FIERY CROSS

The Story of Jim Larkin

Price
1s 3d

by Joseph Deasy

FIERY CROSS

The Story of Jim Larkin

by Joseph Deasy

Inscription for a Headstone

"WHAT Larkin bawled to hungry crowds,
Is murmured now in dining-hall
And study. Faith bestirs itself,
Lest infidels in their impatience
Leave it behind. Who could have guessed
Batons were blessings in disguise,
When every ambulance was filled
With half-killed men and Sunday trampled
Upon arrest? Such fear can harden
Or soften heart, knowing too clearly
His name endures on our holiest page,
Scrawled in a rage by Dublin's poor."

—Austin Clarke. *

* "Inscription for a Headstone," by Austin Clarke from "Later Poems" is reprinted by permission of the writer and the publishers, The Dolmen Press, Dublin.

Preface

ON a bitterly cold day in February, 1947, Jim Larkin — Lion of Irish Labour—dislocated for the last time industrial life in Dublin city. On this occasion his great voice was not rousing his class to revolt against their many wrongs. The trumpet voice was stilled forever.

On the 31st January Big Jim had died, and tens of thousands of Dublin's workers were following his remains through the snows of a terrible winter to their last resting place. That huge procession, a well-earned tribute for a lifetime of dedicated service, included many old devoted comrades who had shared many of his great struggles and hopes. It also included some few prominent citizens to whom the name of Jim Larkin was an ill-omen, signifying nothing but trouble and strife. Their presence was a measure of the changes that had taken place in Dublin since 1913.

There can be no argument about the immensity of Larkin's contribution to those changes. Dublin has been one of the great strongholds of trade unionism in the western world for half a century, and to him must go a substantial part of the credit. His decisive role in rousing Irish workers to revolt against social and economic servitude and in launching a mass trade union movement entitles him to an honoured place in our country's history.

In addition to being an outstanding pioneer of Irish trade unionism, he was also a patriot and a socialist, who saw far beyond the immediate aims of industrial organisation. He wanted an Ireland completely free of exploitation, where a worker's hope of a job no longer depended on an employer's ability to make a profit out of him. His aim was a system of society where the people were masters, economically and politically, and where the stimulus of economic progress was not private profit, but the needs of the people.

He will be mainly remembered for his great industrial struggles; the two facets of his life, however, political and industrial, are inseparable. His political beliefs gave depth and inspiration to his fiery industrial crusades.

Jim Larkin's life has inspired many writers and poets and his work has drawn tributes from national and working class leaders throughout the world. The following pages consist of a brief narrative of his eventful career, which it is hoped will contribute a little to a wider knowledge of his role in Labour history.

"Why are the many poor?"

AT his American trial in 1919, Jim Larkin declared: "I have lived my life under conditions that few men have lived." He did not exaggerate.

The son of an Irish emigrant forced to earn a living in Britain, he was born in Liverpool in 1876. His father, the son of a County Armagh farmer suffered constant ill-health and died when little more than forty years of age. He left behind him a young family and the tragedy of his death compelled Jim, who was the second eldest, to seek work while still a schoolboy.

His occupations were varied. They included delivering milk for 2/6 per week and attending school between deliveries. He was also in turn butcher's boy, an apprentice to a painter and then to a french polisher where he probably experienced his first row with an employer. The latter, who was a Catholic, refused him time off to attend Mass; the dispute ended in Larkin's dismissal. Seeking work he tramped the roads of Britain between Liverpool, Cardiff and London; he slept in fields, in barns and by the wayside, his hardships included frequent and severe hunger

Eventually he was forced to return to Liverpool, where he was allowed to resume his apprenticeship.

Unfortunately his earnings were too small to be of much assistance at home where conditions were critical. Taking advantage of his strength and fine physique, he obtained work on the docks where he could earn more. He also worked as a seaman and encountered the hardships of that occupation at a time when working conditions were such as to tax the endurance of the strongest of men.

Such were some of the typical experiences that schooled Larkin for the battles of his later life; such were the universities from which he graduated with a first hand knowledge of his fellow men. At thirteen he was a member of a trade union, and to quote his own words, "at an early age I took my mind to this question of the ages—why are the many poor?"

Socialist ideas were then rapidly spreading in Britain and were deriving an immense impetus from the rise of the "new unionism" which was then sweeping Britain with a new working class militancy and organising thousands of unskilled workers for

the first time into trade unions. Socialism stirred young Larkin to his depths and at an early age he joined the Social Democratic Federation that drew its inspiration from Karl Marx.

There were, however, other if complementary influences moulding his opinions. During those years in Liverpool there was intense nationalist feeling among Irish emigrants. Larkin's own father, to whom he was deeply attached, was involved in both the constitutional and revolutionary movements. He thus became deeply conscious of Ireland's struggle for freedom.

At an early age, therefore, he could call himself trade unionist, socialist and republican. These were the signposts that were to map the course of his turbulent career. He enriched his own experiences by the study of all kinds of political and general literature, developing a special love for poetry, which contributed immensely to the great oratorical gifts that were to rouse workers in Britain, Ireland and America against their social subjection.

"Fiery Cross" in Belfast

AFTER his seafaring experiences, Jim resumed his duties as a docker and found himself promoted to the post of foreman. In 1905 this promotion was abruptly ended when he sided with his fellow-workers during a strike in which he became one of the men's main spokesmen. He later became an organiser for the National Dock Labourers' Union.

In this capacity he served for a while in Liverpool, during which time he acted as agent for the secretary of the Dockers' Union, James Sexton, during a parliamentary election. He next organised in Scotland. In 1907 at 31 years of age, he arrived in Belfast.*

This city, with a population of nearly 400,000 was the most highly industrialised area in Ireland. Her shipyards and linen mills were world famous.

Belfast had a trades union council with an affiliated membership of about 20,000; at that time, also, she was the chief centre of what socialist organisation there then existed in Ireland. This consisted of a branch of the British Independent Labour Party.

Unfortunately, there was a much darker side. James Connolly has shown how the yoke of capitalism lay heavily on Belfast, and squalor, slums and disease claimed a heavy toll. There was appalling exploitation of women and children in the linen mills. Their wages ranged from 1d. to 3d. per hour, while thousands of able-bodied men were idle.

In spite of a reasonable level of trade unionism in some industries, thousands of "unskilled" workers were completely unorganised and worked a 16-hour day for as little as 16s. a week. Among these were the dockers and carters. Here the fostering of religious bigotry had played a sinister role in preventing the growth of trade union organisation. It was among these workers that Larkin first raised his "Fiery Cross" of revolt in Ireland.

After a short campaign of recruitment he had enrolled 4,000 in the union. He preached the gospel of the new unionism whose chief weapons were complete working-class solidarity, supported by either a straight strike by those immediately involved or a sympathetic strike involving others. All Belfast rang with the slogan: an injury to one is the concern of all. Ireland's "unskilled" battalions were about to receive their baptism of industrial fire, led by the tall stalwart frame of Larkin, who was rapidly proving that as a strike orator he had few equals.

In June, 1907, the issues were first joined by the serving of a demand on behalf of the dockers, seamen and firemen. After a few days' strike, half the firemen's demands were conceded and accepted. The dockers' demands, however, were rejected. Labour-

* Details of the Belfast strike in this section are taken from a chapter in "Jim Larkin, the Rise of the Underman," by R. M. Fox.

ers were brought from other ports and were housed in a ship in the harbour.

A few carters struck in sympathy with the dockers and then submitted their own demands—26s. for a 60-hour week. The Master Carters' Association gave notice of a general lock-out if the striking carters did not return to work. In reply, all the carters of sixty firms struck. Amid threats of general strike some employers conceded carters an increase of 5s. per week and 8d. an hour overtime. In contrast, the coal merchants announced on the 11th July that they would have no dealings with any union, and in the event of a strike against any member of their association they would immediately lock out all their men.

The reply of the workers to this threat was a Belfast miracle. Thousands of Protestant workers, instead of swelling the throngs of the "glorious twelfth," paraded with their Catholic fellow-workers in protest against their bosses, and Larkin addressed a monster meeting at the Custom House. On 26th July, it was announced that the coal dispute was settled on the basis of the recognition of the men's union and an increase of 11s.

With 1,100 dockers and carters still on strike, every weapon at the employers' disposal was being used to whip up religious bigotry. Larkin was accused of having "subversive and nationalist aims" for the promotion of which "he was using the workers." He was the object of a vicious press campaign which reached hysterical levels when he was arrested and charged with assaulting a scab named Bamford with a stone. There were plenty of witnesses to testify that he acted in self-defence as Bamford had rushed towards him with a knife. Larkin in fact, prevented a nasty situation by using the stone to stun his attacker. His counsel succeeded in having the trial postponed pleading that the current strike militated against a fair trial. It was later transferred for hearing in Dublin where it remained buried in obscurity.

Meanwhile drastic tension reached a climax when long simmering discontent over pay and conditions among the Belfast police reached boiling point. These men had organised themselves and found a leader in Constable Barrett. Little was moving in Belfast without a police escort and Barrett touched off an explosion, when he refused to ride with a blackleg carter; this act resulted in his dismissal. The police demanded his re-instatement plus extra wages for all.

The authorities acted swiftly. Deciding that the Belfast police were unreliable in the existing industrial crisis, they expelled other constables in company with Barrett, and transferred 200 or more to other areas outside Belfast. An army expeditionary force was then drafted in to keep "law and order."

A state of siege now existed in the city and the military began to interfere with peaceful picketing. Larkin led a mass picket down to the docks armed with extracts from a recent Act of Parliament legalising such picketing beyond question. His object was to talk to the imported blacklegs who were housed

in the harbour. After a parley he succeeded in persuading the Army officer in charge that he was playing with fire if he prevented picketing. He then had his talk with the blacklegs.

Unfortunately, there was plenty of evidence that the authorities were interested in using the military to rouse sectarian passions. Although the docks were the centre of the struggle, soldiers were provocatively stationed in the nationalist Falls Road area. There was inevitable conflict between the military and local inhabitants, who resented the area being turned into an armed camp. Hostility flared into violence and on the 11th August rioting broke out with the military shooting dead a young man and a girl. Five people received gunshot wounds.

