

by maintaining secret watch on Bobby Byrnes' home, and by trailing his mother to Ryan's. On the day following the rescue attempt, detachments of the Scottish Horse, accompanied by R.I.C. men, moved in on Knocklisheen and sealed off the area. In an upstairs room in Ryan's home, they found the body of the man they wanted, covered by a blood-stained overcoat. At his bedside were his mother and aunt, and the broken-hearted pair were arrested and taken to the R.I.C. barrack. Later, the body was handed over to the relatives, and Bobby Byrnes was laid out in Michael Brennan's Volunteer uniform. But the R.I.C. would have none of this. They would deny him the honour of going to his grave in the uniform of his country's army, and so they stripped the body. Michael Brennan, a top-ranking officer in the East Clare Brigade, protested at this indignity to a dead soldier, during the inquest.

Thousands of mourners lined the route from the quiet farmhouse to St. John's Cathedral, Limerick, as the funeral of the Volunteer officer made its sad journey. The coffin, draped in the Tricolour, was borne silently along the winding roads and through the crowded city streets, and hundreds of Limerick and Clare Volunteers marched in the cortege. Thousands of mourners again lined the footpaths and the roads on the following morning, when the funeral took place after Requiem Mass in the Cathedral. Behind the draped coffin, which was borne on the shoulders of his comrades for the whole of the three-mile journey to Mount St. Laurence cemetery, marched the Volunteers, silently and proudly.

The British army had turned out too. Armoured cars nosed around and their machine-gun turrets swivelled ominously. Overhead droned enemy aircraft. Along the route were posted enemy soldiers in battle dress, steel helmeted, and with bayonets fixed. And they paid tribute to a fallen foe. As the coffin passed the military guard outside William Street R.I.C. barrack, staccato commands ripped out, and, with the clash of nailed boots and the slap of hands against polished rifle butts, British soldiers came smartly to the "Present" to honour an officer of the Irish army.

Bobby Byrnes, the first Irish soldier to fall in the new phase of the War of Independence, had gone to his hero's grave in triumph over the degradations and indignities of the British penal system.

CHAPTER FIVE

A LIMERICK CHALLENGE
TO BRITISH TYRANNY

By James Casey

ON APRIL 9, 1919, the British military authorities in Ireland proclaimed the City of Limerick a special military area. Barriers were erected around the city, and parties going to and from their daily occupation had to face the bayonets of foreign soldiery and the insolence of the R.I.C. In face of this gross act of tyranny, the United Trades and Labour Council of Limerick replied with a general strike which led to one of the most momentous struggles fought against foreign domination in this country. The result was an overwhelming victory for Limerick Labour and Nationalist Ireland.

The reason given for proclaiming the city a special military area was the death of a policeman at the Union Hospital on the occasion of the rescue of Robert J. Byrnes, a prominent member of the Trades and Labour Council, who had been arrested on a charge of having possession of fire-arms. He was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour. On February 1, the feelings of his fellow-workers were expressed in the following leaflet circulated by the Council:

That we, the members of the Limerick Trades and Labour Council, assembled in conference, protest most emphatically against the treatment meted out to the political prisoners at present confined in Limerick County Jail, and view with grave alarm the inactivity of the Visiting Justices and Medical Officer. Furthermore, we call on the public representatives to do their duty to their fellow-countrymen and take the necessary steps to have the prisoners receive what they are justly entitled to, namely, political treatment; that copies of this resolution be submitted to the local Press, Visiting Justices and Medical Officer.

During the discussion which took place at the meeting

of the Council, it was disclosed that on Saturday, February 1, Robert J. Byrnes of Townwall Cottage, a well-known citizen and member of the Trades Council, was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour, because a revolver was found at his mother's house. Naturally, he protested against the barbarous sentence. He was backed up by the political prisoners then confined in Limerick jail. At first they resorted to constitutional methods, but, finding those unavailing, they had recourse to more vigorous procedure. The jail authorities then called for the assistance of the R.I.C. and when the police arrived they entered the cells and deprived the prisoners of their boots, handcuffed them, and, in addition, strapped many of them securely. In that shocking condition they were kept, night and day.

