A large crowd of people, likely Irish unemployed, is gathered in a city street. The image is in a monochromatic orange-red tone. In the background, a sign on a building reads "BRANCH NO 13". The crowd is dense, and many people are looking towards the camera. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant public gathering or protest.

FIGHT STARVE OR EMIGRATE

**A History of the
Irish Unemployed Movements
in the 1950s**



Sit-down march in O'Connell Street by the D.U.A. 1953.

FIGHT STARVE OR EMIGRATE

A History of the
Unemployed Associations
in the 1950s.

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Evanne Kilmurray, April 1988.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.I.U. - Congress of Irish Unions

C.P.I. - Communist Party of Ireland

D.C.T.U. - Dublin Council of Trade Unions

D.U.A. - Dublin Unemployed Association

F.W.U.I./W.U.I. - Federated Workers' Union of Ireland

I.N.U.M./N.U.M. - Irish National Unemployed Movement

I.T.U.C. - Irish Trade Union Congress

P.U.T.U.O. - Provisional United Trade Union Organisation

U.P.C. - Unemployed Protest Committee

Introduction

The Larkin Unemployed Centre is to be congratulated for their initiative in producing this pamphlet. The staff of the Centre are to be commended for their diligent research.

This brief description of the activities unemployed associations in the 1950's helps not just us to understand the history of these organisations but to draw parallels with the situation today. It is particularly appropriate that the history of the Dublin unemployed associations should be chronicled by one of the fourteen Unemployed Centres sponsored by local Trades Councils on a countrywide basis.

This is precisely the sort of project which local Trades Councils can, and should initiate in conjunction with Unemployed Centres. Pamphlets such as this help to redress the balance of history as it is written and taught away from the struggles of ordinary people to earn a decent living. It is particularly appropriate that the production of this pamphlet should closely coincide with the announcement of funding for a Labour History Museum, to be developed in Dublin under the auspices of the Irish Labour History Society. Congress supports this initiative, and congratulates the Irish Labour History in its work of promoting the study of labour history.

Had this pamphlet been produced in the seventies the events detailed between these covers might have seemed remote and somewhat strange to the contemporary reader. In the eighties they have taken on a depressing familiarity. It is all the more important therefore that pamphlets such as this are written so that in understanding our past we may better analyse our present and chart our future.

Peter Cassells

Preface

The 1950s witnessed a striking rise in unemployment in Ireland at a time when most of Western Europe and North America was on the crest of the post-war "long boom". With hindsight the unemployment figures seem light enough, at worst 100,000 compared to today's figure of 300,000.

As always in Ireland, the official statistics of unemployment mask the true numbers seeking and not finding work, above all they fail to reveal the constant drain of emigration.

Not all of those out of work took the boat. Some began organising a movement of the unemployed.

By looking back at the causes of unemployment then, and the movement against it, we can hope to draw some conclusions about combating unemployment today.

Emigration has been a cardinal feature of Irish life for the last two centuries. Up to and including the 1950s most of those emigrating came from small farms in rural Ireland. Ever since the famine, dividing up the farm had been out of the question. Only one son would inherit the land. Unless the family was prosperous all the other sons and all the daughters most probably emigrated¹.

This flight from the land has been a fairly universal phenomenon in modern times. What has made Ireland unique, at least in Europe, is that those fleeing the land don't go to their own cities but to foreign ones. In the crisis of the 50s this pattern was compounded by another. Not only were Irish cities unable to absorb the surplus population from the countryside, they were also unable to provide work for their own urban population. People who had been working in manufacturing industry or in construction found themselves out of jobs and with little prospect of finding any others. Many were married with families to support. They were unable to bring their families abroad to look for work and they were unwilling to leave them behind². Some had been active members of trade unions and were used to organising and expressing themselves on platforms and on paper. They weren't about to accept destitution lying down.

Unemployment benefit in the mid 50s for a husband and wife and two children was 50 shillings a week. Unemployment assistance for the same family was 38 shillings a week³. At the same period a pound of butter cost 4/3d. The prices of meat and eggs were comparative⁴.

The unemployed simply could not afford to eat high protein food. The wife of an unemployed activist who went on hunger strike to

highlight their situation described her family's diet; bread, margarine, tea and milk⁵. Old age pensioners fared little better. Many spent most of their days in bed because they couldn't afford the fuel⁶.

The economic crisis of the mid 50s also led to a national debate about the causes of unemployment and possible solutions to it. Many of the themes of that debate still reverberate today. There existed a general feeling that unemployment was a most unfortunate affair but that was as far as any consensus went.

It was estimated that the number of houses being built in the Dublin region by the middle of the decade was only a fifth of the number which had been built in the previous decade⁷. This decline in house construction undoubtedly had a knock-on effect on other areas of production. The trade unions and the unemployed organisations blamed the Government for allowing the banks to restrict credit and for failing to launch any serious programme for industrial development⁸. This approach was supported in the Dail by Sean McBride who argued that it would be necessary to provide 350,000 new jobs over a ten year period, if anything like full employment was to be achieved. "The banks will have to be informed by the Government in no uncertain terms that they are acting against national policy in restricting credit for any productive purposes and that by so doing they are preventing any expansion of production and are creating unemployment"⁹.

In opposition, the Fianna Fail Party, particularly its major economic spokesman, Sean Lemass, also blamed the policy of restricting credit¹⁰. In government their emphasis was somewhat different. Erskine Childers, the Education Minister in the Fianna Fail government suggested that unemployment could only be solved under a dictatorship¹¹. In a democracy the main body of employment must be provided by individual enterprise. Sean McEntee, the Finance Minister in the same government, argued that foreign borrowing was the source of the problem. Describing reports of starvation among families of the unemployed as exaggerated, he went on "It would be very much better if these people were employed but when the first demand on the economy was to meet interest owed to the United States, some elements of the population were bound to suffer"¹².

The *Irish Times* pointed to a shortage of capital as the root cause of unemployment. Applauding the general synod of the Church of Ireland for rejecting an "impractical" motion that called upon the government to adopt emergency measures to ease the unemployment problem, *The Irish Times* argued that "full employment or anything

approximating it would be a slow process and will demand the expenditure of a great deal of money in the form of capital investment. The money is not there"¹³.

The most comprehensive contribution to the debate came from the recently unified trade union movement. In a document "Planning Full Employment" they argued that capital for productive investment could be made available if the State was to exert control over banking and take measures to repatriate overseas investments by Irish citizens¹⁴. The document was welcomed "with reservations" by Sean Lemass while *The Irish Times* felt that it deserved "serious consideration" but found its proposal to repatriate investment by a special tax "disturbing"¹⁵. In the event no attempt was made then or since to place the banking system under public control or to insure that investments abroad by Irish citizens be repatriated. What did emerge was a very different economic strategy which was predicted to bring about growth and full employment.

The problems of the Irish economy were outlined in a Department of Finance memorandum, drawn up by T.K. Whitaker, sent to the World Bank in 1957. "Further Industrial development", it concluded "was largely a problem of inducing the necessary import of enterprise, technical competence and capital". Most existing industries had grown up "behind a protective trade barrier" and their potential for development was limited since there was little chance of their developing export markets. It was therefore essential that the new industries to which further development must be directed should be competitive in export markets and capable of withstanding the challenge presented by the proposals for a European Free Trade Area.

"Ireland has the significant advantage of political stability, a plentiful and adaptable labour supply, ample power resources and an extensive transport system.....Dividends, interest and profits on all investments may be freely transferred to the foreign investors' country in the appropriate currency. Capital may be repatriated at any time in the currency in which it was and this right also extends to appreciation of such capital"¹⁶.

This approach, focused upon encouraging foreign capital to invest in Ireland and integrating ourselves into the E.E.C. has been the cornerstone of Irish economic strategy ever since.

Three decades later, with 300,000 unemployed and over 30,000 emigrating every year, there is surely a case for re-opening the debate.

I. K. H. Connell "Catholicism and Marriage in Post Famine Ireland" in "Irish Peasant Society" (1968).

2. C.M. Arensburg and S.T. Kinball "Family and Community In Ireland" (1968), Irish Times Pictorial Weekly May 25th. 1957.
3. Figures from Central Statistics Office, Dublin.
4. Figures from Central Statistics Office Dublin.
5. Irish Times Pictorial Weekly May 25th. 1957.
6. *ibid.*
7. Irish Times April 4th. 1957.
8. Irish Times February 11th. 1957, March 12th. 1957, Torch (1953), Protest (1957).
9. Irish Times November 9th. 1956.
10. Irish Times December 14th. 1956.
11. Irish Press, February 10th. 1953.
12. Irish Times July 25th. 1953.
13. Irish Times May 16th. 1957.
14. "Planning Full employment" by Provisional United Trade Union Organisation, Dublin 1956.
15. Irish Times, December 1st. 1956 and March 12th. 1957.
16. Quoted in Ronan Fanning "Irish Department of Finance 1922-58" P512 (1978).



