

# WITH THE TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS.

## REPORT OF DELEGATE CONFERENCE OF I.T. & G.W.U.

Held in the City Hall, Cork, August 6, 1920.

Advantage was taken of the attendance of a large delegation representing the Union at the Trades Union Congress, Cork, to hold a conference of the delegates for the purpose of discussing some matters of immediate interest and surveying the position of the Union as a whole. There were 63 delegates present, and the chair was taken by the general president, Thomas Foran.

The Chairman, in his opening remarks, congratulated the delegation on the intelligent interest displayed by them in the proceedings of Congress. He referred them to the copies of the annual report for 1919 and other statements on finance and membership supplied to them as evidence of the prosperity of the Union. He reminded them that the prestige and good name of the Union had grown side by side with the extension of its industrial activities. It was now in a position to hold its own against any combination.

A report on organisation was read showing the distribution of the membership by counties, the number of branches at different periods, and the number of organisers employed. This report was adopted.

The General Treasurer made a report on finance showing the position of the Union at the end of June, with an account of the receipts and disbursements for the first half-year, which was considered very satisfactory. He called the attention of the delegates to the auditor's report and balance-sheet as printed in the report for 1919. The Union had been able to meet all calls arising out of the big fights of the past year out of income without levying the membership. He emphasised the difficulties in administration caused by the newness of the membership and the inexperience of branch officials. These defects were rapidly remedying themselves, and the gradual tightening of the financial machinery was reflected in the improved income of the Union. The good name of the Union was more important than funds, and for this reason ill-considered action should be avoided lest the prestige of the Union should suffer. A strong combined effort must be made to bring the reserve funds up to a point that would render the organisation secure from any attack.

In reply to a question, the General Treasurer stated that war-chest contributions up to the end of the half-year had amounted to £3,700; and a lengthy discussion ensued as to various methods of enforcing payments of this levy. It was finally decided that a printed notice re payment of war-chest be sent to all branches.

The annual report for 1919 was read to the meeting and adopted, T. Farren emphasising

particularly the paragraph referring to the work of branch committees.

Re National Health Insurance, the Chairman outlined the history of the Approved Society No. 52, explaining the crux that had occurred the previous year in connection with its management, and described the change made by the alteration of rules which had been adopted at the delegate meeting in June. He asked for the co-operation of the delegates and branch officials in extending the Society throughout the Union. He answered a number of questions relative to working details.

Relative to the imprisonment of the General Secretary, the Chairman stated that the activities of interested parties who were exploiting Jim Larkin's fame for their own ends made it necessary for him to explain in detail the position of the Union with regard to his recent trial and imprisonment. Beginning at the foundation of the Union, he traced Larkin's career as general secretary up to the point of his departure for America in 1914. He stated the condition of affairs then and at Easter, 1916, and showed the effect of the insurrection on the fortunes of the organisation since that time. He demonstrated to the satisfaction of all present that the Executive had all along done, and were still doing, their duty by their general officer in exile, and asserted that all the support, moral and financial, needed by Jim Larkin in his trial had been given by the Union, and that, in addition, he had been powerfully aided by Irish organisations in the States. He would welcome practical suggestions of action that would be helpful towards his release. Relative to the activities of the Larkin Release Committee, the unrepresentative character of which he stressed, he declared that a general strike in Ireland was powerless to affect Larkin's position in America, and condemned the methods of terrorism by which the partial strike in Dublin had been brought about.

Correspondence was read from some friends of Larkin in America. Questions were asked as to Larkin's reasons for going to America, his connection with the Union since, and the relation of the insurance crux to the Larkin Release Movement, which were satisfactorily answered, witness being borne to the true state of affairs by delegates who were active in the Union since its foundation.

A statement on land policy, defining the Union's attitude on land holding and purchase, was read to the meeting and discussed at some length. It was decided unanimously that the statement be circulated among the branches for comment, and that a land conference be afterwards called to discuss the whole subject.

### DUBLIN DOINGS.

Negotiations with the Dublin Mineral Water Manufacturers' Association have been broken off. This step has been rendered necessary owing to the persistent attitude of the employers on the question of the introduction of female labour. The employees will not entertain the subject of women labour, because it means, once the principle is established, that a very appreciable number of those at present employed would be displaced to make room for women, whose services would be engaged at a much lower rate of remuneration. Under the circumstances, therefore, a fight in the mineral water trade would appear to be inevitable.

