

Following Larkin's return to Ireland in April 1923, bitter divisions quickly emerged in the ITGWU leading to a split in 1924 with the establishment of the Workers Union of Ireland. The Executive Committee of the ITGWU published a partisan account of the split and related court proceedings in a 170 page booklet titled *'The attempt to smash the Irish Transport and General Workers Union*. The booklet was widely circulated by the ITGWU through its branch networks. By way of example, the Sligo Branch requested ten dozen copies in December 1924. ⁱ

The introductory paragraph gives an accurate flavour of the tone and approach taken in the publication;

'The attempt made by James Larkin to smash the greatest industrial weapon the workers of Ireland have ever wielded or are ever likely to wield, is so treacherous a blow against the Labour movement that a public exposure of its causes and its objects is the least service that can be done for the working-class. That exposure is made in part in the report of the legal proceedings between Larkin and the Executive Committee of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. This report forms the bulk of the present volume and it is supplemented by other documents, of various dates, now printed for the first time for the clearer understanding of certain references in the legal proceedings themselves. The whole story makes a chapter in the history of labour, which, if not very edifying in itself, ought to convey to the working-class a salutary lesson upon the control, management and leadership of a great trade union. The workers have eaten much bitter bread before and since the repeal of the Combination Acts just a hundred years ago, and what Larkin offers them now is as bitter as any they have ever tasted. If this volume helps them to eject this Larkinite poison from their system, as they ejected others in earlier years, the publication of this painful chapter in their history will be work well done'.

The 1924 Annual Report of the ITGWU gives further context to the publication;ⁱⁱ

'When the year 1924 opened, the legal questions between James Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union were still undecided. They were finally determined in February 1924, when the law courts gave judgment in favour of the Executive Committee of the Union and against Larkin. He was thereupon expelled from membership of this organisation on March 14th by unanimous vote of the E.C. A full account of the legal issues raised was given in the Annual Report for 1923, and since then a complete report of the court proceedings, and other valuable historical material, have been published in "The Attempt to Smash the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union." These legal proceedings were very protracted and expensive, and it was apparently Larkin's object to hold up the machinery of the Union and to compel the spending of large sums of Union money in the courts and embarrass the organisation in that way. When the decision of the courts was given against him, he appealed, and then applied for, and got, the hearing of the appeal adjourned until June. But when the courts were about to consider it, his solicitor gave notification that the appeal was dropped. Subsequently an unsuccessful attempt was made to re-open all the questions already decided in the courts by the bringing of a new action against the Union in the names of three of Larkin's dupes. In the courts costs were given against Larkin; but as he did not pay these costs, he was adjudicated bankrupt for them on the application of the Union.'

The account of the dispute with Larkin was not confined by the ITGWU Executive Committee to the events of 1924. There was a description of the foundation of the ITGWU that gives no credit to the role of its founding General Secretary.

'At the outset, it is desirable that a brief summary should be given of the history of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and of James Larkin's connection with it. In 1908 an attempt was made

by a number of Labour men in Dublin to form a national and general union of Irish workers upon the lines upon which the present I.T. and G.W.U. has since developed. The attempt failed owing mainly to the hostility of James Larkin, a native of Liverpool, and at that time an official in Ireland of the Liverpool organisation, the National Union of Dock Labourers. Later in the year Larkin was suspended and finally dismissed by the N.U.D.L. Thereupon he threw in his lot with the Dublin and Cork workers who were planning a separate Irish union independent of the cross-Channel or English unions and in January 1909, the I.T. and G.W.U. was founded. Amongst its actual founders were a number of those Dublin workers who figure in the report of the trials as members and supporters of the Executive Committee'.

The booklet was digitised by Dr Gerry Watts and the ILHS is very grateful to Dr Watts for sharing the digitisation work he undertook during his research on the ITGWU in the 1920's, thus ensuring it is widely available online for the first time. The booklet contains a significant amount of source material over the period from the foundation of the ITGWU in 1909 until 1924. However, readers should be aware of the bias in the selection of material and in the commentary. Notwithstanding this, the booklet is an important historical document.

Also included is a who's who of Dublin Labour figures of the time. This was prepared to assist the ITGWU's legal team and was most likely compiled by Cathal O'Shannon.

i Maurice O'Regan letter in *William O'Brien papers*, National Library of Ireland.

ii ITGWU Annual Report 1924 p 6.