



**NUI MAYNOOTH**  
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**The agricultural labourer and the state in independent Ireland,  
1922-76**

by

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
National University of Ireland, Maynooth**

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**June 2007**

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## Summary

Since the land act of 1881 initiated the process of vesting Ireland's greatest natural resource in a single class, the legacy of peasant proprietorship for Irish social and economic development has been the subject of much debate and comment. Few, however, have considered its implications for the other group indigenous to the land, the agricultural labourers.

Largely synonymous with decline, this thesis challenges the tendency to write this class off as a sector of note by establishing them not only as Ireland's largest single wage earning group until the 1960s but also its poorest and most disadvantaged. At a time when states began to actively intervene in society to protect the interests of their weaker members, this thesis explores Irish state policy towards the agricultural labourer. It examines how the state balanced the needs and interests of this disadvantaged group with those of the remainder of the farming community when agriculture was considered the country's primary industry and the family farm the cornerstone of a self sufficient rural Ireland.

Framed around the activities of the Agricultural Wages Board, a statutory minimum wage fixing body which operated from 1936 until 1976, this study carries out a detailed analysis of its performance in regulating the economic position of the agricultural labourer over forty years. Comparisons are drawn with the wages and hours of work of other Irish workers and comparable workers in the UK and Northern Ireland. Viewing this wage fixing machinery and its governing legislation as a reflection of government policy towards this class, its effectiveness is established by drawing reference to similar measures provided for other workers in Ireland and the UK. The systematic exclusion of the agricultural labourer from the modern labour code introduced for other workers around this period is for the first time examined in this study, and how this institutional stigmatization impacted on the agricultural labourer's struggle to overcome his low status in Irish society.

This thesis is essentially about a mindset which marginalised the agricultural labourer in Irish society until at least the 1970s.

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## Abbreviations

<b>AAI</b>	<b>Agricultural Association of Ireland</b>
<b>AGI</b>	<b>Department of Agriculture file series</b>
<b>AWB</b>	<b>Agricultural Wages Board</b>
<b>CMP</b>	<b>Con Moynihan MSS</b>
<b>Dáil deb</b>	<b>Dáil Eireann parliamentary debates</b>
<b>FRW</b>	<b>Federation of Rural Workers</b>
<b>ICTU</b>	<b>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</b>
<b>IR</b>	<b>Department of Labour file series</b>
<b>ITGWU</b>	<b>Irish Transport and General Workers Union</b>
<b>ITUC</b>	<b>Irish Trade Union Congress</b>
<b>NFA</b>	<b>National Farmers Association</b>
<b>RTE</b>	<b>Radio Telefís Eireann</b>
<b>S</b>	<b>Department of an Taoiseach file series</b>
<b>W</b>	<b>Department of Labour file series</b>

## Acknowledgements

This study hinges on the activities of the Agricultural Wages Board, a government body which operated from 1936 to 1976. An analysis of the Board's activities would not have been possible without the foresight and diligence of Mr Con Moynihan, Carraigrohane, Cork. A dedicated supporter of farm workers throughout his lifetime, Mr Moynihan took this to a national level when he represented these workers on the Board from 1949 to 1976. Mr Moynihan managed to safeguard most of the documentation associated with the Board's proceedings from his appointment. This was not an insignificant task considering Board members were only allowed to retain minutes formally from 1962 and even then under strict confidentiality. Mr Moynihan continued to preserve these records twenty years after the Board's dissolution, until I came knocking on his door. At that point I was still trying to locate the official records of the Board so neither of us appreciated the full importance of the boxes of information in his possession. Since then, it would appear that Mr Moynihan's papers constitute the sole surviving records of a statutory body which regulated the wages of the country's largest and poorest wage earning group for forty years. Sadly, Mr Moynihan passed away shortly after we met. His family, however, generously donated his papers to the Department of History, NUI Maynooth, thus enabling this study to continue. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Mr Moynihan and his family for trusting me with records which were obviously of great personal importance to Mr Moynihan, representing a lifetime's work in support of the labourer. The Con Moynihan Papers will be a tribute to his memory.

Huge thanks are owed to the staff of both the National Archives and the National Library whose help, expertise and advice were always gratefully received. Special thanks to Dr David Craig and Ms Della Murphy in the National Archives without whose assistance the Department of Agriculture files would not have been accessible. Thanks also to the Departments of Equality, Justice and Law Reform and an Taoiseach for allowing special access to files not yet on public release.

For their unending support and encouragement, I would like to thank my family and friends. They have been through many life journeys since this study began many moons ago. Very special thanks are due to my parents, Mogue and Anne, for making the past such an integral and fascinating part of the present, and for selflessly giving me every opportunity in life. I am also very grateful to my colleagues at Trinity College for the good natured (and much needed) badgering which helped bring this thesis to a conclusion.

This brings me to the person to whom I owe my greatest debt of gratitude, Professor RV Comerford, Head of the Department of History at NUI Maynooth, and my supervisor for this study. Professor Comerford has been a great source of inspiration since my undergraduate days at Maynooth, and it was he who stimulated my interest in the agricultural labourer as the widely cited 'forgotten man' of Irish history, particularly in the context of the little traversed twentieth century. On encouraging me to pursue this study, he showed a belief in me that I did not possess myself and through its many stops and starts he has provided patient and unwavering support, good humour, expertise and much sagacity. I will be forever grateful.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my lovely cousin, Catherine Curtis, never far away.

## INTRODUCTION

*The hungry fiend  
Screams the apocalypse of clay  
In every corner of this land*

Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger*

Agriculture may have declined in its relative importance to the Irish economy over the past few decades, but it still remains the most important indigenous industry in the country, and not least because of the deep seated historic and social significance attached to the working of the land. Since the establishment of the Free State, successive governments have sought to reconcile the hard economics of a struggling industry with the noble but rather lofty aspiration of preserving the family farm as the fabric of rural society, a system of land tenure inherited by independent Ireland which, in fact, has served as the greatest obstacle to the optimisation of agricultural productivity.

The present structure of Irish agriculture can be traced to the nineteenth century, and particularly the Great Famine of the 1840s, when the resulting changes in demographic patterns, coupled with the land acts of the later part of the century, set in motion the process of establishing the tenants of Irish land as peasant proprietors.<sup>1</sup> While tenant farmers may have tended the bulk of the land prior to the onslaught of the Famine, they did not dominate the lowest realm of rural society. This was the preserve of the very numerous labouring classes, the farm labourer and the cottier, subsisting on sublet potato ground ranging from small plots to five acres or less.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Breen, Damien F. Hannan, David B. Rottman and Christopher T. Whelan, *Understanding contemporary Ireland* (Dublin, 1990), p.184.

<sup>2</sup> Mary E. Daly, *A social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p.10.

Accounting for some 1,260,215 male labourers in 1841, compared to 453,104 farmers, this class expanded most prolifically in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> It was also the class which was most devastated by the impact of the Famine both in the immediate and longer term. This catastrophe activated a series of transformations which were highly class selective and eventually helped to establish what amounted to a new rural social structure.<sup>4</sup> Between 1845 and 1851 the number of labourers and cottiers fell by 40 per cent, and the number of farmers by 20 per cent. During the following sixty years the number of labourers and cottiers fell again by 40 per cent, and the number of farmers by 5 per cent.<sup>5</sup> While the number of tenant farmers declined by just over one-quarter between 1841 and 1911, agricultural labourers (including relatives assisting) fell by nearly two-thirds, with the ratio of labourers to farmers halving in this period.<sup>6</sup> Within the rural community the class balance swung sharply in favour of the farmers, with the relative size of the two groups moving decisively in favour of those occupying land as against those merely working it.<sup>7</sup> This meant that the decades after the Famine constituted above all a time of growing demographic consolidation on the part of the farmers and, as a result, the balance of social influence and of political strength began to tilt ever more decisively in their favour.<sup>8</sup> The farmers were therefore ideally placed to benefit from the revolution in land tenure which commenced in 1870, when the landlord system that

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<sup>3</sup> Pdraig G. Lane, 'The agricultural labourer in Ireland 1850-1914' (Ph.D. thesis, University College, Cork, 1980), p.9; Kieran A. Kennedy, Thomas Giblin, and Deirdre McHugh, *The economic development of Ireland in the twentieth century* (London, 1988), p.5.

<sup>4</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (New York, 1989), p.83; Breen *et al*, *Understanding contemporary Ireland*, p.185.

<sup>5</sup> J.J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841-1912' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii (1980), p.74.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society*, p.3; Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p.84.

<sup>8</sup> Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p.85.

had drained and dominated the Irish countryside for so many generations was eventually ousted and replaced by tenant proprietorship. By 1916, 63.9 per cent of farmers owned their land.<sup>9</sup>

Although land purchase removed the very top layer of the rural hierarchy, the process of vesting the land in the country's tenant farmers and in a myriad of fragmented farm units re-confirmed and even exacerbated the inequalities of rural Ireland. Land purchase did not, nor would it, produce the desired economic results. Despite its social dressing, peasant proprietorship still amounted to the farmer who had always determined the type of farming and the type of agriculture remaining in control.<sup>10</sup> Not only did most of the new landowners not have the requisite experience or education to deal with farm ownership and development but, more importantly, they also lacked the necessary capital and/or land to make the holding economic.<sup>11</sup> Benefits of ownership were slight for the 100,000 farmers in 1911 who had less than ten acres.<sup>12</sup> By independence only two thirds of Ireland's tenanted lands had been vested under the British land acts.<sup>13</sup> The Land Commission was re-established by the first Free State government to oversee the completion of land purchase and also to initiate compulsory acquisition and redistribution of untenanted lands.<sup>14</sup> Under various land acts introduced between 1923 and 1987, the Commission vested holdings in around 114,000 families, while at least another 134,000 families benefited from

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<sup>9</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformaton of Ireland 1900 – 2000* (Great Britain, 2005) p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland*, p.51.

<sup>11</sup> Terence Dooley, '*The land for the people*': *The land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland*, p.51.

<sup>13</sup> Dooley, '*The land for the people*', p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.



enlargements, new holdings or accommodation plots.<sup>15</sup> Although more families secured ownership, by the 1970s one third of farms were still less than 30 acres in size.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, these families were faced with the problem that the most profitable enterprise for Irish farming was extensive agriculture and store cattle, a system of farming which was unsuitable to the size of most Irish farms.

