

LIMERICK SOCIALIST

NOVEMBER, 1975.

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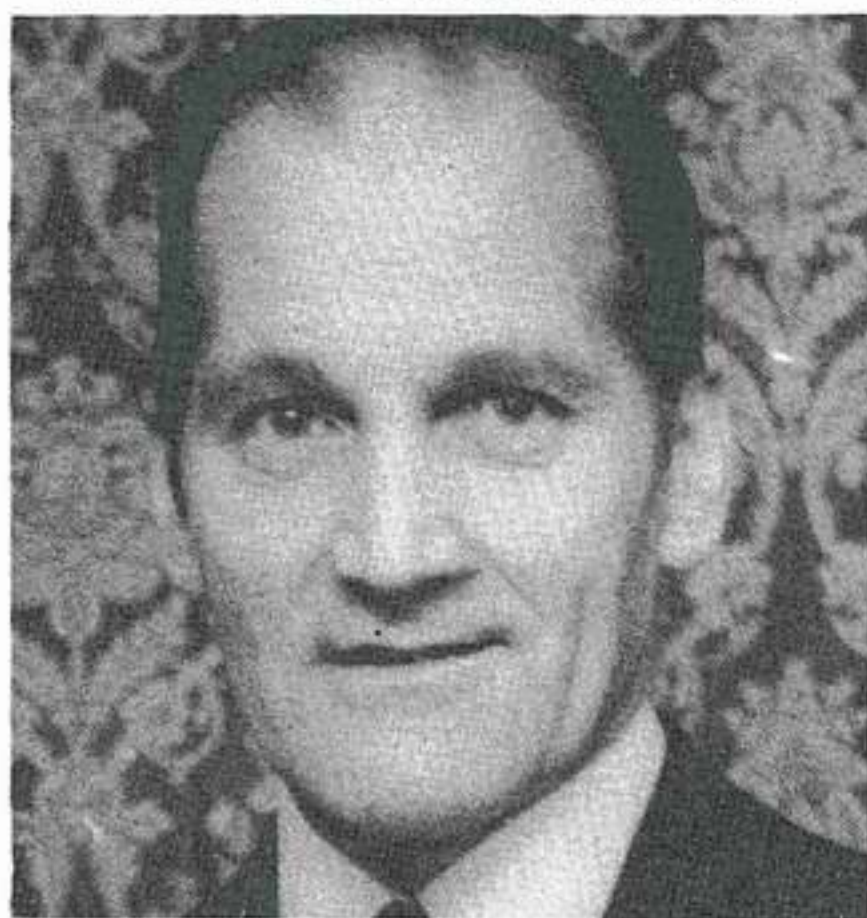
VOL. 4. NO. 11.

THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .'
James Connolly

DR. HERREMA

AND CATHOLIC NATIONALISM

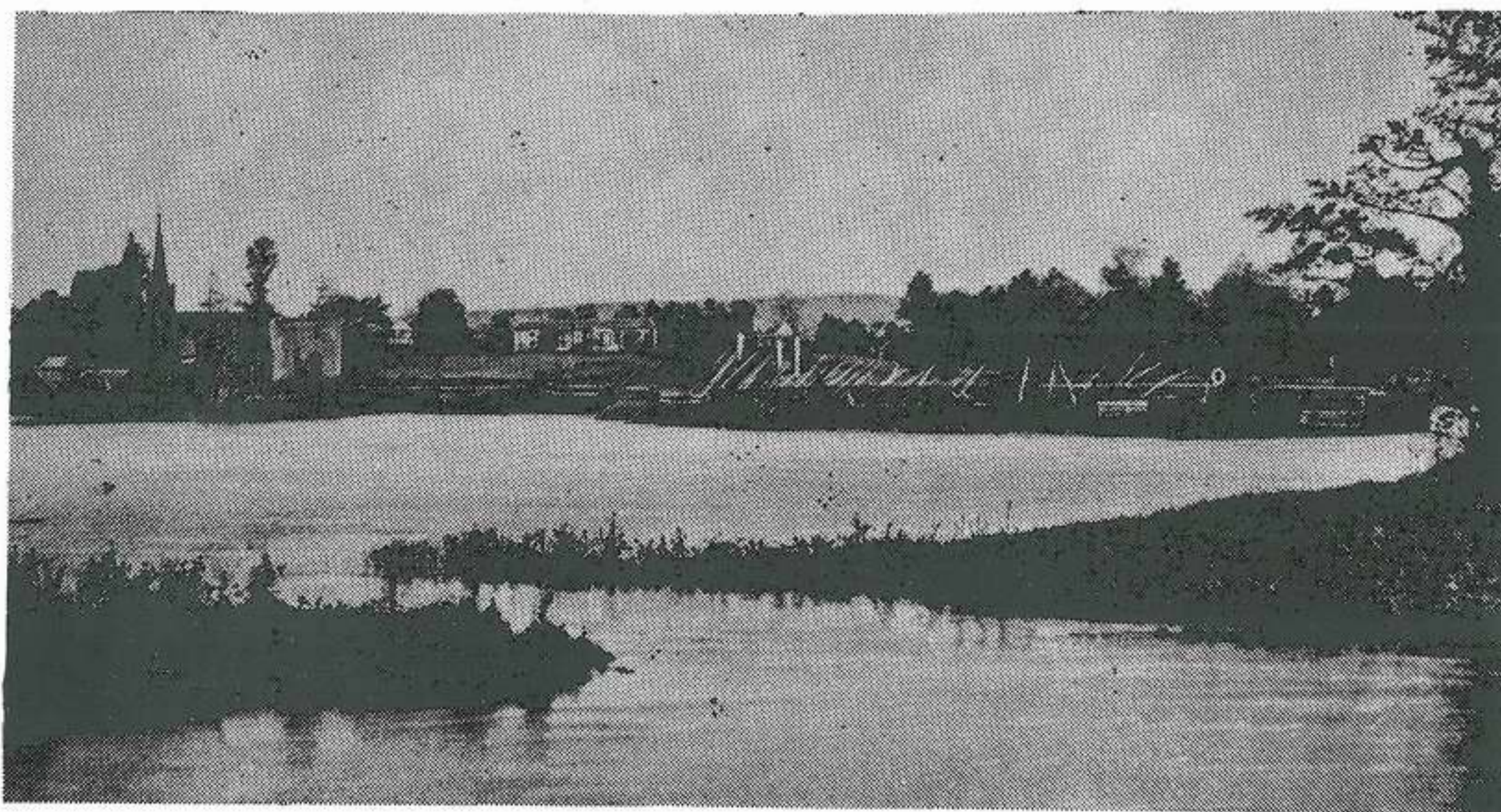


Unemployment

WHAT
NOW ?



THE ABBEY FISHERMEN



THE LAX WEIR

REPLY TO GEORGE McLOUGHLIN

In his letter in the October edition of the "Limerick Socialist", George McLoughlin misses the point of the Reply to Tom Morris, which was far simpler than any theoretical defence of Stalinist socialism would have required it to be. George McLoughlin's intention seems to have been to shift the emphasis from the essence of Tom Morris's argument (i.e., there always have been and will be elites who exploit people under any social system) to his own political views of world communist and socialist developments. The "Reply" was designed, not to dismiss the socialist shortcomings of Russian society as irrelevant to Ireland, or to advocate slavish imitation of the Soviet Union model by Irish socialists, but to deal with the basic issues raised by Tom Morris.

But George McLoughlin's own logic is far from being impeccable. He writes:

The heroic Chinese Communist Revolution alone should serve as sufficient vindication of the claim that the great progress of the proletarian cause in the present century is, indeed, irreversible.

This statement follows another one which states that "the Soviet rulers have, to all intents and purposes, institutionalised the counter-revolution and far from being the vanguard of the proletarian cause, now constitute the only genuinely reactionary force on earth". George McLoughlin further declares that a cancer has gripped international communism — "a cancer which has its roots solely and exclusively in our failure to exorcise completely the ghost of Stalin which still

haunts the world long after the Twentieth Party Congress first denounced his degeneracy".

Here George McLoughlin is clearly out of his ideological depth. Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Congress was published by the American Government within a few months of the Congress in a version generally accepted as being accurate. (The speech has never been published in the Soviet Union). The Chinese Communist Party supported Khrushchev's anti-Stalin campaign in 1956, but in the early sixties, it undertook a qualified defence of Stalin against Khrushchev: the qualifications, however, have been vaguely and even contradictorily expressed.

In recent years the Chinese Communist Party has further changed its course and policies. Its leadership supported the suppression and massacre of the people of Bangla Desh by the bourgeois military dictatorship of Pakistan. The "Peking Review" No. 46, 12th November 1971 contained the text of a message to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers of the USSR, "extending warm greetings to the Soviet people on the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the great October Socialist Revolution". This message to the central organ of state power in Russia, or what George McLoughlin terms "the only genuinely reactionary force on earth" requires some explanation. For some time past, China's foreign policy has not consistently served the proletarian internationalist cause. Socialists throughout the world can, as a result of these developments, no longer look at China with uncritical eyes.

UNEMPLOYMENT

BY JOHN CASEY

The present unemployment figure is over 100,000 and it is estimated that the figure will reach 120,000 during the winter. The popular comment is that "it's worldwide, an international economic crisis". This, of course, is untrue. The economic slump has only effected the socialist countries in their trade with capitalist states. Our politicians, however, would prefer us not to know this. A socialist economy is planned: the capitalist one is not. In an industrial capitalist country, production is determined by profit and by a comparatively small group of extremely wealthy monopolists.

This can be illustrated. Some years ago American wheat farmers set fire to huge quantities of grain. They had grown too much wheat and fearing that a surplus would reduce the price they burned the harvest. Famine and malnutrition in the third world did not deter them, neither did the hunger and poverty in their own ghettos. Other examples are the ships laden with frozen beef floating in E.E.C. waters: the purpose being to keep up the price of meat, to prevent a glut and to keep the ranchers happy. The situation has its amusing sides. French wine producers recently negotiated the sale of a huge quantity of wine to the Russians. Again the reason was profit. They want to maintain the price of wine in E.E.C. countries but they're quite content to provide the Russians with cheap wine.

There must be a few people wondering these days about Lemass's industrialised Ireland. "Lemass's miracle" (which secured his canonisation with Fianna Fail) consisted of paying grants to foreign companies to set up what for the most part were nuts and bolts factories. Some of these have proved to be rare plums. There is Specialist Knives in Caherciveen set up by some German buccaneers with machinery they've been hauling

around Europe since the end of the war. They eventually ended up in Caherciveen with an I.D.A. grant. They paid trainees £12 a week and the maximum wage was £22. However, when a number of employees reached the £22 wage, the company decided it was a good time to recruit new staff. It seems they were taken aback when the trade unions objected. Another peach is Crown Controls of Galway, where the four-letter word strike is in its sixth month. The basic issue is that the American company simply does not want the workers unionised. The Americans are great democrats; they'll pay you for agreeing with them and fire or napalm you for disagreeing.

