THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Subject History

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Summary: The 1913 Dublin Strike and Lockout

Summary: Dublin 1913 – strike and lockout
The strike and lockout involved a struggle between the ITGWU led by Jim Larkin and the Dublin employers controlled by William Martin Murphy. It lasted from August 1913 to January 1914 and resulted in a victory for the employers. It involved 20,000 workers and about 400 employers and is considered the most severe industrial dispute in Irish history.
Key Personalities: Jim Larkin, James Connolly, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington
Socialism: movement that looked to see greater equality in society and increased rights for workers.

Date	Timeline of the Strike and Lockout
1909	Larkin established the Irish Transport and General Workers Union for unskilled workers
1912	Foundation of the Irish Labour Party.
1913	***Strike:*** ***August*** 26th Beginning of the action against the Tramway Company by the ITGWU 31st Larkin appeared in the window of the Imperial Hotel, in disguise, to address a crowd of a banned meeting. A riot followed. Became known as "Bloody Sunday".
	Lockout September: William Martin Murphy persuaded 400 employers to sack those who refused to leave the ITGWU. Numbers affected 20,000.
	October: Archbishop William Walsh condemned the plan (**Kiddies Scheme**) to send children of strikers to England for the duration of the strike.
	November: Irish Citizen Army established to protect workers against police brutality.
1914	**January** ITGWU call off the strike.
	January / February: Striking workers return to work and the lockout ended.

Wider Political Context

This event took place in the wider context of the **Home Rule Crisis**. In 1912 the British government had introduced the 3rd Home Rule Bill. It was due to become law in 1914.

The Bill saw strong opposition concentrated on Ulster. Here Unionists, backed by the Conservative Party in Britain organised the Solemn League and Covenant signed by over 450,000 men and women. This was followed by the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force of 100,000 men.
The crisis worsened with the formation of the Irish Volunteer Force in November 1913.

By 1914 Ireland was on the verge of civil war.
In March officers in the Curragh "mutinied" rather than march on Ulster.
In April Unionists imported arms from Germany and in July Nationalists from the same source.

Attempts at compromise failed and by the end of July civil was seemed certain. This was averted by the outbreak of World War I.

Judging Sources – accounts or political cartoons:

Pro Worker (Hostile to Murphy)	Pro Employer (Hostile to Larkin)
Source from Larkin	Irish Independent / Herald / Sunday Independent
Source from Connolly	Source from a business leader
Irish Worker Newpaper	Irish Times – may pretend to be neutral!
Source from Hanna Sheehy Skeffington	Freeman's Journal
Source from Dora Montefiore	Police report
Source from Markiewicz	
Neutral – less biased	
British Newspaper especially Manchester Guardian	
Leprechaun Cartoon Monthly	

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1. What were conditions like in Dublin in the early 20th century?

- Slum conditions in Dublin were among the worst in Europe. Over **20,000 families lived in one-room dwellings**, and in 1914 there were **5,322 tenement houses housing 87,305 people**. Many of these were classified as unfit for human habitation. For example, **No. 14 Henrietta Street housed 100 people in just one building**, divided into 17 households.
- The death rate was extremely high at **27.6 per 1,000**, while infant mortality reached **153 per 1,000 births in 1913**, one of the worst rates in Britain and Ireland. Diseases such as **tuberculosis (368 deaths per 100,000)**, measles, and whooping cough were widespread due to overcrowding and malnutrition.
- Unemployment could reach **20%**, and out of **90,000 adult males**, **30,000 were unskilled labourers** working in insecure, casual jobs. Women earned about **half the wages of men**, often in domestic service.
- Social problems such as alcoholism, crime (about **100 serious crimes per 10,000 people**), and prostitution were widespread, especially in areas like **Monto**, the largest red-light district in Europe. The collapse of houses at **66–67 Church Street (2 September 1913)**, killing **7 people**, highlighted the dangerous conditions.

2. What was the background to the strike and lockout?

- Labour organisation in Ireland was weak due to limited industry, religious divisions in Belfast, and the dominance of political issues like Home Rule. However, figures such as **Michael Davitt** helped early labour movements, and by 1900 the Irish Trades Union Congress represented **60,000 workers**.
- The key figure was **James 'Big Jim' Larkin**, who founded the **Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU)** in **1909** after being dismissed from the National Union of Dock Labourers.
- Influenced by **syndicalism**, Larkin aimed to unite all workers and use **sympathetic strikes** to improve conditions. Membership quickly grew to **10,000**, supported by figures like **James Connolly** and **William O'Brien**.
- Larkin's success—winning wage increases of **20–25%** in disputes—alarmed employers. The most powerful among them was **William Martin Murphy**, owner of the **Irish Independent**, **Clery's**, and the **Dublin United Tramways Company**.
- In 1911, he led the formation of the **Dublin Employers' Federation**, which refused to recognise the ITGWU. This conflict over union recognition was the central cause of the dispute.

