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# FROM LIMERICK TO THE GOLDEN GATE

## ODYSSEY OF A KILLOUGHTEN CARPENTER

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by *L. A. O'Donnell*

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The throngs of humanity moving along the route between Ireland and America throughout the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, influenced both lands in many ways not yet fully understood. It is clear that the American labour force and economic growth would have been much smaller without them. Indeed, it may be argued that the rise of American trade unions would have been seriously retarded without the years of Irish presence. Yet, the study of Irish influence in trade unions has been rare. There is no lack of awareness that: 'The leaders of most important unions (historically and currently) are predominantly of Irish extraction...' and that the 'beginnings of permanent unions in many trades and industries are inextricably associated with the pressing needs of immigrant Irish workers for economic protection'. (1) Nevertheless, little has been done to illuminate 'the distinctively Irish contribution to trades unions in the United States. (2) Our purpose is to attempt a modest effort to shed light on this important but neglected ethnic aspect of the labour movement by tracing the odyssey of Patrick Henry McCarthy from humble beginnings as an apprentice carpenter in a village of County Limerick to that of a dominant figure who guided unions in San Francisco to exceptional power and influence in the building industry.

\* The story of P.H. McCarthy is an apt one for this purpose because he was undoubtedly the most important labour leader on the Pacific Coast of the United States from 1898 to 1922 and he embodied many of the virtues and shortcomings evident in Irish American labour leaders of that time. A pioneer building trades unionist, he, more than any other individual, was responsible for the reputation of San Francisco as the classic example of a closed shop town. Active in politics, he served a term as mayor of the city from 1909 to 1911. His significance for the development of American unions may be gauged by the space of more than half of one chapter ('The Labor Barony on the West Coast') devoted to his activities in John R. Commons's definitive **History of Labor in the United States**, (3) as well as by the generous attention given him in **A History of the Labor Movement in California** by Professor Ira B. Cross of the University of California (4). Facts about his activity in the building industry also appear in historical accounts of labour relations in the San Francisco Bay area. (5) Our investigation of him as an Irish ethnic figure draws heavily upon his own observations recorded in his unpublished memoirs which have become available. (6)

Given the sequence of his initials and the opposition he faced within his organization and among Bay Area socialists, it was perhaps inevitable that he be nicknamed 'Pinhead'. McCarthy belonged to that colourful generation of building trade union leaders who came to power in large cities around the turn of the century and which included Martin B. 'Skinny' Madden in Chicago and Sam Parks in New York City. Such men outraged the conscience of progressive America with their racketeering practices and corrupt associations with local government. McCarthy, however, stands apart because, although the most powerful labour leader and later mayor in a city not noted for high standards of civic morality, he was never accused of selling 'strike insurance' and never stooped to graft even if he was no stranger to collusive arrangements. Muckraking journalist Ray Stannard Baker, writing in 1904, acknowledged that McCarthy never resorted to terrorism or

bribery, but, nevertheless, found him a prime example of the seemingly inherent tendency of unions to produce a 'Labor Boss'. (7) Ideologically a business unionist, he fought radicals in labour's ranks as fiercely as he did any employer but he was not faithful to Samuel Gompers' rule about avoiding partisan politics. Short, handsome, luxuriously mustachioed and above all a spellbinding speaker with piercing eyes and Irish glint, P.H. McCarthy in celluloid collar and bow tie was the very model of a labour aristocrat from the Edwardian era. (8)

### GROWING UP IN LIMERICK

Patrick Henry McCarthy was born in Killoughteen near Newcastle West, County Limerick, Ireland, on March 17, 1860. (9) He was the youngest son of Patrick and Ellen Hough McCarthy who had a family of four boys and five girls. The first child was born in 1844 and the last in 1862. Thus the family spanned the Famine period and, as far as can be discovered, was not severely affected by it. The family lived in a cottage with a thatched roof customary at that time. McCarthy was born in this cottage and lived there for the first sixteen years of his life. His father was a tenant farmer who enjoyed modest prosperity from the nine or ten cows he kept on the eighteen-acre farm in this rich dairying area of Limerick. Killoughteen is, even today, a community of small farms which make up a townland. Its only community building is the Killoughteen schoolhouse, a national school only a few yards down the road from the McCarthy cottage. Killoughteen is located about three miles from Newcastle West, a town of about three thousand and a market centre for West Limerick.

