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Locked Out: The 1905 Dispute Between the AGIBSLTU and the Master Builders
Association

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Introduction

By the turn of the twentieth century the foundations of the modern Irish trade union movement had been laid. These trade unions were permanent organizations representing a wide range of both manual and non-manual employees, with the Irish Trades Union Congress (ITUC) providing a focal point for co-ordination. Many Irish workers joined amalgamated unions during the latter quarter of the 19th century, so that by 1900 the majority of unionized Irish workers were members of British based societies.

Callan points out that most branches of amalgamated unions in Dublin had originally existed as local unions.¹ The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners experienced slow growth in Ireland for more than 20 years. Then, in 1891, the Regular Carpenters of Dublin merged with this union to give it its first substantial Irish membership.² Similarly, the Regular Operative Slaters and Tilers of Dublin, founded in 1860, joined with the Amalgamated Society of Tilers in 1896.³ At the time this was the general pattern followed by skilled tradesmen in Ireland. The added resources of the British based unions were attractive, and drew their Irish counterparts towards amalgamation. But, not all Irish trade unions went down this route.

The arrival of the amalgamated unions also led, in some circumstances, to inter- union rivalry, as domestic and British based unions fought over members. There were some fierce struggles in the building trade between the rival unions. In 1899 the

National Association of Operative Plasterers challenged the Stucco Plasterers in Dublin.⁴ The Stucco Plasterers managed to survive, holding on to its membership base. However, this inter-union rivalry created distrust between trade unions, and their memberships. It tended to result in institutional overlap, duplication of structures, and a multitude of societies. Inter-union rivalry also created difficulties for employers, as they sometimes found themselves caught between warring unions.

During the late 1880s assertive New Unions emerged in Britain. In 1889 there was a strike by dock workers in London which paralyzed the port.⁵ This strike, above all others in the period, is seen by many writers as representing the culmination of union activity in the wake of the Trade Union Acts in the 1870s.⁶ By 1900 there were estimated to be two million trade unionists in both skilled and unskilled unions in Britain and Ireland.⁷ Their new assertiveness would ultimately lead to a legal and employer backlash, the former evident in the Taff Vale case in Wales, and *Quinn v Leatham* in Belfast, both in 1901.

But, despite the transformations occurring in trade unionism across the United Kingdom at this time, the bricklayers' union examined here, continued to grow steadily in an Irish setting. Although it had experienced various setbacks throughout the 19th century, by the beginning of the 20th century it was poised to move from being a Dublin-based union to a national union. Although not immune to the events occurring around it, this union showed a remarkable ability to insulate itself from radical transformation, and resist the influence of its British based rivals.

In this context, when the issue of a lockout in Dublin comes up for discussion, invariably, the Great Lockout of 1913 springs to mind. This event, in both its scale

and scope, has tended to crowd out the examination of all other lockouts that occurred in the city in the early years of the 20th century. Beside the Great Lockout contemporary industrial disputes have tended to pale in comparison. As a result of its magnitude, the 1913 lockout has provided a vast reservoir of research material that has been heavily mined. However, this concentration on 1913 could lead to the erroneous conclusion that there were few other lockouts at the time, and the few which occurred were of little significance, since little has been written about them.

A consequence of this blinkered approach is that many labour disputes at the start of the 20th century in Ireland have faded into history. The one examined here involved a lockout in the building trades that lasted for four months in the spring and early summer of 1905. This dispute is noteworthy as it provides an insight into how a small Irish trade union, of limited means, as opposed to an amalgamated union, conducted itself during a bruising confrontation. We will examine the tactics utilised by the employers to break the union, and the union's response in order to deflect the employers' assault. This examination also provides an insight into the lives of trade unionists, their union, and the wider society at the time.

The Origins of the AGIBSLTU

The bricklayers union had a long history in Dublin, which it claimed dated back to the ancient guild that preceded it. That guild, the Guild of Saint Bartholomew, had been established by Royal Charter in 1670.⁸ In the 1860s the union was called The Regular Operative Brick and Stonelayers. A decade later it had become The Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin,⁹ and when it formally registered as a

trade union in 1888, its name became the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.¹⁰ It was based at 49 Cuffe Street, a building that became known as the Bricklayers' Hall.

