Easter Rising.[2] It is thus hoped that these articles continue in the same vein, and contribute to the wider literature on the study of the role of labour and class in Scottish and Irish labour history. Above all, these papers share a common theme in that they seek to place class at the centre of the debate, focusing on the social conditions of the rural as well as the urban poor.

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[2] For example, 'The 1916 Rising Centenary Committee (Scotland)' has, and continues to organise various events and seminars which highlight the role of revolutionaries in Scotland and their contribution to the Easter Rising; http://www.1916risingcentenarycommitteescotland.co.uk/ [accessed 12 February 2017].

Was Health and Safety a Strike Issue? Workers, Unions and the Body in Twentieth-Century Scotland

Arthur McIvor

In February 1949, 5,000 or so asbestos miners downed tools and went on strike in a dispute which centred on excessively dusty working conditions which were considered inimical to the health of those breathing this toxic mineral into their lungs. This occurred in the mining town called Asbestos in Quebec, Canada, where Irish migrants were amongst the strike's participants. The Catholic Church was drawn into the conflict, with the nearby Archbishop of Montreal supporting the strikers and organising fund-raising which quickly accumulated over 500,000 Canadian dollars. After a long, bitter and violent five-month struggle the strike was defeated and the men returned to working in the dust. Two decades or so later, in the 1970s, the legacy was evident in uncontroversial medical evidence of spikes in asbestos-related disease deaths amongst Canadian asbestos miners.[1]

This episode is revealing because it appears to be such a rare occurrence: a workers' strike explicitly over occupational health where a substantial number of employees were responding directly to the threat towards their bodies of the labour process, the work environment and the materials with which they worked. How many other such examples can we think of? Such strikes appear to be outliers; few and far between on both sides of the Atlantic, despite the heavy toll on the body that came with industrialisation. The big industrial struggles in Britain and North America have been over wages and the protection of jobs, with working conditions playing a supplementary role and occupational health hardly evident – at least explicitly. In the United States of America one survey in 1980, at a high point in trade union power and strike proneness, calculated that a miniscule 0.7 per cent of all strikes were deemed to have been caused by health and safety issues.[2] In Britain, strikes caused

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[1] See Jessica van Horssen,' "À faire un peu de poussière": Environmental Health and the Asbestos Strike of 1949', *Labour/LeTravail*, 70 (2012) in Pierre Elliot Trudeau (ed.), *The Asbestos Strike* (Toronto, 1974), 101–32.

[2] US Bureau of Labour Statistics data cited in Dorothy Nelkin and Michael Brown, *Workers at Risk: Voices from the Workplace* (Chicago, 1984), 121.

by grievances over 'work conditions' accounted for between 5–8 per cent of all strikes in the 1960s and 1970s: health and safety strikes would have only been a proportion of this number.[3] The key legislative changes in preventative legislation and compensation in Britain, such as the Workmen's Compensation Acts (1897, 1906 and extended periodically thereafter), the Industrial Injuries Act (1946) and the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) were the products of wide party 'alliance' campaigns to which trade union campaigning contributed significantly, though to varying degrees. However, they were not the result of sustained and targeted industry-wide strikes, or other collective action, such as work to rules. Historically, evolution of the UK workplace regulatory code in the Factory and Mines Acts and the scheduling of new industrial diseases also tended to correlate closely to industrial disasters, to breakthroughs in medical knowledge, or they were the product of multi-stakeholder political campaigning. These were important arenas of trade union action, as work on the 'healthy factory', byssinosis, silicosis and 'miners lung' have shown.[4] However, this was through bargaining, advocacy, political and pressure group activity within a legislative framework, rather than deploying the deterrent use of threats of direct action of labour withdrawal.

If it was the case that health and safety strikes were rare, why was this? Why did workers not more readily down tools, as at Asbestos, Quebec, to protect their bodies from the carnage of industrial accidents, disasters and chronic occupational ill-health? What does this tell us about structures of power, prevailing attitudes towards risk and work-health cultures? Does this evident inaction represent a prioritisation of job security and protection of earnings and a concomitant failure on the part of workers and their trade unions to prioritise protection of the body at work? If so, why were bodies not valued more? Moreover, where direct action did take place, why was this and in what circumstances? This essay explores these questions, aiming to extend the conversation about resistance and agency on occupational health

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[3] Philip B. Beaumont, *Safety at Work and the Unions* (London, 1983), 50.

[4] Vicky Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory* (Basingstoke, 2011); Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners' Lung* (Aldershot, 2007); Geoffrey Tweedale, *Magic Mineral to Killer Dust: Turner and Newall and the Asbestos Hazard* (Oxford, 2000); Sue Bowden and Geoffrey Tweedale, 'Mondays without Dread: The Trade Union Response to Byssinosis in the Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Twentieth Century', *Social History of Medicine,* 16, 1 (2003), 79–95; Mark Bufton and Joseph Melling, '"A Mere Matter of Rock": Organized Labour, Scientific Evidence and British Government Schemes for Compensation of Silicosis and Pneumoconiosis among Coalminers, 1926–1940', *Medical History*, 49 (2005), 155–78; Catherine Mills, *Regulating Health and Safety in the British Mining Industries, 1800–1914* (Aldershot, 2010).

and safety on which there is now a growing literature. It will offer explanations for health not being visible in industrial conflict nationally and historically whilst arguing that there has been a long if uneven history of protest and resistance centred around the body. This has been particularly apparent in local and unofficial strike action, especially in the so-called 'dangerous trades'. Fragmentary though it is, this evidence suggests that there is potential for further research in a refocused history of direct action in relation to the body at work and that in the light of this we need to revise any concept that the trade unions somehow 'failed' their members in relation to protecting bodies from trauma, overstrain and long-term chronic disease. This article focuses on developments in Scotland in the twentieth century and, amongst other sources, draws upon oral interview evidence.

Workers and Campaigning around the Body

Historically, and compared to others in the UK, Scottish workers were both more militant and strike-prone in the twentieth century *and* faced relatively high levels of injury and ill-health at work.[5] This has been referred to as 'the Scottish anomaly' by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Various explanations have been offered for more dangerous workplaces and higher levels of working days lost from industrial accidents and chronic occupational diseases, such as pneumoconiosis and asbestos-related disease in Scotland, linked to a range of structural and cultural factors. The main problems occurred in the Clydeside industrial conurbation where more dangerous 'heavy' industries such as coal mining, iron and steel manufacture and shipbuilding were clustered. Irish workers also appear to have faced inordinately high levels of danger in the workplace. Up to the1980s they were more than twice as likely as English workers to be killed at work and International Labour Organisation data suggests there still remained in the 2000s around a 30 per cent additional risk in Ireland compared to the British average.[6] Given this relatively high risk workplace environment, it is surprising that occupational health and safety has attracted so little attention in Irish labour historiography. Francis Devine has also made the point that occupational health and safety has

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[5] See Gregor Gall and Mike Jackson, 'Strike Activity in Scotland', *Scottish Labour History*, 33 (1998), 97–112; Roy Church and Quentin Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889–1966* (Cambridge, 1998).

[6] See Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2013), 183.

hardly featured historically in trade union campaigns and agendas in Ireland, being 'sidelined', as he put it, at least until very recently.[7] There is much scope for further research here.

In Britain, campaigning on health and safety at work was widespread and has long historical antecedents. Fatigue and overstrain, for example, lay behind concerted trade union attempts to control working hours which included the shorter working hours campaigns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which the cotton textile unions played a prominent part. The discourse of 'overwork' was also influential in the anti-'sweating' movements of the 1900s. Beatrice and Sidney Webb attested in their monumental *Industrial Democracy* in 1902 that:

> In the trade union world of today, there is no subject on which workmen of all shades of opinion, and all varieties of occupation, are so unanimous, *and so ready to take combined action*, as the prevention of accidents and the provision of healthy workplaces.[8]

Nonetheless, actual occupational health and safety strikes to protect the body, as opposed to jobs and wages, are elusive. This appears to have not been an explicit cause of any major industry-wide or national strikes in the UK. If one thinks of the great strike waves of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, health, the body and safety issues are not fore-grounded as causes or issues, or at least as *primary* causes. This was even the case with the 1968-74 strike-waves when unions were at the peak of their power in the UK and Ireland. As issues causing strikes, health and safety simply do not register as significant. This does not merit a mention, for example, in Durcan, McCarthy and Redman's comprehensive survey of strikes over 1946–74, or in Church and Outram's quantitative analysis of strikes and militancy in coal mining during 1889–1966.[9] Drilling down and disaggregating the official UK strike statistics further than undertaken in these studies might, however, reveal a pattern of occupational health and safety strikes. This would be a worthwhile exercise. However, as with the USA, it is likely to demonstrate the small number of such incidences. That said, such issues may well have been more prevalent as

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[7] Francis Devine, 'Safety, Health and Welfare at Work in the Irish Free State and the Republic of Ireland, 1922–1990: Measuring the Problem', *Saothar*, 21 (2006), 65–74.

[8] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1902), 357.

[9] J. W. Durcan, W. E .J. McCarthy and G. P. Redman, S*trikes in Post–War Britain, 1946–73* (1983); Church and Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity.*

underlying grievances, with wages and jobs more evident as primary causes because these were areas where workers were most liable to be more readily mobilised. Discourses of health, fatigue and entitlement to well-being were sometimes evident, but muted in the major strikes. The apparent invisibility of health and safety strikes may hide a more complex reality.

Some commentators have developed the argument that trade unions neglected occupational health and safety – or at least prioritised wages, job security and compensation over protecting the body, addressing threats to health and championing prevention through improving work environments and developing really effective regulatory regimes.[10] By not providing an effective 'countervailing force', it is argued, this enabled problems generated by profit-maximising corporate enterprises to persist.[11] The argument here is that much more could have been done, earlier and more aggressively by the unions, to protect workers bodies. John Williams in *Accidents and Ill Health at Work*, published in 1960, criticised the trade unions in Britain for lacking a clear accident prevention policy, declaring: 'Within what limits can the community tolerate the introduction of safety standards by negotiation in slow motion'.[12] Whilst noting the importance of trade union activities on compensation, the Factory Acts and the campaign to get joint safety committees, Williams criticised what he saw as 'a narrow approach' which did not focus on prevention.[13] In his 500 page book there is not a single reference to an occupational health and safety strike. Graham Wilson also commented in *The Politics of Safety and Health* in 1985: 'Health and safety at work have mattered comparatively little to unions in Britain, as in the USA … Only a minority of union officers and officials have shown passionate concern for safety and health at work'.[14]

In relation to Scotland, trade union inertia and inaction on health and safety has been identified in studies of the health and safety of dockers before the Second World War and in relation to the asbestos tragedy.[15] William Kenefick has argued that before the Second World War, Glasgow dockers were more likely to strike for a wage premium ('dirty' or 'danger' money) than

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[10] See Beaumont, *Safety at Work*, 42; Mass Observation, *People in Production* (Harmondsworth, 1942), 203.

[11] As Tweedale has argued in relation to trade unions and asbestos in his study of the UK's main asbestos multi-national: Tweedale, *Magic Mineral*.

[12] John L. Williams, *Accidents and Ill Health at Work* (London, 1960), 341.

[13] Ibid., 343–4.

[14] Graham Wilson, *The Politics of Safety and Health* (Oxford, 1985), 114.

[15] See Ronald Johnston and Arthur McIvor, *Lethal Work* (East Linton, 2000).

to down tools refusing to handle toxic products. He argues: 'For the dockers, trade unionism was more closely linked to gaining preference in employment, and to protecting jobs from outsiders, than concerns over safety … Safety was a non-issue along the Glasgow waterfront'.[16] There are also fragments of oral evidence that corroborate such a negative view of trade union inaction in Scotland right up to the last quarter of the twentieth century. For example, a Scottish occupational health consultant Robin Howie postulated in an oral interview in 2001:

> There are unions which are the exception to the rule, but in my own experience trade unions have not been as concerned about things like health and safety as they are about the fact the job is still there and what the wage rates are … I blame the trade unions to a large extent … During the 1970s we had a series of wage freezes, that's when the unions should have been going for better conditions. They couldn't go for money, they could have gone for better conditions, for better safety in the workplace and they chose not to.[17]

Similarly, a communist Ayrshire coal miner and union activist, Alec Mills, declared in an interview in June 2000: 'Angry. Angry …We never went on strike for masks. But we should have went on strike for masks. A lot of men would be alive today if they had been provided with masks'.[18]

The current President of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) – Nicky Wilson – lamented recently that whilst the miners' union in Scotland had focused on prevention and compensation relating to physical ill-health, historically they had neglected the psychological impacts of disability and work-related deaths which he equated as forms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[19]

The unions have thus had a bit of a bad press when it comes to occupational health and safety, being regarded as having failed members, of trading jobs and wages for health, of not devoting enough resources to campaigning on health

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[16] William Kenefick, *Rebellious and Contrary: The Glasgow Dockers, 1853–1932* (East Linton, 2000), 150–1.

[17] Robin Howie, interviewed by Neil Rafeek, 20 September 2001, Scottish Oral History Centre Archive, University of Strathclyde (hereafter SOHC), Archive 017/C45).

[18] Alec Mills, b 1933, interviewed by Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, 19 June 2000 (SOHC 017/C1).

[19] Nicky Wilson at the Mining Disability Witness Seminar, SOHC, University of Strathclyde, 28 April 2014 (SOHC Archive).

and the body. To this we might add, at least at first sight, that the trade unions failed to make full and effective use of the strike weapon (at least at industry and national level) as a deterrent or as leverage to minimise the damage to the body through trauma or chronic occupational disease. A key point here is that occupational health and safety was framed early on in the nineteenth century in a statutory setting with 'preventative' legislation (Factory Acts; Mines Acts), and, importantly, with the passage of 'no fault' Workmen's Compensation legislation from the 1890s. Strategically, trade union activity became focussed on this level – campaigning and lobbying to extend statutory protection and legal rights, with its responsibilities expanding as time went on – for example with the appointment of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Medical Advisers, Thomas Legge from 1931, then Hyacinth Morgan.[20]

That said, strikes against increased workloads (for example at Singer, Clydebank in 1911), the anti-Bedaux strikes in the 1920s and 1930s and the 'more looms' strikes of the early 1930s, were directed explicitly against work intensification and resultant fatigue and overstrain. The sustained campaigns and strike action to reduce working hours and increase holidays with pay might also be seen in this light. They were articulated within a discourse that incorporated the alienation of bodies under closer supervision and surveillance (including medical monitoring), the need for the body to recuperate, the concept of fatigue and the idea of a 'healthy' work-life balance: necessary for mental as well as physical health. The trade unions were central to campaigns against unhealthy work conditions, from the National Federation of Women Workers campaigning on lead poisoning to the coal mining union's challenge to orthodox medical discourses on dust disease in the 1930s which led to the scheduling of coal workers' pneumoconiosis in 1942. Moreover, the TUC and Scottish Trades Union Congress campaigns on tuberculosis (as part of a wider medical-political 'progressive alliance') resulted ultimately in it being also officially recognised as an occupational disease (in 1951).[21]

By the 1960s and 1970s we do begin to see clearer evidence of strike activity on health and safety issues. This was in part a product of a more health-oriented society as the environmental movement gathered momentum and in part a consequence of the shifting balance of power and assertiveness of trade unions. As plant level bargaining proliferated, health and safety became greater priorities for the growing numbers of shop stewards who worked in

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[20] See Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory.*

[21] See Arthur McIvor, 'Germs at work: Establishing tuberculosis as an occupational disease in Britain, c1900–1951', *Social History of Medicine*, 25 (2012), 812–29.

industry – as the Donovan Commission in 1968 reported. Unfortunately we know little about the role of shop stewards in health and safety during this period – a subject that merits further investigation, which would be facilitated by a systematic oral history project. As Philip Beaumont has shown, however, union pressure led to the establishment of joint health and safety committees across many industries in the 1960s and these played a significant role in raising occupational health and safety standards.[22] Precursors flourished briefly during Second World War when the Joint Production Committees frequently embraced health and safety functions. By the 1970s these joint health and safety committees were shored up by an extension of such provision in the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). This increased focus on the reform of statutory provision for health and safety in the 1970s appears to have been paralleled by a surge in direct action. Beaumont surveyed 225 trade union health and safety officers across different industries in Glasgow in 1979 and around twenty per cent reported they had witnessed industrial action on health and safety in the previous year.[23]

Oral Labour History, Strikes and the Body at Work

Oral evidence provides a lens through which lived experience can be reconstructed, acting as a barometer of prevailing discourses, attitudes and emotions relating to the body at work, as well as elucidating the agency of workers regarding threats to health in the workplace. One period when occupational health risks were significantly heightened in Scotland was the Second World War, especially during the period of crisis following Dunkirk.[24] However, this does not appear to have resulted in significant strike action to protect workers' bodies. Scottish docker and union activist Tom Murray scathingly criticised the unwillingness of the TGWU to support strike action to protect dockers exposed to dangerous chemicals at Leith docks in 1941–2.[25] In wartime strikes were technically illegal, under Order 1305, but that did not stop them happening and with some frequency, especially in the mines

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[22] Beaumont, *Safety at Work*, 59–60.

[23] Ibid., 101–2.

[24] See Ronald Johnston and Arthur McIvor, 'The War at Work: Occupational Health and Safety in Scottish Industry, 1939–1945', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 2 (2005), 113–36.

[25] Tom Murray's interview testimony in Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Voices from Work and Home* (Edinburgh, 2000), 287.

and shipyards.[26] These strikes pivoted around challenges to skilled status with 'dilution' and pay differentials and injustices, as with the 1943 equal pay strike led by Agnes Maclean at Rolls Royce in Hillington, Glasgow.[27] Despite relatively high levels of strike activity compared to the 1930s, few wartime Reserved Occupation workers interviewed for a recent AHRC oral history research project could recall any strikes, never mind ones that were linked to health and safety.[28] Fairly typical was this response in an interview from Scottish railwayman William Mcnaul:

> Q. Was there any trade union action during the war, or strikes?
> A. No. No, nothing like that. Wasn't allowed … No, no, no you daren't do anything like that.[29]

The lack of strike activity in 1940s Scotland on health and safety issues should perhaps not surprise us, given that in wartime many Home Front workers were tolerating higher levels of risk in a context where they saw themselves as supporting combatants (family and friends) facing much greater dangers in uniform. Such hegemonic military masculinities needed to be matched with a patriotic commitment to maximising wartime production. Moreover, workers were assuaged by a wartime government that was markedly pro-labour and keen to directly address workplace health and safety issues through state welfarist initiatives, such as the compulsory employment of company doctors, welfare officers, canteens and other provisions, whilst playing down actual health risks (to maintain wartime morale) and prioritising production. At the centre of this was Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, who famously told asbestos insulation workers on Clydeside that he did not want any nonsense and rejected a call by the local Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) branch for an investigation into dusty conditions in asbestos insulation.[30] In part, the erasure in oral testimonies regarding strikes in wartime might be connected to a sense on the part of such wartime home front narrators that striking was subversive

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[26] See Keith Gildart, 'Coal Strikes on the Home Front: Miners' Militancy and Socialist Politics in the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History,* 20 (2009), 121–51.

[27] Peter Bain, '"Is you is or is you ain't my baby": Women's Pay and the Clydeside Strikes of 1943', *Scottish Labour History,* 30 (1995), 35–60.

[28] See Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinity in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2017); Alison Chand, *Masculinities on Clydeside: Men in Reserved Occupations During the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2016).

[29] William Mcnaul interviewed by Linsey Robb, 27th March 2013 (SOHC Archive).

[30] Alan Dalton, *Asbestos: Killer Dust* (London, 1979), 98.

to the national war effort and clashed with the ways they were composing their memories (and sense of self) in light of efforts to present a narrative that emphasised their contribution to war in a similar way to combatants: that is to place themselves within wartime hierarchies of masculinities that were headed by hegemonic military masculinity associated with combatants. The 'composure' of memories, inter-subjectivity, the cultural circuit, silences and misremembering are all key issues in oral history. Much has been done over recent years to develop the theory of oral history in these areas.[31]

Oral history is a methodology which enables strikes generally and occupational health and safety strikes specifically to be explored through the lens of those who actually directly participated in them. This leads us closer to an emotional history of strikes and the everyday, lived experience of strikers and those who opposed them for that matter. They also tell us much about what trade unionism meant to workers at a personal level. In Scotland, there has been a long tradition in labour history of collecting such oral testimonies and blending these personal narratives into studies of industrial action and community struggles. Ian MacDougall's work stands out as the pioneering oral historian in labour history.[32] The *Oil Lives* project in Aberdeen (headed by Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson) and Jim Phillips' nuanced recent monograph (2012) on the miners' strike in Scotland which draws upon a series of oral interviews are other pertinent examples.[33] Other Scottish labour historians have used oral history methodology to elucidate industrial action, to write biographies of labour activists and, increasingly, to interrogate strike activity (or the lack thereof) and other resistance, such as sit-ins.[34] An outstanding example would be Andrew Perchard's work on the Scottish aluminium communities in Kinlochleven, Invergorden and Lochaber in *Aluminiumville*. Strikes were virtually unheard of in the tightly controlled paternalistic company communities in the Highlands, despite a cluster of worker grievances, including on health and safety issues. Alexander Walker,

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[31] The best introductions to this are Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2010) and Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn, London, 2006). For the Second World War see also Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester, 1998).

[32] See, for example, Ian MacDougall*, Voices from Work and Home* (Edinburgh, 2000).

[33] Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson, 'North Sea Oil, its Narratives and its History', *Northern Scotland*, 27 (2007), 15–41; Jim Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984–85* (Manchester, 2012).

[34] For a recent example see Andrew Clark, "'And the next thing, the chairs barricaded the door": The Lee Jeans Factory Occupation, Trade Unionism and Gender in Scotland in the 1980s', *Scottish Labour History*, 48 (2013), 116–34.

former Electrical TU shop steward who worked at the Lochaber power station between 1964 and 2001 commented:

> During my period in the power station in Lochaber, British Aluminium Works, I was a very strong trade union man… We had disputes with management and we always resolved them, because there was never any danger of us going too far, which I don't think management at the time appreciated, because it wasn't a job it was a community.

He continued: 'the aluminium industry was a saviour to the Highlands'. [35]

Another strand of the oral labour history literature in Scotland has explored health and safety cultures on the job, focusing on the body in the workplace and how workers and their trade unions navigated threats to health and well-being.[36] Again, health and safety strikes rarely, if ever, feature. This work to date has predominantly concentrated on male workers in the 'heavy industries'. There remains much scope for research in the same vein for female workers.

An oral history methodology has the potential then to add other dimensions to analyses of strikes – not least facilitating a re-focused emotional history and the exploration of intersecting identities such as gender, race and class. It is almost axiomatic that labour history projects on the post-1950 period must incorporate interviewing. Oral history approaches can take us right to the point of production through the eyes of workers rather than reconstructing experience through the lens of written institutional sources. The methodology allows us to question and probe particular areas; to engage in a dialogue with the past. This enables the activities of work groups and trade unions to be elucidated, agency and structure to be evaluated, and, relating to the specific issue under scrutiny here, to shed light into occupational health and safety, as well as helping us to understand work-health cultures in the past. Oral history has its limitations of course and has to be utilised sensitively. New

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[35] Andrew Perchard, 'Sculpting the '"Garden of Eden": Patronage, Community and the British Aluminium Company in the Scottish Highlands, 1895–1982', *Scottish Labour History*, 42 (2007), 64; *Aluminiumville* (Lancaster, 2012).

[36] See Ronald Johnston and Arthur McIvor, *Lethal Work* (East Linton, 2000); McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*; David Bradley, 'Oral History, Occupational Health and Safety in Scottish Steel, c1930–1988', *Scottish Labour History*, 46 (2011), 86–101; David Walker, '"Danger was something you were brought up with": Workers' Narratives on Occupational Health and Safety in the Workplace', *Scottish Labour History*, 46 (2011), 54–70.

oral history interviewing projects can only go back as far as living memory, though in some cases previously undertaken and archived interviews are of considerable value.[37] Whilst strong in Scotland, oral history is relatively insignificant in the labour history of Ireland, as Emmet O'Connor's work has shown.[38] The Irish Oral History Network was only established in 2010 and there remains some residual scepticism towards oral history in Irish academic history circles. Where oral history research methodologies have been most evident in Ireland has been in studies of the Troubles and nationalist politics.[39] Exceptions include the work of Liam Cullinane on working lives in Cork (which incorporates discussion about health and safety issues) and Sean O'Connell on the Sailortown community in Belfast.[40]

Undercurrents of Resistance: Occupational Health and Safety Walkouts and 'Wildcats'

Oral evidence for Scotland reveals a subterranean matrix of resistance and direct action on health and safety, co-existing, sometimes uneasily, with consent, apathy and conformity to managerial authority and traditional forms of masculinity expressed in risk-taking. This is evident, for example, in relation to asbestos. Given the significance of asbestos as a work-related hazard its reception by the trade unions and the extent to which direct action was utilised is significant. Historian Geoffrey Tweedale has argued that the trade union movement failed to act as an effective countervailing force

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[37] Here it is important to highlight the collections at the School of Scottish Studies Archive, University of Edinburgh, the Scottish Oral History Centre, University of Strathclyde and Glasgow Museums.

[38] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824–2000* (Dublin, 2011); Emmet O'Connor, 'The Irish Labour History Society: An Outline History', *Labour History Review* Fiftieth Anniversary Supplement, Special Supplement (2010), 147–59. For the most comprehensive survey of oral history in Scotland, see Angela Bartie and Arthur McIvor, 'Oral History in Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review*, 92, Supplement 234 (2013), 108–36.

[39] It appears that none of the sixty–four texts of recommended reading on the Irish Oral History Network website, http://www.oralhistorynetworkireland.ie/advice/reading/ relate directly to labour history.

[40] Liam Cullinane: 'Work, Class and Conflict: Three Cork Factories' (University of Cork, unpublished PhD thesis, 2015); Sean O'Connell, 'The 'troubles' with a Lower Case T: Deindustrialisation and Social Change in Belfast Since the 1960s', unpublished paper to the 'Deindustrialisation and Oral History Workshop', Newcastle University, 5 October 2016.

and activists such as Alan Dalton have been critical of trade union inertia at the top level.[41] In Johnston and McIvor's book *Lethal Work*, the example of some STUC delegates contemptuously ripping up asbestos campaigners' pamphlets in 1976 has been cited.[42] The TUC was also very influenced by their incumbent Medical Adviser (1962–74), Robert Murray, who quelled workers' fears by declaring asbestos safe to work with under certain conditions and assuaged their growing anxieties as medical knowledge of a cancer risk developed in the 1960s. These 'expert' assurances undoubtedly played a role in nipping some nascent industrial action on asbestos in the bud. Murray had a very condescending attitude towards workers exposed to such risks, famously commenting on one occasion that 'workers would pick up asbestos with their teeth if they were paid enough'.[43] By the 1970s there was also a strong pro-asbestos group within the trade unions, headed by the TGWU, representing the interests of workers in asbestos manufacturing who wanted to protect their jobs.[44] This could leave workers ill-informed, confused and vulnerable. On Clydeside a number of oral interviews referred to this difficult environment from the 1960s through to the 1980s where the capacity of the trade unions to resist was limited or they lacked support from the union for local action. A Scottish asbestos insulation lagger recalled:

> Anytime you had a dispute or anything I found that if you tried to call them [TGWU officials] out they wouldnae come. So, what was going on was eh, just basically the guys on the job had to work it out for themselves whether they were going to do it or whether they wernae going to do it, you know. But, union help? Very disappointed with it.[45]

Similarly, a heating engineer who was a member of the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning Workers' Union, recalled that his small union did not have the strength to do much to improve worker health and safety in this period:

> To my knowledge there has only been one strike in the heating trade,

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[41] Tweedale, *Magic Mineral;* Dalton, *Asbestos: Killer Dust.*

[42] Johnston and McIvor, *Lethal Work*, 166.

[43] Cited in *Morning Star*, 15 November 1974, 4; see also Dalton, *Asbestos: Killer Dust*, 90–1.

[44] H. Chappell, 'Fighting Each Other Over Asbestos', *New Society*, 29 September 1983, 471–3.

[45] Interview (anon.), Glasgow insulation engineer b 1943 with Ronald Johnston, 15 March 1999, SOHC Archive 016/A16.

and they couldnae afford … They termed it a catch strike … They only could take out so many firms or so many jobs. Say for talking sake there was eh, say six jobs involved in heating in the town. Well, they'd take three of thae jobs out and the rest had to put a levy in to keep their wages up. The union hadnae enough money and the backing to support a full strike, you know, an all-out strike. So we had to work it on catch strikes, you know. And it only lasted, to my memory, I think it was three weeks, then we couldnae afford it after that. Packed it in. So the strike was just a no-go area.[46]

This testimony speaks to the realities of disempowerment in a fragmented trade dominated by small sub-contracting insulation firms and the constraints on strike activity in this context. Another Clydeside asbestos lagger commented that health and safety disputes when they did arise could be settled by wage concessions or agreement to pay extra bonuses as an incentive:

It always seemed to be that you wanted a bit of extra cash and better conditions. But they sometimes gave you the extra cash and the conditions were back-heeled 'cause they didnae want to know about them … That was a lever used by the trade unions to get extra cash. Instead of pushing for better safety conditions … At that time everybody knew asbestos caused all kinds of illnesses.[47]

Here we see reference to the use of health and safety as a bargaining tool in informal trade-offs where risk would be absorbed in return for financial compensation. 'Danger money' or 'dirt money' collective agreements were negotiated by the unions and were condoned by the workmen affected to varying degrees. In heavy industry workplaces and in mines and construction sites a deeply acculturated macho work culture policed this behaviour for the immediate post-war generation of industrial workers.

That said, there co-existed a significant and growing level of resistance to this idea of an 'acceptable level of risk'. Certainly many local activists and shop stewards were critical of national union leaderships and the STUC / TUC for what they perceived as a failure to support local health and safety disputes by

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[46] Interview (anon.), heating engineer b 1940 with Ronald Johnston, 22 December 1998, SOHC 016/A6.

[47] Interview (anon.), Clydeside insulation engineer b 1930 with Ronald Johnston, 26 January 1999, SOHC 016/A14.

making them official and providing strike pay. Rank and file activity spurned the constraints of official trade union policy and cultural indifference on the job and mobilised to expose the high death and disability toll of industrial work and to protect the body at work utilising a range of tactics, including direct strike action. Examples on Clydeside would be activists such as Hugh Cairney and John Todd and the campaigns of the local Glasgow branch of the insulation workers (laggers) affiliated to the TGWU (local 7/162) from the 1940s to the 1970s on asbestos. In two oral interviews in 1999 and in 2005 former local 7/162 branch secretary Hugh Cairney reflected on how the Glasgow asbestos laggers got organised by the mid-1950s and, with 100 per cent membership and a closed shop, initiated a series of health and conditions strikes to raise environmental standards. They initially faced employer intransigence, typical of the more entrenched managerial authoritarianism and residual anti-unionism that characterised Clydeside. As Cairney recalled: 'When I first started the bosses didnae want to know anything aboot us or talk to us.'[48] Another TGWU activist recalled how the Glasgow laggers' branch had to fight even for basic amenities:

> There were no overalls. No boots. And you were swallowing it [asbestos] all the time, and so was all the people that were working near you. But they had a hut where they made [asbestos] mats only in it. Nae extractor fan or nothing … At one time we didnae have any huts. We had to sit between decks on the ships. We had to go and fight for tae get a hut. You know, an ordinary hut. And in that hut was a' the material. And you were taking your tea during the meal breaks, and a' that material. And every part of the material had asbestos in it, a percentage.[49]

Cairney stressed how the main 'fighting strength' of the trade union was at local branch level:

> Well, if you're talking about the unions. I always think the union is a mythical body. This branch done a lot. We happened to belong to a trade union. We fought … I mean, we walked the streets for twenty-six weeks to get conditions. We were the ones that forced them to give us

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[48] Hugh Cairney, insulation worker b 1934 interviewed by Neil Rafeek, 26 March 2005, SOHC Archive 016/35.

[49] Interview (anon.), Glasgow insulation engineer b 1918 by Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, 1 December 1999, SOHC 016/A23.

tables and chairs to sit down to have a meal with. Made them give us a changing room to hang our clothes up.[50]

When asked 'Was it hard bringing in health and safety into the job?' Cairney replied: 'It was at the start, yes. We always nearly had to hit the gates to get any health and safety, not noo we dae, but then, aye'. Cairney spoke eloquently in the language of solidarity and social justice about protecting his members' bodies:

> When we came, when we took action it was every lagger. We didnae just say we worked for a firm called Millers, we had a dispute in Grangemouth with Millers, we called oot everybody that worked in Millers, didn't matter whether they were in Grangemouth whether they were working in Saltcoats or – you hit the company, right? Everybody. So companies had to come doon and talk to you. I mean we werenae actually bully boys, we just wanted what we thought we were entitled to. We're entitled to be able to wash our hands, we're entitled to take overalls that are covered with asbestos off and go and sit doon, have something to eat without wearing these dirty boiler suits. So we brought they things in. In Grangemouth noo everybody has changing rooms noo and that. So we caused an awful lot of it and it was all through health and safety.[51]

At another point in the interview he returned to the issue of 'entitlement':

> I mean we went on to a job, if the toilets were frozen, that was it. You'd give them until ten o'clock, if they werenae unblocked and cleaned oot, oot the gate and away. And see when we come back the next day? They were fixed but we wouldnae start work until we were paid for that day, things like that. We were quite right. I mean if somebody's got to go to the toilet you're entitled to go to the toilet and it's their job to maintain it and make sure the toilets were clean and working and that.[52]

Cairney's narrative is interesting at a number of levels, apart from what he

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[50] Hugh Cairney, interviewed by Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, 1 December 1999, SOHC 016/A22.

[51] Hugh Cairney interviewed by Neil Rafeek, 26 March 2005, SOHC Archive 016/A35.

[52] Ibid.

reveals about rank and file activism, including strikes, on health and safety issues. This is an archetypal emotive activist narrative, transposing the heroic role of the union branch in the struggle to protect bodies against the 'villains' – both complicit (the employers and managers) and implicit (the union hierarchy in the TGWU). Later the Glasgow TGWU 7/162 branch supported an unofficial month-long strike at Newalls Insulation in 1966 for masks, protective clothing and medical exams.[53] The TGWU and STUC offered no support and the STUC eventually banned local activist John Todd from its Health and Safety training schools because of his outspoken criticism of TGWU inaction on asbestos. Other unofficial action followed, as with London dockers blacking asbestos handling in 1967 and building workers' strikes against asbestos and asbestos substitutes in the 1970s (for example, the Isle of Grain power station strike for nine months in 1976 against the use of glass fibre). This 'prairie fire' of health strikes spread to the oil refineries, including Grangemouth, in the later 1970s.

The 1970s appear to be a watershed with a cluster of significant occupational health and safety strikes. In relation to asbestos in Scotland, the Glasgow laggers branch of the TGWU led the way, with a series of strikes which achieved reforms in health and safety, craft status and wage rates which English areas were struggling to achieve parity with in the 1970s.[54] Here were ripples of a long tradition of rank and file radicalism on 'Red Clydeside' which undoubtedly shaped this more assertive phase of direct action on health and safety. This was also a quite unique mobilisation which drew strength from the close kinship and ethnic links of Irish Catholics amongst the asbestos lagging workers in Glasgow. Activists in the 7/162 Glasgow branch also went on to form the community advocacy and pressure group Clydeside Action on Asbestos (CAA) in 1986, a voluntary organisation that represented victims and campaigned for legislative reform, with much success in the new Scottish devolved parliament from 1999. CAA was representative of diseased and injured workers' movements that emerged across developed economies in the later twentieth century to challenge economic violence in the workplace and environmental pollution.[55]

Where trade union levels were relatively high and labour markets buoyant

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[53] Dalton, *Asbestos: Killer Dust*, 99.

[54] Hugh Cairney interviewed by Neil Rafeek, 26 March 2005, SOHC Archive 016/A35.

[55] See Robert Storey, 'Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: Engaging with the 'Testimony' of Injured Workers', in Steven High (ed.), *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver, 2015).

in 'dangerous trades', there was a pattern of 'wildcat' strikes and walkouts on occupational health issues at a local level in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, on closer scrutiny it was not that workers' failed to go out on strike on health and safety issues, rather that these strikes were short and often unofficial, hence less visible, slipping under the radar. Oral interviews reveal this hidden world of subterranean conflict and resistance around the body and its exploitation at the point of production. Witness, for example, the testimony of Scottish shipbuilding worker John Keggie recalling the 1960s and 1970s:

> By and large most o' the disputes in Robb's [shipyard] were about health and safety issues. They were not really about arguments about money or wages, terms and conditions. They were about health and safety issues, where management under pressure to complete orders would try and put people into environments that were unsafe. And the workers would refuse and the management would then suspend an individual and one individual bein' suspended … Ah mean, ah remember once three - maself and two others - were asked tae go intae a tank that was unsafe and didn't have ventilation. We refused and were suspended. The entire shipyard workforce walked out and a thirteen-week dispute took place.[56]

This strike was followed by a long ban on overtime because, as Keggie recalled: 'management insisted that when we went back we had tae go back intae that unsafe environment.' This 'insider' witness testimony may be interpreted as directly contradicting the narratives of some 'outsider' academics, professionals and the 'official' strike statistics where health and safety do not feature. However, both have meaning and credibility in that one was recounting workplace struggle, agency and activism and the other a relative failure of trade union bureaucracies to support such radicalism and direct action. That is not to say the trade union hierarchy was indifferent to economic violence meted out against the body at work, rather that tactics diverged. At the national union level and at the STUC and TUC, campaigns were directed towards influencing policy and legislation, as the work of Vicky Long has shown.[57] The injured and diseased workers' movement was multi-layered, demonstrating that workers and their unions were also agents in

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[56] John Keggie, interviewed by Ian MacDougall, 6 May 1997 (SWPHT collection; SOHC Archive).

[57] Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory.*

this process at the point of production and not just passive victims. At the workplace and local level, workers and their unions mobilised and could and did resort to the strike weapon and other forms of direct action to protect their bodies.

Health Walkouts in Coal Mining

This pattern of local activism on health and safety was also evident in the Scottish coal mines, characterised as they were by very high incidences of injury, accident mortality and chronic industrial disease – most importantly associated with inhalation of dust, causing pneumoconiosis, bronchitis and emphysema. Miners downed tools and walked out if safety was compromised or environmental conditions were deemed too risky and hazardous to health. These protests were limited, however, to seam or pit level strikes. They could occur at even the most inauspicious times and places – as with the 1932 'dust strike' at the Fife Coal Company's Mary Pit. Here in a modern anthracite colliery (a 'welfarist' company with a relatively good safety policy) employing 1,300 men new coal cutting technology threw up large clouds of dust at the coalface. In response, the men affected walked out on strike in spite of unprecedented high levels of regional unemployment in the Fife coalfield at this high point of the interwar Depression. In an interview one of the 1932 strike participants recalled:

> Ye couldnae see one another … It wis bad. It wis bad. You couldnae see if the coal came over on the loaders … And, ah mean, the dust wis so bad you couldnae get it oot your eyes. We used tae pit margarine roond oor eyes, ye ken. The best thing ye could do wis if ye fell asleep, ye ken. Once ye wakened up and it wisnae sae bad. The coal dust used tae form in your eyes here. It wis bad, it really wis bad.[58]

Interestingly, in this case this miner – John Taylor – commented that direct action may not have been the best tactic to address the issue, reflecting: 'But, ah mean, it wis a wrong fight, ye ken. It could have been negotiated, ah think, better than what we did - what the older boys did'.[59] Welsh miners, in

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[58] John Taylor, interviewed by Ian McDougall, 16 May 1997 (SWPHT Collection; SOHC Archive).
[59] Ibid.

a coalfield where pneumoconiosis was particularly prevalent, recalled similar 'dust strikes': 'One or two boys would go on strike as it were. They wouldn't touch the coal because it was too dusty, and the whole face stopped.'[60] Another said: 'Well very often we'd come up the road [strike]. Very often I had to phone Tom and they'd come up the road because of the dust. They got more educated towards the end like. Years ago the colliers just got on with it.'[61] Nati Thomas suggested in this last comment that the risk acceptance threshold and strike propensity on health issues differed markedly across generations and over time in mining. Older workers were socialised into living with poor environmental conditions underground. As an alternative to striking there was the work to rule option, as Scots miner Tommy Coulter explained:

> By that time the dust suppression awareness was there and, see prior to that if we knew, we knew the rules but if when we operated the rules we didnae get any dough [money]. But when the management were acting the goat we responded wi' a go slow or a cacanny. What they call in factories, work to rule and it just didn't go.[62]

Capacities, political cultures and the will to resist varied considerably across the coalfields and even from pit to pit – as the work of Roy Church and Quentin Outram has shown.[63] Place was significant. Whereas Scottish and Welsh miners might initiate direct action on health and safety issues, those in the Midlands were as likely to tolerate unhealthy work environments. Work-health cultures varied widely across different places, as this following dialogue between two Scottish miners and interviewer, Neil Rafeek reveals:

> GB: I think it's fair to say this. In Scotland, we had a different approach from the NUM to safety and health and the rest of it. See down South, down South, (*gasp*), unbelievable … Much worse. I mean there were men cutting without water … I worked in Stoke–on–Trent, it was bloody awful … the men were on their own and men are very fearless on their own. Me, I worked in a stone mine with the blast borers for the

[60] John Jones, b 1934, interviewed by Susan Morrison, 15 September 2002, SOHC Archive 017/C27.