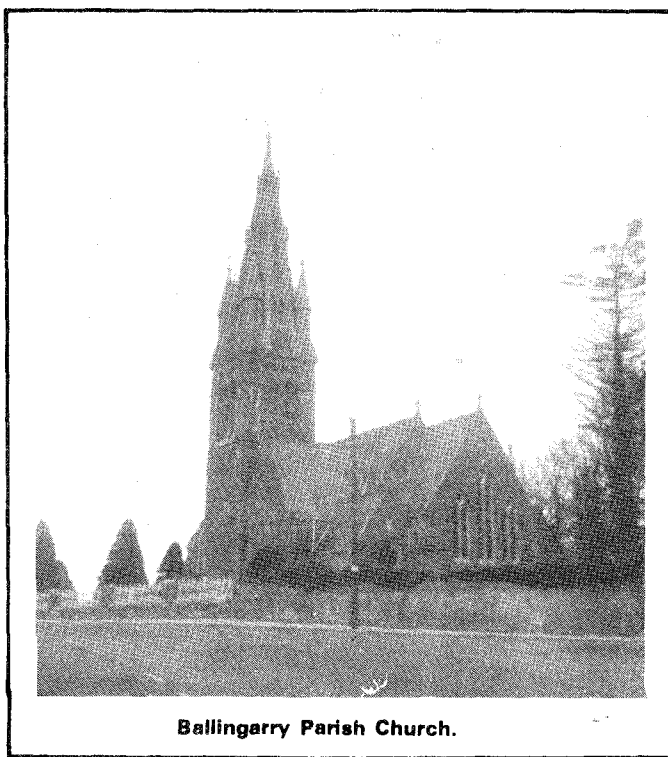
Although the McCarthy children were orphaned when Patrick Henry was nine, the family was able to maintain the farm and remain together. However, by this time the older sisters had emigrated to America. Material as well as moral resources must have existed within the family to see it through a crisis of this kind. P.H. McCarthy's older brother Michael, and a curate from the Catholic parish in Newcastle West, Father John Carrick, were named his guardians by the terms of his father's will. McCarthy proved to be a bright student in Killoughteen school, and prompted by this demonstration of ability, his guardians made plans to send him to secondary school and eventually into the study of law. Unfortunately, the plans had been made without consulting the man himself and, when informed of the decision, he dissented vigorously. According to his memoirs, McCarthy, by the time he was thirteen, had made up his mind to become a carpenter and tenaciously clung to that decision in the face of opposing arguments in several conferences with his guardians. In his own words, he told them: 'that I wanted to be a builder and that no matter what they did to me, I would be a carpenter and a builder'. (10) It was characteristic of him, even then, to pursue a course of action with exceeding determination once he had made up his mind. Finally, it was agreed by all concerned that he be apprenticed in the trade. This was arranged with James McCormack, a respected builder from Knockaderry, County Limerick, who

became his master for four years under the traditional apprenticeship system established by English law. Under this system the master and apprentice relationship resembled that of father and son with the master supplying lodging and board as well as teaching the trade, while the apprentice, bound to the master, received no wages whatsoever. Its appeal for a teenaged orphan must have been quite strong. McCarthy's memories of his apprenticeship were especially warm ones. Mr. McCormack apparently was an excellent teacher, patient, interested in developing the ability of his young men and was in McCarthy's words 'an exceptionally fine man; good-hearted, kind in the extreme, joyful, so much so that he made all those around him happy'. (11)

McCarthy recounts one incident in the course of his apprenticeship which reveals a strong impulse to lead, as well as impatience with clericalism. The McCormack firm contracted to do the carpentry work for a parish church in Ballygarry, County Limerick, and young McCarthy was assigned to the project. (12) At that time the parish priest was one Timothy Shanahan who, with his brother Denis, a curate in the parish, had raised a large sum of money in the United States for the completion of the church. (13) The Shanahan brothers took an almost proprietary view of this church which was designed as an imposing stone structure considerably larger than one would expect to find in a community this small. As the work proceeded, Father Timothy Shanahan, who had the reputation of a very demanding man, became increasingly concerned about finishing the structure by the scheduled date of completion. (14) Accordingly, the priest in his anxiety appeared on the scene one day 'like a cloudburst out of a clear sky' and ordered the men to work overtime daily in order to meet the deadline. In the absence of Mr. McCormack, the men, although reluctant, felt obliged to comply. McCarthy, however, though a mere apprentice, refused. He insisted that if early completion was essential the answer lay in hiring additional carpenters and pointed out that other carpenters were walking the streets idle. When the issue was joined, McCarthy was supported by his three fellow apprentices and several journeymen. Threats of various kinds and an order by Timothy Shanahan that he leave the job were unavailing. Opposing the wishes of a parish priest in Ireland at that time was no small matter and, needless to say, involved great risks for an apprentice. Work was held up until Mr McCormack could be summoned and upon his arrival, and after hearing the full details, he agreed with the position of his apprentices and vindicated McCarthy's judgment. Additional carpenters were hired. McCarthy had won his first strike.

This incident initiated McCarthy in the realities of authority in the nineteenth-century rural Irish village. It made a lasting impression. In the cohort of elders who presided over the community, the parish priest was surely the most awesome authority figure. His word was not lightly to be contravened. That McCarthy's apprenticeship survived this confrontation was due not simply to his own tenacity nor McCormack's unusually sympathetic attitude towards his apprentices. In large measure it was due to exceptionally good fortune which inexplicably favours the careers of some ambitious young men.