The birth of the D.U.A., 1953

Unemployed Association of 1953 and 1957

All though Dublin's city streets
Hear the stamp of marching feet
See our placards and our flag
proclaim our goal
Irish bosses cringe in fear
Everyone demanding freedom
from the dole.¹

Long before the emergence of the unemployed associations of the 1950s Dublin had already seen a varied history of unemployed agitational groups which evolved as a constant form of working class struggle.

Photographs in the *Evening Telegraph* 1923 report the existence of an active unemployed association². Three years later in 1926 the Irish National Unemployed Movement came into being³. The conditions in the late 20s and early 30s for the 130,000⁴ unemployed was critical. While the payment for those with stamps was low, for those without stamps the situation was unbearable. There was no Social Welfare legislation entitling people out of work to any rights. They had to rely on a combination of local relief and private charities⁵.

Similar to the Unemployed Associations in the 50s the N.U.M. was not confined to Dublin. It had branches in Belfast, Coleraine, Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon and Nenagh.

The attitude of the Irish Free State Government (1922-32) to the unemployed at that time was clear. One of its Ministers, McGilligan is on record as having stated that it was not the responsibility of the Government to provide employment⁶.

The unemployed continued to fight for work and improvement in Social Welfare legislation until the early war years. In the mid 30s however, Nolan points out the concept of emigration was seized with both hands by the Fianna Fail Government and used as a means of curtailing serious social unrest⁷.

Emigration to Britain occurred on a large scale to some extent halting the unemployed campaigns, however they emerged again in the late 40s. The Irish Workers Voice reported on an attempt to set up a Dublin Unemployed Association in 1949⁸ with Brian Behan as its acting Chairman⁹. This movement called for the Government to

declare unemployment a national emergency and to take steps to provide work for the unemployed immediately¹⁰.

The next mention of an unemployed movement appears in '53 when the Dublin Unemployed Association came into existence. While this movement collapsed a year later it was quickly followed by the Unemployed Protest Committee which emerged in early '57.

Meanwhile cabinet papers revealed that unemployment was soaring upwards in the 50s. A memo to the Taoiseachs Office¹² on a report entitled "the Trend of employment and unemployment in the years 50 and 51" urged the Government to think twice before issuing the above report as the "position regarding employment and unemployment has changed to such a degree of late that it is felt that it may not be suitable to issue an official publication with such out of date figures"¹³. Between the years 1945 - 60 unemployment figures were at their peak in both 1953 and 1957. (See appendix A)

However, despite unemployment figures on the live register reaching almost 70,000 in both 1953 and 1957, parliamentary debates of the era reveal minimal discussion on the topic of the unemployed and the Government's attitude was, to say the least, somewhat bland. Replying to questions on unemployment the parliamentary secretary replied, "It is hardly necessary to say that the increase in unemployment figures is causing the Government concern. They are watching the situation carefully with a view to providing remedies where possible"¹⁴. At this stage, the unemployed figures had risen to 86,604. The workers faced with a prospect of continued poverty or emigration.

We want work and Social Justice
For too long we've felt the blow
So come every hungry man
With our movement take your stand
and we'll bury employment far
below.¹⁵

NOTE

Labour historical sources display a surprising dearth of material regarding the Irish Unemployed Movement as a whole. With every new topic that is researched there is always a danger of prejudiced sources. In order to avoid any bias of this chronological account of the Unemployed Associations. I have used as wide a range of source material as is available.

Source material for this booklet includes cabinet papers, Parliamentary Debates, F.W.U.I. and ICTU records, D.C.T.U. executive and council minutes; oral interview with members of the Unemployed Association of 1957.

Newspaper sources include Irish Press, Irish Independent, Evening Telegraph, Dublin Evening Mail, Evening Herald, Irish Times, Times Pictorial Weekly and Catholic Standard.

1. Marching song of D.U.A. Torch October 1953.
2. See Evening Telegraph 15.5.23.
3. See history of Communist Party of Ireland - Sam Nolan article "Unemployed Struggles 1920s-1950".
4. See Irish Workers Voice - October 25th, 1930.
5. See Nolans article - Unemployed Struggles 1920-1950 (pages 57-60).
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. Irish Workers Voice - June 1949.
9. Brian Behan brother of Brendan Behan.
10. Irish Workers Voice - June 1949.
11. See Evening Herald - April 27th. 1953.
12. See State Paper Office Cabinet Papers on Full Employment. 13510B - 1948 - 1953. 13510C - 1953 - 1954.
13. *ibid.*
14. Parliamentary Debates Vol. 136 - 4.2.1953.
15. Marching Song of D.U.A. - See Torch October 1953.

Evanne Kilmurray.

Dublin Unemployed Association 1953

The Dublin Unemployed Association (DUA) was launched outside Werburgh Street Labour Exchange ¹ at a public meeting called by four unemployed men². A box was borrowed from a man in a nearby shop and Tom Pearle got up and asked for volunteers to form a provisional committee³. Twelve men responded and after electing Tom Pearle (Chairman) and William McGuinness (Secretary), (the latter), both ordinary Dublin unemployed men with no political affiliations, the committee was given the task of formulating a policy for the unemployed. Speakers told of the need for action so as to alleviate the conditions of the unemployed⁴. A man, wife and two children received fifty shillings and this was the maximum figure that could be drawn, even if there was a family of ten. If a man used up his stamps and went on the Assistance, then his rate dropped to thirty-eight shillings.

As regards relief work, a man had to be on Assistance and have four children to qualify.

Immediately after that meeting, the basis for six demands was worked out: the provision of work; relief work to be paid at Trade Union rates; a 50% rise in benefits; payment for each child; abolition of the three-day waiting period for Assistance; reintroduction of food subsidies^{6*} (*See note*).

The Association began to build up momentum⁷. Deputations went to the main political parties, telling them of their aims, finding out their attitudes to their demands and asking them to raise their plight in the Dail.

The first official march of the Association was held on 3rd June, 1953 and reported as comprising between 50-60 marchers who proceeded to Leinster House. They were stopped by Gardai, who had cordoned off the area. Forty of the marchers were allowed to proceed on a deputation to the Dail, but the gates were shut and the deputation rejoined the main body. The men then formed ranks shouting "We want jobs" and marched into O'Connell Street⁸. A meeting was held in Foster Place, with Deputies T. Kyne and B. Corish explaining that the Labour Party was in session when the deputation had arrived at the Dail and had no idea that the

NOTE: The question of Food Subsidies was one of prime importance both in 1953 and 1957. Although reduced in 1952 Food Subsidies were to be re-introduced in July '56 and later removed in the Budget of May '57.

deputation was outside⁹. A deputation from the Dublin Unemployed Association was later received by William Norton, leader of the Labour Party. The latter promised to try and secure alterations in the scale of unemployment benefits and the Labour Party also agreed to table questions in the Dail on unemployment^{10/11}.

The plight of the workers was slowly beginning to filter through the ranks. At a special delegate I.T.U.C. Conference, Denis Larkin urged that representation be made to the Minister for Local Government for the restoration of a direct labour system and the building programmes. While Ruairi Roberts, Secretary of the I.T.U.C., stated that a joint Conference was being sought with the Labour Party to see what political action could be taken^{12/13}.

The next meeting of the D.U.A. was reported in the *Irish Times* when traffic was held up and delayed for an hour at a meeting at Christchurch. Tom Pearle pointed out that this demonstration had been held to protest against the Minister's refusal to make adequate provision for unemployment and health benefits.

Public demonstrations, at this stage, were becoming a regular feature of the D.U.A.'s tactics. It was the only way they had of demonstrating the realities of their plight to the Government. They felt that they had kept silent for too long¹⁵. They were also gaining more support. Dublin's unemployed began to see the public meetings



D.U.A. Demonstration, College Green, 1953.

and marches as a means by which they could voice their previously untold grievances.

The marches became progressively larger. The *Irish Press* reported on July 7th that batons were drawn by the Gardai, traffic was disrupted and the gates of Leinster House stormed, when 1,000 members of the D.U.A. demonstrated in the main streets of the city¹⁶. The police prevented about 500 of them approaching Leinster House. The *Evening Herald* took up the story. "The demonstrators marched slowly back to O'Connell Street and shortly before 10 o'clock, hundreds of them sat down on the roadway or on the footpath. Some of them lay prostrate in the middle of the main traffic lane on the bridge, shouting "We want work"¹⁷. They remained there for ten minutes before marching up O'Connell Street.

Both the slow marching and the lunch-time sit-ins were to become well known characteristics of the D.U.A. within the next few months. At a meeting held later in Foster Place, Pearle stated that the demonstrations had shown how organised the unemployed could become¹⁸. William McGuinness told the crowd "that there would have been no trouble if the police had not drawn their batons". We have only shown our teeth yet", he declared, amidst cheering. "Next week we will bite and no matter who they arrest, the marches will go on"¹⁹. The following day, meetings were held outside Werburgh Street and Gardiner Street Exchanges. McGuinness announced there would be a further 'mystery march' the following Monday to protest against the three-day waiting period, when there was a change-over from Unemployment Benefit to Unemployment Assistance²⁰. Pearle also announced that the recent attempt to smash the Association had only strengthened it. "All the unemployed wanted" he said, "was work - not promises, not charity and not dole"²¹.