In the jail also was a man who had been convicted of the manslaughter of a girl in circumstances of revolting brutality. He had been sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment in the first division by a judge lenient to his ilk. This man was given nothing to do, and was supplied with such comforts as a cot, books, newspapers, slippers, glasses, writing materials, in fact, almost everything that could be procured in a first-class hotel. Men who had committed no crime believed that they were entitled to the treatment that this criminal was being given. Yet those responsible for the administration of law in Ireland at that time treated the criminal as a gentleman and tried to degrade the political prisoners, who held honour dearer than life and who, while ready to suffer for their national principles, would never willingly submit to be branded as criminals. In that attitude they naturally expected the vigorous support of the people of Limerick. Because of the barbarous treatment meted out to them, Byrnes and others went on hunger strike and he was eventually removed to the workhouse hospital, as his life was in danger. As already described in another chapter, Byrnes was shot in his hospital bed by his R.I.C. guard when an attempt was made to rescue him, and he died the same evening in a house to which he had been carried. During the attempted rescue, one of the R.I.C. guard had been shot dead and the others wounded. The proclamation of the city followed, and when it became known that barriers with military and R.I.C. guards, tanks and armoured cars, were to be erected on all the roads and bridges, strong resentment was expressed by the workers towards the attempt to prevent them attending to their work. Permits to enter the city

were to be granted by the military, but in reality the people were at the mercy of the R.I.C. Those who asked for permits had to present themselves at an office where they were first vetted by the R.I.C. If the police thought the applicant a fit and proper person to be given a permit, one whose loyalty was beyond doubt, they might recommend him to the military authorities who then recorded his height, weight, the colour of his hair, eyes, and other details. Those particulars were all entered on a card which was duly stamped and dated. In some instances, applicants for permits had to go through the ordeal every day, as the permits were granted only from day to day. It is easy to visualise that it was impossible for workers to carry on under such conditions.

Accordingly, on April 13, the Limerick Trades and Labour Council, which was composed of the representatives of thirty-five trades unions, held a special general meeting for the purpose of considering what action should be taken to meet the hardships imposed on the workers by the military proclamation and the erection of barriers at which they had to face the bayonets of foreign soldiery and the insolence of the R.I.C. when going to, or coming from work. After deliberation at that meeting and also at a second meeting held the same evening, it was unanimously decided to order a complete general stoppage of work on the following morning, April 14. A proclamation to that effect was issued by the strike committee, and the strike began at five a.m. on Monday. Every worker obeyed the call loyally. The strike committee took charge of the entire city, and committees were immediately appointed to take care of propaganda, finance, permits, food and vigilance.

The propaganda committee was one of the most efficient and important of the many committees set up. It was in charge of a member of the Clerical Workers' Union and a member of the Typographical Society. One of its smartest bits of work was done the night the strike was declared. The strike was decided upon at 11.30 p.m. on Sunday, when all printing offices were closed; but inside of two hours the following proclamation was posted throughout the city:

LIMERICK UNITED TRADES AND LABOUR COUNCIL
PROCLAMATION

The Workers of Limerick, assembled in Council, hereby
DECLARE CESSATION OF ALL WORK from five a.m. on

MONDAY, FOURTEENTH OF APRIL, 1919, as a protest against the DECISION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IN COMPELLING THEM TO PROCURE PERMITS IN ORDER TO EARN THEIR DAILY BREAD.

By Order of the Strike Committee,
Mechanical Institute.

Any information with reference to the above can be had from the Strike Committee.

Next morning the propaganda committee took over a sympathetic printing works, and, with the permission of the printers, it was worked day and night. There was as much "sedition" printed in one hour in this office during the strike as would normally get the operators ten years' imprisonment. The propaganda committee was also responsible for drafting and printing money, printing permits, proclamations, lists of food prices, and the citizens' news sheet *The Daily Bulletin*. It was also the duty of the committee, each evening, to prepare a report of the events of the day, for the foreign press correspondents who were then in the city. These reports were issued to correspondents who undertook to have them published verbatim. It was particularly fortunate that, at the time of the strike, there were in the city numbers of correspondents from many countries, to cover a proposed transatlantic flight by a Major Woods, who was supposed to land in Limerick for re-fuelling. Those press correspondents were used to the fullest advantage, notably Mr. Morris of the Associated Press of America, whose agency served 750 U.S. newspapers; also Miss Ruth Russell, of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Mr. Philmore, of the *Paris Matin*. Those press people had direct communication with their papers through the American Cable at Valentia without interference by the British Authorities. Consequently, within twenty-four hours, the press of America and Europe published the news of the answer made by the Limerick workers to the British proclamation. An amusing incident occurred following the publication of a paragraph in a British daily pictorial which described the situation as "Limerick's Comic Opera Strike." A picket which had been immediately despatched to the hotel where the correspondent of that paper was staying, went straight to his room, and, in less than half-an-hour, he was standing before the general strike committee. Pale and trembling, he explained that the paragraph was evidently the editor's comment on the notes he had sent, and that he could

not be held responsible. A warning was issued that if anything further appeared in his paper detrimental to the interests of the strike committee, light, food and water would be immediately cut off from his hotel, and that had the desired effect.