The Government are doing everything possible to cushion the disaster. They keep the unemployed quiet with pay-related benefits for which those who are working pay through taxation. In order to prevent the unemployed organising they have arranged that payment to the unemployed should take place at different times.

However, things continue to be bad. People were told that Ireland was a developed country — industrially it was not. And when the slight breeze of competition began to blow the protected Irish industries began to totter. For instance, in the footwear industry 8 firms have closed in the past year and the number of employed fell correspondently. Small family-owned firms were not able to cope with competition from big industry. In the textile trade, firms like Mahonys of Blarney closed in a year in which their profits were up, because of pressure from the bank who were tightening credit facilities. The banks are doing alright — the Central Bank's profit was £16 million last year.

Since its inception the I.D.A. has spent £111 million. Some of the companies who got slices of that cake are long gone. The policy on industrial development has been to invite in foreign capital and to encourage private enterprise. It goes without saying that foreign companies come here to make profit and have no commitment to the country or the people. Indeed, Justin Keating, one of the Sandford Park socialists, advertises Ireland in Canadian papers as a country where

labour is cheap. Irish capitalist interests are their puppets, the politicians try to play down the importance of state enterprises and are always ready to point a finger at the shortcomings of state enterprise. The ludicrous aspect, of course, is that the directors of state companies are Irish capitalists whose private interests frequently clash with their positions on state boards. One example is the National Wool Board on which sit most of the individuals who control the annual wool clip. It is unlikely that they are going to act against their own interests. There are 48 semi-state and state bodies on whom thousands are dependant for livelihood. C.I.E. is 3 times larger than the biggest private enterprise company – the Smurfit group.

What does the future hold? Well the ESRI predict a pick up in the economy but then that's what they're paid for. There

are 55,000 school leavers without jobs, the building trade has laid off 900 apprentices, the ANCO training figure is below that of 1969. Even establishment economists like Kennedy and Bruton are sceptical of the way in which the country is being developed. We have one of the richest lead mines in the world and the mineral wealth is being ripped out of the ground in what will prove to be one of the greatest crimes committed by the politicians of our time. Half the land of Ireland is owned by 25,000 farmers, while there are 150,000 others tilling poor holdings. Some economists predict two decades of slump. The Government will continue paying pay related benefits until after the General Election, when these will be wound down slowly. In the meantime a nationalistic war would prevent people from thinking about empty pockets.

DR. HERREMA AND CATHOLIC NATIONALISM

PART ONE

The kidnapping of Dr. Tiede Herrema, the Dutch chief executive of the Ferenka factory, marks a new departure in the tactics of Catholic nationalistic para-military groups. Judging from the public reaction to the kidnapping and the failure of the kidnappers to achieve any of their aims, it seems unlikely that this kind of strategy will be attempted in the near future.

The public outcry in Southern Ireland against the kidnapping of Dr. Herrema contrasts sharply with the reaction here to the abduction of a German industrialist in Belfast two years ago. This attitude shows that the Provo campaign of economic destruction in Northern Ireland can hope for little success if it attempts to cross the border into Southern Ireland.

But the Dr. Herrema affair has helped to expose the vacillating attitudes of among other people, the Limerick City Council and local workers to the campaign to coerce the Northern Protestant community. An examination of the public response of the members of the City Council to this campaign exposes much of the Catholic nationalist doublethink.

The highpoint of the Northern Ireland offensive was reached just after the killing of 13 Derry people on Bloody Sunday in January 30th, 1972. On Wednesday, February 2nd, the city council met in a special meeting to condemn the killings. Naturally enough, no "special meetings" of the city council were held to condemn the killing by bombing of the cleaning women at Aldershot, the killing by bombing of Protestant people at the Abercorn restaurant in Belfast, the killing by bombing of the twenty-one people, including four Irish at Birmingham last November and the current slaughter of official I.R.A. members in Belfast by the Provisional I.R.A. In fact, the city council has failed even to discuss any of these matters and a motion of sympathy with the relatives of the twenty-one people killed at Birmingham was ruled out of order by the then Mayor, Alderman P. Kennedy, on the grounds that it was "political".

But protests against the Derry shootings were not confined to the politicians. The "Limerick Chronicle" of February 3rd reported, under its headline of "Massive Parades in Limerick":

"All trades, businesses, organisations and associations were represented. It was a massive display of unity and sympathy with our fellow countrymen in the North and a fine demonstration against brutality and murder .. In all, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 people paraded in protest. These included C.I.E., E.S.B., Roadstone, Clondalkin, teachers and vocational students, as well as hundreds of private citizens who walked in sympathy .. countless placards were borne denouncing the British Government, Stormont and the

British Army .. over 500 teachers, including nuns and priests, held separate parades, as well as C.I.E. workers, numbering over 2,000".

Local building workers walked off their sites and one such group, in an act of defiance against the local authorities marched against the on-coming traffic down the one-way William Street to dangerously demonstrate their sympathy. The Limerick City and County Tenants' Organisation of the National Tenants Organisation also condemned the Derry shootings and in, a press statement, concluded:

We call on our politicians and people, irrespective of party politics, to unite and give their support to our less fortunate brothers and sisters in the Northern province of our country.

At Shannon Airport similar demonstrations took place. Two special Masses, attended by over five thousand workers, were said. Under the headline, "Massacre Paralyzes Airport", the "Limerick Leader" reported on February 5th.

