

# How the Shannon Scheme Workers Lived

The building of the Shannon Scheme during the years 1925-'29 affected the Irish public consciousness in varying degrees. The prominence the project enjoyed in 1925 because of a major industrial dispute, which for a time seemed to threaten the whole prospect of the Scheme, receded somewhat at the beginning of 1926 when the strikers were out-manoeuvred. The occasional progress report in the newspapers was all that was to be seen of the undertaking during the following spring and early summer. But in late June the public mind again focused on Ardnacrusha as newspapers alleged that workers were living in barns, stables and pigsties, and called for a special inquiry.

The ferment of ingredients for this latest notoriety had been bubbling away for months. Employment on the works had risen rapidly to over 2,000 since major construction had begun in September 1925. (1) Maximum sleeping accommodation for the Irish workers, skilled and unskilled, at Ardnacrusha camp was 720 and that was only achieved in 1928 when employment rose to as high as 5,000. (2)

In 1926, therefore, approximately 1,300 had to find accommodation either in Limerick City or in the neighbourhood of the works. Besides, scores of men walked to Ardnacrusha from all parts of Ireland looking for a job at the going rate of 32/- a week. Some were sent there by their local Labour Exchange, many others went there full of hope and, oft-times, very little else. (3) There was no dole in those days; neither was the prospect of employment elsewhere very bright.

For less than a quarter of the 2,000-odd employed on the Shannon Scheme in June 1926 free sleeping accommodation was available in the site camp in one of the timber huts provided by the contractors. (4) In the neighbourhood, lodgings could cost anything from 2/- to

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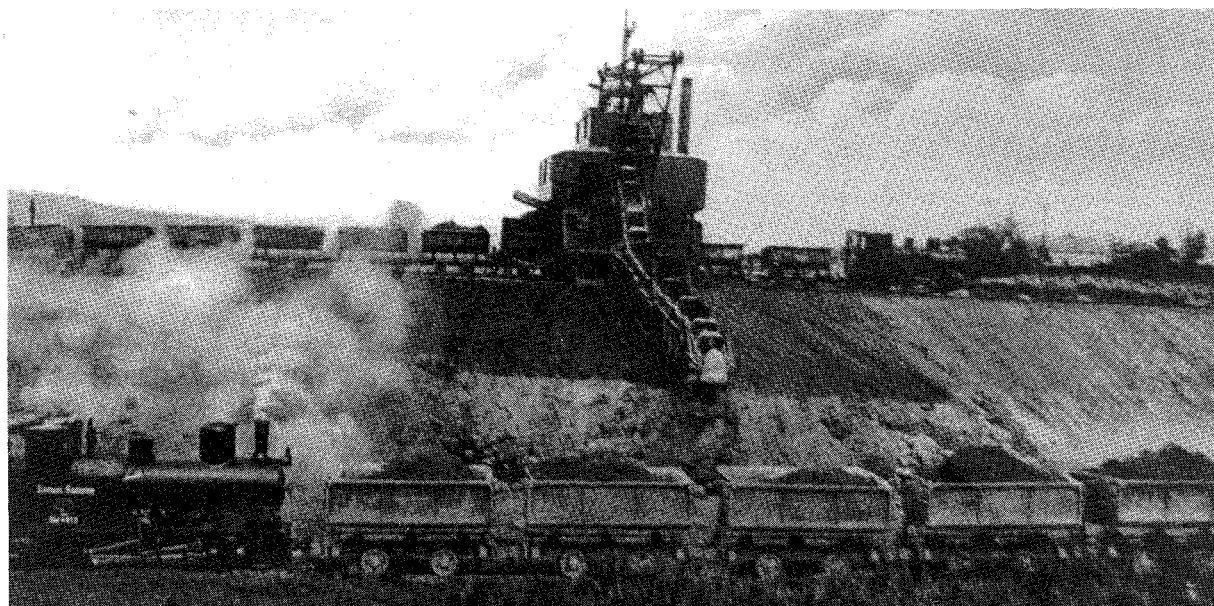
By Michael McCarthy

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£1 a week. (5) Meals could be bought in the camp canteen at the reduced rate of 11/8 a week. (6) A pint of porter then cost 6 pence. Health and unemployment insurance deductions amounted to 1/1 a week. (7) A visit to Limerick's Coliseum or Grand Central to see the latest silent Tom Mix or Gary Cooper would cost 1/- or 1/6. (8) So, for those lucky enough to get jobs the financial pressure of having to provide their own accommodation was considerable, particularly if they were married and had hoped to send home something to their wives and children. The less fortunate were confronted by two options: the long dusty road home or just hanging about in the hope that the following morning might bring a job for them. In the meantime, however, they had to find somewhere to sleep.