The attack to which Pearle had alluded to originated in the *Catholic Standard*²². Carrying large headlines which read "Reds exploit Dublin Unemployed", the article went on to say that two men, Brace and Daly, had resigned from the committee of the D.U.A. owing to the pressure of the Communists on the committee. The resignations were handed in at a meeting called to consider the topic of finance, as some committee members failed to understand the origin of money which was being used to further the cause of the unemployed²³. Brace and Daly had been anxious to know the identity of the philanthropists who were so interested in Dublin's workless. They never found out and after a stormy meeting, resigned. The *Catholic Standard* went on to say, "Daly had fled the country and Brace was preparing to follow suit"²⁴.

D.U.A. protests continued. Three days later, on July 6th, a further march was held using tactics of the slow marches and the lunch-time sit-ins²⁵. Later at a meeting in Foster Place, Pearle said "This is not Communism or any other ism - if it is Communism to protest for three meals a day, then all of you are Reds"²⁶.

The D.U.A. also became known for its championing of social welfare grievances of many of Dublin's poor who lived in absolute squalor and destitution.

One such case was that of a mother of three children who had approached the Association for help. Her husband was suffering from acute heart trouble and had been removed to St. Kevin's Hospital in a dying condition. "She had been in receipt of 37s. 6d. Home Assistance. The Relieving Officer had heard of her husband going into Hospital, had come to the house and told her she would be cut down to 35s. as she had one less mouth to feed. The woman was distraught - the cut was a death blow. She paid 6s. rent, 2s. insurance, 4s. gas, 4s. busfare to visit her husband and brought cigarettes and tea to him. She was left with 19s. a week to feed and clothe herself and three children. She had never bought coal"²⁷. Assuming that herself and the three children were entitled to three meals a day, the Home Assistance allowed her 3d. per person for each meal²⁸. Subsequently, the D.U.A. had gone to interview the Board of Assistance and won back the woman's 2s. 6d.

The *Catholic Standard* carried on its attack on the D.U.A. In a *Standard Special*, it was reported that a D.U.A. deputation visited the *Standard's* offices to protest about the inaccuracies of the previous report³⁰. It was denied that funds were available from hidden sources. McGuinness said that banners and posters had come from the previous Unemployed Association, the placards handmade, the typing done by a member of the I.T.U.C. and the paper supplied by both the W.U.I. and the I.T.U.C.

Questioned if he was prepared to deny that there were Communists on the committee, Furlong replied "we are not Communists on the committee".

Furlong, another member of the D.U.A. committee and Brendan Behan's half brother replied "we are not concerned with the political views of our members"³¹. McGuinness elaborated saying "I don't give a damn if they were Bush Baptists, so long as they are trying to get jobs"³².

An inevitable sequel to the D.U.A. slow marches appeared in the form of summonses. The *Independent* reported that men appeared before District Justice Farrell on charges in respect of sit-down

demonstrations by unemployed on O'Connell Bridge on 1st and 6th July³³. The Judge pointed out that there was no constitutional right for 200-700 men to sit down on the road and obstruct traffic³⁴. In reply, Pearle said that he couldn't give any undertaking that the D.U.A. wouldn't stage similar demonstrations³⁵.

These appearances in Court drew the public like a magnet, however. The cases were closely supervised, the Independent reported, that even Donal Nevin, the I.T.U.C. Research Officer, had difficulty gaining admittance³⁶.



Unemployed Sit-down Protest.

Undeterred, the D.U.A. went on to hold their biggest rally ever on 12th. July in College Green³⁷. A motion calling for increased employment benefits and the creation of employment at Trade Union rates by Government Capital Expenditure was passed at the huge gathering³⁸. Denis Larkin, T.D. said that Dublin had thousands of unemployed builders while the city needed 2,000 new houses. Other speakers at this rally included T. Breen, ex Lord Mayor, Helen Chenevix, Irish Women Workers Union³⁹.



Dominic Behan addresses the D.U.A., 1953.

Meanwhile the 'Torch', the D.U.A.'s monthly journal, began to stir the consciences of politicians and Trade Unionists alike. The December edition of the 'Torch' pointed out that in an official Nutrition Survey carried out by the Department of Health in 1946-48⁴⁰, it was shown that children of the unemployed suffered more from malnutrition than any other section of the population. It was revealed that one out of every four children whose fathers were unemployed, were not in a good nutritional state⁴¹. They had been deprived of the basic foods which were essential for healthy children. The unemployed could not afford to buy enough eggs, butter, meat or cheese. Their children would become innocent victims of poverty and destitution⁴².

Social Welfare complaints continued to pour into the D.U.A. A further case concerned a builder's labourer who had been married a couple of years and had one child. The three lived in one room and had no chance of consideration for a Corporation house until they had at least four children. Six months after the marriage, the man had been sacked. The furniture which had been bought with the hard-earned savings of himself and his wife had to be pawned. Week after week, he cycled around the building sites, but all in vain. Every article the pair had of value had to be pawned. There was no lino on the floor and hardly any bed clothes left. The D.U.A. pointed out that this was not an isolated case - there were hundreds more like it in Dublin⁴³.

The first intimation of Fianna Fail's intention to loosen the purse strings on behalf of the unemployed, came with the announcement of Dublin Corporation state⁴⁴ relief schemes for the workless. The *Independent* reported that for local authorities to qualify for state schemes which would be recruited from public bodies throughout the country, they must embrace all works of an essential nature and have a large labour content⁴⁵.

Following their announcement⁴⁶, a joint delegation of I.T.U.C. and the Labour Party met and decided to seek a meeting with the Government and urge immediate priority on employment and secure one of the D.U.A.'s main demands, that of the elimination of the three-day waiting period on the transition from Unemployed Benefit to Assistance⁴⁷.

Meanwhile, the *Catholic Standard* called for new leaders for the workless⁴⁸, while the *Irish Workers Voice* in defence of the D.U.A., called the *Standard*, "a gutter rag", pointing out that the *Standard* had openly supported the Blueshirts attempt to destroy democratic government in Ireland⁴⁹.

At further meetings outside Werburgh and Gardiner Street Exchanges, the D.U.A. pointed out that they were pleased to see the I.T.U.C. and the Labour Party coalescing⁵⁰. This, coupled with the Government's decision to set up a Special Relief Works Committee in Dublin Corporation, which although meant only to employ a few hundred men, a mere drop in the unemployment ocean, was a heartening sign⁵¹ and proved that the D.U.A.'s efforts were not in vain.

While lunch-time demonstrations continued, a delegation from the I.T.U.C. National Executive and the Labour Party met De Valera and Sean Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce on 27th. July. Prior to the meeting, a memorandum was submitted to the Taoiseach, setting out the general recommendations in accordance with the conclusions of the Unemployed Conference and the joint meeting with the Labour Party⁵². The delegation was assured by De Valera that work for a large number of men would shortly be provided in Dublin. De Valera also pledged that the building industry would soon show signs of improvement and the Special Relief Works committee would be operational almost immediately⁵³. The delegation suggested that "for the duration of this critical period of unemployment that a committee be set up with Government and Trade Union representatives to review measures for the relief of unemployment"⁵⁴. Rejecting the idea in a later letter to the I.T.U.C.



D.U.A. Meeting, 1953.

Executive, De Valera replied that “no real advantage would be gained by the establishment of such a committee. After all, it is always open for the Congress to put forward proposals for the expansion of employment by the Government”⁵⁵.

As the D.U.A. continued to make gains, the convictions and summonses went on. Marchers were fined between 10s. - 40s. for demonstrating. After a court appearance in late August, Pearle announced to a crowd in Foster Place that the D.U.A. would not pay any fine, but would go to jail and demand to be treated as political prisoners⁵⁷.

Subsequently, Pearle, McGuinness, Kearney and another were charged under the Road Traffic Act. Refusing to be bound to the peace, they went to Mountjoy for three months⁵⁸. Although closely reporting the activities of the D.U.A. it is interesting to note that unlike groups throughout the labour movement, media sources made little reference to the harshness of the sentences imposed.

By August/September, evidence of police intimidation was becoming apparent. D.U.A. leaders had to sign a declaration that they would be of good behaviour on any proposed marches. Garda warned the D.U.A. that “they could not sit down in the streets nor spread out nor slow march”⁵⁹. This instruction by the police caused uproar in the Dail. Lemass said that the Gardai instructions were entirely a police matter. Brendan Corish, Labour T.D., pointed out that everyone wanted to see orderly demonstrations and no conflict with the law. But surely it was stretching the law beyond limits, when guarantees must be given beforehand that the law would not be broken⁶⁰.

