

THE PATTERN OF STRIKE ACTIVITY IN IRELAND, 1960-1979: SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Aidan Kelly and Teresa Brannick*

The pervasiveness of research work in the area of strike activity is reflected in the considerable literature on the subject. The reasons for this sustained and enduring interest are many. In the first place the ready availability of empirical data collected by State agencies provides researchers with a data base from which various observations and further analysis may be pursued with comparative ease. Also, as Clark (1980) points out the field of strike activity tends to attract a wide range of research attention because of its nature; strikes mean drama and as a consequence they are widely reported and researched. But apart from such observations relating to the ease of entry into the research of the subject, there are several demonstrably important reasons which justify a continuation of rigorous research into strike trends. Taken longitudinally, the evaluation and interpretation of strike data allow for the partial or supportive illustration of the general social history of the period under considerations. Such data may be regarded as a window through which we may observe the process of socialisation in industry and commerce, and therefore allow us to ascertain the degree to which it might contain such outstanding characteristics as cooperation, overt independence on the part of the major interests, or reflect substantial ideological or material conflicts. Specifically, strike data allows us to assess the relationship between employers and the employed in the context of a capitalist society.

This article deals mainly with the changes which have occurred in the pattern of Irish strike activity during the period 1960 to 1979. A cursory or conjectural examination of this 20 year period might provide a multitude of explanatory hypotheses; the period was marked by numerous events each of which alone, or in combination, could have a great impact on the pattern of strike activity. These two decades saw a dramatic surge forward in the industrialisation process, a stabilisation in population with the halting of emigration for the first time in over 200 years, and a rapid rate of urbanisation; there has also been unprecedented economic growth

* The authors are, respectively, Lecturer and Research Officer in the Department of Industrial Relations, University College, Dublin. They wish to express their gratitude to Mr. Maurice McGuire, Central Statistics Office, Dublin for assistance in validating the data files.

with a clearly high level of worker expectation, accelerating inflationary pressures, full membership of the European Economic Community, two major international recessions, an unbroken series of national pay agreements for eleven years covering the entire labour force, a substantial growth in trade union membership particularly in the white-collar area, the enactment of a wide range of employment legislation favourable to employees, and a fundamental questioning of certain of our industrial relations institutions resulting in the publication of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Industrial Relations (1981). To what extent do the Irish strike data reflect these changes and strains? More specifically, to what extent does the empirical evidence give support to the contention that the level of strike activity has been increasing in recent years, a belief frequently projected in the media? Does the public sector experience greater industrial conflict than the private sector? Are there any fundamental changes occurring in the Irish strike pattern? This article, on the basis of an examination of two separate files of relevant data provides some observations on recent developments.

Research Method

The data used in this study are derived from two sources: the first set of data is provided from official sources, that is, the data compiled by the Central Statistics Office and published annually in *The Irish Statistical Bulletin*. This gives an aggregate enumeration of strikes in the Republic within the prescribed guidelines of the International Labour Organisation and provides information on date, duration, number of workers involved, number of establishments involved, industrial sector and issues causing the conflict. The second set of data is one compiled by the Department of Industrial Relations at University College Dublin.¹ In embarking on a comprehensive analysis of strike activity between 1960 and 1979 we have placed on file, for each strike in the period (numbering over 2,400), data on firm involved, technology type, industrial sector, region, union(s) involved, duration, man-days lost, issue and numerous other variables. There are certain differences in the two sets of data, and these have been reported elsewhere.² For present purposes the sets should be regarded as complementing each other. In this article we draw on both sources, from the CSO data for the period 1945-1979 and from the UCD file for the period 1960-1979, with the latter allowing for forms of analysis not previously possible.

