

Labour history on Irish waterways - snippets 5 - nationalisation of GCC - 1950

25 December 2011

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The change from being a private company with share-holders to a state owned operation with a board of directors, had repercussions right through the Grand Canal Company. The last pay deal agreed with the staff took some time to be implemented and there was the problem of being part of a large and diverse public transport company. Differences in pay rates for workers doing the same job in different sections took quite some time to level out.

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Private boat owners were a group who suffered severe hardship in the changing company and their relationship with it. Traditionally private traders had been given a percentage of work from the company, which was to some, a large part of their income. Canal transport was under threat in a company with rail and road transport systems. Diminishing trade would mean the company would keep its own boats working efficiently, leaving the bye traders with a smaller part of the business.

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Various lists of bye traders and their boats were compiled with the boat information including whether wooden or metal and if the owner was trading full or part- time and the part of the navigation system being worked. In desperation, bye traders joined the Workers Union of Ireland.

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A letter dated 23rd September 1950 from James Scott, general manager and secretary canal section CIE, to James Larkin, general secretary WUI, gives an early sample of the hard times to come.

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Dear Sir,

With reference to discussion at Kingsbridge on the 18th instant, I give you below the private owners whose barges are not suitable for carrying the Board's loading and, therefore, would not be employed by the Board:-

The Turf Supply Company
Mrs. A. Smullen
Denis Ruen
Timothy Dunne
Patrick Pender
Patrick Balfe
C. Kilmurry
J. Flanagan
W. O'Neill
Thomas Mc Cormack

J. Mc Grath trades on the Shannon Navigation and does not seek loading on the canal.

Yours faithfully,

A letter dated 8th November from James Larkin to Mr. M J. Hayes, Labour Relations Officer, CIE provides the list of hopefuls.

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Dear Mr. Hayes,

You will recall the discussion which took place with the Chairman at Kingsbridge with regard to the position of private boat owners, when it was agreed that a list of names of such owners would be submitted who could be regarded as having reasonable and sustainable claims on the Company for consideration in respect of the provision of suitable employment.

The names which have been supplied to me in respect of the private boat owners are as follows:

Patrick Farrell	Boat No. 98B
Joseph Kane	111B
Patrick Nolan.....	108B
Michael Fennell.....	107B
John McDermott.....	103B
Thomas Hughes.....	113B
Peter Farrell.....	125B

In respect of the men working hired boats for the Company the names of Edward Hughes and John Balfe have been

supplied to me.

Yours faithfully,

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The final outcome of this correspondence and meetings was not lâ€™m afraid very positive.

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Bibliography: From the files of the Workers Union of Ireland (canal section), lodged at the Irish Labour History Museum and Archive, Beggars Bush, Dublin 4.

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Joe Treacy 2011.

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