Bad feeling between the D.U.A. and the Gardai was intensified as the marches continued and the number of arrests and summonses grew. Headlines in the *Independent* read: “Unemployed and Gardai clash near Prison”⁶¹. The article went on to say “that five members of the D.U.A. and several Gardai were treated for injuries sustained on Saturday night in a baton charge on the rear of Mountjoy Prison”⁶². “After a meeting at Werburgh Street Exchange where Dominic Behan had called the Gardai “louts”, “blacklegs” and “Gestapo”. the D.U.A. had tried to march to the rear of Mountjoy Prison. Superintendent Kingston told Behan that he couldn’t allow the procession to go beyond the Canal to Mountjoy, as it was a disorderly mob. Behan told the Superintendent that he would give him five minutes to take his men away or they would go away in pieces”⁶³.

In a much publicised court case following the incident at Binn’s

Bridge, evidence was heard from a man called Kavanagh, who claimed he had no links with the D.U.A.⁶⁴. He had noticed the scuffle at Binn's Bridge and had seen a little girl of five or six in danger of being trampled on. As he went to pick her up, he was hit on the head by a policeman and taken away in a squad car⁶⁵. A policeman denied this and told the court that Kavanagh had approached him and said "you Black and Tans, if you don't get out of my way I will tear you apart with my hands"⁶⁶.

A further meeting of D.U.A. marchers were arrested during Horse Show week, but these men were acquitted in court and the police ordered to return banners and placards⁶⁷.

The D.U.A.'s campaign for the release of the leaders came to nothing⁶⁸, even though they had the support of the Labour Regional Council⁶⁹, the D.T.U.C., I.T.U.C. and many other bodies behind them⁷⁰.

Refusing to meet a deputation of the I.T.U.C. Executive, the Minister for Justice pointed out ... "that the persons concerned were Minister for Justice pointed out ... " that the persons concerned were committed to prison in default of entering into recognisances as to their future good behaviour. He would not consider it proper to relieve them of their obligation to give the required undertaking as an alternative to undergoing the penalties considered appropriate by the Court"⁷¹.

The only labour body which stood apart on the issue of the Dublin Unemployed Association was the Congress of Irish Unions. In direct contrast to the I.T.U.C. a resolution proposed at their Conference asking the C.I.U. to express sympathy for the D.U.A. was not passed⁷². Only one delegate spoke in favour. The C.I.U. had decided not to support the D.U.A. except through the Trade Union Movement^{73,74}.

The *Catholic Standard* were now advocating another unemployed pressure group, Deo Duce. Formerly the Painters' Social Club at 47, Parnell Square, Deo Duce was open to all workless except the Communist Party and those affiliated to it. All violence was barred. Clearly, the agitationary tactics of the D.U.A. did not appeal to Deo Duce⁷⁵. The proposals of Deo Duce included personal appeal to each employer who advertised vacancies and a suggestion that members of Trade Unions would work a five-day week and drop a half day's pay⁷⁶. Deo Duce and the D.U.A. did merge for one meeting on the unemployment situation, but Behan and thirty others left within half an hour. The *Catholic Standard* went on to claim that a member of the Deo Duce Executive had been threatened by some of the D.U.A.,

“the Club that you are in wants to smash the D.U.A. If you get too busy you will be taken care of”⁷⁷.

A further joint statement issued on behalf of the Labour Party and I.T.U.C. pointed out that they were not satisfied with the measures to relieve unemployment. The statement pointed out that the unemployment rate was as high as $8\frac{1}{2}\%$ i.e. one in every twelve insured persons was out of work⁷⁸. They maintained that no action had been taken to counter the root cause of the recession and the inevitable worsening of the unemployment⁷⁹ problems during the coming months.

In early October one of the large meetings at College Green was staged by the D.U.A. to welcome the 3 released leaders. Speakers included Donal Nevin, I.T.U.C., E. Tucker, D.T.U.C., Peadar O'Donnell and others⁸⁰.

Sources of the time make a final mention of the D.U.A. in December 1953⁸¹. According to a supplied statement, an alleged meeting took place between a D.U.A. deputation and the Ministers for Industry and Commerce, Social Welfare and Posts and Telegraphs. A pact was said to have been signed between the two parties, involving five commitments: 1. reduction of prices. 2. increase of relief pay. 3. full employment. 4. abolition of three-day waiting period for assistance and 5. representation of the Association on the Public Works Committee⁸².



Donal Nevin addresses the “Welcome Home” Rally.

There are a number of possibilities that present themselves regarding the above meeting. First, that a meeting did take place and that no agreement was entered into. Second, a meeting took place and a secret pact was agreed. Third, neither the meeting nor the pact had ever materialised. Dáil reports deny all knowledge of such a pact being entered into⁸³.

The high profile image of the D.U.A. had begun to fade. They continued to hold public meetings each morning at the Employment Exchanges and took up the many and varied grievances of those denied Social Welfare benefits⁸⁴.

The Association had vanished completely by April 1954, but had not been forgotten. In the ringing words of Dominic Behan "We will continue to campaign until unemployment is ended and a decent standard of living is enjoyed by all working people. Then our story, the story of the D.U.A. will be another proud episode in the history of the working class"⁸⁵.

1. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
2. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
3. *ibid.*
4. Evening Herald - 27.4.1953.
5. *ibid.*
6. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
7. *ibid.*
8. Irish Independent 4.6.1953.
9. *ibid.*
10. Irish Independent 11.6.1953.
11. See also Evening Herald 11.6.1953.
12. See T.U.C. 60th Annual Report 1954-55.
13. Irish Independent 12.6.1953.
14. Irish Times 25.6.1953.
15. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
16. Irish Press 2.7.1953.
17. Evening Herald 2.7.1953.
18. Irish Independent 2.7.1953.
19. Irish Independent 2.7.1953.
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. Catholic Standard - See issues for 3.7.1953 - 28.8.1953.
23. Catholic Standard - 3.7.1953.
24. *ibid.*
25. Irish Independent 7.7.1953.
26. Irish Times 7.7.1953.
27. 'Torch' - October 1953.
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. Catholic Standard 10.7.1953.
31. *ibid.*
32. *ibid.*
33. Irish Independent 11.7.1953.
34. *ibid.*
35. *ibid.*
36. Evening Herald 12.8.1953.
37. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.

38. Irish Independent 13.7.1953.
39. *ibid.*
40. 'Torch' - December 1953.
41. 'Torch' December 1953.
42. *ibid.*
43. *ibid.*
44. Irish Independent 18.7.1953.
45. Irish Independent 15.7.1953.
46. T.U.C. 60th Annual Report 154-55.
47. Irish Independent 17.7.1953.
48. Catholic Standard 17.7.1953.
49. Irish Workers Voice 17.7.1953.
50. Evening Herald 18.7.1953.
51. Irish Independent 21.7.1953.
52. T.U.C. 60th. Annual Report 1954-55.
53. Irish Independent 28.7.1953.
54. T.U.C. 60th. Annual Report 1954-55.
55. *ibid.*
56. Irish Times 29.7.1953.
57. *ibid.*
58. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
59. Irish Times 6.8.1953.
60. See Cabinet Papers S.P.O. - 1948 - 1954 T3510 B.C.
61. Irish Independent 10.8.1953.
62. Irish Times 13.8.1953.
63. Irish Times 13.8.1953.
64. Evening Herald 12.8.1953.
65. *ibid.*
66. *ibid.*
67. 'Torch' - January-February 1954.
68. Irish Independent 28.8.1953.
69. Irish Times 25.9.1953.
70. Irish Independent 7.9.1953.
71. T.U.C. 60th Annual Report 1954-55.
72. Irish Workers Voice - September 1953.
73. *ibid.*
74. See Irish Independent 14.9.1953.
75. Catholic Standard 21.8.1953.
76. *ibid.*
77. Catholic Standard 21.8.1953.
78. Irish Times 24.9.1953.
79. *ibid.*
80. Irish Workers Voice - September 1953.
81. Irish Independent 18.12.1953.
82. *ibid.*
83. Dáil Debates Vol. 47 P 2-4 1954
84. Torch Jan./Feb. 1954
85. *ibid.*

The Unemployed Protest Committee 1957

Although previous attempts to re-start the Dublin Unemployed Association of 1953 had been made by William McGuinness, they had all failed¹. The successor to the D.U.A. entitled "Unemployed Portest Committee" started on January 12th. 1957 in an identical fashion to that of the Dublin Unemployed Association in 1953². As a result of the crises in the Building Trade three or four men, mostly builders³, borrowed a chair from a nearby shop and called a public meeting outside Werburgh Street Labour Exchange⁴. A letter in the *Dublin Evening Mail* put the case of the Unemployed Committee—"once again we, the doomed forgotten men of the unemployed have decided to band together to get a fair crack at the whip. I hope we are treated a little better this time by police, clergy, etc and not branded as 'reds' and 'communists' as some people would make people believe we were. Our claim is just as solid as anyone else's. I ask anybody how can a married man with a family of five or six children feed, clothe and educate them, keep up his morale and watch them all staring into an empty grate. There are thousands of families living day in, day out, on bread and tea. The unemployed have remained silent for too long"⁵.

