Articles

# Scotland and Ireland: Labour Directions and Radical Connections

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## Emmet O'Connor

Systematic comparison of Irish and Scottish history began in 1976 with the conferences of economic and social historians pioneered by Louis M. Cullen and Thomas C. Smout. Similar comparison in social and cultural studies was encouraged from 1995 by the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative. The project has enjoyed a fair wind, boosted by the emergence of the 'four nations' approach to the history of Britain and Ireland, the higher status of Scottish – as distinct from British – history since devolution, and the emphasis on east-west links in the matrix of compromises that made the Belfast Agreement (1998).[1] And not accidentally, when the Belfast Agreement proved unacceptable to hardline Unionists, it was replaced with the St Andrews Agreement (2006).[2] The strength of the Labour and radical ties and of migration across the North Channel should have made Labour history a significant element in the equation. So too should the upsurge of interest in transnational Labour history after the 'fall of the wall' in 1989.[3] The Irish Labour History Society's eighth

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[1] Louis M. Cullen and Thomas C. Smout (eds), *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1977); T. M. Devine and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850: Parallels and Contrasts in Economic and Social Development* (Edinburgh, 1983); Graham Walker, *Intimate Strangers: Political and Cultural Interaction Between Scotland and Ulster in Modern Times* (Edinburgh, 1995); T. M. Devine and James F. McMillan (eds), *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections, 597–1997* (Edinburgh, 1999); Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (eds), *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000* (Dublin, 2005). The best introductions to the 'four nations' historiography are Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge, 1989); Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (London, 1999). For politics, see Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the Survival of the United Kingdom, 1707–2007* (Oxford, 2011), who notes that there have been few scholarly comparisons of the two Unions.

[2] To distinguish them from trade unionists, supporters of the Union with Britain will be capitalised, whether members of the Unionist Party or not.

[3] By 'Labour' is meant trade unions, trades councils, and similar working class organisations and activists. Workers are otherwise referred to as 'labour'. See Joan Allen, Alan Campbell, and John McIlroy (eds), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool, 2010).

annual conference, held in Belfast in 1981, was on 'Irish Labour: the Scottish dimension'. Coevally, there were conferences on 'Dublin and Liverpool labour' in Liverpool in 1981, and on 'Socialism: the Celtic experience' in Wales in 1982.[4] But the momentum for comparison was not sustained. The subject was weak in academe, especially in Ireland, and throughout the northern hemisphere its very future as a discrete discipline came under question in consequence of the 'fall of the wall', the postmodern turn, the decline of the traditional working class, and the emergence of alternative radicalisms, notably in feminism and environmentalism.[5] The possibility of saving Labour history by going global required a fundamental strength to begin with. Certainly there have been a few articles and book chapters on specifics, mainly on individual connections, which are numerous, but no Labour historians have attempted generalised Irish-Scottish comparisons of the sort pioneered in economic, social, and cultural history. This essay will hopefully herald a start to a forward march in that direction. It has four aims. The primary concern is to review the involvement of Scots with Irish labour, and vice versa. If the emphasis is on the former, it may be pleaded that it is the more neglected dimension. Despite the rapidly expanding library on Scots abroad, Kyle Hughes' *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast: A Study in Elite Migration* (2013) is the first book to be published on modern Scottish immigrants in Ireland.[6] As the subtitle suggests, it is not about workers. The second aim is to highlight the relevant literature, which is more plentiful on Scotland. The third aim is to indicate agendas for research. The final aspiration is to see if conclusions can be drawn from patterns in the Scottish-Irish connections. The focus will move from the general to the particular, looking first at labour, then at trade unions and allied bodies, and finally at radicals and politics.

## Labour and Industrial Relations

Closing his magisterial *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, John Boyle made a few points of comparison with Scotland to emphasise the

    [4]  *Saothar*, 8 (1982), 103–5.
    [5]  For retrospects on the Scottish Labour History Society and the Irish Labour History Society, see *Labour History Review: 50th Anniversary Supplement*, 75 (April 2010), 117–27, 147–59. For the Scottish existential angst see the conference report on 'Is there a Future for the Past?': Trade Unions, Women, Labour, and Labour History in the New Millennium', *Scottish Labour History*, 35 (2000), 3–7.
    [6]  Kyle Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast: A Study in Elite Migration* (Edinburgh, 2013). For an introduction to the Scots abroad, see T. M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750–2010* (London, 2011).

sorry state of Irish Labour in 1900; the device was itself exceptional and it is probably no coincidence that Boyle hailed from Belfast. The century had been as bad for Ireland as it was good for Scotland. Never before were their peoples in such contrasting circumstances or so at odds with each other. In 1800, Scotland had a population of 1.6 million and Ireland had some 5 million. The first detailed census in 1841 showed that Scotland had 2.6 million people, and Ireland had 8.1 million. By 1900, both countries had about 4.5 million each, and Scotland's population was increasing, whereas Ireland's was in steady decline. Two-thirds of Scots lived in towns. In Ireland, the figure was one-third. Glasgow alone had more people than Dublin and Belfast combined. Scotland had approximately 900,000 industrial workers; Ireland had 300,000. The Scottish Trades Union Congress (TUC) had 128,000 members. The Irish TUC had about 50,000.[7] Irish Labour's position was further weakened by the fact that its mining industry was tiny compared with that of Scotland, and by the concentration of its manufacturing in north-east Ulster, where the majority of workers were Unionist and suspicious of the nationalist south. With 9 per cent of the population in the early twentieth century, Belfast contained 21 per cent of Ireland's industrial workers, and was pre-eminent in the three major product groups: linen; engineering and shipbuilding; and brewing, distilling, and aerated waters. While Dublin enjoyed a sizable trade in food, drink, and tobacco, Belfast nearly monopolised other sectors. In 1907, it accounted for £19.1 million of Ireland's £20.9 million worth of manufactured exports, excluding food and drink.[8]