The National Patterns of Strike Activity

The most common indices used in the assessment of strike activity are (1), frequency — the total number of strikes which occur during a specific period; (2), breadth — the numbers of workers involved; and (3), aggregate working days lost due to strikes [Stern, 1978]. Data relating to these indices and other related indices are contained in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: *Annual Statements of Numbers of Strikes, Workers Involved, Man-days Lost and Firms Involved, 1960-1979*

Year	Number of Strikes (A)	Workers Involved (B)	Number Man-days lost (C)	Strikers per Strike (B ÷ A)	Days Struck per Striker (C ÷ B)	Number Firms Involved (D)	Firms Involved per Strike (D ÷ A)
1960	49	5,865	80,349	119.7	13.7	60	1.2
1961	96	27,437	377,264	285.8	13.8	342	3.6
1962	60	9,197	104,024	153.3	11.3	112	1.9
1963	70	16,067	233,617	229.5	14.5	114	1.6
1964	87	25,245	545,384	290.2	21.6	339	3.9
1965	89	38,917	552,351	437.3	14.2	227	2.6
1966	112	52,238	783,635	466.4	15.0	175	1.6
1967	79	20,925	182,645	264.9	8.7	237	3.0
1968	126	38,880	405,686	308.6	10.4	801	6.4
1969	134	61,760	935,900	460.9	15.2	368	2.7
1970	134	28,752	1,007,714	214.6	35.0	159	1.2
1971	133	43,783	273,770	329.2	6.3	153	1.2
1972	131	22,274	206,955	170.0	9.3	232	1.8
1973	182	31,761	206,725	174.5	6.5	265	1.5
1974	219	43,459	551,833	198.4	12.7	248	1.1
1975	151	29,124	295,716	192.9	10.2	183	1.2
1976	134	42,281	776,949	315.5	18.4	231	1.7
1977	175	33,805	442,145	193.2	13.1	222	1.3
1978	152	32,558	624,266	214.2	19.2	199	1.3
1979	140	49,621	1,464,952	354.4	29.5	186	1.3

Source: Irish Statistical Bulletins

Table 2: *5 and 10-yearly Statements of Numbers of Strikes, Workers Involved, Man-days Lost and Firms Involved, 1945-1979*

Period	No. Strikes (A)	Workers Involved (B)	Number Man-days lost (C)	Strikers per Strike (B ÷ A)	Days Struck per Striker (C ÷ B)	Number Firms Involved (D)	Firms Involved Per Strike (D ÷ A)
1945-49	686	68,338	1,374,795	99.6	20.1	2,071	3.0
1950-54	530	73,625	1,439,507	138.9	19.6	1,645	3.1
1955-59	317	41,668	627,055	131.4	15.0	983	3.1
1960-64	362	83,811	1,340,638	231.5	16.0	967	2.7
1965-69	540	212,720	2,860,217	393.9	13.4	1,808	3.3
1970-74	799	170,029	2,246,997	212.8	13.2	1,057	1.3
1975-79	752	187,389	3,604,028	249.2	19.2	1,021	1.4
1950-59	847	115,293	2,066,562	136.1	17.9	2,628	3.1
1960-69	902	296,531	4,200,855	328.7	14.2	2,775	3.1
1970-79	1551	557,418	5,851,025	230.4	16.4	2,078	1.3

Source: Irish Statistical Bulletins

These show that all three indices have been moving in the same direction — upwards — during the period under review. With regard to the first index, strike rate, we can see that this has risen considerably between 1960 and 1974, with a peak of 219 in the latter year, but there has been some slight fall-off during the last five years. However, if we attempt to differentiate between the last two decades, where we see a rise of 38.9%, it is clear that the volume of strikes is unmistakably on the increase. Furthermore, the data in table 3, which allows for a consideration of changes

in the working population (that is the potential striking population), confirms the substantial rise in the frequency index.

Table 3: *Strike Frequency, Breadth and Man-days Lost per 100,000 employees, 1950-1979*

Annual Average for	Strikes	Workers Involved [per 100,000 employees]	Man-Days Lost
1950-54	14.7	2,045.1	39,986.3
1955-59	8.9	1,173.7	17,663.5
1960-64	6.8	1,579.8	25,271.2
1965-69	10.1	3,994.7	53,713.0
1970-74	14.9	3,178.1	41,999.9
1975-79	14.0	3,483.1	66,989.4
1950-59	11.9	1,617.0	28,984
1960-69	8.5	2,789.6	39,518
1970-79	14.5	3,331.0	54,529