One of the most obvious places for those without work to look for accommodation was in the City Home in Limerick. During April, May and the beginning of June 1926, an average of ten people, unable to find work on the Shannon Scheme, were admitted each night. Towards the end of June, the number seeking admission had dropped to five a night. But then the City Health Board refused admittance to all those coming from outside the Borough of Limerick. (9)

The decision of the City Health Board to refuse accommodation to all except Limerick townsmen was related to another question which had been occupying the minds of Clare County Board of Health and Limerick City Home and Hospital Committee for some months, namely: who was responsible for the medical care of the Shannon Scheme workers? (10) The German contractors refused to hold themselves responsible, stating that their liability



Excavation and clearance work in progress at the Shannon Scheme.

ceased when they complied with the terms of the National Health and Unemployment Acts. Clare County Board of Health held that, even though the Shannon Scheme was situated in Clare, its hospitals could not cope. It argued, that Scarriff District Hospital had only two beds for other than natives of Clare, that the Fever Hospital in Ennis catering for east, central and north Clare with only 30 beds was already inadequate for current needs, and that the County Hospital in Ennis, being the County Home, held a certain number of beds for the poor of the county but that it had no extra beds available for the Shannon Scheme workers. Limerick Board of Health argued in similar vein that it was incapable of meeting the needs of the Shannon Scheme and that the Minister for Industry and Commerce should make the contractors shoulder their responsibilities. (11) In fact, there was a medical officer at Ardnacrusha and a few beds for the injured and sick but nothing to cope with the kind and volume of injury which invariably happens when you have thousands of unskilled men working under pressure with heavy machinery and explosives.

It was on Thurs. June 24 at one of its regular monthly meetings, that the Clare County Board of Health first heard of Shannon Scheme workers sleeping in pigsties and stables. (12) The Board had just listened to a report from its Secretary, John Quin, on a conference between the Limerick and Clare County Boards and the Department of Local Government on the subject of treating the sick and injured of the Shannon Scheme. The conference had requested the Minister for Local Government to introduce in the Dail a bill which would allow the transfer to their homes of workers from other counties or countries in the event of their being destitute, sick or injured. The representative of the Department had told the conference that Clare and Limerick County Boards of Health could refuse relief to any man coming from outside their respective areas. The report on the conference was warmly welcomed by the members of the Clare Board. As a postscript to its meeting, the Home Assistance Officer for Ardnacrusha was asked for a brief report on the latest position in the area. H.A.O. Mullane stated that a lot of men had billeted themselves in stables, cowsheds and barns. There was, he said, no hut accommodation for many of them. He reported that a man and his wife had taken possession of a pigsty attached to a labourer's cottage, and there were no less than 12-14 in a stable at Blackwater in O'Grady's yard. Some of these men were unemployed, some were not. The H.A.O. informed the Board that about 400 workers were being laid off within a few days and he wanted to know what he would do with those who remained in his district and became destitute. There was, he said, a constant procession through eight miles of his district by men looking for work or dismissed or going home after failing to get work. (13)

A spirited debate followed. Councillor P. McMahon of Blackwater corroborated the statement of the Home Assistance Officer that people were living in pigsties and that some men (and their wives) after being dismissed from the Shannon Scheme remained on in the district. "Surely to God", he exclaimed, "we are not going to let them die with the hunger". Councillor Halpin was of the opinion that the Government should shoulder its responsibility to save people from living like "mere swine". This view was echoed by other members of the Board. Councillor Halpin also cited the case of a man lying in a pigsty with straw for a bed whilst he was suffering from double pneumonia. Councillor Crowe asked "are we to feed the hungry of every county in Ireland?" P. McMahon replied: "We would and divide our last penny with the poor, but if we have not a penny, what then?" The Board resolved, however, that it would abide by the principle of the inter-county conference and grant relief only to Claremen. It

also ordered a comprehensive report on conditions in and about Ardnacrusha from the Medical Inspector of Health for the area, Dr. G.H. Enright.