Governments of independent Ireland therefore inherited a system of agriculture which required them to address an unresolved tension between maximising output and the desire to keep as many as possible on the land.<sup>17</sup> To complicate things further the intense attachment to the family farm militated against any radical changes in the structure of land tenure and made any attempt to force the pace of land reform politically dangerous.<sup>18</sup> This political constraint was compounded by the fact that developing agriculture in accordance with comparative advantage clashed with the country's demographic problem, which imposed a constant pressure for the retention of jobs wherever possible.<sup>19</sup> Government policy towards agriculture never quite decided how to resolve this dilemma.<sup>20</sup> An important aspect of this dilemma which has not been explored and will form the subject of this study is how government, in its attempts to reconcile the paradoxes of the agricultural system, addressed the needs of the other large sector also historically dependent on eking its living from working the land, the hired agricultural labourer.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> Kennedy *et al*, *The economic development of Ireland*, p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

While commentators through the decades have been preoccupied and perplexed with the deep rooted legacy of land ownership for Irish agriculture, the agricultural labourer has only been included in substantive historical analyses since the 1970s. Up to that point historians were so consumed with the landlord-tenant relationship that labourers were generally omitted from consideration. The revised approach to the land question undertaken in the pioneering works of historians such as Lyons, Vaughan, Lee, Donnelly, Bew, Clark, Boyle, Fitzpatrick, Hoppen and Lane have substantially redressed this imbalance.<sup>21</sup> These works addressed the political and social ramifications of the drastic numeric decline of the agricultural labouring class in the decades after the Famine. In doing so they drew attention to the serious long-standing tensions and unrest which prevailed between tenant farmer and labourer, and highlighted the labourer's contribution to the various class and land agitations which occurred around the period of the Land War and before.<sup>22</sup> FSL Lyons, for instance, was one of the first historians to highlight the fate of the agricultural labourer in post Famine Ireland and to categorise the labourer and farmer in terms of proletariat and bourgeoisie. He drew attention to the 'real and potentially dangerous tensions' existing in the Irish countryside, which he argued were intensified 'by the emergence of the family farm as the social and economic unit dominating the lives of the

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<sup>21</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the famine* (London, 1971); J.S. Donnelly, *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London and Boston, 1975); Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978); S. Clark, *Social origins of the Irish land war* (Princeton, 1979); John W. Boyle, 'A marginal figure: the Irish rural labourer' in S. Clark & J.S. Donnelly (eds), *Irish peasants violence and political unrest 1780-1914*, (Manchester, 1983) pp 311-38; W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904* (Studies in Irish Economic and Social History, 2; Dundalk, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> For a valuable account of the position of the agricultural labourer in Ulster from 1820-1914, see Liam Kennedy, 'The rural economy, 1820-1914' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1985).

agricultural population'.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Terence Dooley's recent study, *'The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland*, dismisses any suggestion that the land question had been resolved by independence or that land purchase had been completed.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, he highlights the extent to which ownership of land and land division remained very weighty social and political issues right up to the 1970s. That such issues remained so compelling for rural society and for the state is important for establishing the mindset of successive governments obliged to look after the interests of the agricultural labourer in independent Ireland.

Most studies devoted to the labourer per se have tended to focus on the theme of latent class conflict, and the failure of the agricultural labourer class to realise their potential to use organisational means to address their inferior position in Irish society.<sup>25</sup> Others have focused on housing, and how until the 1930s the state used this measure to improve the labourer's living conditions rather than tackling the inadequacy of their wages.<sup>26</sup> The conditions of migrant labourers and farm servants

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<sup>23</sup> Lyons, *Ireland since the famine*, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Dooley, *'The land for the people': The land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel G. Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle, 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1988); Boyle, 'The Irish rural labourer'; Daniel G. Bradley, 'Speeding the plough: the formation of the Federation of Rural Workers 1944-1948' in *Saothar* 11(1986), pp 39-53; Ross M. Connolly, 'A rightful place in the sun: the struggle of the farm and rural labourers of County Wicklow' in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds), *Wicklow: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1994), pp 911-25; David Fitzpatrick, 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland' in *British Journal of Sociology*, 29 (1978), pp 37-75; Heather Holmes, 'Organising the Irish migratory potato workers: the efforts in the early twentieth century' in *Rural History*, 11, 2 (2000), pp 207-9; Pamela Horn, 'The national agricultural labourers' union in Ireland, 1873-9' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 17 (1971), pp 340-52; Pdraig G. Lane, 'Agricultural labourers and rural violence, 1850-1914' in *Studia Hibernica*, 27 (1993), pp 77-87; Emmet O'Connor, 'Agrarian unrest and the labour movement in Co. Waterford, 1917-23' in *Saothar*, 6 (1980); M. O'Dubhshlaine, 'The lockout - Farm labour dispute in Kilkea, Co. Kildare 1947' (M.A. Local History, N.U.I., Maynooth, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> F.H.A. Aalen, 'The rehousing of rural labourers in Ireland under the Labourers (Ireland) Acts, 1883-1919' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (1986), pp 287-306; Enda McKay, 'The housing of the rural labourer, 1883-1916' in *Saothar*, 17 (1992), pp 27-38; N.J. Synnott, 'Housing of the rural population in Ireland' in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, ix (1904); Anne-Marie Walsh, 'Root them in the land: cottage schemes for agricultural labourers' in Joost Augusteijn (ed.), *Ireland in the 1930s: new perspectives* (Great Britain, 1999), pp 47-66; James

have also been extensively explored through various modes of scholarship.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, Enda Delaney's *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain 1921-1971* is of particular note.<sup>28</sup> This study is an exhaustive exploration of the phenomenon of mass migration to Britain particularly in the post war period. In terms of the agricultural labourer class, Delaney draws attention to how the ongoing decline of this group since the Famine was accelerated in the post Emergency period, along with the even more pronounced and rapid decline of the relatives assisting. He provides valuable insights into how factors such as insufficient work and underemployment, poor wages, low status, rising expectations and changing attitudes contributed to the labourer's exodus to better opportunities in Britain. By exploring the social and economic position of the agricultural labourer during the period in question, this thesis will shed further significant light on the conditions underlining the emigration of this class.

To date, there are two substantial works that deal exclusively with the agricultural labourer that are pertinent to this study. Pdraig Lane's unpublished Ph.D. thesis on the 'Agricultural labourer in Ireland, 1850-1914', was the first indepth account of the drastic transformation of the agricultural labourer and cottier class from a poor but self sufficient group in the pre-Famine era, to a rural class in the post Famine decades

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O'Shea, *Priests, politics and society in post – Famine Ireland: a study of Co. Tipperary 1850 – 1891* (Dublin, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Breen, 'Farm servanthood in Ireland, 1900-40' in *Economic History Review* 36 (1983), pp 87-102; Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and tattie hokers: history and folklore of the Irish migratory agricultural worker in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 1991); Pat Feeley, 'Servant boys and girls in Co. Limerick' in *Old Limerick Journal*, 1 (1979), pp 32-6; Michael O'Hanlon, *Hiring fairs and farm workers in north west Ireland* (Derry, 1992); *Report of the inter-departmental committee on seasonal migration to Great Britain 1937-1938* (Dublin, 1938).

<sup>28</sup> Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain, 1921-71* (Liverpool, 2000); Enda Delaney, 'Emigration, political cultures and post-war Irish society' in Brian Girvin and Gary Murphy (eds), *The Lemass era: politics and society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass* (Dublin, 2005).

defined by their complete dependence on wages and their landless, poverty ridden status.<sup>29</sup> Lane demonstrates how neither the amount of employment or the rate of wages in a new market economy driven by extensive farming and consolidation of holdings proved adequate to provide agricultural labourers with a living even approaching bare subsistence. He explores how the state reluctantly accepted responsibility for addressing the dire conditions of this class through housing legislation. The Labourers Acts provided for the settlement of labourers employed by farmers on half acre allotments and in labourers cottages from 1883 onwards, although no provision was made for the conditions of the vulnerable underemployed and unemployed labourers. In the context of the prevailing views on laissez faire and the protection of private property, Lane examines how the political and social consequences of the state's intervention had contributed to the slow introduction of this unprecedented attempt to compensate labourers for their displacement in a new landed society and economy.

Of particular interest is Lane's exploration of how the increasingly effective mobilisation of the tenant farmers in pursuit of their own ends served to disadvantage the agricultural labourer class further. That this newly dominant group consciously selected certain objectives that would hold the labourers' support for tenant movements but would not burden the farmers, as employers and covetous occupiers, is made clear. For instance, the extent to which the farm labourers were led to believe that their employment prospects depended on tenant proprietorship is emphasised.

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<sup>29</sup> Other articles on this theme by Lane are Padraig G. Lane, 'Agricultural labourers and the land question in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 101-15; Padraig G. Lane, 'Perceptions of agricultural labourers after the great famine, 1850-1870' in *Saothar*, 19 (1994), pp 14-25.

while the degree to which the tenant farmers opposed the provision of allotments and housing for these workers is also explored. Lane chronicles the steadfast opposition of tenant farmers to any great expansion in the number of labourers' cottages after 1883 for fear of any increased financial burden through the rates, which were used to fund the cottages. He demonstrates how tenant farmers used their positions on bodies such as the Board of Guardians to delay the implementation of such schemes, to the extent that it was the early 1900s before any extensive building commenced.

The labourers' own contribution to redressing their conditions is also extensively examined. It is shown that although these workers managed to organise themselves on four different occasions during the 1850-1914 period, the ability of the respective movements to wrest meaningful concessions from either the state or the tenant farmers was affected by the lack of clarity of purpose they displayed and by their inability to sustain independent action. Attention is also given to the limited attraction that militant nationalism held for the workers compared to that of luddism and agrarian violence.

The importance of Lane's study for this thesis lies not so much in the attempts of the workers to seek improvements for their conditions through organisation, but rather in the extent to which the tenant farmers, and their political representatives, succeeded in manipulating any prospective statutory concessions to the workers in the form of housing or allotments, to suit their own interests. The tenant farmers' success in curtailing any improvement of the labourer's social or economic circumstances, and the degree to which the policy pursued by the state was influenced by their demands,

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is of particular concern. Also of note was the agricultural labourer's complete dependence on government for protection, not only from unsympathetic market forces but from the new landed class the state was helping to put in place through land purchase schemes. As the new nation state emerged, many of the future leaders of independent Ireland would be descendants of this new dominant class and it remains to be explored how they would address the ongoing hardship of the agricultural labourer.

Daniel Bradley's *Farm labourers: Irish struggle 1900-1976* provides much evidence of the existence of agricultural labourers as a significant but very disadvantaged proportion of the Irish workforce up to the 1960s. Like the few who have ventured into the realm of the sacrosanct farmer-worker relationship, Bradley's study is approached primarily from the organisational perspective, examining the various agitations undertaken by the labourers to improve their pay, working conditions and social status from 1900 to 1976, with Cork county the subject of specific study. Farm labour organisations before 1918 are reviewed as are the wave of strikes from 1919-23, which witnessed the growth and decline of trade unionism in agriculture. Bradley also explores the revival of trade unionism on the farm in the 1940s under James Larkin and the Workers Union of Ireland, and the consequent agitations for better working conditions involving the Federation of Rural Workers which Larkin helped to found in 1946. Pivotal to this study is the contention that the labourer's rising aspirations were frustrated by the reality of his standard of living. Bradley confirms that the impoverished conditions of this class prevailed far into the twentieth century. In this regard he provides the first major review of the wage fixing machinery

established by government to regulate the livelihood of agricultural workers. He draws attention to the controversy which surrounded the activities of the Agricultural Wages Board from its establishment in 1936 until its dissolution in 1976 and concludes that its performance was seriously inadequate. Although Bradley made significant inroads in broadly documenting the history of the agricultural labourer over much of the last century, in the area of government policy he touches on several discrepancies which required much more systematic investigation.

For instance, in relation to working conditions he notes that hours of work were not fixed for the agricultural worker until 1936, with the exception of the emergency years from 1917-21, yet no explanation is offered. Similarly with regard to the exclusion of the agricultural worker from the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 and the Holidays Act 1939. These were milestone acts of social legislation which regulated holidays and hours of work for most Irish workers.<sup>30</sup> While Bradley examines the strikes of the 1940s as an expression of the labourer's resentment at this exclusion, he does not account for the government's differential treatment of this class. In relation to the Industrial Relations Act 1946, he states as a matter of course that 'as with most previous social legislation, agricultural workers were not given the full benefit of the Labour Court'. The sustained exclusion of these workers from the code of legislation governing the working conditions of the remainder of the workforce is not addressed.