The dispute was abruptly ended by the N.U.D.L. negotiating a settlement over Larkin's head. The terms were much less favourable than he had obtained for some of the workers involved at an early stage of the dispute.

This industrial battle was the first dramatic illustration in modern times of the truth that hopes of a united Ireland must depend primarily on the achieving of a united Irish working class.

Southern Inferno

HIS remarkable activities in Belfast made Larkin famous throughout the country. There were widespread demands for his services from Ireland's dockers, carters and general labourers. His next major engagement was in Cork where he assisted in the satisfactory settlement of a dock strike. In Dublin, Derry, Sligo and Wexford he also preached the gospel of "divine discontent" and sowed the seeds of revolt amongst the most oppressed of his country's wage slaves.

Progress was often slow, but the year 1908 was to be historic and decisive both in Larkin's own career and in the development of Irish Labour.

Following what he considered to be a badly negotiated settlement over his head in Belfast in 1907, Larkin was not on the best of terms with his union executive. Matters were not improved by the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the British executive for his fiery crusade among his own countrymen. Enrolling workers in a union was one thing. Organising a mass assault against the wholesale degradation of a class by an evil social system was another.

In November, 1908, the issues came to a head. Dublin carters recalled Larkin from Derry to lead a strike for which his executive repudiated responsibility. Because he identified himself with the men, he was suspended from the union. In spite of this, the strike was substantially successful and provoked the intervention of Lord Aberdeen, the Lord Lieutenant. All the men were reinstated with an assurance that their grievances would be fairly met. A side issue of this strike resulted in Larkin's first serious jail sentence.

The Cork quay men, not forgetful of his recent services subscribed £64 to the strike fund. To his amazement, Larkin found himself charged with embezzlement. The substance of the charge was purely technical, namely, that he had defrauded the Cork workers because he had not turned over the money to his executive—who had repudiated the strike! During the trial the prosecution twisted the charge to suggest that Larkin had converted the money to his own use although there was a balance sheet to prove that the workers had received every penny.

The verdict and sentence were a brazen example of class law and prejudice. He was found guilty and sentenced to one year's imprisonment with hard labour. There was a widespread outburst of popular indignation, and within three months he was released.

The long threatening climax to the friction between Larkin and the leaders of the National Dock Labourers' Union was reached when the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union was founded in Dublin on 4th January, 1909. Its material resources consisted of a couple of chairs, a table, two empty bottles and a candle. The immediate nucleus of a membership were

the carters whose strike had immediately preceded the union's foundation.

Larkin had concluded that the most effective way of rousing and organising Ireland's general labourers was an Irish union. Twenty years before, the job had been substantially done in Britain. The British trade union leadership of 1909 was apparently not equal to the Irish task and certainly had no evident enthusiasm for it. Abandoning a good position in a British union, Larkin, cheerily, courageously tackled the job.

A Declaration of War

In the city of its birth, the new union was faced with a tremendous task. The poverty of the labouring workers in Dublin was appalling. The city had one of the highest death rates in Europe, 27.6 per 1,000, as high, in fact, as India's Calcutta. Her slums were the worst in the United Kingdom.

There were approximately 5,322 tenement houses in the city in which "lived" 25,822 families or a total population of 87,305. 20,108 families occupied one room, 4,402 of the remainder had two rooms each. An "Irish Times" editorial commenting on the report of a Dublin housing enquiry wrote, "We knew that Dublin had a far larger percentage of single room tenements than any other city in the Kingdom, i.e. Britain. We did not know that 28,000 of our fellow citizens live in dwellings which even the Corporation admits to be unfit for human habitation. Nearly a third of our population so live that from dawn to dark and from dark to dawn it is without cleanliness, privacy or self-respect. Sanitary conditions ruled out ordinary standards of savage morality." Even Arnold Wright, author of "Disturbed Dublin"—a book subsidised by Dublin employers to state their side of the 1913 struggle—wrote: "The Dublin slum is a thing apart in the inferno of social degradation."

If Dublin slum figures were higher than in the rest of the U.K., her wage rates were lower. The average wage for an adult male worker was approximately 18/- per week (equal now to £5 approx.) but thousands laboured for 14/- to 16/- for a 70-hour week, while women's wages were as low as 5/-. Rents were higher than in Britain.

It was against this social degradation that Larkin declared war. Arms and hair flying, with flaying words and a voice of thunder he scourged those who were crushing the working class of Dublin. By calling ugly things by their names and salting his speeches with grim, raw, earthy humour, he roused his exploited brothers to revolt. His oratory and fine physique made him a matchless agitator. One literary observer (David Garnett) concluded a description of his platform presence as follows:

> "There striding about the platform one beheld the whole of the sweated, starved, exploited working-class suddenly incarnate in the shape of a gigantic Tarzan of all the slum jungles of the west."

He always tried to convince the workers of their strength and dignity while reproaching them for the timid acceptance of their slavery. Here is a typical outburst:

"There is no use talking about the Irish nation. I have come to the conclusion that you and I are only a lot of abject slaves. I was speaking to a man in Robinson's employment the other day and he said he was working because Master Norry told him to go to work. While you have the spirit of 'Master Norry' dominating Irish workers there is no help for you under God's sun. Get rid of the idea of Master Norry. You have only one Master—the Creator. No man is your master."

Another typical example is the following reference to the ever-attending Dublin police:

"Look at them, well fed, well clothed. Who feeds them? You do. Who clothes them? You do—and they baton you. Why? Because they are organised and disciplined and you are not."

He was a fervent socialist and was an adept in striking home a telling propagandist point at the ripe moment. The following is an extract from an article written during a strike:

"Why do not the capitalist class carry on the distribution of goods? They are not on strike. Why are the ships lying idle, trains at a standstill, factories closed and commodities rotting? You can take your kings, lords and capitalists, tie them in a bunch, send them out to the Bailey lighthouse and dump them. The world would move on all serene . . . Labour producing all wealth, should own and control all wealth."

The first serious struggle for the new union, however, came not in Dublin but in Cork in June, 1909. Quay labourers, carmen, etc., in the city, members of the Transport Union, struck because three labourers had joined a notorious scab union. The strike spread to the railway, when porters refused to handle "tainted goods." The Cork Employers' Federation resolved to smash the new union and opened a special fund for that object. After a struggle of some weeks the workers had to return to work on the basis of accepting the employers' freedom to employ non-union labour.

This setback was temporary, and in the next few years Larkin—in the words of the famous revolutionary Lenin—"by his remarkable oratorical gifts and his seething Irish energy performed miracles among Irish unskilled workers."

In 1910 he was joined by James Connolly, who had returned from America and taken up a position as organiser in the union. Thus began a partnership of historical significance both for Irish labour and the Irish nation. Larkin had played a decisive role in creating the conditions which made Connolly's return feasible —a fact which has gained inadequate recognition.

Recognition of the new union by the official trade union movement was delayed. While Larkin was still an official of the Dockers Union he had been elected to the parliamentary committee of the Irish T.U.C. Because of his suspension from his old union and his foundation of the new, he was expelled from this committee. In 1909 the affiliation of the I.T.G.W.U. was refused, but in 1910 was accepted. Its membership then was apparently 3,000.

"Larkinism"

THE next few years were to establish endurably the principle of trade unionism among Ireland's hitherto unorganised workers, but they were also to be years of bitter industrial strife. The principle of the sympathetic strike was to be widely applied with many spectacular successes. The gospel that an injury to one was the concern of all gripped the collective soul of Irish workers and struck terror into the hearts of a despotic, greedy employing class battening on sweated labour. A new word was coined—Larkinism.

This word was to perform the duty of describing all things that the propertied classes violently disliked and had reason to fear. Other words perform similar functions today.

In 1911 the docks and railways were the main centres of strife. The National Seamen's and Firemen's Union had called a general strike at all ports. Little progress was being made until Larkin issued instructions that every ship coming into the port of Dublin was to be held up until its crew were given union conditions and wages. In the words of Connolly this action earned for the union "the bitterest hatred of every employer and sweater in the city, everyone of whom swore they would await their chance to get even with Larkin and his crew."

Later in the same year some workers on the Great Southern and Western Railway were locked out because they refused to handle "tainted goods" during a strike of timber workers. The companies refused to negotiate, and consequently the men's union, Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, called a national strike of its members. The railway directors were apparently determined to starve the workers into submission until the I.T.G.W.U. threatened to withdraw all labour, including carters conveying goods to the stations. A settlement soon followed, when with few exceptions all workers were taken back.

Meanwhile in Wexford, the union was waging its first significant struggle against a denial of recognition. In August, 1911, two firms of ironmasters locked out 550 workers because they had joined the Transport Union. Rejecting all offers of compromise, the employers had police poured into the town. The usual casualty list followed. Baton charges became the order of the day, resulting in the death of one worker who was the father of eight children. P. T. Daly, the local union organiser—a stormy petrel —was arrested and deported to Waterford.

The struggle dragged on for six months. Eventually, a settlement was negotiated by James Connolly under which the employers agreed to recognise an Irish Foundry Workers' Union and to reinstate their men through it without victimisation. This union was in affiliation with the Transport Union, and two years later it actually became a branch.

There were also struggles in Waterford and Sligo. In the latter city there were again scenes of violence. There were two fatal casualties, a worker and a policeman. It was in Sligo that

Larkin received his first serious condemnation from a pulpit. Dr. Clancy, bishop of the diocese, denounced him as a socialist, warned against what he called "his pretended sympathy for the poor" and forbade the people to attend his meetings. Despite this prohibition, Larkin addressed one of the biggest meetings that had ever been held in Sligo.

"Irish Worker"

In May, 1911, he launched his weekly paper, the "Irish Worker." The first editorial illustrates a power of expression that frequently reflected a rich vein of poetry which was an essential part of Larkin's make-up. I quote an extract:

"The written word is the most potent force in our modern world. The 'Irish Worker' will be a lamp to guide your feet in the dark hours of the impending struggle; a well of truth reflecting the purity of your motives, and a weekly banquet from which you will arise strengthened in purpose to emulate the deeds of your forefathers who died in dungeon and on scaffold in the hopes of a glorious resurrection for our country." These were the words of no demagogue or "rabble rouser."