Until the 1890s the union had been mainly Dublin based, having branches in Kingstown, Bray and Newbridge, with most of its membership concentrated in the Cuffe Street branch. The satellite branches were small and weak, and each experienced varying degrees of difficulty in simply remaining in existence. On at least one occasion the Kingstown branch ceased to exist, before being reconstituted. While the dates of this branch's initial foundation, and subsequent dissolution, are uncertain, it was stated in the union's minutes that the branch existed in name only in the 1870s¹¹. However, the branch was defiantly reestablished at a meeting in Sandycove on 8 June 1892. That summer evening senior union officers from Cuffe Street, including Richard Sherlock (Master) and James Lyons (Seward), met with over 40 bricklayers from Kingstown in order to set out how the branch would operate.¹²

In 1892 there was a change to the union's rules, permitting it to expand around the country, and establish branches anywhere the executive saw fit, apart from Dublin (1 Appendix A).¹³ This one qualification on unlimited expansion was the result of a dispute that arose in early 1892 over demands to have a second branch established on the north side of the city.¹⁴ The contention of the members from north of the Liffey had been that the Bricklayers Hall, on Cuffe Street, was too small to accommodate all of the members who attended meetings there.¹⁵ However, many on the union's executive council did not want to see a second branch established in Dublin. William Cox, a member of the executive, stated that the existence of such a branch would only

weaken the union, as it would divide its membership, and a branch on O'Connell Street would not have "half the effect or authority acknowledge by the builders that came out of Cuffe Street."¹⁶ Some others on the union's executive, such as James Lyons (steward), regarded the idea of a second branch in the city as the harbinger of a possible AGIBSLTU split. On the evening of 19 May 1892, in very heated exchanges at a meeting in the Bricklayers Hall, Lyons accused those advocating the second branch of wanting to divide the society.¹⁷ In a ballot that evening a majority of membership voted against the idea of a second Dublin branch. There appears to have been no desire on the part of the executive, or membership, to revisit this issue in the years thereafter.¹⁸

After 1900 there was an explosion of new branches across the country, from Derry in the north to Tralee in the south (2 Appendix A). For the most part, this can be put down to the work of Richard O'Carroll who had 'set about rebuilding the union's strength and extending its influence outside of Dublin.'¹⁹ The rapid growth in the number of branches resulted in a significant alteration of the union's management structure. As of 1892 an executive committee consisting of a master, book steward, second steward, secretary, treasurer, two trustees, and six council members governed the union.²⁰ By 1902 a Committee of Management consisting of a president (formerly master), first steward, second steward, treasurer, two trustees, and delegates was conducting the union's business. During this period of growth, the Bricklayers' Hall transformed from the head office of a Dublin based union, with a few outlying branches, to the headquarters of a nationwide trade union, although it remained the headquarters of that union's most important branch.²¹ By the second decade of the

twentieth century an additional layer of management, consisting of a general council, and altered executive council and finance committee, was needed to oversee the more complicated organisational structure resulting from these developments.²²

The Lockout and its Causes

From the turn of the century up until 1905, the bricklayers' union had been doing well: members' working hours had declined, their wages increased, and the number of branches expanded. The union was becoming nationwide in scope and it was poised for further growth.

A special meeting of the union was convened on 23 February 1905 to consider a letter from the Master Builders' Association (MBA) (3 Appendix A). The masters had asked that the addenda to rule 7, of an agreement reached between them and the union in 1896, known as 7a, be incorporated into the union's rules.²³ Rule 7a stated that when union members performed work by measurement, agreement, or piecework, for builders not of the MBA, then the MBA should have the right to claim the same privilege.²⁴ The MBA stated that 'whether the bricklayers stop piece work or not is a matter for themselves. Any advantage which the Society [union] gives to others should at least be given to those who are regular employers of its members.'²⁵ This issue had previously been raised at a meeting between the union and the MBA in November 1902.²⁶

On the surface, at least, the incorporation of addendum 7a into the agreement between the MBA and the union seemed reasonable, merely allowing MBA members to demand from the union what they were already doing for other employers.²⁷

However, from the trade union perspective this request constituted a Trojan Horse. In reality, the AGIBSLTU was set against the practice of measurement, or piece work, being conducted for any employer, whether a member of the MBA or otherwise.²⁸ Thus, the nature of the MBA request was disingenuous, since, by trying to incorporate 7a into their agreement with the union, the masters were seeking to make the terms ‘measurement’ and ‘piecework’ part of that agreement, whether these practices were in operation or not. For the union, this was the thin edge of the wedge, as agreement to addendum 7a would be interpreted by the masters as agreement to the practices of measurement and piecework. Working under piecework, or measurement, had been something the union had fought against in the previous century. It was a demand to which the union could not acquiesce. Members’ concern can be gauged by their attendance at the meeting to discuss the issue, which was the largest since ‘the strike in 1896,²⁹ and when the proposal to incorporate addendum 7a into the union’s rules was put to the meeting, it was rejected. James Quaile, a delegate on the union’s executive, sounded a note of warning when he suggested that this rejection might have been a rash move. His observation proved to be prophetic.³⁰