Source: Irish Statistical Bulletins

The strike breadth index rose to an all-time high during the late 1960s, having peaked in 1969. Throughout the 1970s the level of worker involvement has remained relatively high, at some 20% greater than in the previous decade. The volume of working days lost due to strikes has also continued to rise. While the employment level has remained relatively static over the 20 year period, there has been a 29% increase in total of man-days lost in the latter decade when compared with the previous one. Taking the three indices together, the broad conclusion must be that there has been an unequivocal deterioration in the strike record. While there are occasional temporary respites the overall trend is one which shows a notable increase in strike frequency, breadth and aggregate man-days lost. However, there is also evidence of some movements in the opposite direction. For example, there has been a perceptible fall in the average number of strikers per strike over the past 10 years, even though we have already alluded to a general escalation in the number of workers involved in strikes. This is explained by the fact that the strike rate has been increasing at a considerably faster rate than the breadth index. Also, the average number of days struck per striker has remained remarkably constant over the 20 year period. Finally, we can see from table 2 one other interesting feature of strike activity, concerning the involvement of firms. Given the general upward movement in strike indices one might reasonably expect increasing numbers of firms to become directly involved; however, the opposite occurred. Since the mid-1960s the average annual absolute number of firms involved in strikes has continued to fall, and when this data is set against the strike rate there is clear evidence of a substantial drop in the average number of firms involved in each strike, down from an average of 3.1 to 1.3 as between the two decades. At this stage, one may only speculate on the extent to which this development is

related to the introduction of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' new picketing policy in 1970.³

The Impact of Large Strikes

In considering recent strike data and in attempting to assess the influence of large strikes on the overall record we have identified those strikes which resulted in the loss of 30,000 or more days as being of relatively considerable magnitude. Forty-three such strikes took place during the past 20 years and are detailed in table 4. While these strikes represent only 2% of the total for the period they involved a loss of over 5.7 million man-days or 57% of all days lost due to strikes over this time. Clearly, the Irish strike pattern is extremely sensitive to this comparatively small number of large strikes and it has been an enduring feature over the 20 year period. Indeed should these be removed from the Irish strike quantum the result would be a record which would show a comparatively strike-free nation in terms of workers involved and total man-days lost. This one-strike-major-effect phenomenon had exceptionally disproportionate effects on two of the principal strike indices and if not highlighted can lead to an unrepresentative and inaccurate portrayal of the Irish strike record.

Another interesting feature of strike activity is apparent from the data in table 5. With upward movements in the main strike indices in a relatively stable employment environment, and with relative stability in the impact of large strikes on the strike record in recent years, one might reasonably have expected to see much of the additional conflict to occur in the small strike category. But this is not so. The data in table 5 shows that the proportion of very small strikes has fallen off considerably in recent years, while the gains are evident in the medium-sized categories. From this evidence we can at least conclude that the Irish strike problem is not one of a steady stream of short, small and possibly unofficial-type strikes. Rather, the trend seems to be moving towards the emergence of medium-size strikes as the more dominant feature in the contemporary Irish strike pattern. Whether this is because there are now proportionately more strikes affecting large firms, or whether some other structural facet is undergoing some change, remains unclear at this stage, but as other variables are introduced in to the analysis it may be possible to unravel further explanations. A similar pattern seems to be emerging in the case of the breadth index. There are now proportionately less workers involved in the very small and very large strikes, while there has been a clear increase in participation levels in the middle range strikes.

Strike Trends in the Public and Private Sectors

The presentation of strike data according to public and private enterprise sector labels helps to provide an indication as to whether there are conflicting or common currents within the overall record of strike activity. It