The success of the new paper was astonishing. Within a few months its circulation reached the figure of 94,994. In fact, the modest machinery would not allow the actual demand to be met. The 'Irish Worker' played a powerful role in exposing the wretched conditions of Dublin workers and their families. Like Larkin's own language it was often coarse and offensive, often too much so. The evil things he was fighting, however, would possibly have made more restrained expression useless.

There was no aspect of the people's welfare with which Larkin did not concern himself. During 1911 the Dublin Labour Party was founded, and in January, 1912, this organisation won nine seats on the Dublin City Council. This was a serious challenge to the employers, slum landlords and publicans, who had previously dominated this council. Larkin was one of the elected candidates, but his enemies succeeded in having him disqualified from taking his seat because of the conviction in 1910 on a "criminal charge."

He always made it quite clear that he regarded Socialism as the only lasting remedy for the people's ills, but this never slackened his zealous campaigns for immediate reforms. On the national question he was republican, but he was prepared to accept Home Rule as a first step. This did not deter him from denouncing the Home Rule politicians for their anti-working-class policies.

A teetotaller himself, another of his targets was alcoholic drink, which he regarded as an enemy of the worker. He stopped the practice of paying dockers in public houses.

The "impending struggles" which Larkin predicted in his first editorial were soon to materialise. Some have already been mentioned; many provincial towns and cities were to be scenes of industrial conflict. Dublin, however, was naturally the storm centre.

Between 1911 and 1913 the I.T.G.W.U., mainly through the instrument of the sympathetic strike, won victories in Dublin, not

only for its own expanding membership, but for many skilled trades, also. Through the union's control of the carting industry, engine drivers, coachmakers, cabinet makers, sheet metal workers, carpenters and all building trades got increases in pay. Among its own membership, dockers, general carriers, coal fillers, grain bushellers, men and boys in bottle blowing works, mineral water operatives, biscuit factory workers and railway workers received pay rises. Warehouses were compelled to modify the inhuman conditions under which hundreds of girls were labouring. This formidable list emphasizes the amazing impact the new union had made on the economic life of the capital city. The pay increases varied between 3s. to 10s. weekly—worthwhile increases for the pre-1914 period.

An Industrial Napoleon

The grip of capitalism on its victims had certainly been loosened. Some of its leading lights, however, were planning a savage attack on the organisation that had challenged their supremacy. Chief architect of this sinister planning was Mr. William Martin Murphy, owner of the "Independent," "Evening Herald" and "Irish Catholic" newspapers. He was, also, owner of the Dublin Tramways, had big interests in the hotel and drapery businesses and was the owner of substantial foreign investments. The Dublin employers under the leadership of this industrial Napoleon had formed the Dublin Employers' Federation, an organisation that was to play a major role in the historic events that were shortly to unfold themselves.

Threats

At midnight on 19th July, 1913, Murphy called a meeting of his tramway employees at which he denounced the Transport Union and expressed his displeasure at its efforts to organise his staff. He also announced his intention of giving an increase of 1s. per week with other small concessions. He concluded with the following threat:—"A strike in the tramways would no doubt produce turmoil and disorder created by roughs and looters; but what chance would men have without funds, in a contest with the company who would and could spend £100,000 or more? You must recall that when dealing with a company of this kind, that everyone of the shareholders will have three meals a day whether the men succeed or not. I do not know if the men can count on this."

This was Mr. Murphy's first indication that if the weapon of starvation was necessary to crush his workers' efforts to organise, then he would not hesitate to use it. On 2nd September, addressing the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, he repeated this strike policy:—"The employer all the time managed to get his three meals a day, but the unfortunate workman and his family 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."

During the months of July and early August, Murphy was preparing for his showdown with Larkin, by swelling the ranks of his employees with new recruits who had to sign an undertaking that they would not join the Transport Union. These recruits came from different parts of the country. He circulated all tramway staff, that in case of trouble with cars on the road during a strike "the company are assured of the most ample protection for their men by the forces of the Crown." This was an admission that the employers had been promised the co-operation of the British authorities in their design to smash "Larkinism." Events were to show only too well what this promise meant in actual deeds.

Lock-out

On 12th August, 1913, the following notice was posted in all tramway depots:—

> "It has come to the knowledge of the directors that demands prepared by James Larkin are to be sent to the board by some of the traffic employees under the pretence that they are coming from the body of the men. As no consideration will be given to any communication coming from Mr. Larkin or his union, his agents might save themselves the trouble of sending them in."

Meanwhile with the object of stabilising the remarkable gains by the workers, Larkin had formulated a scheme for a Conciliation Board, which was submitted to the Employers Committee. By 18 votes to three the scheme was agreed to. But one of the minority was Mr. Murphy, who vowed in spite of the vote "to smash the Conciliation Board."

By 21st August nearly 200 men and boys of the parcels department of the Tramways received the following notice:—

> "As the directors understand that you are a member of the Irish Transport Union, whose methods are disorganising the trade and business of the city, they do not further require your services. The parcels traffic will be temporarily suspended. If you are not a member of the union when traffic is resumed your application for re-employment will be favourably considered."

Murphy had cast the die, but the union was not to be found wanting.

Strike

On Tuesday morning, August 26, 1913, the first day of Horse Show Week, fashionable Dublin received a shock. At ten o'clock the tram men took out their Red Hand Union badges and pinned them in their buttonholes. They then walked off their cars, leaving them stranded in the middle of the road. This was the Union's reply to Murphy's bullying. The men had struck work. The strike was called for two reasons:—

1. Dismissal of the parcels men for their union membership.
2. To enforce a demand for an improvement in their wages and conditions, which would give them equality with the staff of the municipally-owned tramways in Belfast.

The wages of the Belfast men were from £1 5s. 9d. per week in the first year to £2 10s. in the fifth year, plus bonus. They worked a 54-hour week. The Dublin trammen's wages ranged from 24s. 6d. to 28s after two years. A special category received 30s. They worked an average of 70 hours per week. The justice of the union demands was beyond question.

Lock-out by the "Noble" Four Hundred

In spite of Murphy being one of a minority of three on the question of the conciliation board, the Dublin employers began to rally to his leadership. James Connolly records:—

> "The employers, mad with hatred of the power that had wrested from them improved conditions . . . rallied around Murphy, and from being one of a minority of three, he became the leader and organising spirit of a band of four hundred."

Each employer deposited in the name of the employers organisation a sum of money in the bank, proportionate to the number of his employees. If the depositor came to terms before his fellows he forfeited his money.

The first employers to follow the example of the Catholic, W. M. Murphy, were the Quakers, Messrs. Shackleton & Sons, Lucan. They were followed by another quaker firm, Messrs. W. and R. Jacob. No religious sectarianism there. The next to rally to this cause of class solidarity were the coal merchants association, consisting of twelve firms. Then on 3rd September, 1913, 400 employers met and pledged an unholy alliance not to employ any person who continued in membership of the Transport Union. They agreed to lock out all employees who refused to sign the following pledge:—

> "I hereby undertake to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers and further I agree to immediately resign my membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (if a member) and I further undertake that I will not join or in any way support this union."

Thus was born the notorious document.

On 13th September, the big Dublin farmers issued an ultimatum on the same lines, although only in August they had concluded an agreement with the union for improved rates and conditions for their workers.

Lies and Hypocrisy

The battle which Murphy had deliberately provoked was now well joined, and the Dublin workers rose gloriously to the occasion. The editorial of 27th August of Murphy's paper, the "Independent," claimed that the tram strike was a failure. This, of course, was a gross exaggeration. His plans of recruitment had undoubtedly offset the men's action to some extent, but the services had to be drastically cut, while no cars at all operated after 7 p.m. This same editorial expressed the terrible hatred of the employers for Larkin, referring to him as "a man of ill-

disciplined mind and inveterate malice . . . an impudent, swaggering bully . . . indescribably foul of mind and tongue." A very lengthy interview with Mr. Murphy was reported in the same edition, in which he claimed he had broken the "malign influence of Mr. Larkin and set him on the run." He used some choice language to describe his arch enemy. Outbursts like "scum like Larkin" and "whenever there is real trouble in the wind he is not to be found where his skin would be in danger," are typical.

The value of these pieces of lying scurrility can best be measured by an episode of a few weeks previous. This was when Larkin had risked his life and was badly burned in saving several people from a burning house in Capel Street. The Dublin Trades Council passed a special resolution congratulating him for his bravery.

Murphy was also able to use his big interest in the paper "Irish Catholic" in his efforts to blacken Larkin. On September 6th, 1913, that paper included the following:—

> "The chief organiser of the Transport Union has never brought benefit or aught but loss and suffering to the toilers of Dublin."

This article went on to say the following of both the workers and their leader:—

> "They are poor and have nought, but if they were rich tomorrow, debauchery would soon have them into poverty again . . . by folly or malice of their so-called leader, they have been placed in deplorable straits . . . all this to gratify the vengeful whims of an adventurer who has been battening on their credulity."

Such attacks were only the latest examples of a press campaign which prompted the eminent writer James Stephens to declare:—"Every lie that malignity could invent was used against him for the last seven years." Physical assault was often resorted to and more than once Larkin had to defend himself from possible fatal injury.

Murphy and his papers also claimed that the objection was not to legitimate trade unionism, but to the brand represented by "Larkinism." The hypocrisy of this claim is easily exposed by the history of previous efforts by trammen to organise. In 1903 Murphy smashed their union, "The Dublin and District Tramways Trade Union" and victimised its leaders.

"Glorious Dublin"

Events soon gave the lie to the boast about setting Larkin "on the run." The workers met the threat to destroy the Transport Union with a heroic resistance. In the following months they suffered baton charges, prison cells, untimely death and acute starvation in defence of the right to organise and to do so in the union of their own choice.