When his apprentice years were nearly over in the spring of 1880, McCarthy made the decision to emigrate to the United States, a familiar course for young Irishmen. He recalled that he chose this path because in his opinion, 'the United States, after all, presented the deeper, broader and more elaborate field for the future in the building industry than did Dublin, England, or any other one of the European countries'. (15) He must also have been influenced by poor economic conditions which prevailed in Ireland at this time due to general crop failures beginning in 1877 and an industrial decline commencing several years earlier. Land League agitation in County Limerick and elsewhere was growing in response to depression in agriculture. (16) The economy offered limited promise for construction craftsmen. In America, on the other hand, employment conditions were improving as the economy recovered from the recession of the seventies. The presence there of three sisters who had been living in Chicago for some twelve years provided a ready source of information on employment oppor-



**Ballygarry Parish Church.**

tunities and undoubtedly helped persuade him to emigrate. The trip was financed through a loan from his older brother, William. Sailing in April from the port of Queenstown (now Cobh) in the South of Ireland, he carried with him some mental baggage, distinctly Irish in character which influenced the style and goals of his career.

Young McCarthy bore little resemblance to the typical emigrant of the famine Irish coming to America in pre-Civil War days. Unlike these earlier refugees, the bulk of whom were unskilled agricultural labourers - frequently illiterate and often Gaelic speaking, McCarthy enjoyed the advantage of a substantial education obtained in the National School system and was equipped to support himself adequately by virtue of his thorough training in a skilled craft. This skill in particular permitted him to avoid the hazard of so many Irish who were consigned to ethnic ghettos in cities on America's Atlantic coast. It afforded mobility by enabling him to readily find work as a carpenter in Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco. McCarthy acknowledged the value of his training in this way: 'for after all is said and done, a mechanic thoroughly versed in his trade, equal to the task of dealing with any phase of it, is a mechanic who, if he has health, can always feel quite rich in the world's goods and absolutely independent'. (17) Furthermore, he could count on the aid of relatives in the United States to cushion his adjustment to a new land.

A novel observation about these 'new immigrants' from Ireland has recently been advanced and, while yet an hypothesis, if valid it would certainly be relevant for McCarthy. It is historian (and biographer of James Larkin) Emmet Larkin's thesis that a devotional revolution occurred in Ireland between 1850 and 1875 which caused the new immigrants not only to be more often 'practising Catholics' but also 'less drunken and less prone to violence' and therefore 'easier to assimilate to their new environment, because they were objectively less objectionable'. (18) While he was no angel and, as we have seen, hardly awed by members of the clergy, McCarthy seems to fit this pattern reasonably well. He was a life-long Roman Catholic, a confidant of Peter C. Yorke, militant labour priest (and native of Galway) in San Francisco and had the reputation of a disciplined, even rather stern man, who was never accused of excess in his personal behaviour. His family life was exemplary. In 1893 he married Maud F. Saunders, late of Cork city, who died eight years later without issue, but in 1905 her sister, Jeanette, became his wife and thereafter bore him eight children.

## EARLY ASSOCIATES WITH CARPENTERS' UNION

Stopping briefly in New York, McCarthy on May 2, 1880, arrived in Chicago where, for the first time, he encountered the attitude of American employers towards unions. Moving in with a married sister and her family, young McCarthy quickly obtained work in the building industry. His first job was on a building going up on Halsted Street. It lasted exactly one day. During the lunch hour McCarthy and his fellow tradesmen discussed the merits of The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, an old and influential organization in Great Britain, a chapter of which had been established in Chicago by men who had been members in England before coming to America. McCarthy's memoirs relate that his favourable attitude toward trade unions was duly reported to his employer by a 'confidential employee' and he was called in, paid his time (\$2.25 for a ten-hour day) and told that he was a disturbing element among the men. (19) For a young man of his temperament, this experience merely strengthened his belief in the necessity of unions. After securing a new job the very next day he interested himself in locating other carpenters who shared his concern about organizing the trade. McCarthy relates that while in Chicago he was first made aware of the difficulties associated with organizing workmen of diverse nationalities and the advantage this situation afforded to American employers in discouraging unionization. An older carpenter among a group with whom he was talking 'seemed to take umbrage at a young fellow like myself trying to talk trade unionism to men who were very much his senior; he knew quite well that trades unionism could never amount to much in a city like Chicago, the tradesmen of which had come from all parts of the world, precluding the possibility of bringing them together with any degree of confidence in each other. It had been tried before and failed and why try to bring it up again'. (20) McCarthy noted that organizing was retarded by 'racial dislikes, fraternal differentialism and, in no small measure, religious bigotry. Those three smoke screens were ... worked overtime by the opponents of the trade and labor movement of America'. (21)