The Unemployed Committee, similar to the Dublin Unemployed Association, called for volunteers. The Committee numbered about 15 or 16 men, and included well known activists such as Sam Nolan, Packie Earley, Johnny and Steve Mooney, William O'Meara (Acting Secretary) and Jack Murphy (Acting Chairman). The first public meeting of the Unemployed Committee which had billed, amongst other speakers, William McGuinness formerly from the Dublin Unemployed Association, got off to a bad start. McGuinness stormed off declaring "he was not with them"⁶. Later he held his own meeting and said he would not join with the other "until they put their cards on the table". He felt the Unemployed Committee was pro Communist and urged the men to form a Catholic Unemployed Association to press for their rights⁷. One of the first actions of the Unemployed Protest Committee was to select a delegation to go to the Dublin Trade Union Council to ask for the loan of a room from 2 o'clock to 4.30 and a donation⁸. They got both. They also went to Blessington Street to beg funds from the Congress of Irish Unions, who also acquiesced.

The first protest march of the U.P.C. took place on January 16th.

MEMBERS OF THE U.P.C.



Top: Johnnie Mooney; Left: Packie Earley; Right: Sam Nolan

1957. By comparison with the D.U.A. some four years previously, the parade was small but the men made it clear that this was only the beginning and bigger demonstrations would be held in future⁹. The parade, 100 strong, was led off from Werburgh Street by Jack Murphy. The men had been given strict instructions to be both quiet and orderly. "Having marched down Gardiner Street, the men went to the Exchange to pick up reinforcements. On passing the offices of the I.T.G.W.U. a notice could be seen calling to all unemployed women to join¹⁰", a feature noticeably absent in the D.U.A. of 1953. Only a little grey haired lady answered the call. The placards and banners summed up the demands of the Unemployed Committee. At the head of the parade was a huge banner reading "Support us in our demand for work". Other placards read "Emigration is no solution to the economic situation" - "6,000 live in slums-building workers idle" - "High bank profits causing slump"¹¹. Outside the Municipal Gallery in Parnell Square, O'Meara addressed the crowd, "This is only the beginning in arousing the public interest. I am proud of the way you behaved today. I realize that when Dubliners get together there is always a gee up and a joke but I appeal to you not to let it go too far or the public will say we are only rowdies and will have no sympathy for our cause¹²". Jack Murphy (Chairman) climbed onto the Corporation bench saying "Thank you for a very successful protest. Watch out for notices of future protests. Now go to your homes in a peaceful manner". However, this was too quiet an ending for some. One man was heard to say to others as they filed away - "We want McGuinness back again". Meanwhile, at Werburgh Street¹³, a separate meeting was held by McGuinness's Catholic Unemployed Association. The President of this Association, Thomas Heffernan, called for work - a 50% increase in social welfare benefits, including old age pensions and reduction in the cost of living¹⁴.

While the U.P.C. began to publicly denounce the unemployment situation, a general meeting of the Operative Plasterers and Allied Trade Society passed a resolution calling on the Labour members of the coalition to address themselves to the problem of unemployment in the building trade¹⁵.

There were calls for the emergency relief schemes and supplementary grants for the relief of unemployment, by the Association of Municipal Authorities in Dublin,^{16;17} while Dublin Corporation called for both a State of Emergency to deal with emigration and unemployment and also an increase in relief schemes to Local Authorities¹⁸. The Labour Regional Council called on



Barber offers cheap haircuts to the unemployed.



Dole day, Werburgh Street.

Labour to either alleviate the unemployment situation or withdraw from the Government entirely¹⁹. While the Provisional Organisation of the United Trade Union Movement pointed out in their recent document entitled "Planning Full Employment" that "the number of unemployed was reaching catastrophic proportions and that up to 20,000 new jobs were needed each year". The general consensus of the Unions at that time seemed to be that the restriction of credit by the Banks had had an adverse effect on employment. The credit squeeze had to come to an end.

The Committee of the P.U.T.U.O. met the Taoiseach and several Ministers for a discussion on their 11 Point Plan for full employment²² a plan which the U.P.C. would use as a basis for their demands. The Committee asked that "Government bodies and Local Authorities be directed not to proceed with economic measures where these would lead to unemployment and that public bodies, State and Semi-State concerns and important private employers should be urged to bring forward capital schemes especially those of a productive nature which might not otherwise be undertaken for some time²³". The Committee also asked that "local authorities and other public bodies be advised to indicate additional work schemes quickly and facilities in getting the necessary capital and that special steps should be taken to expand the local authority house building and school building to bring about a general revival in the builders trade"²⁴,

Other measures suggested that supplementary road grants of an amount equal to those provided last year should immediately be notified to local authorities and that special import grants should be reviewed with a view to withdrawing or modifying those which have brought about unemployment directly²⁵. The P.U.T.U.O. also pointed out that steps should be taken "to relax controls governing hire purchase transactions, especially those affecting the sale of Irish manufactured goods and that the Government should express the strongest view to the Banks on the credit squeeze and pursuing an expansion credit policy"²⁶.

The unemployed continued to agitate to show their growing resentment to the situation. More and more joined the Association. As in 1953, the workless saw this as their only opportunity to air their grievances in public. On January 29th. a special meeting was held in Parnell Square, where a Resolution was passed calling on all unions to instruct their members in the Dail to demand an emergency session of the House to implement the plan of the P.U.T.U.O.²⁷. Jack Murphy (Chairman) told the meeting "that they had finished

running away in the cattle boats from the North Wall. They were entitled to a stake in their own country". He hoped that "after today the Trade Union leaders would realize that they could no longer sit back and wait for someone to make a decision in the far off future"²⁸. Sam Nolan pointed out that "it would have to be impressed on Trade Unions the Government and Dail members that they were not prepared to endure the plight of 95,000 unemployed in the country any longer....Surely it was the responsibility of the Labour leaders and deputies to work out some organized plan. After all, they were supposed to represent the working class", Nolan added "That the 11 Point Plan of the P.O.U.T.O. was a basis for solving the problem of the unemployed"²⁹.

This meeting was followed by a peaceful protest march headed by youths carrying a black coffin. These black coffins symbolizing neither hope nor future, were to become a feature of the demonstrations of the U.P.C.³⁰.

The ideal opportunity for the U.P.C. to strike a blow for the unemployed came with the collapse of the Government due to the withdrawal of Clann na Poblachta support in February 1957³¹. The U.P.C. felt that they had placed enough trust in Labour T.D.'s but to no avail, so at a meeting in Parnell Square, Murphy proposed that the Committee find an unemployed candidate to contest the General Election^{32,33}. The decision as to whom the Committee should run as a Candidate was given much consideration. Two names were considered, those of Jack Murphy and Sam Nolan. Both had a background in the building trade and while Jack Murphy had a history of Republican Socialism, Nolan was a leading member of the Communist Party^{34,35}. Committee members, including Packie Earley and Johnnie Mooney felt Nolan would be the better candidate³⁶. However, Peadar O'Donnell pointed out that Nolan's Communist background would frighten a lot of voters. Even Nolan himself pointed out that his Communist leaning would leave the U.P.C. open to accusations of being a Communist organisation, and push the whole issue of unemployment into the background³⁷.

It was felt that Murphy, with his Republican background had a better chance of being elected. The reasons why Murphy was put forward in Dublin South Central were two fold. On account of being an inner city constituency with a huge density of population, it was far easier to canvass than a large sprawling area. This constituency also boasted of the largest Labour Exchange in Dublin City - Werburgh Street. Not only did unemployed canvassers distribute leaflets outside the dole office, but they used the U.P.C. office -

D.T.U.C. Gardiner Street to broadcast election messages with hired and borrowed loud-speakers.

Peadar O'Donnell took charge of a collection of £100 deposit. He collected £25 apiece from four friends of his - Toddy O'Sullivan, manager of the Gresham; Fr. Counihane, a Jesuit priest sympathetic to the Labour cause; Digby, owner of Pye Radio and a Fianna Fail Senator by the name of Murray. The Election campaign cost exactly £50.00. This money was spend on fish and chips and a packet of Players for the canvassers at lunch time and again in the evening³⁸. The campaign aroused great enthusiasm. Well wishers sent in subscriptions while a former typist in a solicitor's office, Elizabeth Faye, offered her services. Every night after she'd put her children to bed she typed thousands of letters on her portable typewriter³⁹.

Murphy, the U.P.C. candidate in Dublin South Central, was elected after the eighth count polling 3036 votes. He had made a spectacular showing gaining a seat from the Labour Party and beating Roddy Connolly, grandson of James Connolly⁴⁰. Having made history as the first unemployed candidate to be elected to the Dail, Murphy declared "In the Dail I hope to do something for those



Jack Murphy with his wife and two children at the opening of the Dáil on March 20th, 1957.

who elected me. Most of them are like myself. They want work and cannot get it"⁴¹. However, the campaign to elect an unemployed representative held far greater historical significance. It showed that Dublin's workless had abandoned the notion that unemployment was the sole responsibility of the unemployed. It emphasised the Government's moral duty to help its unemployed citizens. The election of Jack Murphy introduced a new trend, previously unknown to Unemployed Associations, the merging of extra-parliamentary tactics with those of a parliamentary nature. It was to prove a powerful combination.