[61] Colin (Nati) Thomas, b 1940, interviewed by Arthur McIvor and Ronnie Johnston, 12 May 2004, SOHC 017/C26.

[62] Tommy Coulter, b 1928, interviewed by Neil Rafeek and Hilary Young, 12 Jan 2005 SOHC 017/C21.

[63] Church and Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity*.

drills – no water. Mining with dust often with a low boring machine – 'Keep going Jock, you know, come on, come on keep going Jock', shocking stuff. Through a middle cut machine, no water. You imagine a machine up there [motioned to head height] throwing all the dust out.

NR: Just what you said there about keeping on working, why was that part of the culture do you think?

GB: It was just the lack of good trade union, how things developed.

DC: I would say money at the end of the day.

GB: There was money but there was also a bad culture. In Stoke–on–Trent, the men werenae, they were not union conscious. I remember working on a road, went out on strike one day, see when the place turned – other men doing the job for us (*laughs*) … that wouldn't happen in Scotland but it happened in Stoke on Trent and elsewhere in England. Different approach to trade unionism. That applies to Yorkshire too apparently, they're not as clever as they thought they were. They're very clever in Scotland and I think also in South Wales to some extent, from what I know of it, union conscious, safety conscious, dust conscious – really, really conscious. So that difference applied.[64]

Whilst this 'heroic' story-telling might have exaggerated the differences in Scots and English miners, the narratives of George Bolton and Derek Carruthers on health and safety do resonate with what we know about deep differences in work and political cultures across coalfields in the UK. Scots were amongst those more likely to resort to the strike weapon to defend workplace environmental standards. Workplace and community solidarity in Scotland underpinned such action, in contrast to elsewhere (eg the English Midlands coalfield).

The 1984–5 miners' strike marked a watershed in many ways. It left the NUM shackled with all kinds of new 'code of conduct' rules restricting industrial action. Excluded from this pernicious attack on trade union rights though was health and safety. Strikes on that issue proliferated over the following decade, as a North East England NUM activist Alan Napier recalled.[65] Oral testimony is insightful at many levels but not least in demonstrating that when and where trade unions were powerful – as in post-Second World War coal mining in Scotland – they were capable of initiating and supporting health and safety

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[64] George Bolton and David Carruthers, both b 1934, interviewed by Neil Rafeek and Hilary Young, 12 January 2005, SOHC 017/C23.

[65] Alan Napier, interviewed by Neil Rafeek, 31 March 2004, SOHC 017/C43.

strikes, albeit at the local level. Miners may have been inured to high levels of danger and worked in an environment where manliness was equated with risk acceptance, but when this became apparent and excessive they became intolerant of exposure to risk, more 'safety conscious' and more willing to walk out to protect their bodies. Over time, this risk threshold shifted and workers became less willing to accept that high levels of death and disability were an intrinsic part of the work.

On the other hand the NUM continued to support historic 'dust money' bonus payments as an incentive to work in unhealthy environments and were sensitive to threats of pit closures and the need to weigh job losses against health and safety concerns. Industrial work could and did damage bodies, but so too did unemployment and in the context of deindustrialisation and sharply diminishing job opportunities trade-offs were made that sacrificed miners' health and safety. Hence, on occasions the NUM lived with non-compliance of dust standards where pit closure was threatened and officially at least wildcat strike action was censured – as, for example, in the decade or so following nationalisation. As the NUM President Will Lawther stated in 1947: 'It is a crime against our own people that unofficial strikes should take place.'[66] Clearly there were tensions between rank and file workplace protest – including strikes – and the wider strategies of union leaders and bureaucracies. This was also expressed in the South Wales miners' abhorrence towards Miners' Federation of Great Britain and NUM support for 'dust' and 'dirt' money collectively bargained agreements – which one local official described as 'organised murder'.[67]

Putting this in Perspective

Oral evidence enables us to better understand the cultural and emotional landscape navigated by workers, and the resources that could be deployed in the mobilisation of workers on occupational health and safety issues. This

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[66] Cited in Andrew Taylor, *The NUM and British Politics Vol 1, 1944–1968* (Aldershot, 2003), 82–3.

[67] NUM (South Wales Area), Minutes of Area Executive Council Meeting, 15 August 1961, 659. See also *The Miner* (September/October 1961), 10. Negotiating for extra payments for working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions was official TUC policy before the passage of the HSWA in 1974. There was a clear rationale to this, in that this monetary penalty was designed to incentivise managerial improvements in work conditions.

suggests, at least in the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s, the existence of a significant, organic, subterranean rank and file movement to protect bodies at work. In this, strikes (and the threat of strikes) were part of the arsenal of weapons used as leverage on managers and employers to make concessions and to re-envisage workers' bodies as worthy of protection. Worker responses and agency regarding the body at work – including strike action – was dependent, however, upon a number of variables. Legislation, such as the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, heightened awareness and legitimised industrial action. On the other hand deindustrialisation undermined the capacity to mobilise in defence of bodies at work and diverted trade union's attention towards what were almost universally regarded in working class communities to be more important priorities – maintaining wages and jobs in the face of factory and mine closures and neo-liberal policies designed to neuter trade unionism. David Gee, a General and Municipal Workers' Union Health and Safety officer noted in 1982 'Asbestos workers could choose to settle for a one in 1000 risk, but that would mean closing down the asbestos industry tomorrow.'[68] In 1979 the Scottish Secretary of the TGWU indicated that rather than implementing the TUC's proposals for phasing out the use of asbestos, the Scottish TGWU was committed to maintaining employment of asbestos workers, but 'would look after the families of those members who suffer from asbestos disease as a result.'[69]

Privatisation and the accelerated shift to the market in the 1980s and 1990s brought more pressures – manifest, for example, in rising levels of work-related injuries and disease, including the epidemic of work-related stress.[70] In this context only major disasters such as Piper Alpha in 1988 (with the deaths of 167 workers caused by lax safety regimes under largely US management in North Sea Oil) could mobilise workers to refocus on directly protecting bodies. As Gregor Gall has noted there were nineteen successful brief rolling strikes and sit-ins organised in the North Sea oilfield by the new industrial union (OILC) after the explosion, including a major strike involving around 4,000 workers on the first anniversary of Piper Alpha. Industrial action continued into 1990. The disaster was an epiphany. 'Piper fundamentally changed the consciousness of workers', Gall has asserted, 'not only had 'enough become

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[68] Cited in Tweedale, *Magic Mineral*, 249.

[69] Letter from Nancy Tait to Raymond MacDonald, Scottish Secretary TGWU, 6 February 1979 (John Todd Papers, Clydeside Action on Asbestos Archive, Glasgow).

[70] The deleterious impact of privatisation on health and safety in coal mining is examined in Emma Wallis, *Industrial Relations in the Privatised Coal Industry* (Aldershot, 2000).

enough' but readiness to confront the employers with widespread strike action emerged.'[71]

Still, occupational health and safety strikes were localised and even in the most dangerous and heavily unionised industries such as coal mining, oil extraction and shipbuilding tended to be confined to workplace level disputes. How can these relatively low levels of industrial action be explained? Why was there a reluctance to ramp health and safety issues up from the workplace / local level to regional, industry-wide and national strikes? For many unions this was a question of strategic choice. State intervention in the nineteenth century created a pattern of campaigning and lobbying for legislative reform to enforce preventative action – for example through Factory Acts, Mines Acts and Home Office Special Regulations, such as those pertaining to 'dangerous trades' such as lead poisoning. This became a key role of the TUC and the STUC and its importance was recognised with the appointment of the Medical Advisers to the TUC. The first, Thomas Legge in 1931, was followed by Hyacinth Morgan who played an important role in getting TB scheduled as an occupational disease in 1951.[72] Dave Lyddon has made the point that:

> A strike is very important in drawing attention to, and can be successful in resolving, an immediate occupational health problem - but its necessarily temporary nature is no substitute for the eventual implementation and continuous enforcement of legal regulations to control a particular hazard.[73]

However, the failure to deploy strikes more widely on occupational health and safety was also a reflection of a macho work-health culture where maximising earnings and taking risks was exalted and overly 'protective' forms of behaviour pilloried as effeminate. The hegemonic 'hard man' masculinity that permeated the relatively dangerous 'heavy industries' where men were socialised into high levels of danger and risk and inured to injury and death on the job was implicated here. As mentioned elsewhere, men had to be seen as

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[71] Gregor Gall, 'Union Organising in the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry', *Scottish Labour History*, 41 (2006), 58. See also Charles Woolfson, John Foster and Matthias Beck, *Paying for the Piper: Capital and Labour in Britain's Offshore Oil Industry* (London, 1996).

[72] See Long, *Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory* and Arthur McIvor, 'Germs at Work: Establishing Tuberculosis as an Occupational Disease in Britain, c1900–1951', *Social History of Medicine*, 25, (2012), 812–29.

[73] Dave Lyddon, 'Health and Safety, 1945–1995', online publication: http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork/narrativedisplay.php?type=healthandsafety.

acting as men and peer pressure to conform could be brutal in working class communities like Clydeside.[74] John L. Williams observed in his detailed (500 page) study of accidents in 1960:

> Fundamentally, the old attitude that the risk of the job must be accepted remains; although, as in other groups exposed to danger, the individual hopes and assumes he will not be involved. Even if some would want to object to certain dangers they may be influenced by concern that colleagues may take a critical view of their 'weakness'. These factors explain, for example, the reluctance of many workers to wear or demand goggles in processes obviously risky to their eyes.[75]

A concerned Safety Officer in Scott Lithgows shipyard on the Clyde reflected in 1977: 'Somehow we have to persuade people to take a safe attitude to their work. It is easier said than done … in a traditional industry like shipbuilding where men are set in their ways.'[76] The question and the response from Ayrshire miner Alec Mills in an interview in 2000 is also revealing:

> AMcI: Why do you think there wasn't a strike on that issue [referring to masks and dust]?
> AM: Well, the men as I say, if they had all been like myself, and had refused to work when they were firing shots on the return side. But the men weren't all built the same. They weren't all built the same. There was unity within the coal mining industry and each individual pit if conditions were difficult, difficult, without the dust being brought into it. But there was never any argument about the dust.[77]

When the same respondent talked about mechanisation generating more dust he reflected: 'No, there were no strikes, once more for obvious reasons. There

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[74] Ronald Johnston and Arthur McIvor, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c1930–1970s' in Eileen Yeo (ed.), *Working Class Masculinities in Britain, 1850 to the Present*, special edition, *Labour History Review,* 69, (2004), 135–52.

[75] Williams, *Accidents and Ill-Health*, 51–2.

[76] J. P. K. Garthwaite (Safety Officer, Scott Lithgows), cited in Martin Bellamy, *The Shipbuilders* (Edinburgh, 2001), 74.

[77] Alec Mills, interviewed by Arthur McIvor and Ronnie Johnston, 19 June, 2000, SOHC 017/C1.

were increased and enhanced payments.'[78] In Mills narrative we see an explicit assertion that occupational health strikes were rare because workers were assuaged with compensatory wage payments.

We need to understand the politics of the body within the labour movement in the context of prevailing workplace culture, power and the realities of lived, daily life. The latter is especially important. In an insecure, declining industry (mining employment peaked around 1920) located in communities where alternative employment opportunities were often limited the opportunity to earn extra wages for working in an unhealthy or hazardous environment was difficult to spurn. This applied also to the use of asbestos in the shipyards. Workers had low expectations regarding their own health because of the broader context of widespread poverty, overcrowding, morbidity and mortality that characterised cities such as Glasgow and deprived Scottish coal mining communities. In this context, the risks of industrial injury and chronic disease – such as lead poisoning, asbestos, silicosis and the like – paled into insignificance. Work conditions might seem more tolerable when contrasted to teeming, overcrowded tenements; the risk of pneumoconiosis so distant in the future that the possibility of a job and decent wages clearly trumped such concerns. The room for manoeuvre was constrained by the realities of lived experience, the prevailing conditions in the labour market and the power of the bosses. This might be especially apposite in Scotland and the industrial heartland of West Scotland where a particularly entrenched anti-union, authoritarian managerial style prevailed. This was both endogenous and imported – a good example of the latter which had catastrophic effects on workers' bodies was North Sea Oil where a largely American 'gung-ho' style of management prevailed which resulted in the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988. Charles Woolfson, John Foster and Matthias Beck, along with Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson have analysed such developments, and oral history interviews in the Oil Lives project have elucidated both the high risk productionist managerial culture and the persistent militancy of the men in trying to neutralise these threats to their health and well-being.[79] Deindustrialisation, plant and pit closures and declining union membership in the more hostile economic and neo-liberal political climate of the 1980s and 1990s only made matters worse. Strike levels declined to all-time lows

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[78] Ibid.

[79] See Woolfson, Foster and Beck, *Paying for the Piper*; Terry Brotherstone and Hugo Manson, 'Voices of Piper Alpha: Enduring Injury in Private Memory, Oral Representation and Labour History', *Scottish Labour History,* 46 (2011), 71–85.

and there was little stomach for walkouts over health and safety amongst blue collar workers in a period when livelihoods were so directly under threat. The strike of 4,000 workers over high stress levels in the Civil Service in November 1999, half a century after the conflagration at Asbestos in Nova Scotia, was both an unusual outlier and a portent that the initiative in industrial action on the body at work was shifting from the traditional sectors of blue collar manual labour, and from physical damage to psycho-social aspects as Britain lurched towards a long-hours and overwork culture in a predominantly service based economy.[80]

Conclusion

This paper has explored the evident invisibility of occupational health and safety strikes, offered tentative explanations as to why this was so and challenged the idea of worker quiescence and trade union inertia on the body at work through some reflections on the subterranean pattern of largely unofficial 'wildcat' walkouts on health and safety in Scotland's 'dangerous trades'. It is hoped that this will form the basis of further reflection, research and an on-going conversation on strikes and the body in the workplace.

In Scotland, the relative lack of strike activity directly on health and safety issues for much of the twentieth century was connected both to fear of the consequences in a region where heavy industry employers were notoriously authoritarian and to the prevailing machismo working environment in which workers were socialised into taking high risks and tolerated high levels of danger. Historically, a high level of risk was accepted and regarded as compensated for in a higher wage and extra 'danger money' payments that prevailed up to the early 1970s. Consent and inertia were also the product of the wider context of deindustrialisation and job shedding (and concomitant labour disempowerment) and in part the result of a strategic prioritisation of campaigning and lobbying on occupational health and safety issues by national trade unions and the STUC and TUC. Occupational health and safety were framed by union leaderships as issues most appropriately and effectively pursued through legislation and state intervention. The latter were the main ways trade unions protected workers' bodies, though an important part was played by localised walkouts, which are probably more frequent than we might

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[80] Philip Taylor and Peter Bain, 'Trade Unions, Workers' Rights and the Frontier of Control in UK Call Centres', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 22 (2001), 39–66.

imagine, obscured by their poor visibility in aggregated metrics. Attitudes and capacities to mobilise were frequently in flux and identities mutating over time. Hegemonic 'hard man' styles of masculinity were being superseded by a range of masculinities, if somewhat belatedly in the traditional working-class communities in Scotland's industrial heartlands. Work-health cultures, nonetheless, were changing. Dave Lyddon has made the important point that the later 1970s marked a watershed with the mass training by the TUC of health and safety representatives – around 80,000 attended trade union ten-day health and safety courses over 1974–82.[81] Still, in the heavy industry manufacturing and mining workplaces that characterised Scotland until the last quarter of the twentieth century, workmen and their unions invariably continued to put jobs and wages before the direct protection of their bodies. This was perfectly logical in the circumstances. Jobs and wages were the key determinants of individual and family health and well-being – and the deleterious impact of unemployment upon physical and mental health is well documented.[82] In part at least this was connected to 'doing masculinity' and being a 'real man' within what was still an intensely patriarchal and work-centred society into the 1970s and 1980s. Understandably where livelihoods and 'breadwinner' status were threatened this was considered more important than occupational health and safety, and peer pressure to conform in such environments was powerful. Whether a more aggressive strike policy on health and safety would have achieved greater results and influenced the pattern of occupational health epidemics like asbestos and pneumoconiosis is debateable. What is evident is that this would have been going against the grain of an entrenched machismo work culture, where pragmatism, fatalism, conformity and a high risk threshold prevailed.

That said, there was significant protest, resistance and advocacy around the body in the workplace environment, including through strikes, albeit at the local level. This rank and file direct action appears to have been growing and most prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s and is an aspect of the wider injured and diseased workers' movement that merits more attention. The argument in this essay is that workers' individual and collective responses on occupational health, safety and risk were complex and contingent, ranging

[81] Dave Lyddon, 'Health and Safety, 1945–1995', online publication: http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork/narrativedisplay.php?type=healthandsafety.
[82] See Arthur McIvor, 'Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health and Disability in the United Kingdom since c1950', in Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon and Andrew Perchard (eds), *Deindustrialization and its Aftermath* (Vancouver, 2017).

across a spectrum depending upon a number of variables, influenced by prevailing power relations and the wider social, economic and cultural context. It has been argued elsewhere that trade unions could be key interlocutors capable of acting, as one trade unionist asserted, as 'custodians of workers' health'.[83] It is apparent that there was also more resistance through direct action, including withdrawal of labour, on health and safety than appears at first sight. An oral history approach can elucidate this, enabling exploration of the individual and collective responses of workers to risks of damage to their bodies – their feelings, emotions, identities and lived experiences – albeit often expressed in conflicting and multi-layered narratives that are difficult to interpret. Such personal testimonies can be especially revealing in exposing patterns of consent, mutating identities, as well as resistance through 'wildcat' strikes, spontaneous 'walkouts' and other means to address threats to bodies at the point of production.

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[83] TUC, *Annual Report,* 1955, 377.

Locality, Regionality and Gender: Revisiting Industrial Protest among Women Workers in Scotland 1910 to 1913

William Kenefick

Less than one woman in twelve was a trade union member by 1914.[1] Where women competed directly with men in the labour market, their role in the workplace was not so highly valued by the wider community, so they failed to attract the support of the male-dominated union and labour moment.[2] Because of the patriarchal notion that men were in charge, women faced discriminatory practices both at home and in the workplace. Indeed, patriarchal notions dominated the activities of women in the public and industrial arena – even where some occupations and workplaces were distinctly gender-specific.[3] Yet, despite the evident difficulties faced by women workers, they were far from being docile or apathetic. According to official statistics nearly 55,000 women were involved in industrial protest in Scotland between 1911 and 1913: one third higher than the combined totals for the previous decade.[4] Other evidence shows that women were willing participants in industrial protest movements, and in some instances were leading the way in taking independent industrial action.[5]

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[1] For a comprehensive overview on the labour unrest 1910 to 1914 see Dave Lyddon, 'Postscript: The Labour Unrest in Britain and Ireland, 1910 to 1914 – Still Uncharted Territory?', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* (HSIR), 33 (2012), 241-65. This issue of the HSIR focuses entirely on the 'Labour Unrest, 1910 to 1914'. See also Hamish W. Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Basingstoke, 1999), 120 and 122..

[2] Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850–1914* (Oxford, 1991), Introduction; Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 120; Lynne Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, Deborah Simonton and Eileen Yeo (eds), *Gender in Scottish Society since 1700* (Edinburgh, 2006), 4–7.

[3] Deborah Simonton, 'Work, Trade and Commerce' in *Gender in Scottish Society since 1700,* 199–200 and 215–18; also Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 190–2.

[4] Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850–1914* (Edinburgh, 1991), 136: the combined total for 1900–1910 was 37,954 women taking strike action.

[5] Thanks to the reviewers, Alan MacDonald, Arthur McIvor and Graeme Morton for their comments. This article can be viewed as a companion piece to William Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth": Female Textile-Workers' Strike Activity in Dundee 1911 to 1912', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* (HSIR), 33 (2012), 189-221. Together they represent work in progress.

Since the pioneering work of Eleanor Gordon, Esther Breitenbach and others, and the studies of the Glasgow Labour History Workshop (GLHW) published in the 1990s, there has been virtually no systematic examination of the impact of the labour unrest in Scotland or the role of women in industrial protest.[6] Catriona Macdonald's work on class, gender and political change in Scotland is one exception, and while there is little focus on the dynamic of the labour unrest, her work demonstrates that women's experience of industrial protest in Scotland varied considerably depending on geography and locality. For example, there was significant industrial unrest among female textile workers at the village of Neilston in East Renfrewshire, whereas at nearby Paisley (some 3.1 miles north of Neilston) there were no strikes among female workers between 1910 and 1913.[7] This clearly shows that regionalism is one of the underlying causes of strike action among workers.

Building on this work with additional material derived from archival sources, and the national, provincial and labour press, this article aims to establish the extent to which women workers were willing participants in the escalation of militancy during the period 1910–13. Given the dearth of trade union records, the lack of detail often missing from such records where they do exist, and the problems associated with the compilation of Board of Trade statistics on strike activity, this line of enquiry often reveals very little about the reasons why women went on strike.[8] The methodological approach employed here bridges that gap by examining a wide array of mainly provincial newspaper accounts of women's involvement in industrial protest.

[6] The three chapters in Kenefick and McIvor (eds), *Roots of Red Clydeside*, refer to the GLHW; Kenefick and McIvor, 'A Class of Work Regimes: Americanisation and the Strike at the Singers Sewing Machine Company, 1911', 193–213; William Knox and Helen Corr, '"Striking Women": *Cotton Workers and Industrial Unrest, c 1907–1914'*, 107–28; George Rawlinson and Anna Robinson, 'The United Turkey Red Strike, December 1911', 175–192: see also Eleanor Gordon and Esther Brietenbach (eds), *The World is Ill Divided: Women's Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1990); and Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon (eds), *Out of Bounds. Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945* (Edinburgh, 1992).

[7] Catriona M. M. Macdonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland. Paisley Politics, 1885–1924* (East Linton, 2000); Macdonald, 'Weak Roots and Branches: Class, Gender and the Geography of Industrial Protest', *Scottish Labour History*, 33 (1998), 6–30.

[8] The general scarcity of documentary sources is a major problem associated with the study of the trade union and labour movement in Scotland as few, if any, records survive: see William H. Marwick, 'Early Trade Unionism in Scotland', *Economic History Review* (1935), 87. For an analysis of the weakness of Board of Trade statistics see Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 190–1.

Reports in the socialist press, in particular *Forward* the propaganda organ of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) are also important in the Scottish context. The ILP actively supported striking workers and in running their 'living wage' campaign they were equally pro-active in organising unskilled workers across Scotland.[9] Such sources provide a valuable insight into the attitude of women involved in industrial protest and the extent to which they were supported by their local communities, trade-union and labour organisations. The main aim here is to promote further thinking and discussion of an aspect of labour history that has suffered from considerable neglect over the last twenty years. Indeed, this series of case studies reveal a good deal about agency and the willingness of women to strike around issues such as the concept of the struggle for the living wage.

1910

The Neilston Strike – East Renfrewshire, May–June 1910

When the Neilston cotton-thread workers struck on 25 May 1910 they were not union organised. Demands for an increase in wages were the main cause of the dispute but as William Knox and Helen Corr demonstrate, workers were increasingly concerned about managerial authoritarianism and employer paternalism. Crucially, the strikers were able to draw on and mobilise the support of the wider trade union and labour movement, which reinforces the importance of locality in predicating the eventual success or failure of any dispute.[10]

Led by Kate McLean and Esther Dick, the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) quickly came to the women's assistance and within days 'the majority of workers in the mills' were NFWW members.[11] They were also supported by Glasgow Trade Council (GTC), the ILP and the SDP.[12] John MacLean (along with many other leading left radicals) appealed to the

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[9] Smyth, Labour in Glasgow, 73–7. 'The Struggle for Living Wages' was part of the 'Scottish Socialist Summer Propaganda Demonstrations' organised in conjunction with the ILP, the Social Democratic Federation/Party and, from 1911, the British Socialist Party (BSP), together with the Fabian Society, Christian Socialist Fellowship, Clarion Scouts, and the Catholic Socialist Society. For an initial report on the 1911 campaign activities see Forward, 23 December 1911: see also Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 214–15.

[10] Knox and Helen Corr, '"Striking Women"', 101–28.

[11] Ibid., 120.

[12] *Glasgow Herald*, 26 May 1910.

whole of the Scottish labour movement to get behind the Neilston workers.[13] The strike initially involved 120 workers, but when the employers R. F. and J. Alexander and Co., of the English Sewing Cotton Company refused to speak to the NFWW, other factory departments struck in sympathy and the employers declared a lockout on 6 June. By then 1,700 women were embroiled in the dispute and in 'a hostile display of defiance' strikers smashed mill windows and personally targeted managers.[14] Mass demonstrations were arranged in support and the numbers in attendance were so great that it became a cause of concern for the local constabulary.[15] On 8 June there was a march of 5,000 people 'complete with pipers, singing and banner-waving', including a large group of male trade unionists from Glasgow, who rallied behind a large demonstration banner that proclaimed: 'WE WANT JUSTICE, FAIR CONDITIONS AND A LIVING WAGE'.[16] There was an unprecedented level of public support for the strikers which forced the employers to call on the assistance of the Board of Trade. With their intervention, which guaranteed an increase in wages, the strike ended on 17 June.[17]

The dispute was regarded as a watershed, for when the hitherto unorganised 'mill girls' struck and joined the NFWW they broke with over half a century of paternalism.[18] Buoyed by their success the mill girls marched to nearby Paisley behind another banner bearing the words: 'NEILSTON EXPECTS THE PAISLEY GIRLS TO JOIN THE UNION'. But it seems they and the NFWW met with little success, and while the NFWW attempted to establish a branch in Paisley the following month the turnout was so small the meeting was abandoned. The Neilston workers, the NFWW, and their political supporters were all perceived as 'unconnected' and from 'outside Paisley' and in a locality that lacked a strong labour tradition this helps explain their failure.[19] Workers in Paisley were unable to mount 'a community-wide challenge to the authority of capitalism.' Indeed, it was the interference of outside forces that laid the foundation for 'third party intervention' including

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[13] *Forward*, 4 June 1910.

[14] Knox and Corr, '"Striking Women"', 120; Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*, 243.

[15] *Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald*, 7 June; *Forward* 11 June 1910.

[16] Knox and Corr, '"Striking Women"', 121–2.

[17] Widely reported in the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* from 26 May to 18 June 1910; and *Forward* (published every Saturday), 28 May and 4, 11 and 18 June 1910.

[18] By 1911 the NFWW had a membership of 10,000 workers in forty-eight branches in England, Scotland and Wales: see Rawlinson and Robinson, 'The United Turkey Red Strike – December 1911', 178.

[19] Macdonald, 'Weak Roots and Branches', 21.

the intervention by the Board of Trade and explains in part the disintegration of paternalism at Neilston.[20]

The Bo'ness Strike – West Lothian, May–June 1910

The action of the Bo'ness women woodyard-workers striking in sympathy for male counterparts was a somewhat different form of industrial protest to the events at Neilston. The strikers had the support of the local trade unions including dockers, iron foundry moulders, miners and 'hundreds of other women sympathisers' from the local mining community, and the ILP.[21] The dispute began on Saturday 29 May and involved 600 male woodyard workers organised by the English-based National Amalgamated Union of Labourers (NAUL) and 'a very gratifying feature of the strike' was the role of 100 women workers who had 'struck with the men'.[22]

Trouble erupted immediately when the employers, who refused to meet with NAUL, engaged the services of 'a well-known west of Scotland strike-breaker' to provide replacement labour. Next day 100 Glasgow 'strike-breakers' arrived in Bo'ness and despite having the protection of 'dozens of extra police' they were attacked and subjected to 'molestation' by the strikers. They returned to Glasgow that same day on a specially chartered train.[23] In celebration, a large meeting of over 1,000 strikers and sympathisers was organised that evening. It was addressed by an NAUL executive member, local ILP activist and Town Councillor Mr Angus Livingstone, and an 'ILP propagandist' Mr Alex McGillvray who spoke on 'The Case for Socialism'. The celebrations were short lived, however, and next morning 350 'unemployed replacement labourers' arrived from Glasgow with fifty extra policemen.[24]

The employers' actions galvanised the community and within hours of the strike-breakers' arrival a procession of 2,000 townspeople was organised. Led by a piper and a drummer they made for the woodyards carrying a banner proclaiming 'WE WANT JUSTICE AND A LIVING WAGE', which on the reverse bore the legend: 'No Reprieve for the Blacklegs'. *Forward* reported that the strikers 'swarmed the yards, driving the "blacklegs" out of the

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[20] Knox and Corr, '"Striking Women"', 125–26.

[21] *Forward,* 4 June 1910.

[22] Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The Making of the Transport and General Workers Union: The Emergence of the Labour Movement, 1. part 1.* (Oxford, 1991), 89 and 126–7. NAUL was formed on Tyneside in 1889 organising the unskilled shipyard and waterside workers largely in North-east England; Forward, 4 June 1910.

[23] *Scotsman,* 31 May 1910.

[24] *Forward,* 4 June 1910.

wagons and the bothies … felled with stick and clubs'. The *Glasgow Herald* described the event as a 'riot' in which thirty people needed serious medical attention. The violence came to an end only after the employers agreed to talk with the NAUL, and there was the promise that the replacement labourers would return immediately to Glasgow.[25] The crowd then 'quietly withdrew, reformed themselves into processional order and marched back into town' to a sympathetic reception from the people of Bo'ness.[26] By one o'clock the bruised and battered 'blacklegs' were on their way back to Glasgow along with the majority of the extra police. With the promised intervention of the Board of Trade it was agreed to refer the wage claim to arbitration and on Saturday 4 June the strikers returned to work.[27]

On the day the strike ended, *Forward* published 'A Special Descriptive Report' wherein they suggested that it 'must have gladdened the hearts of the strikers [to see] blood-bespattered blacklegs … cowed and helpless.' They concluded rather exultantly: 'That a feature of the onslaught was the plucky and effective assistance of the women: The Glasgow 'scabs' learned to their hurt what a handy little instrument a pit-prop can be when it is swung by a Bo'ness woodyard lassie.'[28] By claiming the moral high ground *Forward* was excusing the violence surrounding this event. The *Glasgow Herald* viewed the matter more seriously and they reported on the injuries sustained by the Glasgow men including: severe scalp wounds; dislocated arms and legs; injuries to the back; one fractured hand; and many instances of severe bruising to various parts of the body. These injuries, the report concluded, 'bore evidence of the seriousness of the conflict' and that the injured were specifically 'targeted by women and girls'.[29]

When the Board of Trade's arbitration committee met to discuss the men's wage claim they were presented with an additional demand: 'That the women be withdrawn from the yards'. The Board stated they were not empowered to decide on such issues and the matter was dropped.[30] That the matter was raised at all demonstrates that the level of sympathy and solidarity shown by the women workers was not reciprocated, and while the men secured trade-union recognition and an increase in wages the position of the women remained unaltered. There was a trade-union presence at Bo'ness, and the

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25 *Glasgow Herald*, 1 June 1910.
26 *Forward,* 4 June 1910.
27 *Glasgow Herald* and *Scotsman*, 2 and 4 June 1910.
28 *Forward*, 4 June 1910.
29 *Glasgow Herald*, 2 June 1910.
30 Ibid., 7 July 1910.

ILP were clearly not inactive, but the locality lacked the strong local labour traditions evident at Neilston that could pursue a more inclusive class agenda in support of the women.[31] Perhaps this is a case of gender discrimination, indicative of how women were unlikely to expect wider community support when they directly competed with men for work.[32]

1911

The Lochee Spinners' Strike and the Singers Strike February–April 1911
Given the predilection of women for unorganised and spontaneous strike activity – a tendency that was clearly evident among a broader cross-section of female workers across different regions in Scotland - it was perhaps surprising that Dundee's female textile workers were unusually quiet during 1910. But this changed with the dispute at Cox's Camperdown works at Lochee, when 1,000 Irish spinners, bobbin-shifters, and helpers struck on 25 February 1911. Within days the entire labour force of 4,500 women and 500 men were locked out by the employers.[33]

The Lochee spinners took the unanimous decision to strike over plans to reduce spinning squad sizes from ten to eight operatives per frame.[34] The employers took a firm position from the start and they adamantly refused to deal with the women's union, the Dundee and District Jute and Flax Workers' Union (JFWU) and its officials.[35] There was much public sympathy for the striking women and the local press was uncharacteristically critical of the employers' heavy-handed tactics and their outright refusal to meet with officials of the JFWU, while ignoring the pleas of church ministers and the local Catholic priest to attempt to resolve the dispute.[36]

A notable feature of the dispute was the daily procession from Lochee into Dundee city centre led by marching bands, and the independent leadership role played by the women which the *Weekly News* asserted far excelled that of Dundee men.[37] Some 75 per cent of the 1,000 spinners were members of the JFWU and, while they were in receipt of strike pay, the remaining 4,000 workers received nothing. Financial support came from

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[31] Macdonald, 'Weak Roots and Branches', 120.
[32] Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 120.
[33] *Dundee Advertiser*, 25 and 27 February 1911.
[34] *Scotsman*, 25 and 28 February 1911.
[35] *Scotsman*, 27 February 1911; *Scotsman, Glasgow Herald, Courier and Dundee Advertiser*, 3–14 March 1911.
[36] *Dundee Advertiser*, 15 March 1911.
[37] *Weekly News*, 4 March 1911.

the (male) Calender Workers' Union, and the Tenters' Union, with donations from the Trades Council, the ILP, and the SDF, and Dundee School Board fed the strikers' children during the dispute. The strikers themselves were also raising funds to relieve the poor, showing a 'spirit of self-reliance' that had never come to the surface in any previous dispute.[38] Nevertheless, the strike weakened and after three weeks the employees returned more or less on the employers' terms.

The Irish female spinners of Lochee were the most strike-prone in the city, but they only joined the JFWU in the months preceding the strike. As was the case with other Irish workers their more inclusive role was aided by the emergence of the Catholic Socialist Societies, first formed in Glasgow in 1906 by long-time ILP member John Wheatley.[39] As trade unionists the Lochee spinners helped to cement strong and permanent relations between the JFWU and the wider union and labour movement in the city, in what was 'a serious struggle between capital and labour' with labour coming out on top.[40] Indeed, within a month the Cox brothers were 'obliged to revert back to … former spinning arrangement' with employment back at pre-strike levels.[41]

The Neilston strike was considered a potent example of the effectiveness of worker and community solidarity and the determination of young female workers (between fifteen and eighteen years of age), and its success demonstrated that women could benefit materially from trade-union organisation through membership of the NFWW.[42] The Lochee dispute had a similar impact on Dundee and helped to boost the profile of the JFWU whose membership increased by over 1,000 to reach 6,300 by 1 April 1911.[43] The *Dundee Advertiser* had affectionately described the dispute as 'an effervescence

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[38] *Scotsman, Courier* and *Dundee Advertiser*, 28 February, 3 and 10 March 1911.

[39] Ian Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), 21–7. It was argued that the Catholic Socialist Societies were to take the 'gospel of Socialism to the Catholic population' and that this was 'the gospel as taught by the ILP: see also William Walker, *Juteopolis, Dundee and its Textile Workers, 1885–1923* (Edinburgh, 1979), 142–3.

[40] *Courier* and *Dundee Advertiser*, 18 March 1911.

[41] Walker, *Juteopolis*, 302, n.1 and n.2.

[42] Knox and Corr '"Striking Women"', 107-28; Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*, 241–7.

[43] JFWU general meetings (GM) minutes book, 1906 to 1917; and JFWU committee meetings (CM) minutes book, 1906-17: General Deposit/Jute and Flax/1/1 and General Deposit/Jute and Flax/1/7 (JFWU, GM, GD/JF/1/1/ and JFWU, CM, GD/JF/1/7), Dundee City Archives (DCA): see JFWU GM, 4 and 18 February, 1 April 1911.

of young folk … principally females'.[44] This points to another feature not generally commented upon in relation to the labour unrest: the involvement of young workers.[45]

The Singer Dispute – Clydebank, March–April 1911

The Strike at the Singer Sewing Machine Company factory in Clydebank was the first of the fourteen principal strikes to take place in Scotland between 1911 and 1913, and it revolved around the issue of work intensification. Similar to the Lochee strike, it involved a reduction in squad size: from fifteen to twelve female polishers. When the women walked out in protest, all 2,000 women workers at the plant came out 'in feminine sympathy', and within days they were joined by 9,000 male workers at the factory. Of all the disputes that took place in Scotland in the years before the Great War, the Singer strike was the only one that had clear connections with the syndicalist De Leonist Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the Industrial Workers of the World.[46] The Singer dispute ended in failure and resulted in the mass victimization of the main protagonist but, as at Neilston and Lochee, women workers took the lead and in doing so contributed significantly to the mobilisation of labour on a class-wide, rather than purely sectional, basis.

The Kirkcaldy Textile Dispute – West Fife, January to December 1911

The disputes examined thus far were relatively short in duration. The year-long struggle of male and female textile workers in the small town of Kirkcaldy was an entirely different affair in so far as they faced a determined employers' association vehemently opposed to organised labour. This struggle rarely involved more than a few hundred workers directly but for the Kirkcaldy community it symbolised much more, for it changed the industrial and political mood of an entire working-class community.

The event that triggered the dispute began when the Scottish Mill and Factory Workers Federal Union (SMFWFU) in league with William Adamson, recently elected Labour MP for West Fife, came to Kirkcaldy to support an imminent strike among unorganised powerloom-tenters in early January

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[44] *Dundee Advertiser*, 3 March 1911.

[45] Dave Lyddon, 'PostScript: The Labour Unrest in Great Britain and Ireland, 1910 to 1914 – Still Uncharted Territory?', HSIR, 33, 247–61.

[46] Glasgow Labour History Workshop (GLHW), *The Singer Strike, Clydebank 1911* (Glasgow, 1989); GLHW, 'A Clash of Work Regimes: "Americanisation" and the Strike at the Singer Sewing Machine Company, 1911' in Kenefick and McIvor (eds), *Roots of Red Clydeside*, 193–213.

1911.[47] The union arranged a large demonstration of the benefits of trade-union organisation. The speakers noted that organised powerloom-tenters in nearby Dunfermline earned six shillings more than the unorganised men at Kirkcaldy. In addition, they stressed that unionised woman weavers earned four shillings more than weavers in Kirkcaldy, and that their rate of pay was comparable with organised female textile workers in Lancashire. The Kirkcaldy branch of the SMFWFU was formed that evening and next day the powerloom-tenters struck. Within days the textile employers formed their own association and immediately declared a lockout. So began a dispute for trade-union recognition and improved pay and conditions that would take eleven months to resolve.[48]

The female textile workers, although at this point still unorganised, were actively involved in the dispute in providing sympathy action and by chastising non-strikers. Indeed, as a result of 'such hostile demonstrations at the hand of the women and girls' several men joined the MFWFU and the strike. As the strike went on the actions of the women and girls were almost entirely focused on 'replacement labour' drafted in at various times throughout the eleven-month dispute as the Kirkclaldy employers' association stepped-up their attempt to break the strike.[49]

The employers' association asserted that 'English interference' was at the root of the dispute and, for the first three months, argued consistently that the strikers were being used as pawns by disreputable English trade unionists.[50] It is true that English textile trade unionists were actively assisting the SMFWFU in Kirkcaldy, as they had done earlier at Dunfermline, but the SMFWFU was a Scottish trade union representing Scottish textile workers – the great majority of whom were women. Indeed, the SMFWFU had great success against the employers at Dunfermline and in June 1911 and resolved a five-week push for

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[47] The Scottish Mill and Factory Workers Union (SMFWFU) was formed in 1889 and largely operated as in East Scotland with branches in Ayrshire: see William H. Marwick, 'The Beginnings of the Scottish Working-Class Movement in the Nineteenth Century', *International Review of Social History*, 3 (1938), 19. *Fife Free Press*, 21 January 1911. William Adamson was one of only three Labour MPs elected in Scotland in 1910, the others being Alexander Wilkie, Dundee, and Dundee-born George Barnes who was elected MP for Blackfriars, Glasgow: both Wilkie and Barnes were elected in 1906.