McCarthy remained in Chicago from the spring of 1880 until the fall of that year when he emigrated to St. Louis. The move to St. Louis was auspicious for a young man who aspired to leadership among the workmen because it came at a period crucial to the establishment of permanent trade unions in the United States. In 1880 St. Louis was the scene of organizing activity carried on by Peter J. McGuire which led shortly to the founding of the Brotherhood of Carpenters which in turn became a cornerstone of the American Federation of Labor. McGuire had come to the city in 1878 and worked on behalf of the Socialist Labor Party. (22) Six years older than McCarthy, he was born in New York city of immigrant Irish parents and obtained a secondary education at night school at Cooper Union. He enjoyed a fluency in German, and a disdain for capitalism both owing to a group of German-speaking socialists with whom he became associated in the carpenters' trade in New York after completing his apprenticeship. (23) Like most socialists, he found the American environment hostile to his ideology. By 1880 his experience in various socialist movements had convinced him of the futility of political agitation, and he turned to economic organization of craft unions as the only fruitful approach to realizing improvements for the worker. In addition to founding the carpenters' union he served as its general secretary for twenty-five years and was Samuel Gompers' good right arm in the AFL from 1886 until 1900.

It was McCarthy's good fortune to become associated with him soon after arriving in St. Louis. He describes McGuire as having a great advantage for union work there because he could speak German fluently. McGuire was employed on a job known as Filly's Foundry. His organizing campaign was given impetus when, in the middle of the winter, carpenters on the job were notified that their pay would be reduced from \$3.00 to \$2.50 per day. McGuire called mass meetings at a place called Eurick's Cave, located at Washington and Jefferson Avenues, and the work of convincing men to protect themselves with a

union was carried forward. (24) Thus McCarthy learned the craft of organizing American workmen from a master whose dedication and success in the cause of his own union and a number of others became a legend. He never absorbed McGuire's hatred of capitalism although he did acquire his zeal for business unionism. Of his own efforts in this period McCarthy says:

I recall one instance where I personally visited the homes of 35 carpenters in St. Louis in two weeks. During that time, I either talked with the head of the family or some member of the family, preferably his wife, if I could not talk with himself, and I have rarely failed to convince either or both of the advisability of joining the union... (25)

Illness prevented McCarthy from participating in the founding convention of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America in Chicago on August 12, 1881 although he had been much involved in preparations for it.

## SETTLING IN SAN FRANCISCO

In April of 1886 McCarthy and two friends took a pleasure trip to the West Coast and visited San Francisco for nearly a month. Charmed by the place, and still single, he decided 'one fine afternoon in the month of June' to settle there. On August 6, 1886, he joined Local 22 of the carpenters' union but did not immediately become active because, as he recalled, the organization led by Edward Owens and his capable associates 'was in very good hands' and was 'very well cared for and conducted'. (26) In a few years, however, the union fell on difficult times and McCarthy was once again 'right in the thick of my old love, organized labor'. (27) For P.H. McCarthy the learning phase was over, he was prepared to embark on a serious career in leadership of unions in California. It began with his election as president of Local 22, a post in which he served six consecutive terms. (28)

Local 22 was the oldest and strongest of three carpenters' unions then operating in San Francisco. The others (Local 304 and Local 483) were smaller and Local 304, consisting exclusively of German carpenters, conducted its affairs in German. When, as a result of brothers failing to maintain their cards, total membership of these three Locals fell to less than three hundred, a movement began to combine them into a consolidated Local. McCarthy, quite conscious of ethnic differences and possible frictions, opposed the idea, pointing out that it would not only be unfair to members, but it would not solve the problem. He proposed that initiation fees be reduced and that mass meetings be called to bring all carpenters into the fold, giving them the choice of which union to enter. His view prevailed when members of the three Locals met to vote on the issue. Within three months, according to McCarthy, membership in the three unions increased over four hundred per cent and a new Italian-speaking union had been formed. (29)

## LEADER OF THE BUILDING TRADES COUNCIL

P.H. McCarthy's fame in the annals of labour history arises mainly from his leadership of the San Francisco Building Trades Council from 1898 to 1922. This organization, a federation of local unions in all the building crafts, was established in 1896. In McCarthy's hands it became an effective instrument for stabilizing the construction industry in that city. The high point of McCarthy's early years as president of it occurred in the millmen's dispute of 1900. (30) This came about after the AFL had proclaimed the eight-hour day as a major goal and designated the carpenters' union and several others to lead a movement to achieve it. By 1900 the eight-hour day was a reality for all but a few crafts in the San Francisco building industry, but the Building Trades Council decided to make it universal.