Furthermore, no allusion is made to the several private members bills introduced to Dáil Éireann between 1946 and 1965 seeking legislative concessions from the

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<sup>30</sup> These issues will be explored extensively in Chapter Six.



government to improve the working conditions of the agricultural worker and the modernisation of the minimum wage legislation introduced in 1936. The significance of this constitutional alternative to the traditional agrarian agitation pursued by agricultural workers has completely escaped Bradley and other historians. Bradley's lack of reference to this practice is compounded by the fact that the government itself eventually submitted to the demands of the sponsors. In 1968 the government sponsored a bill which it acknowledged as essentially deriving from a rejected private members bill of 1965. Furthermore, after two decades of incessant campaigning, the government finally yielded to the essence of this agitation and agreed to review the legislation regulating agricultural workers' wages and conditions of employment, which ultimately led to its complete overhaul. This development has also been omitted from Bradley's analysis and will form the subject of substantial investigation in this thesis.<sup>31</sup>

Bradley was not alone in neglecting to develop the government policy aspect of his findings. Emmet O' Connor's 'Agrarian unrest and the labour movement in Co. Waterford 1917-1923' is also notable for a similar shortcoming. An important exploration of the growth and collapse of the ITGWU in Waterford during this period, O'Connor contends that agricultural labourers were better organised in Waterford than in other counties at this time and defeated attempts to reduce their living standards after the War of Independence. However, with the end of the Civil War, the Irish Farmers' Union backed by the government made a determined effort to curb their power which sparked outright class warfare. Although O'Connor is primarily concerned with the long term effects of the events of this period on Labour

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<sup>31</sup> These issues will be explored in Chapter Seven.

history, he does not note its significance for the agricultural labourer. The partisan role of native government in a strike which effectively and permanently broke the power of trade unionism on the farm implies huge ramifications for subsequent government policy in its consideration of this class and will be explored further in chapter two.

Other major commentators of twentieth century Irish history have also neglected to explore this sustained pattern of differential treatment by government. For instance, it is instructive to note the odd but significant allusions which historians such as Lee, Daly, Foster and Hoppen have made to the position of the agricultural labourer in independent Ireland. Both Daly and Foster have noted the comments of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee of 1923 which recommended against the introduction of certain tariffs as 'it would raise farm labourers' wages, and this was undesirable. So too was any legislation controlling their wages or hours of work'.<sup>32</sup> Lee noted in this regard that the interests of the agricultural labourer in the Free State 'were at least, in the short term', directly opposed to those of the farmers, and that reducing farmers costs meant reducing labourers' wages.<sup>33</sup> In this connection Hoppen commented that these workers were 'overwhelmed by the open hostility of Cosgrave's government which seems, more or less openly, to have adhered to the proposition that 'labourers' right is farmers' wrong'.<sup>34</sup> Foster noted that agricultural labourers had been excluded from the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act.<sup>35</sup> Lee acknowledged that McElligott, the Fianna Fáil minister for Finance during the 1930s and 1940s, 'in his renewed assault

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<sup>32</sup> Daly, *A social and economic history of Ireland*, p. 140; R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (Dublin, 1988) p. 523.

<sup>33</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: politics and society* (Dublin, 1989), p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p. 216.

<sup>35</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 564.

in 1946 on agricultural labourers...seems to have harboured a visceral animosity' for this class.<sup>36</sup> Lee, Daly and Hoppen have made references to the introduction of the agricultural minimum wage in 1936 and the establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board. Although Hoppen noted this development, and that the years after the Emergency saw renewed attempts on the part of the labourers to improve their lot through trade union organisation, he concludes that demographic annihilation soon phased them out of Irish society.<sup>37</sup> Daly has made extensive reference to the agricultural labourer in her recent works on the Department of Local Government and the Department of Agriculture.<sup>38</sup> Both accounts, however, focus on the wages of the agricultural labourer in the context of those of other rural workers on local authority and government employment schemes, and in terms of the supply of agricultural labour during the Emergency period. Despite writing a hundred year history of the Department of Agriculture, forty of which it spent overseeing agricultural labour, there is no significant allusion to the department's policy on this class other than in respect of wages, and this tends to cease with the end of the Emergency. More recently, Diarmaid Ferriter in his major survey of the transformation of twentieth century Ireland, refers to the emergence of the Federation of Rural Workers in the 1940s and the strikes of farm labourers after the second world war. In this regard he not only neglects to distinguish between agricultural and rural labourers, but in alluding to the Federation securing a weekly half-day with pay for 'rural labourers' he vaguely refers to their inferior holiday entitlements by noting simply in parentheses '(although they were not given parity with industrial workers where public holidays

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<sup>36</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p.567.

<sup>37</sup> Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p. 216.

were concerned until 1969)'.<sup>39</sup> The most salient comment came from Lee when he noted that the attempts by the agricultural labourer to acquire a stake in the country were brusquely rebuffed by both farmer and government.<sup>40</sup> Despite these incisive remarks, ranging in origin from 1981 to 2005, there has never been any systematic investigation into the nature of the questions raised. Instead, commentators have focused on the plight of the disadvantaged multitude of landowners struggling to survive in the agricultural economy on unviable holdings and the wider impact this has had on Irish society.

Lee could also be quoted as an example of this tendency. Although he clearly commiserates with the fate of the agricultural labourer in independent Ireland and has made a vital contribution to the inclusion of this class in his major surveys of twentieth century history, he nonetheless conveys that his greatest sympathy lay with the 'relatives assisting'. These he labels the 'mute victims to the failure of society to create sufficient work to provide for even a dwindling population and to give its members a decent chance of personal fulfilment'.<sup>41</sup> He epitomises his pity for the fate of this class by referring to Montague's 'creatures crazed with loneliness'.<sup>42</sup> Yet the unfortunate plight of these workers and their families has captured the attention and imagination of governments and commentators down through the decades to a much greater extent than the agricultural labourer, as they tried to grapple with the legacy of small family farms for Irish agriculture, culture and society. Indeed, this thesis will prove that the interests of the relatives assisting were being looked out for at

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<sup>38</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997); Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland*, p. 493.

<sup>40</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p.72.

government level more than most realised or perhaps would have wished. Signs that the interests of the agricultural labourer would be relegated to those of a minority group on account of their less dominant position in the farming community were already evident from a statement made by the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society during the early years of independence. It defensively claimed that the paid labourer in Irish agriculture would have been 'the society's chief concern were it not that so many more of the actual workers upon the land of Ireland own or rent their own farms than are in receipt of wages'.<sup>43</sup> This tendency to focus exclusively on the majority of the agricultural community would represent the characteristic lack of comment on agricultural labourers for most analysts concerned with agriculture over the course of the twentieth century.

Given the paucity of commentary on the agricultural labourer's social and economic position in the twentieth century, it is important to note that the few references which have been made point to the inexorable influence of government in this sphere of the agricultural industry. This thesis is the first comprehensive study of state policy towards the agricultural labourer in independent Ireland. It is not a history of trade unionism among agricultural labourers or of agricultural labour activism, or even the conditions of Irish agricultural labourers. While this study impinges on each of these themes, it is essentially about a mindset which permeated successive administrations, a mindset which effectively marginalised the agricultural labourer in modern Irish society until at least the 1970s.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 649.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> 'The representation and organisation of agricultural workers' in *International Labour Office Studies & Reports, Series K (Agriculture)*, no. 8 (1928), p. 160.

Chapter One provides the statistical data to position the agricultural labourer in independent Ireland and challenges any suggestion that this worker had all but disappeared from the Irish countryside by comparing their numbers to those of the rest of the male workforce. The decline of the labourer vis á vis the other classes constituting the agricultural workforce is also examined. The location of these workers at a national, provincial and county level is identified as well as their distribution on a farm size basis. A definition of the agricultural labourer is also identified for the purpose of this study.

Chapter Two explores the growth and collapse of trade unionism on the farm in the period 1916 to 1923, and examines how the agitation and conflict of this period critically shaped the evolution of native government policy towards the agricultural labourer. The deteriorating fortunes of the agricultural labourer after a brief spell of improved wages during the war years are traced in the context of the first decade of independent government.

Chapter Three examines the background leading to the statutory regulation of agricultural wages in 1936 and the nature of the machinery introduced. Detailed comparison with similar legislative machinery operating in Britain at this time is of great importance in understanding the quality and purpose of the governing legislation introduced by the Irish government.

Chapter Four focuses on the results of the Board's wage fixing decisions over the four decades of its operations and assesses the Board's contribution to improving the economic position of the agricultural labourer by comparing its wage rates with those

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prevalent in comparable sectors. Concluding that the Board's performance as a wage fixing body was substandard, Chapter Five attempts to establish why its record was so poor and the factors that may have guided its wage fixing decisions. The relationship of the Board with government is explored as are the relationships of its members, and the attempts of the worker representatives to seek larger minimum wage increases. Consideration is given to the events surrounding the Board's abolition and the extent to which it contributed to its own demise.

Chapter Six addresses the government policy which excluded agricultural labourers from the same labour code as other workers until 1969. It explores the parliamentary and trade union agitations undertaken to acquire parity in holiday entitlements for this class. The manner in which the principle is eventually conceded but parity with other workers withheld is also explored. The limitations of the Agricultural Wages Board in the regulation of conditions of employment is also accentuated.

Chapter Seven traces the steps which led to the dissolution of the Agricultural Wages Board and its replacement by a joint labour committee under the auspices of the Labour Court. The several private members' bills introduced to Dáil Eireann seeking the revision of the Board's powers initially and ultimately its abolition are examined. The reluctance of the Department of Agriculture to surrender its control over agricultural labour to the Department of Labour is emphasised, as is the influence of the national wage agreements.

The contention underlining this thesis is that from 1923 until 1976 successive governments, through the Department of Agriculture, practiced a policy which was biased towards the farming community when it came to issues concerning the hired

agricultural labourer, to the major detriment of the interests of this worker and his already marginalised position in Irish society. The impact of peasant proprietorship on this policy, and on the status of the agricultural worker over the decades as he struggled to overcome his disadvantaged position, is explored.

The principal primary sources used to establish the government perspective for this study are the **Department of an Taoiseach 'S'** files and the **Department of Labour 'W'** files located at the National Archives. At the time this study first commenced in 1994 many of the files for the 1970s lay outside the thirty year rule. After contacting both departments directly, they kindly arranged special access to material in their respective offices which would not have been released to the public for another decade. The **Department of Agriculture 'AGI'** records were also a rich source of information. Although these records were stored in the National Archives, they had not been made available to the public when I started my research because of their unsorted state on pallets in the basement. However, when the director, Dr David Craig, became aware of the nature of my research, he kindly agreed to release the files. Unfortunately this file series is available to 1950 only, as the remainder of the department's records are still stored offsite due to the lack of space at the Archives. Nevertheless, the existing records have still proven incredibly important for establishing the mindset underlining the policies of the Department of Agriculture. Confirmation that this mindset persisted into the 1970s was gleaned from the files of the Department of an Taoiseach and Labour for this period. It should also be noted that the librarian at the Department of Agriculture provided access to an interdepartmental committee report of 1970 whose recommendations ultimately led to



the Agricultural Wages Board's replacement by a Joint Labour Committee. The **Oireachtas parliamentary debates** are an endless source of information for establishing the mentalities of the politicians of the day. Likewise, the **Hansard parliamentary debates** for England and Wales and Northern Ireland have provided significant commentary on the motivations underlining the introduction of a legislative labour code for agricultural workers by these governments. The conventions and recommendations of the **International Labour Office**, and the research papers it has produced since it was established in 1919, have been an invaluable tool for establishing the standards set internationally for agricultural workers. Other standard sources of note include official publications such as census data, statistical bulletins, annual reports and newspapers.

Establishing a detailed history of the Agricultural Wages Board was difficult because attempts to locate its official records have proved quite futile. Since the Board operated under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, I initially enquired there as to the whereabouts of the Board's records. This department denied any knowledge of the records and transferred me to the Department of Enterprise & Employment who reacted similarly and sent me back to Agriculture again. The only information available at the National Archives pertains to memoranda published by the Board. The memoranda provide details of the Board's minimum wages orders and its annual reports summarising its proceedings, and were submitted to the Dáil and the minister for Agriculture each year. Subsequent to approaching the director of the Archives to see if he had any knowledge of the records' whereabouts, Dr Craig put me in touch with archivist Della Murphy, whose expertise would also later help with

the Department of Agriculture 'AGI' files. Ms Murphy went to great lengths to try to source the Board's records through her various contacts, and even tried addresses provided by me where the Board had been housed at various stages, but to no avail. Later approaches to the minister for Agriculture resulted in some correspondence with his private secretary but again I was redirected, this time to the Labour History Museum and the Joint Labour Committee Section of the Labour Court, neither of which could help. The latter indicated that it understood the Department of Agriculture had responsibility for the Board's records following its dissolution.