3. How did the strike and lockout begin?

- The dispute began in August 1913 when Murphy dismissed workers who were members of the ITGWU. On **21 August**, about **100 tramway workers** were sacked.
- On **26 August**, during the busy Dublin Horse Show, around **700 tram workers** went on strike, stopping trams across the city. This triggered widespread **sympathetic strikes**, with dockers, carters, and railway workers refusing to handle goods linked to Murphy's businesses. The conflict quickly escalated into a city-wide dispute.

4. What was the importance of "Bloody Sunday"?

- On **31 August 1913**, Larkin addressed a banned meeting from the **Imperial Hotel** before being arrested. Police baton-charged crowds on **Sackville Street**, killing **2 people** and injuring around **500**.
- **"Bloody Sunday"** became a turning point. It caused widespread outrage and led to a government inquiry into police brutality. It also gained sympathy from **British trade unions**, helping sustain the strike.

5. How did the strike develop?

- The strike intensified when over **400 employers**, led by **William Martin Murphy**, issued a pledge forcing workers to leave the ITGWU. Those who refused were **locked out**. Thousands rejected the pledge, even non-union workers.
- Conditions in Dublin deteriorated rapidly. Hunger spread through the tenements. Support came from British trade unions, who donated **£100,000** and sent food shipments such as **60,000 "family boxes"** aboard *The Hare*, each feeding a family of five.
- **Liberty Hall** became the centre of relief efforts, with soup kitchens organised by figures like **Countess Markievicz** and **Hanna Sheehy Skeffington**.
- A major controversy arose with the **"kiddies scheme"**. Suggested by **Dora Montefiore**, it aimed to send strikers' children to England to be cared for. However, **Archbishop William J. Walsh** strongly opposed it, fearing Catholic children would lose their faith. Violent clashes occurred at the docks when children attempted to leave.
- The scheme caused major public outrage and **lost the workers significant support**. As Yeates noted, more effort was made to stop children leaving than to feed them at home.
- Meanwhile, Larkin and Connolly tried to convince British unions to call a **general strike**, but they refused. Larkin's anger led to a breakdown in relations, and further aid from Britain declined.
- To defend workers, the **Irish Citizen Army (ICA)** was formed in **November 1913**, led by **James Connolly**, with over **1,000 members**. Its purpose was to protect workers from the **Dublin Metropolitan Police** and maintain morale.
- Despite these efforts, the workers' position weakened as hunger, lack of income, and isolation took their toll.

6. What was the opinion of nationalist politicians to the strike?

- Nationalist politicians, especially the **Home Rule Party**, were largely hostile. They feared the dispute would distract from the struggle for Home Rule.
- Deputy leader **John Dillon** expressed frustration with both Larkin and Murphy, while **Sinn Fein leader Arthur Griffith** criticised Larkin as a disruptive outsider. Newspapers like the **Irish Times** also attacked the ITGWU, describing it as tyrannical and focused on agitation rather than settlement.

7. How did the strike end?

- By **January 1914**, workers were exhausted. Despite British financial aid, the refusal of British unions to strike was decisive.
- The ITGWU leadership met on **18 January 1914** and decided to end the strike. Larkin admitted defeat: *"We are beaten."* Workers gradually returned to work, often forced to accept employers' terms. By February, most had returned, and employers claimed victory.

8. What was the outcome of the strike and lockout?

- In the short term, the workers lost. However, the outcome was more balanced in the long term. The ITGWU recovered quickly, growing from **24,000 members in 1913 to 120,000 by 1920**, helped by labour shortages during **World War I**.

- Employers' opposition was often directed more at **"Larkinism"** than unionism itself. Figures like **Ernest Shackleton** made this clear.
- The strike raised awareness of Dublin's poverty, leading to improvements in housing and public health. It also shaped political ideas—**James Connolly** argued that socialism should align with Irish nationalism.
- The **Irish Citizen Army** later played a role in the **1916 Rising**. While the strike was a defeat, it had lasting social and political consequences. As Connolly later said, it was ultimately "a drawn battle."

Potential Essays

1.Question: What were the social and economic conditions that contributed to the 1913 strike and lockout?