At present the adult rate of pay is 54s. 10d. per week—a transparently ridiculous wage in view of the almost prohibitive prices that are being charged at the moment for household commodities generally.

Feeling the pinch of the times, the employees formulated a demand for better conditions some time ago. In response to the claim a conference was convened at which the details of the application were discussed. At the outset of the discussion it was apparent that the employers were fully bent on making the women aspect the foremost plank in their platform. They admitted, however, that the existent wages were not sufficiently adequate, but in order to meet any further financial outlay it would be necessary to release a considerable number of the males and substitute females therefor. This proposal created a mild sensation among the workers' representatives. It almost scared them stiff. The announcement had the immediate effect of making further discussion futile.

Subsequently the employers suggested arbitration, which was accepted by the men; but when the terms of reference came to be framed it was ascertained that the employers' attitude on the question of the women had remained unchanged, and to all appearances is unchangeable. The next step in the matter rests with the workers, and what their answer will be is pretty certain in the light of what has already transpired during the negotiations.

### Furnishing.

Messrs. O'Dea, Stafford Street, have agreed to advance the wages of their employees by a further 10s. per week. This arrangement has met with the approval of the men concerned in the application.

In the case of the motor men in this firm, negotiations are still proceeding.

### Milling.

The dock milling wagon men are claiming the same tonnage rate as is at present operating in the case of the corresponding workers engaged by the Merchants' Warehousing Co.

### Drapery.

A communication from the Merchant Drapers' Association to hand states that as the members of the Council who met representatives of the Union are at present away on holidays it is impossible to have a further meeting until the end of the month. Whilst the delay is somewhat disappointing, might we, under the circumstances, claim the indulgence of the men when we promise to see that the question of retrospective payment will not be prejudiced under the ultimate terms of settlement?

### Remount.

A communique from the General Headquarters, Irish Command, points out that approval has been received from the War Office for an additional 3s. per week in the pay of the employees at the Remount Depots at Dublin. It is not likely, however, that the men will accept this as the *ne plus ultra* of the War Office in settlement of their demand. Had the advance been doubled there was reasonable hope of acceptance on the part of the men, but having regard to the niggardliness of the amount offered there would be more than a nodicum of justice on the side of the employees if they rejected the present pusillanimous proposal.

### Laundry.

The Laundry Trade Board has practically "gone West" before anything of a real effective nature has been done for the employees in the industry. That hardy annual, the institutional question, has been responsible for the interesting crux that has arisen. The employers have withdrawn from the Board in a body, and whether they will reconsider their decision, is, at the moment, purely a matter for conjecture.

### A Bonus Bone of Contention.

Consternation reigned amongst the employees in a well-known city dry goods store on receipt of information to the effect that their bonus now due would not be paid. A howl of righteous indignation immediately was sent up by those disappointed, and the cry went forth to "clear the decks" for action. Wiser counsels, however, prevailed at the last moment, and the Union has since been sought as a medium to inquire into the circumstances surrounding the mysterious action of the management.

### Wine.

Disciplinary measures had to be taken against certain employees engaged by Messrs. McGrath Bros., Bachelors' Walk, who refused to pay their subs. to the Union. A strike was rendered necessary, which lasted for a day and a half, when the recalcitrants were forced to climb down and stump up. And that's that.

### Kapp's.

Kapp's employees are on the ramp for more kudos.

### Dublin County Council Workers.

The new councillors (a refreshing change from the old) have met the demand by conceding it practically in full: 1s. 6d. per yard to stone-breakers, previous rates being 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d.; 5s. per day increase to carters, previously on 15s. summer and 16s. winter; a 47-hour week. The Council proposes to increase the roadmen's 43s. rate to a 50s. flat minimum, with 2s. extra for each dependent or child under 14 years. The latter is a forward proposition, and, though the rate all round may be further enhanced, opposition to the proposal (which has been put before the men for consideration) may be anticipated from the bachelor element.