The exchange between both countries was similarly unequal. Scotland sent capital, capitalists, and artisans to Ireland. Ireland sent unskilled and seasonal migrants to Scotland. The most substantial Scottish intervention in Ireland lay with the industrialisation of Ulster, where Scottish capital and entrepreneurs helped to develop the engineering, shipbuilding, textile, and clothing industries in Belfast and the shirt-factories of Derry.[9] Ulster of course had well-established ties with Scotland, altered and reinforced by

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[7] John W. Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1988), 328–30.

[8] See Leslie A. Clarkson, 'Population Change and Urbanization, 1821–1911' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820–1939* (Manchester, 1985), 137–54; Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London, 1976), 18; Louis M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland Since 1660* (London, 1987), 16–62.

[9] For urban histories see Sean J. Connolly, *Belfast 400: People, Place, and History* (Liverpool, 2012); Brian Lacy, *Siege City: The Story of Derry and Londonderry* (Belfast, 1990).

the plantations in the seventeenth century, and was quite different to the southern provinces where there was relatively little Scottish penetration. As capital had moved to Ireland in search of cheap labour, importing unskilled workers would have been pointless. But skilled men were needed, and could be had from Scotland. Industrialising Scotland was a land of immigration and emigration – 'the Scottish paradox' as T. M. Devine has called it.[10] Emigrants left in search of higher wages and better conditions. Immigrants arrived to take up low paid or menial jobs. The percentage of Scottish-born residents in Ireland increased in each census between 1841 and 1911, rising from 0.11 per cent to 0.88 per cent. In the 1901 census they accounted for 3.2 per cent of the population of Belfast, and 1 per cent of the population of Dublin. The impact of the Scottish presence in southern Ireland was further diminished by the fact that many were there temporarily with British army units, and many in Donegal especially were returned emigrants and in practice Irish Catholics. By contrast, in Ulster we can say that Presbyterian Scots in Belfast were over-represented in trades associated with shipbuilding and engineering, and disproportionately skilled, with 71 per cent of all Belfast Scots being in skilled, clerical, or professional occupations.[11] In Derry's smaller shipbuilding industry, which employed 600 or so in the 1880s, the immigrant labour was overwhelmingly Scottish. By the 1890s, Scots comprised one-third of skilled and one quarter of semi-skilled employees in the Derry shipyard, and these were mainly from Clydeside.[12] Higher wages for skilled men, better housing, cheaper rents and food costs, and work for female members of the family, were among the attractions for immigrants. During the late 1880s builders in Derry constructed a superior set of artisans' dwellings in what became known as the 'Scotch quarter' where, it was hoped, homesick Scots would be consoled by names such as, Argyll Street, Glasgow Street, and Glasgow Terrace. In Belfast, the Unionist political elite welcomed Scots as hard-working, thrifty, entrepreneurial, fellow Unionists and developed an imagery of Scots which did not accommodate anything else.[13]

Traffic in the other direction was older, heavier, drawn by the same 'pull', but driven more by 'push' factors. The process began, initially in the form of

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[10]  T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society: Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar, University of Strathclyde 1990–91* (Edinburgh, 1992), 3.

[11]  Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast,* 49–55.

[12]  Walter Gallagher, 'People, Work, Space, and Social Structure in Edwardian Derry, 1901–11', D.Phil. dissertation (University of Ulster, 1994), 106–7.

[13]  John Lynch, 'Technology, Labour, and the Growth of Belfast Shipbuilding', *Saothar*, 24 (1999), 33–43; Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast,* 29–55.

seasonal migration, as early as the late eighteenth century, and by the 1800s 16 per cent of Glasgow residents were Irish.[14] The Irish-born population of Scotland stood at 126,321 or 4.8 per cent in the 1841 census, peaking just after the Great Famine at 7.2 per cent, and declining to 3.7 per cent in 1911. James Handley, a Catholic priest who acknowledged the evolution of a dual 'Scoto-Irish' identity, argued that as there was little inter-marriage with the Scots, the Scottish-born children of immigrants in practice doubled the 'Irish' presence.[15] The bulk settled in the south-west – it was typical of destitute immigrants not to venture far beyond the points of entry – though there were sizable Irish communities in Edinburgh and Dundee's 'juteopolis'. Most came from Ulster, where the ports traded primarily with Scotland, except in times of acute distress when the lure of Scotland reached further south. Historians agree that a significant minority were Protestant, but dispute the proportion and are revising the old orthodoxy that the majority of Irish immigrants before the Great Famine were Protestant.[16] Nonetheless, just as the true Scot in Ulster was expected to be a Presbyterian and a Unionist, so the real Irishman in Scotland was supposed to be a Catholic, and it was religion that frustrated his integration into the host community. By far the best known of seasonal migrants are the tattie-hokers (variously spelt): the gangs of men, women, and children who left small-holdings, in Donegal and Mayo chiefly, each year to work nomadically in Scotland at the potato picking.[17] By the late nineteenth century, they had come to dominate the potato harvesting. In both countries, the hokers were regarded as highly marginalised people, from areas of subsistence living. In 1915, for example, over 80 per cent of the 5,258 migrants from Connacht hailed from Mayo, the province's poorest county. The Kirkintilloch tragedy in 1937, when ten tattie-hokers were burnt to death in a bothy, prompted the Irish government to establish a commission on migratory labour and Westminster to introduce the Housing (Agricultural