The appalling massacre in Derry last Sunday cast a shroud of gloom over the airport .. It had a paralysing effect on airport activity .. On Monday the first group to take action were Progress employees .. Immediately there was reaction in other factories and by noon about two thousand workers carrying a Tricolour – draped coffin .. paraded to the airport terminal.

The same newspaper reported that Rory Cowan, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union branch secretary at Shannon and a well-known Provo fellow-traveller, had played a leading part in the action. A letter written by Cowan was presented to Dr. P. Hillery, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was passing through Shannon on the Tuesday on his way to the United Nations. The letter concluded:

We demand (a) total withdrawal of all British troops from the occupied portion of our country; (b) the release of all internees immediately and the suspension of the special powers act and (c) the provision by the U.N. of a peace-keeping force in the Six North Eastern Counties to protect all citizens pending a final political settlement.

The Mayor, Councillor Gus O'Driscoll, the City Manager and three members of the city council attended the funeral of the thirteen Derry people on Wednesday, February 2nd. Three well-known local trade unionists, Tom Joyce, Vincent Moran and Eddie O'Neill, all of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, also attended the funeral.

It seems unlikely that any of these politicians or trade unionists attended the funerals of the Protestant workers killed at the Abercorn restaurant or the Birmingham or Aldershot bombing victims, though Vincent Moran was balanced enough to propose a vote of sympathy to the relatives of the victims of the Birmingham bombings at a meeting of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions.

(To be continued).

**PART
ELEVEN**

**BY
P. J. RYAN**

MOTHER AND CHILD

Despite the fears and terrors caused by bombings shootings and wilful murder, the bedtime story continued with lusty vigour. A month or less to the expected time of a birth the women made due preparations for the happy event. The wealthy women entered "houses of accouchment" where they received expensive attendance due to their status. The "lying-in" hospital in Bedford Row catered for other patients.

Some women preferred to enter the city workhouse for their confinement; this carried the suggestion of poverty, but every woman had her own ideas and whims and acted accordingly.

The unmarried mother would conceal her condition as long as possible and have the birth in the security of her own home. If her good Christian parents denied her the sanctuary of her own home, then the roadside hedge or wood proved that the doctrine of Darwin — natural selection and the survival of the fittest — was superior to Christian dogma.

Parents and relatives visited the workhouse and gave comfort and assurance to the married mother. The unmarried mother was happy in having come through the ordeal alive, but was terrified at the thought of meeting her relations and acquaintances. Her fears and terrors were anticipated and relieved by the celibate females administering the hospital who initiated a "Mother and Child" scheme.

On visiting days, mother and child were on view standing behind bars in a corridor leading into the main building. Their shawls were taken from them so that they could be seen and recognised with the naked eye. Their efforts to conceal themselves behind each other were frustrated by a pious female attendant who compelled them to face the public. In this way visitors to the workhouse could see at a glance that mother and child were well. Chairs were not provided for those tired and humiliated girls during their two hours ordeal, as the tableaux might suggest the title — *Seated Virgins with Child*. The corridor was called the hall of shame and gave rise to the expression "holding the baby".

PUT AND TAKE

On the afternoon of Monday 25th January, 1922 the staff in the sorting office of the G.P.O. in Henry Street were awaiting the arrival of mail from the Railway Station. Some of them were passing the time away by playing Put and Take. In this game a small six-sided top is spun and falling over shows on its upper side a brief order which may be Put one or Take two, or the face may show all Put or Take all. A series of spins had resulted in "all Put" turning up for six consecutive spins.

As the six players were playing for pennies the large sum of three shillings was in the kitty. It was at this point in the game when the excitement was high that three Ford cars filled with armed men halted outside the gate in Henry Street. The men entered the sorting office with revolvers at the ready and ordered the staff to put their hands in the air; they then ordered the Postmaster to open the safe.

The Postmaster suspecting their intentions, pointed out to them that any interference with Majesty's mails carried a possible life sentence in prison, and as they were young men, surely they did not want to spend the rest of their lives in jail. He further pointed out that their intended actions was a breach of Post Office Regulations, an abstract from which clearly states — "not more than one pound may be withdrawn from the Post Office without giving a week's notice in writing". He suggested that they follow the regulations by filling in an

The Fourth Siege of Limerick

application in duplicate and return in a week's time, as he had no intention of endangering his position or pension by negligence in the performance of his duties. The pressure of a gun on his ribs suggested that his position and his life were in greater danger by noncompliance with a lawful order issued on behalf of the Irish Republic.

He then opened the safe which contained almost two thousand pounds in notes of small denominations. The raiders abstracted the contents taking all. They also removed some sacks of mail destined for the British Military and sped away in their Ford cars.

The six players were about to resume their game of Put and Take, when the Supervisor coming on the scene confiscated the kitty taking all. While these events were taking place, the attention of the British Military and the citizens was concentrated on the Theatre Royal a hundred yards away. It had taken fire and the flames were being put out by the Fire Brigade and Military. This was the day of Put and Take.

THE REPUBLICAN POLICE

Following the signing on the eighth of December 1921 of the Article of Agreement for a Treaty by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, a general cease-fire operated in Limerick city and throughout the country. Martial law and Curfew were lifted and the public were free to move around the city without interference. The British Military and Tans moved around the city unarmed. The Tans no longer lounged around their barrack gates or drinking in the nearest pubs but travelled around to any pub or entertainment as they pleased.

