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Eirí Amach na Cásca (Part 3)

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The following is abridged from Mr. McCormack's book, "The Road to Rebellion.

In 1911, near 26,000 families lived in Dublin's inner-city tenements; 20,000 in former apartments divided into one room flats. They died in great numbers from cholera, typhus, influenza and TB. Requests for improvements to unsanitary conditions were ignored by the Dublin Corporation since 16 of its members owned tenements in the slums and actively prevented enforcement of regulations against their properties. Other counties were just as bad as low wages forced workers to the cheap life in the slums to which those fortunate enough to have jobs returned, after putting in 17-hour days.

Early attempts at organizing labor unions had been made by James Connolly in 1896, but with limited success since workers were so intimidated by management. In 1903, Connolly accepted an invitation to work with the American labor movement and emigrated, ending up in Troy, NY. Then in 1908, along came Big Jim Larkin. He began to harvest the seeds Connolly had sewn, organizing all workers, Protestant and Catholic, regardless of trade, into one large **Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU)**. Meanwhile, in America, Connolly was involved in the International Workers of the World promoting the idea of one union for all workers allowing the use of sympathy strikes to empower action. He published a newspaper aimed at the Irish in America's labor market and included articles on events in Ireland. Noting Larkin's struggle, he soon realized that Ireland was where his heart had always been and he returned in 1910. He settled in Belfast to help Larkin organize his union along the lines of the IWW. In a year's time, Connolly moved his family to Dublin and, with Larkin and William O'Brien, helped to organize the **Irish Trade Union Congress and Labor Party**. They were able to secure wage increases for some workers, but the idea of one giant union was beginning to worry employers. By 1913, 30,000 workers had signed up making the General Workers union Ireland's largest.

Enter William Martin Murphy – an example of how an Irish Catholic could succeed by working within the system of the oppressor. He owned the Dublin Tramway System as well as the largest newspaper, department store and hotel. He claimed that he was not against craft unions, but opposed Larkin's idea where workers would control everything, even the government. The union's success was from sympathy strikes because when all workers belonged to one union, it was easy to get strikers to walk off related jobs. In 1912, more than 400 nervous employers responded to Murphy's call to form the **Dublin Employers' Federation Ltd. (DEF)** to break Larkin's Union by refusing to recognize the ITGWU. Murphy demanded that his workers reapply for their jobs and a condition of acceptance was a pledge to shun the union. This act of challenging the worker's right to organize provoked the greatest labor struggle in the history of Western Europe. Larkin and Connolly saw this as a death threat to their union and knew that they had to act! They called a walkout by Murphy's tram workers on 26 August 1913 – the first day of the Dublin horse show! The workers walked off the job and Murphy fired them all! He brought in scab labor protected by the **Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP)**.



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A strike is a weapon to gain concessions, but this strike sought no concessions, it was a matter of self-defense. Clashes between workers and police-protected scabs broke out in various places during which police baton-charged the workers. A warrant was issued for Larkin's arrest claiming he incited the riots. Larkin promised to address his followers the next day from the balcony of Murphy's hotel. On 31 August, police surrounded the hotel and allowed no one to enter except one elderly clergyman. It was Larkin! Disguised by the great patriot and Abbey Theater actress, Helena Molony, Larkin appeared on the balcony, pulled off a fake beard and addressed the huge crowd to wild cheers. Police forced their way up to the balcony and arrested Larkin. Then they baton-charged the crowd, killing two and injuring hundreds. Larkin called for sympathy strikes against all parts of Murphy's DEF and the merchants fired all members of Larkin's union and replaced them with scabs and unemployed workers from England! This preposterous act became known as the **Great Dublin Lockout**. By 29 September, more than 25,000 workers were locked out of their jobs. With the help of Countess Markievicz, Larkin set up food kitchens at union headquarters in Liberty Hall to feed the striking workers families and the AOH in America sent more than a \$1,000. (\$25,000. today) to striking members of the AOH American Alliance.

Then, Connolly met Jack White, a disaffected former British Army officer, who proposed the creation of a worker's militia to protect picket lines from assaults by the DMP and gangs in the pay of the employers. The notion of a Citizen Army, drilled by White, was enthusiastically accepted as White stated, *to put manners on the police*. In 1913, the Countess helped White form the **Irish Citizen Army** which would become a far more significant force than either of them ever planned. The Citizen Army drilled and trained at Liberty Hall and even purchased uniforms and arms to alert the DMP that they could no longer attack workers with impunity. However, despite the assistance provided to the union, as winter winds began to blast the tenements, it was evident that they could not sustain the fight and starving workers began to drift back to work on the employers' terms. In January 1914, Larkin conceded, *we are beaten*. But they had achieved something more significant. They opposed Murphy's attempt to destroy the union and in that they succeeded. Plus they had created a fighting force in the Citizen Army that would soon join with the IRB, Irish Volunteers, Hibernian Rifles, Cumann na mBan and Fianna Eireann to become the Irish Republican Army and strike for Ireland's freedom on Easter Monday, 1916.

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