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14  T. M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1991), 11; William W. Knox, *Industrial Nation: Work, Culture and Society in Scotland, 1800–Present* (Edinburgh, 1999), 37; Jim J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896–1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000), 126.

15  James Handley, *The Irish in Scotland* (Cork, 1945), 91.

16  For conflicting views on Irish Protestant emigration see Knox, *Industrial Nation*, 93, and Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland, 1797–1848: Trade Unions, Strikes, and Political Movements* (Edinburgh, 2008), 23.

17  Ann O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and TattieHokers: History and Folkore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 1991). See also the television documentary, *Here Come the TattieHowkers* (Scottish Screen Archive, 2008, reference number: 8232),

Population) Scotland Act (1937).[18] An echo of the tattie-hokers survives in the ghost-signs over the pubs of Waterloo Street in Derry: 'The Rosses', 'The Gweedore', and 'The Claddagh'. Migrants from these areas made their way to Derry for the 'Scotch boat', which sailed for the last time, still carrying a few Donegal seasonal migrants, in 1966.

Research on the settled Irish workforce is no longer incidental to monographs on Scottish labour. Of note is Martin Mitchell's study of the Irish in the west of Scotland, and William Kenefick's work on Glasgow dockers and the jute operatives of Dundee.[19] The first waves of emigrants worked as weavers, cotton spinners, navvies, colliers, and labourers. After the Great Famine, employment opportunities opened up in heavy industry. Especially relevant to trade unionism were dockers. Due to their concentration on Clydeside, Irish dockers became the single most important element in the workforce on the Glasgow waterfront, followed by Scottish Highlanders. It was hardly coincidental that the Clydeside docks were the least sectarian in those three oft-compared cities, Belfast, Glasgow, and Liverpool; something historians attribute to its stronger Labour tradition. In Belfast, the cross-channel dockers were Protestant and the deep-sea men were Catholic. In Liverpool, the north-end docks were Catholic and the south-end docks were Protestant, and there was very little exchange between the two. No such divisions emerged in Glasgow.[20]

Despite the exchange of labour and capital, it was only in Belfast shipbuilding and engineering that formal Irish-Scottish analogues developed in industrial relations. The need to attract skilled men from Britain caused Belfast employers to be relatively tolerant of craft unions. By 1900, the proportion of unionised men in the city's shipbuilding and engineering trades exceeded the United Kingdom (UK) average. Unlike their British colleagues, Belfast engineering employers made no attempt to break trade unions in the 1860s and 1870s. As early as 1872, the Belfast Employers' Association negotiated directly with unions on conditions and hours. Between 1860 and 1900 skilled

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[18]  Barry Sheppard, 'The Kirkintilloch Tragedy, 1937', http://www.theirishstory. com/2012/09/24/the-kirkintilloch-tragedy [Accessed 18 March 2014]; *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1937–8* (Dublin, 1938).

[19]  Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*; William Kenefick, *'Rebellious and Contrary': The Glasgow Dockers, c.1853 to 1932* (East Linton, 2000).

[20]  Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*, 1–5; Kenefick, *'Rebellious and Contrary'*, 20, 24–6; '"An Effervescence of Youth": Female Textile-Workers' Strike Activity in Dundee, 1911–1912', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 33 (2012) 189–221.

rates in Belfast rose faster than in Britain, though actual earnings tended to be lower due to the absence of piecework. The scarcity of artisans and the abundance of unskilled men contributed to the differential between skilled and unskilled rates in Ulster exceeding the UK average, sometimes reaching a 3:1 ratio.[21] But in 1895, adopting a new militancy in reaction to new unionism, Belfast shipbuilders joined with colleagues on Clydeside in a common front against wage demands. In a move deeply resented by Belfast craftsmen as a breach of the city's tradition of harmonious industrial relations, a strike in one area was to be met by layoffs in the other. In October, 1,100 members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers struck to restore a cut of 2s per week. In January the engineers accepted an extra 1s per week. In 1897, Belfast's engineering employers joined a UK trade agreement for the first time, and it soon embroiled Belfast in another upheaval, the general lockout of engineers from July 1897 to February 1898.[22] Yet there were few subsequent examples of Belfast involvement in UK action. What should have been the buckle in the belt uniting Ireland and Scotland acted more as a firewall.