On the afternoon of Monday 25 January 1922 the Theatre Royal was accidentally burned down. The fire brigade were assisted by unarmed military and Tans in controlling the fire. The spectators were kept at a distance by civilians wearing I.R.A. armbands and revolvers in leather waistbelts; these were the republican police. Seen in profile, they looked patriotic. All patriots are shown in profile. Those republican police when seen in full face looked grim and menacing. The opinion was expressed that it was the height of folly for those men to expose themselves to the scrutiny and recognition by the Tans. Should the Treaty not be accepted by the Dail, those men would be dead in a matter of days or hours. The question was asked: Was it public necessity or conceit which brought those men into public view?

The opinion was also expressed that to replace the R.I.C. by armed republican police was the prelude to a military dictatorship. In Dublin, one man declaimed: "There must be some form of military control until the people are brought to their senses". The implications were that this little country which had endured three years of British and Irish terrorism was now to endure the horrors of a native military despotism. Like straws blown around before a coming storm, other and alternative ideas were rooted.

With the soft insistence of a chapel bell at sunset, the idea of a Theocracy was aired, warmed, cooled, and damned by profanity into oblivion. The age-old dream of former glory found followers who favoured the restoration of the Monarchy in the person of The O'Connor Don, lineal descendent of Roderick O'Connor, last king of Ireland. On the site of the

mounds at Tara, royal palaces were to be built with the costliest of native and imported marbles. Singers and Bards were to assemble at royal banquets.

THE CITY POLICE

From a high flagstaff, the kingly standard of royal blue with the golden harp floating in the wind, would greet the rising sun in the east and salute the setting sun in the west where lies the land called Tir na n-Og and Hy Brazil, the Isle of the Blest. Those beautiful dreamers had many dreams. So many selfish people were so concerned with publicising their own grandeur and pretensions, that they had little time for those modest dreamers, or for the pretensions of others. The dreamers returned to their shells of reserve with the urgency of salted snails, thinking sadly: "Erin the tear and the smile in thine eye". Their last dying effort was the revival of the Tailtean Games in 1928.

Because of public resentment against the militancy of the Republican police, they were withdrawn and did not appear again in public in the role of protectors. The Treaty having succeeded the Truce, the Tans and British military left the city. There was then no police force to safeguard the lives and property of the citizens. Petty larceny and grand larceny became commonplace in the city. Urged by humanitarian and

other interests and to protect the citizens from predators, a number of public-spirited merchants held a meeting and arranged with the republican commanders for the creation of a city police force. As a result of their deliberations, a total of twenty men who had never been involved in politics were assigned the duties of City Police. Their hours and duties were arranged in the Town Hall. They were paid three pounds per week which was paid by the joint contributions of the city merchants. They wore a revolver held in a leather waistbelt. As they had no pretensions to having been former daredevils or bloodthirsty heroes, they were accepted with humorous relief. They patrolled the city for five weeks until the arrival of the national army when they were relieved of all authority and returned to their homes.

THE BIRTH OF THE DIEHARDS

By the authority of the Provisional Government, Michael Brennan of Meelick, Co. Clare was given the rank of Major General with authority over all former members of the Republican Army in Limerick and Clare. As the counties of Limerick and Clare formed part of the ancient kingdom of Thomond, it was considered right and proper that a Clareman with a known and honourable record should be given this appointment. In the apportionment of honours lesser men envy the great.

Envy was a major cause of The Civil War. Those people opposed the Treaty voted against it in the Dail, and would not abide by its acceptance. Because of this opposition, they could not share in the various appointments given to those who supported the Treaty. In making these appointments, the Provisional Government could be most selective without giving offence to their supporters who valued patriotism before pride.

Whether the Treaty was accepted by a nine or ninety per cent majority, political adventurers could see in its acceptance their own eclipse and the exposure of their pretensions.

Such adventurers, wise before the event, and wise in the frailties of their comrades, could by shrewd flattery play upon the conceit and fears of those men whose sincerity had led them to oppose the Treaty in principle. It could be pointed out to some that they had sworn an oath of allegiance to the Republic and that acceptance of the Treaty imposed an oath of allegiance to a British king.

All who opposed the Treaty because of this oath must be given a General Absolution; they did not know that an oath was a mere formula to be taken with mental reservations; that infamous doctrine had yet to be promulgated.

Other men who had cast their votes against the Treaty on returning to their home territory quickly perceived their loss of status. They had fallen from popular grace and the esteem of their fellowmen. They gathered together such malcontents and others as would support them in militant opposition to the expressed will of the people.

(To be continued).

What is Labour History?

Many people active in the Irish Labour Society are frequently asked: What is labour history? Bertolt Brecht offers a fine insight into the balance labour history might give to the textbook of the bourgeois historian:

A WORKER READS HISTORY

*Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings
was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed,
who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song,
were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the
legend
The night the sea rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.
Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
was sunk and destroyed, were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War. Who
triumphed with him?*

*Each page a victory,
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man
who paid the piper?*

*So many particulars,
so many questions.*

(Translation of Fragen Eines Lesenden Arbeiters by H.R. Hays, "Bertolt Brecht, Selected Poems", Grove Press, New York, 1959).

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE . . .

(For the attention of The Southill Tenants' Association)

WANDERING HORSES

"We will never solve the wandering horse problem in Limerick until such time as we have a proper pound", said Mr. T. Collery, deputising for the City Manager at Limerick City Council. The matter was raised by Councillor P. O'Sullivan, who said the people of Rathbane were plagued with wandering horses.

("Limerick Chronicle", April 1965).

THE ABBEY FISHERMEN

THE LAX WEIR

The history of the Abbey fishermen is inextricably bound up with the history of the Lax Weir. The story of the Weir is as turbulent as that of the fishermen and forms an important part of the history of Limerick itself. The saga of the Weir and the legal and physical battles fought over it have been extensively documented in a variety of sources.

