An Cumann Stair Lucht Saithracha na HÉireann
The Irish Labour History Society, 2018

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The Irish Labour History Society was founded in 1973 and has published Saithrach since 1975. Membership is open to individuals, labour organisations, labour related organisations, academic institutions, libraries and archival bodies. The individual subscription rate is £10 and is payable on 1 January each year. For institutional rates, contact the secretary. Members receive a copy of Saithrach for the year, together with news of events and activities. General correspondence should be addressed to Kevin Murphy, secretary, 113B, Labour History Museum and Archives, Beggar’s Bush, Haddington Road, Dublin 4; Tel: (01) 8688 (07); email: secretary@irlabourhistorysociety.com

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Contents

Irish Labour History Society Report 2017-18
Kevin Murphy

The 1841 Children’s Employment Commission Ireland:
the employment of children in mines and manufacturies
Leah Dowdall

William Walker: social activist and Belfast labourist
Mike Mechem

‘Have you all gone mad’ - the 1918 General Strike
Padraig Yeates

Winnedf Carney in the 1918 Elections: Her Stand for Women, James Connolly & the Workers’ Republic
Helga Woggon

Ardmore Studios, film workers and the Irish State:
creative labour in the ‘Decade of Upheaval’
Denis Murphy

‘To fling defiance into the teeth of the Master Class’:
The International Socialist Review, ‘Larkinism’
and the Dublin Lockout
John Newsinger

Children working on Lamb Bros. Fruit Farms
in the 1960s and 1970s
Ray McLoughlin

‘If that is not murder, then what is murder?’
A Note on Irish Labour and the Titanic
Francis Devine

Labour Lives
Brendan Corish (1918-1990) Ambition to Serve
Tony Brown

Sources Study
William Norton and the Civil Service
Francis Devine

Labour Classic Revisited
R.M. Fox, Rebel Irishwomen (1935, 1967)
James Currie
To the Electors of Victoria.

In a very great majority, great goodness will we all share.

Praemium.

In returning to send to the Electors for the Victoria Division, and in asking the support of the Electors, both men and women, for the republican ticket, I dote on the sense which has been expressed to me by the public. The people of Victoria have always been the leaders in the business of freedom, and there is no other subject in which I more earnestly desire to see the people of Victoria act as they have done in the past.

The Republican is in a state of high activity, and I am happy to say, that I have been able to devote the whole of my time to the work of the campaign. I have been able to devote my time to the work of the campaign, and I am happy to say, that I have been able to devote the whole of my time to the work of the campaign. I have been able to devote my time to the work of the campaign, and I am happy to say, that I have been able to devote the whole of my time to the work of the campaign. I have been able to devote my time to the work of the campaign, and I am happy to say, that I have been able to devote the whole of my time to the work of the campaign.

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mission to prepare for free trade and set a new agenda for industrial policy. Lemass needed productivity increases, and hoped for pay restraint as a quid pro quo for union inclusion in the decision making process.

Pay restraint would be a tall order, however. The Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) had been agitating for a living wage of £500 per year since at least 1957, a target still just off way off in 1960, when 60 percent of industrial workers earned less than £10 per week.1 The prevailing system of pay determination had been the ‘wage round’, a system of periodic pay increases that began in 1946. Despite these established processes and other Lemass reforms, the 1960s would see unprecedented levels of industrial action by Irish workers.

Although the film industry had been marked, on the surface at least, by its industrial relations stability, it would not be immune to industrial unrest during the ‘decade of upheaval’ that was the 1960s.4 Ardmore, opened in spring 1958, became the focus of significant attention by Irish and British trade unions, as the studio struggled to establish a place for itself in the filmament of an increasingly globalising film production system. The opening of the studios was an event itself connected to the ambitions of Lemass. As Industry and Commerce minister, Lemass’s interests encompassed film production, despite the scepticism of his colleagues that such an industry could ever be economically viable.5 In the years prior to the implementation of the PEE, Ardmore Studios had been built by Louis Eilliman, MD of the Rank Organisation’s Irish operations, and the film producer Emmet Dalton, the former Free State general under Michael Collins.6 Opening for business in spring 1958, it would later emerge that the studio complex had been financed largely from public funds, to the extent that it could arguably be considered a semi-State operation.7

