

# Irish Labour History News

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The FREE Annual Newsletter of the Irish Labour History Society

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Helena Sheehan, Fionnuala Richardson, Emmet O'Connor and Paul O'Brien at the 2017 Annual Conference (Photograph: Eddie Soye).

## SEAN O'CASEY AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The 2017 annual conference of the Irish Labour History Society took place at the ILHS premises in Beggars Bush on Saturday, 21st October, and dealt with the topics of the life and writings of Seán O'Casey and Ireland's connection with the Russian Revolution.

Each of the day's sessions saw three speakers present papers. The first involved Christopher Murray speaking on 'O'Casey's Union Men as described in his writings', Martin Maguire speaking on 'Protestant, Republicans and Revolutionaries in the time of Sean O'Casey', and Manus O'Riordan speaking on 'O'Casey and O'Riordans on the 1956 Hungarian Uprising'.

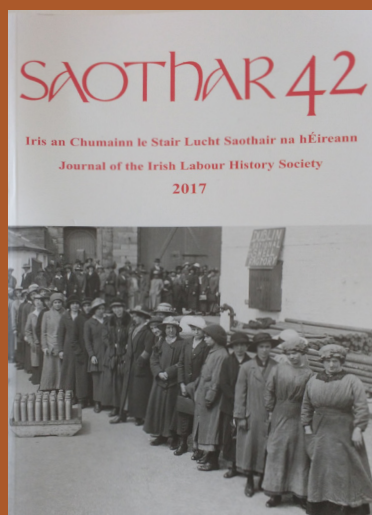
After lunch, the second session then saw Paul O'Brien speak on 'O'Casey and the Soviet Union', Helena Sheehan discuss 'Irish Communists at

the International Lenin School', and Emmet O'Connor speak on 'The Irish left and Soviet Russia, 1917-1943'.

The conference concluded with the launch of Brian Kenny's book *When Ireland Went Red: The Soviet Experiment 1918-1923*. Published by Personal History Publishing in association with the ILHS, Umiskin Press and Pat Bolger (DCTU-IMPACT), this work documents eleven of the Soviets which sprang up in Ireland between 1918-1923 and seeks to 'shine a light on the other revolution that was taking place in Ireland during these tumultuous years'.

The 2018 ILHS conference will take place in Belfast in October. The conference will mark the centenary of the death of the leading Belfast Labour figure, William Walker, in 1918. More details are available on page 4.

## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE



The ILHS online shop includes back issues of *Saothar* and other society publications. You can access it at [www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com](http://www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com)

## ILHS at Derry Radical Book Fair



ILHS Secretary, Kevin Murphy, and committee member Adrian Grant with Robert Emmet Grant, at the Derry Radical Book Fair. (Photograph: Kevin Murphy)

The second annual Derry Radical Book Fair took place at the Pilot's Row Centre, Rossville Street, on Saturday 27 January. The book fair built on the success of last year's event which saw book buyers and sellers come to Derry from across the UK and Ireland. The ILHS was invited to set up a book stall at the fair and secretary, Kevin Murphy, travelled to the north west with the society's various publications. He was joined on the day by local ILHS members, including Emmet O'Connor, who launched a new edition of Peadar O'Donnell's memoir, *There Will Be Another Day*. O'Donnell's connections to the city of Derry were highlighted, such as his time as an ITGWU organiser and later as an IRA commander.

## New Books of Labour History Interest

*Growing Up In Galway: Histories and Memories* is a new collection of essays and other materials collected by Sarah-Anne Buckley and John Cunningham, both history lecturers at NUI Galway. The volume emerged from a cluster of short talks held in Galway City Museum on 'Culture Night', 16 September 2016.