In spite of de Valera's promises to tackle the twin problems of unemployment and emigration, Murphy didn't support his nomination as Taoiseach⁴². Murphy spoke of the fact that De Valera had stated that his first task would be to solve unemployment. However, he had heard all these promises before and his presence in the House was a symbol of all those broken promises and should be taken as a warning. Unemployment and emigration would no longer be suffered in silence⁴³. De Valera's statement on unemployment was, however, welcomed by the Trade Union movement especially the P.U.T.U.O. "The Trade Union movement is prepared to cooperate with the Government which will take measures to solve the unemployment problem"^{44,45}.

Welcoming de Valera's statement that one of the first aims would be to put the building trade back on its feet. Hudson (President of the P.U.T.U.O. said the credit squeeze had brought about a high level of unemployment in the trade, particularly in the Dublin area. The P.O.U.T.U.M. again advocated the necessity of implementing their 11 point plan as quickly as possible⁴⁶. Meanwhile, Lemass, the next Minister of Industry and Commerce went on record as welcoming with reservations the P.U.T.U.O. document "Planning Full Employment"⁴⁷.

Later at a victory rally organized by the U.P.C. at the corner of Abbey Street, Sam Nolan demanded that "The Government carry out to the letter, the promises made in relation to the unemployed during the last General Election"⁴⁸. Murphy said that "The Government should realize that the time was past for party politics. They should put the people of Ireland first. The people should continue to demonstrate and raise their voices against unemployment and they should be supported by all the Trade Unions to force the Government to face their responsibilities and make Ireland what it should be"^{49,50}.

The combination of extra-parliamentary agitations coupled with

parliamentary tactics continued. Murphy used his time in the Dail to press for a Governmental solution to unemployment. In reply to Murphy's question on what immediate measures would be taken to alleviate unemployment, De Valera pointed out that the country was in an emergency situation and that drastic measures possible at other times were now impossible due to a shortage of capital⁵¹. While Trades Councils such as the D.T.U.C. were passing resolutions calling on the Government to "give immediate priority"⁵² to the question of unemployment it seemed the latter were back to their old tricks of empty promises. On May 3rd 1957 the Dept. of Finance announced that the Government had decided to provide £250,000 for relief of the unemployed⁵³. However when Murphy tried⁵⁴ to pin the Parliamentary Secretary down asking how much of the money provided for unemployment schemes would be allocated to Dublin, the reply was somewhat elusive... "I regret that I am not yet in a position to give the information that the deputy has asked for. I hope to be able to do so within a week. As I informed the Deputy on June 4th there is a substantial carry forward of unemployed works in operation in the city⁵⁵". While unable to answer Jack Murphy this same Dept. took up parliamentary enquiries such as Belton's concern for the "hardship imposed on cricket clubs because of the cost of cricket balls. Would the Minister consider removing duties or levies on them until they are manufactured in Ireland"⁵⁶.

In May the Fianna Fail Government introduced what was commonly known as the "Famine Budget". This Budget, which introduced the removal of food subsidies, caused shock waves throughout the Trade Union movement and unemployed alike. The P.U.T.U.O. in a statement which referred to the preparation of a top level Conference to discuss the Budget pointed out "that the removal of food subsidies was neither necessary nor wise. While creating terrible hardship for the unemployed it also created a situation where claims for higher wages would be made with the threat of widespread instability or industrial strife^{57,58}". As a result of the removal of the food subsidies Jack Murphy and two more of the U.P.C. went on an indefinite hunger strike.

The decision to go on the Hunger Strike was a surprise one for many of the U.P.C. It hadn't been discussed beforehand. The first Johnnie Mooney (one of the U.P.C.) had heard of it was when he was ambling along O'Connell Bridge and saw a placard with the heading "T.D. on Hunger Strike"⁶⁰.

Disapproving of the strike, Mooney went to find Murphy and pointed out that "he should be leading the unemployed and not

sitting there on his butt”⁶¹. Although the Communist Party U.P.C. members were unaware of it at the time this was the beginning of the end of the U.P.C. Murphy had been organising his own caucus meeting behind the backs of the Communist Party members⁶².

The Famine Budget hit families of the unemployed very badly. Jimmy Byrne’s wife had £3.3s to feed, clothe and shelter her husband, herself and five children. “I can only spend about 36/- a week on food”⁶³ she said. “This comes to about 9d. per day per head for food; $\frac{3}{4}$ lb tea, 4lbs of sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb butter and $\frac{1}{2}$ lb margarine with the milk and bread comes to 36/-. Then at the weekend, we might buy 1lb jam and some rashers and a few eggs. Then, of course, there’s items like soap and washing powder and a few other little things in the house”. The recent subsidy-slashing budget was a crushing blow to their family. “It means at least another 5/- out of our pockets, despite the increase in children’s allowances. And we just haven’t got that money”⁶⁴.

The hunger strike of the trio lasted four days. Each night, thousands of unemployed gathered at Abbey Street corner to listen



*Jimmy Byrne
and his family
with their
weekly rations.*

to speakers from the U.P.C. A thousand marched to Leinster House on the 14th. May where a deputation asked to see the Minister of Finance or the Minister for Industry and Commerce⁶⁵. Lemass and

Ryan had disappeared out the other gate, so Denis Larkin, T.D., spoke to a delegation of Nolan, Earley and O'Meara in the visitors' hut adjoining the gate. Shortly afterwards, Murphy and other two hunger strikers appeared and after further talks with Denis Larkin, all left the Dail^{66,67}.

*Jimmy Byrne was one of the trio on hunger strike, also a U.P.C. member.

Public opinion swung behind the strikers. The committee received offers from sympathisers, including one woman, to join in the strike. The committee, however, declined the offers⁶⁸. A Dublin Canon at the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, proposed an emergency motion calling on the Government to adopt measures to ease the unemployment problem. It was rejected as well-meaning, but somewhat impractical, by the Primate in Armagh. Not to be outdone, the Dean of Christchurch held a special collection in view of the "needy unemployed"⁷⁰. Resolutions came from both Trades Union branches and Trades Councils, calling for a one-day strike in support of the U.P.C. hunger strike⁷¹, while John Conroy, President of the I.T.G.W.U. pointed out in a letter to the Evening Mail entitled "Idle Rich Parade", "that nowhere in the world was there a country where so much Christianity was taught, but so little practiced"⁷².

However, the hunger strike was not as utopian as everybody had imagined. Murphy fell sick and the others on the strike, Jimmy Byrne and Thomas Canavan, became disillusioned and wanted to finish it. The U.P.C., worried about Murphy's condition, had to find a way of backing out of the predicament and gracefully. After all, a strike was a strike and the U.P.C. had gained much public support and media attention on account of it. The only way of halting the strike was for the Trade Union Movement to make a special plea to end it⁷³. Following negotiations with Donal Nevin, the U.P.C. deputation met with P.U.T.U.O. delegation on 17th. May⁷⁴. Following the meeting a statement was issued from the Trade Union which appealed for an end to the hunger strike. The P.U.T.U.O. assured the U.P.C. that protests voiced by the unemployed had their full support and it would do everything in its power to have measures taken to ease the position of the unemployed⁷⁵.

A rally of several thousand attended at Christchurch Place that night and endorsed the appeal, saying "they wanted good men not dead men to lead them"⁷⁶. The hunger strike had ended.

In a later editorial entitled "The Wrong Line", the *Dublin Evening Mail* took the position that the Government had no moral responsibility to make work or create a situation where work was available to all⁷⁷. This editorial was promptly answered in defence of

the U.P.C. by John de Courcy Ireland, who assured the Mail that the Government had a very definite moral duty in helping the unemployed⁷⁸. The hunger strike, if nothing else, had contributed in forcing public political attention again to the plight of the workless. The U.P.C. continued to hold agitations against the removal of the food subsidies. Resolutions were passed both condemning the Government's removal of the subsidies and encouraging the unemployed to rally to the Unions, because the Unions were the next to spearhead the attack on the Government⁷⁹. Women and children sang to the tune of "A Nation Once Again",

"Starvation once again,
Starvation once again,
No bread, no butter, no tea, no sugar,
Starvation once again"⁸⁰

Meanwhile, Waterford and Cork Protest Committees both set up by the Dublin branch also began agitating. Waterford U.P.C. pointed out that 4079⁸¹ had emigrated in June '57, while the Cork Committee organised huge rallies through the streets. One old Corkman summed it up when he said to Murphy "You know, boy, you've set the Lee on fire"⁸².

Parliamentary agitation at this time was quiet, except for a slanderous allegation by a certain T.D. that Russian gold had been sent to the unemployed⁸³.

A rare mention in the *Irish Times* was also given to a delegation of women from the U.P.C., who met Fianna Fail T.D.'s to complain about the famine budget. They maintained that the withdrawal of food subsidies would ensure their present miserable standard of living and would compel them to reduce their purchase of bread for their families⁸⁴.