Confusion and controversy, however, exist regarding the origins of the Weir. William Lysaght in his book, "The History of the Abbey Fishermen", states:

The building of this weir is often attributed to the Danes, the only evidence produced in this regard being the word "lax". Robert Herbert (late city Librarian), in an article in the "North Munster Journal", supported this theory, giving as his reason the fact that "lax" is the Scandanavian word for salmon. Documentary evidence shows that the weir was in existence in the year 1200 (Charter of King John to William de Braose). It is not until the year 1414 that it was called the "Lax Weir" (Charter of Henry V. to the citizens of Limerick, making the weir over to them forever). In a case before the House of Lords in 1865, Sir Hugh Cairns suggested that the reason for the name was that, shortly before 1414, a party of Norsemen had been brought to Limerick to conduct the weir and put it on a paying basis.

Another local historian supports Herbert's contention about the Danish influence. Kevin Hannan, in a paper presented to the Limerick Corporation's National Monuments Advisory Committee, on May 21st, 1974, wrote:

"The Lax Weir has long been recognised as the oldest institution connected with the city of Limerick. There can be little doubt that the founders of the famous structure were the early Danish settlers; even the word "lax", meaning salmon, has survived down to our own day. There was a strong tradition held by the Abbey fishermen that the weir was built by the Dominicans, who were among its better known early proprietors, and who owned much property in the district, but there are many references to the fishery long before the arrival of the Friars early in the thirteenth century.

Two of Limerick's historians, John Ferrar and Maurice Lenihan, have also mentioned the Lax Weir. Ferrar quotes widely from the verses of the Davis Manuscript written in the

sixteenth century. Four of these poetic extracts refer to the Weir, one of which describes the efforts of Sir George Preston to gain control of the Weir's fishing rights during the Mayoralty of Henry Bindon in 1662:

*Sir George Preston knight, a patent got
For our lax weir, asked, had—why should he not;
His patent shows, possession does demand,
Backed by the viceroy—Mayor does both withstand;
A common Council calls, of them to know
What in that case was best for him to do?
—They all stand mute, advice to him deny,
He in a passion then said hastily,
"I'm in command, my estate is not small,
My life is dear, yet will I hazard all;
Before it shall be said in Bindon's year.
The city lost its ancient, noble weir",
By this, his sole courageous resolution,
They four year after held it in possession,
And thus the city saved eight hundred pound,
May the place with men so spirited abound.*

Maurice Lenihan in his "History of Limerick", written in 1866, described the same dispute and gives further details about the Weir:

.. Sir George Preston got a patent for the great Lax Weir and fishery of the Shannon from its source to the sea. After lengthened disputes and litigation, a compromise was effected in 1677, when the Corporation gave a sum of £1,500 to Sir John Preston, who surrendered his patent in consequence ... on the 2nd October, 1675, Sir George Preston presented a petition to the Common Council, when it was declared that "from time immemorial there has been a passage for boats and cots through the Lax Weir". This is now a startling fact; and goes to show at all events, that when in years afterwards, this same Corporation stopped up the usual gap altogether, and when afterwards, they were compelled to open it — they invented and employed every possible expedient, to render the gap inoperative for its proper purposes, and thus perpetrated an outrage of flagrant injustice, robbing the fishermen, in the assumption of a power to which it could lay no claim ... the Lax weir being finally made over to the Corporation, they let the fishings, 29th January, 1679, for £284.5s a year, "all members of this council to have a salmon or more to eat in the weir-house castle at any time for nothing". All freemen were to have as many salmon as they could eat in the castle, at 9d each.

In his book about the Abbey fishermen, William Lysaght holds firmly to his belief about the beginning of the Weir and calls on the fishermen's own testimony for support:

... the weir was built in its first crude form by the Dominicans, though not in its present position. Patrick Coghlan, secretary of the Net Fishermen's Society in 1841, in a letter to the editor of the "Limerick Reporter", stated "The Lax weir was built by the Dominican Friars in the eleventh century. At this time the Friars were overcrowded in St. Francis Abbey and they built a retreat college on St. Thomas's Island. The students erected a weir by means of which they were able to supply with salmon their own table and the tables of every religious community in Limerick". Later the Friars presented the weir to the first Corporation of Limerick stipulating that the proceeds therefrom should be applied to the mending of streets and roads. The Abbey fishermen who are in a better position to know the facts, support this theory. The pure Irish names for net parts, draws or drafts and the

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thady Coughlan's attempts to get the last iota of political mileage out of the Herrema kidnapping is amusing in its own sick fashion.

He asked for a meeting with Dr. Dugdale saying that he was apolitical and acting as Limerick's first citizen. Needless to say, she refused to see him, since it was only a few months ago since his father was demanding that she be deprived of her children's allowance, which was a fairly miserable proposition but typical of the man.

If Thady was sincere he would have asked another public representative to approach her. But not our Thady, who also asked her to dissociate herself from the kidnapping: Dr. Dugdale, who understands English, naturally said she couldn't dissociate herself, since she wasn't involved in the first place.

Next we hear that Thady and Dr. Jeremiah Newman are going to discuss the kidnapping with the Pope. Later, we read in "Hibernia" that Thady didn't even know he was meeting the Pope until he read it in the paper. Thady seems to be a bigger clown than his father — and that's a fair achievement.

John Casey.

boat parts as described in other chapters show no Norse influence whatsoever.

On April 27th. 1974, in a paper presented to the Old Limerick Society, the local historian, Andy Killeen, described the Lax Weir as it then was.