It might be deduced that the Irish State, newly energised by the PEE and the desire to modernise the economy through foreign direct investment, saw in Ardmore Studios investment as a slice of the inward investment that might be available from mobile international film production. The establishment of Ardmore Studios can therefore be considered a statement of industrial intent, and as such it was accompanied, as was typical during the era, by the formal recognition of the relevant unions. To contextualise the organisation of filmmaking on a more formal basis, and indeed the increasing formalisation of labour-management relations that Ardmore’s existence enabled, I begin with a brief look at union organising in the Irish film industry prior to Ardmore’s existence, noting how Irish Actors’ Equity in particular was able to leverage its position as a supplier of crowd artists (extras) to build a more commanding presence as a representative of acting labour. In the remainder of the article, I examine in detail the escalating labour difficulties that came to a head on the set of the British film Of Human Bondage in 1963. The events leading up to and following the strike illustrate how various labour, capital, and State bodies, on both sides of the Irish Sea, reacted and interacted in response to the outsourcing of British production to Ireland. The conflict pitted emerging Irish film institutions against their much longer-established British rivals. The struggle sheds light on a central concern of Irish labour history, given our historic unemployment problem: the question of access to the available work. It also illustrates the intricate interplay of labour, capital and State interests in brokering a solution to Ardmore’s emerging labour issues.

Trace unions and Irish film: beginnings

The origins and early years of Irish filmmaking have been the subject of considerable scholarship in recent decades.8 The often remarkable achievements of early drama and documentary filmmakers working in the 1930s and 1940s might have framed an interesting pre-industrial preamble to the analysis here presented. For practical reasons, however, I have chosen for a starting point the establishment of Ardmore Studios in the late 1950s, because it was not until this point that the ITGWU and other unions began to organise film production workers, as an extension of union activities in the film distribution and exhibition sectors.
interest is evident from the involvement of prominent government officials and civil servants in the effort to diffuse the growing employer-union tensions. In general, the literature on Irish film production labour, to the extent that it exists at all, has tended to characterise industrial relations during these formative early years as "a restrictive agreement between Ardmore management and the British film technicians' union ACTT", whereby Ardmore would service British productions in return for the exclusive employment of ACTT members. This is undoubtedly true to the extent that it refers to film workers who could not easily be sourced locally. And while the lack of a systematic film-worker training system created a 'vacuum' filled mainly with imported British labour, one film grade -- electricians -- had resisted that trend from Ardmore's earliest days. The resulting precedent provided a reasonably robust platform from which Irish film workers, in the electrical grades at least, might defend the loss of employment to their British counterparts.

On a film set, electricians are responsible for the set-up and general handling of electrical plant and apparatus, including power generators and lighting equipment. At Ardmore, a group of electricians had trained under an experienced gaffer, Thomas Chapman, imported from England for that purpose. These workers were usually referred to the studios by the Electrical Trades Union (Ireland) (ETUI) on secondment from their regular employment in general industry. They had built up substantial experience and expertise under Chapman's tutelage, and accordingly, a 'seniority list' of film electricians had been established, from which Ardmore's client producers would draw for electrical crew.

[Ardmore] wanted an assurance of a supply of electricians, and the original list then became known as the seniority list… By 1962 the men on the seniority list would have become specialised in film work, and had been complemented by producers.

These comments are from High Court testimony by ETUI General Secretary George Lynch in 1964, towards the end of the two-year dispute described below. The dispute brought into sharp focus the question of whether runaway filmmaking in Ireland – and perhaps other forms of foreign direct investment – might lead to long-term, quality employment for Irish workers. The tensions would escalate over the course of a number of British quota films booked into Ardmore Studios from late 1961.

Term of Trial, The Very Edge and The Ballad of the Running Man (1961–62)

In September 1961, the British Film Producers Association (BFPA) and the Federation of British Film Makers (FBFM) met with the three British film worker unions ACTT, NATKE, and the ETU. The primary purpose of the meeting was to devise a labour agreement covering pictures made at Ardmore Studios by BFPA and FBFM member companies. Despite (or perhaps because of) the Films Act (1960) treatment of Irish studios, the meeting agreed that while 'Ardmore Studios is not a foreign location', it nevertheless could not 'be regarded on the same basis as work in the UK'. In recognition of this unusual status, union members working in Ireland would be entitled to a number of special provisions, including straight-time pay for layover weekends and generous (€22 10s) weekly living expenses. While the agreement did not require British producers to hire British workers, it required that British unions be notified of films offshore to Ardmore, 'to allow for any joint prior consultation that may be felt to be necessary'. This fairly loose arrangement marked a departure from previous policy, whereby Ardmore crews were finalised during ad hoc meetings involving producers, unions, and studio management from both countries. Such arrangements had allowed for varying levels of Irish crew participation, and a degree of skills transfer, as outlined above.

The somewhat unstable nature of this arrangement became apparent during pre-production work for another film brought to Ardmore by a British subsidiary of Warner Brothers. In April

abroad. According to material later filed with the Department of Industry and Commerce, Ardmore management hoped to address the labour scarcity through a long-term process of skills transfer.