All over Dublin thousands of workers chose lock-out rather than sign the document. Practically the entire trade union movement showed solidarity. The United Builders' Labourers' Trade

Union, for example, was a union in conflict with Larkin, and the bosses expected its co-operation. When presented with the document, however, the members of this union refused to sign and marched out "to help the I.T.G.W.U. boys." Similarly, most tradesmen showed loyalty to their class. Each trade served by general labourers walked out when the labourers were ordered to sign. The women and girls marched out from their factories just as defiantly once the hateful document was produced. Within a few weeks about 30,000 workers, organised in 32 unions, had been locked out by 400 employers. Well might Connolly write, "Glorious Dublin"!

The earliest effort at conciliation was tried by the British Trade Union Congress, who sent a special delegation to Dublin. This effort failed, the employers refusing to attend a second conference because "it would serve no useful purpose."

Police Co-operation

The co-operation of the British authorities with the employers revealed itself at an early date when Larkin was arrested on charges of seditious libel and conspiracy, because he had advised the workers to defend themselves against assaults by the police. Released on bail, he announced a mass meeting for August 31st, in O'Connell Street. This meeting was proclaimed by the authorities, and Larkin addressing a huge crowd outside Liberty Hall, union headquarters, burned the proclamation and declared defiantly that he would speak in O'Connell Street on the following Sunday. Violent baton charges followed.

Feeling was now running very high and all Dublin waited expectantly to see if Larkin would keep his promise. O'Connell Street was well packed on the fateful day with hundreds of police lining its great thoroughfare. Suddenly the crowd were electrified by the emergence of a well-bearded gentleman on the balcony of Murphy's own "Imperial Hotel," who began to address them. Jim Larkin had kept his promise, for it was he in disguise. His arrest quickly followed; then hell broke loose. Scarcely had the people recovered from their surprise when the police fell on them indiscriminately with a savage baton charge. Independent witnesses later testified to the unbridled ferocity of the police. Men, women and children were brutally struck down, and hundreds were admitted to the city hospitals suffering from injuries.

This police brutality was repeated in other parts of the city. Raids were made on several working-class areas. Tom Clarke, later to be executed as a leader of the 1916 Uprising, wrote to the "Irish Worker" denouncing the police and described how "they ran amok, indiscriminately bludgeoning every man, woman and child they came across, in many cases kicking them on the ground after felling them with a baton. They have wrecked the homes of dozens of our citizens, smashing windows, fanlights of doors, etc., everything breakable, murderously assaulting the inmates, irrespective of age or sex."

One of the biggest scandals was a police attack on a block of municipal tenements called Corporation Buildings, in which

many of the strikers lived. There had been some skirmishes in this area. Nothing however, could excuse the manner in which the police descended on these tenements at two o'clock on a Monday morning. They launched a violent assault, maltreated the inhabitants without distinction of sex or age, and wrecked their homes.

One woman, a mother of six children, testified that the police rushed into her home, burst the door off its hinges, and batoned her brother senseless. Another man had his arm broken. A widow testified to her place being broken into and smashed up, during which her baby sustained an injured eye. These were typical incidents.

Inchicore was a storm centre. Here there was a tram garage where non union drivers had to face mass pickets of men, women and children. Following the arrest of a picket, a public meeting was held outside the local union premises, known as Emmet Hall. During a speech by Councillor William Partridge, two tram cars, each with broken windows, and each guarded by five constables and a sergeant reached the outskirts of the crowd. The police on duty outside the hall drew their batons and tried to clear a way for the cars. The crowd resisted. A fight followed, the strikers arming themselves with sticks and stones. The police then stormed Emmet Hall. The battle raged on until past midnight, hundreds of people being injured. Thousands of police were mobilised and eventually a detachment of military was rushed to the scene.

In prose and verse the "Irish Worker" did full justice to the activities of the police. Here is an extract from some satirical verses on "The Man in Blue":—

"I have seen him in a riot and my word,
Those rowdy people were certainly stunned.
For he can deal as well with grown-up men
As baton ragged urchins under ten.
His critics ask what beggar has a chance
Against six foot of colossal ignorance."

For a striker to suffer prison or fight the police was an honour. Such militancy found frequent expression in verse :—

"They dared to fling a manly brick,
They wrecked a blackleg tram,
They dared to give Harvey Duff a kick,
They didn't give a damn.
They lie in gaol and can't get bail,
Who fought their corner thus:
But you men, with sticks men,
Must make the peelers cuss."

Police conduct inevitably produced fatalities. Two men, James Nolan and John Byrne were batoned to death in the street. Another, Michael Byrne, secretary of the Kingstown (Dun Laoire) branch of the I.T. & G.W.U. was tortured in a police cell and died shortly after release. A young girl, Alice Brady, while walk-

ing quietly home with her strike allowance of food was shot dead by a scab.

The worst of these brutalities occurred when the police were in a state of drunkenness. Dozens of workers were arrested and jailed for the crime of resisting police attacks, often caused by a mere effort to uphold the lawful right of peaceful picketing, which the police were evidently instructed to ignore. The right of public meeting was similarly interfered with.

Such actions provoked Larkin to declare that the people should arm and defend themselves. Many saw in his defiant cry the beginning of the Irish Citizen Army which was then founded and organised by Larkin and Connolly. It was trained by Captain J. White, D.S.O., a veteran of the South Africa War, who now fully sympathised with the workers' cause. The I.C.A. was an army of workers armed with sticks and hurleys for protection against the forces of "law and order." Later the hurleys became guns when this army took part in the 1916 insurrection.

During September at the height of the struggle, the squalor of working-class conditions was spotlighted with tragic pertinence, when two tenement houses collapsed in Church Street. Four people were killed and seven injured.

British Labour

Dublin was now a centre of international labour struggle. If Murphy & Co. were successful, employers elsewhere would surely attempt similar suppression. Messages of sympathy, and financial support poured into Liberty Hall from all over the world — Europe, America, Australia. The British Trade Union Congress was in session at the beginning of the battle and pledged the credit of the British movement to assist the Dublin workers. The widespread indignation and support among British workers helped to re-establish the right of free speech in Dublin. Keir Hardie, leader of the British Labour Party, spoke at a meeting outside Liberty Hall, and denounced the authorities for their co-operation with the employers.

Food ships were despatched, and huge sums of money were collected to help sustain the struggle. This solidarity was an inspiring beginning. However, as the struggle became prolonged, Larkin and Connolly did not hesitate to declare that this battle concerned British just as vitally as it did Irish workers. On that account they expected sympathetic strike action on certain sections of the British industrial front. These expectations, however, were not fulfilled. The school of leadership which then dominated British trade unions would not entertain any support beyond foodships and subscriptions. At a special T.U.C. Congress, held under rank and file pressure, the leaders defeated a resolution calling for a blockade of Dublin. The British workers had asked for the isolation of the capitalists of Dublin. Instead, their leaders succeeded in isolating the Dublin working class.

This attitude of British union leaders certainly encouraged the employers to be less amenable than ever to a settlement. The British policy was all the more tragic because British workers

would undoubtedly have responded to a solidarity call. Enthusiastic mass meetings, some of which were addressed by Larkin himself, testified to this. However, the leaders got away with a plan to increase subsidies to allow better strike pay. This later fell off, too, but it was never a substitute for what the employers dreaded most—the solidarity of industrial action.

Jail Again

The real temper of the British workers was to show itself once more before the struggle ended. As already stated, Larkin was arrested at the start of the dispute but was released on bail. His trial took place at the end of October. The charges were seditious language, incitement to riot and steal. He was charged with declaring: "Remember, if they are going to use the weapon of starvation, there is food in the shops, and clothes. If hungry men want, they have a right to take." The Crown submitted it was not taking sides, that the prisoner was not being prosecuted as a strike leader but "as a wicked and dangerous criminal."

While the hostility of judge and jury made a verdict of "Guilty" a foregone conclusion, the savage sentence that followed, seven months' imprisonment, aroused widespread indigation. Larkin had once again received the benefit of "impartial" class justice.

The reaction of the British working class was quick. Meetings all over Britain passed resolutions of protest, while Members of Parliament were besieged by deputations demanding Larkin's release. Some of these meetings were huge and included speakers like Bernard Shaw and George Russell (AE). Dublin itself was the scene of some angry demonstrations. The situation was so menacing that the Government within three weeks ordered his release. The following week he entitled his "Irish Worker" editorial "Justice: Moryah!" and commented:

"Not liberal justice but solidarity, class solidarity, is the reason why I am free."

The Children

In spite of herculean efforts, including a food kitchen at Liberty Hall, to relieve the more severe hardships of the dispute, after several weeks it was obvious that the workers' children were suffering cruel privations. Their condition moved some sincere people in Britain to organise the temporary transfer of a number of them to British homes. The union, while having its fears of possible hostility on the part of religious leaders to the scheme, agreed to co-operate because of the children's desperate needs. Unfortunately, the union's worst fears were realised. The Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Walsh, despite assurances that the children's faith would be safeguarded, expressed his disapproval. He also stated it as his opinion that the sending of the children to relatively comfortable homes would make them discontented with their own poor homes on their return.

Some elements did not allow the matter to rest there. As children were taken to the boats and trains for embarkation, pickets were organised to try and prevent their departure. Violence

was employed and children were dragged from their parents. W. B. Yeats, the poet, in a letter to the "Irish Worker," headed "Dublin Fanaticism," demanded to know "why the mob at North Wall and elsewhere were permitted to drag children away from their parents . . . by what right have the police refused charges against the rioters . . . and why have they permitted the A.O.H. to besiege the town."

Scandalous motives were imputed to the women who initiated the scheme. They were charged with bringing the children to England for proselytising purposes. The campaign naturally had its effect. However, many children did go to England and Belfast and regular reports were furnished on both their religious and material welfare.

Court of Inquiry

As a result of widespread demands, the Government agreed to set up a Court of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir George Asquith to investigate the merits of the dispute and the charges of police brutality. It was addressed by Larkin on behalf of the union and by the Anti-Parnellite, "the bitterest tongue in this island," Mr. Timothy M. Healy, on behalf of the employers. Its most important finding was that the notorious document imposed on the signatories "conditions which are contrary to individual liberty and which no workman or body of workmen could reasonably be expected to accept." This decision left the employers unmoved and they continued their policy of trying to starve their employees into submission. Similarly, they snubbed the efforts of the Dublin Peace Committee to bring about a settlement. This was a voluntary committee of prominent Dublin citizens under the chairmanship of Professor Tom Kettle. This body was also forced to admit the justice of the union's position. Having recognised this truth, instead of using its influence to promote the workers' cause it weakly dissolved itself.

