



**A LABOUR
HISTORY**
OF IRELAND 1824-1960
EMMET O'CONNOR

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A Labour History of Ireland

1824-1960

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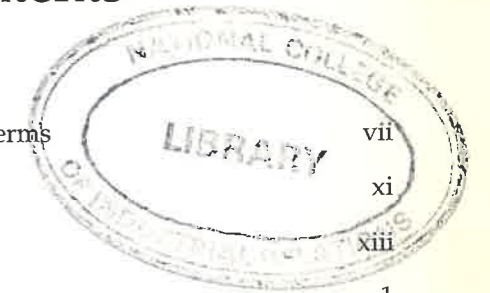
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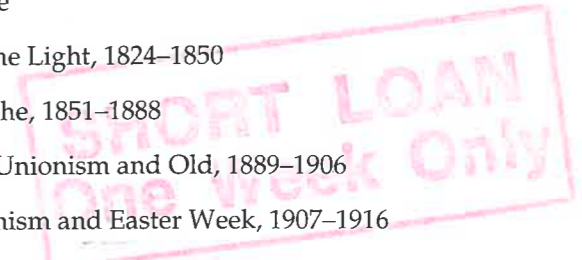
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Abbreviations and Notes on Terms

1. ORGANIZATIONS, NAMES, PLACES, AND TITLES

ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASRS	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
ATGWU	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union
CIU	Congress of Irish Unions
CoIU	Council of Irish Unions
CP	Communist Party of Ireland
FUE	Federated Union of Employers
ICA	Irish Citizen Army
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
ILLA	Irish Land and Labour Association
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ILP(I)	Independent Labour Party (of Ireland)
ILPTUC	Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress

IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
IrLP	Irish Labour Party
ISRP	Irish Socialist Republican Party
ITGWU	Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
ITUC	Irish Trade Union Congress
ITUCLP	Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party
MP	Member of Parliament
NAUL	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
NIC	Northern Ireland Committee
NILP	Northern Ireland Labour Party
NUDL	National Union of Dock Labourers
NUGGL	National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
OBU	One Big Union
PUO	Provisional United Trade Union Organization
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RWG	Revolutionary Workers' Groups
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
TD	Teachta Dala

TUC	Trade Union Congress
UK	United Kingdom
UTA	United Trades' Association
WUI	Workers' Union of Ireland

2. SOURCES, ARCHIVES, AND LIBRARIES

BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
NA	National Archives
NLI	National Library of Ireland
PROL	Public Record Office, London
QUB	Queen's University, Belfast
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UCC	University College, Cork
UCD	University College, Dublin

NOTES ON TERMS

1. The Irish Trade Union Congress was founded in 1894, added 'and Labour Party' to its name in 1914, changed its title to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress in 1918, and reverted to the original in 1930. Throughout this period it was also known simply as Congress.
2. Unionists—that is, supporters of the political Union with Great Britain—whether members of the Unionist Party or not, have been capitalized to avoid confusion with trade unionists.
3. Regional descriptions like Ulster, the north, the south are used for pre-partition Ireland. Thereafter, the North is

x *Abbreviations*

capitalized or referred to as Northern Ireland, the six counties or Ulster as seems appropriate. The south or 26 counties is also referred to as the Free State or Saorstát Éireann from 1922 to 1937, Éire from 1937 to 1949, and then as the Republic.

A NOTE ON MONEY VALUES

In the period covered by this book, the Irish currency was either sterling or—in the case of the Free State/Republic after 1922—a sterling equivalent tied to the British pound and broken into exactly similar units.

The basic unit of currency was the pound (£1), which was composed of twenty shillings (20s.). Each shilling was, in turn, composed of twelve pence (12d.).

Wage rates in excess of £1 were conventionally expressed in shillings, so that it was more usual to write 25s. instead of £1. 5s. 0d., or 26s. 9d. instead of £1. 6s. 9d. I have followed that practice in the text when noting rates of pay. In other cases, however, I have set out monetary amounts in the more usual way for pre-decimal currency, using the £ s. d. symbols in full.

Preface

The first historians of Irish labour, Thomas Brady, James Connolly, J.M. McDonnell, and W.P. Ryan, emerged in the 1900s. They set out to offer a radical version of the people's past and, in the process, to re-interpret the evolution of the nation in a socialist way. Since the 1920s, that tradition has been continued by republican and Marxist pamphleteers and the modern reader is indebted to the Cork Workers' Club, *Historical Reprints Series* for making it accessible. Academic studies of Irish labour have appeared from J.D. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (1926) onwards. Up to the 1970s however, publications came at lengthy intervals and the authors were almost all based abroad. Academics challenged the assumptions of the Connolly school, but underscored its fundamental approach in examining labour in the light of nationalism.