[48] Address by John Young, *Fife Free Press,* 21 January 1911: news of lockout, ibid., 28 January.

[49] *Fife Free Press*, 28 January 1911: there were continual reports on the 'women and girls' throughout the eleven-month dispute.

[50] *Fife Free Press*, 28 January and 15 April 1911.

trade-union recognition in favour of the women weavers.[51] There was another big strike in September for a shorter working week and, with the backing of the community and support from Dunfermline Trades Council, the ILP and the SDP, the SMFWFU entered into successful negotiations with the employers.[52]

At Kirkcaldy the paternalist ethos of the employers still held sway and most women declined to join the SMFWFU. But by the summer of 1911 a group of around 200 female workers had joined and by September they were at the core of a well-supported recruitment campaign. At one well-attended event Mrs Donaldson (Women's Trade Union League) expressed her surprise that during the present unrest 'Kirkcaldy had strangely been left alone in the labour world.' Mr Thomas Shaw, Secretary of the Northern Counties Amalgamated Textile Association (representing 250,000 English workers), made a passionate appeal for women to join the SMFWFU arguing that if Lancashire weavers earned twenty-four shillings per week 'why should the girls of Kirkcaldy' who earned four shillings less 'be any different?' Labour MP William Adamson, James Robertson of the Fife and Kinross Miners' Association, and Mr Young of the Ayrshire SMFWFU all likewise called on women workers to organise.[53]

By early October the women were on strike and, with Mrs Donaldson and Mr Young, they organised 'soap box meetings' at the mill gates to persuade workers to join the union and the dispute, holding a large placard that read: 'Great Kirkcaldy Strike! – Workers Thoroughly Roused – Wemyss Factory Out – OBJECT: Better Conditions for Women Workers.'[54]

The momentum was gathering and at a 'large and enthusiastic' meeting held on 13 October, local United Free Church Minister, the Rev. William Milne, pledged his support, arguing that the time had come for the church 'to show her sympathy with the working men and women' in supporting the SMFWFU's fight for better wages and a shorter working week. William Adamson was once again in attendance, as was Mrs Donaldson and Mr Young, and the meeting concluded by reminding the women that they earned four shillings less than weavers in Dunfermline 'and that was reason enough to join the union'.[55]

It was mid-December before the employers finally agreed to recognise the SMFWFU and settle the strike with the powerloom-tenters and the women weavers.[56] *Forward* praised the women for what they had achieved, stating that,

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51   *Scotsman*, 20 June 1911; see also Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 106.
52   *Fife Free Press*, 2 and 16 September 1911.
53   Ibid., 30 September 1911.
54   Ibid., 7 October 1911.
55   Ibid., 14 October 1911
56   *Scotsman,* 19 December 1911; Fife Free Press, 2, 9, 16 and 23 December; see also

due to their actions, wage increases had been granted in every factory in the district, and in following their lead 'a number of union branches had been established among the previously unorganised workers' (including carters, 'dockers and tramwaymen').[57] According to Mrs Donaldson this was due in the main to the 'splendid courage and enthusiasm' of the women weavers of Kirkcaldy.[58]

The Vale of Leven Strike – Dunbartonshire, December 1911

Another strike of note involving women took place at the United Turkey Red (UTR) Combine at the Vale of Leven, West Dunbartonshire, in December 1911. Similar to Neilston, the strikers were led by Kate McLean but as the work of George Rawlinson and Anna Robinson demonstrates, the NFWW had been active in the area for some time before this particular dispute broke out.[59] The first branch of 600 members was formed in January 1911 and by mid-February the NFWW had some 2,000 members organised in seven branches. Glasgow Trades Council and the Glasgow ILP were involved from the start, and it was the Scottish organiser of the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), who addressed the meeting when the first branch of the NFWW was formed at the Vale of Leven.[60] Indeed, the link with the dockers remained strong and by the time of the strike the women had the active support of the Glasgow-based Scottish Union of Dock Labourers (SUDL) after it was formed in the summer of 1911.

It was the policy of the NFWW to organise women workers and to channel them into male unions where these existed and where women could be admitted.[61] By the summer of 1911, under pressure from the women and the NFWW, the women were admitted as members of a new branch of the National Amalgamated Society of Dyers, Bleachers, Finishers and Kindred Trades (commonly referred to as the ASD). This was the first time the ASD had opened its ranks to women at UTR and in November, in conjunction

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Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 106.

[57] *Forward*, 30 December 1911.

[58] *Fife Free Press*, 28 October 1911: for recruitment meetings involving Donaldson and Pemberton see ibid., 2, 16 and 30 September and 7 October; for later reports on the strike and its resolution see ibid., 11, 18 and 15 November and 16 and 23 December 1911.

[59] Rawlinson and Robinson, 'The United Turkey Red Strike, December 1911', 175–92.

[60] *Forward*, January-February 1911.

[61] Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 195.

with the NFWW, the ASD tabled a joint demand for a 10 per cent increase in wages for male and female workers, and a reduction of the working week to fifty-five hours.

The employers rejected these demands outright. On 9 December a general strike was declared and with 7,000 in dispute the UTR complex was brought to a standstill.[62] The 2,000 striking women held regular meetings and, with the NFWW, Glasgow Trade Council and the ILP, they organised several large public demonstrations. One rally, which was led by four bands, attracted more than 5,000 people holding aloft two effigies representing a company director and a head-clerk at UTR. In common with other disputes involving women there was a carnival atmosphere, but events could and did turn into more serious protests. The *Glasgow Herald* reported on one incident where several clerks were lifted bodily and thrown into the nearby river.[63] The women earned a degree of 'notoriety' for their 'chastising' of directors, managers and clerks who crossed the picket lines: on 18 December the *Dundee Advertiser* printed a photograph of smiling strikers being cautioned by a policeman, asserting that they were none too impressed 'with the dignity of the law'.[64]

Through their connection with the SUDL the women strikers came to be addressed by the well-known French anarcho-syndicalist Madame Sorgue of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) who was influential in the formation of the SUDL during the summer of 1911.[65] Madame Sorgue was interviewed by leading ILP activist Patrick Dollan for *Forward* earlier in June, when she discussed her imprisonment in Portugal and Italy in 1908 and 1909 with the result that the State Prosecutor in France described her 'as the most dangerous woman in Europe'.[66] It is clear that the ASD was unhappy with the interference of 'the foreign lady Madame Sourgue' in their strike, and it instructed the women to 'dissociate' themselves from her and the SUDL. The women ignored these instructions and held the meeting as planned.[67]

The employers initially refused to meet with union officials, but they were under considerable public pressure to broker a deal, and on 20 December they

[62] Rawlinson and Robinson, 'The United Turkey Red Strike – December 1911', 181–2.
[63] *Glasgow Herald*, 14 December 1911.
[64] *Dundee Advertiser*, 18 December 1911.
[65] *Lennox Herald,* 16 December 1911; William Kenefick, 'Rebellious and Contrary': *The Glasgow Dockers, 1853-1932* (East Linton, 2000), 218; Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 126.
[66] *Forward,* 10 June 1911: 'Madame Sorgue "The Most Dangerous Women in Europe"': An Interview with P. J. Dollan.
[67] *Lennox Herald,* 16 December 1911.

agreed to refer the matter to the Board of Trade for arbitration. The men were keen to settle; the women were unhappy about the decision, but under pressure from ASD they grudgingly agreed to return to work on Christmas Day 1911. The arbitration committee met in January 1912 and ruled in favour of the wage claim, but recommended that the women should receive only 50 per cent of the wage demand offered to the men. The women rejected this and ASD were forced to refer it back to the Board of Trade.[68] When they met again in February 1912 the outcome was the same and the women reluctantly accepted the decision.[69]

The UTR dispute was another example of the willingness of women to take the lead in industrial protest. But the unhappy outcome seemed to mark a turning point for the women of the Vale of Leven, as female membership of ADS declined considerably thereafter.[70] The reasons are not entirely clear. Perhaps becoming a women's section of a male-dominated trade union was to blame, or the perceived lack of support by the men and the union over the wage claim? The involvement of the NFWW, Glasgow Trades Council, the ILP, and the dockers clearly encouraged the women to get involved in industrial protest, but the 'outsider' status of these organisations was clearly viewed with a degree of suspicion by the local trade-union movement. Clearly, the ASD branch was unhappy about outside interference in the strike and specifically the role of Madame Sorgue and the SUDL. Thus, like at Paisley, the 'inter-connectedness of industry and locality' arguably reinforced employer paternalism, even if unintentionally, and the union failed to overcome the prevalent fragmented class and gender ideology that persisted at the Vale of Leven.[71] The ready acceptance of the Board of Trade decision by both the employers and the ASD dashed the aspirations of women workers and shows that on this occasion industrial protest was not moulded into an active, community political movement as occurred at Neilston, Dundee and West Fife.

Female Textile Workers and the Carters and Dockers Strike – Dundee, December 1911

As the women of the Vale of Leven concluded their strike, 600 carters and 700 dockers at Dundee were laying down a challenge to railway carting employers

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[68] *Glasgow Herald*, 9 January 1912.
[69] Ibid., 9 February 1912.
[70] Stuart MacIntyre, *Little Moscows* (London, 1980), 87.
[71] Macdonald, 'Weak Roots and Branches', 21, 27.

and the Shipping Federation. In what was described as a syndicalist-style strike, the dispute attracted much press attention from across the country. It was to end in victory for the transport workers, and for the ILP and the trade union and labour movement it was hailed as 'a glorious lesson in the usefulness of solidarity'.[72] The details of this strike have been documented elsewhere but are briefly examined here because of the support and involvement of female workers and the JFWU.[73]

The strike was led by the Carters' leader and local Dundee syndicalist sympathiser Peter Gillespie (founder member of a breakaway union the North of Scotland Horse and Motormen's Society), colleague Peter Fletcher, and JFWU President Nicholas Marra: all well-known members of the ILP, Dundee Trades Council and Dundee Labour Representation Committee (LRC – Dundee Labour Party).[74] A feature of the dispute was widespread sympathy from transport workers in the east-coast ports of Bo'ness, Grangemouth, and Leith, the west-coast ports of Glasgow and the Clyde, and the English ports of Hull, Liverpool and London. With the backing of the SUDL, the NUDL, the Seaman's Union and the National Transport Workers Federation (NTWF), the strike was well planned and organised, bringing transport on the docks and railways to a standstill.[75]

Trouble began when the employers introduced replacement labour and widespread street rioting and disorder ensued. Fearing mass disorder, the town council brought in 300 soldiers, 160 police officers, and a contingent of mounted police. With the jute mills and factories at a standstill, thousands of textile workers joined the strikers, including JFWU members and the female spinners of Lochee. They were involved in several incidents including a baton charge by police, provoked by a band of millgirls who 'singing a strike song and shouting words of incitement' encouraged the men to unyoke a horse from its cart: in another incident they encouraged the men to hurl a lorry into King William Dock.[76]

The millgirls were also involved in 'a monster procession' of 4,000 people led by Tom Mann and Peter Gillespie. It was reported that the piper at its head could hardly be heard 'above the din of the vocal efforts of the mill lassies who took a prominent position within the ranks' (another report included

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[72] *Forward*, 30 December 1911.

[73] Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 202–7.

[74] Baxter and Kenefick, 'Labour Politics and the Dundee Working Class', 201.

[75] Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 107-8.

[76] *Dundee Advertiser, Weekly News; People's Journal,* 23 December 1911.

a photograph of 'millgirls' marching triumphantly along the docks to a procession on 'day five' of the dispute).[77] The success of the strike was a cause of great celebration for the trade union and labour movement at Dundee, and like the disputes at Neilston and Kirkcaldy, demonstrated what could be achieved when working-class organisations and institutions worked together with the support of the wider community.[78] A key feature of the strike was the prominent role of female textile workers, and its successful conclusion prompted the promise that the carters and dockers would do everything to assist the women and the JFWU in any future dispute.[79]

1912

Dundee Textile Workers Dispute – Tayside, January–April 1912.

In all the case studies examined thus far it is clear that an important and significant role was played by trade union and political activists from outside the various regions of industrial activity, and they played a leading role in encouraging unrest among women. But these activities were clearly likely to be more successful when they were conducted in tandem with local networks of support from within the local community; or in the case of Kirkcaldy, the wider regional support offered by workers at Dunfermline. This would confirm Catriona Macdonald's assertion that regionalism is important as an underlying cause of strike action; or conversely, as was the case of Paisley, a means by which strike action is averted.

The importance of outsiders and support from within the local and wider community in Dundee proved essential during the strike wave in the textile industry in the city between January and April 1912 in what was the second principal strike among women in Scotland during the labour unrest. From the moment the strike wave broke out Dundee Trades Council and the ILP supported the women's action, and Peter Gillespie of the carters' union made good his promise to support the women of the JFWU. Notes of sympathy also came from Tom Mann at Liverpool, Ben Tillett at London, Manny Shinwell at Glasgow, A. W. French of the Scottish seamen, and the SUDL at Glasgow

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[77] *Courier and Dundee Advertiser,* 21 December; *Dundee Advertiser,* 23 December 1911.

[78] *Courier; Dundee Advertiser,* 18–26 December 1911.

[79] GD/JF/1/1: this promise of support is first referred to in the minute of the 'Special Committee Meeting', 23 December, and was clarified in the Committee Meeting minutes 7 January 1912. Manny Shinwell representing the seamen, Joe Houghton the SUDL and carters' leader Peter Gillespie, were all on record indicating their support for JFWU in any future industrial action: see Kenefick, *Red Scotland,* 106–8.

promised 'every possible assistance' in blocking raw materials or goods at Glasgow (and even New York) destined for Dundee.[80]

What occurred between January and April 1912 at Dundee was a rolling strike wave across some thirty-four establishments that concluded with a general strike and lockout between March and April – and in the main focused on wage increases. However, even when wage increases as high as 5 per cent were granted many women were reluctant to return to work.[81] Others who had secured increases wanted to strike in sympathy believing they were 'blacklegging' while other women were on strike.[82] Indeed, 400 women at one establishment were granted a 5 per cent wage increase in March, only to reject it and remain on strike on the grounds of solidarity.[83] However, for the great majority of unorganised textiles workers' wages and conditions remained the same and this was unlikely to change as the Dundee Jute Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association (the employers' association) had made clear they would not 'promise any advance' on wages. Supported financially by the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) in London, the JFWU were set to call a city-wide strike, and thus the scene was set for the first general strike of textile workers in Dundee's history.[84]

The impact was immediate: on 1 March 10,000 mill workers went on strike, and within two days this had risen to 18,000.[85] On 6 March they were joined by 5,000 workers at Lochee (who led the strike action in February– March the year before), and two days later, 2,000 workers at Baxter's works were locked-out. By 8 March some 25,000 workers were in dispute.[86] Of the estimated 34,000 textile workers at Dundee only 10–12,000 were organised and in receipt of strike or lockout pay: the remainder had no alternative means of support.[87] With the level of distress increasing daily, and many workers

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[80] Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 109.

[81] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, January 31, 1912: Williamson, Cuthbert and Davidson persuaded the full committee to vote 130 to twelve in favour of the women remaining on strike.

[82] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 12, 26 and 29 February 1912.

[83] *Courier*, 9 March 1912.

[84] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 1 March 1912: see also Walker, Juteopolis, 309: the JFWU affiliated to the GFTU in April 1906: see Kenefick, '"An Effervescence of Youth"', 208. The JFWU affiliated to the GFTU in April 1906 just after its formation in March that year.

[85] *Courier, Dundee Advertiser* and *Scotsman*, 2 March 1912; *Dundee Advertiser,* 4 March 1912.

[86] *People's Journal*, 9 March 1912.

[87] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 19 and 21 March 1912.

returning to work, the dispute began to collapse.[88] But the arrangements for a lockout were still in place because 4,500 female spinners (including 2,000 JFWU members) and 500 male calender workers (Calender Workers' Union members) at Lochee refused to return to work. The Cox brothers locked their gates as did the other firms run by members of the employers' association. When the Baxter Works – and the other firms previously unaffected by the strike – joined the lockout on 4 April, 30,000 workers in Dundee were idle.[89]

Strikers at Lochee used the tactics of intimidation and five female Lochee millgirls appeared before Dundee Sheriff Court charged with attempting to compel 'eleven women workers' to join the strike 'and threatening them with bodily violence'.[90] In another incident the police had to be called in when a 'hostile crowd' of 1,500 female spinners and 500 male calendar workers attempted to force 500 female weavers to join the strike.[91] Reminiscent of the actions of the millgirls at the time of the carters' and dockers' strike, another disturbance at Lochee saw a large crowd attack a jute lorry and pelt the police with 'sticks, stones and other missiles' when they attempted to intervene.[92]

The Lochee strikers would not return to work until their demands were met, while the Cox brothers and the employers' association were equally determined not to acquiesce and steadfastly refused to talk to the JFWU. But through intermediaries and the intervention of Labour MP Alex Wilkie the dispute was finally brought to an end, with an agreement on union recognition and the establishment of collective-bargaining procedures for the industry.[93] On 15 April the lockout notices were withdrawn and the 'Great' Dundee general strike and lockout was over.[94]

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[88] *Dundee Advertiser*, 26 March 1912.

[89] *Courier*, 4 April 1912.

[90] *Weekly News*, 6 April 1912: the women were Elizabeth Docherty, Catherine Rooney, Jessie Ann Tosh, Mary Brownlie and Mary Grimmond; all millworkers and all from Lochee.

[91] *People's Journal*, 9 March 1912. It should be noted that the millworkers (spinners, bobbin shifter and preparers) were thought to be a cut below weavers in terms of respectability and that this incident was viewed initially as a sectional dispute in so far as these two groups rarely mixed in the workplace or socially: see Valerie Wright, 'Juteopolis and After: Women and Work in Twentieth-Century Dundee' in Jim Tomlinson and Christopher A. Whatley (eds), *Jute No More: Transforming Dundee* (Dundee, 2011), 36.

[92] *Weekly News*, 9 March 1912.

[93] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 6, 9 and 11–14 April 1912.

[94] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 15 April 1912; see also *Courier and Dundee Advertiser*, 16 April 1912.

52   William Kenefick

For the JFWU the decision to form the Joint Committee of Textile Unions in April was one of the positive outcomes of the strike.[95] The other was the formation of the Dundee Conciliation Board and Standing Joint Committee.[96] The *Dundee Year Book* reported that, even if born in the throes of an upheaval among millworkers', followed by 'crisis after crisis', and 'strike after strike', the Dundee Conciliation Board 'had more than justified its existence'.[97] Meanwhile, membership of the JFWU continued to grow, reaching a record level of 8,946: including an increase in trade union membership among the Irish spinners of Lochee to over 2,000 by December 1912.[98]

1913

The Kilbirnie Networkers Strike – Ayrshire, April–September 1913

For many Scottish workers 1913 to 1914 was a period of consolidation as they built on the gains made between 1910 and 1912 and the on-going struggle between capital and labour. Women workers were organising and taking direct action in greater numbers than ever before. But there were few big strikes of note except for the protracted dispute that took place in the Ayrshire town of Kilbirnie in 1913: the last big strike to take place before First World War.

The Kilbirnie networkers struck shortly after the first annual meeting of the NFWW at Kirbirnie on 28 March 1913.[99] As was the case at Neilston and the Vale of Leven the strike was led by Kate McLean and, like every other dispute examined in this article, the 390 female strikers had the solid support of the local community, the churches, local and national trade unions, and the now ubiquitous ILP. But it was the networkers themselves who took the lead.

Many demonstrations were held during the six-month dispute but one held in May was so large and well-supported that *Forward* felt moved to describe it 'as the greatest labour demonstration in the industrial history of Ayrshire in support of strikes.' Around 4,000 trade unionists from the surrounding districts marched to the nearby town of Beith and from there to a mass

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[95] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 30 April 1912; the Joint Standing Committee of Textile Unions was made up two representatives each from the JFWU and the DMFOU, and one each from the Calender Workers' Unions, the Tenters' Union and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

[96] GD/JF/1/1: JFWU General Meetings' Minutes Books, 11 July 1912.

[97] *Dundee Year Book* (1913), 50: ARMMS, K Loc 941.31 D914.

[98] GD/JF/1/7: JFWU Committee Minutes, 4 and 18 February 1911 and 24 December 1912.

[99] *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 4 April 1913.

meeting of 10,000 in Kilbirnie. *Forward* also noted that 'Strikes in Kilbirnie [were] akin to village carnivals' and came to involve whole community. Indeed, it reported with some pride that 'Mothers with babes in their arms walked the six miles ungrudgingly in the cause of justice'. Indeed, for many women it was their first involvement in a labour demonstration.[100]

Support came from all quarters. Glasgow Labour MP George Barnes spoke in support and at one large meeting on Friday 23 May 1913, asserted that the strikers had every right to protest against the 'conditions of labour and wages [that] tyrannical employers forced upon them'. He added that a woman's rightful place was at home 'not the factories' but if women were compelled to do men's work, he argued, 'then they ought to have the same wages as men' as was the case in the cotton mills of Lancashire.[101] In concluding his address, Lochee-born Barnes offered the crowd a short biographical sketch, noting: 'That he was employed in a jute factory in Dundee at nine years of age: that his sisters were still working away in Dundee, and that his mother, though eighty-four years of age, was still taking a keen interest in the labour movement.'[102] It is therefore likely that his sisters were involved in the strikes at Dundee and despite his patriarchal view of women and work the women in his own family had little choice but to seek paid employment and enter the workplace.

That evening a meeting organised by the ILP appealed to all workers 'to combine for the emancipation of their class'. The main speaker was ILP member and leader of the Ardrossan dockers, Gilbert Lewis, who first congratulated Kate McLean on bringing 200 women into the NFWW at the Nobels' dynamite factory at nearby Ardeer in Stevenston. He expressed his hope that all the organisations would soon be 'combined and centralised', adding, in a distinctive syndicalist tone, that when that happened 'they would strike a blow that would do away with strikes altogether'.[103] As occurred at Dundee and the Vale of Leven, a feature of the strike at Kilbirnie was the presence of the SUDL, which actively supported and assisted McLean and the NFWW in organising women workers. Indeed, Lewis chaired the inaugural meeting of the recently-formed NFWW branch at Ardeer, sharing

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[100] *Forward*, 19 May 1913.

[101] Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, 254, 277.

[102] *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 30 May 1913, and 14 June 1913. Barnes repeated this view of women and work at a later meeting on 7 June. He attended several other meetings thereafter in support of the women.

[103] *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 30 May 1913.

the platform with McLean and William French of the Scottish Seamen's Union.[104]

Lewis' role as leader of the Ardrossan dockers brought him into close contact with well-known syndicalist Tom Mann. He had supported the dockers during a protracted strike the previous year, alongside London dockers' leader Ben Tillett, Robert Williams of the National Transport Workers Federation (NTWF) and Madame Sorgue (CGT).[105] Mann had returned to Ardrossan along with Houghton, leader of the SUDL, to address a meeting of dockers and seamen, and it was Lewis who invited both to address the Kilbirnie networkers on the afternoon of 30 May. Mann congratulated the strikers and their supporters for their industrial organisation and solidarity and encouraged them to do more. He also warned them to beware of religion and the churches, 'which were bound hand and foot to the capitalist classes', but was heartened that working people dared to have organisations of their own. Houghton followed him noting that, with no fewer than five different strikes taking place at that time, North Ayrshire 'was seething with discontent'.[106]

Despite Mann's warning to be wary of the churches, as at Kirkcaldly the strikers of Kilbirnie had the support of the United Free Church. The Rev. Colin Kidd was invited by Kate McLean to address a large meeting on 11 June and, like his counterpart in Kirkcaldy, he was unequivocal in his support for the female networkers. He noted that the cost of living had gone up by 29 per cent in just five years and that the networkers had not received a wage rise in forty years. Thus they earned well below the accepted minimum average of £1 1s 8d per week that a family could be expected to live on: it was 'a scandal and a disgrace' that they and 10 million other people in Britain 'were living below the poverty line'. He therefore urged them to stand firm and if their position was 'right and just' they would be 'immortalised in the annals of their fair town'.[107]

Kidd's words proved portentous for the dispute had wide-ranging repercussions for Kilbirnie and the surrounding area. The NFWW recruited 1,000 new members and, as occurred at Kirkcaldy and Dundee, the women's

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[104] Ibid., 23 April 1913.

[105] Ibid., 6 June 1913. Ben Tillett visited Ardrossan on 12 November; Madame Sorgue on 5 December; Robert Williams on several occasions during December, and Tom Mann on 17 December 1912: see *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 15 November and 13 and 20 December 1913.

[106] Ibid., 6 and 20 June 1913.

[107] Rev. Colin Gibb made his address on 6 June but it was not reported until June 20.

cause prompted other workers to take strike action, generating unprecedented levels of support and solidarity. But more importantly:

> It contributed significantly to the mobilisation of labour in the area on a class-wide basis rather than on a purely sectional one, with steelworkers, miners, and non-wage-earning members of the community participating in the women's demonstrations, and the striking women giving their support to the disputes of other workers.

It also led to the formation of an ILP branch and 'a permanent socialist presence in the district'.[108]

The Kilbirnie networkers' strike ended on 2 September 1913, and that evening a packed public meeting celebrated its satisfactory conclusion. Joe Houghton (SUDL) and several leading members of the ILP from Glasgow and Ayrshire were in attendance. Kate McLean made the closing address and stressed that it was trade-union organisation that brought about the increase in wages and improvements in working conditions for the networkers. But the NFWW still had work to do with the unorganised networkers at nearby Beith and thereafter 'to the east Coast to organise [women there] with a view of getting higher wages'.[109]

Conclusions

What do these case studies add to our understanding of the role of women and the impact of the labour unrest on women workers? Clearly women were striking for better wages and conditions but they were also deeply concerned about union recognition and workplace control. The supporting role of the local community was also important and in all but two of the localities where women were engaged in industrial protest – Bo'ness and the Vale of Leven – the largely fragmented class ideology that had existed hitherto was translated into an active community political involvement that included male and female workers. The United Free Church also played its part in supporting the women's campaign for a 'Living Wage'. At Kirkcaldy the Rev. Richard Milne bemoaned the great gulf in wealth that left the women weavers struggling to achieve anything like a living wage, and at Kilbirnie Rev. Colin Gibb made

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[108] For details of the Kilbirnie dispute see Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, 247–55; Kenefick and McIvor, *Roots of Red Clydeside*, 35–6.

[109] *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 5 September 1913.

public his unequivocal support for the striking networkers and was angered by the lack of concern shown by an employer.[110]

Female workers clearly suffered setbacks as the examples of Bo'ness and the Vale of Leven show, and here we can identify cases of gender discrimination where women were unlikely to get support from male trade unionists when they directly competed with men for work.[111] In these cases the importance of regionalism worked against the interest of women; women not only suffered discrimination in the workplace but also within the wider labour movement. Yet it is also clear that women were more than willing to take aggressive action to secure their demands or in support of organised community action as occurred at Bo'ness in 1910 and during the general strike and lockout in Dundee in 1912.

The regional perspective is fundamentally important to our understanding of why strikes occurred, but also the role played by outsiders in encouraging trade union recruitment, bolstering local support networks, and in encouraging female workers to take strike action. Local and national trade unions such as the Dundee JFWU, the east coast SMFWFU, the NFWW, NUAL, NUDL, SUDL and the Seamen's union, radical left organisations such as the ILP, the SDF/SDP and the BSP, and local LRCs and trades councils, worked together in close community partnerships in support of unorganised workers and women workers. But it was more likely 'the material benefits of unionization' rather than the propaganda of the left political parties that swayed the opinions of most women workers, as Eleanor Gordon argues was the case with the millgirls at Neilston.[112] But as Jim Smyth reminds us, the ILP in particular were 'consistently and successfully active' in organising unskilled workers, which suggests that they had a role in marshalling working-class support in the area and in leading workers' unrest amongst women.[113]

This also raises the issue of the role of 'outsiders' and 'outsider groups' and the manner in which their activities laid the foundation for third-party intervention. These case studies clearly show that the changing nature of female industrial relations and the attack of employer paternalism by women also encouraged employers to look to 'outsider groups' to solve

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[110]   The address by the Rev. Colin Gibb was reported in full in *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 20 June 1913.

[111]   Fraser, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 120

[112]   Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement*, 245–7.

[113]   Jim Smyth, 'From Industrial Unrest to Political Debacle?': The Labour Left and Industrial Militancy, 1910–1914' in Kenefick and McIvor (eds), *Roots of Red Clydeside,* 251; Knox and Corr, '"Striking Women"', 113.

their industrial relations problems by drawing on the conciliation services of the Board of Trade.[114] It was the work of outsiders that was crucial to the outcome of the general strike and lockout in Dundee in 1912. Had it not been for the support of the London-based GFTU, the JFWU would have been bankrupted by the dispute. Indeed, from the employers' perspective the Lancashire Federation of Master Cotton Spinners (an employers' association) were influential in persuading their association to accept collective bargaining and the establishment of a Dundee textile board of conciliation, as a mean of dealing with the escalating militancy among female textile workers in the city.[115]

In the aftermath of the carters' and dockers' dispute in Dundee in 1911 *Forward* proclaimed the strike to be 'a glorious lesson in the usefulness of solidarity. These same sentiments were expressed time and again after strikes but most notably following the action of female textile workers in Kirkcaldy, and again, after the last of the 'great' strikes, at Kibirnie in 1913. In the case of Kirkcaldy the role of women was even more significant, because their actions and activities contributed significantly to the gains made by the trade-union and labour movement. Indeed, they helped convert Kirkcaldy into one of the most radical areas in West Fife – later it was to become a stronghold of the British Socialist Party.[116] Kirkcaldy was a clear example of a town in a textile region of East Scotland where the actions of the women were supported and also welcomed by the local community, and the labour movement more widely within the region of West Fife. The same was true of Kilbirnie where women made a significant contribution to the further mobilisation of the labour movement in North Ayrshire.[117]

These case studies overwhelming testify to a strike wave that in the main was instigated by women. They also demonstrate how, and to what extent, women made a significant contribution to the further mobilisation of the labour movement not only in their own specific regions but across Scotland as a whole. These case studies reveal too the distinctive story of women workers through their actions and activities during the industrial unrest, as well as their relationship with the male-dominated trade-union and labour movement: particularly in the regional context as the work of Eleanor Gordon and

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[114] Knox and Corr, '"Striking Women"', 113.
[115] Kenefick, '"An effervescence of Youth"', 213.
[116] Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, 125.
[117] Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*; for details of the Kilbirnie dispute see 247–55; Kenefick and McIvor (eds), *Roots of Red Clydeside*, 35–6.

Catriona Macdonald clearly demonstrates. Building on their work, this article reveals more about agency and the willingness of women to take strike action, become trade unionists, and to actively campaign on industrial and political issues such as the campaign for the living wage. And while some of the evidence presented here reflects too on the limits of that agency the overall picture affirms the existence of an autonomous and independent role for women in the development of textile trade-unionism across Scotland between 1911 and 1913.[118]

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[118] For a more detailed examination of textile trade union formation and trade union penetration among textile workers at Dundee between 1906 and 1914 see Kenefick, "'An Effervescence of Youth'", 189– 221.

Scotland and Ireland: Labour Directions and Radical Connections

Emmet O'Connor

Systematic comparison of Irish and Scottish history began in 1976 with the conferences of economic and social historians pioneered by Louis M. Cullen and Thomas C. Smout. Similar comparison in social and cultural studies was encouraged from 1995 by the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative. The project has enjoyed a fair wind, boosted by the emergence of the 'four nations' approach to the history of Britain and Ireland, the higher status of Scottish – as distinct from British – history since devolution, and the emphasis on east-west links in the matrix of compromises that made the Belfast Agreement (1998).[1] And not accidentally, when the Belfast Agreement proved unacceptable to hardline Unionists, it was replaced with the St Andrews Agreement (2006).[2] The strength of the Labour and radical ties and of migration across the North Channel should have made Labour history a significant element in the equation. So too should the upsurge of interest in transnational Labour history after the 'fall of the wall' in 1989.[3] The Irish Labour History Society's eighth

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[1] Louis M. Cullen and Thomas C. Smout (eds), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1977); T. M. Devine and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983); Graham Walker, *Intimate Strangers: Political and Cultural Interaction Between Scotland and Ulster in Modern Times* (Edinburgh, 1995); T. M. Devine and James F. McMillan (eds), *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections, 597–1997* (Edinburgh, 1999); Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000* (Dublin, 2005). The best introductions to the 'four nations' historiography are Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge, 1989); Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (London, 1999). For politics, see Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the Survival of the United Kingdom, 1707–2007* (Oxford, 2011), who notes that there have been few scholarly comparisons of the two Unions.

[2] To distinguish them from trade unionists, supporters of the Union with Britain will be capitalised, whether members of the Unionist Party or not.

[3] By 'Labour' is meant trade unions, trades councils, and similar working class organisations and activists. Workers are otherwise referred to as 'labour'. See Joan Allen, Alan Campbell, and John McIlroy (eds), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool, 2010).

annual conference, held in Belfast in 1981, was on 'Irish Labour: the Scottish dimension'. Coevally, there were conferences on 'Dublin and Liverpool labour' in Liverpool in 1981, and on 'Socialism: the Celtic experience' in Wales in 1982.[4] But the momentum for comparison was not sustained. The subject was weak in academe, especially in Ireland, and throughout the northern hemisphere its very future as a discrete discipline came under question in consequence of the 'fall of the wall', the postmodern turn, the decline of the traditional working class, and the emergence of alternative radicalisms, notably in feminism and environmentalism.[5] The possibility of saving Labour history by going global required a fundamental strength to begin with. Certainly there have been a few articles and book chapters on specifics, mainly on individual connections, which are numerous, but no Labour historians have attempted generalised Irish-Scottish comparisons of the sort pioneered in economic, social, and cultural history. This essay will hopefully herald a start to a forward march in that direction. It has four aims. The primary concern is to review the involvement of Scots with Irish labour, and vice versa. If the emphasis is on the former, it may be pleaded that it is the more neglected dimension. Despite the rapidly expanding library on Scots abroad, Kyle Hughes' *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast: A Study in Elite Migration* (2013) is the first book to be published on modern Scottish immigrants in Ireland.[6] As the subtitle suggests, it is not about workers. The second aim is to highlight the relevant literature, which is more plentiful on Scotland. The third aim is to indicate agendas for research. The final aspiration is to see if conclusions can be drawn from patterns in the Scottish-Irish connections. The focus will move from the general to the particular, looking first at labour, then at trade unions and allied bodies, and finally at radicals and politics.

Labour and Industrial Relations

Closing his magisterial *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, John Boyle made a few points of comparison with Scotland to emphasise the

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[4] *Saothar*, 8 (1982), 103–5.

[5] For retrospects on the Scottish Labour History Society and the Irish Labour History Society, see *Labour History Review: 50th Anniversary Supplement*, 75 (April 2010), 117–27, 147–59. For the Scottish existential angst see the conference report on 'Is there a Future for the Past?': Trade Unions, Women, Labour, and Labour History in the New Millennium', *Scottish Labour History*, 35 (2000), 3–7.

[6] Kyle Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast: A Study in Elite Migration* (Edinburgh, 2013). For an introduction to the Scots abroad, see T. M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750–2010* (London, 2011).

sorry state of Irish Labour in 1900; the device was itself exceptional and it is probably no coincidence that Boyle hailed from Belfast. The century had been as bad for Ireland as it was good for Scotland. Never before were their peoples in such contrasting circumstances or so at odds with each other. In 1800, Scotland had a population of 1.6 million and Ireland had some 5 million. The first detailed census in 1841 showed that Scotland had 2.6 million people, and Ireland had 8.1 million. By 1900, both countries had about 4.5 million each, and Scotland's population was increasing, whereas Ireland's was in steady decline. Two-thirds of Scots lived in towns. In Ireland, the figure was one-third. Glasgow alone had more people than Dublin and Belfast combined. Scotland had approximately 900,000 industrial workers; Ireland had 300,000. The Scottish Trades Union Congress (TUC) had 128,000 members. The Irish TUC had about 50,000.[7] Irish Labour's position was further weakened by the fact that its mining industry was tiny compared with that of Scotland, and by the concentration of its manufacturing in north-east Ulster, where the majority of workers were Unionist and suspicious of the nationalist south. With 9 per cent of the population in the early twentieth century, Belfast contained 21 per cent of Ireland's industrial workers, and was pre-eminent in the three major product groups: linen; engineering and shipbuilding; and brewing, distilling, and aerated waters. While Dublin enjoyed a sizable trade in food, drink, and tobacco, Belfast nearly monopolised other sectors. In 1907, it accounted for £19.1 million of Ireland's £20.9 million worth of manufactured exports, excluding food and drink.[8]

The exchange between both countries was similarly unequal. Scotland sent capital, capitalists, and artisans to Ireland. Ireland sent unskilled and seasonal migrants to Scotland. The most substantial Scottish intervention in Ireland lay with the industrialisation of Ulster, where Scottish capital and entrepreneurs helped to develop the engineering, shipbuilding, textile, and clothing industries in Belfast and the shirt-factories of Derry.[9] Ulster of course had well-established ties with Scotland, altered and reinforced by

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[7] John W. Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1988), 328–30.

[8] See Leslie A. Clarkson, 'Population Change and Urbanization, 1821–1911' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820–1939* (Manchester, 1985), 137–54; Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London, 1976), 18; Louis M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660* (London, 1987), 16–62.

[9] For urban histories see Sean J. Connolly, *Belfast 400: People, Place, and History* (Liverpool, 2012); Brian Lacy, *Siege City: The Story of Derry and Londonderry* (Belfast, 1990).

the plantations in the seventeenth century, and was quite different to the southern provinces where there was relatively little Scottish penetration. As capital had moved to Ireland in search of cheap labour, importing unskilled workers would have been pointless. But skilled men were needed, and could be had from Scotland. Industrialising Scotland was a land of immigration and emigration – 'the Scottish paradox' as T. M. Devine has called it.[10] Emigrants left in search of higher wages and better conditions. Immigrants arrived to take up low paid or menial jobs. The percentage of Scottish-born residents in Ireland increased in each census between 1841 and 1911, rising from 0.11 per cent to 0.88 per cent. In the 1901 census they accounted for 3.2 per cent of the population of Belfast, and 1 per cent of the population of Dublin. The impact of the Scottish presence in southern Ireland was further diminished by the fact that many were there temporarily with British army units, and many in Donegal especially were returned emigrants and in practice Irish Catholics. By contrast, in Ulster we can say that Presbyterian Scots in Belfast were over-represented in trades associated with shipbuilding and engineering, and disproportionately skilled, with 71 per cent of all Belfast Scots being in skilled, clerical, or professional occupations.[11] In Derry's smaller shipbuilding industry, which employed 600 or so in the 1880s, the immigrant labour was overwhelmingly Scottish. By the 1890s, Scots comprised one-third of skilled and one quarter of semi-skilled employees in the Derry shipyard, and these were mainly from Clydeside.[12] Higher wages for skilled men, better housing, cheaper rents and food costs, and work for female members of the family, were among the attractions for immigrants. During the late 1880s builders in Derry constructed a superior set of artisans' dwellings in what became known as the 'Scotch quarter' where, it was hoped, homesick Scots would be consoled by names such as, Argyll Street, Glasgow Street, and Glasgow Terrace. In Belfast, the Unionist political elite welcomed Scots as hard-working, thrifty, entrepreneurial, fellow Unionists and developed an imagery of Scots which did not accommodate anything else.[13]

Traffic in the other direction was older, heavier, drawn by the same 'pull', but driven more by 'push' factors. The process began, initially in the form of

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[10] T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar, University of Strathclyde 1990–91* (Edinburgh, 1992), 3.

[11] Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast,* 49–55.

[12] Walter Gallagher, 'People, Work, Space, and Social Structure in Edwardian Derry, 1901–11', D.Phil. dissertation (University of Ulster, 1994), 106–7.