The Dublin strike and lockout of 1913 was one of the most dramatic labour disputes in Irish history. At its heart lay the desperate social and economic conditions endured by Dublin's working classes, combined with the growing strength of trade unionism under James Larkin and the fierce opposition of powerful employers. Poverty, overcrowding, and insecure employment created an explosive situation that made conflict almost inevitable. Question answered

In early 20th-century Dublin social conditions were very poor. Reference to the question. The city was notorious for its poverty and slums, which were among the worst in Europe. More than 20,000 families lived in one-room tenement dwellings, often in houses originally built for wealthy families but later divided and rented out by landlords. At 14 Henrietta Street in 1911, one house contained 100 residents spread across 17 households. Overcrowding bred disease, and the city's death rate of 27.6 per 1,000 was shockingly high. Infant mortality stood at 147 per 1,000 births, reflecting malnutrition and poor sanitation. Tuberculosis, measles, and whooping cough spread rapidly in these conditions, leaving families devastated. Poverty was worsened by alcohol abuse, as many workers spent wages in pubs, some of which were even used to pay them. Crime was common with a rate higher than comparable British cities. Prostitution flourished in areas like Monto which was reputed to be the largest red light district in Europe. The result was a city where thousands lived in misery, with little prospect of improvement.

Dublin's economy was dominated not by manufacturing, but by transport and distribution. Reference to the Question Many of the city's 90,000 adult males worked as unskilled labourers, often employed casually on a day-to-day basis. Unemployment rates sometimes reached 20 percent, and competition for work left employees with no bargaining power. Wages were poor: less than one pound a week for men, and about half that for women, most of whom worked in domestic service. Trade unions existed, but they were dominated by skilled workers like printers and carpenters, and many were tied to British organisations with little interest in Irish conditions.

The unskilled, who made up the bulk of Dublin's workforce, remained largely unorganised until the arrival of James Larkin. Larkin transformed the Irish labour movement when he founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in 1909. His goal was to unite all workers, skilled and unskilled alike, and to use militant tactics such as sympathetic strikes to force better wages and conditions. The union quickly grew to 10,000 members, and Larkin's powerful speeches inspired loyalty among Dublin's poor. His colleague James Connolly also played a key role in building the union and linking socialism with the Irish labour struggle. Larkin's success alarmed employers, especially William Martin Murphy, one of Dublin's richest businessmen. Murphy, owner of the tramway system and several newspapers, saw Larkinism as a threat to order and profit. In 1911 he helped establish the Dublin Employers' Federation, which united over 400 employers in opposition to the ITGWU.

By 1913, Dublin was a city of extremes: immense poverty and exploitation on the one hand, and growing worker militancy on the other. The appalling housing conditions, widespread unemployment,

and low wages created desperation among the working classes, while the rise of the ITGWU challenged the dominance of employers. When Murphy and his allies refused to recognise the union, conflict was unavoidable. The strike and lockout were therefore the product of decades of social neglect and economic exploitation, brought to a head by the determination of workers to improve their lives and the determination of employers to resist them.

2. Question: How did the strike and lockout occur in 1913 and why did the employers prevail?

The Dublin strike and lockout of 1913 was the most intense industrial conflict in Ireland before independence. It emerged from decades of social deprivation and a bitter struggle between organised labour and powerful employers. The dispute unfolded dramatically over several months, involving violent clashes, hunger, and international attention. In the end, the employers prevailed, but their victory came at a high social cost.

By the early 20th century, Dublin was notorious for its appalling living conditions. Tens of thousands of families lived in overcrowded tenements where disease and poverty were rampant. Wages were low, employment was insecure, and many unskilled workers relied on casual labour. The established trade unions largely represented skilled workers, leaving the majority of Dublin's workforce unprotected.

This situation changed with the arrival of James Larkin, who founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in 1909. Larkin sought to unite skilled and unskilled workers alike, giving the poorest a voice. His militant tactics, including sympathetic strikes, alarmed employers but won him enormous popularity among Dublin's labourers. Together with James Connolly, he built a union that challenged the dominance of employers. Employers were deeply hostile to what they referred to as "Larkinism". William Martin Murphy, one of Dublin's most powerful businessmen, led the opposition. As owner of the Dublin United Tramways Company and the *Irish Independent* newspaper, Murphy wielded enormous influence. He argued that Larkin's tactics threatened both profit and order, and in 1911 he helped establish the Dublin Employers' Federation to resist the ITGWU.