In Britain

In the meantime, Larkin had decided to tour Britain to mobilise more financial and possibly industrial support. He achieved the first objective but failed in the second. Accompanied by Connolly, he addressed numerous monster meetings.

His meeting in Manchester resulted in the "Manchester Guardian" devoting a lengthy editorial to himself and the lock-out. It concluded that Larkin had a just cause and was a man to be reckoned with, especially "when the chance of hearing him speak fills the Free Trade Hall and leaves thousands blocking the streets outside for a sight of him." He also addressed some British union conferences and on occasions rudely insulted the official leadership for what he considered their betrayal of the Dublin workers. He returned to Dublin to find himself evicted from his house for non-payment of rent.

The end of 1913 Strike

With the struggle dragging on towards Christmas a further meeting was eventually arranged between the contending parties during December. On that occasion, Dr. Walsh, the Archbishop,

expressed the view that the union's proposals were "eminently reasonable." However, negotiations broke down when the employers refused to give any guarantee against victimisation in the re-employment of workers.

The dispute finally came to an inconclusive end during February, 1914. The workers gradually returned to work. Many of the union's staunchest members were refused employment, but the notorious document, except in very rare cases, was not produced for signing. On this vital issue the bosses did not prevail.

In the immediate sense it was as Connolly described it—a drawn battle, but in the historical sense, it was a great working class victory. A united front of Irish employers backed by the imperialist British Government, had tried to smash Irish trade unionism, but were defeated by the heroic, but costly, resistance of the Dublin workers. The employing class have never since repeated the challenge on such a scale. Eternal glory to the memory of those workers of whom one poet of the period wrote:

No prouder sight has Ireland seen
Since banded peasant stood
Upon her fields for freedom
Than this famished brotherhood,
Who in their leader's message
Have caught a distant gleam
Of that far off holy city
Our glory and our dream.

—SUSAN L. MITCHEL.

The Aftermath

As the dispute neared its end, Larkin wrote the following comments in the "Irish Worker":

"The most significant fact connected with the industrial struggle in this country has been the direct connection and agreement proved to be existing between the capitalists of the Murphy and Jacob type, the professional politician, the press and the clergy. Each of these sections have most brutally and unashamedly stated that they are opposed to any improvement in the condition of the common people . . . Though every agency is being used against us, still all their designs will come to nought, all their villainies unmasked, their corrupt power smashed and we will enjoy our own again."

By the professional politician he meant mainly the members of the unionist and nationalist Parliamentary parties. Unfortunately opposition to working-class claims was not confined to these groups. It extended to some elements in the Sinn Féin movement. Arthur Griffith directed vicious attacks against Larkin and his hostility was not isolated. However, the Republican wing of the national movement sympathised with Larkin and Connolly. This section was mainly represented by Tom Clarke, Padraic Pearse, Countess Markievicz (who actively participated in the struggle) and Eamonn Ceannt. Many eminent writers and poets also identified themselves with the workers' cause. They

included W. B. Yeats, James Stephens, Padraic Colum, George Russell (AE) — a tireless champion — to say nothing of Bernard Shaw.

It is contended by many that the 1913 battle laid the basis for the republican insurrection of 1916. The role played by the Citizen Army in both battles supplied a direct physical link, while the same social forces who oppressed the workers in 1913 denounced the rebels of Easter Week, 1916.

In February, 1914, there were elections to the Dublin Corporation and "Larkinism" again tested its strength. Because of his "criminal conviction," Larkin himself did not stand. In spite of this disability and of the terrible preceding eight months, Labour polled 10,377 votes. With the votes of nationalists sympathetic to Labour the total came to 12,026 against a nationalist vote of 14,978. All things considered this Labour vote was no mean performance.

Many workers, however, must have been astonished when Archbishop Walsh congratulated Lorcan Sherlock, the Lord Mayor, and opponent of Labour, over "the notable victory gained yesterday over a combination of influences which in addition to the havoc they have wrought in the industrial world of Labour have done no little harm in blunting if not deadening the moral and religious sense of not a few among the working population of our city."

The Citizen Army Prepares

The year 1914 was to be a terrible one for the world, and a particularly decisive one for Ireland.

Towards the end of 1913 a body called the National Volunteers was organised as a counter-stroke to those British Tories and Irish Unionists who were organising to defeat by force the much delayed new Home Rule Bill of 1912. Matters came to a head in March, 1914, when officers at the Curragh led by Sir General Gough refused to serve against Ulster Unionists in defence of the new Bill. In effect British generals and staff officers were refusing to fight against the privileged class to which they themselves belonged. It has been described as the first fascist type of revolt in modern history.

Against this background steps were taken to make the Citizen Army (founded during the lock-out) a more effective military organisation. A constitution was drafted and an army council formed. Its first chairman was Captain Jack White, its secretary, Sean O'Casey (later the famous playwright). Larkin became one of its five vice-chairmen. The constitution embodied demands for national self-determination and political and social democracy.

The army's relationship with the National Volunteers became a serious bone of contention. Larkin and O'Casey vigorously maintained that they should have no association with the Volunteers, among whom were some strong anti-Labour elements. Captain White, Countess Markievicz, and later James Connolly (then in Belfast) maintained the contrary. White eventually resigned on this issue and Larkin succeeded him as chairman

and commandant. Later O'Casey himself resigned because of the position of Countess Markievicz who had official connections with both the Citizen Army and the Volunteers.

Larkin had expressed hostility to the Volunteers and stood fiercely for the independence of the Citizen Army and for its sole claim to the workers' allegiance. Nevertheless, he consented to co-operate with the most advanced sections of the Volunteer movement when he led a Citizen Army contingent to Bodenstown in 1914 to the grave of Wolfe Tone.

Before his departure for America at the end of the year he was to participate in two other big demonstrations of a nationalist character. One was a huge anti-war meeting in Stephen's Green organised by the Citizen Army. With himself and Connolly in the lead, the army, equipped with revolvers, rifles and bayonets, and some little ammunition, marched to the meeting. A massed cordon of R.I.C. men, armed with carbines, was in close attendance. Larkin delivered a very inflammatory speech, at one stage challenging the R.I.C. with the words: "Shoot, you yellow-livered dogs, shoot!" Nearby, in the heavily guarded Mansion House, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, with the Irish parliamentary leaders, John Redmond and John Dillon, was addressing a recruitment meeting which produced six recruits. There was no doubt that the huge Citizen Army meeting and the subsequent parade expressed the real feelings of the Dublin people.

In October of the same year, Larkin led an army contingent to the Parnell commemoration meeting at which he was snubbed by right-wing elements of Sinn Fein, typified by Griffith and MacNeill, but pointedly welcomed by Tom Clarke and Sean MacDiarmada.

Departure

Near the close of 1914, Larkin took one of the most controversial decisions of his career. He embarked for a tour of America. The 1913 struggle had weakened the union in membership and in finance. Larkin hoped by his American tour to collect funds to help repair the ravages of the previous year, and also to help the Citizen Army. He also claimed that part of his mission was to contact the Irish Republican movement in America to examine possibilities of financial aid.

Whatever disputes there may be over precise details of Larkin's journey to America, there can be no argument about his urgent need for a complete break from all immediate union worries. From his arrival in Belfast in 1907 to the day of his departure for America he had worked without interruption or relief in conditions of tremendous strain and in the face of terrible opposition. Even his strong physique could not save him from being physically and mentally exhausted towards the end of 1914. An American comrade on first meeting him after his arrival in America, described him as a gaunt man with a shock of greying hair. At 38 years Larkin's gaunt frame already bore the marks of his herculean labours. However, by 1914 he had won a secure and honoured place in the history of his country and an everlasting and affectionate place in the great heart of the Irish working-class.

American Passage

CENSORSHIP in America and Britain, at the time, very much curtailed news of Larkin's activities in the U.S. It is now known, however, that, true to his deep devotion to the cause of working class struggle, he became very much involved in the activities of the American Labour movement. He became an organiser for the International Workers of the World (the famous "Wobblies"), a militant trade union which was organising American workers on industrial lines in the teeth of fierce persecution from American capitalism. He also became a noted propagandist for the Socialist Party.

The "Workers' Republic," replacing the "Irish Worker" (suppressed), carried occasional news of his exploits. The first account concerns an interview he gave to a socialist paper in California. It is evident that Larkin was expounding more precise political theories as a basis for his propagandist activities. He is reported as saying:

> "Some sixty years ago the right man arrived at the right time to take up the battle for the advancing proletariat. He received his idea from one of my own race and amplified it. Now his teachings, contained in his great work, "Das Capital," are read by millions.
>
> "The real curse (of society) lies in the poverty caused by the right of the master to take away the surplus wealth produced by the working class. We have no enemy save the capitalist class. Let us get down to first principles and assume the offensive rather than the defensive."

He concluded this statement as follows: "In this country (i.e., U.S.A.) there have been two wars for freedom. One to throw off monarchical tyranny, the other to establish wage slavery in place of chattel slavery. The next struggle will be for humanity."

A report in the "Workers' Republic" (13/11/15) shows how deeply Larkin had become immersed in American labour struggles. He had become a militant Labour leader, when such a vocation in America was highly dangerous. The report was entitled "Jim Larkin fights for the rights of labour in America." Connolly, who was then editor of the "Workers' Republic," inserts the comment—"It will be seen that Jim as usual has succeeded in getting the hatred of the enemies of labour and the loyal support of the working class."

What followed indicates that he had come to Butte, Montana, to organise miners into the Western Federation of Miners. The authorities were endeavouring to crush this organisation and the Socialist Party also. Efforts were made to prohibit Larkin from speaking, but he was successful in establishing his right to address the miners who received him with acclamation. There was, apparently, a big proportion of Irishmen among both the workers and the bosses. In his address to the workers, Larkin included the following:

> "I am an Irishman and I love my race. But when I see some of the Irish politicians and place-hunters you have in

Butte my face crimsons with shame and I am glad they did not remain in Ireland. Born and nurtured in hatred of oppression and oppressors, they have become the dirty instruments of oppression."