To accomplish this objective the council announced that August 13, 1900, would be the date on which it would no longer permit any member of its affiliates to work longer than



Patrick Henry McCarthy, circa 1909.

eight hours. Only the planing-mill operators put up any resistance, but as it turned out they were determined to fight the issue as a battle to restore the open shop in San Francisco and break up the Building Trades Council. The mill operators countered by announcing a lockout of unionized millmen to begin also on August 13, and they proceeded with an effort to enlist the support of building contractors. The planing-mill operators, however, had met their match and McCarthy, who had anticipated the conflict, launched Progressive Planing Mill no. to supply millwork to the contractors as long as needed. It was a \$100,000 enterprise operated by the council and financed from union funds, \$40,000 of which was voted by the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners at its convention in 1900 over the opposition of old associate P.J. McGuire. (31) Operation of the union's mill prevented interruption of building in the city and was instrumental in persuading the mill owners' association to submit the dispute to arbitration. The arbitration award called for an eight-hour day and amounted to a great victory for McCarthy assuring supremacy for the Building Trades Council.

Once McCarthy's leadership of the Building Trades Council was well established as a consequence of his victory in the millmen's dispute, he devoted himself to the goal of stabilizing the construction industry in San Francisco. A confirmed business unionist, he believed that stability and welfare of building tradesmen could be advanced within the framework of existing capitalist institutions by minimizing the dislocations attributable to: competition between contractors; fluctuations in business activity; and rivalry between craft unions as reflected in jurisdictional disputes. He was committed to holding strikes to a bare minimum and particularly to avoiding those brought on by ill-timed and unreasonable union demands. McCarthy recognized that the opportunity to limit price competition by standardizing labour costs in a labour intensive industry such as this would be attractive to building industry employers. Needless to say, contractors also welcomed the reduction in jurisdictional disputes which continually plagued the industry. Support from most employers in the industry was a significant factor in the success of this venture. McCarthy worked towards

his goal, first by enhancing and holding firmly his power within the Building Trades Council and, secondly, by careful exercise of the economic power of the Council in the construction industry.

McCarthy had a great advantage for securing power within the organization in virtue of his triumph over the mill operators. It attracted to him a following among leaders of important local unions affiliated with the Council. In form the government of the Council consisted of a body of delegates from affiliated local unions with representation based on size. McCarthy cultivated a group of supporters from large enough local unions and with sufficient balance to give him a dependable working majority. This was the 'McCarthy Machine' balanced according to the ethnic groups which were significantly represented in the construction labour force, including Irish, German, English, Scotch and Scandinavian. It became his vehicle for dominating the Council. It is probably not accidental that his handling of this group resembled that of Irish politicians who rose to power in large American groups in the democratic party. Just as progressives in that era of American history vehemently disapproved of urban Irish political machines, they were highly critical of McCarthy's ruling oligarchy and its methods.

These critics were not without a basis for their criticism of the McCarthy junta. It never gave its opposition a chance. Members of the group knew 'above all how to maintain themselves in control'. (32) McCarthy himself was a valuable asset for retaining control. He presided at monthly meetings of the Council almost without exception - appearing regularly even while Mayor of San Francisco. His stamina, oratorical ability and skill in handling the assemblage made opposition difficult. Keeping opposition at bay also meant that the Council frequently exercised the power to refuse to seat unacceptable delegates sent up by constituent unions, in one case chastising the roofers' union for attempting to 'trifle with the council' when it sent the same delegate to the Council again six months after he had been refused a seat. (33) The Council occasionally invoked the procedures for trial and expulsion of a delegate who became troublesome, even resorting to depriving the expelled delegate of his quarterly working card in rare instances. (34) In the course of its reign the McCarthy group felt compelled to thwart a movement to restore the use of the referendum in the Council. Adherents of the movement believed the referendum could be a valuable check on what they considered to be McCarthy's arbitrary use of power; however, they did not succeed as evidenced by the fact that the Council made no use of the referendum from 1904 to 1921. (35) McCarthy's men occasionally resorted to more drastic measures around election time. Ballot box stuffing and manipulation of membership lists were used when the situation required it.

Internal control afforded by operation of this well-oiled machine, McCarthy was able to accomplish his objective of stability. Control of labour supply was realized through membership restriction by local unions and use of working cards. Local unions were only too glad to restrict supply. The problem was rather in convincing them to admit new members when real shortages arose as in the case of building the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915. Working cards were not new, but their issuance by a building trades council and thorough enforcement by a council was an innovation. Every quarter local unions received a working card for each of its paid-up members and no one was permitted on a job without one. Business agents employed by the Building Trades Council, operating under McCarthy's careful supervision, policed construction sites throughout the city. Effective enforcement under the stern scrutiny of P.H. McCarthy was the key element here, and it was instrumental in establishing San Francisco's reputation as a bastion of the closed shop.