Like any organised government, the strike committee issued and controlled its own finance.

A sub-committee attached to the propaganda committee was responsible for the printing and issuing of the famous paper money, specimens of which were later on exhibition in Limerick, Cork, Dublin, New York and San Francisco. This sub-committee was mainly composed of workers from the accounts departments of such big city firms as Cleeves, the bacon factories, the flour mills and corporation offices. A monetary scheme was devised to alleviate all immediate distress and to make possible the purchase of food. The money was issued in denominations of ten shillings, five shillings and one shilling notes, and to the tune of some thousands of pounds. The money was accepted by numbers of shopkeepers on the promise of redemption by the Trades Council. Ultimately, when the notes were redeemed, there remained a surplus from a fund that had been subscribed by sympathisers in all parts of Ireland.

The permit committee was in charge of four city councillors, men who had a thorough knowledge of the needs of the people. Permits were issued to merchants to save perishable goods, to obtain and carry such commodities as coal, butter and flour from the railway station to traders. The necessary labour to maintain plant was provided in the gas and electricity works and in factories. Every effort was made to prevent inconvenience. Permits were also issued to doctors, chauffeurs and car drivers, when necessary. Applications from American, Continental and British journalists also resulted in permission being given to interview Major Woods on his proposed Atlantic flight. Sir Stephen Quinn obtained a permit to remove from the city the petrol necessary for Major Woods' machine, on condition that Sir Stephen would tell the major that it was through the permission of the strike committee that the flight was taking place. Another American journalist in need of a change of linen made an eloquent appeal to the committee for permission to buy a shirt. The chairman, not convinced of the urgency of the request, brought him before the general strike committee. That committee was busy at the time, and one of

its members suggested that the American should get a short shift. It is not recorded whether he availed of the suggestion.

The food committee was divided into two sections, one for the reception of food and one for its distribution. The farmers of the surrounding districts rose nobly to the occasion and sent in tons of food supplies. Rev. Father Kennedy of Ennis did great work among the farmers of Clare in getting food for the besieged people of Limerick. Through his efforts, ably assisted by the Dalcassians, the food problem was eased. The committee established four food distribution depots from which the traders were supplied at prices fixed by the committee. Any trader found not carrying out instructions was immediately closed by the picket and his supplies were stopped. A vigilance committee watched the distribution of foodstuffs and saw that there was no profiteering or unequal distribution, and that the prices, as published by the food committee, were adhered to strictly. Shopkeepers were required to use discretion in the rationing of supplies and to see that no undue quantities of foodstuffs were given to individuals. Equality of sacrifice was for all classes.

The pickets, which were numerous, paid particular attention to the opening and closing of shops at the prescribed hours, for the sale of necessary food, and they regulated queues outside provision shops and controlled traffic. In fact, it was generally admitted that the city was never guarded or policed so well before. The people, for once, were doing their own work and doing it properly. Publichouses were not allowed to open during the strike. Neither British soldiers nor so-called police (R.I.C.) were in evidence. There was no looting, and not a single court case came up for hearing at the petty sessions.

The only vehicles allowed on the streets were those owned by persons who had appeared before the permits' committee and obtained the necessary permission. Any car that appeared without displaying the notice: "Working under authority of the Strike Committee"—was immediately ordered off the streets by the citizen police. An officer of the United States army arrived by train and obtained the necessary military permit to enter the city. It was his intention to visit relatives in the country, but he could not induce any of the hackney men to drive him to his destination. In time, he appeared before the appropriate committee and was

given a permit to proceed. He delivered a spirited address in which he promised to expose British rule in Ireland when he returned to the States. "I guess," he concluded, "it is some puzzle to know who rules in these parts. One has to get a military permit to get in, and be brought before the committee to get a permit to leave."

A typewritten notice posted up in the streets by the military, disclaimed responsibility for the inconveniences caused to the people, and placed the blame for such upon "certain irresponsible individuals." To this the strike committee replied:

Fellow Citizens—As it has come to our notice that the military authorities are endeavouring to spread the falsehood that it is we rather than they who are trying to starve you, we hereby disclaim any such intentions, as we have already made every arrangement whereby foodstuffs will be distributed to our fellow citizens. Our fight is not against our own people but against the inhuman and tyrannical imposition of martial law by the British Government which is solely responsible.