In December, 1915, he was one of the speakers at the graveside of famous Joseph Hillstorm, more popularly known as Joe Hill, a union leader and song writer who was convicted and executed in Utah by the use of faked evidence.

Paul Robeson's rendering of the song, "Joe Hill," has made the story of Joseph Hillstorm's martyrdom known throughout the world.

When news reached America of the 1916 executions he aroused tremendous wrath at his many meetings of protest. He was also prominent in the famous campaign to free Tom Mooney, the Irish leader of American workers, framed on a murder charge and given a sentence of death, which was commuted to life imprisonment. It took 23 years to free him.

There was no doubt that Larkin made a remarkable impression on radical American Labour leaders, especially Eugene V. Debs, who referred to him as "the incarnation of the revolution" and "one of the bravest and truest that ever gave his life and his all to the working class."

These activities never prevented him from following events in Ireland as closely as possible. The following is an extract from a letter he wrote Tom Foran, president of the Transport Union, in April, 1918:

"I was cheered by reading of the meeting in the Mansion House when that historic edifice rang with the strains of the 'Red Flag.' I hope its echoes were heard by our dead comrades, Jim and Sean Connolly, Partridge, Mallin, O'Carroll.

"Our duty is to our class. Do not forget the Labour and Socialist movements of the world are to be the deciding factors, and if we will it, the governing power at the close of this murderous and 'dollar out' death curse that is destroying Europe.

"I was enthused by the action of the movement at home in congratulating our Russian comrades on the soul stirring and epoch-making struggle for liberty in Russia.

"Tell the boys to keep a stout heart for a stiff brae. I hope soon to bid old Ireland the top of the morning."

The optimism was, unfortunately, premature. After the Russian revolution, with which Larkin was in full sympathy, the persecution of all radical forces in America became more intensified than ever. Hysterical witchhunts were directed against all suspected of sympathy with the new revolution. In fact, even mild disagreement with American capitalism was not safe. In such an atmosphere, Larkin was bound to be one of the chosen victims.

Following differences inside the American Socialist Party, he had identified himself with what was called a left wing movement and he was a delegate to the founding convention of the American Communist Party. The charge preferred against him was "criminal anarchy." He was tried under a law which proscribed the advocacy of force and violence, the overthrow of

government and of the assassination of public officials. The immediate cause of his arrest was a manifesto of the left wing movement. He was essentially on trial because he was a socialist and not for something he had done, but for something he allegedly might do in a certain situation.

Karl Marx had been dead for over fifty years but his writings torn out of context were used as incriminating evidence.

Larkin's whole past life was arraigned against him and he was described by the prosecution as "the most versatile and resourceful of the Red forces in America." His leadership of strikes and his record of prison sentences in Ireland were invoked to show what a dangerous man he was. He was, of course, convicted and his sentence was to be from five to ten years. Not for the last time, he conducted his own defence without legal aid.

R. M. Fox, in his biography of Larkin, says that his final address to the jury deserves to rank among the great orations delivered by prisoners in their defence. Through Fox's efforts the full text is available in a Dublin municipal library, with a full report of the trial. The following extracts are sufficient to support his tribute:

"The defendant claims here now that he is not getting tried for any overt act; he is getting tried for within his mind focussing the ideas of the centuries and trying to bring knowledge into a co-ordinate form, that he might assist, develop and beautify life. This is the charge against the defendant—that he preached a doctrine of humanity against inhumanity . . . that he preached the doctrine of brotherhood as against that mischievous hellish thing of national and brute herd hatred . . . "

"And so at an early age I took my mind to this question of the ages—why are the many poor? It was true to me. I don't know whether the light of God, or the light of humanity or the light of my own intelligence brought it to me but it came like a flash. The thing was wrong because the basis of society was wrong; that the oppression was from the top by forces that I myself for a moment did not visualise . . .

"Now what is that socialism broadly speaking and why are we so fearful of it? The best minds of the century have not been fearful of it and have accepted it. The most brilliant minds in the present field of literature all declare themselves as socialists. Let us take them in any country you please. Anatole France in France, one of the most brilliant imaginative writers the world has ever known; Shaw, the Irishman, who lives in England; the best of this country are proud to align themselves with the socialist movement."

From Larkin's reference during his speech to Marx as "the mastermind of the century," it is clear that Marxism had made a sharp impact on his intellect. His statement, however, was by no means an accurate exposition of the Marxist case. For instance he committed the common error of equating Marxism with eco-

nomic determinism. Such flaws cannot detract from the remarkable range of intellect and power of expression which the speech manifested.

As is evident from the verdict and sentence his eloquence did not impress the 1919 New York jury. He was now to enjoy once more ruling class hospitality. Having been several times a guest of His Britannic Majesty, he was now to be entertained by Uncle Sam. Such a dual distinction must give Larkin a special place among the ranks of those who suffered for human advancement.

One story from his American prison illustrates how Larkin took such adversity in his stride. It also shows what he thought of some Irish-American politicians.

It was St. Patrick's Day, and in honour of the occasion he was permitted to speak to the prisoners about St. Patrick. All went smoothly until Jim began to relate how the saint had driven all the snakes out of Ireland. "And where did they go?" he thundered. "They came to America to become politicians, policemen and prison guards." The celebration was then quickly ended.

After his imprisonment, committees sprang up in Ireland and America agitating for his release. While Mr. de Valera was in America a delegation tried to contact him on Larkin's behalf, but only succeeded in seeing his representative. However, some money was made available from American I.R.A. funds which helped to secure his release on bail.

During 1922 he was released, pending the hearing of an appeal against his sentence. In Ireland the War of Independence against Britain had ended. The Free State Government was in power and the tragic civil war was about to begin. The Chicago Federation of Labour, with a membership of 500,000, cabled Michael Collins to intercede on Larkin's behalf. The appeal was in vain.

Both in Ireland and in America there were allegations that the official leadership of the Transport Union were not exerting much effort to promote his release. While out on bail Larkin himself charged that "the Union had fallen into a moribund state because of shortsighted leadership."

Whatever is said about the validity of these charges, there is no doubt that the policy of the official leadership had considerably changed during the long, enforced absence of the general secretary. The Union's membership increased enormously and in 1919 exceeded 100,000. There were many reasons for this expansion, but the leadership must be accorded due credit. It must also be recorded however that campaign advertisements for new members declared that the union was still "inspired by the teaching of Larkin and Connolly."

As the membership increased there also developed an increasing reluctance to use effectively the enormous industrial power that went with it. The militancy of the Larkin and Connolly leadership was gone. Leaders like William O'Brien, Thomas Foran, Cathal O'Shannon, expressed themselves very radically at times, but in their actions caution prevailed. When the war boom later gave way to slump there was a retreat before the employers' attacks, and wage reductions resulted.

Naturally, there was opposition to this policy within the union, and the leaders of this opposition apparently kept Larkin informed of developments; he replied with appeals for unity.

Whatever qualms or fears the leaders might have about his return, they had no illusions about Larkin's power and influence even if 3.000 miles away and after a long absence.

They cabled him to know if he would allow his name to go forward as a Labour candidate in the 1922 general election. He indignantly refused. He was strongly opposed to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and regarded its acceptance as a betrayal. He was highly critical of the Labour Party's, at first non-committal, attitude and later its support for the Treaty.

An appeal against his sentence was rejected, but in 1923 he was released from Sing-Sing prison by a special order of Al Smith (Governor of New York), who declared that he "had been punished for a statement of his beliefs" and his imprisonment was a violation of civil liberty.

A Stormy Return

STILL general secretary of the I.T.G.W.U., Jim Larkin arrived back in Dublin in April, 1923, after an absence of eight-and-a-half years.

Immediately after his release things had begun to go wrong. He had cabled to the Union for an advance of £5,000 to purchase a "food ship" for the relief of distress in Belfast, caused by the terrible sectarian pogroms which had lately racked that city. This request was rejected by the executive on the grounds of insufficient details. Shortly after his arrival he took issue on the question of changes in the Union rules. He charged that rules had been altered without proper consultation with the members and that they were improperly registered. He also maintained that some paid officials were illegally members of the executive.

However, the most serious issue that divided the two parties was an undeclared one and was a question of policy. Larkin still stood for militancy, the executive for moderation at almost all costs.

At meetings of the No. 1 and No. 3 branches of the Union held in the Olympia Theatre on Sunday, 10th June, 1923, Larkin declared war by moving the suspension of various officials and executive members. His motions were overwhelmingly carried. The following day his followers seized the Union offices and excluded the suspended officials from the premises. The executive retaliated by suspending him from his office as general secretary and applied for an injunction to restrain him and his agents from unlawfully entering upon and taking forcible possession of Liberty Hall and the Union offices in Parnell Square. Larkin then brought to Court his charges which included improper use of Union monies in addition to those mentioned above.

While Larkin was successful on the question of illegal membership of the executive, on the other questions judgment was delivered against him. In March, 1924, he was expelled from membership of the Union by the unanimous vote of the executive.

This was one of the most tragic episodes in the history of Irish Labour. It started a vendetta which was to blight the hopes of Irish workers for an entire generation.

Subsequent history did much to justify Larkin's distrust of the new Transport Union leadership. These leaders had essentially made their peace with the status quo and he charged them with careerism and placehunting. Later developments many years later made many sympathise with some of the stronger language he used.

On the other hand he himself must incur grave criticism. His tactics were very badly conceived. Some of the issues on which he challenged the executive were ill-chosen. The seizure of the Union premises seemed a particularly bad blunder. More patience and less pride would have probably gained him his objectives as he undoubtedly had the sympathy of the members at a crucial stage. Instead of trying to change policies, by working democratically within the Union he made a frontal assault.

This bitter union feud occurred against a background of general national turmoil. During the early part of 1923 the civil war between the Treaty Government of Cosgrave and the anti-Treaty republicans drew to a close but the jails continued to be packed with thousands of untried republican prisoners, hundreds of whom were on hunger strike.