Another of McCarthy's innovations was to centralize control over collective bargaining in the hands of the Building Trades Council. Ordinarily the local union negotiates, but in San Francisco this vital function was transferred to the Council which, in effect, made it the responsibility of P.H. McCarthy. Demands continued to originate in local unions, but if approved by the Council were presented by the Council to the employers'

association for the craft involved. (36) This system contributed to stability by facilitating the application of an over-all wage policy which generally restrained demands made by excessively militant locals and delivered great force to those of weak affiliates. Two other stabilizing elements for which McCarthy was responsible were the Council's rule prohibiting jurisdictional strikes and use of the union label on building materials. Whenever a dispute between crafts arose over work jurisdiction, the Council required that it be presented to its executive board for quick resolution. (37)

Affiliated unions abided by this rule as well as its rule on negotiations because they knew that McCarthy could exact harsh penalties for their refusal. Employers welcomed this rule as did mill-owners the Council's rule that all mill work used either be stamped with the union label identifying it as fabricated in San Francisco or, if brought in from outside, that it be certified as having been produced under union scale of wages and hours at least equal to those in San Francisco.

### EXCURSION INTO POLITICS

While distinctly secondary to his labour leadership, McCarthy's venture into politics warrants at least a brief sketch. In San Francisco it was common for labour leaders to aspire to politics and McCarthy maintained political connections from his early days in the city, but did not become seriously involved until his unsuccessful first campaign for mayor in 1907. He ran on the ticket of the Union Labor Party, a creation of trade unionists in the city in 1901, which McCarthy had originally opposed based on the rule of business unionists that engaging in partisan politics was counterproductive. By 1907 this party had three times elected to the office of mayor its own candidate, Eugen Schmitz. However, in his third term he became embroiled in graft scandals and was later convicted of extortion. Schmitz's demise created the opportunity for McCarthy and, though losing in 1907, he was elected in 1909. His campaign for a second term in 1911 met with defeat and marked the end of the Union Labor Party was a formidable political force. (38) McCarthy's single term as mayor was uneventful, but punctuated by his successful effort to persuade the United States Congress to make San Francisco the site of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915 to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. Needless to say, the Exposition was a boon to the city's construction industry and was, as McCarthy declared, built entirely by unionized craftsmen. (39)

The final episode in McCarthy's odyssey in the cause of organized labour occurred in January of 1922. At that time his retirement from leadership in the Building Trades Council was forced by the successful 'American Plan' or nation-wide open shop campaign which enveloped even the San Francisco business community. The elaborate structure of union power he had erected was replaced by open shop conditions in construction throughout the reactionary decade of the twenties. Thereafter, McCarthy became a building contractor and later a stockbroker. He died in San Francisco on July 1, 1933. Thus ended the odyssey of a Limerick carpenter who left his mark on the building industry and West Coast labour.

### INFERENCES

Understanding Irish influence on American trade unions may be furthered by interpreting the career of P.J. McCarthy with the aid of generalizations drawn from studies of the Irish in American politics. (40) This seems valid because of the similarity in roles between politicians and labour leaders. Both are 'politicians' in the sense that they typically seek power in an urban environment, represent a constituency, must command a following and periodically stand for election. It is reasonable to suppose that the Irish brought to trade unions the same tendencies evident in their involvement in politics. Command of English language and institutions (especially government ones) gave the Irish an advantage over other immigrant groups in politics, enabling them to assume the role of broker or mediator

between diverse nationality groups. (41) McCarthy's career exhibits these features. Even as a newly-arrived immigrant his language was a distinct asset and permitted him to put his considerable powers of persuasion to work almost at once. This underlines the ease with which he cultivated the arts of organizer, benefiting much from the example of P.J. McGuire. Almost immediately he grasped the implications of ethnic diversity in the labour force and adapted to them as had his fellow Irish in the arena of politics. It enabled him to bring cohesion to competing ethnic groups and rival occupational crafts in the construction work force. As we have seen, his leadership group within the internal politics of the Building Trades Council was the counterpart of the balanced ticket in city politics.