It was always the intention of Ardmore to train Irish personnel under experienced technicians from England or elsewhere so that ultimately Ardmore would be in a position to supply all the necessary crews for the production of Pictures.\(^{28}\)

In the first years of Ardmore's operation, a reasonable amount of skills transfer did indeed take place, especially during the production of the studio's first major theatrical film project, Snake Hands with the Devil, a US treatment of the Irish War of Independence starring James Cagney.\(^{29}\) During this and other early productions, native skill levels progressed to the point where the studio could provide sufficiently experienced local crafts labour (e.g. plasterers, painters, electricians). In addition, a small number of the more technical film-specific grades had been trained. Ardmore could offer incoming producers a local clapper/loader, focus puller, grip, sound mixer, boom swinger, and sound camera operator. Further reducing the amount of essential technicians the production company would need to import.\(^{30}\) To hire locally would save the production company the substantial 'all-in allowance' payable — in addition to wages and travel costs — to travelling personnel, under the terms of a special 1961 agreement between British producers and unions.\(^{31}\) Normally, following negotiations between incoming production companies and British unions, any suitably qualified local personnel might be hired.\(^{32}\)

Despite this promising start, Ardmore Studios did not become a major employer of Irish film technicians in this era.\(^{33}\) State intervention in the British film industry, in the form of the so-called Eady levy, would have a profound impact on the Irish studio company. Ardmore opened just months after the levy was established to partly fund the production of indigenous British films. Such films were legislatively supported by the 1927 Cinematograph Film Act, which required distributors to programme a minimum 'quota' of UK films.\(^{34}\) The original legislation limited quota status to films made within the Commonwealth, but by 1960, in a producer-friendly move, Ireland and Irish labour were effectively categorised as British under the legislation.\(^{35}\) Ardmore's appeal to British producers was thus enhanced, but this did not necessarily bode well for Irish film workers. The studio's Eady quota status saw it occupy a somewhat liminal position — neither British nor foreign — in the eyes of the British filmmaking establishment. There would be severe implications for employment, and Ardmore's skills-transfer training strategy.

Ardmore's favourable quota status was further enhanced by the establishment of the Irish Film Finance Corporation (IFFC) in 1960. As a subsidiary of the semi-State Industrial Credit Corporation, the IFFC provided 'end money' to Irish (i.e. Ardmore-based) productions with a distribution guarantee in place, effectively freezing out native producers.\(^{36}\) The availability of what amounted to a soft loan from the IFFC provided an additional incentive to British producers, who otherwise might not have had a compelling reason to shoot their films in Ireland, even for Irish-themed projects.\(^{37}\) As shall emerge below, such developments would not go uncontested by British film unions. In turn, British labour resistance would be countered by varying degrees by the Irish unions. We now turn to that simmering conflict, as growing levels of British filmmaking at Ardmore saw the studios increase their recruitment in international labour politics. The difficulties that emerged set the early tone for Ireland’s involvement in the emerging international division of film labour — a setback that represents by some distance the most significant industrial action ever taken on film sets in Ireland.
1962, Ardmore and the ETUI made separate complaints to the Department of Industry and Commerce, claiming the film’s producer was ‘forced’ by British unions to employ seven crew who might otherwise have been hired locally.\(^{44}\) Ardmore, worried about the threat to its business model, asked the Department of Industry and Commerce to intervene with the British Board of Trade, while the ETUI requested a similar intervention over the threat to Irish jobs.\(^{45}\) The union claimed to have a labour agreement with Ardmore prioritising the employment of its ‘seniority list’ of twenty-one Irish electricians. The union would go on strike over this principle, and had so informed its British counterpart, the ETUI.\(^{46}\)

While the State officials weighed up their options, Ardmore got in touch again, worried that another film, *The Very Edge*, due to shoot in June 1962, might be lost. This time, the British unions increased the pressure, seeking fifteen British crew, all grades otherwise available locally.\(^{47}\) Following several labour-management negotiations, the British unions reduced this demand to three, but the Irish unions held their ground and refused even these token levels of British employment.\(^{48}\) Despite the tension, production appeared to have proceeded, and both films were completed as planned. The uncertainty over these arrangements carried over to Ardmore’s next quota booking, a Columbia production called *The Ballad of the Running Man*, due to arrive in September 1962 following location work in Spain.\(^{49}\) British unions wanted the production company to bring its entire location crew – full camera and sound units, several crafts, and nine electricians. The ETUI again objected, and Ardmore worried about its viability.\(^{50}\) The Department of Industry and Commerce, which had taken copies on all relevant correspondence, seemed reluctant to intervene:

> We have made it clear to Ardmore Studios that we are ready to give any help we can if asked. It is to be presumed that they will come to us if they cannot reach agreement with the unions.\(^{51}\)