Table 4: *Details of Each Strike Exceeding 30,000 Man-Days, 1960-1979*

Year	Number Strikes	Strike Title and Man-days Lost		Total Annual Man-days Lost of Large Strikes	Large Strike Man-days as % of Total	Workers Involved in Large Strikes		Large Strike Worker Involvement as % of Total
1960	—			—	—	—		—
1961	2	Theatres/Cinemas	44,800			1,400		
		Electricity Supply Board	115,280	160,080	42.4	7,205	8,605	31.4
1962	—	—		—	—	—		—
1963	1	Coras Iompair Eireann	130,950	130,950	56.1	4,850	4,850	30.2
1964	2	Building and Construction	417,960			9,720		
		Timber/Fireclay Industry	45,000	462,960	84.9	1,500	11,220	44.4
1965	3	C.I.E.	107,500			10,750		
		Printing Industry	316,200			6,200		
		Bakeries	33,600	457,300	82.8	2,400	19,350	49.7
1966	5	Clondalkin Paper Mills	107,910			990		
		National Paper Mills	45,100			410		
		Sugar/Confectionery	112,000			5,600		
		Associated Banks	324,000			5,400		
		C.I.E.	51,000	640,010	81.7	3,400	15,800	30.2
1967	2	Unidare	32,075			1,283		
		Irish Bacon Curers	49,400	81,475	44.6	3,800	5,083	24.3
1968	2	Bord na Mona	110,200			3,800		
		Dublin Corporation	52,000	162,200	40.0	4,000	7,800	20.1
1969	2	Maintenance Dispute	637,800			31,890		
		Secondary Teachers	114,000	751,800	80.3	6,000	37,890	61.4
1970	3	Irish Cement	88,128			864		
		Associated Banks	780,000			6,500		
		Vocational Teachers	48,000	916,128	90.9	4,000	11,364	39.5

1971	2	Unidare	59,155
		C.I.E.	34,500
1972	1	Gouldings	39,195
1973	--	--	
1974	3	Dublin Corporation	29,475
		C.I.E.	204,050
		Irish Distillers	30,258
1975	--	--	
1976	3	Posts and Telegraphs	48,000
		Associated Banks	472,500
		Bord na Mona	47,883
1977	2	Killarney Hosiery	32,900
		Irish Steel	54,405
1978	7	Aer Lingus	88,000
		Arigna Collieries	34,404
		Irish Base Metals	39,955
		Irish Dunlop	61,250
		Roadstone	54,000
		British Leyland	30,312
		N.E.T.	39,329
1979	3	Agricultural Credit	33,180
		Reg Armstrong	30,733
		Post and Telegraphs	1,157,000
1960-69	19		
1970-79	24		
1960-79	43		

Source: UCD File, 1983.

		2,415		
93,655	34.2	5,750	8,165	18.6
39,195	18.9	603	603	2.7
—	—	—	—	—
		655		
		3,850		
263,783	47.8	738	5,243	12.1
—	—	—	—	—
		6,000		
		10,500		
568,383	73.2	1,451	17,951	42.5
		700		
87,305	19.7	585	1,285	3.8
		2,200		
		244		
		305		
		1,250		
		1,000		
		421		
347,250	55.6	587	6,007	18.5
		420		
		421		
1,220,913	83.3	13,000	13,841	27.9
2,206,765	52.5		110,598	37.3
3,536,612	60.4		64,459	18.0
5,743,377	57.1		175,057	26.8

Table 5: *Percentage Distribution of Strikes, Workers Involved and Man-days lost by Size of Strike for 5 and 10 year periods, 1960-1979*

Strike Size (Days Lost)	Period					
	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1960-69	1970-79
1-99						
No.	24.2	21.7	21.2	11.9	22.8	16.8
WI	2.8	1.6	2.6	1.0	2.0	1.8
MDL	.4	.2	.4	.1	.3	.2
100-499						
No.	33.9	30.7	34.1	30.4	32.0	32.4
WI	11.4	5.8	11.6	9.2	7.5	10.4
MDL	2.5	1.4	2.9	1.6	1.7	2.1
500-1999						
No.	23.7	27.4	27.3	33.3	25.9	30.2
WI	16.8	14.6	24.8	25.8	15.2	25.3
MDL	7.3	5.0	8.5	7.0	5.7	7.6
2000-4999						
No.	9.9	10.9	9.3	12.9	10.5	11.0
WI	12.5	13.4	16.0	18.1	13.1	17.1
MDL	8.3	6.0	9.4	8.3	6.7	8.8
5000-9999						
No.	3.6	3.1	3.9	5.7	3.3	4.8
WI	11.4	5.1	13.1	11.6	7.0	12.3
MDL	7.7	3.6	9.1	7.8	4.9	8.3
10,000 +						
No.	4.7	6.2	4.2	5.7	5.6	4.9
WI	45.1	59.5	31.9	34.4	55.3	33.2
MDL	73.9	83.9	69.8	75.1	80.8	72.9

Source: UCD File, 1983.

is evident from the data in table 6, which relates strike activity to employment levels, that employees in the public sector have been more prone to engage in industrial action than their counterparts in the private sector. The relative propensities of strike action in terms of frequency, worker involvement and man-days lost in these sectors are illustrated in tables 7 and 8.