A number of explanations have been cited for the continuing particularism and conservatism of the metal trades in Belfast. The engineering trades agreement of 1897 left wages to be decided on a district basis, craftsmen remained relatively privileged in Belfast, and the divide between skilled and unskilled was sharper than elsewhere. In comparison with Clydeside, a Belfast apprentice was paid less and served a longer apprenticeship. Unlike Clydeside, his parents were required to pay a deposit of between £2 and £5 as a guarantee of good behaviour.[23] Belfast's metal trades unions were intensely sectional, so that a high proportion of disputes were about demarcation. During World War One, Belfast shipbuilding and engineering was not affected by dilution, and did not produce a shop-stewards' movement like that on Clydeside. Neither was there a 'Red Laganside' to match 'Red Clydeside'. Whereas shipyards on the Clyde experienced a slump in mid-1918, Belfast boomed until mid-1920. There was also the peculiar political situation of Belfast, where the shipyardmen regarded themselves as the shock-troops of loyalism, and were to the fore in sectarian riots in 1857, in attempts to expel Catholic workers in 1864, 1886, 1893, and 1901, and in the expulsion of Catholics and radical Protestants in 1912 and 1920. In fact by the late nineteenth century, one can

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[21]  W. E. Coe, *The Engineering Industry of the North of Ireland* (Belfast, 1969), 178–82.

[22]  Henry Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working Class and the Belfast Labour Movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast, 1980), 91, 178–86.

[23]  Lynch, 'Technology, Labour, and the Growth of Belfast Shipbuilding', 42.

speak of two Labour movements in Belfast. Textile unions were local, small, weak, and supportive of Belfast trades council and the Irish TUC. Unions in the metal trades were British-based, well organised, and under-represented on both the trades council and in the Irish TUC.[24]

Informal analogues were probably more common, but are less documented. Glasgow was a comparator for Derry in seamen's wage strikes in 1889. One of four shipyard unions affiliated to Derry trades council in 1892 was the Associated Scottish Iron Shipbuilders' Helpers' Association.[25] And when labourers with the Londonderry Shipbuilding and Engineering Company struck for 20s per week in 1903, it was pleaded that the rate was below the norm in Glasgow. The directors refused them more than 16s a week.[26]

**Trade Unionism**

The trajectory of trade unionism in Scotland and Ireland in the nineteenth century was similar; one of gradual integration into the British Labour movement. Both countries were governed by more or less the same industrial relations legislation. The Irish parliament was the first to introduce anti-trade union combination acts, in 1729. Westminster followed suit, and then repealed the acts in 1824, decriminalising trade unions decades before other states in Europe, and gradually giving them legal protections, culminating in the Trades Disputes Act (1906), which remained the basic statutory instrument in labour legislation in Britain until 'Tebbit's law' in 1982, and in Ireland until 1990. Not until 1941 did the Irish government attempt to change the industrial relations framework inherited from Britain, and then the initiative was largely a failure.[27] But there was to be an important divergence between Scottish and Irish Labour in the early twentieth century, as unions in the south of Ireland moved towards independence.

Throughout the UK, the unions that emerged after 1824 were small, local societies for craftsmen. In Ireland, the bulk of them stayed that way, stagnating like the economy, until mopped up by expanding cross-channel unions. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who did their best to ignore Ireland, could not help noticing

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[24]  Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824–2000* (Dublin, 2011), 40.

[25]  *Derry Journal*, 1 April, 2 May 1892.

[26]  *Derry Journal*, 11–18 February, 17 May, 7, 10, 14, 24 June 1889; Robert Gavin, William P. Kelly, and Dolores O'Reilly, *Atlantic Gateway: The Port and City of Londonderry Since 1700* (Dublin, 2009), 133, 165.

[27]  Finbarr Joseph O'Shea, 'Government and Trade Unions in Ireland, 1939–46: The Formation of Labour Legislation', MA (University College, Cork, 1988).

a marked contrast between the union of [trade unions in] Scotland with England, and that effected between either of them and Ireland. The English and Scottish Trade Unions federate or combine with each other on equal terms. If complete amalgamation is decided on, it is frequently the Scotchman, bringing with him Scotch procedure and Scotch traditions, who is chosen to reign in England, the centre of government being shifted almost automatically to the main centre of industry. Union with Ireland invariably means the simple absorption of Irish branches, and the unconditional acceptance of English or Scottish rule and organisation.[28]

After 1868, trade unions in Ireland were represented notionally by the British TUC, which assembled in Dublin in 1880 and in Belfast in 1893. These occasions aside, Belfast alone maintained a continual link with the TUC, and even that was not substantial. Out of 380 delegates at the 1893 Congress, thirty four were Irish based. Next year at Norwich, the Irish contingent numbered eight. The Belfast Congress noted the peculiar difficulties of the Irish by accepting a motion to guarantee them a seat on its executive, the parliamentary committee. It was not too little, too late. The problem went much deeper and wider. Sending delegates to meetings in Britain was a considerable expense, and hardly worth the bother for societies too small to figure in the reckoning. Congress dealt with policy at its broadest and was quite unlike a trade union annual conference. Only the most anglicised could ignore the differences between the two countries and the situation of their unions. There was, too, a sense of alienation from the British apparatus on the part of the Irish Labour élite, who were not finding much opportunity for self-advancement in the amalgamateds, as British-based unions in Ireland were called.[29] Even William Walker, an official of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners in Belfast, a Unionist, and a staunch advocate of links with British Labour, told Belfast trades council: 'unfortunately it seemed to be a canon of the amalgamated unions that "Irishmen need not apply".'[30] In 1894 the Irish set up their own TUC.