Two days after the County Board of Health meeting, the national press had picked up the story of housing conditions on the Shannon Scheme. (14) The **Irish Independent** recorded the Home Assistance Officer's statements at the Board of Health meeting in its editorial page under the heading "A Very Amazing Story". Three days later the story had been moved to the world news page and a call was made for a special inquiry and for an early remedy for the inadequate housing conditions of the Shannon Scheme workers. The newspaper had also made its own investigation and published an exclusive report which corroborated the statements of Home Assistance Officer Mullane. Referring to the pigsty attached to the labourer's cottage, the special report stated:

"The latter accommodates a husband, a wife and two children. Some of the places in which men are sleeping are not at all fit for human beings. There was one place referred to by the Home Assistance Officer. It was merely an outoffice; it might have housed horses or cattle. The beds consisted of old hay, thrown on the floor, with no suggestion of bed clothing. One of the heaps of hay was semi-covered with an old sack. This was the very place in which 15 men slept up to a short time ago. The number has now dwindled down to eight and those men are paying rent for the privilege of accommodation. They are being charged 2/- a week for the shelter of the roof and the bed of hay self-provided. Other places in the locality, outhouses and so on have been improvised and are quite alright, but the place to which specific reference has been made ought not to be allowed to exist. The Camp Commandant at Ardnacrusha, Mr. W.J. Stapleton, when interviewed on the matter, stated that it was possible that there were men living in outhouses, but they were not employed on the Scheme and that it was not because of lack of accommodation. 'This morning there were only two men on my waiting list for beds', he said. He further explained to me that some months ago before the huts were completed there was not sufficient accommodation, and the men were obliged to fend for themselves and do the best they could; but now they were able to cater for them. He went on to say that when hut accommodation was not available, the fact was stated to the men before they were employed, and as a result of the rapidly approaching completion of the temporary works at Ardnacrusha, between 200 and 300 men had been disemployed during the past month, and whilst an effort was being made to give them at least one night's accommodation after dismissal, they could not be held responsible for them afterwards. A further matter which he pointed out was that men were arriving at the works daily from all parts of the country, oftentimes penniless, seeking to find employment and unable to find any. It was quite conceivable that those men in numerous instances were obliged to sleep out".

The special report also called for an impartial inquiry into housing conditions for the workers. (5)

One would imagine that at that stage the unions would have become involved in a campaign to improve living conditions and would have used it as a platform to raise the general lot of Irish workers on the Shannon Scheme. Unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest either. A meeting had been held in Ardnacrusha on Sunday, April 17 and was addressed by Cathal O'Shannon



Some of the better sleeping quarters for Shannon Scheme workers.

and Paddy Hogan T.D. in support of a move to organise the unskilled workers on the Scheme and to get them into the I.T. & G.W.U. The two speakers stressed the need for organisation to improve wages and living conditions; a resolution to this effect was adopted. (16) That was the last reported union meeting on the Shannon Scheme and the last indication of any union activity for the remainder of the contract. The union subscription was 6 pence a week. (17)

Even the **Voice of Labour**, which had played such an important role in the Shannon Scheme strike six months earlier by its uncompromising stand and reportage, showed only a short-lived interest. On July 3 it gave front page coverage to the situation at Ardnacrusha. (18) Under the heading "Not Fit For Human Beings" it stated that the revelations of the correspondent of the **Irish Independent** may have been amazing to the capitalist press but not to the **Voice of Labour**. Another edition carried an angry letter signed by "Man from Nowhere". (19) The writer stated that he had seen worse slavery in Mexico. He decried the working conditions - the bread, tea and margarine for breakfast; the extra cup of tea for two pence and the extra slice of bread for one penny. He quoted a worker as saying: "We are working for our chuck, and slowly starving to death on it". Having condemned the bullying German and Irish bosses the writer declared: "What is the labour movement, the republican movement and the Church doing to expose and do away with this infamy? I would warn all three to be up and doing, particularly the latter, as their silence is roundly condemned by the workers in the huts after their day of slavery".

That letter was followed by another signed by "A worker on the job". He wrote:

"The conditions on the Shannon Scheme cannot, and I will venture to say, have any parallel in Europe at present. Take, for instance, the wages of 8½ pence an hour with broken time - and God knows for some weeks we get lots of that. Most of the men are in debt every weekend, and I may add if they were to eat enough of good plain food working as navvies shovelling concrete, or up to their knees in water attending the diggers down below, the wages of even the full week which amount to 34/-, would not be sufficient to buy sustaining food for a hard-working navvy. I have seen my countrymen housed in the cowsheds of England and Scotland years ago. There, at least, the sheds were fairly warm and sanitary compared to the sheds of the farmers of Blackwater where my countrymen are housed now and pay 18/- a week for a half-roofed shed. If William Cosgrave or Kevin O'Higgins were forced to spend a week or two living in O'Grady's cowsheds on the Blackwater, I wonder would they rebel against those conditions, or would adversity make them as slavish as their countrymen, whom they have degraded by forcing those conditions on them?..."