The trouble started the following day, 24 February, when a meeting was held between delegates from the union and the MBA.³¹ The MBA was aggressive from its inception, and certainly lived up to its reputation on this occasion.³² It demanded that the union accept addendum 7a, stating that if members of the union took piecework, or measurement, from private individuals, then builders had the right to demand the same privilege.³³ Nothing came of this meeting. Procedures had been put in place in 1896 for dealing with disputes of this nature, however, neither side appears to have

considered arbitration at this stage. On 25 February James Lyons, Michael Doyle, James Quaille, and Richard O'Carroll, of the AGIBSLTU executive committee, met again with the MBA. Once again, the parties failed to reach agreement.³⁴ Thereafter, the MBA presented the union with an ultimatum, accept 7a or its membership would be locked out from 28 February.³⁵

On 2 March 1905, the first mention of the lockout appeared in the press, when *The Irish Times* reported that 2,000 men had been made idle in the building trade. At the same time there were rumours that the MBA was importing blacklegs from England.³⁶ With both sides entrenched in their positions, there was no suggestion that either was eager for compromise.³⁷ The first item relating to the lockout to appear in the union's records was a note on the sum of money spent in sending blacklegs back across the Irish Sea, dated 4 March.³⁸ This note reads 'sending a large number of scabs to England and Scotland'³⁹, at a cost of £23-10-0.⁴⁰ This action suggests a complex approach by the union towards combating the lockout. It did not merely seek to support its idle membership, but to also actively work against the employers' attempts to keep their construction projects operating. By doing so, the union was interdicting the means by which the employers sought to keep them from working.

Unfortunately, the story of the early months of the lockout, from the union's perspective, is difficult to tell, as the relevant pages are missing from its minute book. Nevertheless, we do know that, in addition to sending blacklegs home, the union sent its own locked out members in search of work. On the night of 4 March, 150 Dublin bricklayers were sent to England in search of employment. Another group, of a similar size, was dispatched the following night.⁴¹ Not only did this action ease the

strain on the union's finances, by reducing the number of members out of work in Dublin, but bricklayers who found work in England were expected to send dues home, providing the union with much needed income. An examination of the union's various account books makes clear how subscription fell off dramatically during the period of the lockout.⁴² The first steward's expense book has a large number of blank pages for the period from March to July in 1905, with little recorded in the way of income.⁴³ This situation is mirrored in the case of the secretary's expense book.⁴⁴

On 6 March, at the monthly meeting of Dublin Corporation, a deputation from the union attended. This deputation of William Doyle and James Quaile stated that 'by locking the brick and stonelayers out the result was to throw a large number of labourers out of employment – a very serious thing for a large number of families.'⁴⁵ The deputation hoped that the corporation would force the contractors to carry out the contracts they had undertaken to perform.⁴⁶ In order to portray the union's reasonableness, Quaile reported that it had adopted a resolution which bound its membership 'hand and foot not to take one inch of work from anyone outside the MBA'.⁴⁷ However, he reported that the masters kept insisting that measurement and piecework also be adopted by the union. According to Quail, the masters wanted everything while giving the men nothing in return.⁴⁸

At the same time another deputation from the union met with the MBA, but came away with the impression that the builders did not want a settlement, but instead preferred to teach the union a lesson.⁴⁹ Similarly, *The Irish Times* reported that the MBA wanted the men to acquiesce to their demands, whether they liked it, or not.⁵⁰ The AGIBSLTU fought on, rather than accept the ultimatums of the MBA, which

demanded the union's unconditional surrender. It continued to send members to Britain in search of work, while simultaneously intercepting blacklegs as they arrived in the city.

The Ongoing Lockout and its Wider Perception

By late March, a resolution to the lockout seemed as far away as ever. The dispute to that point had cost the AGIBSLTU over £150-0-0, a significant drain on the finances of a relatively small trade union. However, the AGIBSLTU was not alone in its struggle. At first, other unions, such as the Associated Shipwrights' Society and the Operative Plasterers' Society, passed motions of sympathy with it,⁵¹ but these motions were soon followed by direct financial aid.

In early April a public meeting was held in the Carpenters' Hall, Cuffe Street, for the purpose of expressing sympathy with the bricklayers. Here a committee was formed to make house to house collections in the Mountjoy Ward of the city.⁵² A couple of days later, at a meeting of the union's lockout committee, a deputation from the Mountjoy Ward presented a cheque for £66-0-0. This was to be the first of many such instalments from this ward of the city. At the same meeting a deputation from the Tailors' Society gave £25-0-0; the City of Dublin Bakers, Bridge Street gave £20-0-0, Operative Plasterers £25-0-0, and the Farriers' Society contributed £5-0-0 for the lockout.⁵³

On 9 April a number of meetings were held across Dublin to assist the bricklayers. Members of the corporation addressed a public gathering at Beresford Place. A second meeting was held at Inchicore, at which a number of bands played for

the public. Thereafter, a third public gathering took place at Rutland Square.⁵⁴ At all of these meetings, money was collected for the locked out builders.