The formation of the Scottish TUC in 1897 had more to do with politics and the question of what to do with union organisation rather than union

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[28] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1897), 87–8.

[29] Emmet O'Connor, 'Problems of Reform in the Irish Trades Union Congress, 1894–1914', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 23/24, (2007), 40.

[30] Quoted in Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, 297.

representation per se. Scottish unions had considered federating separately
from the TUC as early as 1872. When the TUC reacted to the possibility of an
alliance of Independent Labour Party supporters and trades council delegates
pushing it into radical action by introducing the card vote and excluding trades
councils, Scots were appalled: in Scotland, as in Ireland, trades councils were
more important than their counterparts in England. In the early years, the two
breakaway Congresses huddled together in the face of TUC indignation.[31] But
there were key differences between them. Whereas the Irish TUC duplicated
and displaced the British TUC, which accepted the loss of Ireland in the
1900s, the Scottish Congress had a more ambiguous relationship with London.
Initially it saw itself primarily as a platform for political demands, and justified
its role as a supplement to the work of the TUC, while rejecting the idea that
it was a glorified trades council. Not until the end of World War One did it
secure recognition from the TUC, and relations remained 'touchy'. When it
resolved to give more attention to union organisation after 1923, it sought to
strengthen its ties with the TUC and accepted subordination to London during
the general strike of 1926.[32] At the same time, it would be an exaggeration to
depict the pre-1914 Irish Labour movement as independent and its Scottish
counterpart as regional. There remained a strong national element in Scottish
Labour. Over 100 Scottish unions were still extant in 1900. The majority of
craft unions in baking, printing, construction, iron and steel, and textiles were
Scottish-based, and most Labour socialist bodies supported Home Rule for
Scotland up to the ascendancy of the British Labour Party in the 1920s.[33]
Equally, the majority – some 75 per cent in 1900 – of affiliates to the Irish
TUC were in British-based unions, and the Irish Congress regularly called on
them to join the British Labour Party. It was Jim Larkin and Larkinism that
made Irish Labour truly independent.

Born in Liverpool of Irish parents, Larkin brought to the fore the critical
differences between the contexts of Irish and Scottish trade unionism as an
agent of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL).[34] Known in Britain
as 'the Irish union', the NUDL had been founded in Glasgow in 1889, before
moving its headquarters to Liverpool in 1890. Its first president and general

[31]  Angela Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress: The First 80 Years, 1897–1977*
      (Edinburgh, 1986), 15–25, 68.
[32]  Keith Aitken, *The Bairns O'Adam: The Story of the STUC* (Edinburgh, 1997), 22, 107.
[33]  William Knox (ed.), *Scottish Labour Leaders, 1918–39: A Biographical Dictionary*
      (Edinburgh, 1984), 41; Tuckett, *The Scottish Trades Union Congress*, 15.
[34]  See Eric Taplin, *The Dockers' Union: A Study of the National Union of Dock Labourers,
      1889–1922* (Leicester, 1986).

secretary were Richard McGhee and Edward McHugh, two Ulster migrants to Scotland. After his appointment as an organiser in 1905, Larkin worked in the north of England and Scotland, and in Ireland from 1907. What made Larkin so relevant in Ireland was that he offered an answer to the two big questions facing Irish trade unionism: how to build an effective trade unionism in a country where craftsmen were not able to act as a leading sector for the mass of workers, and where employers were hostile to the unionisation of the unskilled; and whether the way forward was to stick with the big battalions of British trade unionism, or form a separate Irish Labour movement.

Larkin's experience in Belfast and Dublin led him to conclude that sympathetic action was the way to combat Irish employers, much to the horror of his moderate general secretary, James Sexton. He also discovered a circle of radicals who told him that British unions would never commit sufficient resources to Ireland to tackle the problems of Irish Labour. The upshot was the launch of the breakaway Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in 1909; a union that was militant, radical, republican and an advocate of 'Irish unions for Irish workers'.[35] It would really come into its own during the upsurge of union membership between 1917 and 1921, and when the Free State was formed 75 per cent of its trade unionists were in Irish-based unions. In Scotland too, Larkin's militant style generated antagonism to Sexton. Ultimately it would lead Clydeside, Dundee, and Bo'ness dockers to decamp from the NUDL and launch the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers in 1911. Yet we do not speak of Larkinism in Scotland. The Scottish Union of Dock Labourers was the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers; the ITGWU was the rebirth of the Irish labour movement.

The post-1917 advance brought the ITGWU to Scotland. With the help of Glasgow trades council and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union it negotiated for the tattie-hokers with the Scottish Potato Merchants' Association in 1918. In the wake of the Kirkintilloch tragedy, the Scottish Farm Servants' Union opened an Irish migratory workers' branch, with Irish help.[36] There were surprisingly few similar examples of unions following potential constituents, or of inter-union co-operation, across the Sea of Moyle.