Table 6: *Strike Frequency, Breadth and Man-days Lost per 100,000 workers in the Public and Private Sectors, 1960-79*

Average Annual for	Strikes		Workers Involved [per 100,000 employees]		Man-days Lost	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
1960-64	7.3	7.2	3,186.3	1,392.3	38,726.8	22,187.9
1965-69	9.5	9.8	8,263.4	2,977.9	67,779.9	50,116.0
1970-74	11.5	16.0	4,692.7	2,673.5	51,781.4	44,431.6
1975-79	11.9	14.3	4,447.5	2,948.9	130,501.1	45,216.9
1960-69	8.2	8.4	5,641.9	2,182.0	52,244.8	36,101.4
1970-79	10.6	15.5	4,070.5	2,879.3	85,628.4	45,955.7

Source: Irish Statistical Bulletins, UCD File, 1983.

Table 7: Percentage Distribution of Strikes, Workers Involved and Man-days Lost by Principal Sector for 5 and 10 year periods, 1960-1979

Sector	Period					
	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1960-69	1970-79
Public/Semi-State						
No.	18.3	17.5	14.9	21.9	17.9	18.3
WI	33.3	37.5	30.0	34.7	36.3	32.5
MDL	25.1	22.5	21.5	48.5	23.3	37.8
Quoted Companies						
No.	5.1	5.2	6.9	6.3	5.2	6.1
WI	9.7	6.8	17.8	12.1	7.6	14.8
MDL	5.4	15.1	44.3	17.2	12.1	28.0
Private Companies						
No.	76.5	77.3	78.2	71.8	77.0	75.1
WI	57.0	55.7	52.2	53.2	56.1	52.7
MDL	69.5	62.5	34.1	34.3	64.6	34.2

Source: UCD File, 1983.

From the data in table 7 we see that the public sector experiences approximately 20% of the total number of strikes, but these strikes account for about a third of the total number of workers involved and, until 1975, a quarter of the total of man-days lost; during the last five years under review (1975-1979) the proportion of man-days lost accounted for by strikes in the public sector stood at 48.5% and this exceptional rise is largely the result of the most protracted strike ever in the public sector, the Post Office dispute of 1979.

The private sector, by contrast, displays a different pattern; while it accounts for approximately 80% of all strikes (1970-79), these actions produce proportionately less worker involvement and man-days lost than in the public sector, at around 66% and 62%, respectively. However, during the last five years there has been a dramatic fall-off in the proportion of man-days lost experienced by the private sector, with the proportions of the total falling to 51%, down from the average of 76% over the previous 15 years. Also, if we exclude those companies holding Stock Exchange quotations, which for the most part are the largest industrial and commercial undertakings in the country, we see an especially marked change in the private sector between the two decades under review. While the strike rate and worker involvement indices remain remarkably consistent in their proportionate contributions, the resulting number of man-days lost has been almost halved. Thus, coupling this data with that in tables 1 and 2, where we noted the absolute increase in the strike rate, we can see a definite change in the strike pattern in this sector; the strike rate remains steady but in terms of worker involvement and man-days lost there are changes in the general shape of strikes.⁴

Table 8: *Strike Means and Standard Deviations of Numbers of Workers Involved, Man-days Lost and Length for the Public and Private Sectors, 1960-79*

Sector	Workers Involved		Man-days Lost		Length (days)	
	1960-69	1970-79	1960-69	1970-79	1960-69	1970-79
Public						
\bar{X}	687	390	6,499	8,218	9.29	11.26
SD	1,944	1,080	21,414	71,326	12.81	18.93
Quoted Companies						
\bar{X}	402	493	7,566	13,690	11.09	16.73
SD	638	1,264	35,815	79,470	17.03	23.02
Private						
\bar{X}	235	152	3,838	1,702	11.53	14.02
SD	1,384	268	33,226	4,543	19.12	21.27

Source: UCD File, 1983.