The Weir, which extends across the Shannon from near the site of the now derelict Corbally Mill on the south shore to Parteen Protestant Church on the north shore, is approximately 1,150 feet long. Although now in a dilapidated condition, and rapidly disappearing through neglect, the original nature of the weir is still plainly discernible. It consisted of a number of piers, about 30 feet long, spaced at irregular intervals. These piers, held in position the timber screens, used to block the passage of the salmon up-stream, and to divert them into traps, from which they were taken by large nets. The history of the Lax Weir fishery prior to 1200 A.D. is largely a matter of conjecture, but since that date it is fully documented in a series of charters and leases. In 1934 the weir was finally abandoned as a fishing site.

And Kevin Hannan has left us with this picture of the Weir as it appeared to him in May of this year:

Today, the broken piers stretch across from Corbally to Parteen-a-Lax. The small castle in the centre, and directly below the tail of St. Thomas' Island, gives the heaps of stones a more important and worthwhile standing. In more recent years, the piers carried a substantial footbridge from the Limerick side, but was not connected with the Clare side, at least during the past sixty years, as a result of litigation over rights of way at Parteen-a-Lax. The part of the footbridge spanning the "Queen's Gap" was destroyed during the Black and Tan period, and never replaced. The piers on the Clare side, being in a more sheltered position, are in much better condition than those on the Limerick side. The radical change in the main channel of the river after the Shannon "Scheme" has resulted in considerable silting up in this area. Sand and gravel carried downstream in winter floods has lodged in great quantities in the backwater of the island.

Thus, it can be said, after a study of all available records, that the taking of salmon at the Lax Weir, at the head of the Shannon Estuary, had continued, with periodic and sometimes violent interruptions, for over a thousand years. And, for this period, the structure of the Lax Weir has withstood the ravages of man, time and elements in enduring to the Limerick of 1975.

(To be continued).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TRAPPED RABBITS

Dermot McEvoy's reference in his article in the October edition of the "Limerick Socialist" to the notice "Trapped Rabbits", seen recently in a poulterer's window in Roches Street is worthy of a few comments.

This legend is specially couched to guarantee immunity from the chance of being sold a rabbit carcass affected with comminuted fractures, torn ligaments, black and bruised tissue, caused by the fangs of the bastard greyhound, the wattle of the "sportsman", or the searing shotgun blast. The housewife knows that the "trapped rabbit" is wholesome of flesh, and shows no signs of the savagery that brought about its dissolution. (The head, with its bulging terror-stricken eyes, and the mangled paws, has already been discarded).

She knows nothing of the agony and fear in the face of the little rabbit which is held firmly by its broken legs in the steel jaws of the gin-trap. She has never heard its agonising screams through the long night as it waits for the merciful *coup de grace* of the trapper. Neither does she know of the poor creatures slow and painful strangulation in the snare.

The dealers are well aware of the barbarous cruelty attached to the use of these devices but they continue to turn a well practised blind eye to it. Business is business. They cannot be expected to find time away from their lucrative trade to contemplate the cruelties attendant on their abundant supplies of rabbits. They never have time for a second glance at John Drinkwater's "Stupidity Street".

While the hare is now partially protected by legislation and, by a curious respect, almost reverence shown to it by some people, bunny is despised, and held up to engage our attention as being fair game for every fiendish device invented for its destruction. It is respected only as a palate-tickling addition to our normal dietary, and having special attractions for those with "weak constitutions" and persons aiming to cut down on superfluous adipose tissue:

Likewise, the most humane methods of slaughtering cattle, sheep, and pigs have long been in requisition. That the humanitarian societies, who have been fighting for so long for the abolition of blood sports, have completely ignored the great cruelties inflicted on the rabbit is another indication of the indifference generally shown towards this animal, which has, at least, the same senses and feelings as the hare. Even the harassment of reynard himself is tempered by the tolerance of

the "Tally Ho" merchants. The rabbit, however, is only thought of in relation of its value in new pence.

No creature has to work harder for its board and lodgings than the rabbit. It can sleep in comfort and reasonable safety only by the dint of prodigious labour in boring into the bank or ditch, moving great quantities of earth, sand and gravel, with only its paws for tools and its teeth for cutting the roots.

Though it loves to sit outside its burrow in the early morning and during the long summer evenings, grazing is carried out only under the cloak of darkness, when most of its enemies are at rest. Pdraig Pearse remembered the "little rabbits in the fields at evening".

When next you pass by Roches Street and gaze at the legend in the poulterers window, "Trapped Rabbits", think of the lines of James Stephens:

*I hear a sudden cry of pain!
There is a rabbit in a snare;
Now I hear the cry again,
But I cannot tell from where.*

*But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid;
Crying on the frightened air,
Making everything afraid.*

*Making everything afraid,
Wrinkling up his little face,
As he cries again for aid,
And I cannot find the place!*

*And I cannot find the place
Where his paw is in the snare:
Little one! Oh, little one!
I am searching everywhere.*

Maybe, when on his next visit to Limerick, Dermot McEvoy will give further thought to some of the pain and suffering lurking behind the word "trapped" on the Roche's Street window sign.

Michael Dillon,
Limerick.

THE ROTTEN APPLE

by **DERMOT McEVOY**

IF YOU expect any gems of wisdom in this, my column, this month you're going to be disappointed. I offer by my of explanation, but not as excuse, that I have been out of town. I've been on holiday in New York and I've been drinking from Brooklyn Heights to Spanish Harlem: I've done all the things (and more) that I have been warning you against. I find on sober reflection that I am a frail, fallible man just like the rest of you.