The founding of the Irish Labour History Society in 1973 and the annual publication of *Saothar* brought significant changes in the philosophy and content of scholarship. Radical history gave way to the narrower concept of labour history, understood as the study of labour organizations and movements and of the politics and consciousness produced by these forces. The bibliography now includes a substantial corpus of monographs, together with a few general surveys. Recent years have seen a commendable output of commissioned trade union and trades council histories. The effect of this flowering of interest has been to establish the integrity of the subject and disentangle labour from the seemingly all pervasive story of nationalism. At the same time, labour history has become detached from the wider picture, and monographic research, of its nature, has not been able to construct an overall framework or chart the course of events.

The book is intended as an introduction for the general reader and a synopsis for the specialist. The basic concern has been to

outline the course of labour history, to illustrate the different phases of its chronology, and to determine the forces behind its development. Secondly, it has tried to unravel the puzzles on which there is contention in the published texts. Some of these are general questions. Why was labour marginalized in disaffected nineteenth-century Ireland? Why did nationalism present such a problem in the twentieth century? Why does Ireland have a strong trade union movement and a stunted political left? How have unions survived the divisions in Northern Ireland? Others are more specific. Why did labour not contest the 1918 election? Was the Trade Union Act (1941) motivated by nationalism? Why did Congress split in 1945? Finally, the book seeks to broaden the definition of labour—a focus on conventional trade unions is hopelessly inadequate for nineteenth-century history, for example—and to set it within the context of mainstream political and economic trends, partly in the hope that scholars in the field will edge away from their current compartmentalized outlook and re-integrate with Irish historical consciousness.

There are two themes in this book. The first, which needs no explanation, is the evolution and efficiency of labour structures, labour policy, and radical politics. The second is colonization. From the 1830s onwards, the trajectory of trade unions was determined by economic colonization; their mentality was dictated by reaction to economic and political colonization. During the 1890s, a more complex factor was added to the equation as trade union organization and values were themselves colonized. Attempts to iron out this legacy, sometimes visionary, sometimes neurotic, became inter-meshed with the class theme from 1908 to 1959.

University of Ulster,
Magee College,
July 1992

Acknowledgments

The research for this book is based largely on the work of others, and my greatest debt is to them, especially the late Professor Charles McCarthy, Professor John Boyle, and Dr Fergus D'Arcy. Colleagues in the Irish Labour History Society offered inspiration and advice, and I must thank Peter Collins, Francis Devine, Noirin Greene, Gerry Moran, and Sarah Ward-Perkins for help with sources. I am obliged to Donal Nevin for details on the origin of *Trade Union Information*, to Jim Mullen and Charlie Spillane for technical assistance, to Fergal Tobin and Gill and Macmillan for commissioning the book, and to the staffs of the National Archives, the National Library, Magee College Library, the University of Ulster at Coleraine Library, the Public Record Office, London, the British Library, and Waterford Municipal Library. Remaining mistakes are my own. The University of Ulster kindly granted sabbatical leave to expedite research and, as ever, I am grateful to staff and students at Magee for their encouragement. The book is dedicated to Bridgett O'Connor.

A LABOUR HISTORY OF IRELAND 1824-1960

Emmet O'Connor

This pioneering overview of Irish labour history serves both as an introduction for the general reader and a synopsis for the specialist. Its basic concern is to outline the course of labour history, to illustrate the different phases of its chronology and to determine the forces behind its development. It also investigates some of the most persistent questions surrounding the history of labour in Ireland. Why was labour marginalized in disaffected nineteenth-century Ireland? Why did nationalism present such a problem in the twentieth century? Why does Ireland have a strong trade union movement and a stunted political left? How have unions survived the divisions in Northern Ireland?

The book also looks in detail at specific issues. Among these are the change in emphasis from craft unions to general unions in the early twentieth century; the development of trade union legislation; the relationship between trade unionism and nationalism; and the reasons for the split in the trade union movement in 1945.

In particular, Emmet O'Connor's book broadens the definitions of labour. He argues that the traditional focus on conventional trade unions is hopelessly inadequate. Instead, he attempts to set the history of Irish labour in the context of mainstream political and economic trends.

THE AUTHOR

Dr Emmet O'Connor is a lecturer in modern history at the University of Ulster, Magee College, Derry. He is a specialist in Irish labour history and a joint editor of *Saothar*, the journal of the Irish Labour History Society.

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