In the interim, I had written to former board members at the addresses cited on the Board memoranda to see if they had any information or would meet for an interview. While the few responses received indicated that most had passed away, the exception was of vital importance. Con Moynihan, of Carraigrohane in Cork, replied to my letter and indicated that he had some information that would be of interest to me. I had written to Mr Moynihan for two reasons. Firstly, he had been a worker representative on the Board for almost twenty five years and secondly, I had observed from Daniel Bradley's bibliography that he had quite recently been a source of information and material for his research. Mr Moynihan provided me with several boxes of invaluable documentation relating to the Board's operations and procedures from the late 1950s. This body of information has been a source of inestimable value for gaining an understanding of the mentality of the Board members and its practices. It has been suggested that since the Board's official records cannot be located they may have been destroyed at the time of its dissolution, a practice which apparently was not uncommon at that time. This is difficult to accept since one would expect that

the Joint Labour Committee which replaced the Board would have drawn on its material for reference purposes, especially in the early years when the secretary of the JLC was the former secretary to the Board. I did mention this to the JLC section of the Labour Court but they insist that the only records held there pertain to the setting up of the JLC and afterwards. Despite recent correspondence to the minister for Agriculture, the department has not admitted any responsibility for, or knowledge of, the Board's records. For now it would appear that the **Con Moynihan Papers** are the only known archive pertaining to the operations of this very significant body. Sadly Mr Moynihan passed away shortly after we met. His family kindly donated the Con Moynihan Papers to the Department of History, NUI Maynooth.

## Chapter I

### **The disappearance of the agricultural labourer: a statistical review 1926-81**

The proportion of agricultural labourers had fallen 'from over half the occupied male population in 1841 to less than one-third in 1911', and the decline was continuing....A whole class was vanishing off the face of the land, statistics bearing a mute witness to the process.<sup>1</sup>

For most historians the story of the agricultural labourer is synonymous with decline. The drastic reduction in the numbers of this class between the years of 1841 and 1911 has led many to discount them as a sector of note, even before the advent of independence. This tendency has not been challenged by twentieth century commentators. Influenced by the state's desire to facilitate the continued existence of the family farm, as evidenced in Article 45(v) of the constitution and in agricultural policy, analysts of change in the agricultural workforce have tended to focus more exclusively on the family farm labour force than on its employees.<sup>2</sup> That agricultural labourers as a group have been declining since the Famine is not in dispute. That this class was not a sector of note in independent Ireland, however, is. The objective of this chapter is to contextualise the decline of the agricultural labourer by contrasting it with the decline of the family worker similarly engaged, demonstrating that notwithstanding this decline, agricultural labourers still constituted a significant element of not only the agricultural workforce, but the entire workforce, for the greater part of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 74 and 159.

<sup>2</sup> Julie O'Neill, 'Changes in the structure of the agricultural labour force' (M.Sc. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1984), par. 3.10.1.

Since the difficulties associated with defining the term 'agricultural worker' are quite notorious, it is prudent at this stage to distinguish between the various categories of the agricultural workforce for the purpose of this thesis. The definition of 'agricultural worker' generally depends upon the delimitation of the two words 'agriculture' and 'worker'.<sup>3</sup> While 'agriculture' is generally agreed to include the cultivation of crops and the rearing of stock, here the agreement ends.<sup>4</sup> Some countries regard forestry and horticulture as branches of agriculture, while others do not on the grounds that they are much more 'industrialised' than ordinary field work.<sup>5</sup> Likewise countries vary as to whether work preparatory to agricultural work such as drainage, irrigation and even road-making counts as agricultural work.

The most important and most contentious determinant revolves around the issue of those *working* the land, whether engaged as farmers, relatives assisting or employees. To date, of all those working in agriculture it is the enumeration of the agricultural labourer which has proven most cumbersome. The difficulties associated with defining their numbers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been well documented by historians such as David Fitzpatrick.<sup>6</sup> While largely due to the quality of the census records for these periods, the real crux relates to the age old problem of perception and how the figures for those who did and did not return themselves as agricultural labourers were a true reflection of the actual numbers. The problem was particularly acute in the decades just after the Famine because the demarcation

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<sup>3</sup> 'The representation and organisation of agricultural workers' in *International Labour Office Studies and Reports, Series K (Agriculture)* no. 8 (1928), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841-1912', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii (1980), pp 66-92.

between farmer, especially the smallholder, and labourer was blurred with many of the latter, many of whom might at one stage have held quarter of an acre or so, considering themselves as farmers without land, and those small farmers with land or their relatives assisting occasionally labouring for hire recording their occupation as agricultural labour. The problem was further compounded by later census reports vaguely declaring that it considered the majority of general labourers recorded to be agricultural labourers.<sup>7</sup> This problem had been mitigated to a considerable extent by independence and since the census records are much more reliable from this point the classifications used in this study are based on those used in the reports of 1926 to 1981.

The census reports tend to divide agricultural occupations into two main groups: the family farm sector and the employee sector. The former group is obviously the largest, comprising farmers and their relatives assisting. Relatives assisting generally comprise two distinct categories: farmers' sons and daughters assisting on the home farm, and farmers' other relatives assisting on the home farm. With regard to the residual group in the agricultural workforce, the employees, the census reports have generally distinguished between those principally employed in farm work, and those mainly employed in non-farming agricultural work. The types of worker included in the latter category have varied over the years, reflecting the diverging consensus as to what constitutes agricultural work. For instance, this category has always included such miscellaneous workers as farm managers (and farm foremen until 1961), foresters (woodmen until 1951, and forestry labourers from 1961), gardeners,

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<sup>7</sup> *Census of Ireland* 1911, general report table 20, pp 16-17; F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (Great Britain, 1971), p. 53.

nurserymen and gardeners' labourers (market gardeners, jobbing gardeners and groundsmen from 1961). Although fishermen were not considered agricultural workers for most of the period under review, constituting a category of their own, they were classified with agricultural workers for the 1971 and 1981 censuses. It was likewise with turf workers. When recorded in the census for the first time in 1946 they were classified as agricultural workers, but from 1961 they were categorised under mining and quarrying occupations.

The census distinguishes between workers mainly employed in non-farming agricultural work and those principally employed in farm work by categorising the latter as 'agricultural labourers'. Until 1966 agricultural labourers were classified into two distinct groups according to whether they were 'living in' or 'living out'. The agricultural labourer living in was a farm servant, usually unmarried, who resided in the household of the employing farmer for any period ranging from six months to a year, or longer.<sup>8</sup> The labourer living out encompassed all those workers not resident on the farm with the employer, but with homes usually in the surrounding districts. This category covered both casually and permanently employed labourers paid in cash and/or in kind on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. As such this category also subsumed the many small farmers or relatives assisting whom, at the time of the census, returned their principal occupation as agricultural labour.

Apart from the classification of workers involved in agricultural occupations, the census reports since 1971 have also tended to use the term 'agricultural worker' as an umbrella term to encompass all engaged/employed in agriculture, other than forestry

workers and fishermen. In order to avoid any confusion in this regard it is useful to distinguish between the different groups for the purpose of this study. Farmers and their relatives assisting will be referred to collectively as 'family farm labour'. Farmers' sons and daughters assisting and farmers' other relatives assisting will be referred to specifically as sons and daughters assisting or other relatives assisting, or in aggregate as 'relatives assisting'. For the purposes of collectively identifying those employed in agricultural occupations but not necessarily in farm work the term 'agricultural worker' will be adopted. The term 'agricultural labourer' shall be used therefore to encompass those workers recorded by the census as being principally *employed in farm work for payment in cash or kind*. The term 'agricultural labour force' will be adopted for the purposes of collectively referring to the farmer, his relatives assisting and the agricultural labourer. When alluding to all engaged/employed in agricultural occupations the term 'agricultural workforce' will be used.

As previously mentioned, the dramatic reduction in the number of agricultural labourers in the decades after the Famine has blinded many to the survival of this group into the twentieth century. With a decline from 849,798 (939,458 if ploughmen, herds and graziers are included) in 1851 to 192,677 (196,473 if shepherds are included) in 1911, perhaps this is not surprising.<sup>9</sup> In relative terms this decline meant that compared to representing some 65 per cent of the entire workforce engaged in both agriculture and the food industry in 1851, by 1911 agricultural

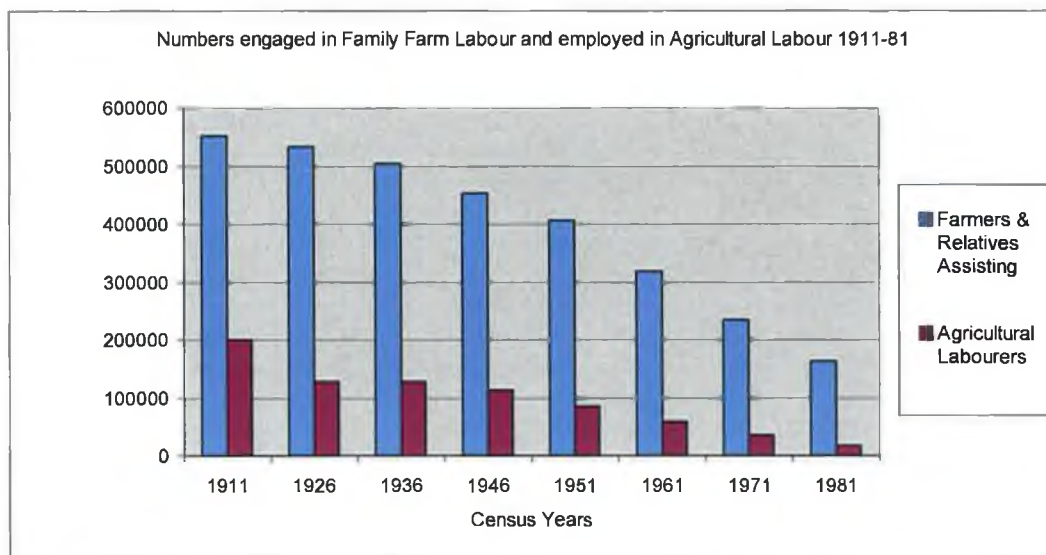
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<sup>8</sup> Richard Breen's article 'Farm Servanthood in Ireland, 1900-40', in *Economic History Review* 36 (1983), pp 87-102, provides a detailed analysis of farm servanthood in twentieth century Ireland.



labourers represented one third of the agricultural labour force.<sup>10</sup> That the decline continued to the extent that this group's proportion of the agricultural labour force had decreased to almost one fifth by 1926, signalled for many the collapse of this class. Figure 1.1 is instructive in this regard. It compares the total numbers engaged or employed in farm work in the period 1911-81.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1.1** Family farm labour versus agricultural labour, 1911-81<sup>12</sup>



Sources: *Census of Population* 1911, general report table 20, pp 9-11, 16-17; 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

The most striking feature of this chart is the extent to which family farm labour exceeded agricultural labour. For instance, in 1926 farmers and their relatives

<sup>9</sup> This data relates to returns for male and female agricultural labourers (both cottager and indoor farm servant) aged 15 years and upwards. *Census of Ireland 1851*, part vi, general report table v, p.634; *Census of Ireland 1911*, general report table 20, pp 9-11, 16-17.