The P.U.T.U.O. continued to push their 11 point plan, but met with little success⁸⁵. The Government, in the main, ignored Trade Union suggestions. As the Trade Union Movement was making little headway, the U.P.C. decided to send a deputation to enlist the help of Archbishop McQuaid in their campaign against the removal of food subsidies⁸⁶. Instead, Jack Murphy set off on his own which, as he was to say some twenty years later, "was a bad mistake either through lack of foresight, imagination, or plain goddamn ignorance"⁸⁷.

Murphy later informed the Committee that McQuaid had made three main points. First, as Archbishop, he couldn't interfere in political decisions. Secondly, he had authorised work on church property to help create employment and thirdly, had warned Jack Murphy of the association with the Communist Party and their bid to

use him⁸⁸. Murphy replied, saying that he knew there were Communist activists on the committee and while he didn't agree with their politics, he had great respect for the work of the Communist Party. The only qualification required for a man to sit on the committee was "a signing-on card".⁸⁹

However, in his resignation letter to the *Evening Mail* in May '58, Murphy pointed out that there had been conflict between himself and the Communist Party "on his complete inability to hold orderly public protest meetings"⁹⁰. He blamed this entirely on the Communist element whom he said wanted to "create public disorder and riots"⁹¹. Despite the fact that Murphy later denied any dissention between himself and the Communist Party, he still held his own caucus meetings without inviting the Communist Party members. As a rule, all meetings were held in D.T.U.C. in Gardiner Street, but Murphy held his own meetings in the Boiler Makers Hall⁹². The end of the Communist Party involvement on the U.P.C. came at one such caucus meeting to which Murphy had invited Johnnie Mooney. Murphy formally asked the Communist Party to leave the committee, as they were impeding the progress of the unemployed movement. Murphy was adamant that the Communists leave the committee⁹³.

The Communist Party committee members were in quandary. To let the public know a split had emerged in the U.P.C. would have weakened the Association further. They still met themselves, pretending to the outside world that the U.P.C. was still intact. Subsequently, with the death of a Fianna Fail T.D., a by-election was called. Although Sherwin, an Independent T.D., won the seat in the end, the Communist Party members had to let on to Dublin's unemployed that they were contemplating putting up a further T.D., with the full support of Jack Murphy⁹⁴.

By the end of May, the Government had announced new measures to restore activity in the building trade. One of the conditions inside the U.P.C. was that if a member was offered a job, he had to take it. As most of the Communist Party Committee members were in the building trade, they all got jobs, leaving the unskilled and unorganised workless on the committee. Although the Communist members still remained active, they could only attend meetings at night⁹⁵, as they were working.

Alongside the slow collapse of the U.P.C. was a boycott by the media regarding many activities of the former. Murphy claimed there was both "a conspiracy of silence and a smear campaign afoot"⁹⁶. The last big demonstration of the U.P.C. took place in July '57.⁹⁷

Murphy opposed the demonstration, claiming he needed a period free from public agitation to settle down to Dail work⁹⁸. Once Murphy disassociated himself from the committee, it subsequently collapsed. The U.P.C. had needed the combination of Parliamentary activities with extra Parliamentary tactics to really make any impact.

Meanwhile, the P.U.T.U.O. had made little headway. At their Annual Conference in July '57, it was pointed out that they would have to put pressure on the Government of the day to implement their 11 point plan⁹⁹. Lemass simply ignored the Trade Union Movement and made lukewarm suggestions such as "the examination of the opportunities of developing new industries with a view to making new arrangements where necessary to extend production, especially production for export"¹⁰⁰.

In a final bid for political attention, the P.U.T.U.O. held a much publicised Conference on Unemployment in April 1958. This Conference, concluded with how deeply perturbed the Trade Union Movement was at the seriousness of the unemployment situation¹⁰¹.

Jack Murphy announced his resignation in March 1958. He said that he had resigned "as a protest against the appalling indifference of the main political parties to the plight of the unemployed"¹⁰². In a later letter, he expounded saying, "I'd simply reached the end of the line. I had explored every avenue and there was nothing further I could have done to improve the lot of the unfortunate unemployed"¹⁰³. (* see note) There was great bitterness felt at the fact that Murphy had consulted nobody and simply resigned off his own bat. To add insult to injury, Fianna Fail gained Murphy's seat in the following by-election.

A letter penned by the Communist Party Committee members acknowledged that Murphy had been under severe political and personal pressures. But they also felt that he had terminated the campaign for the unemployed before the Government had been forced to grant any real concessions.

Little did the U.P.C. realise that the fight for the rights of the unemployed was still to be waged some thirty years later.

"We want work and social justice
For too long we've felt the blow
So come every hungry man
With our movement take your stand
And we'll bury unemployment far below".

* There was speculation that Archbishop McQuaid bribed Jack Murphy to emigrate to Canada. These rumours, however are totally unfounded and without question, false.

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Conclusion

(SILENT TOO LONG)

Thirty years ago the unemployed forced public awareness of their plight by the formation of unemployed pressure groups. In both 1953 and 1957 the two years of highest unemployment since 1945, two separate pressure groups emerged from the ranks of the poor and the workless. The Dublin Unemployed Association of 1953 a radical protest group achieved the implementation of Dublin Corporation Relief Schemes. While the U.P.C. of 1957 also a pressure group went one step further. Using parliamentary tactics combined with extra parliamentary activities they succeeded in gaining certain measures which combined with government policy, put the building trade back on its feet, to a large degree.

The essential difference between the two groups was not one of political approach but rather one of the composition.

The D.U.A. consisted of a band of politicised but somewhat disorganized unemployed men. The U.P.C. of 1957 was comprised of a group of organised skilled Trade Unionists who unlike the D.U.A. of '53 had a certain level of female participation.

There was also a difference in attitude between the D.U.A. and the U.P.C. While the D.U.A. excited police hostility the U.P.C. were orderly and avoided hand to hand scuffles.

In terms of demands the D.U.A. set out a list of their own grievances while the U.P.C. supported the Trade Union Programme the P.U.T.U.O. Plan For Full Employment.

Now thirty years later May Day 1988 almost 300,000 emigrating yearly, Work Schemes, Relieving Officers, dole queues.

One might ask quite justly what has changed? Has Irish Society progressed at all in thirty years.

Demands still go to Government for job creation, investment in the economy in favour of paying the "National Debt".

Daily we witness factory closures, redundancies, cut backs in the Public Sector and further attacks on the living standards of the poorest section of our society. Combat Poverty figures estimate that 450,000 adults are living below the poverty line. Continually the Government of the day for the last ten years tell us we must tighten our belts, times are rough and will get worse before they get better. They say we, the Irish people, are to blame for the state of the economy and therefore we must pay the price. We, the unemployed did not sanction the government's foreign borrowing, nor were we

asked to. Yet we must pay.

One thing seems abundantly clear from our research; consecutive governments have learned the lessons of the 50's. They know how to juggle the employment figures, how to use work schemes to the maximum advantage, for example the last 4% rise for those on Unemployment Assistance was not extended to those on work schemes. Rates of pay on these schemes and training courses have been arbitrarily cut. Emigration is as always the safety valve. This year has seen calls that the Government actually pay people to emigrate. And why not when it saves the government money and will displace angry unemployed people who otherwise might stay home and demand work.

What have we learned?

Firstly, unemployed people must become organised. This is now happening for the first time ever on a National basis in the form of the Irish National organisation of the Unemployed. Without organisation we will get nowhere, but in unity we have strength.

Secondly, if we are to have any success our campaigns must be based firmly in the Trade Union Movement. In recent times the Trade Union Movement has let us down badly. Wage restraints, cutbacks and redundancies have been the order of the day, with little or no response from Working Class leaders. Even for its own survival the Trade Union Movement must take up this battle. If Trade Unions cease to fight - they cease to exist.

Most recently however Local Trades Councils and Congress have taken the initiative of sponsoring Unemployed Centres throughout the country. Some individual trade unions are also responding to the crisis of unemployment by helping the setting up of Workers co-operatives, or making donations to the Unemployed Centres. While such initiatives are to be welcomed they are not enough. We need mass activity, pressure and support. It is up to the Trade Union Leadership to provide it.

Thirdly, we must educate ourselves. Where have our jobs gone and why? How much is spent by the Government on T.D.'s pay and pensions, and how much on Private Sector expansion, how much on security and how much on job creation and development?

We must know how the economy works, then we will know how to provide full employment. We will know if full employment can be a reality in a capitalist economy, and what our alternatives are. If we keep voting for those who espouse Thatcherist Monitorist policies that is precisely what we will get.

We must be prepared too for our enemies to try and smash our

campaigns for the Right to work, as in the fifties we are already being branded reds, greens and any other colour you care to mention. It will not deter those who believe in the right to a decent standard of life for all our citizens.