That situation soon transpired, after extensive negotiations, some of which took place at Government offices, proved futile.\(^{52}\) At one such meeting, attended by the rival electrical unions, the ETUI insisted again on half the electrical jobs, based on the principle that the film qualified for British subsidy. When the ETUI refused to accept this principle, the tone of the discussion appeared to deteriorate. The ETUI accused the Irish union of trying to ‘rich British quota moneys but to keep the British labour out’.\(^{53}\) Eventually, the ETUI left the table. Chairing the meeting, A. Kenman, an official of the Department, told the ETUI they were being unreasonable and the Minister would not be sympathetic.\(^{54}\)

By now, word of the difficulties had reached the Irish media, and The Irish Times ran several stories covering the various efforts to resolve the difficulties.\(^{55}\) The newspaper coverage was broadly accurate in its summary of the essential issues behind the inter-union difficulties, namely the ETUI’s claim to have an arrangement with Ardmore ‘precluding the engagement of ETUI members’.\(^{56}\) The newspapers were as yet unaware of the Department’s participation in efforts to resolve the dispute, an involvement that would not emerge for almost two years.\(^{57}\) In September, at a meeting of British producers and unions, ETUI official Bert Batchelor alleged that some films were going to Ireland for purely financial reasons. Despite his castigation of producers, however, Batchelor clearly considered the current difficulty to be with the ETUI, who would ‘not have any British electricians working there at all’, even after three sets of meetings between the two unions.

> We were quite prepared to reach some form of accommodation, but since the attitude of the Irish union is what it is... we want to give you notice that we are going to use every possible means in our power to prevent any further production of films at Ardmore Studios because they will not reach any reasonable accommodation with us.\(^{58}\)

Although the meeting was reminded that, as far as Easy regulations were concerned, ‘Irish labour counted as British labour’, Batchelor vowed to mobilise ‘as much resistance as we can muster’ against the offshoring of British films to Ardmore.\(^{59}\)

Nevertheless, *The Running Man* went ahead as scheduled with Irish electricians employed. Nine British electricians had travelled to Ireland to work on the film, but were told by Columbia not to report to the studio, remaining idle (and presumably paid) until recalled to the UK a week later.\(^{60}\) After the ETUI withdrew its members, it stepped up its war of words against Ardmore, and Irish labour in general. It told its branches to refuse membership to Irish workers – a considerable snub to the huge numbers of Irish living and working in Britain following the mass emigration of the 1950s. It threatened to ‘disrupt’ the activities of British producers doing business in ‘Southern Ireland’. It warned producers that its members would not handle equipment bound for Ardmore.\(^{61}\)

The threatened reprisals prompted Elliman and another Ardmore director, Cornelius McGraith, to arrange a meeting with the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Jack Lynch, having apparently discussed the situation with the Taoiseach.\(^{62}\)

The situation was made all the more urgent because the next film booked into the studios, an adaptation of the Somerset Maugham novel *Of Human Bondage*, would be the Studios’ biggest project to date. Ardmore management feared the ETUI would effectively shut down the studios unless the ETUI compromised, reflecting a clear shift of blame towards the Irish union. They asked the Minister to intervene directly with the ETUI, which he agreed to do, but only as a last resort. If *Bondage* producer Sheldon Reynolds sought to withdraw from his contract, they would come back to the Minister. If not, the State would take a back seat and ‘matters would simply have to be allowed to take their course’.\(^{63}\)

**Coming to a head: Of Human Bondage, Ardmore and the ETUI**

In December 1962, news of the prestigious *Bondage* project had reached the newspapers. US company Seven Arts Productions would make the film at Ardmore Studios through its UK subsidiary.\(^{64}\) As was by now perhaps inevitable, labour difficulties immediately emerged. Three English trades unions led by the ETU put their guns to the production company’s head. The English unions demanded that a minimum of 85 of their members should be taken to Ireland and employed there. The production company compromised on 35 English technicians, which they believe to be a more than generous concession, but the English unions have refused to accept.\(^{65}\)

While the framing of this Irish Times report - demanding, intrasignificant unions pressurising a compromising, generously conceding production company – is revealing, perhaps more significant is the placing of the blame not with the film unions in general, but rather with the English unions. This would change over the course of the dispute. The production company’s first response was to threaten to move production to Hollywood, claiming the British unions were trying to ‘close down Ardmore’ with ‘exorbitant’ demands that would escalate costs by $100,000.\(^{66}\)

Seven Arts’ immediate concern seemed less concerned with overall crewing numbers than on the numbers of UK workers it was being asked to send to Ireland, which would increase its costs under the terms of the 1961 producer–union agreement.\(^{67}\)

[Seven Arts Executive Producer] Mr. Patterson said that the unions were demanding that a total of 70 people, on the technical side, should be drawn from Britain. This would mean a living allowance of $25 for each, plus $5 pocket money and first-class air fares each way on top of salaries. There were certain technicians from Britain who were absolutely necessary, but there was absolutely no need to bring labourers, carpenters and electricians in such numbers.\(^{68}\)

Seemingly sympathising with Irish labour, Patterson claimed that ‘the Irish did not build Ardmore for the benefit of the British unions’, and counter-proposed a British crew of twenty-nine. The standoff continued with the ETUI insisting on fifty British electricians alone. Patterson seemed to be treating the demands seriously, allowing that the company was looking to ‘prune the costs
sufficiently without interfering with the quality of the film. Meanwhile, reflecting the growing uncertainty, lead actress Kim Novak’s travel plans were put on hold.