By mid-April many of the bricklayers who had come from England had gone home.⁵⁵ The AGIBSLTU had been so successful at intercepting blacklegs that *The Irish Times* remarked some of these men had been turned around at the port by the bricklayers, who paid their fares back across the Irish Sea.⁵⁶ The cost of doing this, estimated at over £250-0-0, was an additional drain on the union's strained funds.⁵⁷

One incident on 7 April is of particular interest. A contingent of bricklayers arrived in Dublin from England. Once in the city they were taken to the Bricklayers' Hall, Cuffe Street, where they were briefed on the situation, after which, the Englishmen decided to return home at once.⁵⁸ It turned out that most of these English bricklayers had been unaware that their Dublin counterparts had been locked out by their employers, and that they were arriving into the middle of an industrial dispute.⁵⁹ Other groups of English bricklayers, on learning of the lockout, refused to commence work in Dublin, and returned home at their own expense,⁶⁰ so as not to take money from the AGIBSLTU, which they recognised needed all of its resources in order to fight the lockout.⁶¹ Some English bricklayers stated that they had been persuaded to travel to Dublin under false pretences by agents of the MBA.⁶² While the efforts of the MBA to import labour from England failed, this activity embittered the locked out bricklayers, and cost the employers what public support there had been for them.⁶³ Letters to the newspapers portrayed a high level of public anger at the activities of the MBA, as the lockout was only exacerbating the already depressed state of the city's economy.⁶⁴ Another, and even more cunning, response by the AGIBSLTU to the

presence of scabs was to try and recruit them into the union. This would permit the union to collect dues from them, and at the same time inform the MBA that certain jobs were now being actively worked by AGIBSLTU members.⁶⁵

At this stage MBA secretary, John Good, presented the association's case to the public in a letter to *The Irish Times*. This stated that the union's membership had been taking building contracts which the masters regarded as an invasion of their rights. These contracts involved workmen subcontracting to other workmen, while at the same time the union objected to masters subcontracting. The trade unionists ignoring the masters' exclusive the right to subcontract was, the MBA argued, at the heart of the dispute, and the reason for the lockout. It was a right accepted by the other unions, such as the Carpenters', Stonecutters', and Plumbers' Societies. John Good summed up the complexity of the situation, from the MBA point of view, with this rather byzantine sentence:

The men offer to give up more than they are asked, provided they are allowed to prevent the Masters from enjoying a privilege [subcontracting] which the latter don't ask for, while the Masters attach a condition to their willingness to arbitrate which the men declare to be gratuitous [piecework].⁶⁶

By this time, the MBA had come to favour arbitration to resolve the dispute. The same day as they were writing to *The Irish Times*, the MBA sent a letter to John Simmons of the Dublin Trades Council (DTC) accepting the idea of arbitration. The MBA demand was: 'to get every advantage given by members of the society [union]

to other non-members of the Master Builder's Association, and where work is done by measurement or agreement for such persons the master builders to have the right claim a similar advantage.⁶⁷ Here the MBA was presenting two separate demands: in addition to its original demand that the union's membership work for them by measurement, the masters also wanted exclusive rights to subcontracting.

A few days later the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Joseph Hutchenson, wrote to *The Irish Times* with the suggestion that the dispute might be diffused by the masters permitting the men to return to work, and the questions at issue being put aside until 1 May 1906. This, he suggested, would give the parties time to reconsider their positions.⁶⁸ However, both sides were now eager for a resolution, and each seemed confident of getting their way. Thus, Hutchenson's suggestion fell on deaf ears.

On 14 April the union sent a letter to the MBA insisting that rule 7a was the only point upon which they would go to arbitration.⁶⁹ No other issue, insisted the union, was up for consideration. This could be regarded as the union's attempt to stop the MBA from widening the ranges of concession it was seeking.

But, despite the union holding fast, the situation of its membership was deteriorating. Although an increasing amount of the union's finances was going to meet the needs of its locked out membership, more and more bricklayers were turning to the poorhouses for support. In mid-April, a meeting of the South Dublin Union noted the enormous increase in the number seeking help in the poor house; indeed, the level of poverty was so great that it seemed that rates on houses might have to increase the following year to meet this level of distress.⁷⁰

Several thousand people attended a meeting in support of the bricklayers in the Phoenix Park on 16 April. A letter of support was read out from the London Order of Bricklayers. The London society also sent £10-0-0 to support the AGIBSLTU, and an apology for the fact that English bricklayers were being imported as blacklegs.⁷¹

By the end of April more city councillors were calling for the dispute to be resolved by arbitration. A Samuel Worthington wrote to *The Irish Times* on 29 April with the suggestion that an alderman named Cotton be appointed arbitrator. Cotton was a large employer in the city. Worthington suggested that if either side refused arbitration it would be clear to all that they wanted the dispute to remain unresolved and would be held accountable.⁷²