### In Search of the 'Celtic Entente'

By contrast to union connections, contacts between radicals were both

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[35] For the official history see C. Desmond Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union: The Formative Years, 1909–23* (Dublin, 1982).

[36] Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork, 2001), 9–11, 101.

numerous and countervailing. They had much in common: the land question, especially, and, to a lesser extent, urban working-class issues and Home Rule. On the other hand, they had to contend with Scottish fears of a growing Irish Catholic presence. Scottish historians have generally depicted the pre-Famine Irish in Scotland as, at best, too intimidated to engage with radical movements and known more for their strike-breaking than trade unionism, and, at worst, too backward and Catholic to share the innate democratic intellect of the Scot; a received wisdom challenged by Martin Mitchell, who has cited evidence of Irish involvement with radicals from the United Scotsmen to Chartism.[37] James Young claimed that socialists were no less prejudiced: 'Scottish socialism … crystalised within a society characterised by Presbyterian "superiority", a suffocating Kailyard sentimentality, and ethnic conflict.'[38] Despite the best efforts of such as Waterford-born John Wheatley and his Glasgow Catholic Socialist Society, there remained a gulf of suspicion between the Scottish left and Irish Catholics. For their part, Irish socialists had little sympathy with Scottish nationalism.

The Irish Land War of 1879–81 and the Crofters' War of the 1880s raised hopes of a new departure. But while events in Ireland were important, the direct Irish input into the Scottish agrarian unrest was limited to Michael Davitt and Glasgow-based urban radicals. Connections between the peasantry of both countries were 'extremely tenuous.'[39] A second extraneous element was Henry George, celebrated advocate of a single tax on land and author of the hugely influential *Progress and Poverty* (1879), and sections of the Irish and Scottish diaspora in the United States. The initial steps in forging the coalition were taken by Highlanders in Glasgow making common cause with the Irish Home Government Federation. A Highland Land Law Reform Association was established in 1882 to secure provisions similar to the Irish Land Act of 1881. Ireland remained something of a double-edged sword. The fear of a comparable land war developing in Scotland amounted to a potent threat to the authorities. Radical Georgites 'revelled in their Irish connections.'[40] On the other hand, moderates found them an embarrassment. Most Scots regarded the Irish as superstitious, impoverished, disaffected, and anything but an appropriate model, and conservatives deliberately exaggerated

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[37]  Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland*, 6–13.

[38]  James D. Young, 'The Irish Immigrants' Contribution to Scottish Socialism, 1880–1926', *Saothar*, 13 (1988), 89–98.

[39]  Andrew Newby, *Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands, c.1870–1912* (Edinburgh, 2007), 27.

[40]  Ibid., 92.

the level of Irish involvement. The Crofters' war, in which rent strikes and boycotts were organised against attempts to evict crofters in rent arrears or clear land for hunting and shooting, was most intense on Skye, but supported throughout the Highlands and Islands. Five 'Crofters' MPs' – dubbed 'the Scotch Parnellite party' – were returned in the general election of 1885. Based in part on the Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, the Crofters' Act provided security of tenure, introduced widespread rent reductions, and established a commission with power to fix rents. The 'Scotch Parnellites' were too few to influence the Act or prevent the Liberals stealing their clothes. In the 1890s the Highland land reform movement 'crumbled in the face of internal splits and remedial Tory legislation, and the other radical threads which were entwined for a period in the 1880s unravelled.'[41] The Crofters' war was a Scottish affair, though Davitt's *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Or the Story of the Irish Land League Revolution* (1904) treated it as a successful extension of the Irish Land War, led by Irishmen. This myth allowed him to claim the outcome as a victory and the struggle as an example of Celtic solidarity. In reality, Davitt, George and their ilk were disappointed, both by the compromises that ended the Irish Land War, and in the hope that Scotland would offer a fresh opportunity to pursue a radical agenda. Disappointing too, for Davitt and kindred spirits in Scotland, was their failure to generate pan-Celtic unity.

After the Crofters' war, radical connections shifted to urban, industrial contexts, and political parties. In 1893 Keir Hardie visited Ireland to promote branches of the Independent Labour Party in Belfast, Dublin and Waterford. In the 1900s, Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald made regular trips to Belfast in support of William Walker's candidacy for the British Labour Party in Belfast North. Walker despaired of winning a Westminster seat in Belfast after the Liberal landslide brought Home Rule back into the realm of possibility in 1906, and in January 1910 he stood for Labour in Leith Burghs, coming third in a three-cornered fight. His early speeches addressed the fact that he was Irish and anti-Home Rule until he decided that neither were of interest to the electors, and then spoke as any Labour candidate would.[42] What remained of the British Labour Party in Belfast was destroyed by the third Home Rule crisis.

A more enduring link was initiated by James Connolly. Born in Edinburgh

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[41]  Ibid., 171.
[42]  Bob Purdie, 'An Ulster Labourist in Liberal Scotland: William Walker and the Leith Burghs election of 1910' in Ian S. Wood (ed.), *Scotland and Ulster* (Edinburgh, 1994), 133.