During these political upheavals, employers had launched a fierce attack against the wages and conditions of the workers. Thousands were forced to accept wage reductions while the numbers of unemployed grew enormously. There were countless strikes and lock-outs, including a general dock strike near the end of the year which lasted two months. Larkin, although suspended by the Transport Union from General Secretaryship, was said to have been using his influence to encourage the dockers to resist the bosses' attacks, although the union's officials recommended acceptance of their terms.

The Government decided to take a hand in this strike and proposed that the dockers resume work with a 1/- per day reduction on the understanding that there would be a court of inquiry to report on the question of labour at the ports.

Some weeks later, Larkin made one of the vital controversial moves of his life. The union officials having already recommended acceptance he addressed a letter to President Cosgrave proposing that if all industrial disputes be settled in accordance with the Government circular, the Government should undertake to release the thousands of political prisoners; if such a Government undertaking were given he would co-operate in guaranteeing a resumption of work. Cosgrave rejected the proposal.

Larkin was attacked by left and right wings of the Labour Movement for his proposals. He left himself exposed to the charge that he had no authority to take such action and he did so without consulting the workers. He could reply that it was quite clear at that stage that there remained little hope of successfully resisting the wage reductions and that it was an effort to achieve much needed national peace and to imbue the struggle with a high political motive which could have dynamic possibilities for the future of the entire country. It was a typical case of Larkinite spontaneity full of exciting possibilities. Tragedy lies in the fact that the Labour-Republican alliance here envisaged should have been a constant objective of the 'twenties, properly organised—not a subject for sudden flashes of inspiration.

Larkin was active in other ways since his return. During 1923 he founded the "Irish Worker" League and revived his old paper, "Irish Worker." He was in sympathy with the Russian Revolution and accorded full support to the aims and policies of the new Soviet State.

The I.W.L., which he founded, was part of the international Communist Movement. It was, however, regarded only as a temporary organisation and it was the intention that it should evolve into a party which would be called the Workers' Party of Ireland. Larkin declared that there was a need for "a Workers' Party which would fight for the complete overthrow of

capitalism and the establishment of a free Irish Workers' Republic—the real hope and desire of the most famous of Ireland's noble line of fighters from Wolfe Tone to Connolly."

His political position during this period is most eloquently illustrated by an extract from an article commemorating the first anniversary of Lenin's death:

"A year ago he passed—the great master, the mind that shook the world, destroyed an empire and gave hope and inspiration to the common people of the earth . . . .

"The capitalist governments of the world and the paid defamers and the licensed liars may spit out their venom, may continue to lie and malign and even caricature the Bolsheviki and their leaders and their teacher Lenin, but he who laughs last laughs best. And to one who has been privileged to look on the face of the dead Lenin with that intriguing smile which conveys so much one understands. He laughs last. Lenin laughed away a corrupt despotism in an hour—despotism that had endured for nearly four centuries. Leninism will laugh the capitalist system out of face into oblivion." ("Irish Worker," 24/1/25).

The Crucible of the 'Twenties

For the Labour Movement as with every vital facet of Irish life, the nineteen twenties was a period of crucial changes which were to determine the pattern of the future for the immediate decades ahead.

It is part of the sad history of the working class of the period that a Workers' Party as envisaged above never materialised under Larkin's leadership; nor did he make any serious effort to transform the I.W.L. into a properly constituted political organisation with regular activities. This failure grievously disappointed countless workers who were ready to support a socialist movement led by Larkin.

He expended much time and energy justifiably attacking the opportunism and timidity of the official Labour leadership, but he frequently carried his attacks much too far and maintained them when new policies were clearly needed.

In 1924 he visited the Soviet Union where he was greeted as one of the outstanding leaders of the world Labour Movement. He was elected to the executive committee of the Red International of Labour Unions.

During this visit a strike broke out among gas workers in Dublin which the Transport Union (of which the workers were members) refused to recognise. His followers had here a basis for a new union and so the Workers' Union of Ireland was founded, Jim Larkin being appointed as general secretary. Until his return the moving spirit of the new organisation seems to have been Jim's brother, Peter Larkin, who had been for years a famous working class leader in Australia and had been jailed there for his activities.

The gas workers were successful in their strike and on the return of the new union's secretary its membership rapidly expanded. It soon became involved in a series of strikes. Its firm

stand in a big municipal strike reduced a wage cut from 6/- to 2/-. It became affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions.

During the 'twenties, Larkin's interest in the promotion of co-operative societies manifested itself. During a coal strike in which the new union was involved he established the Unity Coal Co. Boats were chartered to bring the coal which was sold at cost price to defeat the coal merchants' price ring. In 1926, during the British coal strike, he brought Arigna coal to Dublin. His motive here was also to promote the use of Irish fuel; but always he was anxious to inspire workers' confidence in themselves.

During 1925 he again became involved in a law case. Arising out of a debate in the Dail he accused Tom Johnson, Labour Party leader, of encouraging the Government to shoot unemployed demonstrators. A libel action followed and heavy damages were awarded against him. He had no money so he was declared a bankrupt.

In October, 1927, supported by the "Irish Worker" League and describing himself as an Independent Labour candidate, he was elected to Dail Eireann. Because of his bankruptcy he could not take his seat.

Up to the early years of the 'thirties, the bitter dispute between Larkin and the official Labour leadership continued. During a May Day speech in 1931 he declared:

"The official gang did not observe May Day but spent their time in fashionable hotels. There was a need for a revolutionary leadership in the Irish Labour Movement. There must be erected a new movement based on the Marxian philosophy."

Referring to the Soviet Union he stated he would always support the Soviet Republic. He challenged people "who were spreading lies about that country and its people to go with him and see the conditions for themselves." He appealed for a new unity of the workers for a struggle to better their own conditions and set up their own Workers' State in Ireland.

The paper, 'Irish Worker' was published somewhat regularly up to 1931 when it was suppressed by the Cosgrave Government and the files seized by the C.I.D. under powers granted by the Coercion Act, 1931. In 1932 and in subsequent years, up to 1938, it was published at irregular intervals.

"Tranquil Waters"

The latter years of Larkin's life were comparatively tranquil. His career was no longer marked by major industrial upheavals or prison sentences. One of his chief aims was to establish the Workers' Union of Ireland as an integral part of the official Labour movement. Unfortunately, the power exercised by the Transport Union in the Trade Union Congress blocked this achievement. This feud against Larkin sterilised the country's largest union and contributed considerably to the lack of political progress by the Labour movement.

The Workers' Union of Ireland did succeed in affiliating to the Dublin Trades Council. In 1939, as a delegate representing

this latter body at the Trade Union Congress, Larkin raised the question of his Union's application for affiliation. He was told it had been received too late for the consideration of Congress.

In 1941, Mr. G. Lynch, representing the Trades Council, again raised the question. The application for affiliation had been rejected by the executive of the Congress and Mr. Lynch moved that the relevant paragraph in the annual report be referred back. Mr. William O'Brien, of the Transport Union, was chairman. He refused to accept Lynch's motion. There was then a resolution to remove him from the chair. He refused to accept that motion either. At this Congress Larkin was only three votes short of being elected to the executive committee.

It was evident that the days of Transport Union domination were drawing to a close. In spite of that Union's opposition, Larkin was adopted as an official Labour candidate for the 1943 general election. Himself and his son James Larkin, Junior, were both elected to the Dail as official Labour deputies. He had also been elected in 1937 as Independent Labour.

Unfortunately, the Transport Union leadership exacted a heavy price for these reverses.

The early 'forties was a period when the Fianna Fail Government was enacting severe anti-Labour legislation. There was the anti-trade union act of 1941 and later still the standstill wages order in the face of ever-rising prices. In such a period Labour unity was imperative. In the 1942 local elections Labour scored very remarkable successes and in 1943 the Dublin City Council elected the city's first Labour Lord Mayor, Alderman M. O'Sullivan. All seemed set for a real Labour advance.

It was then that the Transport Union leadership struck a shattering blow. In 1944 they disaffiliated the Union from both the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress. In the first case their stated reasons were Communist influence within the party and the entry of other "disruptive" elements, meaning, of course, Jim Larkin. In the case of the disaffiliation from the T.U.C. the reason given was so-called domination of the Congress by British unions. Of course there was also the unspecified danger of the acceptance of the Workers' Union of Ireland as an affiliated union. By drawing some other Irish unions with them, Messrs. O'Brien, Kennedy, etc., split seriously the whole Irish Labour movement. The glory of 1913 was commemorated by the tragedies of '23 and '43. Meanwhile, Irish workers in their tens of thousands crowded the Labour Exchanges and the emigrant ships.

As Jim Larkin approached his seventieth year he was yet to render one more great service to Irish workers. In 1945 the Workers' Union called out on strike its members in the butchers' trade in support of its demand for two weeks' holiday with pay. Shortly after, the Women Workers' Union called out the laundry girls in support of the same demand. These strikes were essentially victorious. They established the now widespread fortnight's holidays for industrial workers, even if the immediate result was a compromise.

During his last twenty years, Larkin served on the Dublin Trades Council, the Dublin Port and Docks and was an elected member of the Dublin Corporation. (For years he was practically the only Labour voice on that body).

As a councillor he made outstanding contributions to various social problems. His favourite interest was the housing of the workers. For many years he was chairman of the Corporation's Housing Committee and in that capacity he became something of an institution. He was justly proud at the time of the Corporation's record in house building. Two outstanding features of the Corporation's policy owed much to Larkin's perseverence. These were the Direct Labour schemes and the allocation of a proportion of houses each year to newly weds.

He never restricted the struggle to a fight for better wages and conditions. He was not only concerned with the worries of the world. He was also keenly alive to its wonders and beauty. Having a great love of knowledge himself he demanded that the workers should have the means and the time to enjoy the rich heritage of mankind—to read good books, to listen to great music, to admire the marvels of nature. As Sean O'Casey, the famous playright and Larkin's life-long friend once phrased it: "His ideal was a loaf of bread under the worker's oxters, a bouquet of flowers in his hands."

In the thick of industrial battles he never failed to stress to the workers the value of their personal dignity of which the immediate demand was a facet. He fostered all kinds of cultural activities around Liberty Hall and Croydon Park was purchased by union funds for outdoor activities.

