

**CASE
STUDY**

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Teaching *Dublin 1913 - strike and lockout*



Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to outline and explain how I would teach the 1913 Dublin Lockout to senior cycle students. My main objectives are:

- ♦ that the students should develop a good understanding of the causes and consequences of this event;
- ♦ to teach the main points as narrative using course textbook (see notes);
- ♦ to encourage students to use the essential historical concepts of evidence, research and interpretation using appropriate methodologies;
- ♦ to develop some key aspects of the Lockout in a thematic manner.

On 26 August 1913 the trams stopped running in Dublin. Striking conductors and drivers, members of the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union, abandoned their vehicles. They had refused a demand from their employer, William Martin Murphy of the Dublin United Transport Company, to forswear union membership or face dismissal. The company then locked them out. Within a month, the charismatic union leader, James Larkin, had called out over 20,000 workers across the city in sympathetic action.¹

Causes of the Lockout

I would spend at least two classes dealing with the causes of the dispute and emphasise the dreadful social and economic conditions that were prevalent in Dublin during the early twentieth century and develop this theme by quoting some relevant statistics:

- ♦ 26,000 families lived in 5,000 tenements over 21,000 families lived in one room
- ♦ One-third of the population lived in the slum jungle
- ♦ Over 4¼ million pledges were taken in pawnbrokers a year
- ♦ Infant mortality among the poor was 142 in Dublin compared to 103, in London (per 1,000 births)
- ♦ Because of TB the vast majority of the deaths occurred among the poorer classes.²

The arrival of Jim Larkin to Dublin and his subsequent setting up of the ITGWU needs to be stressed as does the importance of the ITGWU as the first Irish union that represented Irish unskilled labour. To satisfy the criteria of the new syllabus I would encourage students to become as familiar with the primary evidence of the Lockout as soon as possible. To make it interesting, I would base my teaching around certain themes during the dispute. The following are some examples of such themes that may stimulate the students' interests and encourage them to embark on a course of self-study.

Theme No.1 – Clash of Titans Larkin –V– Murphy

The clash between Jim Larkin's ITGWU and the Dublin Employers Federation led by William Martin Murphy needs to be taught in an unbiased way. Students will invariably be attracted to the side of the underdog in what was an unequal fight. It is important to try and balance the source material as fairly as possible, but it must be stressed that the vast amount of material is more than sympathetic to Larkin and a fair proportion is downright hostile to Murphy. Keogh recognised this dilemma when he argued: "for all his faults, Murphy remains

NARRATIVE OUTLINE

SECTION A – CAUSES

Tenement City – social conditions in Dublin
James Larkin and the Development of Irish Trade Unionism
Larkin's Strengths and Weaknesses
The Sympathetic Strike
William Martin Murphy and the Employer's Federation
The Tramway Workers
Murphy Begins his Attack

Suggest devoting two classes to teaching the causes and general background to the Lockout

SECTION B – EVENTS DURING THE STRIKE

The Tramway Strike
Arrests
A Police Riot in Sackville Street
Civil Rioting and sympathy
Murphy's next step – Lockout
James Connolly and the Irish Citizens Army
Delia Larkin and the Women's Workers Union
British Trade Unionists and the Dublin Lockout
The British authorities and the Lockout
The popular media and the Lock-out
Conservative nationalism and the Lockout
Literary Ireland and the Lockout
The Askwith Enquiry
The Dublin Kiddies Scheme and the Catholic Church

Suggest four classes should be sufficient to cover the main events during the strike.

SECTION C – CONSEQUENCES

The collapse and the aftermath of the Lockout

Suggest one class should be sufficient to cover the consequences and aftermath.