"Let your Labour members ask Mr. McGilligan why are three or four hundred men per week sent from labour exchanges to the job, and a similar number sacked after from one to six weeks' work and left to drift back home, and sacked for no cause. Ask McGilligan why it was a man was crushed to death between two waggons when the Irish foreman told him not to go on the waggon as it was dangerous. The German told him to get up or go. His son gave evidence to this effect and was immediately dis-

missed. Ask him why the Camp Commandant Stapleton will pull down a notice the men put up, and tell them "they must not talk of a union here". Ask him why it is that when the men put up a lean-to for the purpose of cooking, because their wages won't buy them sufficient food in the canteen, it's pulled down...

Last week the workers had one holiday and two wet days. No money to buy food this week. Yet another holiday today, Thursday! We would advise the workers to get busy and give them the following advise:-

"Quit hollering out for martyrs  
To be slaughtered in your sight;  
Get off your knees, you lobsters,  
And learn to think and fight!" (20)

The apparent lack of involvement by the unions in the issue of living conditions, following so rapidly as it did on the heels of the strike which had held up work on the Scheme for months, may have been due to the fact that the unions were at this point demoralised. Joe McGrath, a former Minister for Industry and Commerce, former head of the secret service, and former official with Larkin's Union, was Director of Labour for the German contractors. He had out-flanked and out-played the unions during the strike by using ex-servicemens' labour. (21) The unions never recovered from this setback, and McGrath's ruthlessness and tight-ship style favoured the employment of ex-Free State army men, of whom the camp commandant was a captain, and excluded would-be troublemakers and union organisers. The contractors also, reportedly, indulged in counter-moves by encouraging the formation of bogus unions in the Ardnacrusha camp, setting up an effective camp C.I.D., and by employing a "heavy gang" to keep law and order. (22)

Housing conditions in Ardnacrusha surfaced in the Dail on July 1. Paddy McGilligan, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, was asked by Deputy Lyons (Longford-Westmeath) whether reports that appeared in the press as to the manner in which men worked on the Shannon Scheme were correct? The Minister replied: "You may take it *prima facie* that the press is inaccurate". (23) But the Munster deputies were not to be as easily dismissed. Later in the afternoon Deputy Paddy Hogan, in whose constituency the Shannon Scheme was based, gave notice that on the motion for the adjournment he would raise the question of the entire lack of accommodation for the care of the workmen on the Scheme when they became sick and injured. McGilligan knew what Hogan was about and tried to head him off by stating that there was accommodation in the camp for 140 more men than were there then. But Hogan was not to be dissuaded and repeated his intention of raising the question of accommodation during the adjournment debate.

The opening speech was made by Hogan himself. He dealt first of all with the question of accommodation for sick and injured workers:

"A worker from Co. Mayo who has been unemployed, say, for a period of twelve months, or, perhaps two years, and he has therefore lapsed in National Health Insurance. He has nothing to his credit in the records of the National Health Insurance Society. He gets work on the Shannon Scheme and after two or three months he becomes ill or injured. He has eight or twelve National Health Insurance stamps, probably, to his credit and he has no claim upon the funds of any National Health Insurance Society. He has to fall back on the arrangements made by the local health authorities of the district; while the local health authorities

have only made arrangements to meet normal conditions." (24)

Hogan argued that since the Shannon Scheme was not a normal type of work and since the local health authorities were unable to cope with the situation, the Minister should make special provision for the workers. He then got on to the question of general accommodation. "I would like to say that I am not very much interested in the opinions expressed by the Minister in the press report - the opinion expressed by him this afternoon in reply to questions addressed to him by Deputy Lyons". (25) He quoted from the report of Home Assistance Officer Mullane to the Clare County Board of Health and from the minutes of the County Board meeting where H.A.O. Mullane was complimented by the Chairman of the County Board "on his report as to the extraordinary circumstances in which people were living - in out-houses, pig-sties and barns and lying on straw". From information he had received from public officials in the Ardnacrusha area he supported the veracity of the Home Assistance Officer's report and called on the Minister to state what arrangements he had made regarding the sick and injured and in regard to accommodation in general. Hogan was supported by Deputy Clancy from Limerick:

"If something is not done very soon as regards the sanitary arrangements at Ardnacrusha, I greatly fear that an epidemic will break out that will be more serious than the 'flu epidemic we had in this country in 1918 and 1919. I was there in the months of April and May, and I must say that the air was anything but pleasant ... If that condition of affairs is allowed to continue, I think that the people of Limerick and Clare will very soon have to turn their noses towards the Government and appeal to have something done." (26)

The Minister for Industry and Commerce replied to both speakers with what could be described as a typical McGilligan broadside. "I put in direct negation to what Deputy Clancy has said that there is a medical officer in the camp, and that the sanitary arrangements at Ardnacrusha are as sound as they could be on any works. As far as these arrangements are concerned, there is not the slightest fear of any attack or any epidemic such as the Deputy has outlined here tonight". (27) As for Paddy Hogan's arguments, the Minister did not deal with them directly but made a vicious personal attack on H.A.O. Mullane. "We have the statement made by his Home Assistance Officer who strangely enough put in some very hard work indeed for a fortnight before he issued his report trying to get a son or a relative employed on the scheme under these filthy conditions that he has described. The bad sanitary arrangements and the other matters that he refers to would appear to have only been discovered when he could not procure a post for his relative under the scheme." (28) The Minister then insisted that it would be outrageous to expect the contractors to provide hospital beds for all the sick and injured. There were a few beds in the camp for accident cases and it was up to the Clare and Limerick authorities to look after the rest, he said.

The debate went on until after 10 p.m., with McGilligan defending stoutly and not giving an inch. In conclusion, Deputy T. Murphy (West Cork) put it to him: "Has the Minister any statement to make with regard to the report that appeared in the *Irish Independent*, on the conditions, from a journalist who was sent specially to investigate matters?" (29) McGilligan replied, "I saw the statement there of the Commandant of the camp which, I think, answered the journalist's statement perfectly." (30) The Dail adjourned at 10.25 p.m.



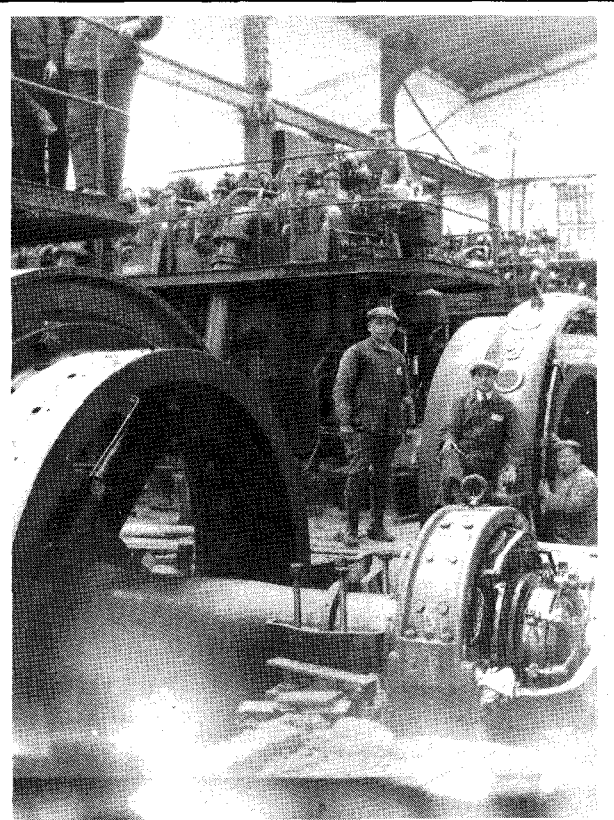
On the following day the **Irish Times** reported the Dail debate and the next issue of the **Limerick Leader** also carried a parliamentary report but it was left to the **Clare Champion** to defend its countrymen in the face of the Minister's attack. (31) McGilligan had accompanied President Cosgrave to a Cumann na nGaedheal convention in Limerick City Hall on July 10. During their visit they took time off to tour the works at Ardnacrusha and to inspect the accommodation. At the convention though the Minister was attacked for his statements in the Dail on living conditions at the Shannon Scheme and his arguments were flatly rebutted. (32) Seemingly the experience at the convention mollified McGilligan somewhat. The next issue of the **Clare Champion** reported:

"During his recent visit to Limerick the Minister for Industry and Commerce seems to have been convinced that a number of workers employed on the Shannon Scheme were living in outhouses in the neighbourhood of Ardnacrusha under insanitary conditions, and he admitted that the Boards of Health of Limerick and Clare in drawing attention to them were not activated by unworthy motives. Mr. McGilligan would have done the gracious act if he had also withdrawn his suggestion that Home Assistance Officer Mullane reported the conditions merely because a relative had not got a job on the works. Mr. Mullane reported the conditions in the ordinary course of his duty. In his official capacity, Mr. Mullane would have been blameworthy if he had allowed men to crowd into barns and stables without remark. There was no suggestion that the Shannon Scheme contractors were responsible for the actions of the men, and no slur was cast upon the manner in which the works are being conducted. But when men herd in stables and pig sties, there is an obvious menace to the public health, and if timely measures were not taken to deal with it the consequences might be very grave." (33)

The Medical Inspector of Health for Ardnacrusha, Dr. G. Enright, visited the area on July 5. His report on accommodation at the Shannon Scheme was presented by him during the same week to a meeting of the Clare County Board of Health. (34) He found that seven houses in which workers lodged - Henneberry, Haskins, Lavery, Greensmith, Leahy, Ryan and Hogan - were found to be satisfactory. An eighth house was somewhat congested. In a ruined building on Hartigan's land, in which eleven men lived and slept on shavings, Dr. Enright found conditions unsatisfactory. The place was not habitable and should have been closed. In William O'Grady's yard there were eight or ten occupants living under insanitary conditions. In a sty attached to Keegan's labourer's cottage there was a husband, a wife and two children living under insanitary conditions. All of the men living in those places, with one exception, were working on the Shannon Scheme. Dr. Enright also reported that a number of independent traders had opened shops in the district. They were all very clean inside, but the outside sanitary arrangements were defective. As to hut accommodation at the works, Dr. Enright said the average number in each hut was 26.

A discussion of the report followed. Mr. Kerin, Chairman of the Board, said that Dr. Enright's report repudiated the Minister's remark in the Dail and corroborated the report of Home Assistance Officer Mullane. Mr. P. McMahon said that the man in the pig sty was earning 1/- an hour and so could not afford to stay in the huts himself and pay for his wife and children's accommodation elsewhere. An order was made to close the ruin on Hartigan's land and the stable at O'Grady's yard,

while a directive was also given that the sty attached to the labourer's cottage should not be sublet. The Chairman closed the meeting with the general observation that "the Poor Law was never intended to meet an emergency of this kind, and the Government and the contractors should shoulder their responsibilities". (35)



Building the Shannon Scheme engines and turbines.

The order to close the ruins on Thomas Hartigan's land could be considered as an ironic side to the whole episode. In November 1925 the Government acquired through compulsory order Hartigan's farm at Ardnacrusha for use as part of the Shannon Scheme development. Hartigan, of Quinville House, Parteen, like most of the other farmers and landowners in the district, had not yet been compensated for his loss of land. So when the order came from the Clare County Board of Health to close up the buildings on the farm he reacted swiftly and angrily. He wrote to the Board: "The Germans took that farm from me last November. They took the stones out of the doors and windows and converted them to their own use. It is bad enough to have my own land gone and no sign of getting paid for it without being compelled to look after it." (36) In fact, it is now clear from the McGilligan papers that after nine months waiting, Hartigan's claim for compensation had just passed that point of the complex government process of acquiring land where ministerial approval had just been given to department officials to take the lands permanently. (37)

While Hartigan may have complained about the Government taking his land and the County Board of Health asking him to maintain it, his complaint was minor in comparison with the anomaly, as pointed out by a justice in the Civil Bill Court in Limerick in 1928, where one government department was taking land without paying compensation and another government department was suing for land annuities! (38)