He was completely in character when he proposed at a City Council meeting in March 1946 that the Honorary Freedom of the City of Dublin be conferred upon George Bernard Shaw. The motion was carried and Shaw accepted the invitation of his native city with a typical Shavian reply.

"I have hitherto evaded credentials from foreign sources; Dublin alone has the right to affirm that in spite of my incessantly controversial past and present I have not disgraced her." To Larkin he wrote:—

"My dear Jim.—Nothing could have pleased me more in this Freedom Honour than its being initiated by you nor made it surer of acceptance. You have been a leader and a martyr while I have never had a day's discomfort."

Larkin was a firm champion of women's rights and often strongly reproached workers for any thoughtless neglect of their wives and families. When the children's allowance scheme was being introduced into the Dail he urged, unsuccessfully, that the money be made payable direct to the wives.

Throughout 1946 his health was not good and several times he was reported ill. Finally, on the 31st January, 1947, Dublin was shocked by the announcement that Jim Larkin was dead. It was true. The lion of Irish Labour was no more. His great turbulent spirit was finally at rest.

Dead? — 'Don't Believe It'

There are very few now of Larkin's "Old Guard" in the land of the living. The stalwarts who shared his great battles are becoming year by year ever scarcer in number. But to many, Big Jim is still a vivid living memory of whom some particular recollections are cherished.

The present writer's personal acquaintance with him was confined to the last eighteen months of his life through membership of the Dublin City Council. His eloquence, wit, and whole dynamic personality were unforgettable.

It must be admitted, however, that he also gave his fellow Labour councillors as well as his comrades in other activities some very unpleasant interludes.

He has often been accused of being dictatorial, domineering, prone to irresponsible, reckless statements which were often very unjust and offensive. Some of these allegations are true and even his warmest admirers had often occasion to refer to him in exasperation as "an impossible man." He was a law unto himself and was incapable of submitting to the discipline necessary in any organisation. In spite, however, of very trying faults he had a rich vein of humanity which often erupted with volcanic force. Such moments were memorable.

On one occasion at a Housing Committee meeting some evictions by a private landlord were under discussion. One councillor attempted to justify the landlord's actions by describing alleged ill-treatment of the premises by the children of the families concerned. Larkin, who was chairman, swept the man almost literally off his feet when he angrily roared "All God's children haven't got wings!"

Who can forget him at public meetings snapping his jaws and thundering: "Do you think they hire you because they like the colour of your lovely blue eyes or the sheen of your golden hair. No! They hire you to make a profit out of you."

Some people like to refer to Larkin as a "mob orator." This description is a slander.

In spite of his little schooling and his hard struggle for bare survival, his depth of thought and indications of wide reading and study were remarkable. This was apparent to all who listened to him attentively. He would scorn the use of flattery, the stock in trade of demagogues. In debate he was often unreasonable and unpredictable. Yet, his contributions were well-informed, constructive and frequently moving. He was far from always being uncompromising and could be conciliatory.

He often burst spontaneously into poetry. His favourite poet seemed to be the American, Walt Whitman, whose exuberant verses so eloquently proclaimed rebellion against all tyrannies and brotherhood amongst all men. In his prime he thought nothing of bursting into song during a public meeting, though he had a poor singing voice.

However, the following editorial by Larkin himself in the "Irish Worker" on 12/8/11 expresses more beautifully than any poet or playwright ever did, the ideals and dreams that animated his mind and spirit.

"We are living in stirring times. Those of us who during the last years have been preaching the need of organisation in the industrial field have much to be thankful for. Many times we have had to pause and consider—will anything come of our labours?

"The apathy of the workers seemed to stultify all our efforts; it seemed that with the advance of education a spirit of selfishness had been imparted and self-sacrifice had died out . . . Men replied to your appeal for fellowship and brotherly love in the words of Cain—'Am I my brother's keeper?' You whose lives flow on like a placid stream cannot appreciate the temperament of those who, like myself, go down amongst the exploited in the field, factory, workshop and aboard the great argosies that convey the products of fellow-workers from one area to another. We who are born with the microbe of discontent in our blood must of necessity live the strenuous life; one day down in the depths of despondency, the next day lifted up on the peak of Mount Optimism. The appeal of the fettered and harassed worker, the cry of the poor sweated exploited sister, and beyond their pain, the heartrending bitter wail of the helpless, unfed, illclothed, uncared for child, drives us down to the seventh Hell, depicted by Dante; and then comes a moment in our lives, such a moment as we are passing through now, when we feel the very atmosphere moving in harmony, crying out in one triumphant refrain, 'Brotherhood one in spirit, oneness in action, oneness amongst the workers the world over'.

"It is good to be alive in these momentous days. Reader, have you ever got up on a box or chair, physically and mentally tired, perhaps suffering from want of food; amongst strangers, say a mass of tired workers, released from their bastilles of workshop or factory; and then suffering from lack of training, want of education, but filled with the spirit of a new gospel. You try to impart to that unthinking mass the feeling which possesses yourself. The life all round seems to stagnate, everything seems miserable and depressing. Yet you want them to realise that there is great hope for the future—that there is something worth working for, if the workers will only rouse themselves. You plead with them to cast their eyes upward to the stars, instead of grovelling in the slime of their own degradation; point out to them life's promised fulness and joy if they would only seek it. You appeal to their manhood, their love of their little ones, their race instinct, but all these appeals seem to fall on deaf ears: they turn away apparently utterly apathetic, and one tramps on to the next town or meeting, feeling it was hopeless to try and move them. You then creep into a hedgerow, pull out a cheap copy of Morris's 'News from Nowhere,' 'The Dream of John Ball,' 'Franciscan Friar,' Dante's 'Inferno,' John Mitchel's 'Jail Journal' or last but not least, 'Fugitive Essays,' by Fintan Lalor, then forgetting the world 'and by the world forgot' one lives.

"And then suddenly when things seem blackest and dark night enshrouds abroad, lo! the Sun, and lo! thereunder rises

wrath and hope and wonder, and the worker comes marching on. Friends, there is great hope for the future. The worker is beginning to feel his limbs are free."

These are the words of a man whose life was utterly dedicated to the welfare of the working class.

At his death it was, perhaps, Sean O'Casey who appropriately enough penned the most eloquent tribute:

"We shall be told that Jim Larkin is dead. Don't believe it. He still speaks to you and to me; to every man and woman who toils for a living in office, factory, field and workshop, and to all who go down to the sea in ships . . . Whenever the workers gather to solve a problem there beside them will be the big figure of Jim Larkin ready to help them solve it. Whenever the workers march forth with band and banner to demonstrate the great hope that is in them, there will be the Big Figure striding at their head.

"He speaks still from a platform in Pearse Street, O'Connell Street and Cathal Brugha Street. His fine head is still framed in the old window of Liberty Hall and the voice echoes throughout Beresford Place and whirls down on the waters of the Liffey.

"It is to us to finish the work that Jim began so mightily and well."

"They Never Bought Jim Larkin"

R. M. FOX classifies Larkin as belonging to "the English School of Socialism" and declares "always he had a disregard for social theory."

The present writer cannot concur with this assessment even if there could be agreement on what is precisely meant by the term "English school." Whatever partial justification there could be for this conclusion in relation to the pre-1914 period of his life it certainly does not correctly describe Larkin's subsequent position. Even in his earliest days in Britain he was a member of the Social Democratic Federation which was Marxist in policy.

While in America he became influenced by industrial unionism but he also clearly devoted more time to the study of socialist theories. He became increasingly acquainted with and guided by Marxist ideas; some of the quotations included in this booklet clearly attest to this. While some of his conceptions were not strictly in accordance with Marxian tenets his general political position was certainly Marxist. For a long period after the Russian Revolution in 1917 he was associated both in America and Ireland with the Communist Movement and the "Irish Worker" League which he founded was attached to it.

At all times, however, he was extremely individualistic, unpredictable and unamenable to the discipline of any organisation, political or industrial. Furthermore, industrial matters always occupied more of his time and thoughts than those of a political character.

During the 'thirties he was not identified with any political party and he pursued an independent course of his own. In the 'forties and up to the time of his death he was a member of the Labour Party which he represented on the Dublin Corporation and in the Dail for a short time.

In spite of his individualism he could not be immune to the general national atmosphere in which the Labour Movement developed in the 'twenties and after. It is only in relation to that background that his changing role and tactics are explicable. It was a period in which the hopes of spectacular socialist advances received setbacks; there was an increasing reliance by the official Labour leadership on theories of class collaboration rather than on struggle and militancy. These theories had made considerable progress up to the time of Larkin's death and have continued to do so.

In such an atmosphere, rightly or wrongly he obviously decided to concentrate on developing the Workers' Union of Ireland and in this he succeeded.

He was not a great political theoretician but much of his writings, as popular expositions of socialism and militant trade unionism are brilliant and at times have extraordinary literary power.

It is his fame as a trade union pioneer and his tremendous labours in rousing Irish workers to revolt against evil conditions that will ensure his permanent place in history. He represented a school of trade union leadership which was unselfishly and incorruptibly dedicated to the cause of the working class. His supporters were often heard to declare "They never bought Jim Larkin." Such sentiments may now be irksome to some of the sophisticated in the contemporary Labour movement, but no other words could more truthfully summarise Larkin's life or serve as his epitaph.

He left an indelible mark on Irish Labour by imbuing the workers of his day with a spirit, a dignity and a militancy that to this day is part of our most valuable heritage. The militancy of Irish workers and their high degree of union organisation must forever be linked with his name.

Inseparable however from his industrial labours was his abiding faith in Socialism and in its inevitable triumph throughout the world. That was the steel which strengthened his great integrity, the gleam which illuminated his vision of a future in which would be realised man's desire for universal brotherhood and a guarantee for all of a full and better life, free from poverty and exploitation.

When such fervent Socialist beliefs permeate our Labour movement it will emerge as a dynamic, national force which will ensure national independence and unity, social security and prosperity.

We will then have honoured Larkin, Connolly, Mallin, Partridge and all the pioneers and heroes of Irish Labour.

Cover drawing by

Marian Jeffares

Published by
New Books Publications, 16a Pearse Street, Dublin, Ireland.
(April, 1963).