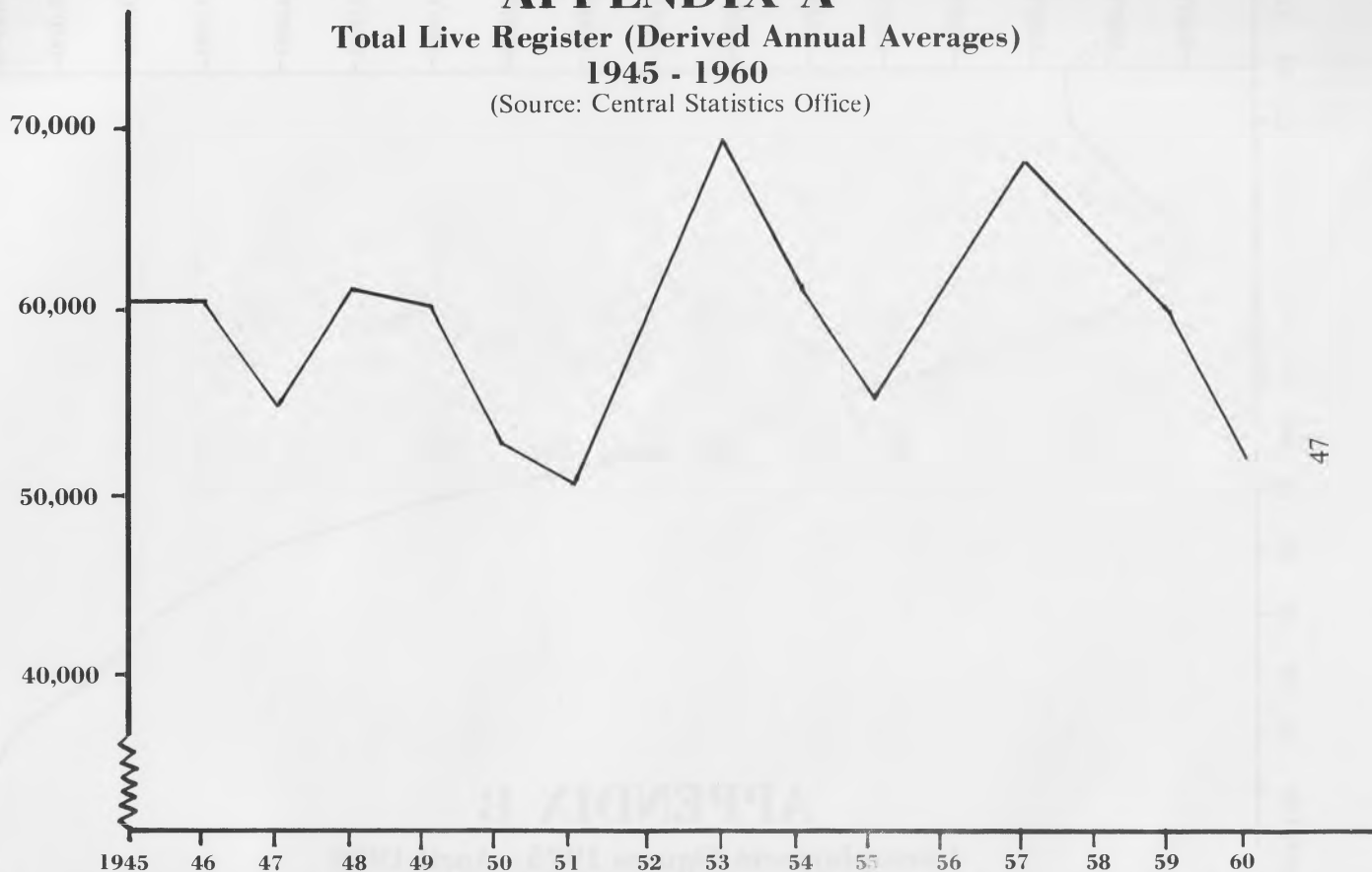
For thirty years now unemployed people have been without a voice. For the past 10 years they have been without hope. There are 25 year olds who have never worked and 40 year olds who will never work again. There are families with every member unemployed and third generation unemployment is not unusual. 20% of our people are poor, depressed, isolated and dejected, and what do our leaders do? Like Pontius Pilot they wash their hands. We have been silent too long. Our choice is the same as it was in the fifties "Fight, Starve or Emigrate". With the support of the Trade Union Movement we will fight and we will win.

APPENDIX A

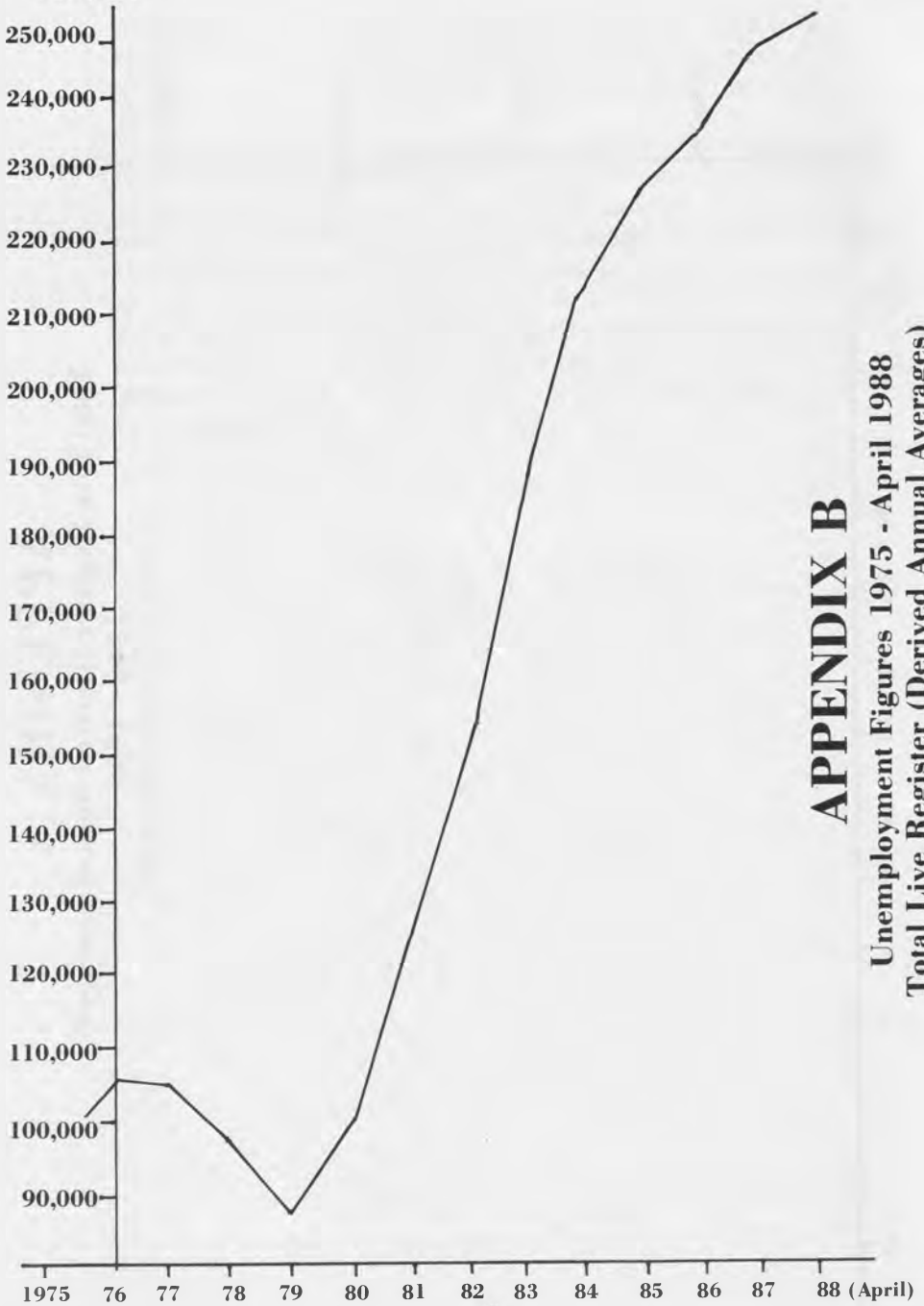
Total Live Register (Derived Annual Averages)

1945 - 1960

(Source: Central Statistics Office)



252,607



APPENDIX B

Unemployment Figures 1975 - April 1988
Total Live Register (Derived Annual Averages)
(Source: Central Statistics Office)



UNEMPLOYED GO TO WORK —with a smile

SOME 400 of Dublin's unemployed have gone to work. They are cleaning up the beds of the rivers Dodder and Tolka, brightening up public parks and cleaning by-roads and laneways.

It's all part of a Dublin Corporation relief scheme which will keep the men working—and happy—for three months. But no plans have been made beyond that point. As yet there is no scheme to clean up the Liffey, for instance, though every Dubliner will agree that it is long overdue.

But the present relief scheme is a step in the right direction. And the opportunity to earn £6 10d. a week has brought smiles to the faces of the two men in this picture by Dermot Barry. Edward McEvoy (left), who has twelve children, has been jobless for three years; Thomas Byrne is the father of eight, and the Dodder clean-up has given him his first job in twelve months.

The Larkin Unemployed Centre

The
Brunn-Berlin
Creep Cafe



Title: Fight, Starve or Emigrate: A History of the Unemployed Associations in the 1950s

Organisation: The Larkin Unemployed Centre

Author: Evanne Kilmurray

Date: 1989

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