With all the booze that a large trolley could conveniently carry I arrived sober at Kennedy Airport, the booze was for the friend who was waiting for me. A friend I had not seen for over 50 years; it will be another 50 before he'll want to see me again. I drank only coffee on the way to The Big Apple as the natives call the place. Well, The Big Apple is rotten to the core. Slummier, filthier and infinitely more menacing than when I was there a few years ago. Why so? Well, it's bust: no policemen to be seen (they've cut the payroll): schools are closed (they can't pay the teachers): and please don't get sick because they've cut the nursing staffs, the food — and the blood — for the patients. But surely, you say, the Government will not allow that to happen. Answer: the Government of President (Dead Head) Ford has allowed it to happen. And why would he allow a thing like that to happen? Answer: Ford is a Republican and New York votes Democratic. A simple parallel would be to give Limerick nothing unless Limerick voted "the right way". It's a hard world, my masters. The *accepted* face of capitalism is the same the world over from Chile to New York via Shannon.

But there is a bright side. After you have treble-locked the door of your apartment you can lift the phone and order booze and food to be delivered at any hour of the night and when you've checked the delivery boy — with the chains still on your door — you can eat and drink in comfort. Go out for a meal? You've got to be joking, or mad, or both. A friend of my host was held up and robbed in daylight in Times Square, off Broadway, by three pretty girls. While one of them, he swears she was the most attractive, held a knife at his throat, the others took all he had in his pockets. Including his trousers pockets, I asked. Yes, said my host, that was the only thrill he got out of it.

At one stage I wanted to go down to Third Avenue to see a friend who has a saloon there. We took a taxi: it looked more like an armoured car. Fortunately, my friend was away in Washington and, as he's a generous fellow, I expect we'd have stayed on drinking the sauce and I'd have wound up either in Bellevue (the loony bin) or the City Morgue. Gangs of Spicks (that's the derogatory term for Americans of Spanish blood) were at all the street corners: they'd never done a day's work and are, thanks to President Ford, never likely to. They survive on Relief, burglary, mugging, pimping, or male prostitution. That's The Big Apple.

Intelligent Americans — if that's not a contradiction in terms — sneered when I was introduced as "an Irish friend". What's that you bastards are doing to Dr. Herrema, what harm did he do to you, is it because he is a Jew: these are some of the questions flung at me. Some of the more polite ones. I sang dumb.

I bought a few books, paid a straight single fare (though I had a return ticket that would have involved me in staying a further week) and got back to Ireland — and comparative civilisation.

At home in my local pub, glancing through back numbers of the Irish papers, I found that a naive young man called Thady Coughlan had been trying to make political capital out of the plight of Dr. Herrema. He would see Bridget Rose Dugdale in Limerick jail and all would be right. See the lady devil to tell her paramour to surrender! I seem to remember that Jim Kemmy said at the time of Thady's selection as Limerick's Chief Citizen that he was still wet behind the ears. Was the talk in that pub and others I was visiting at the time about the plight of Dr. Herrema. Not a bit of it. Football and racing were the topics of general conversation. Frankly, the people of Ireland — the vast, vast majority — care only for themselves and their precious money. I am not given to praying but I did pray for Herrema.

At one state I remember having in mind Bishop Jowett's remarks: "My dear lady, you must believe in God in spite of what the clergy tell you". On this subject, I have not yet read or heard of sentence of Excommunication being passed by the Irish Hierarchy on the IRA in all its factions; the Editor and staff of the *Limerick Leader* were excommunicated for a lot less, but, of course, that was in Bishop O'Dwyer's time. And he was mad! (I wonder if I've wronged him).

Let others forget if they wish, but let us remember that for five days in Mountmellick Herrema was bound hand and foot, blindfolded and had cotton wool stuffed in his ears. It was sensory deprivation of the sort stridently condemned by Republicans (so-called) when practised by the British Army in Belfast and they were dealing with gunmen, not an innocent Dutchman. The Irish Government is still pursuing the case on behalf of the sufferers of that mind-torture before the International Court of Justice. The case won't be helped by Gallagher, Coyle and Company. Finally, what would I do to that lot? I would sentence them not to die, but to live. That's the toughest punishment I can think of because if I were in their shoes (which the Lord forbend!) I would chose death. In all this, let the Irish people go round saying it was only an accident that we were born in the Island of Saints and Scholars. And wasn't it?

I crave your indulgence this month because I am still not back to my "normal" self. I am NOT drinking now nor shall I drink for the foreseeable future. No merit in it; I just don't like drink. In this regard, and not to end on too sombre a note, I am reminded of the parable of the "Hunger Artist" by Franz Kafka. Kafka describes a man who kills himself by public fasts, but confesses as he dies that he achieved these feats only because he could not find any food he liked: "Had I found it, believe me, I would have caused no sensation but have stuffed myself like all the rest of you! Ultimately, man has to admit that what is wrong is not the human predicament but his own inability to be a philistine.

To my correspondent Eamonn O'Brien of Dooradoyle: I apologise for putting Liam Forde in charge of the wrong river but I cited his case of jobs-for-the-boys not out of bitterness but out of devotion to the truth. Is it out of bitterness, Eamonn, that you mention Liam Forde "distinguished himself in 1953 by being instrumental in introducing sanctions on the Limerick anglers when the simple worm was prohibited for the first time in local waters"? Bitterness, Eamonn, come off it! Especially, when the only fish I ever caught was with a worm. A simple worm if you like, a simpler fish I'd swear.

Up Garryowen!