

IMPACT Leaving Certificate History Study Guide.

The 1913 lockout is a topic that often appears on the leaving certificate history exam. The question on 1913 is almost always in the *Movements for Political and Social Reform (topic 2 in section 2 IRELAND)* section of the exam. The question is worth 25% of the written exam. We have written an answer to a higher level question on 1913, though it contains all the information needed to answer an ordinary level question on the same topic. There is no guarantee that this question will be on any given paper, though it does appear frequently.

Some Questions from Past Higher Level Leaving Certificate Papers

2016: What were the issues and outcomes of the elections of 1885 and 1886 and/or the 1913 Dublin strike and lockout?

2014: Was the Dublin strike and lockout (1913) a total failure? Argue your case.

2013: During the period 1870-1914, which was more successful, land agitation or the 1913 strike and lockout? Argue your case, referring to both.

2011: How effectively did James Larkin seek improvements for workers?

2009: To what extent was the Dublin strike and lockout, 1913, a success or a failure?

Note on the questions: you will notice that the questions are all asking you to consider essentially the same thing: was 1913 a success or a failure. Accordingly, that is the question we have answered:

The 1913 lockout was a complex political event. Both the striking workers and the employers imposing the lockout encountered successes as well as failures. This essay aims to set out the causes behind the various wins and losses enjoyed and suffered by each group.

Elements Contributing to the Success of the Strike

Though it was an incredibly difficult time for them, the events of the 1913 lockout provided workers with at least some causes for celebration. Elements of their campaign were successful. In this section, I aim to explore some of the elements and episodes that lent themselves to aiding the workers' cause.

- (i) **The skill and experience of Jim Larkin:** Jim Larkin, a leader of the striking workers and founder of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, was a formidable and talented union organiser. By the time he reached Dublin, he had already proved his credentials where carrying out effective industrial action was concerned. For example, he had successfully recruited members and carried out strikes in Scotland, Belfast, Cork and Derry. He had orchestrated successful strikes

of carters, dockers, and railwaymen. One, for example, took place in Wexford in 1911. Larkin had also won a series of disputes that increased wage rates for unskilled Dublin workers by between 20 and 25 per cent.

- (ii) **Syndicalism:** Larkin's preferred method of industrial action, syndicalism, had proved highly effective. Proponents of this method believed that all workers should behave as though they were in a single union. The key technique in syndicalism is the 'sympathetic strike'. Sympathetic strikes involve workers supporting other striking workers by refusing to cooperate in any way with the striking workers' employers. The technique is so effective because one strike can lead to system-wide stoppages – which place huge pressure on employers to meet union demands. For example, as soon as tram workers began the 1913 strike, delivery workers began refusing to handle William Martin Murphy's *Irish Independent*. When Easons & Co. continued to stock Murphy's paper against workers' wishes, dock workers refused to handle Eason goods.
- (iii) **The Timing of the Strike:** Larkin timed the beginning of the strike for maximum impact. He chose to stop the trams at roughly 10am on the 26th of August in order to coincide with the first day of the massive Dublin Horse Show.
- (iv) **Brutal Police Behaviour:** Counterintuitively, brutal treatment of striking workers by police ultimately worked in the workers favour. As workers took to the streets, there were many clashes with the police. Fierce baton charges resulted in numerous injuries amongst the striking workers. In fact, three people, James Nolan, James Byrne and Alice Brady, were killed. Seeing the workers brutalised helped move public opinion onto the side of the strike. The funerals of James Nolan and Alice Brady became focal points for public support of the strike and thousands attended. The fact that the police arrested and temporarily imprisoned Larkin for his involvement in the strike also helped raise his profile and cement his image as a hero in the eyes of the workers and the public at large.
- (v) **The British Connection:** Though it ultimately dried up, the initial support that the striking workers received from the British congress was instrumental in allowing the workers to hold out for so long. British unions sent a shipment worth of 60,000 'family boxes' of food and supplies to the striking workers. The shipment was worth about £100,000 and each box held supplies for five people. The British unions also made some key interventions in terms of trying to bring about peace – for example, they sent a delegation to act as independent arbitrators between the workers and employers. Those these attempts were not ultimately successful, they were good for morale and were important as demonstrations of support for the striking workers.
- (vi) **The Findings of the Askwith Inquiry:** A tribunal of inquiry known as the Askwith Inquiry, was set up to meet representatives of employers and of workers, and to resolve their dispute. The findings of the inquiry were not all in the workers' favour. However, the inquiry did side with the workers on some important points.

Most notably, the findings condemned the employers for requiring workers to sign a document pledging not to engage in any way with the ITGWU or face dismissal. The inquiry deemed this to be 'contrary to individual liberty'.

- (vii) **Alleviation of Slum Conditions:** One short-term and crucially important success of the strike was that it contributed to raising awareness of the horrific slum conditions in which many of Dublin's poor lived. The year after the strike, in 1914, a civic exhibition was held in Dublin. One of the main objectives of the exhibition was to explore ways in which effective town planning could alleviate the worst of Dublin's slum conditions.
- (viii) **The Coming of Age of the Trade Union Movement:** Ostensibly, workers were banned from engaging with the ITGWU in any manner. However, it didn't take long after the end of the lockout for workers to begin drifting back to the union. A labour shortage caused by World War 1 meant that workers, who were suddenly in demand, had more power and influence. Before long, the ITGWU was the largest union in Ireland with 120,000 members. 1913 had demonstrated to both workers and employers that the union and the labour movement more generally were forces to be reckoned with. It had served to move some of Ireland's most vulnerable and marginalised people – Dublin's working poor – to the centre of the national stage. The labour movement has remained there since.
- (ix) **The Irish Citizens' Army and 1916:** The events of 1913 taught Irish organised labour leaders, particularly James Connolly, an important lesson: that they would only succeed in achieving their aims if they managed to align themselves with nationalism and republicanism. As a consequence of this, the Irish Citizen Army – a militia force that had been set up by labour leaders to protect the striking workers from police brutality – joined forces with the Irish Republican Brotherhood. That alliance would ultimately prove to be instrumental in the events of the 1916 Easter Rising and, as a consequence, in the very foundation of the Ireland we know today.