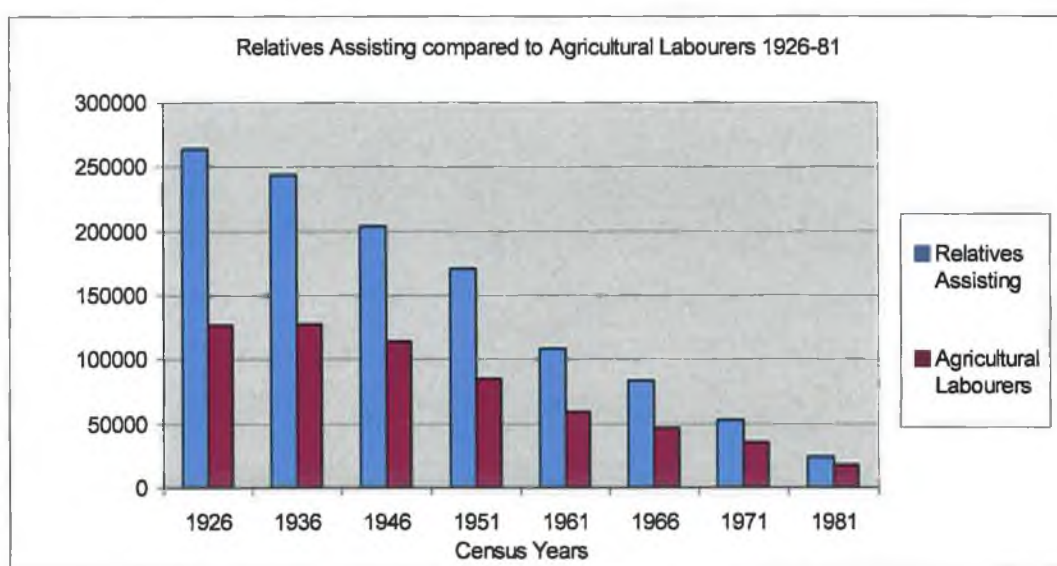
<sup>10</sup> Allowance should be made for the fact that the 1851 census did not make separate provision for farmers' relatives assisting in this classification. It was 1881 before any attempt was made to distinguish between those whose labour was rewarded by wages and those who worked for board and lodging with a relative.

<sup>11</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.1 in Appendix I. It provides a composite picture of the total numbers engaged in agricultural occupations between 1926 and 1981.

<sup>12</sup> The 1911 figures cover the 32 counties. The family farm figures for 1911 exclude numbers for daughters, sisters, nieces or grand-daughters' assisting. The figures for all other census years, in this and subsequent figures and tables, cover the 26 counties and are total figures representing males and females in all classifications unless otherwise specified.

assisting collectively accounted for 553,025 persons compared to 126,409 agricultural labourers. The latter as a proportion of family farm labour had fallen from 22.8 per cent in 1926 to 15.1 per cent in 1971. When the two groups are viewed in this manner it might seem obvious why commentators would focus attention on a group which so clearly dominates the agricultural sector. The inequities of this approach, however, are revealed in Figure 1.2, which focuses purely on the relatives assisting and hired labour elements of farming.

Figure 1.2 Relatives Assisting and Agricultural Labourers, 1926-81



Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

It is apparent from this chart that the tendency to collate the figures for farmers and their relatives assisting obscures the extent to which agricultural labourers constituted a significant proportion of the latter. Though this proportion constituted slightly more than two fifths in 1926, it actually increased to more than one half over subsequent decades, with labourers equalling two thirds of relatives assisting by 1981. The rate at which relatives assisting declined compared to agricultural labourers clearly

contributed to this proportionate increase. Table 1.1 indicates the rate of decline of both groups over the period in question. Perhaps one of the most notable features of this table is the slight increase in the number of agricultural labourers, for the first time in almost a century, in the period 1926-36. This increase was part of a wider trend during the period, resulting from the onslaught of the Great Depression in 1929 and a tightening of US immigration laws, which saw an increase in the total population for the first time since independence until about 1936.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1. 1** Rate of intercensal decline of relatives assisting and agricultural labourers, 1926-81

<b>Census Year</b>	<b>Relatives Assisting</b>	<b>Rate of intercensal decline</b>	<b>Agricultural Labourers</b>	<b>Rate of intercensal decline</b>	<b>Agricultural Labourers as % of Relatives Assisting</b>
1926 <sup>14</sup>	264,095		126,409		47.8
1936 <sup>15</sup>	244,197	(7.5)	127,834	1.1	52.3
1946	203,460	(16.7)	113,812	(10.9)	55.9
1951	171,085	(15.9)	84,657	(25.6)	49.4
1961	108,000	(36.9)	59,595	(29.6)	55.1
1966	83,147	(23.0)	46,430	(22.0)	55.8
1971	52,921	(36.4)	35,569	(23.4)	67.2
1981 <sup>16</sup>	24,237	(54.2)	17,775	(50.0)	73.3

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

Relatives assisting did not record an increase for this or any later periods. With the exception of the period 1946-51, the rate of decline of this group was considerably greater than that of agricultural labourers. Its impact can be viewed in the proportionate increase of the latter, especially after 1951. Though the rate of decline

<sup>13</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland: nation and state* (Dublin, 1994), p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> Applied to those aged 12 years and over.

<sup>15</sup> Applied to those aged 14 years and over 1936-71.

<sup>16</sup> Applied to those aged 15 years and over.

for agricultural labourers seems to decelerate between 1961 and 1971, until rising substantially again in the period 1971-81, the brief respite in the decline of relatives assisting was confined to 1961-6. Again, its effects are immediately evident in the proportionate increase of agricultural labourers from 55.8 per cent in 1966 to 73.3 per cent in 1981.

The less rapid decline of the agricultural labourer compared to relatives assisting is also discernible in relation to their proportion of total agricultural occupations. This trend is reflected in Table 1.2 which outlines farmers, relatives assisting, agricultural labourers and agricultural workers as a proportion of total agricultural occupations.

**Table 1.2** Agricultural occupations as a proportion of total agricultural occupations, 1926-81

Census Year	Farmers	Relatives Assisting	Agricultural Labourers	Agricultural Workers
<b>% of total agricultural occupations</b>				
1926	40.0	39.2	18.8	1.8
1936	40.2	37.8	19.8	1.9
1946	42.0	34.2	19.1	4.4
1951	45.9	33.3	16.5	4.1
1961	53.5	27.5	15.2	3.7
1966	58.1	24.1	13.4	4.2
1971	62.9	18.3	12.3	6.4
1981	69.8	12.2	8.9	8.9

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

Though agricultural labourers declined from almost one fifth of the total in 1926 to slightly less than one tenth in 1981, relatives assisting fell from almost two fifths in

1926 to little over one tenth in 1981. For relatives assisting this reduction meant declining from a proportion almost equalling that of farmers in 1926 to almost half that by 1961, arriving at a position in 1981 where their proportionate share was only fractionally greater than agricultural labourers. While both these groups experienced decline in their proportionate share of the agricultural workforce, it is evident that the number of farmers, though also in decline, began to represent an even greater proportion of those totally occupied in agriculture. In fact their proportionate increase of 29.8 percentage points over this period seemed to absorb almost exclusively the proportionate decline of relatives assisting.

However, it is interesting to note that farmers were not the only group to record an increase over this period. Agricultural workers also recorded a steady increase in their proportionate share of the agricultural workforce. In fact this table suggests that they comprised the same proportion of total agricultural occupations as the agricultural labourer by 1981. It also suggests that this proportionate increase began around 1946, rising from 1.9 per cent in 1936 to 4.4 per cent in 1946. The reality is a little different, as Table 1.3 indicates. In addition to outlining agricultural labourers as a proportion of all agricultural employees, Table 1.3 also indicates the number of agricultural workers in the period 1926-81.

Although it would seem that the agricultural workers' proportionate increase began from 1946, this increase was in fact deceptive given that turf workers were temporarily added to the 'other agricultural occupations' sector of this group in 1946 and again in 1951, representing increases of at least 10,000 in 1946 and 5,608 in

1951.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the substantial increase in agricultural workers in 1971 is largely attributable to the inclusion of fishermen in agricultural occupations for this census report, a trend which was also repeated in 1981, accounting for additional increases of 2,790 and 2,992 respectively.

**Table 1.3** Agricultural labourers as a proportion of total paid agricultural employees, 1926-81

Census Year	Agricultural Labourers	Agricultural Workers <sup>18</sup>	Agricultural labourers as a % of total paid agricultural employees
1926 <sup>19</sup>	126,409	12,695	90.8
1936 <sup>20</sup>	127,834	12,686	90.8
1946	113,812	26,483	81.1
1951	84,657	21,437 (15,829)	79.1 (84.2)
1961	59,447	14,749	79.9
1966	46,430	14,806	75.8
1971	35,569	18,636 (15,846)	65.6 (69.1)
1981 <sup>21</sup>	17,775	17,745 (14,753)	50.0 (54.6)

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp. 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

When these factors are taken into consideration, as the figures in the brackets reveal, agricultural labourers clearly constituted the largest category of paid workers in the employee group in agriculture up to 1981. Even between the years of 1946 and 1961,

<sup>17</sup> Returns for turf workers were not recorded until 1946 but on this occasion they were not distinguished from 'other agricultural occupations'. Given that the latter category recorded 909 persons in 1926, 1,002 persons in 1936 and some 13,822 persons in 1946, it is possible to only loosely estimate that the figure was over 10,000. The figures for 1951 are accurate.

<sup>18</sup> The figures for this miscellaneous group of workers expanded temporarily in 1946 and 1951 when turf workers were added to agricultural occupations. In addition fishermen were included in agricultural occupations in 1971 and 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Applied to those aged 12 years and over.

<sup>20</sup> Applied to those aged 14 years and over 1936-71.

<sup>21</sup> Applied to those aged 15 years and over.

a time of heightened emigration amongst this class, only the slightest reduction in its proportionate share of this sector was recorded. Moreover, contrary to the suggestion in Table 1.2 that agricultural workers as a group were set to exceed the number of agricultural labourers post 1981, Table 1.3 reveals that this was by no means a foregone conclusion. Indeed, Table 1.4 illustrates just how substantial a sector agricultural labourers were when compared to such miscellaneous agricultural/rural workers as gardeners, forestry workers, fishermen and turf workers in the period 1926 to 1981.

**Table 1.4** Agricultural labourers and certain other agricultural/rural workers, 1951-81

Census Year	Agricultural Labourers	Gardeners and Gardeners' Labourers <sup>22</sup>	Foresters and Forestry Labourers <sup>23</sup>	Fishermen	Turf workers <sup>24</sup>
1926	126,409	8,157	539	5,753	
1936	127,834	8,242	1,526	4,385	
1946	113,812	7,739	2,566	3,647	
1951	84,657	6,999	3,751	2,775	5,608
1961	59,447	5,813	5,217	2,475	3,899
1966	46,430	5,265	5,271	2,292	3,204
1971	35,569	5,473	4,552	2,790	2,946
1981	17,775	5,059	3,726	2,992	3,167

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> The census did not distinguish between nurserymen, groundsmen and marketing and jobbing gardeners until 1961. Instead it had two categories – ‘gardeners and nurserymen’ and ‘gardeners’ labourers’. From 1961 these categories became ‘market gardeners and nurserymen’ and ‘jobbing gardeners, groundsmen and gardeners’ labourers’. For this table the figures for the two categories ‘gardeners and nurserymen’ and ‘gardeners’ labourers’ have been collated for 1926-51. The categories ‘market gardeners and nurserymen’ and ‘jobbing gardeners, groundsmen and gardeners’ labourers’ have been collated for 1961-81.

<sup>23</sup> Known as woodsmen in 1926; foresters and woodsmen from 1936 to 1951; foresters and forestry labourers from 1961.

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 17.

The various categories of gardeners and their labourers clearly constituted the largest of these groups for this period, with the exception of turf workers in 1946. Even at that, gardeners at their peak in 1926 still comprised only 6.4 per cent of agricultural labourers. Although this proportion had increased to 28.4 per cent in 1981, this increase was attributable to a decline in agricultural labour rather than an increase in the absolute number of gardeners. So while agricultural labourers were subject to considerable decline during this period, their dominance in these areas of rural work still remained uncontested by 1981.