SECTION D – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Skills of the historian: research, note-taking, report-writing and interpretation

Suggest spending at least two classes

the most important catholic businessman of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland. Murphy may not have been particularly charismatic. He was no titan. But all too often he has been presented through the eyes of his main adversary, Larkin. While the latter has – for his early biographers – remained on a plinth, Murphy has been consigned to a historical Hades. The narrowness of that historical approach has closed off as a subject for investigation the world of Catholic

nationalist businessmen of Murphy's generation, who were a significant force in the establishment of the new state".³

Larkin viewed the dispute as a type of gladiatorial contest between himself and William Martin Murphy and contempt for Murphy was often evident in his speeches: "William Martin Murphy has stated that the cars are running, but I would ask, "How many of them are running?" I hope that no workingman will go into them. The cars were taken off the street at 7 o'



clock. Murphy is a coward. If I had the same power behind me as Murphy, I would take the cars out night, noon and morning.⁴

Theme No.2 – The role of the Dublin Metropolitan Police

The role of the Dublin Metropolitan Police has come under a lot of scrutiny as many strikers believed that they were on the side of the employers. Indeed the Sackville Street riot on Sunday 31st August 1913 lends credence to that view.

At about 1 o’ clock on Sunday 31st August, as he was attempting to address a crowd in the street from the balcony of the hotel, was followed by fierce rioting in the vicinity of the hotel. Stones were thrown by a section of the crowd and the police thereupon charged with drawn batons. As the people fled from Sackville Street into Prince’s Street they were met and dispersed by another force of police which was drawn up there. During the evening of Sunday, 31st August, a series of conflicts between the police and the people took place, and a number of business premises in the centre of the City were partially wrecked. Several trams on the various lines were attacked and the glass smashed. In all over 100 arrests were made during the course of the rioting. Over 400 civilians, including several women and girls, were treated in hospital for injuries during the rioting on Saturday and Sunday, while over 50 police had to be treated for wounds.⁵

Theme No.3 – Aspects of writing during the Lockout

This is an ideal opportunity to highlight the interdisciplinary

approach to this case study. The dispute occurred during the early 20th century, a rich period of Irish literature. The poet W.B. Yeats was sympathetic to the strikers and launched an attack at Murphy and his fellow employers in his poem *September 1913*.

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone?
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,
It’s with O’Leary in the grave.⁶

The newspaper of the ITGWU, The Irish Worker, launched vitriolic attack aimed at Martin Murphy. To reinforce that view of him as a type of vulture,

The following accompanied the caricature:
“The Demon of Death spread his wings on the blast
And spat on the face of the poor as he passed.”⁷

Theme No.4 – Class division within Irish society

This is an important theme to develop the students as most of their historical consciousness is centred around the National struggle. The 1913 Lockout provides an insight into the frustrations felt by the underprivileged urban working class against their conservative middle class representatives, in particular, the Home Rule MPs that represented Dublin at that time AE Russell touched on this point when he claimed that:

“The men have been deserted by those who were their natural leaders. For ten weeks, the miserable creatures who misrepresented them in Parliament kept silent. When they were up for the first time in their lives against anything real they scurried back like rats to their hole. These cacklers about self-government had no word to say on the politics of their own city, but after ten weeks they came out with six lines of a letter signed by all the six poltroons. They disclaimed all responsibil-



ity for what is happening in the city and county they represent. It is of no concern of theirs; but they agree to anything the Archbishop might say. Are they not heroic prodigies! Dublin is looking on these men with alien eyes".⁸

Theme No.5 – The Catholic Church and the Strike

Many individual Catholic clergy were initially sympathetic to the plight of the strikers and it's no harm to explain this to students. However the emergence of the 'Dublin Kiddies Scheme' enraged Archbishop Walsh who despite his earlier sympathy came out against the strike.

On the 20th October Archbishop Walsh, in a letter to the press condemning the proposal emanating from Larkin to send the children of the unemployed to England during the strike, appealed for a settlement of the dispute. The deportation of children commenced on the 21st October and was the cause of some exciting scenes, both in Dublin and Kingstown. Owing to the exertions of the R.C. clergy and others all attempts at deportation were soon abandoned. The number of children actually deported was small.⁹

Theme No.6 – Women and the Strike

Until recently the role of women during the Dublin Lockout was regarded as merely supporting their menfolk, recent research suggests otherwise. Delia Larkin, Jim's sister, headed a woman's trade union called IWWU within the ambit of the ITGWU and they became fully involved when the dispute exploded.