The dispute started in August 1913. Murphy ordered tramway workers to renounce their union membership. When they refused, he sacked over 300 employees. This provoked sympathy strikes by other workers, and soon over 20,000 were either on strike or locked out. Employers united in support of Murphy's stance, circulating a pledge requiring employees to forswear the ITGWU. Those who refused were barred from work. The authorities sided with the employers. The Dublin Metropolitan Police and the Royal Irish Constabulary were used to break up protests. On 31 August 1913, a banned demonstration ended in "Bloody Sunday," when baton charges left over 500 injured and two dead. The strikers and their families faced starvation. Relief funds and food ships from British trade unions helped for a time, but aid was insufficient. A plan to send strikers' children to England for temporary relief — the so-called "kiddies scheme" — collapsed after Catholic leaders condemned it as an attack on faith and family. With no welfare system to rely on, families endured immense suffering.

Several factors explain why the employers ultimately prevailed. First, they were united, disciplined, and financially secure. Over 400 firms supported Murphy's stance, ensuring that workers could not play employers against each other. The employers also had deep financial reserves to endure a long struggle. Second, the workers were isolated. Larkin had hoped that British trade unions would call sympathetic strikes, but they stopped short of such action. Instead, they limited themselves to financial support. Without broader solidarity, Dublin's workers could not match the employers' power. Finally, time worked against the strikers. Hunger and desperation forced families to return to work. By January 1914, many had signed the employers' pledge, and the ITGWU leadership admitted defeat.

The 1913 strike and lockout occurred because Dublin's unskilled workers, long exploited and living in terrible conditions, sought to organise under the ITGWU, while employers under William Martin Murphy were determined to prevent union recognition. The conflict escalated into a bitter struggle involving mass lockouts, violent clashes, and international attention. The employers prevailed because they were united, wealthy, and backed by the state, while workers were isolated, impoverished, and unable to sustain the strike. Although a defeat in the short term, the lockout remains a defining moment in Irish history, highlighting both the vulnerability of workers and the power of collective organisation.

3.Question; Did the 1913 Strike and Lockout fail in its objectives?

The 1913 Dublin strike and lockout was the most significant industrial dispute in modern Irish history. It pitted James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) against powerful employers led by William Martin Murphy. At first sight, the strike ended in failure: workers returned defeated and union recognition was denied. However, the longer-term consequences suggest that the lockout was not a total failure, as it laid the groundwork for future trade union strength and raised public awareness of poverty in Dublin.

The ITGWU's main aim was recognition for unskilled workers and improved wages and conditions. Larkin's strategy relied on militant tactics such as sympathetic strikes, designed to show solidarity across industries. More broadly, he and James Connolly wanted to challenge the dominance of employers and give Dublin's poor some dignity and bargaining power. Employers, led by Murphy, were determined to crush the ITGWU. They circulated a pledge requiring workers to renounce membership, locking out those who refused. The dispute quickly escalated into a battle over the right to unionise.

In the short term, the lockout was a defeat. The hoped-for sympathetic strike by British trade unions never came, though they provided funds and food aid. By January 1914, starvation and hardship forced workers back to their jobs, many signing Murphy's pledge. Larkin admitted: "We are beaten." Bloody Sunday and the collapse of the "kiddies scheme" left workers demoralised, and their living conditions were often worse than before. On this level, the strike failed in its immediate objectives.

Yet the ITGWU was not destroyed. Membership initially fell, but the union revived during the First World War when labour shortages gave workers more bargaining power. By 1920, it had become Ireland's largest union with over 120,000 members. Employers had claimed victory in 1913, but they could not prevent unionism from regaining strength. This resilience was helped by the fact that many employers objected more to Larkin personally than to trade unionism itself. Once he left for America in 1914, it became easier for workers to rejoin unions without provoking the same hostility.

The lockout had important consequences beyond the industrial struggle. It highlighted the appalling poverty of Dublin's tenements, drawing public attention to housing and health reform. The creation of the Irish Citizen Army during the dispute also ensured that the workers' fight lived on politically. Under Connolly, the ICA later played a key role in the 1916 Rising. Connolly himself came to see that socialism in Ireland needed to be linked with nationalism. The lockout, therefore, influenced the merging of labour and republican politics, shaping Ireland's revolutionary decade.

The 1913 strike and lockout was undoubtedly a defeat in the short term. Workers returned to their jobs without union recognition, and many families endured terrible suffering. However,

the dispute did not destroy trade unionism. Instead, it strengthened the long-term position of the ITGWU, drew attention to poverty, and influenced future political struggles. While the strike failed in its immediate aims, it succeeded in reshaping Irish society and laying the foundations for change.