

Francis Devine & Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh (eds) **Bread Not Profits: Provincial Working Class Politics During the Irish Revolution**, (Dublin 2022) Umiskin Press, ISBN: 9781838111281 (hb) 9781838111298 (pb) pp.xxx,302, €28 paperback.

As the title indicates, this collection moves beyond the cities of Dublin and Belfast, looking instead to the provincial working class experience of the revolutionary era. The collection is arranged by the four provinces, with a balance between broad over-view and closely-focused essays. Two of the contributions look to Connacht. John Cunningham writes on labour conflict in Sligo 1911-13, detailing a fortuitous alliance between the early ITGWU, Catholic bourgeois and the Ancient Order of Hibernians in opposing the power of the Protestant business establishment of the Pollexfens on the Sligo docks. This culminated in a successful strike in 1913 that has been overshadowed by the disastrous Dublin lockout of the same year. Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh writes a brief biography on Micheál Ó Maoláin the ITGWU and Gaelic League activist from the Aran Islands. A journalist, socialist, and trade union activist organising the rural labourers in county Dublin he was active in the Sligo strike detailed by Cunningham. Imprisoned in Wakefield after the 1916 Rising and then in Frongoch, he linked the cultural, class and national struggles.

Three contributions look to Leinster. Terry Dunne writes on labour in County Laois, Joe Supple and Frank Taaffe write on Christopher Supple of Athy as an ‘unsung hero’ of the labour struggle in County Kildare, whilst Francis Devine writes on the Meath Labour Union 1906-1922. Dunne focuses on two different disputes, the first a lockout of the workers in the Portarlinton Sawmills and the second a strike by the farm labourers in Clonaslee in the Slieve Bloom. These very different disputes of the trade and the spade illustrate the role of local activists in the foundation of ITGWU branches in rural Ireland and also the typical experience of the highly conditional support of advanced nationalism for labour especially as the strong farmers organised to resist rural radicalism. The history of Christopher Supple of Athy illustrates the danger of being a trade union activist in rural Ireland and, again, the role of the new Free State government and army in securing the farmer interest and in suppressing trade union radicalism. Supple suffered a seven week internment for his union activism without even a pretence by the state that he was in any way involved in anti-Treaty activities. Devine contributes a broad review of the Meath Labour Union and its pathway into merger into the ITGWU, an example of local evolution of labour radicalism and the journey from ‘rural labourer’ to ‘worker’ and the end of deference.

The province of Munster is covered by the majority of the contributions, six in all. Dominic Haugh’s class struggle amongst rural labourers in the mid-west is centred on Limerick, as is Sharon Slater’s contribution on the Limerick Clothing Factory. Haugh’s is a broad analysis of the rise and fall of the ITGWU in the mid-west region, the continuity of older traditions of resistance amongst the rural labourers, and the evolution from spontaneous to organised action in confrontation with the strong farmer class organised in the Farmers’ Union. The Farmers were supported by the IRA that eschewed divisive class struggle. The rural labourers were abandoned eventually by the ITGWU as it cut its losses and cease organising agricultural workers. Slater’s is a close history of the Limerick Clothing Factory, a significant local employer of men and women in the textile sector over a long period in which workers organised by the ITGWU within a factory system had to fight hard to defend their rights in response to technical innovations and changes in management and government policies. Maurice Casey writes on the life of the founding member of Saor Éire, David Fitzgerald, born in Cahir County Tipperary. His life illustrates the global vision of an Irish radical that reached from Cahir to Moscow and influenced the leftward turn of the republican movement in the inter-war years. Emmet O’Connor offers an overview of Munster labour in the “Red Flag” years that shows a widespread local knowledge of international events and

ideologies that a cautious leadership in Labour's political and industrial wings failed to recognise and lead. Oliver Coquelin contributes a close contextualisation and analysis of the Cleeve's soviet agitation as an example of socialism 'from below'. Kevin McNulty writes on County Kerry experience of class and gender in the civil war period through the experience of the extraordinary daughter of the "Big House" Gobnait Ní Bhruadair/Albina Brodrick. The essay illustrates the developing suppression of feminist and class identities by an all-embracing nationalism that eroded democracy in Kerry and cleared the path for extra-judicial executions in the civil war period.

Ulster is covered by three contributions. Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh writes on the working class republican tradition on East Tyrone, and in a further essay on working class militancy in the wider area of mid-Ulster. In the first essay he argues that the labour movement in pre-partition East Tyrone, centred on Coalisland and Dungannon, fed on a local Fenian mentalité that encouraged a convergence of traditional resistance to Unionist discrimination with resistance to the worsening social conditions, leading to the creation of a republican labour movement. In his second essay Mac Bhloscaidh looks at the same region in the later period of world war, the war of independence, and partition. Here the British-based unions were more significant than the ITGWU in creating a labour militancy and in exploiting the opportunities for the unskilled that the world war created., though ultimately defeated by the yellow union of Carson-created Ulster Unionist Labour Association. Luke Dineen compares labour in Cork and in Derry, arguing the same economic conditions and syndicalist counter-culture produced different outcomes due to the sectarianism in Derry city. The collection concludes with three thematic essays. Michael Pierse writes on portrayals of working class life in fictional writing of the period; Siobhra Aiken on the novel *Green Volcano* by Jim Phelan, and Brian Casey queries the assumptions often made on the culture of deference in Irish Catholicism in the early twentieth century.

The essays all contest the now-dated view that the provincial and rural labour movements and the anti-treaty activism all drew on an atavistic, pre-modern mob mentality that was anti-democratic and lacked a coherent ideology. In provincial Ireland between 1912 and 1923, the essays show, working class radicalism was more global in its view than has been appreciated, able to engage in a range of labour struggles by calling upon an eclectic range of mobilisations. During the world war, strike action compelled the state to intervene on behalf of labour to maintain industrial peace. In the period after the end of the world war, as the nationalist revolution developed, labour fought hard to hold on to the gains made and to win new improvements. Various ideologies were drawn upon as required – 'Red Flag' Bolshevism, Sovietism, republicanism, syndicalism and agrarianism – but always in pursuit of the goal of securing a better life for the working class.

Martin Maguire