Dublin women workers paid a high price in the lock-out. Between four and five hundred women never got their jobs back. They had been arrested and imprisoned, like fourteen year old Lily Kempson, who died in January 1996. Fifteen-year old Alice Brady was shot by a scab and died in the new year of 1914.¹⁰

Consequences

The strike petered out towards the end of 1913, early 1914 when the men and women slowly drifted back to work. It is important that students can interpret the different viewpoints of both the victor and the vanquished. William Martin Murphy was triumphant when he declared to the Dublin Chamber of Commerce 'the fight against Larkin was not after all so difficult; it was easier than it appeared. The prospect of a strike and the anticipation of it had much more terror for the employer than the actual strike when it took place. An employer who had never been up against a strike was terrorised by the prospect. When the strike actually took place the employer had to get his back to the wall, and the workman had fired his last cartridge. The employer all the time managed to get his three meals a day, but the unfortunate workman had no resources whatever except submission, and that was what occurred in 99 cases out of 100. The difficulty of teaching that lesson to the workman was



extraordinary.¹¹

The ITGWU was defeated but it was not crushed and its very survival was in its own way the most important victory. However, James Connolly didn't see that immediately when he declared "And so we Irish workers must again go down into Hell, bow our backs to the last of the slave drivers, let our hearts be seared by the iron of his hatred and instead of the sacramental wafer of brotherhood and common sacrifice, eat the dust of defeat and betrayal. Dublin is isolated."¹²

Context

The 1913 Dublin Lockout is a unique event in Irish history, in that, it does not fit comfortably into mainstream Irish history of the period which is mainly concerned with the Irish national question. However, the Lockout is the most important event within the context of modern Irish labour history and it has proved to be a watershed in industrial relations between trade unions and employers. The bitterness of the dispute lingered on for many generations especially in Dublin where the tradition of militant trade unionism is much more profound than in the rest of the country. James Connolly, frustrated at the end of the Lockout turned his attention at that of the citizen's army to the national question that culminated in the 1916 rising and his subsequent execution. After 1916, the national question held centre stage, but the experiences gained by both sides in 1913 played a very important role in modern industrial relations in independent Ireland. The Lockout ensured that unskilled workers could now be represented by a professional Irish-based trade union and could engage employers in the process of free collective bargaining. Employers, recognised the futility in trying to prevent the unskilled organising and instead of trying to crush them, pursued a policy of containment.

Document A

The Dublin Strike

By AE George W. Russell. "Irish Worker" Press, Liberty Hall, Dublin.

A Plea for the Workers. A speech delivered in the Royal Albert Hall, London, November 1, 1913, to an audience of 12,000 persons.

I beseech you not to forsake these men who are out on strike. They may have been to blame for many an action. The masters may perhaps justifiably complain of things done and undone. But if the masters have rights by the light of reason and for the moment the men are right by the light of reason and for eternity.

This labour uprising in Ireland is the despairing effort of humanity to raise itself out of a dismal swamp of disease and poverty. James Larkin may have been an indiscreet leader. He may have committed blunders, but I believe in the sight of heaven the crimes are all on the other side. If our Courts of Justice were courts of humanity, the masters of Dublin would be in the dock charged with criminal conspiracy, their crime that they tried to starve out one-third of the people of Dublin, to break their hearts, and degrade their manhood, for the greatest crime against humanity is its own degradation.

"The men have always been willing to submit their case to arbitration, but the masters refuse to meet them. They refused to consult with your trades union leaders. They would not abide with the Askwith report. They refused to hear of prominent Irishmen acting as arbitrators. They said scornfully of the Peace Committee that it was only interfering. They say that they are not fighting [trades] unionism, but they refuse point blank to meet the Trades Council in Dublin. They want their own way absolutely. These Shylocks of industry want their pound of flesh starved off the bones of the workers. They think their employees have no rights as human beings, no spirit whose dignity can be abased. You have no idea what labour in Ireland which fights for the bare means of human support is up against. The autocrats of industry can let loose upon them the wild beasts that kill in the name of the state. They can let loose upon them a horde of wild fanatics who will rend them in the name of God.