– though he claimed to have been born in Monaghan, like his parents – and trained as a Marxist in the Scottish Socialist Federation, the Scottish wing of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Connolly moved to Dublin in 1896 to found the Irish Socialist Republican Party. The party organ, the *Workers' Republic*, was launched in 1898 with a loan of £50 from Hardie.[43] That Connolly retained contacts with Scotland is not so well known in Ireland, though they have been documented.[44] Following the Millerand controversy, when the French socialist, Alexandre Millerand joined Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau's 'government of Republican Defence', the Second International's refusal to condemn the decision brought to a head the differences in socialist parties between the 'impossibilists' and the reformists. Only two delegations to the 1900 congress of the International were unanimous in their complete condemnation of Millerand: those from the Irish Socialist Republican Party and the American Socialist Labor Party (SLP), led by Daniel De Leon. The Millerand controversy had a similar impact on the Scottish SDF, and in 1902 Connolly helped the Scottish impossibilists to form a new Glasgow-based party, which was called the SLP of Great Britain at his suggestion. The SLP introduced American syndicalism to Britain through its progeny, the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism, founded at Birmingham in 1907. The Advocates of Industrial Unionism were inspired also by the Industrial Workers of the World, or the Wobblies, formed in Chicago in 1905. When the Wobblies split in 1908 over whether to endorse political action, as De Leon wanted, or concentrate on industrial action, the British were affected. De Leonists moved to the SLP and the pure syndicalists went to the Advocates of Industrial Unionism, which in 1909 established the Industrial Workers of Great Britain. Membership of the Industrial Workers of Great Britain topped 4,000, mainly on Clydeside, in 1911, though its power was broken that same year in a strike at the Singer factory in Clydebank.[45] Raymond Challinor saw the SLP as 'the origins of British Bolshevism', and most of the leading personalities of the early Communist Party of Great Britain were forged in the SLP.

Connolly had a purer impact, or at least one closer to his own heart, on John Maclean, and their perspectives on each other's countries illustrate the tortuous attitude of contemporary socialists to nationalism. Influenced by

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[43]  David Lynch, *Radical Politics in Modern Ireland: The Irish Socialist Republican Party, 1896–1904* (Dublin, 2005), 50.

[44]  See James D. Young, 'John Leslie, 1856–1921: A Scottish-Irishman as Internationalist', *Saothar*, 18 (1993), 55–61. Leslie had a formative influence on Connolly in Scotland.

[45]  Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London, 1977), 98–102.

John Leslie and by his regular correspondence with John Carstairs Matheson, a Lowland Scot and the major theorist of the SLP, Connolly had no time for Scottish nationalism. Matheson rejected all nationalisms except the Irish, while Maclean would not endorse Irish independence on the ground that it would entail a Catholic state.[46] But events in Ireland changed Maclean's outlook profoundly. After visiting Belfast during the 1907 dock strike at the invitation of the Belfast Socialist Society, he acquired an undying admiration for Larkin. Then a member of the SDF and sceptical of the political value of trade unions, he was persuaded that unions could play a useful role in class struggle.[47] By 1918–19 Maclean was embracing Connolly's view of Irish history as an evolution from the primitive communism of the Gaelic clans to the feudalism of the Normans and the capitalism of the English, and he projected communism as a re-conquest, expressed in the slogan 'back and forward to communism.' In response to the Irish War of Independence Maclean wrote the pamphlet *The Irish Tragedy: Scotland's Disgrace* (1920), calling for a British withdrawal from Ireland. He had a short answer for the Ulster Unionists: integrate or emigrate.

The 1916–23 period marked the high-tide of Scottish-Irish radicalism. As Máirtín Seán Ó Catháin has shown, Glasgow was a key centre in the Fenian world from the 1860s, and contributed a few dozen volunteers to the Easter Rising.[48] Their number was augmented by a handful of high calibre revolutionaries – such as George Pollock, alias, McLay, a future general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) – who left Scotland for Ireland to avoid conscription. Various cultural and nationalist bodies, including the Scottish National Committee, the Highland Land League, the Irish Self-Determination League, Sinn Féin, and the Gaelic League corresponded on creating what Rory Erskine of Marr called 'a Celtic entente.'[49] Between the Rising and the end of the Irish Civil War, Glasgow was a bolt hole for Irish revolutionaries, and a hub which brought socialists and republicans together. Republicans who spent time there were usually radicalised by it; notably Seán McLoughlin and Seán Murray, who went on to activism in the SLP and the CPI.[50] In 1918

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[46] Young, 'John Leslie', 55–61; James D. Young, 'John Maclean, Socialism, and the Easter Rising', *Saothar*, 16 (1991), 23–33.

[47] Brian J. Ripley and John McHugh, *John Maclean* (Manchester, 1989), 30–2.

[48] Máirtín Seán Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland, 1858–1916: Fenians in Exile* (Dublin, 2007).

[49] National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Art Ó Briain Papers, MS 8427 /18.