[13] John Lynch, 'Technology, Labour, and the Growth of Belfast Shipbuilding', *Saothar*, 24 (1999), 33–43; Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast,* 29–55.

seasonal migration, as early as the late eighteenth century, and by the 1800s 16 per cent of Glasgow residents were Irish.[14] The Irish-born population of Scotland stood at 126,321 or 4.8 per cent in the 1841 census, peaking just after the Great Famine at 7.2 per cent, and declining to 3.7 per cent in 1911. James Handley, a Catholic priest who acknowledged the evolution of a dual 'Scoto-Irish' identity, argued that as there was little inter-marriage with the Scots, the Scottish-born children of immigrants in practice doubled the 'Irish' presence.[15] The bulk settled in the south-west – it was typical of destitute immigrants not to venture far beyond the points of entry – though there were sizable Irish communities in Edinburgh and Dundee's 'juteopolis'. Most came from Ulster, where the ports traded primarily with Scotland, except in times of acute distress when the lure of Scotland reached further south. Historians agree that a significant minority were Protestant, but dispute the proportion and are revising the old orthodoxy that the majority of Irish immigrants before the Great Famine were Protestant.[16] Nonetheless, just as the true Scot in Ulster was expected to be a Presbyterian and a Unionist, so the real Irishman in Scotland was supposed to be a Catholic, and it was religion that frustrated his integration into the host community. By far the best known of seasonal migrants are the tattie-hokers (variously spelt): the gangs of men, women, and children who left small-holdings, in Donegal and Mayo chiefly, each year to work nomadically in Scotland at the potato picking.[17] By the late nineteenth century, they had come to dominate the potato harvesting. In both countries, the hokers were regarded as highly marginalised people, from areas of subsistence living. In 1915, for example, over 80 per cent of the 5,258 migrants from Connacht hailed from Mayo, the province's poorest county. The Kirkintilloch tragedy in 1937, when ten tattie-hokers were burnt to death in a bothy, prompted the Irish government to establish a commission on migratory labour and Westminster to introduce the Housing (Agricultural

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[14] T. M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1991), 11; William W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland, 1800–Present* (Edinburgh, 1999), 37; Jim J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896–1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000), 126.

[15] James Handley, *The Irish in Scotland* (Cork, 1945), 91.

[16] For conflicting views on Irish Protestant emigration see Knox, *Industrial Nation*, 93, and Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland, 1797–1848: Trade Unions, Strikes, and Political Movements* (Edinburgh, 2008), 23.

[17] Ann O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and TattieHokers: History and Folkore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 1991). See also the television documentary, *Here Come the TattieHowkers* (Scottish Screen Archive, 2008, reference number: 8232),

Population) Scotland Act (1937).[18] An echo of the tattie-hokers survives in the ghost-signs over the pubs of Waterloo Street in Derry: 'The Rosses', 'The Gweedore', and 'The Claddagh'. Migrants from these areas made their way to Derry for the 'Scotch boat', which sailed for the last time, still carrying a few Donegal seasonal migrants, in 1966.

Research on the settled Irish workforce is no longer incidental to monographs on Scottish labour. Of note is Martin Mitchell's study of the Irish in the west of Scotland, and William Kenefick's work on Glasgow dockers and the jute operatives of Dundee.[19] The first waves of emigrants worked as weavers, cotton spinners, navvies, colliers, and labourers. After the Great Famine, employment opportunities opened up in heavy industry. Especially relevant to trade unionism were dockers. Due to their concentration on Clydeside, Irish dockers became the single most important element in the workforce on the Glasgow waterfront, followed by Scottish Highlanders. It was hardly coincidental that the Clydeside docks were the least sectarian in those three oft-compared cities, Belfast, Glasgow, and Liverpool; something historians attribute to its stronger Labour tradition. In Belfast, the cross-channel dockers were Protestant and the deep-sea men were Catholic. In Liverpool, the north-end docks were Catholic and the south-end docks were Protestant, and there was very little exchange between the two. No such divisions emerged in Glasgow.[20]

Despite the exchange of labour and capital, it was only in Belfast shipbuilding and engineering that formal Irish-Scottish analogues developed in industrial relations. The need to attract skilled men from Britain caused Belfast employers to be relatively tolerant of craft unions. By 1900, the proportion of unionised men in the city's shipbuilding and engineering trades exceeded the United Kingdom (UK) average. Unlike their British colleagues, Belfast engineering employers made no attempt to break trade unions in the 1860s and 1870s. As early as 1872, the Belfast Employers' Association negotiated directly with unions on conditions and hours. Between 1860 and 1900 skilled

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[18] Barry Sheppard, 'The Kirkintilloch Tragedy, 1937', http://www.theirishstory. com/2012/09/24/the-kirkintilloch-tragedy [Accessed 18 March 2014]; *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1937–8* (Dublin, 1938).

[19] Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*; William Kenefick, *'Rebellious and Contrary': The Glasgow Dockers, c.1853 to 1932* (East Linton, 2000).

[20] Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*, 1–5; Kenefick, *'Rebellious and Contrary'*, 20, 24–6; '"An Effervescence of Youth": Female Textile-Workers' Strike Activity in Dundee, 1911–1912', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 33 (2012) 189–221.

rates in Belfast rose faster than in Britain, though actual earnings tended to be lower due to the absence of piecework. The scarcity of artisans and the abundance of unskilled men contributed to the differential between skilled and unskilled rates in Ulster exceeding the UK average, sometimes reaching a 3:1 ratio.[21] But in 1895, adopting a new militancy in reaction to new unionism, Belfast shipbuilders joined with colleagues on Clydeside in a common front against wage demands. In a move deeply resented by Belfast craftsmen as a breach of the city's tradition of harmonious industrial relations, a strike in one area was to be met by layoffs in the other. In October, 1,100 members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers struck to restore a cut of 2s per week. In January the engineers accepted an extra 1s per week. In 1897, Belfast's engineering employers joined a UK trade agreement for the first time, and it soon embroiled Belfast in another upheaval, the general lockout of engineers from July 1897 to February 1898.[22] Yet there were few subsequent examples of Belfast involvement in UK action. What should have been the buckle in the belt uniting Ireland and Scotland acted more as a firewall.

A number of explanations have been cited for the continuing particularism and conservatism of the metal trades in Belfast. The engineering trades agreement of 1897 left wages to be decided on a district basis, craftsmen remained relatively privileged in Belfast, and the divide between skilled and unskilled was sharper than elsewhere. In comparison with Clydeside, a Belfast apprentice was paid less and served a longer apprenticeship. Unlike Clydeside, his parents were required to pay a deposit of between £2 and £5 as a guarantee of good behaviour.[23] Belfast's metal trades unions were intensely sectional, so that a high proportion of disputes were about demarcation. During World War One, Belfast shipbuilding and engineering was not affected by dilution, and did not produce a shop-stewards' movement like that on Clydeside. Neither was there a 'Red Laganside' to match 'Red Clydeside'. Whereas shipyards on the Clyde experienced a slump in mid-1918, Belfast boomed until mid-1920. There was also the peculiar political situation of Belfast, where the shipyardmen regarded themselves as the shock-troops of loyalism, and were to the fore in sectarian riots in 1857, in attempts to expel Catholic workers in 1864, 1886, 1893, and 1901, and in the expulsion of Catholics and radical Protestants in 1912 and 1920. In fact by the late nineteenth century, one can

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[21] W. E. Coe, *The Engineering Industry of the North of Ireland* (Belfast, 1969), 178–82.

[22] Henry Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working Class and the Belfast Labour Movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast, 1980), 91, 178–86.

[23] Lynch, 'Technology, Labour, and the Growth of Belfast Shipbuilding', 42.

speak of two Labour movements in Belfast. Textile unions were local, small, weak, and supportive of Belfast trades council and the Irish TUC. Unions in the metal trades were British-based, well organised, and under-represented on both the trades council and in the Irish TUC.[24]

Informal analogues were probably more common, but are less documented. Glasgow was a comparator for Derry in seamen's wage strikes in 1889. One of four shipyard unions affiliated to Derry trades council in 1892 was the Associated Scottish Iron Shipbuilders' Helpers' Association.[25] And when labourers with the Londonderry Shipbuilding and Engineering Company struck for 20s per week in 1903, it was pleaded that the rate was below the norm in Glasgow. The directors refused them more than 16s a week.[26]

Trade Unionism

The trajectory of trade unionism in Scotland and Ireland in the nineteenth century was similar; one of gradual integration into the British Labour movement. Both countries were governed by more or less the same industrial relations legislation. The Irish parliament was the first to introduce anti-trade union combination acts, in 1729. Westminster followed suit, and then repealed the acts in 1824, decriminalising trade unions decades before other states in Europe, and gradually giving them legal protections, culminating in the Trades Disputes Act (1906), which remained the basic statutory instrument in labour legislation in Britain until 'Tebbit's law' in 1982, and in Ireland until 1990. Not until 1941 did the Irish government attempt to change the industrial relations framework inherited from Britain, and then the initiative was largely a failure.[27] But there was to be an important divergence between Scottish and Irish Labour in the early twentieth century, as unions in the south of Ireland moved towards independence.

Throughout the UK, the unions that emerged after 1824 were small, local societies for craftsmen. In Ireland, the bulk of them stayed that way, stagnating like the economy, until mopped up by expanding cross-channel unions. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who did their best to ignore Ireland, could not help noticing

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[24] Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824–2000* (Dublin, 2011), 40.

[25] *Derry Journal*, 1 April, 2 May 1892.

[26] *Derry Journal*, 11–18 February, 17 May, 7, 10, 14, 24 June 1889; Robert Gavin, William P. Kelly, and Dolores O'Reilly, *Atlantic Gateway: The Port and City of Londonderry Since 1700* (Dublin, 2009), 133, 165.

[27] Finbarr Joseph O'Shea, 'Government and Trade Unions in Ireland, 1939–46: The Formation of Labour Legislation', MA (University College, Cork, 1988).

a marked contrast between the union of [trade unions in] Scotland with England, and that effected between either of them and Ireland. The English and Scottish Trade Unions federate or combine with each other on equal terms. If complete amalgamation is decided on, it is frequently the Scotchman, bringing with him Scotch procedure and Scotch traditions, who is chosen to reign in England, the centre of government being shifted almost automatically to the main centre of industry. Union with Ireland invariably means the simple absorption of Irish branches, and the unconditional acceptance of English or Scottish rule and organisation.[28]

After 1868, trade unions in Ireland were represented notionally by the British TUC, which assembled in Dublin in 1880 and in Belfast in 1893. These occasions aside, Belfast alone maintained a continual link with the TUC, and even that was not substantial. Out of 380 delegates at the 1893 Congress, thirty four were Irish based. Next year at Norwich, the Irish contingent numbered eight. The Belfast Congress noted the peculiar difficulties of the Irish by accepting a motion to guarantee them a seat on its executive, the parliamentary committee. It was not too little, too late. The problem went much deeper and wider. Sending delegates to meetings in Britain was a considerable expense, and hardly worth the bother for societies too small to figure in the reckoning. Congress dealt with policy at its broadest and was quite unlike a trade union annual conference. Only the most anglicised could ignore the differences between the two countries and the situation of their unions. There was, too, a sense of alienation from the British apparatus on the part of the Irish Labour élite, who were not finding much opportunity for self-advancement in the amalgamateds, as British-based unions in Ireland were called.[29] Even William Walker, an official of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners in Belfast, a Unionist, and a staunch advocate of links with British Labour, told Belfast trades council: 'unfortunately it seemed to be a canon of the amalgamated unions that "Irishmen need not apply".'[30] In 1894 the Irish set up their own TUC.

The formation of the Scottish TUC in 1897 had more to do with politics and the question of what to do with union organisation rather than union

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[28] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1897), 87–8.

[29] Emmet O'Connor, 'Problems of Reform in the Irish Trades Union Congress, 1894–1914', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 23/24, (2007), 40.

[30] Quoted in Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, 297.

representation per se. Scottish unions had considered federating separately from the TUC as early as 1872. When the TUC reacted to the possibility of an alliance of Independent Labour Party supporters and trades council delegates pushing it into radical action by introducing the card vote and excluding trades councils, Scots were appalled: in Scotland, as in Ireland, trades councils were more important than their counterparts in England. In the early years, the two breakaway Congresses huddled together in the face of TUC indignation.[31] But there were key differences between them. Whereas the Irish TUC duplicated and displaced the British TUC, which accepted the loss of Ireland in the 1900s, the Scottish Congress had a more ambiguous relationship with London. Initially it saw itself primarily as a platform for political demands, and justified its role as a supplement to the work of the TUC, while rejecting the idea that it was a glorified trades council. Not until the end of World War One did it secure recognition from the TUC, and relations remained 'touchy'. When it resolved to give more attention to union organisation after 1923, it sought to strengthen its ties with the TUC and accepted subordination to London during the general strike of 1926.[32] At the same time, it would be an exaggeration to depict the pre-1914 Irish Labour movement as independent and its Scottish counterpart as regional. There remained a strong national element in Scottish Labour. Over 100 Scottish unions were still extant in 1900. The majority of craft unions in baking, printing, construction, iron and steel, and textiles were Scottish-based, and most Labour socialist bodies supported Home Rule for Scotland up to the ascendancy of the British Labour Party in the 1920s.[33] Equally, the majority – some 75 per cent in 1900 – of affiliates to the Irish TUC were in British-based unions, and the Irish Congress regularly called on them to join the British Labour Party. It was Jim Larkin and Larkinism that made Irish Labour truly independent.

Born in Liverpool of Irish parents, Larkin brought to the fore the critical differences between the contexts of Irish and Scottish trade unionism as an agent of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL).[34] Known in Britain as 'the Irish union', the NUDL had been founded in Glasgow in 1889, before moving its headquarters to Liverpool in 1890. Its first president and general

[31]   Angela Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress: The First 80 Years, 1897–1977* (Edinburgh, 1986), 15–25, 68.
[32]   Keith Aitken, *The Bairns O'Adam: The Story of the STUC* (Edinburgh, 1997), 22, 107.
[33]   William Knox (ed.), *Scottish Labour Leaders, 1918–39: A Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1984), 41; Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress*, 15.
[34]   See Eric Taplin, *The Dockers' Union: A Study of the National Union of Dock Labourers, 1889–1922* (Leicester, 1986).

secretary were Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh, two Ulster migrants to Scotland. After his appointment as an organiser in 1905, Larkin worked in the north of England and Scotland, and in Ireland from 1907. What made Larkin so relevant in Ireland was that he offered an answer to the two big questions facing Irish trade unionism: how to build an effective trade unionism in a country where craftsmen were not able to act as a leading sector for the mass of workers, and where employers were hostile to the unionisation of the unskilled; and whether the way forward was to stick with the big battalions of British trade unionism, or form a separate Irish Labour movement.

Larkin's experience in Belfast and Dublin led him to conclude that sympathetic action was the way to combat Irish employers, much to the horror of his moderate general secretary, James Sexton. He also discovered a circle of radicals who told him that British unions would never commit sufficient resources to Ireland to tackle the problems of Irish Labour. The upshot was the launch of the breakaway Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in 1909; a union that was militant, radical, republican and an advocate of 'Irish unions for Irish workers'.[35] It would really come into its own during the upsurge of union membership between 1917 and 1921, and when the Free State was formed 75 per cent of its trade unionists were in Irish-based unions. In Scotland too, Larkin's militant style generated antagonism to Sexton. Ultimately it would lead Clydeside, Dundee, and Bo'ness dockers to decamp from the NUDL and launch the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers in 1911. Yet we do not speak of Larkinism in Scotland. The Scottish Union of Dock Labourers was the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers; the ITGWU was the rebirth of the Irish labour movement.

The post-1917 advance brought the ITGWU to Scotland. With the help of Glasgow trades council and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union it negotiated for the tattie-hokers with the Scottish Potato Merchants' Association in 1918. In the wake of the Kirkintilloch tragedy, the Scottish Farm Servants' Union opened an Irish migratory workers' branch, with Irish help.[36] There were surprisingly few similar examples of unions following potential constituents, or of inter-union co-operation, across the Sea of Moyle.

In Search of the 'Celtic Entente'
By contrast to union connections, contacts between radicals were both

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[35] For the official history see C. Desmond Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union: The Formative Years, 1909–23* (Dublin, 1982).

[36] Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), 9–11, 101.

numerous and countervailing. They had much in common: the land question, especially, and, to a lesser extent, urban working-class issues and Home Rule. On the other hand, they had to contend with Scottish fears of a growing Irish Catholic presence. Scottish historians have generally depicted the pre-Famine Irish in Scotland as, at best, too intimidated to engage with radical movements and known more for their strike-breaking than trade unionism, and, at worst, too backward and Catholic to share the innate democratic intellect of the Scot; a received wisdom challenged by Martin Mitchell, who has cited evidence of Irish involvement with radicals from the United Scotsmen to Chartism.[37] James Young claimed that socialists were no less prejudiced: 'Scottish socialism … crystalised within a society characterised by Presbyterian "superiority", a suffocating Kailyard sentimentality, and ethnic conflict.'[38] Despite the best efforts of such as Waterford-born John Wheatley and his Glasgow Catholic Socialist Society, there remained a gulf of suspicion between the Scottish left and Irish Catholics. For their part, Irish socialists had little sympathy with Scottish nationalism.

The Irish Land War of 1879–81 and the Crofters' War of the 1880s raised hopes of a new departure. But while events in Ireland were important, the direct Irish input into the Scottish agrarian unrest was limited to Michael Davitt and Glasgow-based urban radicals. Connections between the peasantry of both countries were 'extremely tenuous.'[39] A second extraneous element was Henry George, celebrated advocate of a single tax on land and author of the hugely influential *Progress and Poverty* (1879), and sections of the Irish and Scottish diaspora in the United States. The initial steps in forging the coalition were taken by Highlanders in Glasgow making common cause with the Irish Home Government Federation. A Highland Land Law Reform Association was established in 1882 to secure provisions similar to the Irish Land Act of 1881. Ireland remained something of a double-edged sword. The fear of a comparable land war developing in Scotland amounted to a potent threat to the authorities. Radical Georgites 'revelled in their Irish connections.'[40] On the other hand, moderates found them an embarrassment. Most Scots regarded the Irish as superstitious, impoverished, disaffected, and anything but an appropriate model, and conservatives deliberately exaggerated

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[37] Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*, 6–13.
[38] James D. Young, 'The Irish Immigrants' Contribution to Scottish Socialism, 1880–1926', *Saothar*, 13 (1988), 89–98.
[39] Andrew Newby, *Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands, c.1870–1912* (Edinburgh, 2007), 27.
[40] Ibid., 92.

the level of Irish involvement. The Crofters' war, in which rent strikes and boycotts were organised against attempts to evict crofters in rent arrears or clear land for hunting and shooting, was most intense on Skye, but supported throughout the Highlands and Islands. Five 'Crofters' MPs' – dubbed 'the Scotch Parnellite party' – were returned in the general election of 1885. Based in part on the Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, the Crofters' Act provided security of tenure, introduced widespread rent reductions, and established a commission with power to fix rents. The 'Scotch Parnellites' were too few to influence the Act or prevent the Liberals stealing their clothes. In the 1890s the Highland land reform movement 'crumbled in the face of internal splits and remedial Tory legislation, and the other radical threads which were entwined for a period in the 1880s unravelled.'[41] The Crofters' war was a Scottish affair, though Davitt's *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Or the Story of the Irish Land League Revolution* (1904) treated it as a successful extension of the Irish Land War, led by Irishmen. This myth allowed him to claim the outcome as a victory and the struggle as an example of Celtic solidarity. In reality, Davitt, George and their ilk were disappointed, both by the compromises that ended the Irish Land War, and in the hope that Scotland would offer a fresh opportunity to pursue a radical agenda. Disappointing too, for Davitt and kindred spirits in Scotland, was their failure to generate pan-Celtic unity.

After the Crofters' war, radical connections shifted to urban, industrial contexts, and political parties. In 1893 Keir Hardie visited Ireland to promote branches of the Independent Labour Party in Belfast, Dublin and Waterford. In the 1900s, Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald made regular trips to Belfast in support of William Walker's candidacy for the British Labour Party in Belfast North. Walker despaired of winning a Westminster seat in Belfast after the Liberal landslide brought Home Rule back into the realm of possibility in 1906, and in January 1910 he stood for Labour in Leith Burghs, coming third in a three-cornered fight. His early speeches addressed the fact that he was Irish and anti-Home Rule until he decided that neither were of interest to the electors, and then spoke as any Labour candidate would.[42] What remained of the British Labour Party in Belfast was destroyed by the third Home Rule crisis.

A more enduring link was initiated by James Connolly. Born in Edinburgh

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[41] Ibid., 171.
[42] Bob Purdie, 'An Ulster Labourist in Liberal Scotland: William Walker and the Leith Burghs election of 1910' in Ian S. Wood (ed.), *Scotland and Ulster* (Edinburgh, 1994), 133.

– though he claimed to have been born in Monaghan, like his parents – and
trained as a Marxist in the Scottish Socialist Federation, the Scottish wing
of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Connolly moved to Dublin
in 1896 to found the Irish Socialist Republican Party. The party organ, the
Workers' Republic, was launched in 1898 with a loan of £50 from Hardie.[43] That
Connolly retained contacts with Scotland is not so well known in Ireland,
though they have been documented.[44] Following the Millerand controversy,
when the French socialist, Alexandre Millerand joined Pierre Waldeck-
Rousseau's 'government of Republican Defence', the Second International's
refusal to condemn the decision brought to a head the differences in socialist
parties between the 'impossibilists' and the reformists. Only two delegations
to the 1900 congress of the International were unanimous in their complete
condemnation of Millerand: those from the Irish Socialist Republican Party
and the American Socialist Labor Party (SLP), led by Daniel De Leon. The
Millerand controversy had a similar impact on the Scottish SDF, and in 1902
Connolly helped the Scottish impossibilists to form a new Glasgow-based
party, which was called the SLP of Great Britain at his suggestion. The SLP
introduced American syndicalism to Britain through its progeny, the British
Advocates of Industrial Unionism, founded at Birmingham in 1907. The
Advocates of Industrial Unionism were inspired also by the Industrial Workers
of the World, or the Wobblies, formed in Chicago in 1905. When the Wobblies
split in 1908 over whether to endorse political action, as De Leon wanted, or
concentrate on industrial action, the British were affected. De Leonists moved
to the SLP and the pure syndicalists went to the Advocates of Industrial
Unionism, which in 1909 established the Industrial Workers of Great Britain.
Membership of the Industrial Workers of Great Britain topped 4,000, mainly
on Clydeside, in 1911, though its power was broken that same year in a strike
at the Singer factory in Clydebank.[45] Raymond Challinor saw the SLP as 'the
origins of British Bolshevism', and most of the leading personalities of the
early Communist Party of Great Britain were forged in the SLP.

Connolly had a purer impact, or at least one closer to his own heart, on
John Maclean, and their perspectives on each other's countries illustrate the
tortuous attitude of contemporary socialists to nationalism. Influenced by

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[43] David Lynch, *Radical Politics in Modern Ireland: The Irish Socialist Republican Party, 1896–
        1904* (Dublin, 2005), 50.
[44] See James D. Young, 'John Leslie, 1856–1921: A Scottish-Irishman as Internationalist',
        Saothar, 18 (1993), 55–61. Leslie had a formative influence on Connolly in Scotland.
[45] Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London, 1977), 98–102.

John Leslie and by his regular correspondence with John Carstairs Matheson, a Lowland Scot and the major theorist of the SLP, Connolly had no time for Scottish nationalism. Matheson rejected all nationalisms except the Irish, while Maclean would not endorse Irish independence on the ground that it would entail a Catholic state.[46] But events in Ireland changed Maclean's outlook profoundly. After visiting Belfast during the 1907 dock strike at the invitation of the Belfast Socialist Society, he acquired an undying admiration for Larkin. Then a member of the SDF and sceptical of the political value of trade unions, he was persuaded that unions could play a useful role in class struggle.[47] By 1918–19 Maclean was embracing Connolly's view of Irish history as an evolution from the primitive communism of the Gaelic clans to the feudalism of the Normans and the capitalism of the English, and he projected communism as a re-conquest, expressed in the slogan 'back and forward to communism.' In response to the Irish War of Independence Maclean wrote the pamphlet *The Irish Tragedy: Scotland's Disgrace* (1920), calling for a British withdrawal from Ireland. He had a short answer for the Ulster Unionists: integrate or emigrate.

The 1916–23 period marked the high-tide of Scottish-Irish radicalism. As Máirtín Seán Ó Catháin has shown, Glasgow was a key centre in the Fenian world from the 1860s, and contributed a few dozen volunteers to the Easter Rising.[48] Their number was augmented by a handful of high calibre revolutionaries – such as George Pollock, alias, McLay, a future general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) – who left Scotland for Ireland to avoid conscription. Various cultural and nationalist bodies, including the Scottish National Committee, the Highland Land League, the Irish Self-Determination League, Sinn Féin, and the Gaelic League corresponded on creating what Rory Erskine of Marr called 'a Celtic entente.'[49] Between the Rising and the end of the Irish Civil War, Glasgow was a bolt hole for Irish revolutionaries, and a hub which brought socialists and republicans together. Republicans who spent time there were usually radicalised by it; notably Seán McLoughlin and Seán Murray, who went on to activism in the SLP and the CPI.[50] In 1918

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[46] Young, 'John Leslie', 55–61; James D. Young, 'John Maclean, Socialism, and the Easter Rising', *Saothar*, 16 (1991), 23–33.
[47] Brian J. Ripley and John McHugh, *John Maclean* (Manchester, 1989), 30–2.
[48] Máirtín Seán Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland, 1858–1916: Fenians in Exile* (Dublin, 2007).
[49] National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Art Ó Briain Papers, MS 8427 /18.
[50] Charlie McGuire, *Sean McLoughlin, Ireland's Forgotten Revolutionary* (Pontypool, 2011); Emmet O'Connor, 'Murray, John (Seán), 1898–1961, Communist Party of Ireland

Glasgow's Marxists, the Scottish Brigade of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and a workers' defence force organised by Willie Gallacher were forging links with Irish revolutionism that would persist into the 1930s. When Larkin wanted to query his exclusion from the British dominions in 1919, he got Neil MacLean, Labour MP for Glasgow Govan, to table a parliamentary question.[51] In August 1922, at the height of the Civil War, the leading republican paper *An Phoblacht* was being produced in Glasgow and the editorial staff wrote to Ernie O'Malley, the IRA's second in command, urging republicans to engage with the national postal strike and ally with the CPI.[52] There were calls too for a Labour alliance. Scottish radicals were impressed by the Irish general strike against conscription on 23 April 1918. Tricolours and Sinn Féiners mixed with red flags and socialists at Glasgow's famous May Day celebration in 1919, which attracted 100,000 workers. Maclean found the insurgent spirit in republicanism so compelling that he began to co-operate with the aristocratic Erskine of Marr. On the Irish side, the ITGWU paper, the *Voice of Labour*, thought collaboration with Scottish workers would be one way of tackling the Ulster question.[53]

The Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 took much of the steam out of the Scottish-Irish relationship, defusing the Irish question just before the triumph of British Labour shelved the Scottish question – in both cases, coincidentally, for some fifty years. Only in communism did the radical entente survive. Such was the Scottish involvement in the CPI in 1923 that Dublin wags dubbed it the Communist Party of Scotland.[54] Over the next two decades, the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the controlling body of all communist parties up to the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, sent a stream of Scots – Belfast-born Arthur Macmanus, Bob Stewart, Jack Leckie, Tom Bell, Pat Devine, and Willie Gallacher to supervise the organisationally precarious and ideologically wayward communist groups in Ireland: the CPI (1921–4), the Irish Worker League (1923–9), the Revolutionary Workers' Groups (1930–3), and the second CPI (1933–41). Stewart did not

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General Secretary' in Keith Gildart, David Howell, and Neville Kirk (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography, XI* (London, 2003), 200–5.

[51] *Parliamentary Debates House of Commons*, 18 August 1919, Vol. 119; col.1977–8; 19 November 1919, vol. 121, col.942.

[52] Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia, and the Communist Internationals, 1919–43* (Dublin, 2004), 70–2.

[53] Young, 'John Maclean, Socialism, and the Easter Rising', 30.

[54] For the Scots and Irish communism, see O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, passim. See also Robert Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters: The Memoirs of Bob Stewart* (London, 1967).

exaggerate in saying of Larkin: 'I was one of the few men he really trusted politically.'[55] Their common horror of alcohol assisted. Other emissaries were not so warmly received. The Irish deeply resented any subordination to the British party, and the consistent choice of Scots makes it improbable that the selection simply reflected their prominence in contemporary British communism. Almost certainly, Moscow was calculating that the Irish would find it easier to take advice from Celts than Saxons. In 1941, after the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia, it was Gallacher who persuaded the second CPI to dissolve in neutral Éire, on the basis that it would be impossible to reconcile the near universal support for neutrality with the communist policy of total commitment to the war effort. It was the end, not merely of the CPI in Éire, but of a radical tradition. In an epilogue, Larkin attended an Independent Labour Party summer school in 1943, and was eulogised and inducted into honorary membership of the party by another legend, James Maxton.[56] Both were dead within four years.

Conclusion

What is most obvious about Scottish-Irish connections is that they were strongest in Ulster, and on Clydeside. One could grow up in the south of Ireland largely unaware of Scotland, but in Ulster the Scottish influence is everywhere. Secondly, one might distinguish between passive and active connections. Those of the mainstream Labour movement were passive, and reflected the trajectory of trade unionism in both countries. The lines of trade-union development in Ireland and Scotland were closest at the turn of the last century, as Scottish capital and artisans moved into Ulster and British trade unionists colonised Ireland generally. The centralisation of British trade unionism in London, the incorporation of Scotland into British capitalism, and the decolonisation of Irish trade unionism under Larkin, led Scottish and Irish Labour organisation to diverge.

Active connections were more likely to be pursued by radicals – be they land reformers, republicans, socialists, or communists. Surprisingly, the pan-Celtic radicalism dreamed of by Davitt, and in recent times by the likes of Peter Berresford Ellis, was not more widespread.[57] For all their similarities, Scotland and Ireland were very different places, with distinctive political

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[55] Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters*, 149–50.

[56] *New Leader*, 14 August 1943.

[57] See, inter alia, Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Revolution: A Study in Anti-Imperialism* (Ceredigion, 1985).

cultures and different radical agendas. One illustration of the differences is found in the address of James Browne, one of two fraternal delegates from the Scottish TUC, at the Irish TUC in Cork in 1913:

> They would have in Ireland the same enemies to meet as the workers had to meet in Scotland. Last Saturday 3,000 young Scotchmen and women had to emigrate because they could not find room to live at home. They had landlordism in Scotland as rampant as ever it had been in Ireland, and land was not available for the people to live in because of deer forests and playgrounds which the landlords insisted on having.
>
> A voice in the public gallery – Why don't ye shoot them (great laughter).
>
> Mr Browne – I forgot that I was in Ireland (renewed laughter).[58]

University of Ulster

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[58] University of Ulster, Magee College, *Report of the Twentieth Irish Trades Union Congress*, 50.

'Strike Patterns in Three Irish Firms: A Comparative Analysis'

Liam Cullinane

There is a reasonably strong body of industrial relations literature in Ireland. However, there have been few attempts to combine this literature with the practice of Irish labour history. On the one hand, 'the awareness of industrial relations literature among labour historians still appears to be limited', meanwhile much of the work produced within the discipline of industrial relations 'tends to be ahistoric with little emphasis on interest in past trends. The subject is purposefully more present and future-minded.'[1] It is unfortunate that this is the case, given the undoubted benefit that could be reaped from the marrying of both disciplines, as evidenced by the successful synthesis of industrial relations analysis and historical research which has been an important feature, for example, of Australian labour history.[2] This article will take just such an approach to the historical development of plant-level industrial relations by conducting a comparative analysis of strikes and industrial relations in three Irish factories over the course of the twentieth century: Irish Steel (1939–95), Sunbeam (1927–90) and the Ford Marina Plant (1919–84).

This essay will employ a Marxist theoretical framework in its analysis of industrial relations. At the core of this approach is the observation, articulated by Richard Hyman, that 'work relations (within capitalism) are an inevitable source of dispute. The interests of employees are in large part opposed to those of their employers: hence both parties seek to wield power and mobilise

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[1] Teresa Brannick, Francis Devine and Aidan Kelly, 'Social Statistics for Labour Historians: Strike Statistics, 1922-99', *Saothar*, 25 (2000), 114.

[2] In Australia, labour historians were frequently employed by Industrial Relations departments which utilised a multi-disciplinary approach involving law, sociology and history. The two largest Industrial Relations journals also frequently published articles on labour history. As such the connection between the two disciplines in the Australian context is notable. See Greg Patmore, 'Australia' in Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy (eds), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool, 2010), 231–61.

resources in order to ensure the predominance of their own interests.'[3] Conflict, according to this model, is a fundamental and endemic aspect of industrial relations. However, Hyman's Marxist analysis of capitalist work relations does not imply a continual and unending industrial warfare. As another analyst comments: 'A basic antagonism between capital and labour need not imply that capitalists and workers will meet as opposing classes with clearly opposed interests. But neither should analysis go to the other extreme of denying that structurally based antagonisms exist.'[4] In other words, 'Workers do not simply enter work and then seek means of resistance. Instead, they find means of living with the system as they find it.'[5]

Owners of industry attempt to organise their firms in such a way as to generate profit and minimise conflict with their workforce. Workers, when engaging with their employers, 'make rational decisions based on their astute assessment of the meagre economic and ideological alternatives available to them.'[6] Whether these decisions involve resistance to, or accommodation with, management varies depending on a variety of factors. Strikes, while the most visible and dramatic aspects of industrial relations, are simply one expression of the relations between management and the workforce. Indeed, even in the most militant of workplaces, strikes are an exception, a disruption of the normal relations on the factory floor and their occurrence can only be understood properly in the context of long-term changes and processes both within the firm and society. The nature and development of industrial relations within individual firms are determined by a multitude of internal and external factors. In the case of the former, the character of the workforce (including bargaining strength, inherited political and industrial traditions etc.), the strategies pursued by management, the nature of the labour process, and the economic fortunes of the firm itself determine how workers and employers seek to pursue their respective interests. External factors are also significant and interact with these internal processes. Government policy, macro-economic changes, national-level collective bargaining and the varying strength of the trade-union movement all influence plant-level actors in their relationships with each other and affect the likelihood of overt expressions of conflict, such as strikes and lockouts. This article will incorporate all these

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[3] Richard Hyman, *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction* (London, 1975), 187.

[4] P. K. Edwards, *Conflict at Work: A Materialist Analysis of Workplace Relations* (Oxford, 1986), 55.

[5] Ibid., 42.

[6] Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto, 1995), 140.

factors in its analysis when examining the overall development of industrial relations in the three firms over the course of their existence, before, through a process of comparison, contrast and analysis, determining how and why the record of strikes and industrial relations in each firm assumed the contours they did, utilising extensive primary research in doing so.[7]

The Factories

The significance of Sunbeam, Irish Steel and the Ford Marina Plant in the local history of Cork are well attested to. In a country where, in 1958, there were only thirty-one manufacturing establishments employing over 500 people in the entire state, these three firms were industrial giants, each employing several hundred people under the same roof.[8] The Ford Marina Plant was the earliest of these firms to be established, beginning tractor production as Henry Ford and Sons Ltd (technically an independent firm though under direct control of the Ford Motor Company) in 1919. The decision to establish the Irish branch was primarily determined by sentimental and patriotic motives on the part of Henry Ford, who could trace his ancestry back to Cork.[9] Throughout the 1920s, the Ford plant was an island of industry in a city otherwise characterised by commerce and agriculture, at its height employing 7,000 workers.[10] By 1932 however, the tractor production experiment at Cork had proven to be a failure and Ford made the decision to cease manufacturing operations at the Marina Plant.[11] Acting quickly, the new Fianna Fáil government introduced import duties and tariffs which made it uneconomical for firms to import cars, thus creating a small car assembly industry in Ireland.[12] The company,

[7] This research involved dozen of oral history interviews, conducted by the author, Miriam Nyhan, the University College Cork Women's Oral History Project and the Cork Folklore Project. It also involved the in-depth examination of business records relating to all three firms and the utilisation of local and national media records.

[8] David O'Mahony, *The Irish Economy: An Introductory Description* (Cork, 1962), 31. Employment in Irish Steel peaked at 1,100 while Sunbeam in 1967 was employing 1,600 people at Millfield. Employment in the Ford plant in the post-war period varied between 400 and 700 employees.

[9] See Thomas Grimes, 'Starting Ireland on the Road to Industry: Henry Ford in Cork', Ph.D thesis (NUI Maynooth, 2008), 38–59.

[10] The exact number is 6,924. Pearce to G.S Hibberson, 26 February 1930, Benson Ford Research Centre (hereafter BFRC) Myra Wilkins Papers, Acc. 880 Box 7.

[11] Percival Perry to Edsel B. Ford, 15 April 1932, BFRC, Nevins and Hill Series, Acc.572, Box 18.

[12] Percival Perry to Charles Sorensen, 3 June 1932, BFRC, Nevins and Hill, Acc.572, Box

not wanting to lose their access to the Irish market, switched their operations to car assembly and continued to maintain the Marina Plant on this basis until the removal of tariffs in 1984, when the company finally closed the Marina Plant for good.

The protectionist policies which forced Ford to maintain their Irish operations were successful in generating manufacturing industry in Ireland more generally. Local industrialist William Dwyer, for example, set up the Sunbeam Hosiery Company in 1927. Initially employing just fifty or so people, the introduction of tariff protections for the textiles and clothing industries allowed the firm to expand massively. By the end of the Second World War the company had a workforce of 1,000 people and had moved to larger premises at Millfield, where it remained until closure.[13] Sunbeam continued to grow in the post-war period, eventually becoming a multinational with over twenty subsidiary companies spread across Britain and Ireland and nearly 1,600 people employed in the original Millfield factory.[14] However, despite the success of the company in these years, the epoch of free trade (beginning with the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement of 1965) was not kind to the firm. Experiencing over a decade of crisis, the company shrank consistently until the original factory was finally closed in 1990. Like Sunbeam, Irish Steel was a product of Fianna Fáil's import-substitution policies. Established as a private company in 1939, the steel mill quickly failed, primarily due to the impact of the Second World War in obstructing the procurement of supplies. In 1947 the company was nationalised and resumed steel production under state ownership. Under generous tariffs and a monopoly on domestic scrap, the company remained modestly profitable until EEC membership and an international steel recession in the 1970s and 1980s threw the company into a crisis from which it never recovered.[15] Struggling through the next two decades with the help of expensive bailouts, the firm was finally sold off to Indian Multinational ISPAT in 1995 for just £1, before the plant closed completely in 2001.

As such, while all three plants varied in their ownership and product,

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[13] Sunbeam Wolsey Limited 22nd Annual Report, 1950, Cork City and County Archives (hereafter CCCA), Sunbeam Business Records, B505/ Bundle 63 /1.

[14] The precise number was 1,655. Committee on Industrial Progress – Questionnaire on the Hosiery Manufacturing Industry, October, 1968, CCCA, Sunbeam Business Records, B505/BND 13/TEMP 127.

[15] Irish Steel was the only steel mill in the world to use entirely scrap rather than ferrous raw materials in its production process.

they were all (from 1932 onwards) import-substitution companies based on protectionism. Although there has been a great deal written on the relationship between plant-size and militancy, numbers employed were not a major differentiating factor as all three factories employed broadly similar numbers.[16] Additionally, the location of each industry was unlikely to be a major determinant factor in a comparison of industrial relations; Sunbeam and Ford were located within a few miles of each other in the same city. While Irish Steel was located on an island about twenty-two kilometres from the city and drew its workforce primarily from the small town of Cobh and the Lower Harbour region, the industry did not have the characteristics of pit villages or similar single-industry communities that Kerr, Siegel and others have claimed are naturally prone to militancy and strike-propensity.[17] One significant difference however was the gender composition of the workforce. Ford and Irish Steel were predominantly male workplaces while Sunbeam had a majority female workforce. However, as we shall observe, this factor does not seem to have rendered the firm any less liable to industrial conflict than Irish Steel or Ford.

Industrial Relations in the Ford Marina Plant

The system of industrial relations in the Henry Ford and Sons plant derived from the policies employed by the Ford Motor Company internationally. In the early period of the firm (1920s and 1930s) Fordism in both Europe and America was characterised by a combination of high wage rates, strict discipline and a hire and fire system that offered little job security for employees and ensured that unionisation was a difficult prospect. The oral testimony of workers who were employed by Ford prior to unionisation in 1949 stresses the authoritarian nature of work in the factory during this period. One employee recalled from conversations with his father, who was employed in the plant from 1919 until

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[16] See, for example, Geoffrey K. Ingham, *Size of Industrial Organisation and Worker Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1970). Each factory, after 1932, employed workforces ranging from 500 to 1,600 people.