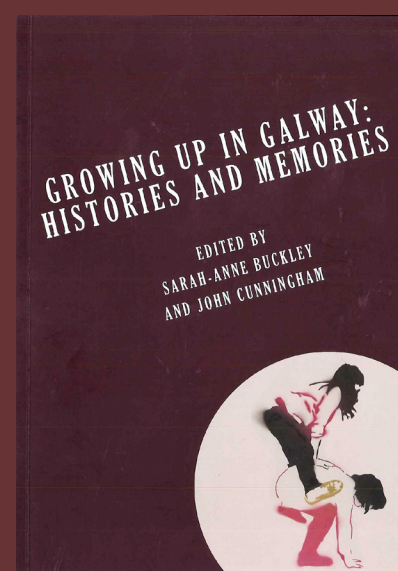
It spans a period from the 1840s to the 1970s, with a mixture of urban and rural perspectives, and comprises short research papers, oral histories, songs, and document studies, intersecting class and gender lines (several by ILHS members). Contributors are wide-ranging – spanning memories of carefree evenings at crossroads dances, to an account of the Letterfrack Industrial School; from the educational formation of the sons of the 19th century landed elite to the student radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s; from the establishment of a school for children with learning disabilities to the deliberate destruction of an orphanage building.

The book is published by Eva

Books, with the support of Galway City Museum. Those interested in obtaining copies or any other matter concerning the publication should email [sarahanne@nuigalway.ie](mailto:sarahanne@nuigalway.ie).

The life of the trade unionist, politician and ombudsman, Stephen McGonagle is the subject of a new book due to be published in April by Umiskin Press. McGonagle was a well known figure in his native Derry and Donegal and later became nationally known due to his numerous public appointments and his role as an Irish senator.

*The Life and Times of Stephen McGonagle: Ombudsman, Trade Unionist, Senator*, written by Stephen's son, Owen, outlines the life of McGonagle, sketching the origins of the family into which he was born, the influences that shaped the individual person, his views, attitudes, instincts and motivations. From the very particular Irish context of his birth in Derry, his education and upbringing, in Donegal and Derry, he energetically engaged



in a fundamental and principled interest in humanity. From trade unionist to politician, to human rights activist, he faced any opposition, in the pursuit of improved human conditions and peaceful, non-violent solutions to our more recalcitrant problems. Many issues that he dealt with might seem to have belonged to the past, yet they are still with us.

The book will be launched in Derry and Dublin in April. See page 4.

## REBEL IRISHWOMEN

The book fair forms part of the programme of events marking the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, which took place in the city on 30 January 1972

The organisers of the book fair stated that

*"We have been happily surrounded by visitors as well as stall holders from as far away as Dublin and Cork, and of course those who travelled here especially for today's event from England, Scotland and Wales. All of who are great book lovers and lovers of politics. This year's event has seen more bookstalls, talks and discussions which gives us great excitement and enthusiasm as we look towards planning for next year's Radical Book Fair."*

ILHS members Adrian Grant and Emmet O'Connor were also speakers at the Alternative University held at the Nerve Centre, Derry, during the UCU strike in defence of university pensions in March. A similar event was held at the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast during the strike action, which was still ongoing at the time of writing.

Throughout 2018 the Irish Labour History Society is sponsoring a *Rebel Irishwomen* monthly lecture series taking place at the GPO Witness History Visitor Centre. The lectures mark the centenary of the process of women's first inclusion in politics, and deal with the dozen subjects profiled by journalist and author R. M. Fox (1891-1969) in his 1935 book *Rebel Irishwomen*.

Apart from Mother Jones, a legendary figure in American labour history, the women were personal friends of Fox and his wife Patricia Lynch, an acclaimed children's author. The first two lectures of the series saw Margaret Ward and Padraig Yeates discuss the lives of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Countess Markievicz respectively. Alongside Markievicz's sister Eva Gore Booth, the other 'rebels' focused on in the lectures are Maud Gonne MacBride, Mary MacSwiney, Grace Gifford Plunkett, Nora Connolly O'Brien, Helena Molony, Maeve Cavanagh MacDowell, Dora Maguire and Charlotte Despard.

While dismissed by one critic as 'a collection of propagandist articles written for immature minds and not for adults', *Rebel Irishwomen* received enthusiastic reviews in most Irish newspapers and periodicals. A second edition appeared in 1967, two years before Fox's death.