As peaceful workers, we only desire that we should be left alone to exercise the right of free men in our own country. What is happening in Limerick now, what may happen hereafter, will be laid at the door of the British Government, and in our fight for freedom we disclaim responsibility for the doings of the said Government.

We confidently appeal to our fellow citizens of Limerick to aid us in preserving the order of our city and to co-operate with us in every way in making the strike effective. Should any suffering or inconvenience be occasioned, we rely on the men and women of Limerick, inspired as they are by old and proud traditions, to suffer them patiently, as our forefathers did before us in the glorious cause of freedom. Limerick has proud and noble traditions to uphold, and now in our hour of trial, we confidently rely on Limerick to fight gallantly in this glorious cause in which we shall soon have millions of supporters from all over the world.

And from the Bishop and clergy of the city came the following manifesto:

1. That we consider the proclamation of the City of Limerick in existing circumstances as quite unwarrantable without investigation of any kind. The citizens of Limerick are being penalised for the commentable incidents at the Limerick Workhouse.

2. That the military arrangements of the funeral of the late Mr. Robert Byrnes were unnecessarily aggressive and provocative. The presence of armoured cars on the route and the hovering of aeroplanes over the city during the funeral procession were quite an uncalled for display, in the circumstances, of military power, and calculated to fill every right-minded person with feelings of disgust and abhorrence.
3. That in fixing the boundaries of the military area, the responsible authorities have shown a lamentable want of consideration for the convenience of the citizens at large and especially for the working classes.

(Signed) DENIS HALLINAN,
Bishop of Limerick;

David Canon O'Driscoll, P.P., V.G., St. Munchin's; David Canon Keane, St. Munchin's College; Michael Murphy, P.P., St. Patrick's; P. A. O'Connor, P.P., St. Mary's; B. J. Connelly, Adm., St. John's; Father Bonaventure, O.F.M., Guardian, Henry Street; P. Hennessy, Prior, O.S.A.; S. M. Fahy, O.P., Prior; L. B. Potter, S.J., Rector; J. F. Kelly, C.S.S.R., Director of the Men's Confraternity.

At a special meeting of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce held on April 19, a resolution, couched in strongest terms, was passed and sent to Mr. Bonar Law, the British statesman. It demanded that martial law be removed. Martial law was removed, and, on April 26, the strike committee ordered all back to work, having demonstrated to the world that the people of Ireland united were competent to manage their own affairs without interference, whatever the pretext. During the entire two weeks of Limerick's protest there was not a single case of looting or disorder of any kind.

The women of Limerick, true to their grand traditions, played a noble part in the general strike, and the spirit even of the very poorest was inspiring. Sarsfield himself would have been proud of such defenders of his city. From 1690 to 1919 was a long stretch, but the spirit of Limerick was as strong, proud and defiant at the time of the great general strike as when William battered its walls in vain. The city had sustained two memorable sieges in the past, and the third proved as big a stumbling block to British tyranny as any of its predecessors.

While the Trades Council and strike committees controlled

all activities inside Limerick city, during the general strike, the Irish Republican Army was busy without. Supplies of much-needed food for the beleaguered population were systematically collected from neighbouring towns and villages. After nightfall, relays of boats, with muffled oars, were successfully used to run the food and other supplies through the blockade, and to maintain communication with the citizens. Numerous stratagems were employed to elude the military cordons, and funeral hearses from the Union Hospital and other districts outside the city did not always have corpses in the coffins.

CHAPTER SIX

FAILURE OF AN ATTEMPT TO RESCUE HOSTAGES

By Bill Kelly

A CHILL MARCH MORNING dampness lay about the awakening city of Limerick as church bells, calling the people to early Mass, tolled also that curfew had ended. Through the seven o'clock darkness men slipped quietly, singly or in pairs, on their way towards Shaws bacon factory in Mulgrave Street. They were of the Limerick City Second Battalion I.R.A. and were being mobilised to attempt the rescue of two of their comrades from British forces. It was Sunday, March 13, 1921, and a superstitious I.R.A. man was to blame the date for the failure of the enterprise. In fact, it failed not because thirteen is held to be unlucky by the superstitious, not because it had not been properly planned, and certainly not for want of determined men. It failed simply because the British, constantly on the alert for trouble, had become suspicious of the strange behaviour of their prisoners and of noises that emanated from the bacon factory which was never in production on Sundays.

For months past, the British had been frequently attacked by the I.R.A. active service units in the city and recently they decided to ensure the safety of their personnel in trucks and convoys, as far as possible, by carrying hostages. The carrying of hostages by the enemy had become general throughout the country, and the British in Limerick knew