[17] Kerr and Siegel argued that industries in isolated areas with a workforce and community concentrated in single industries (Harlan County, South Wales etc.) were more likely to produce industrial militancy and conflict. See George Kerr and Abraham Siegel 'The Interindustry Propensity to Strike – An International Comparison' in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (eds), *Industrial Conflict* (London, 1954), 189–212.

the late 1930s, that 'conditions were very strict and difficult' and were 'nearly as bad when I started there in 1948.'[18] Bob Elliott noted that the factory was 'a tough place to work' and compared the factory in the pre-union days to a 'reform school' in terms of strictness.[19] Michael V. O'Donoghue, who began work in the factory in 1919, commented that while he was initially attracted to the high wages in the factory, he 'very shortly regretted' his decision.[20] The Ford Motor Company also imported its stringent anti-unionism to their Cork concern. Bob Elliott described how he hid his union allegiances while working in the factory in the same period: 'I was belonging to a union when I went there after about six months. But you kept that in your pocket and you didn't say anything to anybody'.[21] Gus McLaughlin, a Ford worker involved in the unionisation of both the Cork and Dagenham factories, recalls being told by manager John O'Neill just prior to a recognition strike 1949: 'Well you can go back to Connolly Hall [the regional headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU)] tomorrow and tell them that there'll be no shop steward ever stand in this company.'[22]

There were some variations on this system in Cork though. Since European Ford managers 'saw advantages in seeking a contented labour force through allowing self-help welfare activities in the factory' and because of the belief of Cork management in the 'careful organisation and assumption of responsibilities in respect of . . . improving conditions of living of employees', management policies in the Marina plant bore some hallmarks of the Welfare Capitalism introduced by Ford during the 'five-dollar day' reforms.[23] As such, the factory provided healthcare facilities, a saving and loans scheme and a Workers' Representation Council to militate against trade union penetration.[24] The company also delivered leisure opportunities, such as Irish-language classes and a football team.[25] There was even an attempt by Managing Director Edward Grace to embark on a housing scheme, though this was shot down

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[18] Miriam Nyhan, Interview with Gus McLaughlin, 2 August 2003.

[19] Miriam Nyhan, Interview with Bob Elliott, 22 January 2003.

[20] Bureau of Military History: Michael V. O'Donoghue Witness Statement, WS 1,741, File S 2676.

[21] Nyhan, Bob Elliott.

[22] Author's Interview with Gus McLoughlin, 29 July 2013.

[23] Steven Tolliday, 'Management and Labour in Britain, 1896-1939' in Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds), *Between Fordism and Flexibility* (Oxford, 1992), 35; Percival Perry to Henry Ford, Report on Establishing a Plant in Cork, 15 February 1913, BFRC, Henry Ford Office, Acc. 62 Box 59.

[24] BFRC: Fordson Worker, 15 November 1920. Sorensen Acc. 38 Box 43

[25] Ibid.

by his superiors.[26]

  The pre-war history of the Irish Ford operation, which was a large and desirable employer in an area which suffered from high levels of unemployment and emigration, was largely free of strikes. Only two exceptions existed to this industrial quietude. The first occurred in October 1920, at the height of the Irish War of Independence, when the employees of the plant ignored instructions from management by abandoning their posts and attending a protest against the incarceration of Republican Lord Mayor Terence MacSwiney, then on hunger strike in Brixton Prison. Following this incident, the entire workforce were locked out and grudgingly re-employed only after declaring that they would not desert their posts again.[27] The hunger strike affair represented an importance case of mass resistance to managerial authority but, importantly, was directed at the British authorities rather than at the Ford Company. Indeed, just a few years later, when the company was in dispute with Cork Corporation over the terms of a lease agreement, the workforce held a demonstration to evidence their loyalty to the firm and express their opposition to the actions of the council in potentially placing their jobs in jeopardy.[28] The only time industrial action, traditionally defined, was taken by Ford workers occurred in 1932, when the company attempted to initiate a 10 per cent cut in wages across its British and Irish possessions, the result of which was simultaneous strike actions in both the Cork and Dagenham facilities and a victory for the workers, despite the absence of trade-union organisation.[29]

While the 1932 strike represented the prelude to a more sustained, albeit unsuccessful, campaign of industrial organisation in the Dagenham plant that occurred the following year, this would not be repeated in Cork. In 1932, the company had intended to cease manufacturing operations at the Marina Plant and transfer all Irish production to Dagenham. However, the sudden imposition of import duties on cars that year forced Ford to retain Cork as an assembly centre for the small Irish market. The Marina Plant's transformation from manufacturing to assembly operations resulted in a significant reduction in the workforce, as well as initiating a process of transferring Irish Ford workers in Cork to other Ford facilities in Britain. The outbreak of war intensified this trend, with local management at one point applying for 500 travelling permits

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[26] Grimes, 'Henry Ford in Cork', 116–24.

[27] Ibid, 177–80.

[28] Dan Fitzgerald to Henry Ford, 2 March 1922. BFRC, Charles E. Sorensen Records Series, Acc.38 Box 45.

[29] See *Irish Times*, 2-9 April 1932. The strike succeeded in limiting the pay cuts only to the highest pay grades within the factory.

for current or former Marina workers to take up employment in England.[30] The prospects of earning considerably higher wages in Britain, alongside the fact that travelling permits had to be acquired through official company channels, militated against attempts at strikes or unionisation and, in contrast to Dagenham, there is no evidence for industrial action of any description in the Marina between 1932 and the end of the war.

In the early post-war period however, the prospects for unionisation in the plant were considerably improved by a variety of factors. The most important of these was the fact that the Ford Company had finally been forced to accept the organisation of its workforce, with the United Auto Workers winning a hard fought recognition strike in Detroit in 1941.[31] British workers followed the example of their American counterparts, culminating in the recognition of trade unions in Dagenham by 1943.[32] In the domestic context, the end of the war had seen the government introduce a series of measures, such as a Labour Court, and increased centralised bargaining which gave trade unions respectability, facilitating organisation and expansion.[33] Additionally, the experience of Irish Ford workers in the recognition strikes in Dagenham and elsewhere likely had the effect of increasing confidence and trade union commitment among returning employees.[34] Marina Plant workers held their first recognition strike in 1949, culminating in complete recognition and the creation of permanent negotiating structures by 1950.[35]

Following the achievement of union recognition, industrial relations in Ford became notably less dramatic. Following a relatively significant strike action taken in late 1954, the company remained free from significant industrial conflict for the remainder of its existence. Both Myriam Nyhan and the present author noted in their interviews with former Ford workers that interviewees were reluctant to describe the frequent unofficial industrial action taken by the workforce as 'strikes', preferring 'walkouts' or other, less potent,

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[30] John O'Neill to A. S. McCanna, Office of the Minister for Industry and Commerce, 7 July 1941, National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), Department of the Taoiseach (hereafter TAOIS), 3/ S578 B

[31] Huw Beynon, *Working For Ford* (Wakefield, 1975), 37.

[32] Miriam Nyhanm, *Are You Still Below? The Ford Marina Plant, Cork, 1917–1984* (Cork, 2007), 82.

[33] Christopher Coleman-Doyle, 'Industrial Relations in Post-World War 2 Ireland, 1946–1950', MPhil dissertation, (University College Cork, 1999), 11.

[34] Gus McLoughlin for example was involved in both the Dagenham and Cork recognition strikes.

[35] *Liberty*, 3 (April–May, 1950).

terms.[36] Similarly, they were dismissive of these walkouts or their significance and, in general, demonstrated a notable sense of loyalty to the Ford Company and an awareness of their prestige as the highest-paid manufacturing workers in the city. Indeed, wages never seem to have been a major source of dispute in the company after 1954 and conflicts relating to the labour process could often be conducted through informal methods such as the 'blacking' of cars.[37] Regardless, the low production demands of the Cork plant, meant that the minor, unofficial disputes which were a fact of life for the factory in the post-unionisation period, never had a significant impact on the firm's profitability or ability to meet orders. Contrasting sharply with Ford factories in Britain, relations between management and labour in the Marina plant from 1954 until closure in 1984 were notably cordial and free from major conflict. Indeed, the Industrial Development Authority later commented that the 'Ford plant in Cork had probably the best record of all the company's plants throughout the world' in relation to strike levels.[38]

Industrial Relations in Sunbeam

William Dwyer was well known in Cork for his 'progressive' employment policies, employing a variation of industrial paternalism in his management of the Sunbeam factory at Millfield. This industrial relations strategy is described by Andrea Tone as being 'anchored in the reality of employer provision and the expectation of employee deference, guided by a familial metaphor accentuating reciprocity, mutuality and obligation.'[39] Paternalism entailed a broad spectrum of practices including 'company-provided housing, stores, schools, churches, libraries, hospitals, summer camps, recreational and social activities, holiday gifts, paid vacations, savings-and-loan associations, stock-buying options, profit-sharing plans, medical and life insurance, pensions, training and promotion opportunities, and representation councils.'[40] Sunbeam paternalism bore some resemblance to the Ford Company's provision of

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[36] Nyhan, *Are You Still Below?*, 82.

[37] Extra cars placed on the line would be ignored by the workforce until they reached the end without being assembled.

[38] *Evening Echo*, 25 August 1977.

[39] Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (London, 1997), 1.

[40] Walter Licht, 'Fringe Benefits: A Review Essay on the American Workplace', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 53 (1998), 168.

welfare and leisure programmes, but was based on a more personal relationship between the workforce and the Dwyer family rather than with a monolithic and bureaucratic entity like the Ford Motor Company.

The success of Dwyer's strategy of paternalism is reflected in the popular memory of the Sunbeam workforce, who were almost unanimous in their opinions of William Dwyer and his successor Declan Dwyer. Workers recalled them as being 'excellent employers', 'very good people', 'marvellous' and 'very respectful and very decent and nice to their . . . employees'.[41] Indeed, the provisions afforded to employees were generous. These included an on-site doctor, nurse, dentist and dispensary, baths for employee usage, sickness benefits, marriage and mortality grants, a canteen, social outings subsidised by the company, sports teams, housing provisions, tennis courts, a company shop and better pay and working conditions than other firms. During the Second World War employees were even provided with an air-raid shelter capable of protecting the entire workforce in the unlikely event of Cork being bombed. Dwyer, in a similar fashion to other paternalist employers, acted as a patron of the local community, through actions such the re-construction of the Church of the Annunciation in Blackpool, the building of the Farranree Community Hall and patronage of numerous local charities.[42] The success of these actions in cementing William Dwyer's popularity was reflected in the vote he received during his brief foray into politics when he was elected as an independent candidate for Cork City in the 1944 general election, topping the poll with 11,000 first preferences.[43]

The paternalist system operated in Sunbeam was influenced by a number of sources. These included a pre-existing tradition of paternalism among local industrialists, particularly within the textiles and clothing industries. Industrial and welfare policies in the plant were also rooted in Catholic social teaching. Máire Leane and Elizabeth Kiely write that: 'William Dwyer was … a devout Catholic, who embraced Catholic social teaching on the duty of employers to workers, as enunciated in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*' which 'advised of the need to cultivate greater solidarity between capitalist employers and workers.'[44] Indeed, Dwyer's introduction of a Social Service's Society received the support of the clergy when the local bishop 'gave his cordial approval

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[41] Greta Kiely, 8 October 1997. Cork Folklore Project (hereafter CFP), SR97; Madge Barry, 28 August 1997, CFP, SR95; Peggy Payne, 5 August 1998, CFP, SR224.
[42] *Irish Independent*, 21 December 1944; *Irish Times,* 11 May 1951.
[43] *Southern Star*, 6 April 1946.
[44] Máire Leane and Elizabeth Kiely, *Irish Women at Work 1930-1960: An Oral History* (Sallins, 2012), 197.

and blessing' to the undertaking, noting that 'in the last fifty years especially, the Church had exercised a very important influence on the relations between employer and employee.'[45] Similarly, Reverend T. J. O'Donnell, a member of An Rioghacht, a Catholic lay organisation dedicated to the implementation of the papal encyclicals, noted that it was 'gratifying to see that their Irish companies, like Sunbeam Wolsey, were showing that a Catholic country was putting into practice the principles of their sociology.'[46]

Early examinations of paternalism regarded the practice as nothing more than an anti-union ploy, a 'padded glove over an iron fist'.[47] This was clearly not the case in Sunbeam. The Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) commanded the loyalties of the majority of the Sunbeam workforce and was well established there by the outbreak of the Second World War. Supervisory, maintenance and warehouse staff were also unionised. While many firms saw paternalism as a way of holding off the challenge of trade unions and ensuring the domination of employers in their industry, others 'accepted unionism in principle and in practice.'[48] William Dwyer clearly fell into the latter category, once even describing himself as 'trade unionist dyed in the wool.'[49] Dwyer's paternalism and cultivation of positive relations with the trade-union movement was reflected in the tributes paid to him by the Cork Worker's Council on his death, who described him as 'one of the most progressive men in the country' and noted that 'Cork would be the poorer by his passing.'[50] Additionally *Liberty*, the ITGWU magazine, frequently carried advertisements for Sunbeam, Seafield Fabrics and other companies owned by the Dwyers, a privilege reserved only for those firms that the union considered to have positive relations with the labour movement. More importantly from the company's perspective, Dwyer's 1949 boast that 'I have spent a long life in business trying to avoid strikes and I am glad to say in the last twenty-one years no strike has occurred' was largely accurate.[51]

As late as 1966, the Cork Economic Development Council was using Sunbeam as an example of friendly labour relations in the city in order to attract foreign investment, boasting that the firm had not experienced a strike

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[45] *Evening Echo*, 15 April 1943.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Tone, *The Business of Benevolence*, 3.

[48] Ibid.

[49] *Irish Press*, 13 January 1939.

[50] Cork Trades Council Minutes, 10 May 1951, CCCA, U216/1/11

[51] *Irish Times*, 9 September 1949.

since 1945.[52] Within just a few years this situation had changed drastically. There were rumblings as early as early as 1968 when members of the National Electrical and Engineering Trade Union (NEETU) picketed the premises. Even though the dispute only concerned the hosiery mechanical workers, a small minority of the total workforce, between 800 and 900 employees refused to pass the picket. One local newspaper commented that the strike was 'believed to be the first major shutdown at the Sunbeam factory for many years though there have been minor disputes and unofficial stoppages.'[53] Three years later an even bigger stoppage occurred when 1,200 workers took unofficial strike action over the dismissal of a technician. Following the outbreak of the strike a company spokesman opined that 'it was difficult to believe that a union of the size and stature of the ITGWU could not effectively control its members' and that 'this type of tactic had become prevalent of late in the company.'[54]

These clashes however were mere preludes to the 'big strike' of 1975. The dispute began when the company attempted to introduce a three-day working week in three departments in Millfield. The ITGWU rejected this proposal and demanded redundancies on a first in, last out basis instead. However, when workers in the half-hose, nylon-knitting and underwear divisions arrived at the plant on Monday 6 January 1975, they found their departments shut.[55] The following Saturday, ITGWU members in the plant voted 'overwhelmingly' in favour of strike action.[56] The following Monday, there was a complete stoppage at the factory when 700 workers in the affected sections withdrew their labour.[57] 100 clerical workers were also put out of work due to the effects of the dispute. Two aspects of the strike which stand out were the militancy of the workers and the intransigence of management. In the case of the workforce, the strikers organised a march from the city centre to the plant where they then proceeded to occupy the boardroom. They remained there for the following two nights with the official backing of the ITGWU.[58] When office staff attempted to access the building, the workers barricaded the corridors to prevent them from entering.[59] In the case of management,

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[52] Cork Economic Development Council, 'City of Cork – Community Monograph – Facts for Industry' (First Draft, June 1966), CCCA, B505 / BND 20/2 TEMP 102.

[53] *Evening Echo*. 19 February 1968.

[54] Ibid., 3 May 1971.

[55] Ibid., 6 January 1975.

[56] Ibid., 11 January 1975.

[57] Ibid., 13 January 1975.

[58] Ibid., 4 February and 7 February 1975.

[59] Ibid., 5 February 1975.

the board had repeatedly ignored Labour Court recommendations and consistently insisted that the ITGWU meet with departmental managers rather than company representatives.[60] On 21 February 1975 the strikers voted to return to work in return in exchange for some concessions from management. The strike had lasted nearly six weeks.[61] In the space of just ten years Sunbeam had transformed from an island of industrial peace to one of the most strike-afflicted factories in the city.

Industrial Relations in Irish Steel

Irish Steel's first few two decades of state ownership were largely free from significant strike activity. In the early years of the company, the lack of a steelmaking tradition in Ireland meant that the workforce consisted of a mixture of unskilled local labour and foreign technicians with backgrounds in the steel industry. Management experienced trouble with these predominantly British employees in the early years of the firm. The directors, in their 1949 annual report, complained that the foreign experts were 'arrogant', 'insubordinate' and 'not disposed to pass on their knowledge to local workers.'[62] Poor relations between these foreign technicians and management meant that 'the Directors had to intensify their efforts to loosen the grip which these non-Irish workers have over the industry.'[63] The matter came to a head in December 1948 when one of the English workers was fired for malicious damage and most of the foreign personnel left the company with him.[64] Most of the skilled positions were quickly filled by Irishmen trained in local technical schools and the number of non-national technicians in the firm fell from fifty to just eight.[65] Relations with the Irish workers appear to have been far more cordial with management reporting that, aside from the troublesome skilled Englishmen, 'All the workers are members of Trade Unions and up to the present, reasonably satisfactory relations exist between these Unions and the Company.'[66]

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[60] Ibid., 29 January 1975.

[61] Ibid., 21 February 1975.

[62] *Irish Steel Holdings Limited – Director's Report*, 1949, NAI, Department of Industry and Commerce (hereafter IND), 10/28.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

When Irish Steel came under state control in 1947, it inherited the union structures of the private company. Most of the workforce was organised in the ITGWU, while the tradesmen employed in the factory belonged to a number of craft unions catering for each individual trade, a similar structure to that which prevailed in Sunbeam and Ford. Management, in the early years of the firm, often adopted a hard line that contrasted sharply with the approach developed in later years. In 1954, for example, there was an unofficial strike in the merchant mill. The general manager responded by sacking the strikers and used a mixture of non-unionised mill labour and 'gallant volunteers' from the unorganised office staff in order to break the strike.[67] No sympathetic action emerged from the other sections of the plant and the strikers were forced to capitulate after ten days.[68] Most of these workers were re-employed but the ringleaders were immediately dismissed. Chairman Sarsfield Hogan, recalling the incident in 1980, noted that it was memorable only for the fact that 'in the light of present-day management/labour attitudes, it seems incredible that it ever could have happened.'[69]

In spite of this tough management attitude, the ITGWU managed to consolidate its position greatly during the 1950s, culminating in the recognition of a 'closed shop' in 1957.[70] The strengthening of the ITGWU's hand, combined with the power of the craft unions, led to a steady increase in the wages paid in the firm. Hogan opined that 'on many grounds, the company would have preferred to deal with a single well-organised union.'[71] The multiplicity of craft unions, combined with strong ITGWU organisation in the plant, led to leapfrogging in wage negotiations. The tradesmen in the plant possessed considerable industrial strength. They were primarily employed in maintenance and without them the furnaces could not be kept in operation. Thus, despite representing a small minority of the total workforce, the craft-workers were capable of halting production in the firm entirely. While the craft unions consistently negotiated significant pay increases, the ITGWU also ensured that the pay of their unskilled members would increase in what Hogan described as 'tug of war.'[72] The maintenance of differentials meant that a pay increase for any section of the workforce would be immediately followed by claims from other sections. As such, the wages of both the skilled and

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[67] Sarsfield Hogan, *A History of Irish Steel* (Dublin, 1980), 89.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 97.
[71] Ibid., 96.
[72] Ibid.

unskilled workers in the plant rose consistently. In the early years of the firm, the wages of unskilled workers were tied to those of builder's labourers in the Cork area, a sum lower than the generally higher than average wages received by workers in larger manufacturing concerns. By the end of the 1950s, the general workforce was receiving a wage equivalent to that received by workers in general and, by the mid-1980s, the average wage in Irish Steel was nearly a third higher than the average industrial wage.[73]

The lack of strike action in this period, combined with the consistent increase in wages for both skilled and unskilled workers, suggest that management policy in Irish Steel was to avoid industrial action by acceding to the demands made by the unions in the firm. One former employee tells a story regarding one of the shop stewards among the craft workers who approached the wages department regarding the late payment of wages to tradesmen. The shop steward questioned the manager in charge of wages about the issue, threatening an overtime ban or even strike action unless the issue was resolved:

> 'Oh yeah,' he said. 'Yeah, there's a shortage this way. We'll fix it up next week.'
>
> 'You won't.' he said 'You'll fix it up today' he [the shop steward] said. 'And tomorrow' he said. 'Is Friday. And those men had better be paid by tomorrow night, before they leave here tomorrow evening'
>
> So your man went away with his tail between his legs and he had the money ready for them the next day.[74]

Whatever the accuracy of the precise details of the anecdote, it illustrates both the power of the craft unions, and management's apparent desire to keep the workforce satisfied for fear of the possibility of strike action. Worker militancy combined with high wage rates was a general feature of Irish semi-state industries where 'the monopoly power of the trade unions' was employed in order 'to produce wage levels above what are necessary to clear labour markets.'[75] It is also the case, stated simplistically, albeit accurately, by Susan Milner that 'State-owned companies are never permitted to be as ruthless

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[73] Frank Barry and Joe Durkan, *TEAM and Irish Steel: An Application of the Declining High Wages Industries Literature* (Dublin, 1995), 12.

[74] Author's interview with Robert Walsh, 19 August 2013.

[75] John Bristow, 'State-Sponsored Bodies' in Frank Little (ed.), *Unequal Achievement: The Irish Experience, 1975–1982* (Dublin, 1982), 175.

as private companies' and are more likely to acceded to demands for wages increases.[76] The relationship between the craft workers and management in Irish Steel indeed bears a striking resemblance to that of other semi-state companies like the Electricity Supply Board, which were also characterised by high wages and militancy, particularly on the part of skilled workers.

Prior to 1977, the strike pattern in Irish Steel was typical of other Irish manufacturing centres, characterised primarily by small, unofficial strikes which were quickly and easily resolved:

> Donal Brady: There was a few small strikes there [over] small, niggly little things.[77]
> Robert Walsh: In all the years that I was there, a strike might last for two or three hours, might last for a day, I don't think there was ever any strike, any other strike that lasted more than a day, maybe forty-eight hours at the most. [78]
> Jim Shealy: There had been other strikes, lightning strikes, they would have been over, you know, some minor issue that could be, ah, resolved within twenty-four or forty-eight hours.[79]

This pattern was not unusual however, in post-war industrial relations in Ireland, where brief, unofficial strikes were a regular fact of life (also reflected in the Ford plant and at Sunbeam). However, in 1977, the relatively peaceful industrial relations in Irish Steel were shattered by the outbreak of a devastating and lengthy strike.

In March of that year, the company's eighty-seven craftsmen, consisting of fitters, electricians, plumbers and other skilled workers, placed two pickets on the Irish Steel plant. The tradesmen sought full implementation of a pay increase agreement made in 1972 and to ensure relativity of 20 per cent with the unskilled workers in the factory. The remainder of the workforce, numbering 700 general operatives and office staff, were instructed by their unions to ignore the picket and did so, entering work as usual.[80] The strike revealed in stark terms the power and organisation of the craftsmen. Despite the participation of just a few dozen men, the strike lasted for six months

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[76] Susan Milner, *The Effect of Protection on Irish Steel and the EC Steel Industry*, MA dissertation (University College Cork, 1995), 24.

[77] Author's Interview with Donal Brady, 26 November 2013.

[78] Robert Walsh.

[79] Author's Interview with Jim Shealy, 23 September 2013.

[80] *Evening Echo*, 26 March 1977.

and was successful in shutting down the factory within three weeks of pickets being placed, resulting in the lay-off of the entire workforce.[81] The strike was unusually divisive, particularly as a key demand of the strikers was the maintenance of relativity with the general workforce. As one employee recalls: 'It created a lot of hardship for the people out on strike and, some of the people that were on strike, their brothers were general operatives and they were on the dole so it kind of ate into families, in Cobh, so it was a bit like the civil war.'[82]

The sheer number of craft unions, catering for a small number of workers, and the fact that most of these unions were not affiliated to the Irish Trades Union Congress and therefore existed outside of national bargaining structures, made resolution difficult. Additionally, the Strike Committee established by the workers themselves was well organised and militant, organising sympathetic strikes in other firms and raising money to supplement their meagre strike pay.[83] When the strike was finally resolved, six months after it began, with the negotiation of a pay increase for the craft workers just short of the 20 per cent they had initially demanded, the company attributed £700,000 in direct trading losses to the tradesmen's withdrawal of labour, which had forced complete cessation of production for nearly the entire duration of the dispute.[84] Following the resolution of the 1977 strike, the craftsmen remained militant in their attitude to wage negotiations throughout the 1980s, though never again taking official strike action. During these years, the power of the tradesmen was greatly reduced until 1994 when there was a major campaign to reduce labour costs before privatising the company, which finally broke the power of the craft unions at Irish Steel.[85]

Analysis

As this study has demonstrated, there are both commonalities and divergences in the record of strikes and industrial relations of the Ford Marina Plant, Sunbeam and Irish Steel. All three experienced a generally low level of strikes in the period from their establishment until the late 1960s. However, between

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[81] Ibid., 19 April 1977.

[82] Author's interview with James Cronin, 25 June 2013.

[83] Donal Brady.

[84] Hogan, *A History of Irish Steel*, 204.

[85] Tim Hastings, *Irish Semi-States in Crisis: The Challenge for Industrial Relations in the ESB and Other Major Semi-State Companies* (Dublin, 1994), 7–9.

1965 and 1980, the industrial relations record of both Sunbeam and Irish Steel changed dramatically, culminating in two large strikes in both firms within a three-year period. Ford however, diverges at this point. Unusually for a Ford plant, or for the auto assembly industry in general, the pattern of strike activity between 1960 and closure in 1984 consisted entirely of brief, quickly resolved, unofficial industrial actions with no strikes of significant scale or length. After the peak in strike occurrence in both Sunbeam and Irish Steel throughout the 1970s, both companies returned to quiescence with little in the way of overt industrial conflict for the remainder of their existence.

How then do we account for this pattern? The policies of protectionism and import-substitution introduced in the 1930s are central to any such discussion. These policies, according to Brian Girvin, allowed such significant expansion in manufacturing employment that 'by 1939 virtually a new class had been created.'[86] The protectionist development strategy also altered the balance of power in industrial relations, meaning that 'business was in a weaker position than labour. Fianna Fáil policies gave to the working class a certain security by modifying the impact of the market and reducing the fear of uncertainty … The new business community was wholly dependent on the tariff system to survive … and were consequently far more dependent on the state and had less autonomy than labour.'[87] It was these factors that meant that Irish Steel was unionised from its inception while Sunbeam was organised early in its history, without the need to resort to a recognition strike, contrasting sharply with the harsh anti-union attitude of the export-orientated Ford Company in the 1920s. Additionally, the monopoly position of the protected industries allowed security of employment, good wages and other benefits for workers that would have been difficult or impossible in a situation where competition would have necessitated the maintenance of low labour costs.

The worsening of industrial relations in both Sunbeam and Irish Steel during the 1970s corresponds to broader trends within Irish strike patterns. Aidan Kelly and Teresa Brannick, in a study of strike-proneness within British companies operating in Ireland, noted that the strike-propensity of these companies increased dramatically, from a relatively quiescent period during the 1960s to a much more turbulent one in the 1970s. Investigating the matter closely through aggregate strike data, Kelly and Brannick found that the significance of the declining industrial relations record of a company was not

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[86] Brian Girvin, 'Industrialisation and the Irish Working Class since 1922', *Saothar*, 10 (1984), 33.
[87] Ibid.

related to the nationality of their ownership, but rather to the character of the industries such firms were engaged in. British manufacturing operations in Ireland, they found, were concentrated in protected industries such as food, drink, textiles and tobacco:

> Most of these companies remained on in Ireland and continued to trade profitably … They also developed satisfactory relationships with their workers, which is clearly in evidence for the strike performance data for the 1960s … For almost forty years they supplied the Irish market relatively free from competition, but by the end of the 1960s, they began to experience difficulties which threatened their very survival.[88]

The effect of these economic changes was significant: 'The resulting industrial conflict can be viewed, therefore, as a sharp disjunction in the traditional relationship between the companies and their employees, which became manifested in the wholesale change in management strategies.'[89]

These trends were reflected in the companies under examination here. In the case of Sunbeam, manager Tom Scott, who began his career in the textiles industry in Huddersfield, highlighted the differences between the highly competitive British industry and the conditions he found in Sunbeam during the 1950s, 'sheltered from the harsh, cruel world of competition', noting in particular that labour attitudes, union influence and the generous fringe benefits in the factory were radically different from the free-trade conditions he had experienced in the British industry.[90] In the 1970s, the influence of free trade and EEC membership devastated the company. The 1975 annual report of the Sunbeam group demonstrated the scale of this decline with chairman C. O. Stanley reporting a loss of £855,000 and the closure of several subsidiary companies.[91] The success of the policy of paternalism in Sunbeam was based on a number of factors, but the most important of these were the provision of higher than average wages and extensive fringe benefits, which were themselves predicated on the profitability of the company and its ability to engage in capital and current expenditure beyond the purely business needs of the firm. Under protectionism, Sunbeam's monopoly position within the

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[88] Aidan Kelly and Teresa Brannick, 'Explaining the Strike Proneness of British Companies in Ireland', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 26 (1988), 48.
[89] Ibid., 52.
[90] Author's interview with Tom Scott, 18 December 2012.
[91] Sunbeam Annual Report, 1975, CCCA, B505/ BND 29 / 1 / TEMP 65.

Irish market and insulation from foreign competition ensured the company's
stability, profitability and prosperity. Once these conditions changed and the
company was forced to introduce redundancies, short-time working and other
cost-cutting measures, the company's positive relations with the workforce were
fatally undermined as employees took strike action to defend the conditions
they had enjoyed in the days of protectionism. The ability of workers to engage
in this kind of resistance was aided by the fact that the period coincided with a
peak in trade-union membership in the Republic of Ireland, facilitating strike
activity.[92] In 1975, the year of the 'big strike' in the Millfield factory, there were
strikes right across the Sunbeam Group of companies 'due to our inability to
pay increases which would only create further losses and unemployment.'[93]
Paternalism, once deprived of its economic base, simply collapsed.

These sudden structural changes in the employment relationship are
reflected in the popular memory of Sunbeam workers, whose recollections
present a narrative where the era of paternalist management under the Dwyers
acquires the reputation of a 'golden age' for the factory, in sharp contrast to
the strife and insecurity of the seventies and eighties when control passed
away from the Dwyer family. Catherine O'Callaghan, who worked in Sunbeam
from 1975 to 1984, attributed the 'fall of the Sunbeam empire' to distant
shareholders and other interests 'only in there at the time to feather their own
nest and [who] didn't really care about what happened, the actual company at
the end of the day' in distinct contrast to when the company was 'in their [The
Dwyers'] own house'.[94] Madge Barry expressed the common opinion that
'they should have kept it as a Dwyer establishment and they would have, they'd
still be going today if they had done that.'[95] In reality, the memory of a Dwyer
'golden age' followed by the destruction of the company by distant interests
reflected the changes wrought by the introduction of free trade, which simply
happened to coincide with the phasing out of Dwyer involvement with the
company.

Irish Steel's industrial relations history was similarly influenced by the
protections under which it existed. The 'tug of war' between the craft and
general unions, alongside the industrial might of the tradesmen, led to

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[92] Trade union membership in Ireland increased by over 50 per cent between the mid-
1960s and the late 1970s, with density peaking at 55 per cent in 1980. See Joseph
Wallace, Patrick Gunnigle and Gerard McMahon, *Industrial Relations in Ireland*, 3rd
Edition (Dublin, 2004), 11.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Catherine O'Callaghan, 29 April, 1997, CFP, SR93.
[95] Madge Barry, 28 August 1997, CFP, SR95.

steadily increasing wages throughout the protectionist period of the firm. While defended from competition by tariffs and the vital scrap monopoly, the company could afford these pay increases. However, the advent of EEC membership, combined with an international steel recession, forced a change of policy within the company. In 1976, for example, chairman Kevin McCourt was complaining that the volume of exports sales had fallen by 53 per cent with home sales declining by 14 per cent.[96] By 1977, the firm was in negotiations with the EEC for its survival, and with the Irish government for an extensive investment package that would allow it to update its plant and remain viable under the new conditions in which it found itself. Additionally, the company was about to be deprived of the vital scrap monopoly, which would have the effect of immediately increasing prices for all products. As such, Irish Steel was under pressure to prevent increasing labour costs and maintain profitability in order to survive. When the craft workers pressed their claim for a wage increase in 1977, the company's refusal to accept their demands represented a sea change in management policy which had, until that point, been to acquiesce to worker demands. The result was the devastating strike of 1977, the length and severity of which came as a surprise to both strikers and management.

The brief period of industrial conflict experienced by both Sunbeam and Irish Steel during the 1970s contrast sharply with the Marina Plant. The most obvious explanation for this divergence lies in the fact that, unlike its counterparts in clothing, textiles and steel production, the Ford plant was able to benefit from a reprieve in the introduction of free trade, tariff protections for the factory being extended until 1984. In its early years, the employees of the company accepted strict discipline of the factory, the denial of trade-union rights and the monotony of the assembly line process in exchange for exceptionally high wages at a time of high unemployment. The importance of wages is emphasised by the fact that the only non-political industrial dispute to occur in the factory prior to unionisation was in response to a pay cut at a period when the Ford company was forced to reduce labour costs right across its companies due to the effects of the great depression.

Ford's transformation into a protected industry later that year ensured its profitability and its ability to maintain high wage levels, while the extension of tariff protections for the industry until 1984 allowed it to maintain these levels until closure. As such, the company did not find it necessary to

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[96] Irish Steel, Chairman's Review, 16 November 1976, NAI, TAOIS 2006/133/79.

dramatically alter management policy or introduce redundancies, pay cuts or major changes in working conditions even as Sunbeam and Irish Steel were forced to restructure in response to free-trade conditions. As one former worker remarked of the early 1980s, a period of high unemployment in Ireland generally, 'there was no recession in Fords.'[97] The minor industrial disputes that the factory did experience mainly related to control of the labour process and were generally resolved without recourse to serious strike action. While the industrial relations tribulations in the 1970s of Sunbeam and Irish Steel can be attributed to the difficulties created by a significant shift in work practices and conditions, necessitated by a changing economic context, Ford never encountered such a transition. When tariffs were removed, the company simply ended its operations in Ireland with a single and total closure combined with generous redundancy packages which satisfied the plant's workforce and precluded the possibility of an occupation over severance terms along the lines of the nearby Dunlops' factory, which closed in the same period.[98]

Therefore the experience of the Ford Marina plant, as well as both Sunbeam and Irish Steel, suggests that the course of macro-level industrial development in Ireland was the most important factor in determining work relations in all three companies. The policies of protectionism and import-substitution first introduced in the 1930s had the effect of mediating class antagonisms within manufacturing industry. These policies ensured that capitalists like William Dwyer and others were granted a semi-monopoly position and guaranteed profitability through insulation from foreign competition. Workers in these same industries benefited from relatively good wages, security of employment and other benefits which were made possible by import-substitution policies, militating against industrial conflict. With the advent of free trade however, these cosy relations were fundamentally transformed, as management sought to reduce labour costs and enforce more stringent working conditions in order to maintain their profits in a difficult new environment. Without the intervention of the state through import-substitution to mitigate the possibility of class conflict in the old protected industries, antagonisms erupted in spectacular fashion. Crucially, the ability of workers to resist management authority was aided by economic growth and high trade-union density. Resistance, rather than compliance, was a rational response to engagement with management. By the end of the 1970s, however, the economic position of workers had weakened greatly. High unemployment generally, combined with the constant

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[97] Author's interview with Michael Lenihan, 31 January 2013.
[98] Author's interview with Michael Lenihan, 31 January 2013.

threat of closure in the cases of Sunbeam and Irish Steel, militated against the possibility of strike action during the 1980s as workers became increasingly disempowered and largely unable to win gains through resistance, reflecting the beginning of a broader decline in Irish strike activity which has continued to the present day.

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The Irish in Greenock: Employment, Networks and Ethnicity – A Primary Analysis

Shaun Kavanagh

The Great Famine has been a natural tipping point for the majority of Irish diaspora studies. The colossal movement out of Ireland that occurred as result of this tragedy was characterised by generalised descriptions of a great 'exodus' of impoverished peoples, forced to migrate unwillingly to new, often unwelcoming, landscapes. Indeed, earlier studies have portrayed the Irish in Scotland as reluctant migrants, forced to settle in a strange and often hostile environment.[1] Yet these accounts have overshadowed the wider dynamics of Irish migration which were far more complex and multifaceted than have been firmly impressed upon the collective imagination. In recent years, scholars have offered a much more refined version of dynamics underpinning Irish migration.[2] This article will add to this growing body of literature by providing an analysis of the Irish in the Greenock labour market during the first half of the nineteenth century. Due to the restrictions in space, the importance of associational cultures and the church in fostering 'ethnic identities' is beyond the scope of this article. What this essay will show is that distinctive channels of mobility existed between the northern counties of Ireland and Greenock before the Famine. It will also be shown that employers' perceptions of 'Irishness' was a crucial factor for migrants looking to secure employment. Employers in certain industries recognised Irish migrants for their qualities of dedication and willingness to undertake jobs that others normally disregarded. This should not be viewed as negative. In fact, employers' recognition of these Irish qualities, real or imagined, was a vital component in securing employment in certain industries in Greenock.

The location of Greenock has been chosen for the purpose of this particular study for a number of factors. Greenock is part of 'Clydeside':

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[1] Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace* (Manchester, 1987); James Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947).

[2] See in particular Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast, 1996); David Fitzpatrick, 'The Irish in Britain: Settlers or Transients?' in Patrick Buckland and John Belcham (eds), *The Irish in British Labour History* (Liverpool, 1993).

the umbrella term often given to industrial towns on the River Clyde in Scotland. Undoubtedly, however, there have been a plethora of studies that focus on Glasgow which have overshadowed the wider experience of urban development in Scotland during the nineteenth century. As a port town, Greenock was a node of international trade and a channel of movement and migration. In the eighteenth century the Clyde port towns gained international prominence through commercial networks with North America and the West Indies, with Greenock alone controlling 22 per cent of Scotland's international trade.[3] Such commercial success demanded intense concentration of labour, which naturally led to urban development. By utilising the precocious position of Clyde ports, industrial partnerships between colonial merchants established further industries in the West of Scotland, which became some of the greatest employers of industrial manpower in those regions. Greenock and Port Glasgow particularly would become the locational nucleus of the Scottish sugar industry, whilst also benefitting from merchant investment in shipbuilding, rope-making and sailcloth manufacturers.[4] Like the rest of urban Scotland, Greenock went through significant changes throughout the nineteenth century. It is in this period that one commentator has suggested that Greenock, with its developing industries and infrastructures, may be taken as the 'archetypal port town of the Western Lowlands'.[5] Furthermore, the purpose of selecting Greenock as the location of this study is the overwhelming number of its migrants from both Ireland and the Highlands that inhabited the town at similar time periods, and contributed significantly to the expanding labour force. Out of a population of 36,882 in Greenock in 1841, 4,307 of participants were Irish-born migrants. From 1851, out of a population of 37,543, the total number of Irish-born residents was 4,986, whilst 4,719 were born in Highland parishes. In 1851 therefore, 25.8 per cent of the total population of Greenock were born in Ireland or the Highlands. In-migration from this principally Celtic inflow from rural parishes transformed Greenock and set it apart somewhat from its nearby vicinities. Competing and conflicting forms of ethnicity – Irish, Lowland Scot, and Highlander – were strongly pronounced, and tensions often developed in matters of residence, welfare and employment. Irish migrants in particular were most often found

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[3] Laura E. Cochran, *Scottish Trade with Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1985), 143.

[4] Ibid., 37.

[5] T. M. Devine, 'Urbanisation' in Tom M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland: Vol. 1, 1700–1830* (Edinburgh, 1988), 35.

in the lower echelons of the labour market, particularly as dock labourers and sugarhouse workers.

Yet it is doubtful that many Irish migrants possessed illusions of Greenock as a 'promised land'. According to Enda Delaney, for Irish Catholics especially, emigration was all about survival rather than prosperity.[6] Indeed, whilst Irish migrants typically occupied the lowest sectors of employment in Greenock, they were incredibly attuned in seeking out 'niche' sectors in the Greenock labour market. There were two reasons for this. First, social networks were important as conduits of information between Greenock and Ireland. The development of steam travel in the early nineteenth century allowed for a more porous movement between Ireland and Scotland, and migration to Scotland was not always permanent. Ever sensitive to labour market conditions, residents in Ireland were made aware of opportunities for work by returning migrants who had earned enough money working in the Greenock factories and docks. Secondly, the importance of ethnic identity was also significant in securing employment in Greenock. In some cases, employers in Greenock factories and other workplaces used ethnicity as a marker to determine whether certain workers were more employable than others. Thus, the Irish in Greenock reinforced their positions within the community by assuming control over particular sectors of employment, whilst also maintaining links with the old country through return migration. Therefore, the Irish in Greenock were economic opportunists; active players in their own situations who were willing to take risks in order to facilitate social progression, or simply to earn enough money temporarily in Scotland in order to live more comfortably in Ireland.