Abbreviated readings of his twelve essays will be performed at the beginning of each *Rebel Irishwomen* event, setting the scene for the subjects to then receive a modern treatment from a variety of historians. The result will be an opportunity to consider both the merits of Fox's approach to historical writing, and Michael Davitt's contention that female rebels were more uncompromising than their male counterparts and therefore not only valuable, but indeed necessary assets in any revolutionary movement.

The lecture series, co-sponsored by Dublin City Council and *History Ireland* magazine, is curated by ILHS committee member James Curry.



Micheline Sheehy Skeffington taking part in the Suffragist window smashing re-enactment at Dublin Castle on 6 February 2018. (Photograph: Julian Behel, OPW)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**11 & 19 April 2018**

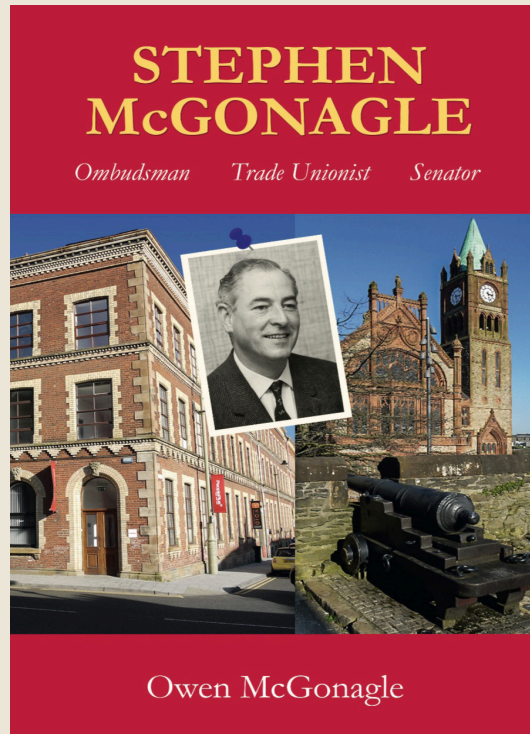
The Derry and Dublin launches of *Stephen McGonagle: Ombudsman, Trade Unionist, Senator* will take place in April 2018. The book will be launched at the City Hotel, Derry on 11 April at 7:30pm, and at Liberty Hall on 19 April at 5:30pm. Those seeking copies or an invitation to either launch should email [kmcginly@tcd.ie](mailto:kmcginly@tcd.ie) with 'Umiskin Press' in the subject headline. The book will be available to purchase at the launch and in select bookshops thereafter.

**18 April 2018:**

The annual Hugh Geraghty Lecture will take place in Cois Life, Liberty Hall, Dublin at 7.30pm. It is taking place in association with the Clé Club monthly gathering and will focus on the life of the nineteenth century political activist and author 'The Red Flag', Jim Connell. ILHS Honorary President Francis Devine will deliver the lecture.

**5 May 2018:**

A conference exploring 'Labour and Nationalism' in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales will take place at the University of Huddersfield in May. The conference is organised by the Society for the Study of Labour History, with the support of the ILHS, the Scottish Labour History Society and Llafur: The Welsh People's History Society. ILHS members, Emmet O'Connor, James Curry, Adrian Grant, and D.R. O'Connor Lysaght will speak on various aspects of Irish labour and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The full programme is available at [sslh.org.uk](http://sslh.org.uk)



**October 2018:**

The annual conference of the ILHS will take place in Belfast, focusing on the life of Northern Irish labour leader William Walker, who died in 1918. The final dates and venue will be circulated to members in advance of the conference, and members can check [www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com](http://www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com) for updates.



President Michael D. Higgins unveils a bronze replica statue of Connemara socialist author Pádraic Ó Conaire in Galway's Eyre Square on 23 November 2017. The original statue by Albert Power, which stood in Eyre Square for over sixty years after its unveiling by Éamon de Valera in 1935, can still be accessed in the entrance lobby of Galway City Museum  
(Photograph: James Curry).

### **NOTICE TO MEMBERS AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS**

You can now pay or renew your ILHS membership at [www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com](http://www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com)