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Workers' Party of Ireland

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What is Happening to Dublin Port

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WHAT IS HAPPENING TO DUBLIN PORT

The work-force is being run down in Ireland's chief port. In the cross-channel section of Dublin Port the number of dockers has fallen in the last nine years from nearly 1,100 TO 120. The number of deep-sea dockers has fallen from 1,300 in 1964 to 804 in 1974.

If there are any further redundancies, with present redundancy payments, this will place additional costs on the port which has already lost trade - the banana trade, milk power, most of the meat trade and black wire.

Containers have reduced the amount of cargo handling and this is only one of the new methods which have been introduced. All the world's chief ports are going through a period of change. Working conditions and rates of pay in the Dublin docks have been won by trade union activity over a long number of years.

WHAT PROBLEMS ARE LIKELY TO ARISE FROM THE MODERNISATION OF THE PORT ?
What is the experience of ports in Britain in similar circumstances?

In Britain various employers -exporters of special products and container-packing contractors- attempted to use the new situation to undermine long established rates of pay and conditions in the ports. Container-packing bases were established in yards and open spaces, sometimes many miles from a port. Rates of pay and working conditions in these places in no way compared to those which operated in the ports. At least one open prison in Britain does this work which in fact, in this particular case, using slave labour.

Employers claim that new methods reduce costs; this is not strictly true because they usually put the saving in their pockets and call it profit. Saving costs in this way is just another name for a cut in wages which if attempted in any port would be strongly resisted.

British dockers became aware of the real situation when the new system was in operation for a period of time. One large container depot -Chobham Farm- was picketed by dockers in 1972. This container-packing firm were eventually forced to engage dockers to do this work at traditional port rates of pay.

British dockers have succeeded in forcing many container firms to employ dockers to do this work of packing containers. The efforts to force the employment at Aintree Container Base, near Liverpool, succeeded after four years. Dockers are also employed at the big Barking container base in London.

The experience of the British dockers is of value to the Dublin dockers and shows that it is possible to hold on to established rates under new conditions.

The measure of the British dockers success can be judged from the fact that the British government has announced its intention to designate all cargo-handling operations within five miles of a port as dockwork.

Dublin port occupies a very special position in Ireland. It is the only deep water port on the east coast of the state and is capable of receiving ships of up to 200,000 tons. 45% of the international trade of the republic originates or terminates (in the case of exports) within 40 miles of Dublin port.

Sinn Fein have made a study of the Dublin port area in the same way as we have made a study of other areas of national life. We are concerned about the question of falling employment in the port and about the development of the port. We believe that this country's major port should be much more than a place where goods are shipped from or landed.

We believe that people who work and are concerned with the life of the port should have some say in its management. We support the establishment of a properly constituted Port and Bay Development Authority to oversee all existing bodies. This should be representative of all the public and state authorities and trade unions in the port area. There are at present twelve stevedoring firms in Dublin port; this work could be more effectively done by a port authority.

We believe in the development of industry in the port which by comparison with other ports of its size has little industry.

Jobs are difficult to get in Dublin where there are now 33,000 people out of work. We believe that the building of a refinery in the port can provide the finance to develop the port and to create employment.