This article will be split into three main sections. The first will focus on early patterns of migration that can be reconstructed from the analysis of marriage registers in the Catholic Chapel. The second section will evaluate the significance of ethnicity in securing opportunities of employment through testimonies extracted from the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor*. The final section will provide a statistical analysis of Irish migrants in the Greenock labour market in the immediate post-Famine era, in comparison with Highland migrants, paying close attention to the role of ethnic agency in opportunities of employment.

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[6] Enda Delaney, 'Narratives of Exile and Displacement: Irish Catholic Emigrants and the National Past, 1850–1914' in Terence Dooley (ed.), *Ireland's Polemical Past: Views of Irish History in Honour of R. V. Comerford* (Dublin, 2010), 102–22.

**Early Irish Settlement in Greenock: Migration Patterns and Networks**

Before the analysis of Irish occupational patterns in Greenock can take place, it is necessary to explain the concept of the social network in migration theory. The concept of the network in this context is meant to suggest a measure of conscious thought among the migrants.[7] Those leaving Ireland pursued well-known mobility channels that had been shaped by economic and labour market circumstances. Migrants were responsive to employment opportunities by taking advantage of cross-border linkages between extended family members and friends. There is some evidence of this being accurate from the analysis the early patterns of Irish settlement in Greenock, which can be obtained from the Parish records for St Mary's Chapel. Built in 1808, this was, at the time, the only Roman Catholic Chapel in Greenock. Parish records for marriage do not record the birthplace of the couples involved. Catholic marriages became more frequent as the century progressed, and priests would often be sparse in writing down the personal details of couples beyond names, ages and current addresses. However, the earliest Registers of Catholic Marriages for Greenock from 1808 and 1818 contain notable exceptions that specify the birthplaces of those who were recently betrothed. Furthermore, the birthplace for Catholics married in Greenock between 1831 and 1834 were recorded for the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor*. Though this is merely a snapshot, by analysis of the Register, distinct migratory pattern from Ireland to Greenock is highlighted. Certainly there are limitations to this source. Not all Irish migrants to Greenock were Catholics. Additionally, not all marriages that took place within St Mary's were between Irish migrants. Nonetheless, the Register for Catholic Marriages still provides a useful, albeit brief, insight into the patterns of migration and the interrelation of the Catholic Irish community in Greenock. By analysis of the birthplaces of Irish migrants, the importance of networks between Irish localities and Greenock is emphasised.

Social networks were important sources of information that were based around friends, extended family, or members of the same rural communities. The presence of a family member or friend in the prospective destination had understandable benefits to potential migrants. Their presence in the new land would help to minimise the trauma and uncertainty over relocating. Personal networks also helped migration become conventional as each new wave of

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[7] Enda Delaney, Donald McRaild, 'Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities since 1750: An Introduction', *Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, 23 (2005), 127–42.

migrants developed connections and acquaintances that were available to ensuing newcomers.[8]

Figure 1.1: Birthplace of Irish Catholics Married in St Mary's, Greenock between 1811-1818, Source: Register for Catholic Marriages, St Mary's
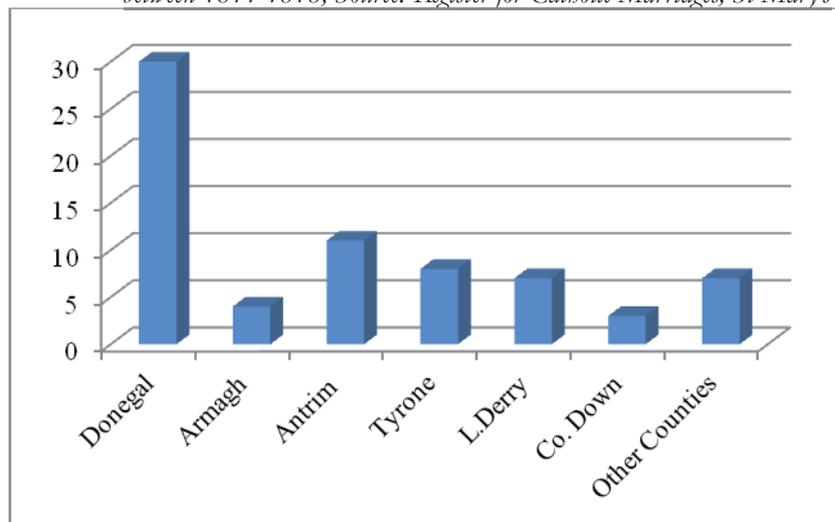
The first marriage in Greenock between Irish-born migrants took place in 1811. Out of forty-seven marriages that took place in St Mary's in the subsequent years to 1818, forty involved Irish migrants. Six marriages were between natives of Lowland Scotland and Ireland; four were between Irish and Highlanders; and one between Irish and English. In all, twenty-nine marriages were between Irish-born migrants in total. Out of seventy Irish natives on the marriage register between 1811 and 1818, sixty-four were from the Ulster provinces.

Thirty of the Irish natives on the register were from Donegal; eleven were born in Antrim; eight from Tyrone; seven from Londonderry; four from Armagh and three from County Down.[9] In the first phase of migration to Greenock, then, it would appear that Irish migrants tended to marry amongst one another. However, there were exceptions. One marriage in 1814 took

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[8] Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921–1971* (Liverpool, 2000), 9; Monica Boyd, 'Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas', *International Migration Review*, 23 (1989), 641.

[9] Register for Catholic Marriages, St. Mary's Parish: Columba House, Edinburgh, 5.

place between natives of County Down and Clachan, Argyll. There were two marriages in 1815 between Irish and Highland migrants; John McDade, a native of Donegal, married Euphemia Darroch, a Protestant from Isla, whilst James Campbell, stated on the register as Irish, married Margaret McPherson, again Protestant, from Killearn, and in 1816 John Sullivan from Donegal married Ann Sutherland, from Sutherland. Only three marriages took place between 1808 and 1818 where both parties were Highlanders; three from South Uist, one from Skye; one from Islay and one from Oban.

The marriage registers between 1831 and 1834 show similar patterns in regards to the Irish. Out of forty-two marriages in 1831-34, thirteen were between Irish and natives of Scotland, of whom appeared from their names to be of Irish parents; one was between Irish and English, and one between Irish and a native of Guernsey. Out of sixty-eight Irish natives on the Marriage Register, fifty-six were from the northern counties of Antrim, Armagh, Donegal, Derry and Tyrone.[10]

Most of the Irish-born married others from Ireland. Their ethnic affiliation encouraged Irish migrants in Greenock to stick together, seek work in the same factories and find similar residences together. The numbers of migrants before the 1841 Census are vague, however Rev. William Gordon, priest in St Mary's, stated in *The Report for the Irish Poor* that there were around 4,000 people in his flock, 'whom all within about fifty are Irish.'[11] Indeed, by the time of the 1841 Census there were 4,307 Irish-born persons resident in Greenock. The relatively low number of Catholic marriages, between 1831 and 1834 especially, is perhaps key evidence that it was mostly first-generation families who were emigrating from Ireland to Greenock.

The high proportion of emigrants from Donegal, Antrim and Tyrone were connected with declining economic opportunities in the north west of Ireland. As Brenda Collins has shown, the flax-growing families in the north-west counties of Ireland were affected by competition from mainland Britain after the introduction of mechanised cotton production in Lancashire and Paisley.[12] The decline of the domestic linen industry in north-west Ireland meant that migrants had little to lose by emigrating. Dundee was the pre-eminent centre for linen production in Britain attracted the largest number of

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[10] Ibid, also noted in British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836), 138.

[11] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836).

[12] Brenda Collins, 'Early Evidence of Irish Immigration to Scotland: A Note on the Catholic Parish Register', 1-6: http://www.localpopulationstudies.org [accessed 18 March 2014].

Irish emigrants outside of Liverpool.[13] Textile manufacturers and rope-works certainly existed in Greenock at this time, although not to the same extent as Dundee, or even nearby Paisley. Yet Irish immigration to Greenock, before the Great Famine at least, was geographically specific to the counties suffering economic decline in the textile trade.

Figure 1.2: Birthplace of Irish Catholics Married in St Mary's, Greenock between 1831-1834, Source: Register for Catholic Marriages, St Mary's
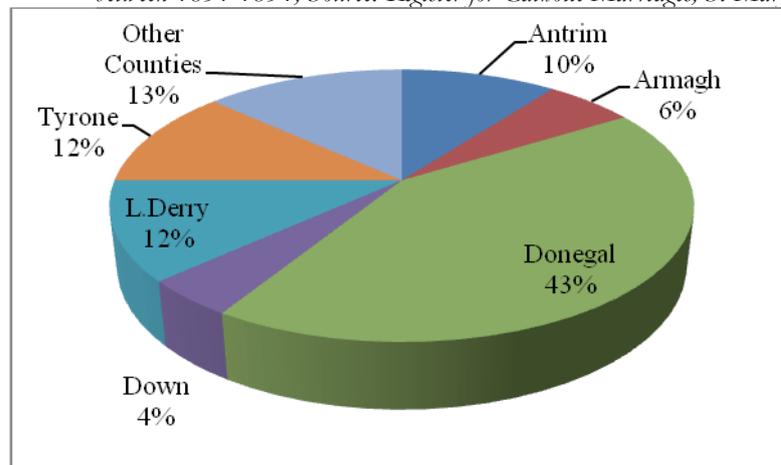
The pull-factor of home ties therefore that were replicated through continued migration was clearly a strong factor for choosing Greenock as a destination. Steamboats from Derry and Belfast to Greenock began in the early 1820s, and competition between rival companies kept fares low enough for weavers to make the journey with their families.[14]

Ethnicity, Social Networks and Opportunities of Labour

Though the term 'ethnicity' can be traced back to the ancient Greek *ethnos*; its current application in the sociology of migration is more historical and inclusive. Sociological studies locate ethnic membership within a multifarious

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[13] Brenda Collins, 'The Linen Industry and Emigration to Britain during the Mid-Nineteenth Century' in Margaret E. Crawford (ed.), *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine* (Belfast, 1997), 153.

[14] Brenda Collins, 'The Origins of Irish Immigration to Scotland' in Tom M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigration and Scottish Society* (Edinburgh, 1991), 8.

cooperative process, a socio-historical and political discourse between dominant and subsidiary groups. Simply put, there can be no ethnic 'them' without an ethnic 'us'.[15] A cultural construction, ethnic identity is defined and projected in two main ways: through opposition to an 'alien' other and by the invocation of deep-rooted, self-referential myth 'based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate.'[16] One source which highlights the importance of ethnicity as a factor in determining opportunities of labour amongst migrants in Greenock is the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor*, which was published in 1836. An essential source for studies of Irish migration in nineteenth-century Britain, it concluded that Irish immigration was 'an example of a less civilised population spreading themselves, as a kind of substratum, beneath a more civilised community, and, without excelling in any branch of industry, obtaining possession of all the lowest departments of manual labour.'[17] None the less, the Report contains favourable testimony from employers in Greenock in regard to the need for Irish labour. As will be shown, various employers actively sought Irish workers to work in their factories and yards as they believed that the Irish possessed qualities that were synonymous with hard work and willingness to do work that natives or Highlanders would normally refuse. Moreover, testimonies within the report are crucial in furthering our understanding of the importance of social networks in assisting further migration from Ireland.

John Robb owned a construction works in West Blackhall Street, Greenock that employed eighty people; sixty of which were masons, and twenty labourers. Robb stated that Irish workers rarely became masons, as they had not learned the trade in the old country, but all the labourers were Irish 'without exception'.[18] Robb furthermore revealed that the Irish were more likely than Scots to be employed as farm labourers as they were acknowledged

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[15] See John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), *Ethnicity* (Oxford, 1996). As the Project Director conceded, research funded by the European Science Foundation on 'Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850–1940' concentrated on ethnic minorities, see F. M. L. Thompson, 'Series Preface' in Max Engman (ed.), *Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe* (Aldershot, 1992), xix. See also, Richard Williams, *Hierarchical Structures and Social Value: The Creation of Black and Irish Identities in the United States* (Cambridge, 1990).

[16] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: an Introduction* (2nd Edition, London, 2008), 17.

[17] BPP, 1836 XXXIV, First Report of Inquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland. Appendix G, State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain, 456–7.

[18] Ibid., 140.

by employers for their industrious qualities and willingness to accept a lower rate of wages:

> The Irish are industrious and hardworking, and in general they are good labourers. They are quite the reverse of drunken during their working hours. In most cases, they are very poor … If it were not for the Irish, masons labourers could not be got at the present wages. Men might be got from the Highlands; but I suspect that the Highlandmen would not like to work at the same rate of wages … As far as I can ascertain, from 300 to 350 persons are employed here on the quays in loading and unloading vessels, about 150 of whom are Scotch, chiefly Highlanders; the rest are Irish.[19]

This statement suggests that the mass supply of labour in certain industries came predominantly from Ireland and the Highlands. However, it is also an insightful indication of the tendency of Highland migrants' not to work for the inadequate wages provided by labouring, as opposed to Irish migrants.

Although Irish migrant labour is the main discussion point, the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* for Greenock also reveals the employers' attitudes towards Highlanders at this time. For some contemporary commentators, Highlanders were not well suited to urban life on account of their language differences and a belief in the crude stereotype that they were lazy.[20] According to Engine works owner Robert Gordon Esq:

> We decidedly prefer the Irish as labourers either to the English or Scotch; they work with more heart and good will, and are more civil and attentive. Highlanders could be got in sufficient numbers, but we do not like them so well, they are not so willing and obedient, nor so hardworking and industrious.[21]

Greenock was well recognised in the nineteenth century for its dominance over the sugar industry in Scotland. Sugar cane was imported from the West Indies from 1745 and processed in various factories between Greenock and Port Glasgow.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Charles Withers, *Urban Highlanders: Highland-Lowland Migration and Urban Gaelic Culture, 1700-1900* (East Linton, 1998), 133.

[21] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836), 140.

Figure 1.3: Map denoting the Locations of the Various Sugarhouses in Greenock and Port Glasgow

The work was notoriously exhausting; with employees operating heavy machinery over long hours in extremely hot conditions. It was certainly an industry that was dominated by Irish labour from the early nineteenth century. Most of the refineries in Greenock relied on German expertise on how to properly refine sugar; and Irish graft to work the furnaces. Thomas Fairrie operated one of the largest sugarhouses in the town at the Cartsdyke Bridge in Rue-End Street, and employed over sixty Irishmen in his industry. In his response to the investigators, he explained the necessity for Irish labour in Greenock:

> The natives of this town do not like this work, chiefly on account of the heat, and, as it requires no apprenticeship, it is not considered as a trade, and the Scotch prefer bringing up their children to trades. The men working in the sugar houses required to be admitted into the trades' union of the town, but were refused … the Scotch will not work in sugar houses; the heat drives them away in the first fortnight.[22]

There are a number of important points from Mr Fairrie's testimony. The Irish were certainly willing to brave the gruelling conditions of sugarhouse labour in order to earn a living, whilst native Scots were more reluctant, both on account of the strenuous working environment and, perhaps more crucially,

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[22] Ibid.

that sugarhouse work was not considered as a trade; which would have held more job prospects and, no doubt, better wages.

1.4 Birthplaces of Workers Employed in Sugar Refining in Greenock in 1851 by Percentage,
Source: 1851 Census
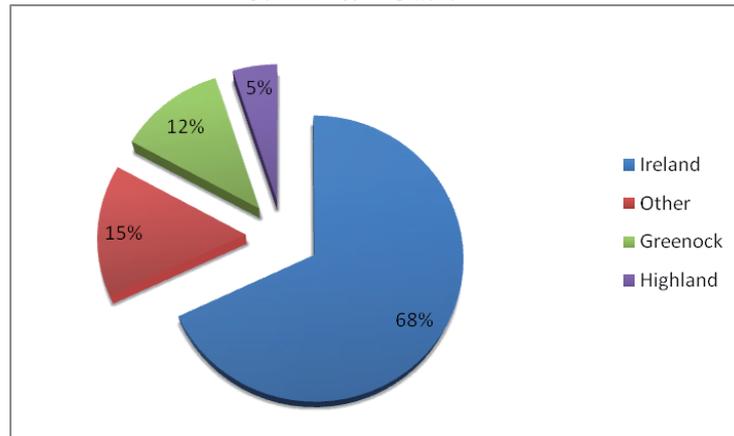
Nevertheless, it is revealed in the analysis of wages for Farrie's sugarhouse that Irish workers, as well as Germans, were amongst the highest earners.

1.5 Numbers of Persons Employed in Thomas Fairrie's Sugar Works and Weekly Warnings of Workers, Source: Report on the State of the Irish Poor, 1836

Weekly Earnings	Scottish	Irish	German
16s.–22s.	0	13	3
13s.–15s.	2	45	0
6s.–8s.	3	4	0

Mr Fairrie also states that his sugar works also employed a selection process in which Irish migrants were actually preferred to Scottish applicants:

> We have opportunities of selecting the men employed in our works, and the Irish are more serviceable to our purpose and more manageable than the Scotch … If it were not for the Irish, we should be forced to give up trade, and the same applies to every sugarhouse in town; this is

a well-known fact. Germans would be our only resource, and we could not regularly get them; Highlanders would not do the work.[23]

Despite a relatively favourable testimony from Thomas Fairrie, which expressed the fundamental need for Irish labour in the sugar industries, other employers were not so complimentary in their opinion of Irish workers. The Irish in Greenock were often at a disadvantage in the labour market as a result of the construction of discriminatory stereotypes by employers. Despite the assertion that sugar refiners would have to give up trade without the labour of Irish migrants, William MacFie, who owned a sugar refinery on Bogle Street, Greenock, found them a disreputable influence:

> We have received supplies of men chiefly from the Highlands. The Irish in Greenock are, in general of the working classes. I think the introduction of the Irish has deteriorated the lower classes with us. It has diminished the wages of labour.[24]

It would appear from his testimony that William MacFie was the only sugar refiner in Greenock who decidedly preferred Highlanders, and found them willing, to work in his sugarhouse. It may also be more than coincidental that William MacFie's father Robert was a native of the Isle of Bute, and formerly a member of the Glasgow Highland Society.[25] William MacFie himself was also president of the Gaelic School Society in Greenock, which was established in 1820.[26] This is perhaps an indication of the favouritism of a senior industrialist for his 'own kind', and the commensurate ethnic discrimination towards Irish workers. Indeed, Charles Withers has demonstrated how Highlanders established common networks in the Lowlands, which advanced occupational prospects of later migrants from Highland parishes. Norman McLeod, a Highland minister who held a parish in Barony, Glasgow, described how Highland migrants in the city would take care of their counterparts: 'we are very clannish; and those who come from one Island do it for the men of that Island who have to get employment.'[27] Highland migrants searching for work in the Lowlands therefore could benefit from the common heritage of

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Withers, *Urban Highlanders*, 136.

[26] *Fowler's Commercial Directory for the Lower Wards of Renfrewshire for 1834–1835* (Renfrewshire Directory Office, Paisley, 1835), 106.

[27] Withers, *Urban Highlanders*, 93.

prospective employers. In Greenock however, William MacFie not only utilised forged networks in the Highlands as a source of labour for his sugarhouse, but also operated a system of occupational exclusion based on ethnic identity.

Rev. William Gordon, the resident Catholic priest of St Mary's Parish, again further indicated the typical occupation patterns of Irish workers, which showed a relative spread across the lower to skilled trades:

> The Irish in this town belong almost exclusively to the working classes; there are a few small shop-keepers, some cloth merchants, some brokers and some provision sellers. Many of them are also hawkers; but these do not stay constantly in Greenock; the rest are labouring men, many of whom work at the quays, loading and unloading vessels; others are engaged by the farmers in the neighbourhood in their improvements in agriculture; a good many work as ship carpenters; a great many are engaged in the sugar manufactories; some in the foundries …[28]

An interesting point to be made is the permeable nature of migration between Ireland and Scotland, and the relationship this had on influencing further migration. The development of steam travel in the nineteenth century helped facilitate a route way access in the Irish Sea that was significant in producing information networks between Scotland and Ireland. Thomas Fairrie stated that the Irishmen employed in his sugar works would regularly go back to Ireland for a year to 'enjoy themselves on the money they have saved, and then come back at the end of the time.'[29] This suggests that Irish migrants in Greenock still maintained their links with the old country, and that migration for many was certainly not permanent. Those sugarhouse workers could have been an important source of information for other would-be migrants; earning enough money to leave Scotland for several months to come back home and encourage friends and family members to do the same. Indeed, Brenda Collins has noted similar circumstances for the growth of the Dundee Irish community in the nineteenth century. As young girls were not typically employed as farm servants, Irish families were attracted by the prospect of sending their children to work in the mills to contribute to the family upkeep. By immigrating to Dundee, whole families could maintain a family economy based on the textile industry.[30]

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[28] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Collins, 'The Linen Industry and Emigration to Britain during the Mid-Nineteenth

According to Donald H. Akenson, the 'Gaelic-Catholic-Disability' model may have hindered the advancement of individual Irish Catholics in urban America, but may have facilitated an ethnic base for resource organisation at a collective level. Thus, according to Akenson, Irish-Americans utilised their common cultural backgrounds in order to reinforce their positions within society.[31] In some cases, employers in Greenock factories and other workplaces used ethnicity as a marker to determine whether certain workers were deemed more employable than others. Thus, the Irish in Greenock reinforced their positions within the community by assuming control over particular sectors of employment, whilst also maintaining links with the old country through return migration. Therefore, the Irish in Greenock were not necessarily 'exiles' who were never to return, but economic opportunists; active players in their own situations who were willing to take risks to facilitate social progression, or simply to earn enough money temporarily in Scotland in order to live more comfortably in Ireland.

Rev. Gordon revealed significant information regarding the importance of the cohesive network of the pre-Famine Irish migrant community in encouraging and providing support for new migrants coming from the old country:

> The Irish in this town certainly have the will to assist one another in times of distress or sickness, as far as their abilities will permit them. They often harbour friends, relations, and neighbours when they first come from Ireland, before they can get work.[32]

Tellingly, the priest revealed further details of the migration process that highlight a careful degree of rational decision-making amongst those who departed and their families. In order to diversify risk, some family members remained in the local economy, whilst, others, notably the young within the family, were sent to work in Scotland:

> They sometimes invite their own relations if they be destitute at home; generally the young come first, and, if they succeed, they send for the other members of their families, chiefly their parents, in order to support them. There is a great deal of family affection amongst them;

Century', 158.

[31] Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora* (Belfast, 1996), 237–42.

[32] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836).

making allowances for their poverty, they appear to me to pay every attention to their children.[33]

The rationale for leaving Ireland for Greenock, certainly in the pre-Famine era, was one of conscious determination rather than desperation. According to Rev. William Gordon, however, the internal cohesion of the Irish Catholic population in Greenock acted as a barrier in further assimilation with the host community. Generally through competition for labour and partly through religion, many within the native working class held views that the Irish were adversely set apart from the rest of the population:

> The Irish in this are treated in this town with a kind of exclusive policy, principally by the lower classes: I do not think there is that feeling among the higher classes; the lower classes consider them as a distinct class of persons. The religious prejudice may probably also contribute something; this is now fast wearing away.[34]

Discrimination towards Irish workers in Scottish workplaces has been well documented. Martin J. Mitchell has challenged the common perception of the use of Irish migrants as strike-breakers in Scottish workplaces, which added to the native Scottish resentment towards the Irish.[35] According to Callum Brown, 'partly through the use of immigrants as strike-breakers and partly through sectarianism, Catholics were generally isolated from the trade unions and Labour movements before 1890.'[36] Mitchell ascertains that whilst there can be no doubt this took place on several occasions, it was far more commonplace in areas with high employment in coal manufacturing, especially Lanarkshire. Indeed, there is evidence that Irish workers participated in strike activity in Greenock in the mid-nineteenth century. A joiners' strike that took place Greenock in 1833 was blamed on 'bellowers against the bill for suppressing disturbances in Ireland'.[37] Irish workers were identified with the roughest of manual labour. At that level, ethnicity could prove a functional means of mobilising resources. In Greenock, however, ethnic identity among working-class Irish was often a means of coping with disadvantages in the

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1998).
[36] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 120.
[37] *Greenock Advertiser*, 25 April 1833.

lowest tiers of the labour market. The Greenock Catholic Friendly Society was established by a number of Irish Catholics as a defensive measure against the dangers of sickness and unemployment. Ethnic and religious identity was interwoven in this society that was formed on the basis of mutual support for Catholics alike:

> . . . Chiefly working men . . . the Roman Catholics in Greenock . . . live in houses of the poorest description, and when sickness or death visits us, we are too often (contrary to our spirits) forced to seek a poor pittance from the powers that be, or what is even worse, become the dejected outcasts of society.[38]

One of the more remarkable personal testimonies in the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* for Greenock, reveals however, that Irish migrants were used as blackleg labour to fill positions of other Irish workers, as well as Scots, who formed a trades union and struck work:

> Last August the sawyers in my yard struck, fourteen couple of whom were Irish. The Irish were not the ringleaders; they were earning from 35s. to 40s. a pair per week, frequently as much as £3. We refused their terms, and employed common labourers, chiefly Irish, to fill the pits; by degrees they learnt the trade, and are now earning from 30s. to 35s. a-week; some come up to 40s. The hands who struck are now beginning to be employed on their former wages, and have entirely dissolved the union they formed.[39]

The statement from Charles Scott, a shipbuilding magnate, also demonstrates how Irish and Scottish workers were willing to unite on common ground and form a trade union, albeit unsuccessfully. Furthermore, by the use of Irish labourers to fill the vacant positions of their fellow countrymen who had struck work, it raises the question of just how much of a 'community' the Irish in Greenock really were. It is certainly evident from this statement that ties of ethnicity were cut across readily when there was a promise of work to be had. Moreover, numerous local newspaper reports detailed faction fighting between Irish migrants in Greenock workplaces. The *Greenock Advertiser* noted in 1829 that the Angus and Co. Sugarhouse had become a 'favourite arena for the

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[38] NAS FS4/1107 Rules and Regulations of the Greenock Catholic Friendly Society.
[39] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836).

decision of pugilistic contests' between Irish employees.[40] It may be suggested that regional rivalries existed between Irish migrants in the workplace. It is difficult to comprehend how this may have affected their self-perceptions of 'Irishness'. Nonetheless, participants were perceived by employers and by the press as one and the same: Irish.

Whilst the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* is a valuable source in order to gain some perspective on the early occupational choices of Irish migrants in Greenock in the pre-Famine period, there are limitations to its usefulness. The overall intention of the Report is an inquiry on the Irish poor in Scotland; therefore any examples of middle-class Irish migrants were ignored in favour of a distorted picture of Irish at the bottom rung of the social ladder. Furthermore, the *Report* does not contain any testimony from Irish migrants themselves. This would have been far more useful to evaluate the motivations for emigrating, the experience of life and work in Greenock in the early nineteenth century, and how this influenced their own perceptions of ethnic identity.

The Irish in the Greenock Labour Market: Evidence from the 1851 Census

The occupational and social status of migrants is of considerable interest in studying the patterns of migration out of Ireland. The census data makes it possible to determine the most notable features of the Irish settlements in Greenock. The enumerator's sheets allow us to examine such quantitative data as spatial distribution of migrants, their age, occupational profile and marital status. Yet, any attempt to reconstruct the Irish migrant experience in Lowland Scotland requires more than census data. First, census statistics provide decennial 'snapshots' of the Irish in certain parishes at particular stages in time, and in doing so ignore the reciprocal patterns of migration, settlement and re-emigration.[41] Second, matters of religious adherence, involvement in politics and trade unions, and appearance in local crime statistics require further investigation beyond the analysis of census statistics. However, the census data provides the essential boundaries within which the discourses of these matters can take place. As a point of comparison, the patterns of

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[40] *Greenock Advertiser*, 29 April 1829.

[41] Roger Swift, *The Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815–1914: A Documentary History* (Cork, 2002), 27.

Irish employment will be analysed alongside the other major migrant group in Greenock, the Highlanders, in order to examine whether conflicting opinions of ethnicity were prevalent amongst employers in providing jobs to migrants.

The census confirms that the steady flow of Irish migration to Scotland peaked in 1851, with 207,367 of the total population of Scotland originating from Ireland. In Renfrewshire alone, one in ten people were born in Ireland, with most of these migrants concentrated in the towns of Greenock, Paisley and Port Glasgow. Due to deficiencies in the national census that did not specify the parish of birth for Scottish-born participants, it is difficult to quantify accurate numbers of Highland-born migrants in Greenock before 1851. Out of a population of 36,882 in Greenock in 1841, 4,307 of participants were Irish-born migrants. From 1851, out of a population of 37,543, the total number of Irish-born residents was 4,986, whilst 4,719 were born in Highland parishes. In 1851 therefore, 25.8 per cent of the total population of Greenock were born in Ireland or the Highlands.

The census returns which were copied into enumeration books were used to discover the general pattern of the occupations undertaken by Irish and Highland-born migrants living in Greenock, over the age of fourteen, in 1851. The occupational classifications adopted by W. A. Armstrong will be used, which are divided into professional/managerial *(Class I)*, clerical and commercial *(Class II)*, artisans and skilled workers *(Class III)*, semi-skilled and self-employed *(Class IV)* and unskilled workers *(Class V)*.[42]

From Figure 2.1 we can see the pluralistic nature of Greenock in 1851. Whilst there was a steady increase in migration from Irish and Highland parishes to Greenock in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is clear that this was part of a much bigger picture. Indeed, from an analysis of the Greenock labour market in 1851, it is clear that Irish and Highland migration to Greenock was part of a larger migratory pattern, with Greenock-born persons forming just over 25 per cent of the total labour force in the town. Certainly this suggests that Highland migrants to Greenock were just one element of a nation 'on the move'. Notwithstanding this point however, it is clear that Irish and Highland migrants made a massive contribution to the

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[42] W. A. Armstrong, 'The Use of Information about Occupation' in Edward A. Wrigley (ed.), *Nineteenth-century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (Cambridge, 1972), 191–310. For further analysis of statistical census data for Greenock in the nineteenth century, see R. D. Lobban, 'The Migration of Highlanders into Lowland Scotland, c. 1750–1850, with particular reference of Greenock', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh (1970).

labour market in Greenock, providing a combined total of almost half of the entire workforce of the town, which totalled 10,222 people.

Figure 2.1 Birthplaces of Greenock Workforce in 1851: Source: Census for Scotland 1851
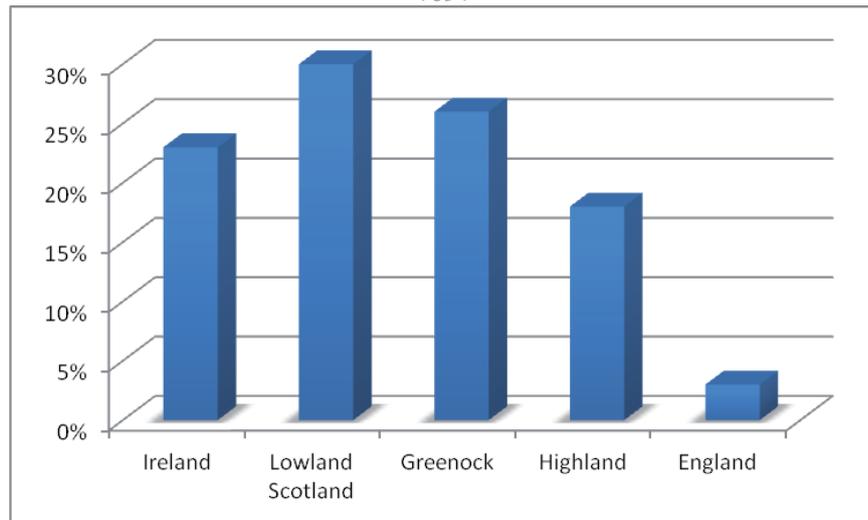
The majority of Lowland-born workers in Greenock were employed as skilled workers in the heavy industries of shipyard work and engineering. Indeed, only 13 per cent of workers born in Greenock were to be found in the unskilled sectors. The occupational patterns of Irish and Highland migrants in Greenock that are revealed in the 1851 census show some notable distinctions against this general trend, and even more so between the two ethnic groups. Whilst both groups tended to be found generally between the skilled (*Class III*) and unskilled (*Class V*) sectors of employment, there were certainly many cases of dissimilarity in specific job choices between the Irish and Highland workers. It is evident that a slight majority of Highland-born migrants in Greenock were artisans and tradesmen. A total of 58 per cent of Highlanders who were employed in Greenock were skilled workers, which is almost on par with the general trend of the host population; 64 per cent of Greenock-born workers were employed as tradesmen and in other skilled sectors.

For Irish-born migrants however, this trend differs considerably, with only 33 per cent of those represented in the *Class III* group. The Irish-born labour force in Greenock was overwhelmingly employed in the unskilled sector (*Class V*). The Irish are represented in the *Class V* group at 61 per cent, which contrasts remarkably with those born in Greenock, and furthermore

with workers born outside Renfrewshire who made up only 7 per cent of the unskilled workers in Greenock. Nearly a third of the total of Highland born workers were also employed in the *Class V* subdivision, yet they were still under-represented in this group when compared with the Irish. It is evident from the analysis of the statistical data that the Irish dominated the unskilled sectors of employment in Greenock in 1851.

However, Irish migrants were also prominent in skilled trades, notably as sawyers and masons. They also represented 35 per cent of the tailoring trade, and 33 per cent of shoemakers. This is not uncommon. English journalist and reform advocate Henry Mayhew noted that Irish migrants formed a large component of the tailoring and shoemaking trades in London. Despite the skilled nature of this work, however, tailoring was a sweated industry with excessive hours and very little reward:

> When the Irishmen reached the sweater's place, near Houndsditch, they found him in a den of a place, anything but clean, and anything but sweet, and were at once set to work at trouser making, at 1s. a pair, finding their own trimmings … they could not clear more than 5s. by constant labour, and the sweater offered to teach them, if they would bind themselves apprentices to him.[43]

The Highlanders of Greenock did not necessarily deviate from the typical occupational trends of the host population. Most Highland males were employed in the heavy industries of shipbuilding and engineering, which coincided with the general trend of the rest of the Scottish-born males residing in Greenock. Yet there were certain other industries in which Highlanders were more prevalent, setting them apart from the rest of the population - notably the police force, alcohol distillation and selling, gas works and transportation.

Out of forty-six police constables in Greenock in 1851, twenty three were born in Highland parishes, whilst Irish migrants contributed six constables to the police force. Only two policemen were born in Greenock, with the others who made up the force were born in various other Lowland parishes. This is not unique to Greenock, as Charles Withers has shown in his research on Glasgow that a notable presence of Highland migrants were found in the police regiments there in the nineteenth century.[44] This would suggest

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[43] *The Morning Chronicle*, 18 December 1849, quoted in Swift, *The Irish Migrants in Britain*, 57.

[44] Charles Withers, "'The Long Arm of the Law": Migration of Highland-Born

that Highland males typically possessed the desirable qualities, usually strong and disciplinarian, that were deemed necessary for police work in the nineteenth century. Highland males also composed half of the labour force employed in alcohol production in Greenock in 1851.

Figure 2.2: Birthplace of Greenock Police Force by percentage in 1851, source: 1851 Census for Scotland
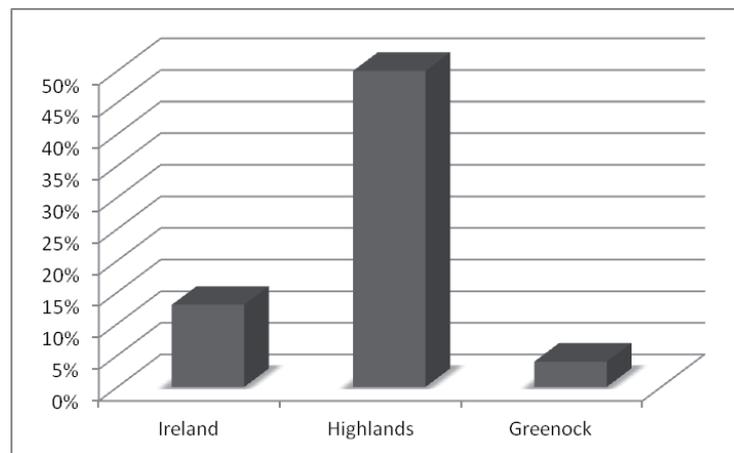
Conversely, there were certain industries that employed curiously few Highland migrants. Highlanders made up only 5 per cent of the labour force in the sugar refineries, whilst contributing only 2 per cent of the workers of the rope-work factories, and none in the potteries. However, almost a third of all occupationally active Highlanders were involved in unskilled trades in Greenock, mostly laboring. Where Irish and Highland migrants competed most in the Greenock labour market was in 'navvying'. The 'navvy', abbreviated from 'navigator', was ascribed to workers who 'cut the navigation' of canals, roads and railways in Britain in the nineteenth century.[45] In Greenock, these workers were overwhelmingly hired hands from Ireland and the Highlands. This type of labour required no skill nor apprenticeship, but merely brute strength, and was vital to the construction of the harbours and railways in Greenock, and indeed to the development of trade in the town. The growth of the sugar trade in Greenock was the catalyst for the construction of new harbours and

Policemen to Glasgow, 1826–1891', *Local Historian*, 18 (1988), 127–35.
    [45] James E. Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland* (Cork, 1970), 8.

improvement to existing docks in the first half of the nineteenth century. The evidence relating to the origins of the workers in the construction of the early harbours has been lost, however in the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* William MacFie stated that large-scale Irish migration to Greenock commenced with the construction of the East India Harbour, which was the first to be completed in 1805: 'About the year 1800 and upwards, when the new harbours were begun . . . they generally came of their own accord, I am not aware of them being sent for.'[46] The Custom House Quay was further developed in 1818. Yet it was the beginning of the construction of the Glasgow, Paisley and Greenock Railway in 1838 that employed thousands of men, many from Ireland and the Highlands. At its peak, the railway line employed in the excess of 3,500 men, with over 1,000 of those concentrated at the section between Port Glasgow and Bishopton. So concerned were ministers of the churches as to the moral character of these labourers that they requested money from the railway directors to establish a temporary mission at Bishopton in order to conduct masses for the men; to be addressed in Gaelic as well as English:

> The Rev. Mr Stewart, finding it impossible to accommodate so many in the parish church, promoted to the directors that a missionary should be appointed especially for the workmen and offered if the company would contribute £30 to raise another £30, so far as to make his salary £60 a year. Mr Stewart's offer was readily agreed to and Mr McMaster labours with ability, faithfulness and zeal. He preaches both in Gaelic and in English. His labours are very useful, not only in promoting good order and correct conduct but in giving that religious instruction of which men deprive themselves in leaving their homes and which is of no much importance they should enjoy.[47]

The most notable contrasts between Irish and Highland work patterns in 1851 however lie in the breakdown of occupations of female migrants. Domestic service was the greatest employer of female labour in Greenock in 1851. Over 1,200 women were employed in this sector, with 316 of those women born in Highland parishes, more so than any other migrant groups in Greenock. Curiously however, Irish women were far less likely to be employed as domestic servants than any other group, with only 7 per cent of Irish women contributing to the overall total. Considering the similar numbers of Irish

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[46] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* (1836), 140.
[47] *Greenock Advertiser*, 9 July 1839.

and Highland females residing in Greenock in 1851, these figures suggest a clear disparity in the preference of the employers of domestic servants, where Highland females were more employable than their Irish counterparts. However, whilst preference may certainly be a factor in explaining the low prevalence of Irish domestic servants, there is evidence to suggest that Irish women and girls were actively discriminated against in this mode of employment. In a remarkable statement George Williamson, the procurator fiscal of Greenock and Renfrew, remarked that Irish females were unlikely to be employed as domestic servants as they were supposedly deceitful and uneducated:

> The Irish females, from their not being much liked as servants in families, are forced to remain in their parents' houses, and become dissolute and untidy, and marry persons just like their parents. The females are disliked as servants because they are not trustworthy, and have not had a good education. The female servants of Greenock are chiefly from the Highlands.[48]

Irish females in Greenock, then, were at a disadvantage in trying to secure jobs in domestic service. According to Williamson, certain employers in this sector considered 'Irishness' as axiomatic with raggedness and deceitfulness. Conversely, Irish women were far more likely than Highlanders to be employed in the factories. Many Highlanders were employed as dressmakers and lodging housekeepers. Irish female migrants however contributed more workers to textile production (44 per cent) and rope-work factories (60 per cent) than any other resident group in Greenock in 1851. Irish females in Greenock also dominated the labour force of the paper mills, with 75 per cent of employees in that sector born in Irish counties. In comparison, Highland women contributed only 4 per cent of those employed in the rope-works, and only 2 per cent of textile workers.