### Kilcommon.

The Kahki-clad and the Black-and-Tans have engaged in all manner of shootings-up, incendiarism and hell-let-loose generally in this area, and within the past few weeks have burnt down several creameries. These depredations have, however, only intensified the spirit of the workers in the district, and the small but sturdy branch is more than keeping its end up. Secretary O'Connell and Branch President Hayes secured good increases running from 12s. to 43s. for the men in the Co-op. Creamery, new rates being: Engine driver 50s., platform hands 49s. 6d., and carters 20s. per day.

### Lucan.

Boss Hill is evidently out to make of himself a second Shackleton, but is finding himself up against a tough proposition in his attempt to starve into submission the 100 men and 200 girls who struck in his woollen mills five weeks ago. The strikers are sticking it with praise-worthy grit, and will continue the stoppage till Hill is humbled. Meanwhile, their strike fund is being augmented by their fellow-workers in the surrounding country, and on Sunday last football matches arranged for the town brought in a good gate, a procession a couple of thousand strong being afterwards held through the town.

### Ennis.

Employees on the Fergus Reclamation Syndicate's 800-acre tract are considering a 4s. offer and also a much bigger proposition which, should events move happily, may result in another Rahaline in Co. Clare.

### Virginia.

Thirty-four new members have been recruited for the branch, following a few hours' stoppage against non-Union workers and members in arrears, and a procession through the town of the Red-handers, all outsiders being marched to and signed on at the Union rooms.

### Newcastle.

The solitary employer in this County Tipp. district who withheld from the new farm settlement has been left solitary by his men, who are banking on an early victory in their strike.

### Rosecommon County Council Workers.

The roadmen do not consider themselves over sanguine in anticipating a 50s. offer on recent demand. Other improved conditions are also being sought.

### Castlepollard.

No gap in the ranks this time, the town workers declare, in connection with their new 40s. demand.

### Knocklong.

A repite in what looks like the making of another dust-up has been gained in the matter of the projected dismissals by Cleeves of some men on account of alleged work shortage, the notices of discharge having been withdrawn.

### Newbridge.

The R.E. Department are well on the way to duplicating their previous five months' delay in according their Curragh labourers the 1s. 5d. per hour rate granted by all contractors as from May 1, and have been reminded accordingly.

### Millford.

The non-Union ganger, who has occasioned many stoppages of roadmen in this County Cork area, has been beset from many sides, and must come into line. Resolutions which figure on the agendas of Cos. Cork and Limerick Councils requiring that only Trade Unionists get employment on the roads, should smooth out friction of this sort.

### Easkoy.

The men have sat upon the town demand since June, and now hope to make the bosses do so, the claims having been sent in now that the awaited opportunity has presented itself.

### Drogheda.

Bakers have been insulted with a 6s. offer, vanmen more so with a 3s. one, and joint strike notices covering all firms are timed to expire on Saturday, saving much improved offers meanwhile.

### Fent.

Dock workers at this, the Port of Tralee, have had a flush of work lately owing to the arrival of several grain ships, and have benefited all the more because of their recently increased rates. That for discharging corn is 1s. 11d. per ton, not 1s. 9d. as previously stated.

### Killeshandra.

Settled for workers on a big farm at increases running from 4s. 6d. to 6s. on A.W.B. rates.

### Baldoyle.

Coal merchants' men have got 50s. offer.

### Ferbane.

Builders' labourers are offered 1½d. per hour increase, present conditions being 48s. for 48 hours.

### County Carlow Farm Dispute.

Pleading that their County Executive should first have to be consulted, the Farmers' Association did not send representatives to the Conference summoned by the Dail for 12th inst., and all preparations were accordingly made for the county stoppage on Saturday last. However, at the last moment it was agreed to postpone the strike pending a mid-week conference.

### Kells.

After a brief stoppage, Org. Sec. McCormack secured for one firm's breadvan drivers 30s. cash wage, 1s. 8d. in the £ commission on private sales, and 2d. per doz. over 20 doz. daily; and for another firm's men 35s. with like commission—about 10s. increase.

### Leix Farms.

The farm workers' ballot on the Association's offer resulted in a small majority for acceptance. The new outdoor rates graduate from 35s., harvest bonus ranges from 40s. to 50s. in the three zones, overtime and Sunday work at time-and-a-half.