Pressure Builds on the AGIBSLTU

Despite the pleas for a resolution, and tentative steps towards arbitration, the lockout endured into May. On 7 May another large meeting in support of the bricklayers was held in the Phoenix Park. T P Daly of the DTC, and T C Harrington MP, addressed the gathering and wholeheartedly condemned the actions of the MBA. Collections were made to support the families of the locked out builders.⁷³ On 14 May Richard O'Carroll noted that the builders were introducing all the scab labour they could, from counties outside Dublin, in an effort to crush the union. He said this so that the men would realise that there could be no easy victory over the employers.⁷⁴ Occasionally, the tension between the locked out bricklayers and blacklegs, and between those supporting the bricklayers and those accommodating the blacklegs, spilled over in physical violence. In one incident, two members of the AGIBSLTU, a William

Barrett and a James Hooligan, were charged with intimidation in early May. They were accused of breaking the front windows of No. 35 and of No. 36 Talbot Street, two houses lodging blacklegs.⁷⁵

At this time the AGIBSLTU received a letter from John Batchelor, secretary of the London Order of Bricklayers (Appendix 4),⁷⁶ which indicated the English union's intention to establish a branch in Dublin. The AGIBSLTU considered this unacceptable, especially so under the current circumstances. The union's officers discussed inviting an English delegate to Dublin in order to get the English scab labour working there to leave the city, but O'Carroll was against seeking any help of this kind from English trade unionists, since he felt the AGIBSLTU was capable of managing its own affairs. This attitude was also probably motivated by a fear that if the English union's representatives came to Dublin they might not be willing to leave after the lockout ended.⁷⁷ Not only did the AGIBSLTU feel pressurised by the MBA, but now it had to face the prospect of a rival union establishing in Dublin.

An all-pervasive sense of panic permeates the union's minute books during this time. It was under attack on a number of fronts, and appeared to be losing on each. Finances were creaking under the strain of supporting so many men unable to find work. Between 25 March and 1 July £1,506-12-8 the AGIBSLTU spent on lockout payments (see Table 1.1).⁷⁸

Table 1.1: Lockout expenses 25 March – 1 July 1905

Date	£	S	d
25/3/1905	172	17	0
1/4/1905	101	1	6
8/4/1905	100	0	2

15/4/1905	116	0	6
22/4/1905	116	19	0
29/4/1905	83	0	6
6/5/1905	87	7	6
13/5/1905	92	18	6
20/5/1905	83	19	0
26/5/1905	83	7	0
3/6/1905	95	2	0
10/6/1905	91	14	0
17/6/1905	95	14	0
24/6/1905	93	11	6
1/7/1905	93	0	6
Total	1506	12	8

Source: 1097/11/1 Lockout Account 1905, Income and Expenditure

Support for these expenses came from a range of sources. Many individuals gave small donations or loans, alongside larger support from the other trade unions. For instance, a Pat Whelan from Irishtown gave a loan of £10-0-0 on 1 April, while the Bakers' Society loaned £20-0-0 on 5 April, and the Plasterers' Society provided £25-0-0 a few days later.⁷⁹ Different areas of the city, such as the Mountjoy, Arran Quay, and North City wards, all donated money during the latter part of April, and early May.⁸⁰ The AGIBSLTU's other branches across Ireland also sent assistance to Dublin. In late May, the Tralee and Kingstown branches donated over £15-0-0 between them.⁸¹ While substantial sums flowed into the union, most of this cash was readily spent on the lockout. The fact that much of this money had to be repaid meant that the full cost and impact of the lockout would not become apparent until well into 1906.

Although the AGIBSLTU was the trade union at the centre of the lockout, it was not the only union affected by it. Over a hundred labourers, all members of the

United Labourers of Dublin Trade Union, found themselves out of work due to the dispute. While the AGIBSLTU was a craft union, and its membership considered part of the aristocracy of the working class, the labourers, and their union, would have been far poorer. Thus, the cost of the lockout to the labourers' union, running at £30-0-0 per week, was extremely onerous.⁸²

In early June, under the strain of the lockout, antagonism developed between Cuffe Street and its Kingstown branch. The trouble focused on the forwarding of subscriptions, as Kingstown always retained £4-0-0 for incidental expenses. Frank Weafer, Kingstown's delegate to the executive, reported that its membership did not appreciate the tone of correspondence coming from Dublin demanding explanations in relation to its finances. The Kingstown branch felt that Cuffe Street was insinuating that something dishonest had occurred.⁸³ Solidarity was starting to fray at the edges.

