

Labour history on Irish waterways - snippets - 3 - 1919/20

16 February 2011

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The paperwork contained in the Irish Transport & General Workersâ€™ Union (ITGWU) archive of â€™Canals 1919 to 1927â€™ study in its own right.

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The initial complaint from the workmen is nearly always hand-written in pencil, on scraps of paper or even on pages from company ledgers. Telegrams to branch secretaries are common and the mention of a phone conversation is rare.

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The Grand Canal Companyâ€™s letterhead is minimal and to the point; the language used is typical of the era with surnames used on their own, such as â€™Phillips saidâ€™ or â€™Larkin demandsâ€™.

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The Ministry of Labour (Irish Department!) with offices in Lord Edward Street, Dublin captures the politics of the day.

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The letterhead of the ITGWU shows the strength of the organisation at this time, just a few years after the painful 1913 lockout. The centrepiece of the letterhead is a drawing of Liberty Hall surrounded by stylised Celtic figures reminiscent of old illuminated manuscripts. The Unionâ€™s branches are listed down both sides. A quaint touch is the shorthand on the reverse, no doubt a paper saving measure.

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The content of the ITGWU letter reads:

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â€™Your wire received yesterday morning, no settlement arrived at with Canal, it is strange that after a week Phillips has not given one word or the other whether they agreed or disagreed. The men are anxious to know as some of them will go away if he does not agree to the termsâ€™.

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Bibliography: From the Irish Transport and General Workersâ€™ Union (canal section) files, lodged at the Labour History museum and archive, Beggars Bush, Dublin 4

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