The constant pressure from the officers of the Clare

County Board of Health seems to have eliminated the worst of the accommodation abuses at Ardnacrusha, temporarily at least. Where the occupants of the stables and pigsties went for accommodation one is not quite sure. But perhaps a clue is provided by the **Limerick Leader** of October 6. The Clare County Board has been discussing of late the illegal erection of 13 huts on plots tenanted by locals. (39) When called on by the County Board to explain why they had allowed huts to be erected on public property, one tenant wrote: "I wish to inform you that my plot is of no value owing to the work in progress on the Shannon Scheme being carried out in the vicinity. The only way out of the situation was to sublet it to a few friends who have given me a small fee for the use of the huts for a few months. Only for so doing myself and my family would be on the verge of starvation..." (40) Another tenant explained his position: "I wish to inform you that my plot was of no value to me owing to the work carried on here. I could sow nothing in the plot as it was encroached upon by every form of trespass. The only thing left me to do was to oblige a few who helped me by giving me a small item for the place for a few huts for a few months." (41) Members of the County Board of Health noted the correspondence but they also noted that employment on the Scheme was topping 3,000, and considering what happened as regards accommodation when numbers employed were considerably lower, they decided to take no action against the tenants and to leave the illegal huts. (42)

Christmas 1927 at Ardnacrusha was quiet, and the locals, reportedly pined for the New Year which would signal the Connemaramen's return with a new consignment of poitin.

The New Year brought the Connemaramen back to the Shannon Scheme but it also brought echoes of the housing scandal of 1926, and worse. The first week of February saw the **Clare Champion** with the front page headline, "Crowds in Stable - Shocking Conditions at Ardnacrusha". Dr. G. Enright, Medical Officer for the district, had reported to the Clare County Board of Health that housing problems had again arisen in the Shannon Scheme area. O'Grady's yard in Blackwater was singled out by the Medical Officer as the main place requiring the attention of the County Engineer's office. In the past year O'Grady's yard had been occupied for a time by workers before they were evacuated by officers of the Board of Health. This time, workers, their wives and children constituted the "households" which swarmed in the stables and outhouses of O'Grady's yard. (43)

Dr. Enright listed the following families being present:

- Mr. & Mrs. Dennehy & 1 child;
- Mrs. & Mrs. Sheehan & 3 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Greensmith & 5 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. O'Halloran & 3 children;
- Mrs. Rosethorne and brother;
- Mr. & Mrs. Lee & 2 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Leahy & 4 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. O'Dwyer & 6 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Spain;
- Mr. & Mrs. Hogan & 5 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Moloney & 2 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Haskins & 2 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Henneberry & 1 child;
- Mr. & Mrs. O'Callaghan;
- Mr. & Mrs. MacMahon & 2 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Lavery & 3 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Ward & 4 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Leahy & 3 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Higgins & 3 children;
- Mr. & Mrs. Shanahan & 2 children and
- Mr. & Mrs. Moore & 2 children.

The total number of people in the yard came to 94. In the Hogan family mentioned above, Dr. Enright reported that the husband had been moved to hospital suffering from typhoid fever, having been admitted on the certificate of Dr. M. McSweeney. The case of typhoid shows, said Dr. Enright, that "the drainage requires immediate attention whilst the list of families resident in the place makes it obvious that the area is very congested". (44) It is believed that the occupants of the stables and outhouses were being charged £1 a week.