Questions on the Document

Document A

Where does the document come from?

What was the purpose of AE Russell's speech in the Royal Albert Hall?

According to Russell, was the employer's reaction to arbitration?

What was his opinion of Larkin's leadership?

How did he compare this to the actions of the employers?

This speech was made during the height of the dispute. Do you think this influenced its tone and content? Give examples.

Notes and selected Bibliography

¹ Yeates, Pdraig, 2001, *Lockout Dublin 1913*, Gill & Macmillan.

² Nevin, Donal (ed.), 1998, *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold*, Gill & Macmillan.

³ Keogh, Dermot, 1998, *Clash of Titans: James Larkin and William Martin Murphy*, p47-55 in *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold*, Donal Nevin ed. 1998

⁴ CO 904/158/3 A note on the recent Labour Troubles in Dublin submitted to the Under Secretary for Ireland, Public Records Office, Kew.

⁵ CO 904/158/3 (ibid) A note on the recent Labour Troubles in Dublin submitted to the Under Secretary for Ireland, Public Records Office, Kew.

⁶ Yeats, William B., *Collected Poems*, London: Macmillan 1963.

⁷ *Irish Worker*, 6 September, 1913.

⁸ Russell, AE George W., *A Plea for the Workers*, A speech delivered in the Royal Albert Hall, London, 1 November, 1913 to an audience of 12,000 persons, Irish Worker Press, Liberty Hall Dublin.

⁹ CO 904/158/3 (ibid) A note on the recent Labour Troubles in Dublin submitted to the Under Secretary for Ireland, Public Records Office, Kew.

¹⁰ Moriarty, Theresa, 1998, *Larkin and the Women's*

Movement, p93-98, in *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold*, Donal Nevin ed. 1998

¹¹ Nevin, Donal (ed.), 1998, appendix, p245 in *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold*, Gill & Macmillan.

¹² Connolly, James, article in *Forward* dated 7 February 1914. Picture credits: National Photographic Library of Ireland

Additional Sources

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Plunkett, James, 1978, *Strumpet City*, published by Arrow Ltd.

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/easterrising/prelude/pr05.shtml>

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Further Reading

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Ellis, P. Berresford, **A history of the Irish working class**, London: Pluto Press, 1985

Document B

CO 904/158/3 A note on the recent Labour Troubles in Dublin submitted to the Under Secretary for Ireland, Public Records Office, Kew. (A Separate Note in the File)

In connection with the allegation made by Larkin that a Dublin girl had been sent to a home for fallen women at High Park, Drumcondra, a girl named Mary Murphy, who was on strike from Messrs. Jacobs Factory was charged with assaulting one of the girls employed by Messrs Jacob on the morning of the 3rd November and with acting in a similar manner in the afternoon of the same day when the girl was returning from dinner. Mary Murphy was remanded for a week, and, being under the age of 16 years, she was ordered to be sent to the Reformatory School at High Park, Drumcondra, which is a place of detention under the Children Act 1908. On the expiration of the remand she was convicted of the assault and sentenced to detention for one month in the same Reformatory School. Under the provisions of the Children Act the Magistrate had no alternative but to commit her to the Reformatory School as a place of detention: he could not send her to prison. There is a Magdalene Asylum or Home for Fallen Women in charge of the Community of Nuns who manage the Reformatory School, but the Magdalene Asylum is entirely separate from the Reformatory School; the entrances are distinct; and the inmates of the two Institutions never come into contact

Questions on the Document

Document B

- Where does this document come from?
- What did Larkin allege?
- What does the document tell us about the judicial system in Ireland when dealing with minors?
- What does the document tell us about the relations between workers at Jacobs?
- Can you detect any biases in the writer's account of the event?

Granville, Gary (Curriculum Development Unit, Dublin), **Divided City, Portrait of Dublin 1913**, Dublin: O'Brien Educational, 1978

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Illustrations: *Divided City, Portrait of Dublin 1913*