Moving beyond the sphere of agricultural occupations it is useful to examine how these trends persisted on a wider level. Table 1.5 indicates both relatives assisting and agricultural labourers as a proportion of the total occupied workforce. In 1926 relatives assisting constituted 20.1 per cent of total occupied persons and agricultural labourers constituted 9.6 per cent. This effectively represented about half their proportions of total agricultural occupations, which were 39.2 per cent and 18.8 per cent respectively. By 1981 their proportions of total occupied persons were 1.9 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively, and as such had declined to one sixth of their proportions of total agricultural occupations. While this table is further testimony to the decline of both groups, in keeping in line with the pattern in agriculture, relatives assisting recorded a far greater reduction in their proportion of occupied persons during this period than agricultural labourers. What this table completely fails to do, however, is reveal the sheer preponderance of agricultural labourers as wage paid



employees compared to their colleagues in non agricultural occupations. Figure 1.3 is instructive in this regard.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 1.5** Relatives assisting and agricultural labourers as a proportion of total occupied persons, 1926-81

Census Year	Total Occupied Persons	Relatives Assisting	Agricultural Labourers
		As % of total occupied persons	
1926 <sup>26</sup>	1,307,662	20.1	9.6
1936 <sup>27</sup>	1,304,920	18.7	9.7
1946	1,339,085	15.1	8.4
1951	1,272,038	13.4	6.6
1961	1,108,108	9.7	5.3
1966	1,118,204	7.4	4.1
1971	1,119,531	4.7	3.1
1981 <sup>28</sup>	1,271,122	1.9	1.3

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the number of male agricultural labourers in the period 1926 to 1981 compared to some of the largest groups of male workers in manufacturing industry, transport and communications, commercial, finance and insurance occupations, and persons in professional occupations and clerical work. The groups of workers chosen for this chart have been selected on the basis that they represented the largest individual groups of male workers in their occupational divisions for most of the period under review.

<sup>25</sup> For data on this chart see Table AI.2 in Appendix I.

<sup>26</sup> Applied to those aged 12 years and over.

<sup>27</sup> Applied to those aged 14 years and over 1936-71.

<sup>28</sup> Applied to those aged 15 years and over.

Figure 1.3 Male agricultural labourers compared to several of the largest male groups in non-agricultural occupations, 1926 – 81



Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2 pp 2-13; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-15; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-15; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-19; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 3-9; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-7; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-10.

For instance, carpenters represent the largest group in the woodworker occupational group;<sup>29</sup> fitters and mechanics in the engineering and related trades group;<sup>30</sup> builders' labourers in the building and construction group;<sup>31</sup> drivers of road goods vehicles in the transport and communications sector;<sup>32</sup> shop assistants in the commercial, financial and insurance occupations group;<sup>33</sup> teachers in the professional occupations group and last but by no means least, clerks in the clerical workers group.

To view agricultural labourers exclusively in terms of their proportion of total occupied persons clearly obscures the extent to which this group predominated in the employee sector. For instance, in 1926 agricultural labourers not only greatly exceeded the individual groups noted above, but they also exceeded most of the larger occupational groups of which these were part. Drivers of road goods vehicles, for example, constituted the largest group classified under road transportation and also all workers in the wider transport and communications occupational group itself. Transport and communication workers in total accounted for 63,686 occupied males in 1926, but equalled only 50.8 per cent of agricultural labourers. Those employed in

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<sup>29</sup> Recorded as carpenters and joiners from 1951 and carpenters, joiners and cabinet makers in 1981.

<sup>30</sup> This occupational group was labelled metal workers until 1961 when it became known as machinists, fitters and related workers. It was renamed engineering and related trades group in 1971. Fitters and mechanics were recorded as two separate groups until 1961. The figures for the earlier census years have been collated for the purpose of this chart.

<sup>31</sup> Although the figures for labourers involved in local authority building works would generally have been greater than those for builders' labourers in other building and construction works, the latter group have been used to represent the building and construction sector because the figures available are more consistent. The figures for builder's labourers were not recorded in the building and construction group in 1971 or 1981. They were recorded with the figures for general and unskilled labourers instead. The figures are missing from Figure 1.3 for 1971 because the census did not distinguish between the various groups subsumed under the latter.

<sup>32</sup> Recorded as drivers of motor vehicles until 1946. In 1951 they were recorded as drivers of self propelled goods vehicles and tractors – non agricultural. They were renamed drivers of road goods vehicles in 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Figures for salesmen were included with this group until 1961 when they were added to the auctioneers and valuers group; Figures for barmen were added in 1971.

commerce, finance and insurance occupations constituted 56,520 occupied males in 1926 but equalled only 45.1 per cent of agricultural labourers. Likewise the proportion of males engaged in professional occupations in public administration and defence for this period equalled only 26.6 and 20.7 per cent respectively of agricultural labourers. The exception in this regard is the 'other industrial occupations' group. As this occupational group accounted for many diverse industries ranging from food, drink and tobacco production, makers of textiles, paper and cardboard goods, workers in chemical processes and various forms of electrical and metal engineering, construction and decorating, it was the largest occupational classification after agricultural occupations and in 1926 accounted for some 159,572 males. Three of the largest occupational groups in this category were woodworkers, metal workers and construction related workers, and the extent of their largest individual groups: carpenters, drivers of road goods vehicles and builders' labourers, can be viewed in Figure 1.3. So even though this occupational heading subsumed around ten different occupational groups, agricultural labourers still constituted 78.4 per cent of its entirety in 1926.

Furthermore, while Table 1.5 suggests that agricultural labourers as a proportion of total occupied persons had declined to 3.1 per cent by 1971, Figure 1.3 clearly demonstrates that at an individual group level, this class still surpassed the other largest groups by some degree. For instance, carpenters still only equalled 53.4 per cent of agricultural labourers, shop assistants 67 per cent and drivers of road goods vehicles, 69.4 per cent. In fact, while agricultural labourers were not surpassed in number by the entire transport and communications occupational group until 1966,

they still exceeded total numbers for males engaged in public administration and defence, in professional occupations and in clerical work. By 1971 they still outnumbered total numbers engaged in public administration and defence and in service work. Therefore, as this evidence suggests, the fact that agricultural labourers constituted the largest single group of male workers for most of the twentieth century is quite incontrovertible.

Having ascertained the considerable number of agricultural labourers employed in agriculture for the greater part of this period, as a proportion of those engaged in farm work, in non-farming agricultural occupations, and in the occupied population as a whole, it is worth establishing how these trends persisted at a regional level. Tables 1.6 to 1.9 provide a breakdown of the numbers engaged in farming in the four provinces, and their proportions of those totally occupied in agriculture in each province between 1926 and 1981. These tables reveal that while agricultural labourers were concentrated mostly in Leinster and least in Connacht, relatives assisting were the inverse of this pattern, being concentrated mostly in Connacht and least in Leinster. Moreover, while all four tables reflect the numerical dominance of farmers in each province, it is clear that their pattern of distribution was identical to that of relatives assisting.

**Table 1.6** Distribution of the agricultural labour force in Leinster, 1926-81

Leinster	Farmers		Relatives Assisting		Agricultural labourers	
	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture
1926	57549	(34.0)	52071	(30.8)	52080	(30.8)
1936	55099	(34.0)	47782	(29.5)	51343	(31.7)
1946	54808	(34.0)	42787	(26.5)	48302	(30.0)
1951	51019	(37.3)	35694	(26.1)	37493	(27.4)
1961	47164	(44.2)	24522	(23.0)	27097	(25.4)
1966	45555	(48.4)	19422	(20.6)	21482	(22.8)
1971	42167	(52.8)	12880	(16.1)	16023	(20.0)
1981	34529	(59.1)	6880	(11.7)	8882	(15.2)

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

**Table 1.7** Distribution of the agricultural labour force in Munster, 1926-81

Munster	Farmers		Relatives Assisting		Agricultural Labourers	
	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture	No.	% of total occupied in agriculture
1926	78119	(36.0)	84085	(38.8)	50269	(23.2)
1936	76936	(36.5)	78531	(37.3)	51063	(24.2)
1946	74795	(38.7)	66207	(34.3)	44429	(23.0)
1951	72119	(42.5)	57631	(34.0)	33646	(19.8)
1961	67056	(50.4)	37505	(28.2)	23781	(17.8)
1966	64477	(55.1)	29747	(25.4)	17964	(15.3)
1971	60067	(60.2)	20280	(20.3)	13212	(13.2)
1981	49178	(69.2)	10206	(14.3)	6062	(8.5)

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

Table 1.8 Distribution of the agricultural labour force in Connacht, 1926-81

Connacht	Farmers		Relatives Assisting		Agricultural labourers	
	Census year	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	
1926	88652	(46.8)	88342	(46.6)	11263	(5.9)
1936	85590	(47.6)	80722	(44.9)	12405	(6.9)
1946	81676	(50.9)	65373	(40.7)	10411	(6.4)
1951	77048	(55.2)	53754	(38.5)	6278	(4.5)
1961	67103	(63.9)	32503	(30.9)	3885	(3.7)
1966	63242	(68.9)	24089	(26.2)	3094	(3.3)
1971	55649	(74.8)	13907	(18.6)	2826	(3.7)
1981	38757	(82.2)	4988	(10.5)	1194	(2.5)

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

Table 1.9 Distribution of the agricultural labour force in Ulster (3 counties), 1926-81

Ulster	Farmers		Relatives Assisting		Agricultural labourers	
	Census Year	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	No. % of total occupied in agriculture	
1926	44610	(45.6)	39597	(40.5)	12797	(13.1)
1936	41487	(44.9)	37162	(40.2)	13023	(14.1)
1946	38619	(48.5)	29093	(36.5)	10670	(13.4)
1951	35145	(52.1)	24006	(35.6)	7240	(10.7)
1961	29008	(60.0)	13470	(27.8)	4832	(10.0)
1966	27351	(64.7)	9889	(23.4)	3890	(9.2)
1971	23744	(68.0)	5854	(16.7)	3508	(10.0)
1981	16292	(74.0)	2163	(9.8)	1637	(7.4)

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

Although Connacht had the greatest numbers of relatives assisting, to the extent that in 1926 their numbers were almost on a par with farmers, the number of relatives assisting in Munster, though smaller in absolute terms than in Connacht, actually exceeded the number of farmers until about 1946.

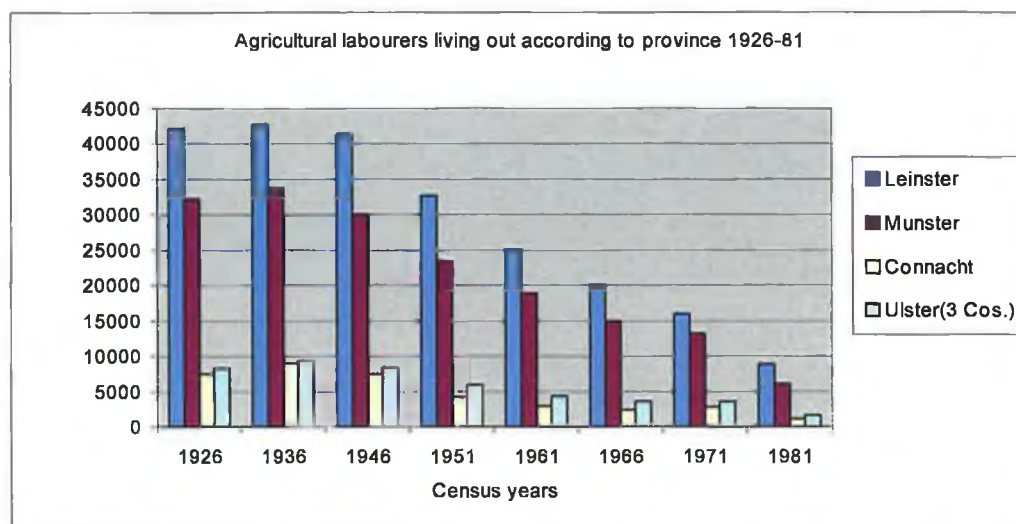
The extent to which agricultural labourers were concentrated in Leinster is apparent from their proportion of persons occupied in agriculture for each province. In 1926, 30.8 per cent of all persons occupied in agriculture in Leinster were agricultural labourers. This compared to 23 per cent in Munster, 13.1 per cent in Ulster and a mere 5.9 per cent in Connacht. Not only did agricultural labourers slightly outnumber relatives assisting in Leinster in 1926, with both groups constituting the same proportion of persons totally occupied in agriculture, but agricultural labourers actually exceeded the number of relatives assisting in this province for the rest of the period. In this regard it is worth observing that Leinster was the only province not to actually record an absolute increase in agricultural labourers in the period 1926 to 1936. While all other provinces recorded a slight increase in numbers, Connacht actually recorded the largest with an absolute increase of 1,142. Of course, these increases were almost immediately negated by the rising rate of decline over the subsequent decades. Of the four provinces, the rate of decline was slowest in Leinster, notwithstanding the absence of an increase between 1926 and 1936.