In table 8 the strike data in the public and private sectors are presented in terms of means and standard deviations of workers involved per strike, man-days lost per strike and average length of strike. Here, we see the three sectors displaying clearly different strike patterns over time and in the relative size of outbreaks and their length. As far as the workers involved index is concerned we observed from table 7 that for the public sector, in percentage terms, there has not been any substantial change over the twenty year period. However, table 8 shows a considerable fall in the mean number of workers involved per strike. Side by side with this development there is a 26% rise in the mean number of man-days lost per strike and a greatly increased average amount of variability around this mean. Thus, the outstanding characteristic in the trend of public sector strike activity is one of an increasing number of longer strikes with the larger proportion of days lost being derived not necessarily from a growing average of worker involvement, but from more sustained and longer-drawn out strike campaigns by comparatively smaller groups of workers than in the past; this is reflected in the data on mean man-days lost per strike.

Over the two decades, there has been a 22% increase in the mean number of workers involved in strikes affecting the publicly quoted companies, and the mean man-days lost per strike has almost doubled; the upward movements in both indices are undoubtedly affected by two protracted commercial bank strikes in the 1970s. On the rest of the private sector our earlier comment may be elaborated upon on the basis of table 8 data; the private sector, excluding the publicly quoted companies, while experiencing no fall-off in proportionate strike frequency, is nevertheless exhibiting considerably lower levels of worker involvement in the average strike and also more than a halving of the number of man-days lost in each strike. Paradoxically, the net result of these developments has not led to a proliferation of smaller strikes in this sector. On the contrary,

the average length of strikes has increased by 22% over the last decade. Thus, the fall-off in the mean number of man-days lost is the result of the decline in the mean number of workers involved in each strike and not because of a change in the average length of strikes. Also, we may see from the standard deviations of both the workers involved and man-days lost indices that this part of the private sector, in recent times, has been almost free of long strikes involving large numbers of workers.

Concluding Comment

This article should be regarded as no more than a partial presentation and analysis of the patterns of strike activity at national level. Numerous other aspects need to be considered before unqualified explanations may be tendered in respect of firm, trade union, sectoral, regional, duration, issue and various other strike-related variables. We intend to return to these in some detail in later publications. Here, we have been concerned with an initial exploration of the broad strike pattern and we hope that the results will help those concerned in the debate on industrial conflict to agree on the significance of certain underlying characteristics and also dispel some fictional narrative which has gained common currency in recent years. Unfortunately, the subject of Irish strike activity has not been dealt with in great detail before, although there have been some analyses from an economic standpoint [Mulvey, 1968; Sapsford, 1980]. And the most recent comment, in the Commission on Industrial Relations (1981), failed to display any depth of knowledge, or instructive or challenging analysis which would allow for clear policy and strategic responses on the part of employers, trade unions and government. In these concluding remarks we wish to comment briefly on three issues: the need to use a multiplicity of strike indicators, the significance of the large strike and the public sector/private sector dichotomy.

It is evident from the data presented in this article that the incidence of strikes, worker involvement and man-days lost is now at a considerably higher level than that experienced during the 1960s and before. Overall, there has been an upward trend as measured by all three indices, and there is a temptation to conclude that the Irish strike problem is a pervasive phenomenon, reaching into all sectors and affecting employees throughout the economy with equal intensity. However, the results of the analysis undertaken for this article rejects this saturation hypothesis. While the three indices of strike-proneness are seen to move in the same general direction this does not mean that they are, in unison, describing a clear, all-embracing and unqualified pattern of strike activity; on the contrary, closer examination shows substantial divergences in the pace and direction of these indices. Thus, when using the term strike-proneness it is important to clarify the precise character of that disposition; a high strike rate does not necessarily lead to a high level of worker

involvement in strikes or a large number of man-days lost. Various other superficially contradictory permutations of the indices are also possible. It is important, therefore, to show great care in the treatment of the data through these indices for the purpose of measuring and assessing strike-proneness. Clearly, there is great room for the selective use and abuse of the strike data and, as Bharadwaj and Mathur (1970) point out, because different indicators of strike-proneness may not show a uniform pattern of association, it is all the more necessary to forego the use of the uni-dimensional approach in favour of a multi-dimensional one for measuring and explaining strike phenomena. The examination of the Irish strike data confirms this view.