### Roscrea.

Builders' labourers' strike was settled at 40s. by Org. Hayes.

### North Tipp. Roadmen

Are moving for improvements somewhat similar to those demanded in the South County.

### Burncourt.

Estimate workers, farm labourers and creamery men are on the move for better conditions.

### Mullingar.

Building tradesmen claim 2s. per hour, and labourers have also preferred demands.

### Listowel.

Latchford's grist men secured 48s. (5s. increase) after arbitration, at which Org. McGrath was their principal spokesman.

## CARLOW FARMERS CLIMB DOWN.

### Decision to Negotiate after Months of Shilly-Shally.

"Soft persuasion" failed. Verbal threats of drastic action failed. Dail overtures were rejected with lofty pooh-poohs. The bourgeoisie of the land and the more aristocratic land-hogs had hauled high their flag of defiance. A fight seemed inevitable, and both sides, after manoeuvring cautiously for months, had girded their loins, when a remarkable development occurred. On Friday last—the day before that on which the Reds had arranged to open active hostilities—the Whites dipped their flag politely and sent an intermediary to our lines to arrange for an immediate peace conference. The conference that for months we had pleaded, bluffed and threatened for, the conference that the Dail failed to arrange with the obdurate farmers, was fixed for Tuesday, and a few days' armistice was settled upon. Thus the first round has gone to the Transport Union.

### Farmers' "Strategical Retirement."

It is disappointing when, with one's courage screwed to the fighting point, the enemy turns tail and flees. All arrangements had been made by us for a remorselessly-waged fight. The Red commandants had perfected their plan of campaign, and the rank and file were ready. This was to have been no mere stay-out, holiday strike. The time is past when battles are won by men on holiday. The experience of last year's land strikes has proved that if the proletariat of the land can win against the organised farmers, victory only comes through organised aggression—not organised passivity. In the light of experience our policy was to have been penetration into the employers' camp, and war in his lines. Terrorism is the most potent of Labour's weapons, and while every instrument in our armoury must be used, it is on the Red Terror that our greatest reliance is placed. The holiday policy is obsolete and futile. . . . In Carlow we made no secret of our plans; and the Farmers' Union learnt wisdom just in the nick of time. Face to face with the menace they blanched. Just another illustration of the superiority of physical logic to logic of the metaphysical species!

### "Ready, Aye, Ready!"

At the time of writing it is not possible to deal with the entire episode. Unforeseen developments may yet occur but our men are ready for any emergency. The steady courage and determination that characterised their bearing in the crisis just passed has so alarmed the farmers that a satisfactory settlement is expected. They have shown their capacity for a stern struggle; and what better guarantee is there of peace than readiness for war?

### A Futile Conspiracy.

An interesting point in connection with the Carlow movement was the reason given by the farmers' organisation for refusing to negotiate. It may be stated as follows: The Congress Executive had placed a ban on the export of certain farm products, and had controlled the prices of certain foodstuffs. These restrictions adversely affected farming interests. The Transport Union, as a unit of the Labour movement, was in part responsible for these "hardships." The no-negotiations attitude was therefore a sort of reprisal. This policy, we learn, was adopted by several county farmers' organisations in this part of the country; but under pressure was abandoned. The decision of the Carlow farmers means the final abandonment of this policy of reprisals. It has gone the way of the famous "Freedom Force" that was to have achieved such great things for the landed reactionaries in Ireland.

### Great Series of Meetings.

Our Carlow correspondent writing later says: A great series of meetings was held in all the county centres, on Sunday, and were addressed by Messrs. P. Gaffney (E.C. Member), P. O'Toole (Carlow Sec.), A. Heron and E. Rooney (organisers). The meetings were marked by the greatest enthusiasm, though a feeling of disappointment was manifested at the postponement of strike action until Thursday. Indeed in one area—Leighlinbridge—the men refused to defer action, and an immediate stoppage was decided upon. The demonstrations throughout the County are an all-convincing answer to and repudiation of those responsible for the circulation of stories about the timidity of the Carlow land workers.

If a settlement is not effected at Wednesday's conference, interesting and perhaps exciting developments may be awaited. LASERIAN.