On 11 January 1963, Cornelius McGrath called to the Department and asked that the matter be taken up again with the UK Board of Trade. On the same day, in a seemingly related move, Seven Arts complained to the Irish Embassy in London about the British unions’ exorbitant demands:

Apparently the unions were making them employ three times the number of people actually needed and would not allow any Irish labour at all to be employed at Ardmore. The Minister again decided against any investigation. Seven Arts threatened to move its entire slate of British productions to Hollywood. The British unions, meanwhile, claimed that they just wanted a ‘reasonable participation in the labour content’ of Bondage. Over the following days, more discussions were held in London between the production company, the British unions, and an Irish union delegation including the ETUI. These talks, the fifth occasion on which the British and Irish electrical unions had come together, appeared to produce a breakthrough, and it was announced on January 18 that production would go ahead. Four days later, however, set-building was put on hold when the ETUI Executive committee refused to ratify the proposals. The about-turn led to tension with the other film unions, who feared the loss of the production.

The usual union view seems to be that the film industry which gives permanent employment to 180 people and casual employment to many more is too valuable to be allowed to be endangered because of an intransigent demand by any one union.

These fears seemed well founded. In Kine Weekly, the ETUI stated that ‘We will do our utmost to see that the picture is made in [Britain] or not at all’. Meanwhile, Seven Arts, abandoned its support of the Irish labour position, declaring it had ‘no complaints about the English unions’, clearly laying the blame at the door of the ETUI. Thus the Bondage dispute, initially blamed on Irish union insensitivity, was now attributed to the Irish ETU, which had allegedly reneged on a multilateral agreement reached in London. Aware of this not-so-subtle shift in emphasis, the Irish union claimed no desire for friction with its British counterpart, citing again the historical precedent for its actions:

Since 1958, this union has supplied electricians to the studios for all films made, without any difficulty... As employment at the studios is purely casual... it is the intention to use [the seniority list] in the hope that regular employment will eventually operate.

A strike injected

While the ETUI had a direct interest in disrupting Ardmore productions that ignored this precedent, it could not necessarily count on the support of the other unions, representing trades and other craft workers whose right to work on incoming films was not in any real dispute. The ETUI did not appear to be in good standing with the other unions. It had withdrawn from the Ardmore Studio Group in 1962 and had also been expelled from the Irish Congress of Traders Unions over allegations of poaching members from other unions. It must nevertheless have come as a surprise to the ETUI when it was announced on January 30th that the dispute had been resolved. Production on the film would go ahead, the agreed nine Irish electricians (i.e. 50 percent of the electrical crew) supplied by the ETUI but another union in the Studio Group, the Irish Engineering, Industrial and Electrical Trade Union (IEETU). To add insult to injury, ICTU had directed its affiliated unions and trade councils to cease all cooperation with the ETUI.

At this point, the ETUI impediment having been removed from the production, contacts between the Department and the Studios ceased, at least until the lengthy production lull that was to follow Bondage. By mid-February 1963, eighty Studio Group union members were doing prep work on the film. The Irish electricians were to be joined by nine British counterparts when shooting commenced. The ETUI reaction was to declare a strike, on the grounds that Ardmore had ranged on an offer to hire its members. A picket was duly placed on the studio on February 25th. Ardmore’s counterargument was that the union’s insistence on supplying all 18 electricians had negated the original offer. The studio was granted a series of injunctions curtailing the picket, and Bondage was completed more or less on schedule in June 1963. The following month, the case recommenced in the High Court. On 30th July, the ETUI appeared to emerge victorious, as Justice Frederick Budd ruled that it had been entitled to picket. The Justice was ‘in no doubt whatever of the existence of the seniority list which operated from 1958 and became crystallised around December 1961, with 20 names on it’.

Ardmore Studios: a strategic receivership?