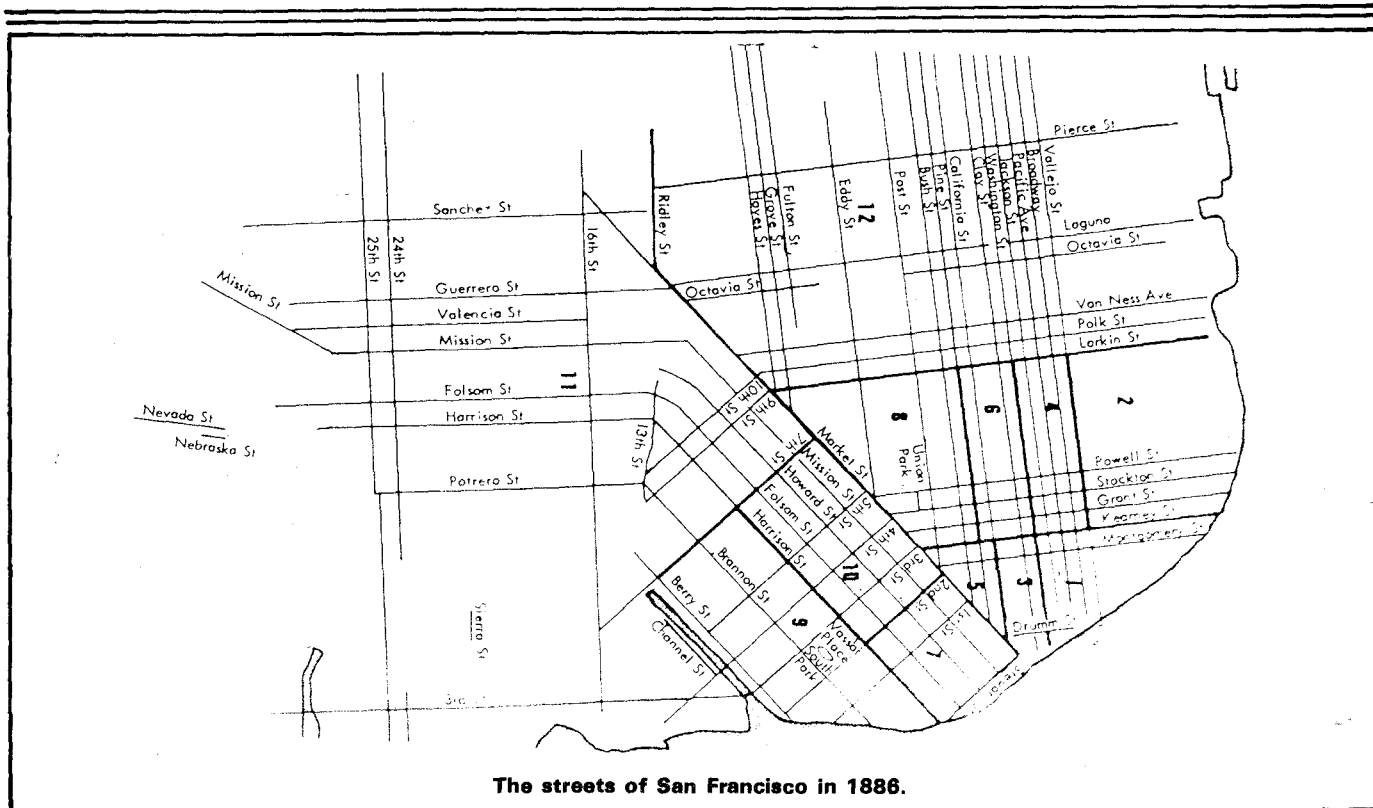
Once in power, Irish politicians tended to be conservative and to avoid programmes for basic social changes. (42) They lacked social vision. The great emphasis they placed on stability was also characteristic of McCarthy. While this is in the realm of speculation, it is said to be a reflection of the Irish village which 'was a place of stable predictable social relations in which almost everyone had a role to play, under the surveillance of a stern oligarchy of elders, and in which, on the whole, a person's position was likely to improve with time'. (43) Properly understood, this is not bad as a description of the operation of the Building Trades Council. Of Irish politicians in the United States it is said that 'they never thought of politics as an instrument of social change.' (44) It may be observed that McCarthy in no way advocated a basic change in the economic or social system as a whole or in the construction industry in particular. He sought to advance the interests of building tradesmen within the framework of the existing wage and property system.

This type of leadership was also characteristic of McCarthy's most influential contemporaries among Irish union officials in San Francisco. These included Michael Casey and John P. McLaughlin, leaders of the Teamsters' Union, and Andrew P. Gallagher and John O'Connell, officials of the San Francisco Labor Council, a federation encompassing all local unions in the city. Typical of these men was Casey, an immigrant from Donegal. Despite the misleading nickname of 'Bloody Mike', he was a moderate, a foe of class war ideology and unnecessary or ill-advised strikes. Frequently a mediator of disputes involving other unions, he was respected by union and business leaders alike after leading the infant Teamsters' Union through a severe test of survival at the hands of the Employers' Association in 1901. (45) Acceptance of such men by the business community was far more easily achieved because of their moderation and pragmatism. Like the social conservatism of the Irish politician, it was an important ingredient of their success. Although this group of men, as we have said, the most influential among Irish labour leaders in the city, had much in common, it should not be assumed that they made up a close-knit harmonious group. Far from it. They were often at odds and not infrequently they and their respective organizations were engaged in bitter feuds with each other. Perhaps this is also an aspect of their 'Irishness'. In any case, Peter C. Yorke, priest with a special ministry to labour and the Irish community, spent much of his time engaged in efforts to reconcile their differences. (46)

It is clear that McCarthy's career and apparently those of his Irish labour contemporaries in San Francisco had much in common with those of Irish politicians in America of this period. Our knowledge of Irish politicians provides a useful framework for understanding their motives and methods. But one cannot ask too much of a case study of this kind. Whether or not the traits noted here are representative or typical of Irish labour leaders around the country can only be determined through additional research.