   This is a considerable disparity that suggests that Irish workers were much preferred by employers of these industries. This can perhaps be explained by the prevalence of the textile trades in the northern counties in Ireland. Female migrants from these counties no doubt possessed valuable experience that was utilised in the Greenock factories. Furthermore, the large numbers of workers in the textile factories in Greenock may correlate with the fact that the

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[48] BPP, *Report on the State of the Irish Poor: Greenock* (1836).

largest textile production company in the town was co-owned by three Irish migrants – John Fleming, Robert Neil and James Reid of the Neil, Fleming and Reid Company of Overton. In similar fashion to William MacFie having a preference for Highland workers in his sugar refinery, this is perhaps evidence of Irish employers in Greenock favouring people of similar ethnicity to work in their factory.

Figure 2.3: Birthplace of Female Employees in Greenock Textile Factories by percentage: Source: 1851 Census
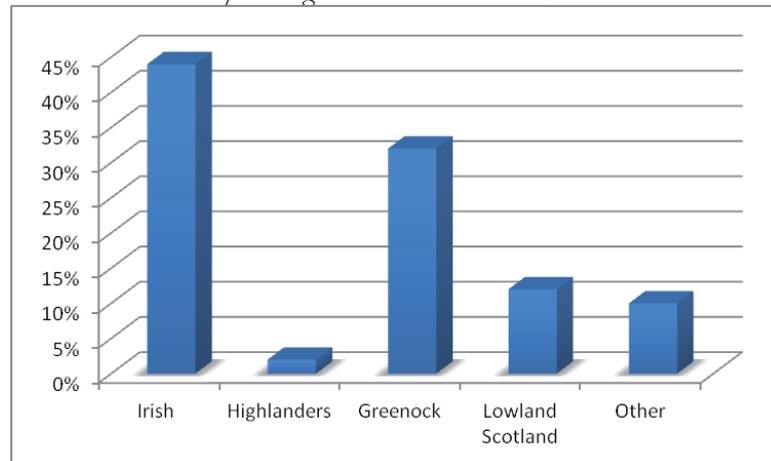
It was evident from the analysis of the 1851 Census that employers were averse to employing Highland women in the factories. Only twenty Highland women were employed in the textile factories, whilst four girls worked in the mills. These figures are remarkable considering that the particular industries in question employed almost 1,300 women in Greenock. Whilst opportunities in work for females in Scotland at this time were still relatively limited, the startling near-absence of Highlanders from factories in Greenock between 1851 is difficult to comprehend. Omission of Highland migrants from certain industries in Greenock initially may be explained by ethnic preference of employers in 1851. Indeed, this correlates with Joan MacKenzie's analysis of Glasgow, who found that industrial employers were prejudiced against Highland labour: "A great majority of the West Highland hands are quite useless; they are deficient in the aptitude to learn, and they do not work heartily; in general, they are a lazy, idle set, we decidedly prefer the Irish to these

Highlanders."[49] Close scrutiny of the Census data for 1851 suggests that both Irish and Highlanders in Greenock occupied mainly working-class positions in employment. However, male migrants from the Highlands also penetrated some higher-end employment sectors. It would also appear that Irish migrants were more readily available to apply themselves in lower-skilled trades than any other group in Greenock in order to secure employment. The Census also confirms that ethnicity was a crucial element in securing work in various sectors of employment for both Irish and Highland migrants. Preconceived notions of 'Irishness' or 'Highlandism', could either be a positive influence or a hindrance to securing employment, depending on the nature of the work. For example, the census for 1851 corroborates with the statements from the *Report on the State of the Irish Poor* that male Irish workers dominated the sectors of sugarhouse labour and dock work, meanwhile Irish females were predominantly found in factory employment. Highlanders, however, owing to the prejudices of certain employers that they adverse to certain modes of employment, were far less likely to be employed in factories. Instead, Highland males monopolised the police force, and were also prominent in the customs trade and as spirit dealers. Highland females were far more likely to be employed as domestic servants as they were deemed to be 'more trustworthy' than Irish girls. Clearly then, preconceived notions of Irish or Highland 'qualities', real or imagined, were often at play in matters of employment.

Conclusion

By the scrutiny of the evidence it is likely that the Irish in Greenock were involved in ethnic-based informal networks, societal and economic, that were important for settling in their new communities. Across time and between several locations, social networks in a variety of forms were a fundamental element of the Irish diasporic experience. Two key points emerge from the analysis of the marriage patterns of Irish Catholics in Greenock in the early nineteenth century.

First, the relatively low numbers of Irish Catholics marrying suggests that the first waves of migration to Greenock were largely first-generation families or married couples. Irish Catholics who married in Greenock overwhelmingly married partners who belonged to the same ethno-religious group. In some

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[49] Joan MacKenzie, 'The Highland Community in Glasgow in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Non-assimilation', Ph.D thesis (University of Stirling, 1987), 87.

cases, this could be attributed to the migration of pre-wed couples who waited until migrating before deciding to marry.

Second, by focusing primarily on the labour market in Greenock, this study demonstrates how Irish migrants formed networks by maintaining links with the homeland, but was also partly shaped by the urban space that the migrants inhabited. Also important in this process was the perceptions of 'Irishness' that was held by the host society. Irish workers were recognised by employers for their hard-working qualities and willingness to undertake jobs that others did not. This should not be viewed as negative. In fact, employers' recognition of these 'Irish qualities', real or imagined, was a vital component securing employment in certain industries in Greenock. With the exception of William MacFie, who refused to employ Irishmen in favour of Highlanders, sugar refiners in Greenock readily employed Irish labour over any other ethnic group in the town.

Indeed, the predominance of Irish labour in the textile mills in 1851 can perhaps be linked to the owners being Irish-born. Returning migrants, and family members who were already in Greenock, were important sources of information that could enlighten prospective Irish migrants to opportunities of work and life in Greenock. As previously stated, the Irish migrants in Greenock would not have considered Greenock as a biblical 'promised land', but merely a land of new, humble prospects. The Irish in Greenock may have occupied the lowest-paid jobs and lived in the poorest quarters of town, but they were certainly not helpless casualties of migration. The implication for the historical study of the Irish in Greenock, therefore, is not a narrative of reluctant migrants who became 'strangers in a strange land', but conscientious decision-makers and economic opportunists. Furthermore, by maintaining links with the old country through return migration and personal networks, they made sure that home was never far away.

University of Glasgow

'Better to die by the sword than to die of starvation': Popular Resistance to Food Exports in Ireland and Scotland, 1846–7

John Cunningham

Two contemporary documents indicate a similarity in the responses of poor people in Ireland and Scotland to the crises arising from the potato failure of the 1840s:

> … We will not stand it if twice the number of troops come to town for to see our children starving and staring us in the face. It is better to die by the sword than to die of starvation.[1]
> … No expostulation or threats made the slightest impression on the mob, who said they might as well die by being shot as of starvation and they were determined to resist to the last the removal of any grain from the country ... but they did not proceed to use violence.[2]

The first extract is from a threatening notice posted in the town of Galway in the west of Ireland in 1846; the second from the report of a public official in Dingwall in the north-east of Scotland in 1847. Starting with these documents, this paper will make some connections and draw some comparisons between the popular mobilisations to prevent the export of the 1846 grain crop that occurred in several parts of Ireland in the two-month period from late September to November 1846 – the months of most intense and widespread protest during the Irish Famine – with those that spread through the north-east of Scotland in the two-month period January to March 1847. While the subject of protest has been largely neglected in the voluminous literature on the Irish Famine, the Scottish mobilisations of 1847 discussed here were the subject of a significant publication by Eric Richards.[3]

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[1] Cited in John Cunningham, *'A Town Tormented by the Sea': Galway, 1790–1914* (Dublin, 2004), 128. There is biblical allusion in both quotes to Lamentations, 4:9: 'They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger.'

[2] Cited in Eric Richards, *The Last Scottish Food Riots, Past & Present Supplement*, No. 6 (1982), 11.

[3] Ibid., passim.

Any coincidence of mentality implied by the above quotations was not a result of direct connections between the west of Ireland and the east of Scotland *per se*, but a reflection of a moral economy and a repertoire of protest in relation to food supply which people in Galway and Dingwall shared with others throughout northern Europe. The conduct and outcome of the protests in Scotland were affected by the unrest in Ireland, however, not least because both places were subject to decisions of government in London.

Economically, Scotland and Ireland were increasingly integrated into the British market during the lives of a generation or two before the potato failure. A process of 'agriculturalisation', together with free trade and the protections provided by government for capitalist enterprises had undermined endeavours like kelp-making, poteen-making, and proto-industrial textile production, making the rural and small town poor more dependent on land. On the land, a combination of population and public policy pressures forced people into reliance on the potato, the only crop capable of supporting an average family for most of a year on an acre. Evidence given to the Devon Commission in the mid-1840s showed that an Irish farm labourer in the east of the country might pay back most of his year's wages to his employer in exchange for the sub-tenancy of an acre on which to grow potatoes for his family.[4] The commercialisation of farming in the east of Scotland similarly created a class of prosperous grain-growing farmers on the one hand, and on the other a growing class of landless proletarians – labourers and fishermen – dependent to a greater or lesser degree on small potato plots.[5] Potatoes purchased in the marketplace were also a considerable part of the diet of the urban poor.

The scale of potato-dependency, however, was rather different in the two places. Scotland's population in the 1840s was less than one third of Ireland's (2.6 million to 8.2 million in 1841), and Scotland was generally more industrialised, with the south capable of absorbing migrants from the north. Moreover, 'railway mania' was further advanced in Scotland than in Ireland, and employment in railway construction was available by the time of the potato failure. With its potato-dependent population at about half-a-million – one sixth of Ireland's figure – the challenge presented by potato blight was

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[4] *Evidence taken before the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Law and Practice in Respect to the Occupation of Land in Ireland, part iii,* House of Commons, 19 (1845), 428, 445–6, 448.

[5] Liz Young, 'Spaces for Famine: A Comparative Geographical Analysis of Famine in Ireland and the Highlands in the 1840s', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* New Series, 21 (1996), 666–80.

more manageable in Scotland.[6] Indeed, boosted by an influx from Ireland, Scotland's population would grow during the 1840s (2.9 million to Ireland's 6.5 million in 1851), though young and old succumbed in the highlands. Distress, it should be noted, was also uneven in Ireland, with Connacht and Munster mortality rates greatly exceeding those of Ulster and Leinster.

The purpose of the popular anti-export mobilisations of late 1846 in Ireland and almost immediately afterwards in Scotland was to influence at local level the price and the availability of food staples – grain in particular, because it was a substitute for the failed potato. During subsistence crises historically, governments and local authorities had intervened in the food market in the interests of order and fairness, banning the export of grain (the term 'export' in this context meaning removal from the district where it was grown) and distilling so as to preserve scarce stocks. These interventions were elements of a 'moral economy', as defined by E. P. Thompson, and people came to expect them. With the rise of capitalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, political economists condemned civic and state efforts to regulate markets as contravening *laissez faire* principles, and ultimately counter-productive as far the poor were concerned. Members of economic and social elites were largely persuaded by the arguments of the political economists but poorer citizens continued to expect their customary and legal protections. And the predicament of the poorer citizens, if not necessarily their occasional protests, also continued to enjoy a measure of sympathy among the better-off.[7]

So-called 'food riots' at this time represented efforts by communities to assert laws which were being disregarded by the responsible authorities. As 'reserve' enforcers of law and custom in this regard, crowds of the common people generally behaved in a restrained and disciplined fashion, and any damage to property was usually limited and purposeful – the exemplary destruction of the scales which had been used to weigh overpriced potatoes or grain, for example. Such 'riots' were part of a type of bargaining process, and the crowds involved usually dispersed when offered a significant concession

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[6] T. M. Devine, *The Great Highland Famine: Hunger, Emigration and Scottish Highlands in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1988), 12–18; Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords, and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh, 2000), 199–203, 324–6; Peter Gray, 'Famine Relief Policy in Comparative Perspective: Ireland, Scotland, and Northwestern Europe, 1845–1849', *Éire-Ireland: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal of Irish Studies,* 32 (1997), 86–108.

[7] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present,* 50 (1971), 76–136.

by the authorities or by merchants, even if it was not precisely the concession demanded.

Outbreaks for the purpose of regulating food supply had come to be regarded as anachronistic in Britain by the 1840s. According to one authority, there were no significant 'food riots' in Scotland in the three decades after 1817, which was a year of widespread scarcity throughout the northern hemisphere due to the impact on crops of volcanic dust in the atmosphere. Food riots continued to recur in urban Ireland during the subsistence crises of the 1820s, 1830s and early 1840s, while the regulation of food supply and price was also a concern of the secret societies that thrived in much of rural Ireland.[8]

There were protests in Ireland throughout the Famine period, concerning a range of issues, from the operation of relief works and soup kitchens to the payment of rent and poor rates, but the period of most widespread, numerous and animated protests was between late September and November 1846.[9] The outbreak commenced soon after it was realised that the entire potato crop was lost, in a country already agitated following the partial failure of the previous year. The realisation that circumstances were to become much worse galvanised the people into acting to hold the remaining food at home. A few months elapsed before the two-month-long wave of Scottish unrest commenced. The Irish outbreak will first be examined, and then the Scottish.

Ireland, September to November 1846

Because Irish protests in these months were concentrated mainly in three regions, this section of the article will consider in turn the unrest in (i) Galway and Mayo; (ii) Limerick and Clare; (iii) Waterford and East Cork.

(i) *Galway and Mayo*
At 5 am on 21 September 1846, between 600 and 700 hundred people, men,

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[8] John Cunningham, 'Popular Protest and a "Moral Economy" in Provincial Ireland in the Early Nineteenth Century'" in Francis Devine, Fintan Lane and Niamh Puirséil (eds), *Essays in Irish Labour History: A Festschrift for John and Elizabeth Boyle* (Dublin, 2008) 26–48; John Cunningham, '"Compelled to their bad acts by hunger": Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817–45', *Éire-Ireland,* 45 (2010), 128–51; Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots,* 4–5.

[9] A wider range of Famine-era protests is discussed by John Cunningham in '"Tis hard to argue starvation into quiet": Protest and Resistance, 1846–47', Enda Delaney and Breandán Mac Suibhne (eds), *Ireland's Great Famine and Popular Politics* (New York, 2016), 10–33.

women and children, assembled in the coastal town of Westport, County Mayo, determined to prevent five cartloads of oats, the property of a local merchant, from reaching the quayside. Although, 'they did not offer the slightest violence,' the people forced the carts to return to the store through sheer force of numbers, declaring that 'they would not allow one grain of corn to leave the country.' Requesting additional cavalry and infantry, the resident magistrate advised that he did not have force sufficient to protect the property of the merchant who was exporting 'a very large quantity' of meal and flour on a daily basis.[10]

Similar scenes might have been anticipated fifty miles south of Westport, in Galway, a town of somewhat under 20,000 with an established flour and grain trade.[11] That trade had been subject to interruption during previous seasons of scarcity, with crowds mobilising to retain food at home or at least to secure assurances that an affordable supply would be made available to them. Insofar as such popular efforts had been successful, this was due to the determined leadership of the fishing community of Claddagh, a Gaelic-speaking suburban village which housed about one-sixth of Galway's population. Claddagh people had a strong sense of their traditional rights generally, having been active in resisting fishing practices in the bay that they considered anti-social, notably the incursion of commercial trawling interests.[12] The characteristic Galway 'food riot' of the pre-Famine period was a ritualised affair, with the following features: a demonstration / blockade led by the women and children of Claddagh; the fishermen preventing grain ships from leaving, either by confiscating their sails or blockading the harbour; limited exemplary damage to the property of the exporting merchants; a confrontation with police or soldiers, followed by the disbandment of the crowd. Usually, the demobilisation of the crowd was quickly followed by a concession, either by merchants making a portion of their cargo available at a 'fair price', or by the opening of a subsidized food store.[13] If no adequate concession was made, a further mobilization would ensue.

In November 1845, following the first partial failure of the potato crop, a planned blockade was thwarted. According to the resident magistrate, he was alerted to the fact that 'emissaries from the town' had approached the

[10] National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Outrage reports, Co. Mayo, 1846, 21/26029.

[11] Cunningham, *A Town Tormented*, 18

[12] John Cunningham, 'The mayor/admiral of Claddagh', in Emmet O'Connor and John Cunningham (eds), *Studies in Irish Radical Leadership: Lives on the Left,* (Manchester, 2016), 22–34.

[13] Cunningham, *A Town Tormented*, 86–98.

Claddagh fishermen, requesting that they prevent ships carrying grain from sailing. The magistrate informed one of the Dominican priests who lived in Claddagh and were greatly respected there. For his part, the priest duly persuaded the fishermen not to act. An admiralty steamer was dispatched to Galway to protect trade, along with two regiments, satisfying the resident magistrate that he had at his disposal sufficient force for the purpose of 'overawing the mob.'[14]

With the second failure of the potato, popular excitement was at an even greater pitch in the autumn of 1846 than it had been a year earlier. In early October, with demands being heard to blockade exports, the authorities again deployed gunboats at the port 'to protect the river between Claddagh … in case the Claddagh men should be persuaded to join the townspeople'.[15] Frustrated, the townspeople turned their attention to provisions, including relief provisions, which were leaving by road for inland towns. Car men were obliged to take oaths to the effect that they would not carry any flour or meal from the town. Tragedy struck on 8 October 1846, when a vigilante force organised by a Catholic priest came into conflict with a crowd determined to turn back a convoy of meal bound for Tuam. One of the blockaders, Bridget Kelly, fell under a cart-wheel and lost her life.[16]

The authorities succeeding in protecting trade in Galway but, significantly, the safe passage of relief provisions had to be overseen by voluntary effort. Naval vessels, including twelve men-of-war, had been deployed to assist with the movement of Indian meal acquired by the government, but the commanders of these vessels were under instruction to 'preserve' their military character so as be in a position to intervene 'in case of outbreak'. Naturally, particular attention was paid to places engaged in the grain trade, especially those, like Galway, with a history of anti-export protests.[17] Given the extent of the crisis of 1846, however, it was not possible to secure the trade in every place.

From the town of Ballinasloe, County Galway, a resident magistrate alerted his superiors in mid-October to an incident involving 'considerable numbers 'of the townspeople, who had compelled a grain buyer, one Horsman, to

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[14] NAI, Outrage papers, 1846, Co. Galway, 11/19343.

[15] Ibid., 11/27341.

[16] Cunningham, '*A Town Tormented',* 134.

[17] *Belfast Newsletter,* 6 October 1846. See also British Parliamentary Papers, *Accounts and Papers; Relief of the Distress in Ireland:* Commissariat series (1847), 151 (Hewetson to Trevelyan, Limerick, 11 October 1846), 171 (ibid., 9 December 1846), 352 (Pigot to Routh, Cork, 16 October 1846). W. J. Lowe, 'Policing Famine Ireland', *Éire-Ireland: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal of Irish Studies,* 29 (1994), 47–66.

return to the countryside with grain he had purchased there. The crowd indicated a willingness to allow the supplies to be brought to the stores of Mr Hood, because, unlike Horsman, he 'retails out small quantities at moderate price'. The magistrate had been unable to intervene, lacking the force to do so, but the Catholic clergy had prevailed upon the people to disperse.[18] In another incident a few days later, the Ballinasloe crowd prevented an unnamed would-be-purchaser from buying grain at the weekly market and obliged the sellers to withdraw it from sale. Seven men judged to have been 'ringleaders' in this instance were charged but treated leniently on the instruction of the resident magistrate.[19] Other interventions in the county's food trade during these weeks took place near Dunmore, where a trench was dug across the road to prevent grain carts from leaving the district.[20] A number of small appropriations took place near Clonfert in the east of the county, where portions of supplies bound for Ballinasloe Asylum were taken by groups pleading hunger, but maintaining an almost apologetic demeanour.[21]

(ii) *Limerick and Clare*
County Clare was noted for the extent of violent class conflict there in the pre-Famine period, perpetrated by agrarian secret societies, the Terry Alts and Lady Clare's Boys. By contrast with the food regulating crowds described, the modus operandi of the secret societies was violent and secretive. Along with conacre rents, evictions, wage rates and the employment of 'strangers' the agrarian underground had taken an intermittent interest in the regulation of food supply and price, and the earliest efforts to prevent grain sales in Limerick-Clare area in the autumn of 1846 were taken by small groups drawing on this tradition.[22] They targeted better-off farmers. On 18 September 1846, ten armed men, wearing women's clothing and with faces blackened, visited Richard Floyd at Ballycar, near Newmarket-on-Fergus, to warn him not to sell any more grain. Before departing, members of the

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[18] NAI, Outrage report, County Galway, 14 October 1846, 11/28027.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 11/27843.

[21] Ibid., 11/29375, 11/30877.

[22] Andrés Eiríksson, 'Crime and Popular Protest in County Clare, 1815-52', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Dublin, 1991), passim; Joseph Power, *A History of Clare Castle and its Environs* (Ennis, 2004), 133-46. Famine-era protest in the region has also been considered by Eiríksson: 'Food Supply and Food Riots', in Cormac Ó Gráda (ed.), *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series,* (Dublin, 1997), 69–94.

gang beat Floyd's workman and fired a shot.[23] A week later, three other farmers in Ballycar received similar visits from an estimated thirty men.[24] More pointed warnings were given during the same week. In two townlands in the Newmarket-on-Fergus area, on the night of 19-20 September, three horses were shot dead in their fields by way of punishing their owners for selling grain at the Limerick market.[25] Three horses in harness were shot near Ennis on 10 October, while conveying grain to the market in Ennis.[26] On 2 November 1846, at Ballykilty, in the same general area, the families of two farmers who had sold grain were assaulted in their houses by fourteen armed and disguised men. Another farmer was served with a threatening notice warning him not to sell grain outside the community and setting the price at which he should sell it locally. On the following evening, a farmer who had allowed his horse to be used in the transport of grain was visited by men with blackened faces.[27]

In Limerick city, which had a history of anti-export activity similar to that of Galway, there was relatively little popular excitement during the autumn of 1846.[28] At the end of September notices appeared throughout the city, calling people to a public meeting at the racecourse to draw attention to their condition. Recognising that such assemblies had been the prelude to popular protests and blockades on previous occasions, a Catholic priest, Fr O'Connor, determined to put a stop to it. As the crowd assembled the priest addressed them, warning of the futility of violence and persuading the organisers to postpone the meeting for a few days. 'But for this timely interposition of the faithful clergy of the people', observed the *Limerick Reporter,* 'there is no knowing what might be the consequence.' O'Connor's promise was that relief works would be quickly initiated, and indeed merchant interests in the city were already lobbying for the wherewithal to commence harbour improvements.[29] But if disorder was averted in Limerick itself, the city's merchants were affected by unrest in the city's hinterland – and not only by the secret society activity described above.

Ennis, the inland county town of Clare with a population of about

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[23] NAI, Outrage report, Co. Clare, 19 September 1846, 5/25309.

[24] Ibid., 26 September 1846, 5/26693.

[25] Ibid., 20 September 1846, 5/25629, 5/26631.

[26] Ibid., 12 October 1846, 5/27697.

[27] Ibid., 6 November 1846, 5/31105.

[28] See Cunningham, 'Three Irish Urban Crowds, 1817–45', 128–51.

[29] *Limerick Reporter,* 2 October 1846; Limerick Chamber of Commerce minutes, 2, 9 October 1846.

10,000, supplied the Limerick export market, via the quays on the River Fergus at Clarecastle, about three miles from Ennis itself.[30] The town had a tradition of resistance to grain exports and a notably volatile crowd. As recently as 1842, five of its people had lost their lives in the course of a food riot.[31] On 5 October 1846, an Ennis crowd of about 500 'turned back the horses and carts laden with oats for shipment', warning the boatmen 'not to take any more food from the county.'[32] Some days later, an anonymous notice was posted on the Catholic chapel door, convening a meeting to convey to the government the consequences of the loss of the potato crop. 'No apology' would be accepted for non-attendance and 'persons considering themselves invested with authority' were warned not to remove the notice.[33] On 10 November, an 'efficient force' of police was mustered to face down the populace of Ennis, with a view to escorting a large cargo of grain from stores in the town to the Clarecastle quays. The cargo was much smaller than it might have been, because only three cars could be procured, the owners and drivers of the others having been intimidated into refusing the merchants' custom. About 400 people were assembled at Clarecastle, but the constables in this instance were able to force their way through. When they reached the quay however, they discovered that 'the same degree of intimidation which prevented a sufficient supply of cars also operated in the minds of the boat owners.'[34] On 24 November, there was further contretemps on the Clarecastle quays, the outcome of which was the return to Ennis of the unloaded carts of grain. Two 'ringleaders' of the crowd, however, were apprehended.[35]

Elsewhere in County Clare, a number of anti-export mobilisations took place on the River Shannon. On 28 October, a boatload of oatmeal and flour left O'Briensbridge under police escort. Within a few hundred yards, a crowd of several thousand forced the boatmen to return the cargo to the mill from which it had come, threatening to throw it overboard if they did not. Later, the crowd laid siege to the mill, but were persuaded to disperse by a Catholic priest.[36] Next day, in the course of a further mobilisation at the mill, the crowd extracted an undertaking from the mill-owner that he would sell oatmeal at

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[30] Power, *A History of Clare Castle,* 133–46.
[31] Cunningham, 'Three Irish Urban Crowds', 147–8.
[32] NAI, Outrage report, County Clare, 5 October 1846, 5/22855.
[33] Ibid., 5/27697.
[34] Ibid., 10 November 1846, 5/31485.
[35] Ibid., 24 October 1846, 5/33233.
[36] Ibid., 28 October 1846, 5/29933.

2s 8d per stone, provided he could acquire oats for 1s 8d per stone. He was assured that local farmers would be persuaded by the people to accept 'the stipulated price'.[37]

Upriver, at Scarriff on 30 October, more than 500 people surrounded the mill there, demanding that the mill-owner, Charles Walnutt, make meal and flour available in small quantities and at reduced prices. When the owner protested that the prices were too low, given 'the prices the farmers were demanding', the leaders of the crowd responded that if the farmers would not cooperate, they 'would go and thresh every stack yard in the country and bring him the grain.' Before departing, the crowd obliged Walnutt to give refunds to all those he was considered to have overcharged before he had agreed to the price reductions.[38]

Elsewhere crowds blocked roads to prevent convoys from reaching Limerick. In mid-October, it was reported that several cartloads of oats had been unable to get through the village of Hospital, while in Broadford, through which 'a great portion of the corn of this country normally passes', repeated mobilisations of the people had resulted in suppliers in that area ceasing to supply Limerick.[39] At Birdhill, close to Limerick but in the county of Tipperary, 'a large, armed group, three to four hundred strong' prevailed over a small detachment of police on 31 October, obliging farmers to return home with their grain. The farmers, it was reported, were waiting until 'a larger force can be found to protect its route to Limerick.'[40]

(iii) *West Waterford and East Cork*

The Irish famine protests best-known to contemporaries and to posterity were the outbreaks in Dungarvan, County Waterford, and twenty miles away in Youghal, County Cork. Their renown was due to the fact that artists from *The Pictorial Times* and *The Illustrated London News* were on hand in late September 1846 to record riotous proceedings in one instance and aftermath in another. The dynamic image of a man leading a crowd outside a Dungarvan baker's shop while holding a long pole with a loaf affixed (a recognised symbol of distress) has had an especial resonance. The disturbances in Youghal and Dungarvan that have been remembered, however, were not even the most

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[37] Ibid., 29 October 1846, 5/29929.
[38] Ibid., 30 October 1846, 5/29941.
[39] Ibid., 12 October 1846, 17/27705, 17/28773.
[40] NAI Outrage reports, County Limerick, 1 November 1846, 17/29875.

dramatic of the many protests that took place in that region over a period of several weeks.[41]

Widespread protest began on 13 September when, according to a report from the resident magistrate in Dungarvan, the 'country was lighted as far as eye could see with signal fires' and crowds were heard 'traversing the country and making the most hideous noises.' The demonstrators were hoping to intimidate proprietors and cess-payers in advance of special presentment sessions at Dungarvan. About 4,000 assembled at the courthouse on 14 September, and they refused to allow the members of the gentry attending to leave the building until they approved a number of public works, and agreed to a daily wage on these works of a shilling. Outside the courthouse, Catholic clergy appealed to people to disperse so as to avoid coming into conflict with the authorities, to which the popular response was as follows: 'life is a battle for us, and the sooner we lose it the better.' Eventually the crowd dispersed of its own accord, only to muster again for the reconvened sessions a few days later, following another night of bonfires and horn-blowing. There were similar scenes at meetings in a number of other parts of Ireland during these two months, notably at Kells, County Meath, and Newcastle West, County Limerick, where it took the intervention of Catholic priests to secure the release of committees of local notables.[42]

On the third day of the disturbances in Dungarvan, matters took a turn for the worse as far as the authorities were concerned, when it came to their attention that eighteen carts of grain bound for the Waterford market had been turned back by a crowd at Kilmacthomas. Over the following days, other crowds acted in a similar fashion in relation to convoys going to other markets in the area. On 22 September, the lighting of bonfires at night was again reported, but from a larger area – the triangle formed by Fermoy, Lismore, and Youghal. Throughout this area, the movement of grain was obstructed during the daytime. Lacking the resources to disperse the people, magistrates tried to expedite the commencement of relief works, calculating that if there were fewer idle people, protests would be more easily controlled.[43]

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[41] This unrest is discussed by William Fraher, 'The Dungarvan Disturbances of 1846 and Sequels', in Des Cowman and Donald Brady (eds), *The Famine in Waterford, 1845–1850: Teacht na Bprátaí Dubha* (Dublin, 1995), 137–52.

[42] NAI Outrage reports: County Meath, 23 November 1846, 22/34165; County Limerick, 3 November 1846, 17/30671. For similar, see County Cork, 24 September 1846, 6/25979; County Kerry, 29 October 1846, 12/30085; County Kilkenny, 24 September 1846, 14/25789; County Carlow, 19 September 1846, 3/25885.

[43] NAI, Outrage papers, County Waterford, 22 September 1846, 29/25731.

By 23 September, the unrest had spread to the River Blackwater, along twenty-five miles of whose banks 'numbers of men armed with stones and other weapons . . . wholly intercepted the transport of corn, flour and other provisions.'[44] Two naval vessels were sent to protect navigation. The captain of one of the vessels reported that the crew of one lighter was persuaded to attempt the journey to the river-mouth, but that the crowd followed all the way, 'pouring into the town' of Youghal. In the town itself, there was already great excitement. A public meeting had brought a large crowd to the central Mall, and from there the participants had marched to the quays, where they seized vessels that were loading grain and refused to allow them to sail. Grainstores were surrounded, and convoys of grain entering the town were forced back. The crowd next seized the portcullis bridge over the Blackwater, a short distance from the town, thereby preventing trade by road and preventing military reinforcements from reaching the town. With the arrival of the large crowds on 23 September, the Relief Committee hurriedly put numbers of them to work 'levelling a hill', and had placards posted announcing a reduction in the price of meal.

In Dungarvan, tensions remained high. On 28 September, open conflict resumed, when a crowd of some hundreds assembled outside a grain store and warned the owner not to export any corn. The crowd swelled to several thousand in the course of the afternoon, and was perceived to threaten the grain stores near the quay. Evidently, the fishermen had already been active in this regard, maintaining a blockade of the port. A few 'ringleaders' were arrested on the instruction of the resident magistrate, to the great irritation of their followers, who began to throw stone at the police. A troop of the Royal Dragoons, brought into the field when the police were forced to withdraw, suffered similar treatment. Given the authority by the magistrate the soldiers fired, injuring several people and causing the crowd to disperse. One of those injured, Michael Fleming, would die of his injuries a few weeks later in the workhouse hospital.[45]

On the day after the shooting, 29 September, the people mobilised again in opposition to the merchants. Unemployed labourers began 'parading', compelling some who were at work to leave their posts and join them, and summoning others with a bell. Numbers quickly grew to 3,000. The next day, 30 September was fine, so the fisherman abandoned their blockade to go fishing. The women of the community, however, took steps to prevent ships

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[44] Ibid., 23 September 1846, 29/25931.
[45] Fraher, 'Dungarvan disturbances', 143.

loading, throwing stones at dock workers and those protecting them. The workers loading the ships were so intimidated 'by the yells and the threats that they struck work', according to the resident magistrate. Having secured their initiative, the women indicated that they would allow business to resume only when a supply of cheap meal was provided, refusing to accept mere promises in this regard.[46]

In the wider area, in early October, efforts to prevent the movement of grain by land and by waterway continued. On 6 October, it was reported from Stancally on the Blackwater that 'a large number of persons from both sides of the river, who threatened and threw stones at the boatmen, were preventing lighters from proceeding to Youghal, obliging them to return to Janeville Quay, near Tullow [County Carlow].' The boatmen were refusing to identify their attackers.[47] By this point another form of protest had also become widespread in east Waterford. A movement of labourers which had begun in a small way in Donamon on 26 September or thereabouts had spread through Cappoquin towards Dungarvan, where 'bodies of 500 to 600 were going through the countryside demanding that farmers refund conacre rent.' The labourers involved were sub-tenants of potato ground and they were insisting that the farmers from whom they rented their patches should bear at least part of the cost of the potato failure. Through force of numbers, they secured refunds in at least some instances.[48] This mobilisation of the conacre labourers was the last significant episode in the three-week-long wave of unrest in west Waterford. Repression, tempered by modest concession, restored an uneasy peace in the region.

East of Scotland Protests

A definitive account of the disturbances in the north-east of Scotland in the period January to March 1847 has been provided by Eric Richards. It remains to provide a brief summary of developments there and to identify points of comparison with the slightly earlier wave of unrest in Ireland.

In the winter of 1846–7, public alarm grew throughout Britain in response to rising food prices and to reports of the crisis in Ireland, leading to outbreaks of protest in the English West Country, and also on the island

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[46] NAI, Outrage reports, County Waterford, 1 October 1846, 29/26755.

[47] Ibid., 1846, 29/26961, 6 October; 1846; 29/27299, 4 October 1846.

[48] Ibid., 26 September 1846, 29/26359, 2 October 1846, 29/26761, 3 October 1846, 29/26911.

of Jersey. These episodes, however, were on a smaller scale than many elsewhere in northern Europe.[49] In eastern Scotland, there had already been a few riotous efforts to block the export of potatoes to London. These took place in Inverness and nearby Nairn during February 1846, and were singular enough as to prompt comparisons with the last-remembered food riots in that area, which had taken place as long ago as 1796.[50] Notwithstanding these apparent warnings, the outbreaks of the following year took responsible authorities by surprise.

The disturbances of January 1847 began about sixty miles east of Nairn at Macduff in Banffshire on 15 January. Over the following weeks the unrest spread west and north along the coast for a distance of 200 miles, reaching Thurso in the far north. Richards identified forty 'locations of riot' over the period, some of them hosting protracted or repeated outbreaks.[51] The wave began, 'almost spontaneously' according to a magistrate, with a movement among the fishermen and the general population along the Moray coast, to block the removal of all types of grain by sea, and sometimes to set a 'people's price', as had occurred in Ireland, notably along the River Shannon.[52]

At Avoch, on the Moray Firth, poorer people were angered in mid-February that farmers had commenced to ship grain, breaking an undertaking which had been read aloud by a representative at a public meeting in the previous week to retain grain for sale at in the district. Acts of popular resistance included the turning back of carts, the cutting open of grain sacks, and the seizure of a vessel:

> They had continued during the night to unmoor the vessel and had barricaded the access to the pier with boats drawn across which were literally covered with women … As the tide did not permit the vessel to approach the pier for a number of hours, we could take no steps to put the grain on board.[53]

When soldiers were deployed against them, the people of Avoch greeted

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[49] Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots,* 3-4; Manfred Gailus, 'Food Riots in Germany in the Late 1840s', *Past & Present,* 145 (1994), 157–93; Eric Vanheute, Richard Paping and Cormac Ó Gráda, *The European Subsistence Crisis of 1845–50: A Comparative Perspective,* IEHC (2006) Helsinki: Session 123, 17–18.

[50] *Nairnshire Mirror,* 7 February 1846.

[51] Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots,* 7–20.

[52] Ibid., 8.

[53] Cited in ibid., 11.

them with a barrage of stones and snowballs.[54] These events were replicated in other places as indicated by the following excerpt from a letter published in *The Scotsman* in early March: 'Within fifteen miles of each other are three shipping places, Balintraid, Invergordon, and Foulis, all of which have been under mob domination during that time [the past month] so as to prevent export of a single quarter of any kind of grain.'[55]

Invergordon was the centre of the most determined, durable, and disciplined action – although the discipline of all the Scottish crowds involved was much remarked upon. Beginning in early February and extending over several weeks, the town was in the hands of a crowd which prohibited all food exports – and not just of staples. Women were especially prominent, sabotaging carts by removing the pins from their axles and deliberately frightening horses. A team of people's 'inspectors' checked all carts entering the town. It was from Invergordon that that the strategy of mixing differing grains – precluding its sale but not its use as food – was first reported, and it quickly spread throughout Easter Ross. This strategy was not noted in Ireland at this time, though it had been reported from Carrick-on-Suir during the unrest of 1812.[56] The relative freedom of action of the crowd in Invergordon was due to a lack of soldiers in the area, and to delays in sending them. Troops were tied up in trying to subdue the notably militant crowd at Burghead and a few other places, leaving small bodies of police to contend with the clamour elsewhere. By the time military reinforcements arrived in the disturbed region, protests had got a grip and the protestors had gained confidence.

The question of military and naval resources, in fact, are the key to explaining the different outcomes of the unrest in Ireland and Scotland in the autumn/winter of 1846-7. As we have seen, up to twenty naval vessels were deployed around the Irish coast in late 1846, engaged mainly in relief distribution but available for law enforcement. The authorities in Scotland had at their disposal only one slow and cumbersome Admiralty vessel to patrol 200 miles of coast, and there were fewer than 300 soldiers at the end of January 1847 in the entire of the area that would be affected by the unrest.[57] The quiescence of a whole generation of Scots had made the authorities complacent; the uneasy state of Ireland led to delays in the deployment of reinforcements.

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[54] Ibid., 11.

[55] Ibid., 12.

[56] Cunningham, 'Popular Protest and a "Moral Economy" in provincial Ireland', in Devine, Lane and Puirséil (eds), *Essays in Irish Labour*, 26–48.

[57] Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots,* 50.

Their different religious loyalties notwithstanding, clergymen in both places proved to be reliable auxiliaries to civil authority. In Ireland, as we have seen, Catholic priests had dissuaded crowds from forming in some instances and persuaded them to disperse in others. Church of Scotland ministers were likewise active. The volatile crowd at Burghead and nearby Hopeman was calmed by the local minister, while others in Banffshire used their pulpits to explain proposed relief schemes and to urge patience while they were in preparation. Clergymen generally were advocates of 'peaceful calm', and in places like Ennis, County Clare, where notices on their church doors urged popular action, it is unlikely that these were posted with clerical approval. Only one instance was recorded in which militant action was organised in a church building, and that was a chapel of the dissenting Secession Church at Lossiemouth, the port of Elgin in Moray.[58]

The role of fishermen in the agitation is worthy of note. Fishing communities were certainly the most dynamic in the Scottish events; indeed, only a few confrontations took place away from the coast. In Ireland the most effective anti-export blockade was raised by the fishing community at Dungarvan, while it has been shown that the authorities took considerable care to neutralize the seasoned food rioters at Galway's Claddagh. Of Claddagh, it has been argued that discipline required of the fishermen in their day-to-day work was what made them effective as leaders of protests. Significantly, like some of their Scottish counterparts, they were also involved in 'moral' agitation and resistance to commercial fishing interests whom they considered to be rapacious and oblivious to the need to maintain fishing stocks.[59]

Conclusions

If the outcomes were not the same in the two places, the Irish and Scottish crowds discussed above mobilised for essentially the same purpose, which was to prevent the removal of the grain crop of 1846 from the district in which it was grown, or at least to hold that crop 'hostage' until alternative means of subsistence were secured. No larger radical political objective was apparent in either place. And if the Irish crowds involved were prevented by the considerable military and naval presence from exercising the same degree of hegemony as did the coastal communities of the north-eastern

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[58] Ibid., 14.

[59] Cunningham, 'The Mayor / admiral', 27–31; James R. Coull, *The Sea Fisheries of Scotland: A Historical Geography* (Edinburgh, 1996), 140–2.