While Of Human Bondage had survived the dispute, it now looked like Ardmore might not. No further films had been booked in to the facility at the time. A situation blamed by management on the ‘uncertainty of the labour situation’. By the time the High Court ruled in the ETUI’s favour, the studio’s forty-five permanent and temporary staff, including ‘craftsmen, technicians, canton staff and clerical workers’ had already received notice of their imminent lay-off, with ‘little hope of any immediate solution’. ICTU Secretary Leo Crawford sought discussions with Industry and Commerce on the future of the studios, precipitating more meetings at the Department. At one of these, the unions affirmed that they would continue to direct members to pass the reinstated ETUI picket, although it was noted that individual union members (including some incoming British union members) might not obey this directive. It was essential, therefore, to renegotiate with the ETUI. Louis Elliman claimed that if a guarantee of labour stability could be given to incoming producers, Ardmore could reopen with no shortage of incoming contracts. He appeared pessimistic though: the studio was losing money, had acquired a reputation for labour trouble, and his instinct was ‘to pack it in’. Despite the recent High Court ruling, Elliman claimed he would have nothing to do with ETUI if it insisted on its ‘supposed’ rights under the seniority agreement. Another Ardmore director, William Sandys, then made a radical proposal:

the solution to the whole problem of the ETUI and the seniority agreement might be for the company to go into liquidation and then set up a new company which could enter into fresh agreements.

The Sandys proposal might be described as a strategic dissolution, to nullify not only the company’s existing union agreements, but also the High Court ruling that served to reinforce them. In effect, entering receivership allowed Ardmore to function as the new company that Sandys had proposed, freeing the studio from its obligations to labour by nullifying its union agreements. Seven weeks later, the proposal effectively became a reality when Ardmore’s major creditor – the Industrial Credit Corporation – called in its loans and placed the Studios in receivership, with Sandys himself appointed as receiver.

Ballad in Blue, the ETUI, and the Ardmore receiver

The final chapter in the ETUI’s battle with Ardmore then played out, as Sandys made new agreements with the twelve technical and crafts unions in the Studio Group, freezing out the ETUI. A few months later, the studios hosted a Ray Charles vehicle called Ballad in Blue. In the spirit of his new agreement with the Studio Group, Sandys had claimed it would be a breach to employ ETUI members, and electricians were hired once more from the IEETU. Frozen out, the ETUI mounted another picket at the studio gates. Despite the previous year’s High Court ruling in favour of the ETUI, the Studio Group advised its members to ‘remain at work, even if this entails passing a picket’. 
Sandy's applied for yet another injunction, arguing that he - in his capacity as receiver - was not subject to prior Ardmore union agreements. This amounted to an attempt to negate the Justice Budd ruling due to the studio's new circumstances. There were two issues to be determined by the court:

- Did the picketers or the Union... genuinely believe, on rational grounds, that Ardmore Studios, in the existing circumstances, was bound by agreement to employ only electricians from the Seniority list; and, Whether, as a matter of law, any agreement, existing prior to the date of his appointment, in relation to the employment of labour, could be held to bind the receiver?78

With an injunction in place, the union was powerless to prevent the completion of Ballad in Blue with the IEETU electricians. A final judgment was delivered several months later, when Justice Richard McLoughlin dealt the ETU a critical blow. He ruled that the seniority list, 'even if it existed as an agreement on the date of the appointment of the receiver' was not binding on Sandy's. Thus the ETU's right to picket was comprehensively overturned, and it appears that the union did not engage in any further disputes with Ardmore Studios, in any of its successive states of ownership. Indeed the ETU's influence on filmmaking in Ireland appears to have gone into decline following the events described above. The union continued to represent electricians in RTÉ, where it was involved in a number of high-profile disputes over the following decades. In the film industry, however, its rival union IEETU held on to its dominant position representing electrical workers. Having amalgamated with the National Engineering Union in 1966 to form the National Engineering and Electrical Trade Union (NEETU), it was involved in a skirmish during which it picketed the Dunquin set of Ryan's Daughter. Eventually, the ETU merged with NEETU in 2001 to form the Technical, Electrical, & Engineering Union (TEEU). In its current incarnation, the union continues to represent electrical workers in both the film and television industries.

Conclusion

Writing a few years after these events, Irish filmmaker Louis Marcus claimed that the electrical dispute clearly demonstrated 'the irrelevance of Ardmore Studios' to the development of indigenous filmmaking. The studio, which had 'failed to intervene on the electricians behalf, and eventually acted against them', had revealed its alignment with the interests of its UK client producers. That no Irish 'camera crew, sound recordists, or other Irish film technicians' had been available to add weight to the electricians' protest served to underline the extent to which Ardmore was merely an extension of the British industry, making Eady-subsidised films with British labour. While the above account does not contradict the general thrust of this 'Ardmore irrelevance' thesis, it adds an additional layer of nuance to the argument, foregrounding fine levels of interaction between labour, management, and especially the Department of Industry and Commerce. This State involvement was only hinted at in the contemporary media coverage, in occasional veiled references to pressure from 'high quarters' to resolve the dispute. The additional layer allows us to move away from an essentially bureaucratic analysis of the dispute, in which the production process, and access to film work at Ardmore, is seen to be conditioned by structural market forces. In this view, Ardmore Studios accedes to the needs of British client producers (especially in relation to their agreements with British unions) in order to survive as a production facility serving the international market. Alternatively, we might view the incident in terms of the political and economic power relations at play, with Ardmore Film workers at the centre of an interplay of forces involving labour, mobile film capital and the Irish and British States. From this perspective, we might make some observations.