While we have not included any data which would allow for an international comparative analysis of national strike records, it would appear that Ireland's position is largely determined from one year to another by a relatively small number of disputes; the great majority of these disputes involve the largest enterprises in the public and private (publicly quoted) sectors. Furthermore, the great majority of these disputes were concerned with wage issues, and being "inter-set" type disputes are not likely to fall into the "breach of procedure" category, the type which seemed to preoccupy much of the work of the Commission on Industrial Relations. McAuley (1967) was the first to delineate the significance of the large strike in the Irish record, and even though these disputes accounted for an even greater proportion of man-days lost during the last decade, the Commission neglected to identify the phenomenon. It would appear to us that any analysis of Irish strike activity which fails to take cognisance of the impact of large strikes is fundamentally deficient and calls into question recommendations, such as those in the Commission's report, which are concerned with attempting to curtail strikes that, relatively speaking, have little impact on the national economy as a whole.

Finally, the classification and analysis of the strike data according to public and private sector sources, provides us with a sectoral view of strike-proneness. This new examination of the Irish strike record has exposed considerable differences in the performance of the various strike indicators in the different sectors, all of which inevitably calls for an emphasis on component analysis in the evaluation of strike data.

In conclusion, it is important to state that in analysing and commenting on the strikes, we are dealing with most complex phenomena. The overall national data, using any of the strike indicators, while inevitably providing the requisite portion of drama, does not necessarily convey an accurate assessment of the country's strike record. Without a component analysis there will be a temptation to attribute fault or negligence to all sectors and parties, to "tar all with the same brush". As we have seen for

some sectors the national interpretation would indeed be a spurious assessment of their condition. Clearly, as in the use of strike indicators, we need to emphasise the incorporation and use of a multiplicity of causal variables.

REFERENCES

- Bharadwaj V.P. and R.S. Marthur, "Inter-Industry Variations in Strike-Proneness in India 1959-1967." Paper read at *Second World Congress. International Industrial Relations Association*, 1-4 September 1970. Geneva, pp. 1-16.
- Clarke, R.O., "Labour-Management Disputes: A Perspective," *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1980. March, Volume XVIII, No. 1. pp. 14-25.
- Irish Statistical Bulletins*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1946-1981.
- McAuley, D.J., "Collective Bargaining and Industrial Disputes in Ireland," *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Volume 21, No. 5, 1966-67, pp. 125-150.
- Mulvey, C., "Unemployment and the Incidence of Strikes in the Republic of Ireland 1942-1966," *Journal of Economic Studies*, 1968, Volume 3, No. 2, pp. 73-84.
- Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Industrial Relations*. Dublin. The Stationery Office. 1981.
- Sapsford, D., "Strike Activity in Ireland: An Economic Analysis of a Particular Aspect of Irish Industrial Relations," (in Symposium on Necessary Changes in Industrial Relations), *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, 1979/80. Volume XXIV, Pt. 2, pp. 29-68.
- Stern, Robert N., "Methodological Issues in Quantitative Strike Analysis," *Industrial Relations*. February, 1978. Volume 17, No. 1, pp. 32-42.

NOTES

1. In 1981 the Department of Industrial Relations at University College Dublin commenced work on a major project dealing with a comprehensive assessment of industrial conflict for the period 1960-1979.
2. See T. Brannick and A. Kelly, "The Reliability and Validity of Irish Strike Data and Statistics" (to be published). For the 20-year period the data collected by UCD researchers differ from the CSO data to the following extent:

Numbers of strikes	.9%
Workers involved	2.4%
Man-days lost	.6%

3. The 1970 Annual Delegate Conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions adopted certain decisions in relation to trade union picketing policies, as follows: two types of strikes were differentiated; (i) the "All-Out Strike," where all workers stop working, and (ii) the "Individual Strike," where only those workers in membership of trade unions directly involved in a conflict should cease working.
4. During the twenty-year period under review, the proportion of the workforce employed in the private sector declined from 83% in 1960 to 75% in 1977.