Elements Contributing to the Failure of the Strike

The striking workers also encountered a great deal of adversity. Much of the political landscape was not arranged in their favour.

- (i) **William Martin Murphy, a Formidable Opponent:** Murphy was Ireland's most influential businessman. He was vastly wealthy and was the proprietor of several iconic brands: Clery's Department store, the *Irish Independent* and the Dublin United Tramways Company amongst them. In order to prevent dissension amongst his workers, he built up a reputation for paying comparatively generous wages. However he also had a reputation for coming down harshly on any workers who did rebel. His extensive business interests gave him both significant clout

amongst fellow business leaders as well as the material resources to absorb the costs of a long and difficult dispute like the one that took place in 1913.

- (ii) **Syndicalism of the Bosses:** Murphy's stroke of ingenuity was to defeat Larkin and the striking workers by using the very tactic that had made Larkin's strikes so successful: syndicalism. Of course Murphy's syndicalism was syndicalism of the bosses, however, and not of the workers. Murphy decided to form a federation in order to break the ITGWU. The resulting Dublin Employers' Federation refused to recognise Larkin's union. The employers involved in the federation drew up a pledge for workers, which stated that they were not, and would not become, members of the Larkin's union. If they signed the pledge, Murphy said, they could return to work; otherwise, they were locked out.
- (iii) **Weakness of the Workers:** In stark contrast to Murphy and his elite gang of employers, Dublin's workers were in a very weak position. Dublin was not a manufacturing city. The effect of this was that work was usually unskilled, mainly connected to the distribution and transportation of goods. Work was casual and precarious. There were more workers than jobs. The unemployment rate was around 20%. Consequently, workers were in no position to make demands. Moreover, workers were physically weak. Due to Dublin's very low-quality tenement housing conditions, disease was rampant. Illnesses such as measles, TB or whooping cough were real threats. Alcoholism was also rife in Dublin's tenements. Many turned to drinking as their only means of escaping the horrors of their daily lives.
- (iv) **Scab Labour:** Some workers did not go out on strike in solidarity with Larkin's union members. This had the effect of undermining the strike to an extent.
- (v) **British Support Dries Up:** Though British unions were an important source of support for the striking workers, that support only went so far. On a number of occasions Larkin attempted to push British unions into going on sympathetic strike in support of the Dublin workers. He went on tours of Britain in order to generate support for this action. Larkin also called on the British unions to 'black' ships sailing into Dublin Port and to prevent British dockers from working in Ireland. These requests were met with refusals. Larkin harshly condemned the British for their failure to strike in sympathy with the Dublin workers. Larkin's strong condemnation alienated the British unions, causing them to cease sending food and resources to the Dublin workers. This loss of support was critical to the ultimate failure of the strike.
- (vi) **'Save the Kiddies':** By October 1913, many families had no food for their children. Larkin and Irish labour leaders decided to send the children of the worst-affected families to sympathetic homes in England. They called this the 'Save the Kiddies' campaign. The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, William J. Walsh, however, was opposed to this because he believed that impressionable Catholic children would be exposed to dangerous ideas in non-Catholic households. By falling foul of the

Catholic Church, Larkin lost himself a significant amount of Irish public support. This proved harmful to his movement.

- (vii) **Opposition from Home Rule:** Not only did Larkin lose the support of the Catholic Church, he also lost the support of an influential cohort of nationalists. The middle class nationalist Home Rule movement saw Larkinism as a great threat. The Home Rulers had been campaigning for 40 years and now their goal appeared within their grasp. They needed the support of both the Liberals and the Labour Party in Britain. In general, the Home Rule MPs agreed to support Labour Party bills and, in return, the Labour Party would vote in favour of Home Rule. However, the Labour Party began to worry that they ought to be supporting their fellow labour activists in the Dublin strike. To the Home Rule movement, this was an unwelcome distraction. They saw it as complicating the Irish question in the British mind when they only wanted one Irish issue on the agenda: that of Home Rule.
- (viii) **The Findings of the Askwith Inquiry:** As discussed above, some of the findings of the Askwith inquiry were beneficial to the workers' cause. Others, however, were not. The inquiry, for example, condemned the workers' employment of sympathetic strikes. The inquiry also suggested that workers and employers should elect representatives to form a Conciliation Committee to discuss problems before taking drastic action. In another blow to the workers, the employers replied to the Commission, saying that they could not accept the proposals of the commission.
- (ix) **Electoral Rejection of Larkinism:** After the strike had collapsed, the lockout had ended and the workers had returned to work, Larkinism took an immediate hit. In the January 1914 municipal elections ten Larkinite candidates stood for election in Dublin but only one was elected.

Conclusion

It is difficult to say whether the 1913 strike and lockout was a success or a failure. As I have demonstrated, reasonable arguments can be made on each side. The evidence suggests that the strike was a failure in the immediate-term. As I have shown, a whole matrix of reasons exists for this failure. Above all, though, hunger, poverty and desperation brought about by the lockout forced workers to abandon the picket and return to work.

Taking the longer view, 1913 can be seen as a success. It galvanised a forgotten and neglected constituency – the urban poor. It also served to move trade unionism to the centre of the national stage, where it has remained since. Finally, the lockout, as a major episode of urban unrest, paved the way and foreshadowed the next: the 1916 Easter Rising.