Firstly, these events foreshadow Ireland's current position as an established 'runaway' production hub within the commodity cultural production system facilitated by an international division of cultural labour (NDL). As theorised by Toby Miller, this system is a constituent element of late-stage, globalised capitalism, with the State employed to undermine the advancement of the organised labour in the post-war period. It is notable that the era under analysis - the early 1960s - predates by some two decades the technological developments, geopolitical change, and neoliberal market deregulation often associated with the globalisation process - just as Equity's cooperative relationship with SAG, so fruitful in boosting the Irish union's organising effectiveness during the filming of The Quiet Man, long predates the ICT developments that make such 'labour internationalism' commonplace today. In Miller's NDL thesis, a number of factors contribute to a location's attractiveness to mobile Hollywood capital. Giving the labour intensity of the film production process, the availability of cost-effective, flexible labour is arguably the most important of these. The account above suggests that some Irish labour was not yet sufficiently flexible for the optimal capture of mobile production. However State cooperation with mobile capital, a prerequisite feature of globalisation, and others, might be employed to remove that obstacle to capital flow.

The crucial involvement of the Irish State in the electrical dispute - although ostensibly informal, neutral, and devoid of any statutory basis for actual intervention - is evidence of such a cooperation. A striking feature of the account presented here is the evidence that Ardmore's 1963 receivership was strategic, to release the Studio from its existing labour agreements. That the receivership was effected by the semi-State Industrial Credit Corporation further supports the argument that it was plausibly orchestrated by the State. If so, 'State power' has clearly been applied to 'crush organised labour', or at least one section of organised labour seen to stand in the way of Ireland's prototypical embrace of foreign direct investment, and the prospects presented by globalised capitalism for native business interests. The incidents illustrate the Irish State's anxiety to embrace the investment opportunities - if not the longer term employment prospects for native workers - that might result from an outward-looking economy.

Third, claims for the exclusion of Irish electricians - the one category of native film technician to gain a modest foothold at Ardmore - have been somewhat overstated. On the Of Human Bondage and Ballad in Blue sets, the proposed Irish electricians were replaced in the main by British electricians (as implied in the literature) but by members of another Irish electricians union. To the older story of excluded Irish film technicians, then, is added a labourist subplot of fragile solidarity. The ETU's weak relations with other unions are evident from the Studio Group's willingness to facilitate Ardmore management and the British ETU, supplying electricians from its own ranks and passing the inevitable ETU picket. It is also clear that Irish labour's solidarity was severely undermined by the much more powerful British unions, united in their own struggle to resist mobile capital and retain a share of employment on runaway British production. The considerable labour unrest engendered by the entry of Ardmore Studios and Irish labour into the UK production nexus was ultimately absorbed and neutralised through the prioritisation of 'status group' interests within the Studio Group - a 'class in itself', perhaps, in contrast to the more militant ETU's 'class for itself'. Ultimately, the IEETU and the rest of the Studio Group, through their marginalisation of the ETU, acted as a labour aristocracy of sorts, to preserve the status quo and preserve a presumably acceptable amount of film employment for their members. A more long-term political strategy, of the sort that might create an Irish film industry based mainly on the employment of native workers, would have to wait. The lessons learned during these early industrial skirmishes would contribute to the later, more formal orientation of Irish film and television production policy towards the capture of foreign investment motivated by financial subsidy and a global division of labour. Cultural capital or otherwise. In the meantime, however, overseas productions continued to arrive. The ITGWU estimated that feature film and advertising production at Ardmore studios provided over two million pounds in wages and other expenditures in 1967, and more than twelve million the following year.
Most of these wages, however, still went to British workers and would not be spent in the Irish economy. Throughout the 1960s, Irish unions would press ahead with their attempts to maximise Irish employment at Ardmore. The studies had been bought out of recceperiod in 1966 by a UK consortium, Film Studios of Ireland Ltd. A ‘comprehensive agreement’ to govern ‘all film production in Ireland’ was signed by Ardmore management and the various film unions, now styled the Irish Film Production Group of Unions (IFPGU) in 1967. It appears, however, that the creation of this agreement related mainly to craft and general grades rather than technician and creative grades. Even at this level, incoming productions would continue to skirt the rules, necessitating talks between Irish and British unions in 1968, during which the British unions undertook to advise British producers of their obligations under the new agreement.

Difficulties faced by Irish film technicians in securing employment on Irish-based productions continued. The issue would be decisively addressed by film workers in the following decade, when film workers leveraged their position within Ireland’s largest trade union, the ITGWU, to secure employment in the growing industry for television advertising production. As that development flowed directly to the establishment of Telefís Éireann, and indeed the successful organisation of television workers along with their film industry brethren – it can also trace its roots to the ‘decade of upheaval’.