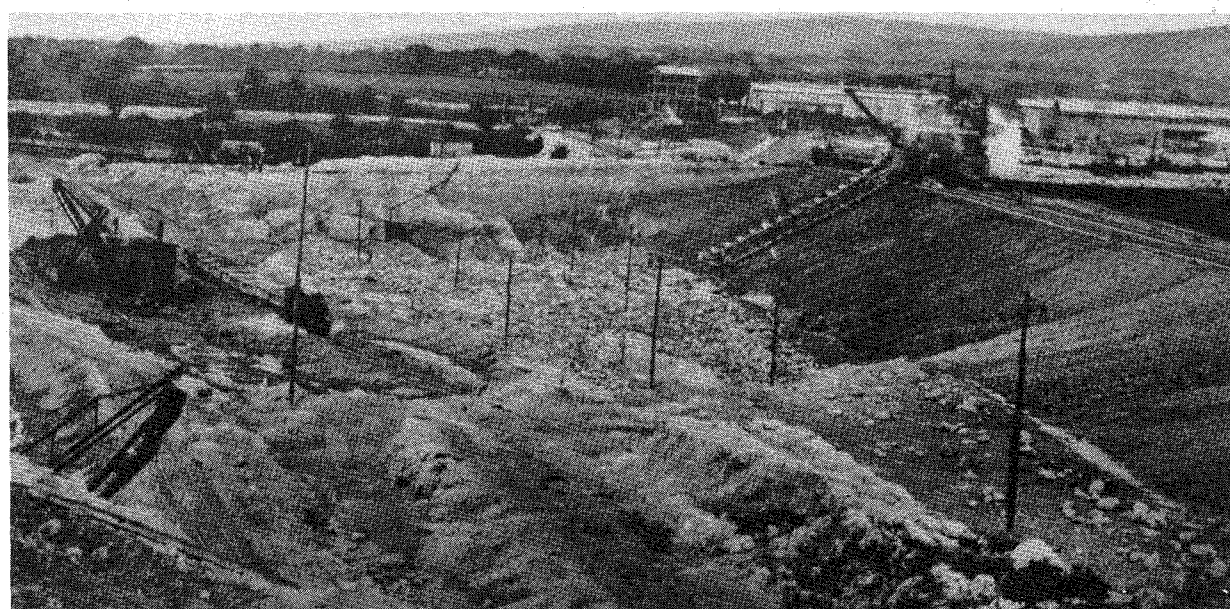
The next meeting of the County Board of Health took place on February 9, 1928. A letter from the Department of Local Government was read acknowledging receipt of Dr Enright's report. The department "presumed that the Board of Health will obtain further information from the Medical Officer of Health as to the character of the housing accommodation, whether the congestion is due to circumstances of a permanent or temporary nature and what remedial measures are available, and will then proceed to consider the advisability of dealing with the situation so disclosed under the powers conferred on them by the Public Health Acts". (43) This piece of bureaucratic jargon returned the ball to the County Board's court and effectively forced the Board to close down O'Grady's yard once again.

Nothing more was heard of housing conditions on the Shannon Scheme during its remaining construction period even though employment rose at one stage to over 5,000, thereby putting extreme pressure on whatever accommodation was available. (46) In general, like the bitterly-fought issue of labourers' wages which threatened the prospect of the Shannon Scheme in 1925, the issue of living conditions for the workers, as a platform for change in the fledgling republic, was gradually vacated by public representatives and politicians. Organised labour had passed up another opportunity to put its own stamp on the biggest industrial undertaking since independence.

The completion of the Shannon Scheme was due in no small measure to the brilliance and determination of Paddy McGilligan, the Minister for Industry and Commerce. There is no doubt that he could have put more pressure on the German contractors to improve the lot of Irish workers. He argued publicly, at all times, that it would be unfair and unreasonable to expect the Germans to carry any more responsibility than they were already doing. But the Germans, in fact, cannot really be faulted because, as is now well known, they were quite prepared to pay more and to raise the standard of accommodation. McGilligan's inflexibility in the face of protracted disputes and oftentimes severe pressure inevitably made him the object of criticism and satire for many a pen. At the time when living conditions and worker's accommodation were in dispute the following was a contemporary example of one poet's efforts:

"I am McGilligan, McGilligan, McGilligan!  
 Never shall you see such wonderful skill again.  
 I've got a plan on  
 Down where the Shannon  
 Rolls to the foaming sea.  
 Jealous folks say it is a bit of a gamble  
 But we know better, don't we?  
 For there's Siemens-Schuckert and Gordon Campbell  
 Joe McGrath and McLaughlin and me!

So now come all ye unemployed,  
 You surely should be overjoyed,  
 At the finest job that was ever seen,  
 Thirty-two bob and a cheap canteen;  
 We want every man on,  
 So come to the Shannon  
 Come down to the Shannon with me.



Cutting the canal at Ardnacrusha.

I'm McGilligan, McGilligan, McGilligan!  
 See me bend resistance to my will again  
 From Derry I came  
 To the Halls of Fame  
 Like a blast from the North  
 My decree has gone forth,  
 And as I have told you before  
 There is thirty-two bob  
 For each man on the job  
 And never a half-penny more ...  
 They say it's outrageous,  
 But I say it's courageous,  
 To pay to a navvy agricultural wages; ...  
 Anyway there's a job  
 At thirty-two bob  
 Ready to begin  
 With the food thrown in,  
 So don't mind the ban on  
 Come on to the Shannon  
 Come down to the Shannon with me.

## Chorus

Dot vos McGilligan, McGilligan, McGilligan,  
 He will our empty pouches fill again;  
 Ja! Ja! Ja!  
 Ja! Ja! Ja!  
 Oui! Oui! Oui!  
 C'est comme ca.  
 Dot vos von  
 Great big man  
 Ja!  
 Ja!  
 Ja!  
 McGilligan". (47)

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