[50] Charlie McGuire, *Sean McLoughlin, Ireland's Forgotten Revolutionary* (Pontypool, 2011); Emmet O'Connor, 'Murray, John (Seán), 1898–1961, Communist Party of Ireland

Glasgow's Marxists, the Scottish Brigade of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and a workers' defence force organised by Willie Gallacher were forging links with Irish revolutionism that would persist into the 1930s. When Larkin wanted to query his exclusion from the British dominions in 1919, he got Neil MacLean, Labour MP for Glasgow Govan, to table a parliamentary question.[51] In August 1922, at the height of the Civil War, the leading republican paper *An Phoblacht* was being produced in Glasgow and the editorial staff wrote to Ernie O'Malley, the IRA's second in command, urging republicans to engage with the national postal strike and ally with the CPI.[52] There were calls too for a Labour alliance. Scottish radicals were impressed by the Irish general strike against conscription on 23 April 1918. Tricolours and Sinn Féiners mixed with red flags and socialists at Glasgow's famous May Day celebration in 1919, which attracted 100,000 workers. Maclean found the insurgent spirit in republicanism so compelling that he began to co-operate with the aristocratic Erskine of Marr. On the Irish side, the ITGWU paper, the *Voice of Labour*, thought collaboration with Scottish workers would be one way of tackling the Ulster question.[53]

The Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 took much of the steam out of the Scottish-Irish relationship, defusing the Irish question just before the triumph of British Labour shelved the Scottish question – in both cases, coincidentally, for some fifty years. Only in communism did the radical entente survive. Such was the Scottish involvement in the CPI in 1923 that Dublin wags dubbed it the Communist Party of Scotland.[54] Over the next two decades, the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the controlling body of all communist parties up to the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, sent a stream of Scots – Belfast-born Arthur Macmanus, Bob Stewart, Jack Leckie, Tom Bell, Pat Devine, and Willie Gallacher to supervise the organisationally precarious and ideologically wayward communist groups in Ireland: the CPI (1921–4), the Irish Worker League (1923–9), the Revolutionary Workers' Groups (1930–3), and the second CPI (1933–41). Stewart did not

General Secretary' in Keith Gildart, David Howell, and Neville Kirk (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography, XI* (London, 2003), 200–5.

[51] *Parliamentary Debates House of Commons*, 18 August 1919, Vol. 119; col.1977–8; 19 November 1919, vol. 121, col.942.

[52] Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia, and the Communist Internationals, 1919–43* (Dublin, 2004), 70–2.

[53] Young, 'John Maclean, Socialism, and the Easter Rising', 30.

[54] For the Scots and Irish communism, see O'Connor, *Reds and the Green*, passim. See also Robert Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters: The Memoirs of Bob Stewart* (London, 1967).

exaggerate in saying of Larkin: 'I was one of the few men he really trusted politically.'[55] Their common horror of alcohol assisted. Other emissaries were not so warmly received. The Irish deeply resented any subordination to the British party, and the consistent choice of Scots makes it improbable that the selection simply reflected their prominence in contemporary British communism. Almost certainly, Moscow was calculating that the Irish would find it easier to take advice from Celts than Saxons. In 1941, after the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia, it was Gallacher who persuaded the second CPI to dissolve in neutral Éire, on the basis that it would be impossible to reconcile the near universal support for neutrality with the communist policy of total commitment to the war effort. It was the end, not merely of the CPI in Éire, but of a radical tradition. In an epilogue, Larkin attended an Independent Labour Party summer school in 1943, and was eulogised and inducted into honorary membership of the party by another legend, James Maxton.[56] Both were dead within four years.

## Conclusion

What is most obvious about Scottish-Irish connections is that they were strongest in Ulster, and on Clydeside. One could grow up in the south of Ireland largely unaware of Scotland, but in Ulster the Scottish influence is everywhere. Secondly, one might distinguish between passive and active connections. Those of the mainstream Labour movement were passive, and reflected the trajectory of trade unionism in both countries. The lines of trade-union development in Ireland and Scotland were closest at the turn of the last century, as Scottish capital and artisans moved into Ulster and British trade unionists colonised Ireland generally. The centralisation of British trade unionism in London, the incorporation of Scotland into British capitalism, and the decolonisation of Irish trade unionism under Larkin, led Scottish and Irish Labour organisation to diverge.

Active connections were more likely to be pursued by radicals – be they land reformers, republicans, socialists, or communists. Surprisingly, the pan-Celtic radicalism dreamed of by Davitt, and in recent times by the likes of Peter Berresford Ellis, was not more widespread.[57] For all their similarities, Scotland and Ireland were very different places, with distinctive political

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[55] Stewart, *Breaking the Fetters*, 149–50.

[56] *New Leader*, 14 August 1943.

[57] See, inter alia, Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Revolution: A Study in Anti-Imperialism* (Ceredigion, 1985).

cultures and different radical agendas. One illustration of the differences is found in the address of James Browne, one of two fraternal delegates from the Scottish TUC, at the Irish TUC in Cork in 1913:

> They would have in Ireland the same enemies to meet as the workers had to meet in Scotland. Last Saturday 3,000 young Scotchmen and women had to emigrate because they could not find room to live at home. They had landlordism in Scotland as rampant as ever it had been in Ireland, and land was not available for the people to live in because of deer forests and playgrounds which the landlords insisted on having.
>
>     A voice in the public gallery – Why don't ye shoot them (great laughter).
>
>     Mr Browne – I forgot that I was in Ireland (renewed laughter).[58]

University of Ulster

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58  University of Ulster, Magee College, *Report of the Twentieth Irish Trades Union Congress*, 50.