Notes

1 Irish Times, 22 December 1957, p. 12.
2 Irish Times, 14 March 1959.
6 O’Connor, A Labour History of Ireland, p. 221.
7 ibid., p. 222; ITGWU, Annual Report 1957 (Dublin 1958), p. 97; ITGWU, Annual Report 1958 (Dublin 1959), pp. 80-81. The corresponding figure in Britain was eight percent.
11 e.g. The Irish Times, 4 August 1967, p. 12; Marcus 1967, Flynn, ‘A Semi-State in All But Name’.
15 ibid., p. 17.
16 Early examples included another shore (1948) and Saints and Sinners, 20 November 1949.
17 ibid., p. 19.
18 Personal interview with Dermot Doolan, retired Irish Actors’ Equity, official, 20 November 2014.
20 UCD Archives, Irish Actors’ Equity Collection, TU12/7, Meeting Minutes, 18 October 1957; Personal interview with Dermot Doolan, retired Irish Actors’ Equity, official, 20 November 2014.
21 UCD Archives, Irish Actors’ Equity Collection, TU12/7, Meeting Minutes, 10 January 1958; Meeting Minutes 17 January 1958.
22 The Irish Times, 14 March 1958, p.6. However in 1963, ITGWU Dublin 7 Branch members in 1963 enjoyed wages closer to £13 per week (Liberty, July 1963).
24 National Archives (NA), 2001/50/124, Dept. of Industry and Commerce papers, Ardmore Studios (I.I.) Ltd., Bray reps regarding labour difficulties, Memorandum to Department of Industry and Commerce covering the apparent pressure by British unions on producers to bring excessive staffs to Ardmore, c. 30 April 1963.
To Fling Defiance into the Teeth of the Master Class: The International Socialist Review, ‘Larkinism’ and the Dublin Lockout

John Newsinger

'A spectre is haunting all Europe! Parliaments are debating how to fight it. Kings and emperors are concerned with its menacing significance. The capitalist class is arming to protect itself against it. The spectre is what the daily papers fearfully call “Larkinism”' - Caroline Nelson, International Socialist Review, December 1913

The International Socialist Review (ISR) was launched with some 800 subscribers by the socialist publisher Charles Kerr in July 1900. A year's subscription cost $1. By April the following year the number of subscribers had risen to 3,500. By the end of 1904 and the start of 1905, its monthly circulation was around 6,000.¹ In this, its first phase, the ISR was a primarily theoretical journal, indeed it proclaimed itself to be a 'Monthly Journal of International Socialist Thought'. It was concerned to teach Marxism to the US labour movement and oriented itself on the Deb's wing of the Socialist Party of America (SPA). According to Paul Buhle, in its early years the ISR published 'virtually every famed European Socialist thinker...more theory than all other US Socialist publications combined'.² The result was, if the truth be told, a dry, somewhat pedestrian publication whose temper is perhaps captured by the four part series on the "Cooperative Movement in Belgium" that began in October 1901, something that was hardly going to set the world alight. Working class struggle was not of much interest to the ISR at this time.

This began to change in the course of 1908. At this time, the ISR began a transformation into an activists' magazine, chronicling the class struggle in the United States and abroad. By June 1910, its monthly circulation had risen to 27,000 and the following year was to pass 40,000.³ This second phase saw it increasingly identifying with revolutionary industrial unionism, moving close to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) with the Wobbly leader, 'Big' Bill Haywood, actually joining its editorial board in October 1911. A crucial moment seems to have been the Pressed Steel Car Company strike in McKees Rocks in 1909, where the IWW played a decisive role. This was a brutal, bloody hard-fought dispute, even by American standards, where the victory of a largely immigrant workforce, that spoke sixteen different languages, over the ruthless anti-union Steel Trust was seen, mistakenly as it turned out, as presaging a decisive shift in the balance of class forces in the US.⁴ Indeed, Louis Duchsé, actually argued in the pages of the ISR that in his view this great triumph for class solidarity with its toll of a dozen dead and many more injured would inspire the workers of the world to 'turn their eyes to America as the opening scene of the last struggle with the master class'. Kerr and his comrades saw revolutionary industrial unionism as the way to break the power of the US capitalist class with the political wing of the movement, the SPA, relegated to a subsidiary role. The American working class was going to give a lead to the whole international workers' movement. The issue of the ISR that celebrated "Victory at McKees Rocks", also published an article, 'Ballots, Bullets, or -', by a certain James Connolly.

Here Connolly argued the case for 'Industrial Unionism' as the 'economic manifestation of Socialism'. It was, he believed, certain that the capitalist class would either not allow or not accept a Socialist electoral victory in the USA. To respond to this denial of democracy by an armed uprising