On 6 June, the Lord Mayor, Joseph Hutchinson, and Alderman Cotton, convinced delegates from the union's executive that if the dispute went to arbitration, the union was likely to be the victor. Cotton, who would act as arbitrator, went so far as to assure the delegates that he would settle at least one of the points under arbitration in the union's favour, while throwing the other, in his own words, 'overboard.'⁸⁴ The matter of arbitration was debated at a special union meeting at the Bricklayer's Hall on 9 June. James Quaille informed the union membership that if the two points at issue went to arbitration, he was certain the AGIBSLTU would emerge victorious, although, the executive does not appear to have informed the general membership of Alderman Cotton's guarantees at this point. However, John Hand, an ordinary member of the union, remarked that Michael Doyle, on the executive, had

previously promised that there would only be arbitration on the single issue they were locked out over. Now they wanted to arbitrate on two points! To the ordinary members the union's position looked to be deteriorating.⁸⁵

One executive member, James Lyons, stressed the gravity of the situation, and the necessity of finding a solution, by described how the union was losing the lockout: public opinion, he said, was becoming cool to their cause; some of the union's members, who managed to find work, were not bothering to pay their levies, and certain Dublin MPs were encouraging the AGIBSLTU to go to arbitration.⁸⁶ The longer the lockout endured the greater the pressure of mounting liabilities, as it borrowed money from every, and any, source. In the open trial of endurance that was the lockout, some within the union were beginning to recognize that the situation could not go on as it had for much longer. The AGIBSLTU faced a very strong and determined opponent in the MBA, while at the same time trying to hold on to its branches, and fend off the prospect of a rival British based union setting up in the city. In the end, any settlement was better than going down to total and humiliating defeat. At a meeting on 6 June, Richard O'Carroll suggested a vote should be taken amongst the locked out members on submitting the issue to arbitration. Many of these men, and more especially their wives and children, were suffering terribly, having to walk the streets at night for lack of accommodation. The result was 151 in favour, and 97 against. Some members protested this, and after heated exchanges the meeting was adjourned.⁸⁷

The issue of the lockout was raised at the ITUC annual conference in Cork in mid-June. There, Richard O'Carroll presented the union's situation, and asked for a

motion of support from Congress.⁸⁸ While a gesture of support was readily forthcoming, it appears that there was little else the other unions could do besides continuing to provide assistance in the form of grants and loans.

The End of the Lockout

The arbitration took place in camera, in the Mansion House on 22 June, with Alderman Cotton, the manager of the gas works, in the chair. The MBA was represented by its president James Beckett, vice president Thomas Connelly, and secretary John Good. On the union side were president Richard O'Carroll, J P Cox (a city councillor), and James Lyons. The proceeding lasted for two hours.⁸⁹ Some months later, O'Carroll recalled how he had come out of the arbitration court convinced they had put their case across excellently, and that the AGIBSLTU would almost certainly win.⁹⁰ Whether this was the reality of the situation, or merely a retrospective gloss on O'Carroll's part, we cannot know, but when Alderman Cotton's decision was revealed a week later, the news for the union was bad. Firstly, Cotton stated that Rule 7a would be added to the rules of agreement signed between the MBA and the trade union, under the date 21 August 1896.

The Master Builders are to get every advantage give by members of the Society to others not members of the Master Builder's Association, and where work is done by measurement or agreement for such persons the Master Builders are to have the right to claim a similar advantage.⁹¹

Additionally, Cotton ruled

that every employer shall be at liberty to employ tradesmen from any recognised Society of Brick and Stonelayers in the United Kingdom, but all such tradesmen shall, if they continue to work in Dublin, be bound, within twelve months for commencing such employment, to join the Dublin Society in the terms provided in Rule 15 of the Rules and Regulations of the Society (1892 Edition).⁹²

On 30 June Richard O'Carroll revealed the arbitration result to the union's members. A clearly stunned O'Carroll proclaimed, rather meekly, that he felt they 'might have got at least one of the points at issue.' One ordinary member named Harney summed up the mood that day when he said, 'we [are] in a far worse position than ever, the fact remains that we were defeated!' Harney continued by placing the blame for the defeat on the stupidity, and treachery, of the union's representatives. This comment highlights how high tensions had been running amongst the ordinary members of the union. However, another member, John Heynes, remarked that he did not care who got his job so long as he belonged to the union.⁹³ Thus, a heady mixture of dissent and defiance permeated the air in Cuffe Street that midsummer evening. On Monday 3 July the bricklayers started to return to work.⁹⁴

The Long Term Consequence of the Lockout

The lockout was to have serious long term repercussions for the trade unions' finances, and especially the benefits it provided to its membership. As of 1 March 1905, at the beginning of the lockout, 15 elderly union members made up its pensions

list.⁹⁵ Each, according to a 1902 rule, was entitled to a 5s. pension per week, however, many were only being paid 2s. 6d.⁹⁶ The previous year had been fiscally good for the union, and at Christmas 1904 an extra 5s. had been granted to pensioners.⁹⁷ However, in the wake of the disastrous lockout, no extra money was given to the pensioners during the festive season of 1905. Instead, by that time, all pensions had been reduced to only 1s. 6d. per week.⁹⁸

In response to the costs of the lockout, union dues increased, and pressure was placed upon members in arrears.⁹⁹ At an executive council meeting on 5 September 1905 an addendum was added to the union's rule 39 stating that no members over twelve months in arrears would be eligible to vote at meetings.¹⁰⁰ It was hoped that the introduction of this prerequisite on democracy would encourage members to pay their dues. However, this hard-line approach seems to have achieved very little. In fact, most members appear to have been quite dissatisfied, believing that they were already being taxed far too heavily in the wake of the lockout.