### NOTES

- (1). Jack Barbash, 'Ethnic Factors in the Development of the Labor Movement', in George W. Brooks et al, *Interpreting the Labor Movement*, Madison, Wisconsin, Industrial Relations Research Association, 1952, p. 73.
- (2). See: David Doyle, 'The Irish and American Labor 1880-1929',



The streets of San Francisco in 1886.

- Saothar 2, *Journal of the Irish Labor History Society*, May 1976, pp. 42-53. Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1956 (Chapter XX 'The Irish in the Labor Movement').
- (3). Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932*, New York, Macmillan, 1935, pp. 76-81 (Volume IV of History by John R. Commons and Associates).
  - (4). B. Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1935.
  - (5). Frederick I. Ryan, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Building Trades*. Norman, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1935. Robert F.I., Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918*, Berkeley, Univ. of California press, 1960.
  - (6). Patrick H. McCarthy, Unpublished Memories, xeroxed, n.d. (hereinafter referred to as simply memoirs). A copy of the memoirs was made available by P.J. McCarthy, Jr., prominent labour attorney in San Francisco.
  - (7). Ray Stannard Baker, 'A Corner in Labor', *McClure's Magazine*, February 1904, p. 372.
  - (8). See photograph, Cross History ... p. 235.
  - (9). McCarthy's Memoirs and other sources identify March 17, 1863, as his date of birth; however, this is not correct. A microfilmed copy of the parish register from Newcastle West (available in the Genealogical Office, Dublin Castle) reviewed by the writer records the baptism of Patrick McCarthy, child of Patrick McCarthy and Ellen Hough, on March 18, 1860. This date was confirmed in a letter to the writer from Daniel G. O'Brien, parish priest, Newcastle West, dated April 13, 1975, after he had consulted the original parish register.
  - (10). Memoirs, p.2.
  - (11). Ibid., pp. 6-7.
  - (12). Ibid., pp. 7-12, McCarthy does not identify the church and the priests by name but they were identified through interviews with Joseph and Patrick McCormack of Ardagh, County Limerick, grandnephews of James McCormack, and with the help of elders in the parish of Ballingarry, including Michael Quinn, Michael O'Grady and G.T.S. Trainor, Canon John Fitzgibbon of Ballingarry was especially helpful.
  - (13). John Archdeacon Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the Present Time*, Dublin, Browne & Nolan Ltd., 1938, pp. 558-559.
  - (14). He was probably anxious since his predecessor Rev. James Enright who had initiated the project was forced to discontinue construction after only a few feet were completed when the funds he had raised were exhausted. Ibid., P. 558.
  - (15). Memoirs, pp. 12-13.
  - (16). L.M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660*, New York, Harper & Row, 1972, pp. 146-149, P.J. Meghen, *Limerick Rural Survey*, (Vol. V, Social History) Dublin, Stationery Office, n.d., pp. 91-92.
  - (17). Memoirs, p. 6
  - (18). Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75', *American Historical Review*, June 1971, pp. 651-652.
  - (19). Memoirs, pp. 15-17.
  - (20). Ibid., p. 16.
  - (21). Ibid., pp. 61-62.
  - (22). Robert A. Christie, *Empire in Wood*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1956, pp. 35, 37.
  - (23). John R. Commons and Associates, *History of Labor...*, vol. II, p. 231.
  - (24). Memoirs, p. 21.
  - (25). Ibid., p. 25.
  - (26). Ibid., pp. 36-37.
  - (27). Ibid., p. 36.
  - (28). *Organized Labor*, Jan. 12, 1901, p. 4 (Organ of the San Francisco Building Trades Council).
  - (29). Memoirs, pp. 53-57.
  - (30). See accounts in: Knight, pp. 52-55, pp. 105-109; Cross pp. 233-234.
  - (31). Memoirs, p. 113. McGuire's opposition was based upon his conviction that any effort to win the eight-hour day for millmen was both unprecedented, and bound to fail. He was convinced that the union would merely be throwing its money away.
  - (32). Perlman and Taft, p. 77.
  - (33). *Organized Labor*, Dec. 29, 1906, p. 5.
  - (34). Ryan, p. 30.
  - (35). Ibid., p. 37.
  - (36). Ibid., p. 112.
  - (37). Ibid., p. 67.
  - (38). Knight, p. 244.
  - (39). Memoirs, p. 196.
  - (40). See Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1963, (Chapter titled 'The Irish'). Edward M. Levine, *The Irish and Irish Politicians*. Notre Dame, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1966. William W. Shannon, *The American Irish*, New York, Macmillan, 1963. Andrew M. Greeley, *That Most Distressful Nation*, Chicago, Quadrangel Books, 1972 (Chapter titled 'The Irish Politician').
  - (41). Greeley, p. 206.
  - (42). Glazer and Moynihan, p. 229.
  - (43). Ibid., p. 226.
  - (44). Ibid., p. 229.
  - (45). Knight, p. 383.
  - (46). See Bernard C. Cronin, *Father Yorke and the Labor Movement in San Francisco, 1900-1910*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1943.