Examining the composition of agricultural labour in more depth, Figures 1.4 and 1.5 reveal the distribution of this class in each province according to whether they lived



in or out. Figure 1.4 demonstrates the distribution of the agricultural labourer living out.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 1.4** Agricultural labourers living out by province, 1926-81



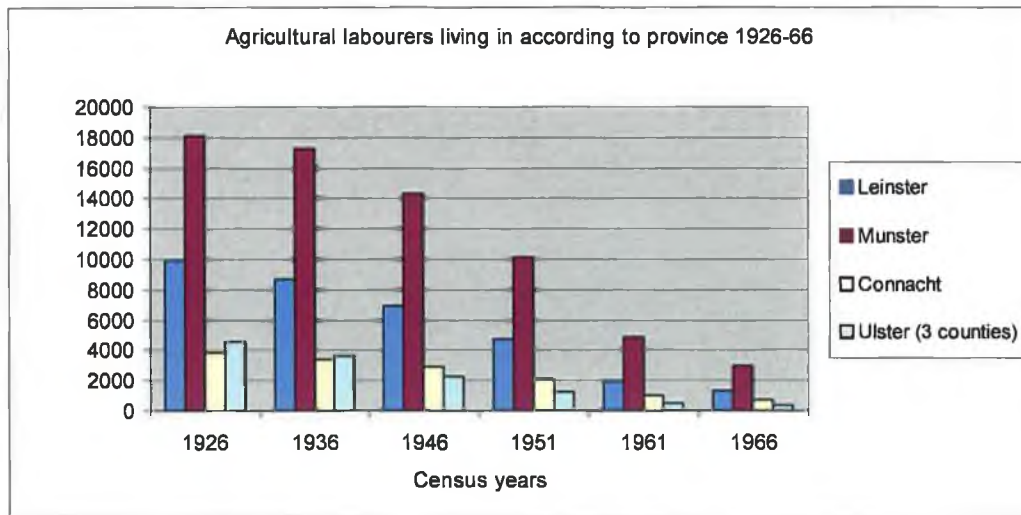
Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-3; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, p. 32; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-33; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-33; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-25; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-9.

This chart reflects the tendency of agricultural labourers to be very much concentrated in Leinster, and to a lesser but similarly significant extent in Munster. It also dramatically reveals how relatively small the proportions of agricultural labourers living out in Connacht and Ulster actually were. Decline became more pronounced in Leinster and Munster after 1946, but up to that point both provinces had recorded in excess of 40,000 and 30,000 labourers, respectively, living out. Despite the passage of several decades, numbers still remained sizeable by 1981, with Leinster recording in excess of 8,000 and Munster in excess of 6,000. Figure 1.5 highlights the distribution of agricultural labourers living in.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.3 in Appendix I.

<sup>35</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.3 in Appendix I

**Figure 1.5** Agricultural labourers living in by province, 1926-66

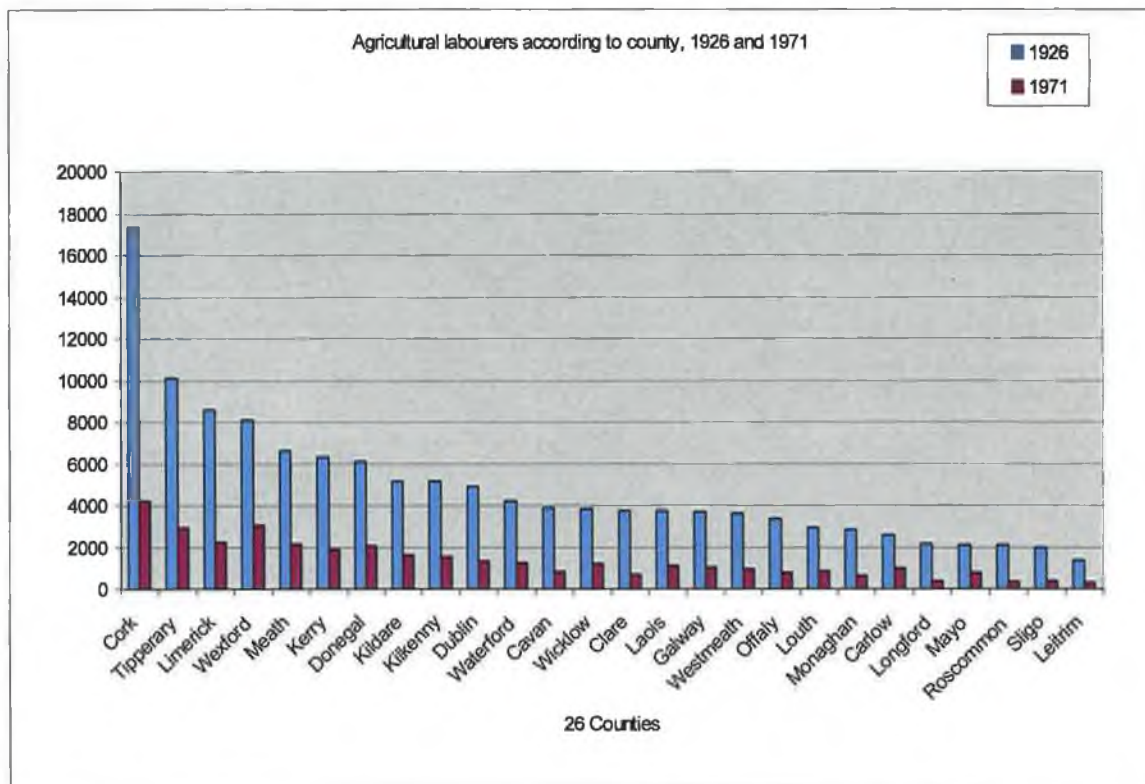


Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5 pp, 32-3; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, p. 32; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-33; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-33; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-25; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-9.

Evidently the concentration of these workers in Munster was a little at variance with the tendency of the majority to be concentrated primarily in Leinster. In fact, the proportion in Leinster was almost half that of Munster for most of the period under review. Unlike agricultural labourers living out, no increase was recorded for those living in for any province during the period 1926 to 1936. Although in constant decline, the rate accelerated after 1946 and became particularly pronounced in the period 1951 to 1961, with all provinces recording losses at a minimum rate of fifty per cent. Leinster and Ulster recorded the largest reduction with rates of 58.4 and 60.5 per cent respectively. Even though the census did not account for this group after 1966, it is evident that agricultural labourers living in were a considerable group in their own right, with numbers approaching 3,000 recorded in Munster in 1966 and 1,291 in Leinster.

Taking the analysis a step further, Figure 1.6 focuses on the distribution of the agricultural labourer on a county basis in the census years 1926 and 1971.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 1.6** Distribution of agricultural labourers according to county, 1926 and 1971



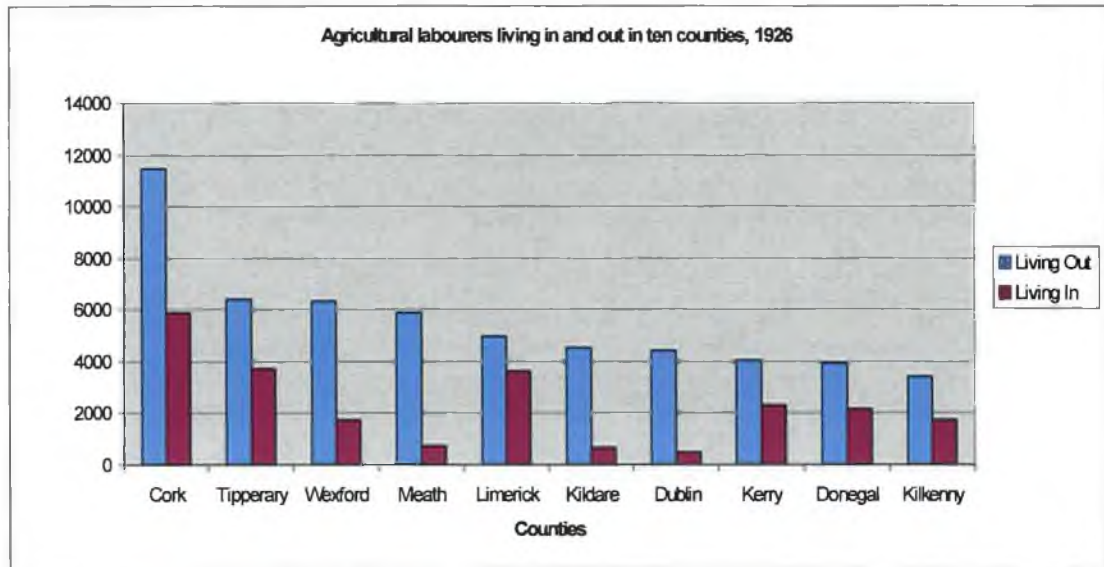
Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26.

This chart demonstrates that in 1926 almost all of the twenty six counties, with the exception of Leitrim, recorded the existence of 2,000 agricultural labourers at a very minimum. The counties which tended to have the greatest proportions over the period 1926 to 1971 were those recording at least 5,000 in 1926. Ten principal counties may be identified in this regard. In descending numerical order these were Cork, Tipperary, Limerick, Wexford, Meath, Kerry, Donegal, Kildare, Kilkenny and

<sup>36</sup> See Tables AI.4-11 for data on agricultural labourers living in and out according to county, 1926-81.

Dublin. That three Munster counties should account for the greatest concentration in 1926 suggested that the provincial trends hid internal variations. However, as Figure 1.7 reveals, the arrangement of this grouping alters slightly when the county figures are considered according to whether the agricultural labourer lived in or out.

**Figure 1.7** Agricultural labourers living in and out in ten counties, 1926



Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

In line with the trends at a provincial level, this figure clearly illustrates that the Leinster counties had far greater proportions of labourers living out than living in. The Munster counties on the other hand, while having slightly less proportions of labourers living out, with the exception of Cork (and Tipperary until 1951), had at least half as much again of agricultural labourers living in as they did labourers living out. This is why Limerick, for example, outnumbered Wexford in the total county calculations in Figure 1.6, and Kerry and Donegal exceeded the numbers for Kildare and Dublin. However, by 1951, the more rapid decline in the number of labourers

living in meant that Wexford had superseded Limerick as the most dominant county after Cork in terms of total figures. It had also replaced Tipperary as the county with the greatest concentration of labourers living out after Cork. Indeed, as large as Cork was in terms of total population, it is still impossible to be unimpressed by the sheer scale of the labourers concentrated in this county on both a living in and out basis, especially when compared to other counties. But as impressive as these numbers were in absolute terms, Tables 1.10 and 1.11 reveal that their proportion of the total persons occupied in agriculture was a little less striking relative to some other counties.