At a special meeting of the union in late November 1905, another attempt was made to acquire more funds. In this instance, all members less than £2-0-0 in arrears with their contributions were to start clean of dues from the previous 1 November. This was also to apply to members over £2-0-0 in arrears. However, in their case, they would not be entitled to union benefits for six months thereafter. That this proposal was adopted unanimously suggests the earlier approach taken towards members in arrears had found few supporters.¹⁰¹ The money was needed in order to satisfy the increasing demands of creditors who lent to the union during the lockout. For instance, a Mr. Morkhan, a publican on Queen Street, was seeking the return of £10-0-

0 he had given, while a Mr. Cahill, from Aungier Street, was threatening to go to law if he was not returned the £20-0-0 that he had lent.¹⁰²

In late April 1907, at a special general meeting in Cuffe Street, the union's financial situation was reviewed for the membership. The balance sheet for the first quarter of the year showed a total expenditure of £115-9-9½, while income was £120-15-11.¹⁰³ More significantly, a statement of accounts, commencing with the lockout, and ending on 31 March 1907, was presented. This showed a total of £778-3-8 on the debit side of the accounts, and only £139-0-0 on the credit side, leaving a total debt of £639-3-8.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the union still owed substantial amounts to its creditors 18 months after the end of the dispute.

Despite the fact that pensions had already been reduced, this meeting decided to suspend all pensions.¹⁰⁵ This was a drastic step in light of the basis for the union's existence.¹⁰⁶ However, with creditors demanding repayment there was little else the union could do. It would be October 1908 before the AGIBSLTU could reintroduce its pension scheme.¹⁰⁷ The meeting also reduced mortality benefits for members from £10-0-0¹⁰⁸ to £5-0-0, while accident benefits were cut to 12s. per week.¹⁰⁹

Richard O'Carroll readily admitted to the members attending the meeting that the suspension of pensions was 'an unpleasant thing,' but, that there was no choice in the matter, as the union's creditors were becoming very impatient. He spoke feelingly of the need to clear the debt, and to maintain the union in existence.¹¹⁰ He talked to the members of how the union had been handed down to them, and that it was their 'duty as men to hand it down in turn, and in an improved state if possible, to those who are to follow us.'¹¹¹

Two months later mortality benefit was further reduced. Then, in late June 1907, the union's finances deteriorated to the point where it would no longer pay for the cost of members' burials, only providing loans instead.¹¹² In one gloomy incident in 1907 the union even refused to give a loan for burial, when it was discovered that a young bricklayer had died before becoming a full member of the society.¹¹³ However, by 1912 the union was again providing mortality benefits, but the amount was set at £8-0-0,¹¹⁴ £2-0-0 less than had been provided a decade earlier.¹¹⁵

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the 1905 lockout the finances of the trade union were thrown into complete turmoil. It was to be 1909, a full four years after the lockout ended, before the AGIBSLTU finances had returned to a semblance of order,¹¹⁶ and the pressures threatening its existence had abated.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the lockout, and the result of the arbitration, constituted the AGIBSLTU's worst defeat. Ironically, although the arbitration result was a complete defeat, it ultimately, if unintentionally, saved the trade union. By going to arbitration, and losing, most members were able to return to work, and the arterial flow of funds from the union ceased. If the lockout had lasted much longer it would almost certainly have bankrupted the union. At the same time, in terms of saving face, the union and its membership could at least point to the fact that they had not caved in during the lockout, but had lost at arbitration.

The 1905 lockout was to have long lasting ramifications for the AGIBSLTU. The need to repay loans meant that many of the benefits provided to members had to

be severely curtailed for years afterwards. Some branches even collapsed, as did general discipline in the wake of the June result. Nevertheless, there were no large-scale desertions from the union, partially out of a lack of alternatives, but also out of a strong sense of fraternal loyalty. Some employers kept their scabs on for quite some time after the end of the lockout, as if to taunt the union in its moment of defeat.

General Secretary Michael Ennis lost his job the following year to Richard O'Carroll.¹¹⁷ Somebody's head had to roll for the fiasco. This victory by O'Carroll over the 'incumbent secretary represented a revolt by the rank and file.'¹¹⁸ The union was to take a long time before it either threatened a strike, or actually engaged in industrial action. As Alderman Cotton was a large employer, maybe the union had displayed naivety by believing all that he had told them prior to arbitration. Nevertheless, the AGIBSLTU did survive, and still survives today as part of the Building and Allied Trade Union.