Scotland, many of them secured some temporary relief by their efforts. This phase of Irish Famine protest petered out due to the strong opposition it faced in November 1846; the Scottish wave ended abruptly in mid-March, by which time sufficient temporary employment had been made available to convince protesting communities that their position was secure until the commencement of the fishing season in May.[60] Whatever successes were won were facilitated by a degree of sympathy among the better-off, reflected for example in generally lenient sentencing and in the difficulty in raising special constables to restore order in Scotland.[61] With a small number of exceptions in Ireland, moreover, the crowds in both countries were not especially hungry at the time of their mobilisation; rather, they anticipated that they and their dependents would go hungry in the near future if they did not take action.

In their disposition these crowds, while determined, were overwhelmingly disciplined and peaceful – though in the heat of confrontation with police and soldiery a misinterpreted gesture followed by an over-reaction from either party did occasionally lead to a general melée or worse. And there were striking similarities in the 'repertoire of protest' in the two countries. Apart from the prominence of women, a feature of protests of this nature historically, there were other similarities in strategies and tactics: in the intimidation of boatmen and car-drivers; in the seizing of the sails of ships engaged in the grain trade, in the blocking of cart-roads, in the 'rough music' of trumpets.[62]

NUI Galway[63]

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[60] Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots,* 54.

[61] Ibid., 41.

[62] A tried and tested tactic of the Galway crowd (see above), the seizure of sails was reported from Banff in 1847 (Richards, *Last Scottish Food Riots*, 14).

[63] I wish to thank Florry O'Driscoll, Ailbhe O'Leary, and Claire Smith for their contribution to the research for this article.

Reflections on Labour History in Irish-Scottish Studies

Terry Brotherstone

Each of the essays in this valuable issue of the *Journal* guest-edited by Chloe Alexander speaks eloquently for itself. The reflections that follow concern the broader significance of the symposium where they were first aired, which I regretted being unable to attend. It came, I thought, at a significant moment both for British labour historiography and in Irish-Scottish comparative studies; and the sense of significance has only been increased by political developments since.

We are half a century on from the decade, the 1960s, which saw the emergence in British mainstream scholarship of Marxist-influenced social history and of a new interest in labour history as a distinctive – and for many practitioners a politically engaged – sub-discipline, deploying class and class struggle as central concepts. In the following decade came critical reaction, focusing on the limitations of the foundational works and seeking to develop approaches sensitive to the dangers of reductionism and more flexible in encompassing ideas about gender, race and sexuality. Then, in the 1980s, some saw these developments as supplanting rather than supplementing the earlier achievements.

Many historians in Scotland and Ireland, meanwhile, whether concerned with these theoretical and methodological questions or not, were increasingly provoked by the Anglocentricity of much otherwise innovative scholarship. During the mid-1970s, the first of the series of essay-collections on the comparative socio-economic development of these two 'peripheral' nations, referred to above by Emmet O'Connor, appeared, pointing a way for researchers who rejected a 'British History' that had often in reality been English history writ large.[1] This approach was important to the broader

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[1] For an essay suggesting how an Irish-Scottish approach can counteract not only Anglocentricity but also the not-so-long-ago dominant tendency for 'British history' to be written from 'the viewpoint of the ruling primarily Protestant, overwhelmingly male élite', see Terry Brotherstone, Anna Clark and Kevin Whelan, 'Rethinking the Trajectory of Modern British History: an Ireland-Scotland Approach', in Brotherstone, Clark and Whelan (eds), *These Fissured Isles: Ireland, Scotland and British*

exercise of reinterpreting the history of the four nations that, from 1800 to 1921, formed the United Kingdom and were at the centre of its global empire.[2] When the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson famously declared, at West Point on 5 December 1962, that Great Britain had lost an empire and not found a new role, he might have added that it was also in danger of losing a relevant historical narrative, and was much in need of a new, post-imperial, one.

The new labour history came at a time of growing political crisis for the labour movement as the financial viability of the welfare state and the fundamentals of Keynesian-inspired programmes for dealing with the economic crises of the capital system came under question; and the development of Irish-Scottish studies was in part at least a response to the re-emergence in practical mainstream politics – for the first time since twenty-six counties of Ireland became an independent state in 1922 – of internal nationalisms within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Each of the developing sub-disciplines can be seen as contributing, in its own way, to picking up, at least in a partial way, the post-imperial historiographical gauntlet Acheson had omitted to throw down. Then, in the 1980s and early 1990s, came the collapse of the Soviet system, the growing dominance of neoliberalism and later (in the ongoing crisis that erupted in 2007–08) the implosion of its triumphalist phase. These economic and political changes, and their social consequences must surely in their turn prompt the asking of new and urgent questions about historical interpretation. The Research Institute for Irish and Scottish Studies (RIISS) symposium bringing labour-history perspectives to bear within Irish-Scottish studies – and now recorded in this issue of the *Journal* – was timely indeed.

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The evidence of the recent issues of the leading labour history journals is that, internationally, the discipline has regained confidence following a string of jeremiads in the 1990s about its – perhaps terminal – crisis.[3] A few years ago,

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      history, 1798–1848 (Edinburgh, 2005), 1–42: the quotation is from Whelan's essay on 'Ireland, Scotland and Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century', 48.

[2] Emmet O'Connor, 'Scotland and Ireland: Labour Directions and Radical Connections'.

[3] For the history of the labour history and its societies in England (Britain), Scotland, Wales and Ireland, see the special supplement to *Labour History Review*, 75 (2010). It includes John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, John Halstead and David Martin, 'Fifty Years On', 1–14; McIlroy's 'The Society for the Study of Labour History, 1956–1985: Its

reviewing Paul Mason's *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the Working Class Went Global*, a popular book but, in its own way, also an important one for scholars, I proposed the headline, 'Labour History Resurgent?'[4] The time has perhaps come to remove the question mark and to encourage new thinking about the critical edge, the capacity to critique historiographical orthodoxy, which labour history – by the nature of its focus on the oppressed and the exploited, and on oppositional struggle and ideas about radical social change – brings to comparative Irish and Scottish historical studies.

In the latter 1980s, teaching history at the University of Aberdeen and inspired in part by the volumes of comparative socio-economic historical essays that had appeared since 1977, I introduced an honours course on Scotland and Ireland since the late eighteenth century. I wanted to create a counterbalance to the conservative way in which, it seemed to me, both British and Scottish history were being taught. Reluctant to plunge our students into the obscurer postmodernist depths of 'the cultural turn', which in any case was being covered in an empirically well-founded way in Aberdeen's innovative 'cultural history' programme, I hoped that the comparative approach would offer something challenging and new without departing from the values of traditional historical scholarship.[5] The seminars focused selectively on aspects of the two national experiences that I thought could instructively be juxtaposed. The relative popularity of the course may have been enhanced by the session on comparative whisk(e)y-tasting, which coincided with the

Origins and Heyday', 19–112; Robert Duncan, 'The Scottish Labour History Society: A Retrospect', 117–27; and Emmet O'Connor, 'The Irish Labour History Society: An Outline History', 147–59. See also Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy, *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool, 2010). On the crisis, see also the files of Labour History Review during the 1990s; Neville Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960–2010', *Labour History Review,* 75 (2010), 162–80; and, inter alia, Terry Irving, *Challenges to Labour History* (Sydney, 1996).

4 Paul Mason, *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the Working Class Went Global* (London, first ed., 2007); Terry Brotherstone, 'Labour History Resurgent?', *Variant* (Glasgow), 33 (2009), 6–7, http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue33/v33_brotherstone.pdf [accessed 5 February 2015].

5 For cultural history at Aberdeen towards the end of the twentieth century, see William Scott, 'Cultural History at the Crossroads. A Local Experience and a Personal View' in *Tidskrift for Kultur Studier*, 1 (1995), 56–96. There is a general account of the programme's history in its 2007 twenty-first anniversary Aberdeen conference brochure, 'Varieties of Cultural History', see: http://www.culthist.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/final_conference_booklet.pdf [accessed 28 November 2016]. The programme was, regrettably in my view, eventually axed primarily for managerial rather than pedagogical reasons.

completion of student assessment forms. But it had also, amongst its eclectic topics, aspects of comparative radical and labour history: 'whisky and fre edom,' wrote Burns, 'gang thegither'.[6]

Particular themes included (whether as background or for explicit examination) how the political radicalism that seemed, in the 1790s, to offer the possibility of bringing Scottish and Irish oppositionists closer together, diverged into the class politics of Chartism on the one hand, and, on the other, the nationalism of the age of Daniel O'Connell; and how meaningful it was to compare the early twentieth-century story of John Maclean and the shop stewards' and rent strike movements on 'Red Clydeside' with that of James Connolly, the Easter Rising and Ireland's militant independence struggle.[7] Had this issue of the *Journal* existed then, it might have brought greater sophistication to our deliberations, in particular our efforts to resist an over-simplified idea that, while the political trajectory of modern Scotland was, to a significant extent, determined by class and the rise of labour, Ireland can be understood unproblematically as a story of nationalism and the struggle for home rule or independence. A labour-history approach is one way of promoting greater critical attention to the social-class and political-ideological contradictions within both paths of development.[8]

Scotland's Independence Referendum on 18 September 2014, moreover, showed that the need to stress the class dialectic *within* Irish nationalism must now be accompanied, as some historians have for long insisted, by attention to the lingering, if often dormant, national element within class movements in Scotland.[9] 'Red Clydeside', the leading psephologist John Curtice excitedly

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[6] Robert Burns, 'The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer' (1786): available in many selected editions and online.

[7] Connolly's years in Edinburgh, where he was born in 1868 and became a socialist militant in the early 1890s, was the subject of renewed and more focussed interest in preparation for, and during, the centenary of the Easter Rising in 2016. See, inter alia, Chloe Ross Alexander, 'James Connolly: the Emergence of a Socialist, Edinburgh (1868–1896)', Scottish Labour History, 49 (2014), 74–85; and Allan Armstrong, 'Class, Nation and the Politics of James Connolly: A Research Note', *Scottish Labour History*, 50 (2015), 136–40. At Edinburgh International Festival in August 2016, Festival director Fergus Linehan commissioned Ben Harrison, working from a text I prepared, to script and direct 'Before the Hudson and the Liffey: James Connolly's years in Edinburgh and Leith'. Held on Saturday 20 August, 2016, it was a sell-out performance and discussion event at the Festival centre, The Hub.

[8] For an exemplary exercise by labour historians in providing new perspectives on Irish national history, see the special 1916 Easter Rising commemoration issue of *Saothar*, 41, guest-edited by Francis Devine, Sarah Anne Buckley and Brian Hanley.

[9] The late James D. Young for one: see for example his 'Scotland's Lost Past: British

told BBC breakfast television audiences in his 19 September analysis of the previous day's poll, 'has become nationalist Clydeside.'[10] The vote in the Referendum did not mean that nationalist enthusiasm had replaced class concerns. But much of west-central Scotland – which, in 1922, when ten of the area's fifteen seats were won and 'the Clydesiders' set off from Glasgow's St Enoch station with mass choruses of 'Jerusalem', 'The Red Flag' and 'The Internationale' ringing in their ears, as they promised that , having played their part in seeting the Labour Party on its road to Westminster government, they would enact socialism in the United Kindom – had voted for independence. In contrast, more middle-class areas – in recentl years inclined to favour the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Westminster and Holyrood elections – had not.[11] Formerly solid Labour areas, apparently disillusioned about the party's ability, or even desire, to deliver on social democracy, or an end to austerity, had found in the SNP-led call for independence an opportunity to vote for these things by other means.[12]

The trend continued into the 2015 Westminster general election when the SNP won fifty-eight out of sixty-one seats in a landslide, albeit one enabled by an archaic electoral system, and the 2016 Scottish parliament elections, although in these the vagaries of the proportional representation system meant that the party retained its substantial plurality but lost the narrow overall majority it had gained in 2010. That the shift in voting allegiance represented something relatively deep-rooted, even a historically significant shift rather than a short-term, pragmatic phenomenon, was confirmed by the differential result of the 23 June 2016 referendum on UK membership of the European Union. While the overall vote produced a small but significant majority to leave, over sixty per cent of the Scottish electorate was for staying. All this is surely a reason for fresh reflections on our understanding of Scottish labour

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History and the Paradoxes of the Scottish Nation', in Brotherstone, Clark and Whelan, *Fissured Isles*, 242–59. Idem, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London, 1979); and idem, *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish International Radicalism* (Glasgow, 1996).

[10] John Curtice, Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University, 'Breakfast', BBC 1, September 19, 2014.

[11] In the present context a thoughtful (and cross-nationally informed) account of the Scottish referendum and its immediate aftermath is by the Irish, Scottish-domiciled journalist, Peter Geoghegan, *The People's Referendum: Why Scotland will Never be the Same Again* (Edinburgh, 2015).

[12] For my comments on this, see Tom Owen and Terry Brotherstone, 'Britain: A State of Disorder and a Disunited Kingdom', in Cliff Slaughter (ed.), *Against Capital: Experiences of Class Struggle and Rethinking Revolutionary Agency* (London, 2016), 63–109, esp. 91ff.

history, including its interactions with, and differences from Ireland, as we attempt better to grasp what political possibilities the future hold.[13]

Some years after the launch of my undergraduate course, the thinking that lay behind it underpinned an international conference in Aberdeen, which led to the collection of essays entitled *These Fissured Isles: Ireland, Scotland and British History, 1798–1848*.[14] The book, one reviewer wrote, attempted to connect Scotland and Ireland to the 'broader historical narratives' of post-colonial studies, and was, for its time, a publication which 'managed to push through the intimate world of Scottish historians to broad, international audiences.'[15] Chloe Alexander's rationale for organising the RIISS symposium and producing this collection of essays, seems to me to echo the motivation behind that earlier conference and book. Just as, in the latter 1990s, I thought that the possible bicentennial opportunities afforded by revisiting the revolutionary 1790s were being more eagerly grasped by historians of Irish radicalism than by their Scottish counterparts, so she contrasts the critical historical enterprise being officially promoted between 2012 to 2022 as Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries' with the failure of 'Scottish labour history academics … to launch something similar.'[16] The essays she has attracted, moreover, albeit from an interesting variety of more systematically labour-history standpoints,

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[13] The outcome of the referendum on British membership of the European Union in June 2016, when a UK majority supported leaving the Union while a substantial majority in Scotland voted to remain – but an element in the Scottish National Party's support supported the 'Brexit' position – reinforced the argument that the Scottish independence movement has outlived its origins in romantic nostalgia and become an arena of struggle over the country's socio-economic future. The SNP (and the cause of immediate independence) suffered a considerable setback in the unexpected general election of June 2017 that took place after this article was complete; but it remained the largest elected party in Scotland. While the point cannotb be pursued here, I do not think my basic argument is affected. [TB September 2017].

[14] A bequest from Dr J. R. M. Mackie of Glenmillan, financed, amongst other things, six conferences, five of which led to publications, organised by members of the University of Aberdeen History Department towards the end of the twentieth century.

[15] Brotherstone, Clark and Whelan, *Fissured Isles*; Andrew Kincaid, 'The Union's Cracks', *Northern Scotland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Studies*, 27 (2007), 216.

[16] Chloe Alexander, 'Introduction'. *An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta /* Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht website: http://www. decadeofcentenaries.com [accessed 10 February 2015]. In this context, Alexander's own paper on 'Scottish Responses to the 1913 Dublin Lock-out and the 1916 Easter Rising' was a particularly apt contribution to the RIISS conference: it is a pity that it could not appear here because committed elsewhere, but it can surely be read as a fitting addendum: Chloe Alexander, 'Scottish responses to the 1913 Dublin Lock-out and the 1916 Easter Rising', *Saothar*, 41 (2016), 269–77.

take over chronologically from the point, in the 1840s, at which *These Fissured Isles* left off, providing a further contribution to critical reinterpretation of the history of the nations of the United Kingdom before and after 1922 relevant to everyone seeking historical perspectives on the British isles in the post-imperial world of globalised capital.

The Irish government-sponsored 'Decade of Centenaries' encourages not only a public engagement with scholarly approaches to contemporary Irish history but also renewed interrogation of the politics of the subject. I come from the generation of postgraduates which , as the left-wing historian of modern Germany Geoff Eley wrote in his engaging intellectual memoir *A Crooked Line*, came to labour history during the latter 1960s as young people 'living through a time of excitements and upheaval'. We were, Eley commented, 'seeking to change the world' and believed that 'history really *mattered*.'[17] Labour history can trace its own early history as much in the labour movement as in the universities and it attracted many from amongst the new cohort of historical researchers – afforded opportunities for scholarly careers by the expansion of UK higher education in the era of the 1963 Robbins Report – as much, I think, for political as for academic reasons.[18] This was the time of mass protests against the Vietnam War, the victories of anti-imperialist national liberation movements and in the UK, the raising and dashing of hopes in Harold Wilson's technology-based, utopian version of what he called 'British socialism'.[19] Growing trade-union militancy and the student revolts inspired by the May-June events in Paris and the 'Prague Spring' in 1968 seemed to hold out the real prospect of radical social change: perhaps historical work could play a part in developing broadly based socialist consciousness.

There was also a rich seam of inspiring scholarly work being developed, notably John Saville's and Asa Briggs's edited volume of *Essays in Labour History*;

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[17] Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor [MI], 2005), ix.

[18] The 1963 Robbins Report on higher education facilitated and rationalised the already-taken decision to expand higher education, giving intellectual distinction to the policy and coming to symbolise the social and academic principles lying behind the next quarter century of UK higher education, although the period of adequate funding to implement it was short-lived.

[19] See especially Harold Wilson, *The Relevance of British Socialism* (London, 1964), originally an article in *The Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year*; his speeches in *The New Britain: Labour's Plan* (Harmondsworth, 1964), including the famous Scarborough address to the Labour Party conference on 1 October 1963, which was inspirational despite the careful ambiguity of its apparent promise to harness 'the white heat of technology' in the interest of the working class.

Eric J. Hobsbawm's *Labouring Men*; and, above all, Edward P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, all available by 1964; and Thompson's seminal essay 'History from Below' in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1966.[20] But this work in itself was not simply the product of shifting academic fashion: behind it lay the 1956–7 split in the Communist Party following Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech'. This lifted a corner of the veil previously cast over Stalin's crimes, and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution. Scholars previously hampered by sectarian party loyalties and the constraints of inner-party discussion had to rethink old certainties and were eager to enter into a broader intellectual discourse.[21]

Many of those who came together to found the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH) in 1960 had been Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) members. However, others such as Asa Briggs, who was a key figure in giving academic respectability to the enterprise, were not.[22] But the work of the SSLH, which sprouted independent offshoots in Scotland and later in Ireland, was strongly influenced from the beginning by the ideas of scholars attempting to liberate the Marxism they had learnt in the CPGB from its associations with Stalinism.[23] Not the least of the virtues of this symposium is that it contains an essay unapologetically advocating the use of a 'Marxist model' for industrial-relations analysis. While one can argue about whether the

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[20] Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds) *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960); Edward P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963); Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (London, 1964). Thompson's 'History from Below' appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966.

[21] Terry Brotherstone, 'Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012: Some Questions from a Never-completed Conversation About History', *Critique*, 64 (2013), 269–286, argues that there were important limits to this discourse that should be revisited.

[22] The Scottish Labour History Society was founded in 1966 and the Irish Labour History Society in 1973.

[23] There is now a substantial literature on the influence on historiography of members of what had been the CPGB Historians' Group. For a discussion between two of them that took place in Aberdeen, see Terry Brotherstone, '1956 and the Crisis in the Communist Party of Great Britain: four witnesses', *Critique*, 35 (2007), 189–209, esp. 205–8. Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis* (Basingstoke, 1995), by a historical sociologist, is just what its subtitle suggests. The most thoughtful recent assessments of two pivotal figures are Theodore Koditschek, 'The Possibilities of Theory: Edward Thompson's Marxist History' in Roger Fieldhouse and Richard Taylor (eds), *E. P. Thompson and English Radicalism* (Manchester, 2013); and idem, 'How to Change History: Reflections on Eric Hobsbawm's *How to Change the World*', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 433–50. For a critique of Hobsbawm's Marxism, see Terry Brotherstone, 'Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012): Some Questions from a Never-Completed Conversation about History', *Critique*, 41 (2013), 269–86.

language of Marxism and that of sociological 'model-building' sit productively together, it is surely right to return, in the light of the current systemic global crisis, to an interrogation of what role critically developed Marxist ideas can play in a refreshed dialogue about the nature and purposes of labour history.[24]

If there was a note of hesitation in my earlier suggestion that the time may have come to remove the question mark from my 'Labour History Resurgent?' headline, it was because I want to argue that a fully-fledged resurgence needs to involve the recapturing, not just of academic confidence but also of a sense of political commitment. I do not however, mean commitment to some particular doctrine or programme. But labour history is, or can be, at its best when it seeks to combine scholarly integrity with active intellectual engagement with the situation now facing working people (including many who sociologists in the 1960s told us had become an incorporated and politically complaisant middle class); and with critical interrogation of the idea that, acting as a class, they could be the key agent of transition to a more humane social future. In the 1960s, for many on the left, surrounded by a culture increasingly permeated by proletarian narratives and imagery, particularly in cinema and the newly popular medium of television, this seemed pretty much like common sense; but it is an idea that, in today's much changed society, requires

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[24] For a contribution to this argument, see Cliff Slaughter, 'The Theoretical Foundations', part V of Slaughter, *Against Capital*. For a more philosophical, but stimulating, approach to Marxism, history and historical consciousness, see István Mészáros, 'The Rise and Fall of Historical Temporality' in Terry Brotherstone and Geoff Pilling (eds), *History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism: Essays in Memory of Tom Kemp* (London, 1996), 251–92; and Mészáros's work as a whole, particularly his recent *The Necessity of Social Control* (New York, 2015), where he writes about leaving Hungary following the Soviet suppression of the 1956 rising and coming to the UK in part because it is 'the home of the Industrial Revolution … [and of] a working class with tremendously deep roots, and that remains [true today] despite everything.' Political and social commitment, he adds, must have theoretical 'points of reference' and 'there cannot be social transformation without an agency and the only agency conceivable … to take us out of this mess is labo[u]r – labo[u]r in the sense Marx was talking about and which we have to rediscover for ourselves under our present conditions', 53–4. Contributing to the development of the necessary theoretical points of reference, would, in my view, be worth consideration as part of what universities these days like to call a 'mission statement' for a *new*, new labour history (see below). Mészáros's central work is *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition* (London, 1995). His most recent publication, 'From Primitive to Substantive Equality – via Slavery', *Monthly Review Press*, vol. 68(4), 2016, accessible at http://monthlyreview.org/2016/09/01/from-primitive-to-substantive-equality-via-slavery/, is a foretaste of a major study of the state, *Beyond Leviathan*, due in separate volumes between 2017 and 2020.

the kind of radical re-examination, to which labour historians are particularly well-equipped to contribute.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the too easy identification of Marxist theory with the collapse of so-called Soviet Communism (which had little or nothing to do with the communism of Marx's and Engels' 1848 *Manifesto*), together with the shock of the catastrophic defeats inflicted on the traditional industrial working class by the extraordinarily rapid and brutal implementation of neoliberal policies, led to a disabling pessimism and scepticism about theoretical approaches that aspired to go beyond ever more sophisticated ways of describing how things used to be by engaging critically with how they must become. But since the crisis imposed on the world by finance capital in 2007–08, general awareness of the need for radical social change has developed in a far more profound and widespread way than was the case in the 1960s. The contradiction is that the sense of powerlessness to bring about a systemic transformation is also much greater. In the years after the SSLH and its independent national offspring came into being, left-wing labour-movement scholars could assume they were playing an important role merely by documenting both the potentialities of, and the contradictions in, working-class history, more or less taking it as read that they were writing about the social force destined to bring about revolutionary change. The challenge today is to develop critical theory in a period when appearances no longer coincide with political aspiration, while continuing to discover new things through original research carried out with scholarly integrity.

While that is a personal view, I think it is increasingly widely echoed. When Geoff Eley, quoted above as witness to the intellectual and political atmosphere of the 1960s, followed his personal memoir with a volume co-produced on the eve of the financial crisis, with the social historian Keith Nield, called *What's Left of the Social? The Future of Class in History*, he exuded an almost desperate pessimism. He worried that, as the real Berlin Wall was being pulled down, an intellectual equivalent had been erected, dividing politically and socially-engaged historians from those who had become immersed in, rather than productively informed by, the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s.[25] Eley called for a recapturing of the spirit of collaborative scholarly discourse he thought had prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, taking on board the innovations of the best 'postmodern' studies but not rejecting previous achievements *tout court*. Whether that call has yet been well answered, I am not equipped to judge. But,

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[25] Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History. What's Left of the Social* (Ann Arbor [MI], 2007).

to give one example, in the autumn of 2014 a conference at the University of Essex for early career historians focussed on the idea that class, 'firmly at the centre of historical debate' in the 1960s but, 'along with class struggle as a driver of social change' fallen until recently 'out of fashion' as 'a key analytical category' was 'making a comeback.'[26] And, despite Eley's pessimism about the negative reception of the ideas Nield and he had been advocating during the period of 'there is no alternative' to Thatcherite (and Blairite) neoliberalism, the years of crisis since 2007 have seen growing appreciation of their argument.[27]

Soon after Eley's and Nield's book, moreover, and on the eve the financial crisis, Mason's *Live Working or Die Fighting* appeared. Disguised as a journalist's bestseller, it contained a brief but effective critique of a generation or more of labour history. Mason's book is an innovative set of studies that finds echoes of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century class struggles in the battles faced by workers his reporting career has brought him into contact with in many parts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century world. He contextualises his studies instructively by recounting his own upbringing. Born in 1960 in working-class Lancashire, until he left home he knew no one who, however they voted, was not a trade unionist or in a trade-union family. His father became a first-generation home-owner of a property that still had an outside toilet. Labour won every election in the area. He lived through many industrial

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[26] See 'The Resurgence of Class in History' on 12–13 September 2014: http://www.essex.ac.uk/history/documents/conferences/resurgence-of-class-in-history-programme.pdf [accessed 5 February 2015]. Another sign of changing times was a day conference at the University of St Andrews organised by young historians on 'A Radical Inheritance: Commemoration, Memorialisation and Traditions of Protest in the History of Political Radicalism?', 23 November 2013. Jim Phillips, in his conference report in *Scottish Labour History*, 49 (2014), 22–4, thought the most interesting aspects of my paper on revisiting 'Red Clydeside' were my call for 'a new "new labour history"', looking beyond the historically exceptional welfarist period from World War II to the 1970s, 'and repositioning social class as the central factor in our understanding of the past and the present, tempered by greater awareness of gender and racial inequalities;' and my argument that in Scotland 'devolution … and the independence debate … have dampened class aspirations, narrowing in the process the scope of historical inquiry and understanding'; with academic labour historians having difficulty in transcending 'this low level of [political] ambition' in part at least because of a perceived need to put higher education research priorities – themselves 'highly politicised' – that 'broadly speaking negate the urgency of class conflicts and inequalities' ahead of political engagement.

[27] See, for example, Andrew August, *The Urban Working Class in Britain, 1830–1914* (4 Volumes, London, 2013), I, ix–x; and Keith Mann, *Forging Political Identity: Silk and Metal Workers in Lyon, France, 1900–1939* (New York and Oxford, 2010), 6.

actions, including two miners' strikes (in 1972 and 1974), the second of which brought down a Tory government. Yet he never he saw what he thought of as a political demonstration or the waving of a red flag. The demands he was aware of were for decent working conditions, pensions, health-care and sports facilities. Recounted grandparental memories of the Depression of the 1930s told him more about the meaning of history than any textbook or film, and formed the background to the demand articulated in various ways in the community for 'socialism through evolution'.

This family narrative gives a grounding of personality to Mason's argument that the labour movement as it existed from 1945 to 1989 was quite different from the one covered in *Live Working or Die Fighting*, which stretched from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to World War II. After the war, the unions in the West, allied with the employers and the nation states in the fight against fascism. They were rewarded, more or less effectively and in return for abandoning the aspiration to overthrow capitalism through militant class struggle, with welfarism and an implicit social contract in which they played a key role. In Russia, China and Eastern Europe 'a different deal was imposed: in return for subservience and the absence of democratic rights, the worker … was guaranteed a social wage and a job for life and was vaunted in the public ideology of the Stalinist states.' And, thus, 'for the first time' in its history:

> the world's working class was strategically divided; workers in the communist states lived wholly different lives to those in the west … [R]evolution and class struggle became playthings of the forces ranged against each other in the cold war, in eastern Europe and the developing world. For forty years working-class rebels would be either assassinated by the CIA or trained by the CIA, depending on geography…[28]

Then in the Reagan-Thatcher years, when neoliberal doctrines were imported into western democracies from, in the Chilean case particularly, more violent experiments in Latin American dictatorships, 'these post-war compromises fell apart.'[29]

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[28] Mason, *Live Working*, 277.
[29] For a historically controversial but thought-provoking account of this process, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London, 2007).

The industrial democracy that had been built as an instrument of class struggle with national variations in the interwar years continued for the most part only as a 'parallel lifestyle, separate from but not opposed to that of the upper classes', and even this eventually withered away, except perhaps in a few areas such as 'the Welsh valleys … the Tuscan hill towns [and] the Buenos Aires docks.'[30] But by the time Mason's father died in 1986, the threat of mass unemployment had returned and governments were responding to shop-floor militancy by abandoning consensus, freeing capital to seek cheap labour transnationally, and metaphorically or, in the case of the air traffic controllers in Reagan's America, in reality chaining trade unionists hand and foot. In Britain the last battle for 'progress and evolution' was fought by the miners and lost in 1984–5. By the 1990s, neoliberal policies were being pursued in the post-Stalinist states and even by governments that continued to call themselves 'Communist' in China and Vietnam.

In his own story Mason (for long BBC2's 'Newsnight' economics editor before moving in 2013 to Channel 4 and then going freelance)[31] found, *in parvo*, an emblematic account of the sea-change in social opportunities and political attitudes that reflect, in an 'advanced' country, the underlying shifts in the tectonic plates of the capital system that have been at work since (say) the early 1970s.[32] However, the aspect of Mason's book most directly relevant for my argument here is that his background reading leads him to comment that 'during the post-war period "official" labour history was devoted to

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[30] To which, after his experience of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum campaign, he might have added parts of the West of Scotland, though, in that case, the class culture had not so much been preserved in once-industrial areas as transposed from them to post-war housing schemes.

[31] Mason, now the best-selling author of, most recently, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (London, 2015) and a political adviser to the Labour Party, returned to this theme in an analysis of the 2016 'Brexit' vote to leave the European Union: see 'We Must Be Ready to Cause a Commotion', *New Statesman*, 23–29 September, 2016, 35-37. His recent commentary (he is now a columnist in the liberal London newspaper, *The Guardian*) places considerably less emphasis on class and class struggle than *Live Working or Die Fighting*.

[32] Although Mason's is a written autobiographical account, it is an example of the usefulness of the personal life-story through which oral history, when critically interpreted, can assist labour historians who want to tease out the big themes in the particular stories that can be researched with empirical rigour. This is worth a comment here because of the potentiality for using oral history in Irish-Scottish labour history. This approach is well demonstrated in the essay by Arthur McIvor of the pioneering Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde.

rationalising the deal made in 1945 between employers and workers on both sides of the Iron Curtain.' 'Only at the edges', Mason continued;

> did academics begin chipping away at the monolith. Edward Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* initiated a school of labour history based on the micro story: not the macro narrative. Much of the insight we now have … [on the topics Mason covers] comes from work by scholars following Thomson's approach. But in this 'new' labour history what gets lost is often story and significance. In reaction to the narrative superimposed on facts by Moscow, modern academics tend to avoid 'big truths' within the life stories of those they have rescued from oblivion.[33]

A year after *Live Working* was published, the financial crisis that was to explode in 2008 and which was to be the subject of Mason's next book, began to make itself felt.[34] The crisis and its political aftermath, I would argue, have provided more eloquent endorsement than any theoretical argument of the need for the post-Thompsonian, *new* 'new labour history' Mason was in effect advocating; for a re-examination of the forces that have brought about radical social change in the past, and the renewal of an historically informed discourse about the ongoing reconfiguration of such forces.

In 2011, at an international conference at the University of Lisbon, a new online journal, *Workers of the World: International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts*, was launched.[35] The subtitle is no accident.[36] At the conference

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[33] Mason, *Live Working*, 279.

[34] Paul Mason, *Meltdown: The End of the Age of Greed* (London, 2010).

[35] For my conference paper in Lisbon, see Terry Brotherstone, 'Energy Workers against Thatcherite Neoliberalism. Scottish Coal Miners and North Sea Offshore Workers: revisiting the class struggle in the UK in the 1980s', *Workers of the World*, 1 (2013), 135–54; http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=wotw [accessed 5 February 2015].

[36] *Workers of the World* appeared online in 2012, 'to consolidate the [2011 Lisbon conference] initiative … creating an international association of researchers and institutions involved in the study of [labour].' The editors stated that the 'working class repeatedly continues to make its presence known and by doing so refutes the pessimistic predictions about the end of social conflicts that were popular in past decades … Despite numerous attempts to theoretically declare the end of social classes, strikes, and social movements, the inherent social contradictions in society and workers' own actions constitute imposing evidence to the contrary. Industrial conflicts repeatedly have intersected with other social conflicts and ethnic, gender and generational issues', renewing 'interest in collective action [and] bringing in new

session at which it was discussed, two things were striking. First, the level of international participation, notably from Latin America and second, a level of political engagement, informing a commitment to scholarly objectivity rather than being superimposed on to it, that would probably still be unusual in the UK. It is also significant that outside the university, on the streets of the Portuguese capital, a context of relevance to the scholarly discourse taking place in the seminar rooms was provided by mass demonstrations against the European austerity programme. A proposal that the explicit reference to 'strikes and social conflicts' should be dropped in favour of a formulation stressing the study of working-class life more broadly, for being less confrontational and more in line with postmodernist sensitivities, was firmly rejected.

The early issues of the journal contain a wide variety of empirical material and methodological discussion, including for example, contributions to the discourse inspired by Marcel van der Linden's encyclopaedic and stimulatingly controversial work on rethinking the nature of the global working class.[37] But *Workers of the World* refreshingly recognises, not that labour history should limit itself to the study of open class war, but rather that struggle is implicit in the way in which working people in societies under the hegemony of capital have to live. Whether scholarly focus is on personal life, family relations, gender and racial inequalities, leisure or any other aspects highlighted in the work given new impetus by the 'cultural turn' of the 1980s, this is a fundamental truth of working-class existence. *Workers of the World* is one arena in which the discourse I hope this issue of the *Journal* will help to promote, could develop.

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theoretical and analytical challenges to researchers.' The editors committed *Workers of the World* to innovative 'studies on labour and social conflicts in an interdisciplinary, global, long-term historical and non-Eurocentric perspective', moving away 'from traditional forms of methodological nationalism' and publishing 'empirical research and theoretical discussions that address strikes and social conflicts in an innovative and rigorous manner.' *Workers of the World* is an English-language journal with a multilingual editorial board: submitted contributions can be judged in their original language, facilitating applications for translation costs to research funds available in a number of countries only when publication can be guaranteed: see https://workersoftheworldjournal.wordpress.com/about-the-journal/ Ongoing I [accessed 12 February 2017].

[37] The seminal work is Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays in Global History* (Boston, 2008).

In the 1980s, Neville Kirk, in a fiftieth-anniversary overview of labour history since the formation of the Society for the Study of Labour History in 1960, wrote that it was often claimed that 'the pioneering challenge posed by "young" labour history to the intellectual and political *status quo* during the 1960s and 1970s' had turned 'middle-aged'; it was 'flabby and outmoded, academically, publicly, and politically.'[38] In reality, Kirk argued that the discipline had not only achieved much in its 'wide-ranging … empirical' way, but had tempered its 'eclectic pluralism' by display[ing] core concerns and oppositions'. It had 'been characterised at times by important conceptual, methodological, and empirical initiatives' and 'debates … both within its own boundaries and against other sub-disciplines, disciplines and methodologies.'[39] Aspects of study to which key contributions have been made include 'history from below', class, culture, gender, and labour institutions, and a far from purely negative critique of postmodernism, with renewed interest in how personalities, institutions and languages influence political fortunes.

However, Kirk remained nervous about the tendency of UK labour history to 'retreat into conservative insularity and academicism.' He perceived 'an overriding concern with national and sub-national subject matter at the expense of sufficient engagement with the global, transnational and cross-national comparative concerns … [engaging] increasing numbers of labour historians across the world.'[40] These concerns, I would add, were reflected at the 2011 Lisbon conference. Neither, thought Kirk, was the discipline immune from 'excessive concentration in the competitive, status-ridden and introverted world of higher education': a research agenda, that is to say, increasingly being shoehorned into managerially determined, assessment-culture-led institutional priorities. This has meant a loss in the 'cooperative character and … engagement with matters public and political' that, an echo here of Geoff Eley's argument, characterised the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s.

Kirk sought renewed vigour for labour history through 'once again combining what is best in the tough-minded and "committed" British empirical tradition with a more active engagement with these "outside" forces and issues':

> The current and interlinked crises of global capitalism and the
> environment may well spark renewed interest among labour historians

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[38] Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal?', 169 and 175.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

in alternative politico-economic strategies. In this event, the questions of 'commitment' and 'objectivity' will once again come to the fore … The harsh realities of the current global crisis of capitalism will also probably force labour historians to re-think the nature of their practice, its subject matter, its message, and its purpose. The latter is all to the good. Only by engaging with this 'outside' world will British labour history successfully renew itself.[41]

Bringing the methods and discursive perspectives of labour history more systematically to Irish-Scottish studies could valuably contribute to this process, to the agenda proposed by *Workers of the World*, and to the *new* 'new labour history' that Mason's *Live Working or Die Fighting* perhaps foreshadowed. This pioneering issue of the *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* should not be the end of the matter.[42]

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[41] Ibid., 163.

[42] This article was completed early in 2015; minor revisions were made early in 2017, with proof corrections one minor update in September 2017.

Notes on Contributors

Chloe Alexander received her PhD in 2014 from the University of Aberdeen. Her research focused on the activities and political writings of the Scottish-born, Irish labour leader James Connolly and the internationalism of the Scottish and Irish Labour movements (1880-1916). She has previously been published in Saothar: Journal of Irish Labour History. Alongside continuing her research, Chloe works in the Centre for Academic Development at the University of Aberdeen.
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Terry Brotherstone has, since retiring from lecturing in 2008, been an Honorary Research Fellow in History at the University of Aberdeen, where he also directed the Lives in the Oil Industry oral history project. He has edited, or co-edited, a number of books, including Covenant, Charter and Party (1989); The Trotsky Reappraisal (1992); History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism (1996); Gendering Scottish History (1999); and These Fissured Isles: Ireland, Scotland and British History 1798-1848 (2006). He has published articles on a diversity of subjects including the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Chartism, 'Red Clydeside', the Communist Party of Great Britain and the North Sea Oil industry.

Liam Cullinane received his PhD from University College Cork in 2017. His doctoral research consisted of a comparative oral history of manufacturing workers in Cork, Ireland, and was funded by a Government of Ireland postgraduate scholarship from the Irish Research Council. He has previously been published in academic journals such as Saothar: The Journal of the Irish History Society and the Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society as well as the Irish Examiner. He is currently preparing his first monograph, based on his PhD thesis, for publication..

John Cunningham is a Lecturer in History at the National University of Ireland, Galway, where he is Co-Director of the Irish Centre for the Histories of Labour and Class. Recently an editor of Saothar: Journal of Irish Labour History, he has published widely on Irish labour and local history. He is currently writing the life of Tom Glynn (1881-1934), who was prominent in the Australian 'Administration' of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Shaun Kavanagh is a student at University of Glasgow. He has researched Irish and Highland migration to Greenock in the nineteenth century, and has contributed a chapter to 'Scotland and the Easter Rising: Fresh Perspectives on 1916' (Luath: 2016).

William Kenefick is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Dundee. He has published widely on Scottish maritime and labour history, the impact of the Great War and the Russian Revolution on the Scottish working class, Irish and Jewish relations in Scotland, and labour politics and the Dundee working class. He co-edited (with A. McIvor) Roots of Red Clydeside, 1910-1914 (1996), is author of Rebellious and Contrary: The Glasgow Dockers, 1853-1932 (2000), and Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical left, c.1872-1932 (2007).

Arthur McIvor is Professor of Social History and Director of the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. He is a specialist in the history of work and occupational health and has published widely in these fields, including Working Lives: Work in Britain Since 1945 (2013) and, with Ronald Johnston, Miners' Lung (2007). His most recent book (with Juliette Pattinson and Linsey Robb) is Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War (2017).

Emmet O'Connor lectures in History in Ulster University. Between 1983 and 2001 he co-edited Saothar, and is an honorary president of the Irish Labour History Society. He has published widely on labour history, including Big Jim Larkin: Hero or Wrecker? (UCD Press, 2015). At present he is working on a study of the Irish in the International Brigades.