This account of the 1905 lockout in the building trade provides a detailed insight into the conduct of a labour dispute in Dublin at the start of the 20th century. Although this dispute has long been ignored, the events during those four months in 1905 paint a vivid picture of the tactics used by the employers in their efforts to crush the union, and the union's responses to these. As quickly as the employers imported scabs from England, the union sent them home. Both sides sought to appeal to the public through letters to the newspapers in an early form of media spin. Both sides did everything in their power to win, but after four months the situation remained stalemated. Despite the power of the MBA, the union was able to stand up to it, partly due its own efforts, and partly on account of outside support, showing how the wider

community of trade unionists came to each others' aid in times of need. Ironically, it was the financial aspect of this support, so crucial to enabling the ABIGSTU weather the lockout, that was to bring it to the verge of bankruptcy afterwards. The case highlights the fragility of Irish based trade unions at this time, especially when compared to their larger British counterparts. Ultimately, the AGIBSLTU did survive the 1905 lockout, but only just.

Appendix

1.

Rule 52. – Branch Lodges.

That this Trade Union has the power to establish Branch Lodges throughout Ireland, Dublin excepted. Such lodges to be affiliated to the Central Executive Council in Dublin. That it shall be competent for the Executive Council to direct that any town making application for permission to be opened as a Branch Lodge under the Rules and Regulations of this Union, shall be established as a branch, providing that such town can guarantee and the Executive Council are satisfied that at the opening there shall not be less than six persons who have paid their entrance fee. In all cases of towns making such application, they must, previous to being opened, certify the schedule of rules, and customs, and privileges of the town which they have had twelve months previous, and if the employers take any privileges from the schedule. Such lodge to be supported from the General Fund. All lodges to be opened by the principle officers of the Dublin Executive, who shall attend the opening of every new Branch, and be allowed reasonable charges therefor.

2.

The branches of the union throughout its history

Arklow	Cork	Kilkenny	Sligo
Athenry	Drogheda	Killarney	Tralee
Athlone	Dundalk	Larne	Waterford
Belfast	Dungannon	Limerick	Wexford
Bray	Dun Laoghaire	Londonderry	Youghal
Clare	Fermoy	Mullingar	
Clonmel	Galway	Newry	
Comber	Kildare	Queenstown	

3.

*Letter from the Master Builders to the Bricklayer's Union*¹¹⁹

Master Builders Association,

55 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin,

2nd March, 1095.

To: Mr. M. Ennis, Secretary Brick and Stonelayers Society.

Dear Sir – The attention of my Committee has been attracted to statements of your representatives, in which it is alleged that sweating and its many attendant evils are

likely to result from the adoption by your Society of our rule, as referred to in the correspondence.

Permit us to remind you that this rule, in precisely the same words, is already embodied in our working arrangements with the Carpenters' Society and the Stonecutters' Society in our city. It is also in the working agreement with the Plumbers' Society, and in no case that we know of has ever a question been raised on it in either of these large trades, though the rule has been in force in two of these trades for a period of over eight and a half years, and in the plumbing trade for over four years.

Surely if the evil consequences you anticipate were likely to arise would they not have arisen long ago in these trades?

My committee feel that the satisfactory working of our agreements with the trades I have mentioned had been largely due to the establishment of this important rule when framing these arrangements, and also to the straightforward manner in which these trades have at all times carried out the terms of their agreements.

Yours truly,

John Good, Hon. Secretary.

4.

Letter from John Batchelor, General Secretary, Operative Bricklayers Society

Operative Bricklayers' Society,
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL GENERAL OFFICE,
46, Southwark Bridge Road, London, S. E.

May 9 1905.

Mr. Michael Ennis,
Secretary Brick & Stone Layers T. U.
48 Cuffe Street,
Dublin,

Dear Sir,

We have been invited to open a branch of our Society in Dublin but before deciding the question my council would like your view of the matter. I may say we are informed that there are a large number of nonunionist Bricklayers in the City + district in addition to a small society which we understand has recently been founded + whose members desire admission if the branch is opened, your early reply will oblige,

Yours faithfully,

John Batchelor

G. Sec.

Notes

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- ⁵ Michael Vincent, *Introduction to Industrial Relations*, (London, 1983), p. 61.
- ⁶ H. A. Clegg, Alan Fox, and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, (Oxford, 1964), p.55.
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- ²⁰ NAI, AGIBSLTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 4. – Constitution and Government, p. 11.
- ²¹ NAI, AGIBSLTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 3. – Constitution and Government, p. 6.
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- ²⁵ *ibid.*, 28 February, 1905, p. 6.
- ²⁶ NAI, AGIBSLTU, 1097/30/11, Report of Executive Council on piecework meeting with master builders, 10 November, 1902.
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- ²⁸ *The Irish Independent*, 6 March, 1905, p. 6.
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