**Table 1.10** Agricultural labourers living out as a proportion of total persons occupied in agriculture for ten counties, 1926-81

Census year	Cork	Tipperary	Wexford	Meath	Limerick	Kildare	Dublin	Kerry	Donegal	Kilkenny
1926	16.5	17.7	26.1	35.0	18.0	37.6	37.8	9.8	8.0	18.5
1936	17.1	18.3	29.9	34.3	19.6	38.4	37.3	11.7	10.2	20.3
1946	17.2	20.3	31.7	31.1	19.1	30.4	36.2	8.9	12.9	21.4
1951	14.6	18.3	29.3	30.4	17.6	32.5	33.2	8.7	10.2	19.9
1961	14.5	18.8	29.8	28.2	19.4	34.2	29.3	9.1	10.5	21.2
1966	12.9	16.4	27.4	25.0	16.4	31.7	25.5	9.6	9.9	19.4
1971	13.2	16.7	25.9	22.9	16.7	26.4	21.5	10.4	12.5	18.0
1981	9.0	10.9	18.9	20.5	9.8	19.8	16.2	5.0	10.1	11.9

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

Despite Cork recording the largest number of labourers living out, this class seems to have formed a greater proportion of the agricultural labour force in counties such as Wexford and Meath, reflecting the larger farms in these regions. This tendency is also reflected in Kildare and Dublin. Even though these counties recorded far less

labourers than in Wexford or Meath, they actually had the largest proportion of labourers living out. Indeed, with the exception of counties like Cork, this table is notable for highlighting the extent to which this class constituted such a considerable proportion of the agricultural workforce in these counties. It is obvious that the highest proportions were concentrated in Leinster counties, which on a regional level recorded a maximum of 24.9 per cent in 1926 and 15.2 per cent in 1981. Counties such as Meath and Kildare recorded far higher proportions on a county basis. It was likewise in Munster, where even counties Cork, Limerick and Tipperary reflected this trend. However, their proportions on a county basis, although slightly greater than the regional proportions of 14.8 per cent in 1926 and 8.5 per cent in 1981, were considerably less marked than the divergences existing between regional and county proportions for Leinster counties, such as Meath and Kildare. Overall these figures indicate that, with the exceptions of Donegal and Kerry, those counties recording the greatest number of labourers actually accounted for considerably higher proportions of those occupied in agriculture than the national figures would suggest.

Table 1.11 indicates that the returns for labourers living in also reflected the trends of the agricultural labourer living out on a county basis. For instance this class consistently accounted for a greater proportion of agricultural occupations in Limerick than it did in Cork or Tipperary, despite its numeric concentration in these counties. And while labourers living in comprised a considerable proportion of agricultural occupations in counties such as Kilkenny and Waterford in 1926, their decline was greater than in Cork, and so by 1966 their proportionate representation was less.

**Table 1.11** Agricultural labourers living in in certain counties as a proportion of total persons occupied in agriculture for the respective county, 1926-66

Census Years	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Kerry	Donegal	Wexford	Kilkenny	Waterford	Clare	Galway
1926	8.4	10.3	13.1	5.6	4.4	7.2	9.3	9.5	4.5	2.2
1936	8.5	9.7	13.0	5.3	3.0	6.8	8.2	8.5	4.5	2.1
1946	7.8	8.1	11.1	5.7	1.8	4.6	7.2	6.9	4.3	2.1
1951	6.4	6.7	9.1	4.1	1.0	3.5	5.9	5.0	3.6	1.8
1961	4.1	3.4	5.7	2.8	0.6	1.9	2.7	2.9	2.1	1.2
1966	2.9	2.5	3.6	1.8	0.6	1.3	2.3	2.1	1.6	0.9

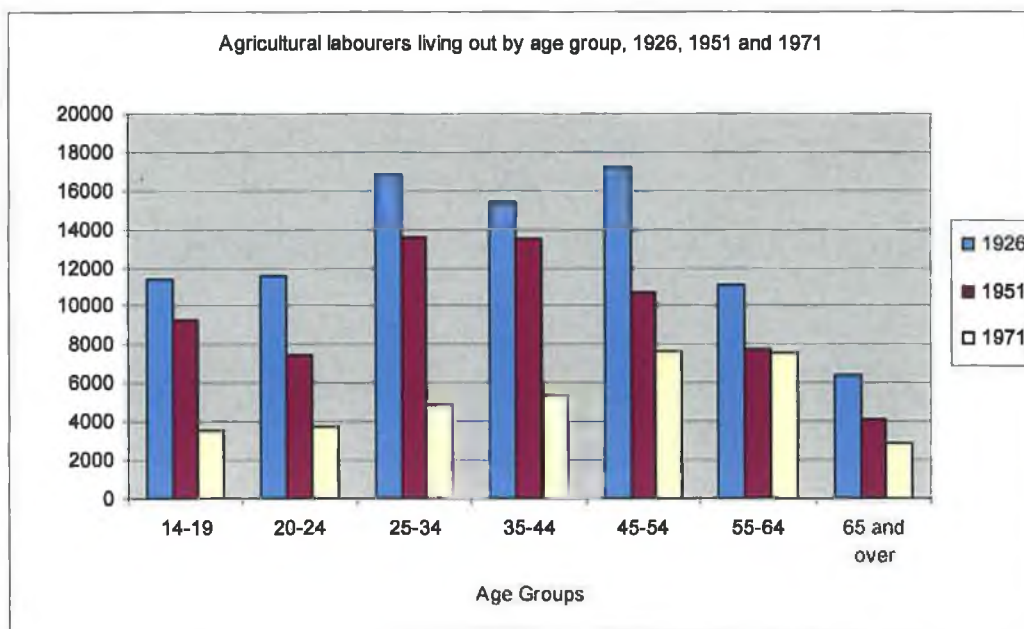
Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35.

That this class had not totally disappeared from the countryside by 1966 is also discernible from this table. Although their numbers were considerably less than those of labourers living out, they still represented a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce in at least eight counties.

Figures 1.8 and 1.9 are useful for gauging the age distribution of agricultural labourers living out and in at certain census years.<sup>37</sup> Figure 1.8 indicates how a considerable proportion of agricultural labourers living out were aged between 25 and 54, representing a proportion of 55 per cent until 1971, when it declined to 50 per cent. Young workers aged between 14 and 24 also constituted a strong cohort of labourers living out, representing 25 per cent until 1971. By then the balance of the age groups had begun to tilt towards an older generation of workers, reflecting the industry's growing lack of attraction for younger workers.

<sup>37</sup> For data on these charts, see tables AI. 12-13 in Appendix I.

**Figure 1.8** Agricultural labourers living out by age group, 1926, 1951 and 1971



Sources: *Census of Population* 1926; vol. v table 4a, p. 10 and table 4b, p. 33; 1936, vol. v part 2 table 4a, p. 10; 1946, vol. v part 2 table 4a, p.12; 1951, vol. iii table 4b, p. 40 and table 4a, p. 13; 1961, vol. ii table 2a, p.10; 1966, vol. v table 3a, p. 35; 1971, vol. v table 2a, p. 11 and table 2b, p. 29.

Figure 1.9 on the other hand illustrates that the age distribution of agricultural labourers living in was very much balanced towards the youngest groups aged between 14 and 34. Most striking was the preponderance of labourers living in aged between 14 and 19, representing a ratio of 25 per cent in 1926, with those aged 20-34 constituting another 39 per cent. By 1966 it is apparent that this group had undergone a major reduction in numbers and its average age composition had also been transformed. The 45-64 age group represented the largest cohort of living in labourers, some 40 per cent, with the broader 35-65 plus age group constituting 65 per cent.



**Figure 1.9** Agricultural labourers living out according to age group, 1926, 1946 and 1966



Sources: *Census of Population 1926*; vol. v table 4a, p. 10 and table 4b, p. 33; 1936, vol. v part 2 table 4a, p. 10; 1946, vol v part 2 table 4a, p.12; 1951, vol. iii table 4a, p. 12; 1961, vol. ii table 2a, p. 9; 1966, vol. v table 3a, p.35.

Before moving on to establish the distribution of agricultural labourers according to farm size, allusion should be made to their female component. Like their male counterparts, female workers who recorded their principal occupation as paid work in agriculture were categorised in the census according to whether they lived in on the farm with the employer or lived out in the surrounding district. Table 1.12 outlines the number of female agricultural labourers living in and out in each province from 1926 to 1981. The sparseness of female labourers compared to males is quite striking. Like male labourers living out, female labourers living out were concentrated in Leinster, but at only 315 persons in 1926 compared to a total of 41,800 males. Although the female labourers recorded in the other provinces constituted a higher proportion of male labourers than in Leinster, this reflected the smaller concentration of male labourers living out in these regions. For instance, unlike Leinster or

Munster, Connacht and Ulster were the only provinces in which female labourers living out actually constituted 1 per cent of male labourers, with Connacht recording 2.2 per cent in 1936 and 1946. This coincided with the fact that Connacht had been the only province to record a significant increase in this female group in 1936 at a time when other provinces were showing decline. In doing so it was the only province to reflect the increase in the wider body of male agricultural labourers recorded in 1936, noted earlier. Contradicting this trend, the provinces of Leinster and Ulster instead recorded increases in female labourers living out in 1946, while Munster recorded an increase in females living in.

**Table 1.12** Female agricultural labourers living in and out according to province, 1926-81

Census year	Leinster		Munster		Connacht		Ulster	
	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In
1926	315	95	314	225	121	36	96	46
1936	195	41	150	87	198	27	96	12
1946	261	38	86	111	162	18	126	11
1951	165	26	74	58	8	10	17	5
1961	72	8	20	15	16	3	12	2
1966	66	3	41	6	5	4	9	1
1971	43	-	69	-	14	-	8	-
1981	86	-	52	-	6	-	17	-

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

However, it is also evident that by 1951 the census recorded only 8 females living out in Connacht, suggesting that once the restrictions on emigration were lifted, the demise of female labourers in this province was rapid. Figures for female labourers

living out in Ulster also plummeted around this time, from 126 to 17. Munster and Leinster on the other hand exhibited a less dramatic decline, but the period 1946-51 also left its mark on numbers in these regions. Tables 1.13 and 1.14 indicate the main distribution of female agricultural labourers living in and out on a county basis.

**Table 1.13** Female agricultural labourers living out in ten principal counties, 1926-81

Census Year	Cork	Dublin	Tipperary	Mayo	Limerick	Donegal	Kildare	Galway	Wexford
1926	127	90	59	44	42	40	38	36	34
1936	55	63	17	156	43	61	12	15	25
1946	32	132	12	149	21	119	46	2	20
1951	21	63	8	3	19	10	40	2	5
1961	8	22	4	15	4	12	19	1	8
1966	15	17	4	2	6	7	16	1	6
1971	20	2	17	6	10	6	7	2	9
1981	29	14	7	0	6	7	10	4	14

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

On a county level female labourers living out were concentrated in counties such as Cork, Dublin, Tipperary, Mayo, Limerick, Donegal, Kildare, Galway and Wexford. Counties to record the highest numbers by 1981 were Cork, Meath, Dublin, Wexford and Kildare. Reflecting the provincial trends, it is apparent from this table that while other counties recorded considerable declines of up to 50 per cent in the period from 1926 to 1936, Mayo recorded the opposite trend as did Donegal. The latter continued this trend in to 1946 also.

As Table 1.14 indicates, there was no pause in the decline of the female agricultural labourer living in. This worker, like her male counterpart, would have been recorded as a farm 'servant' and would have lived full time with the employer and his family

for periods varying from six months to a year. While it is likely that both male and female farm servants would have had household chores in addition to farm work, and this would have had connotations of domestic service for the females especially, it is unlikely, though not impossible, that their principal occupations would have been recorded in the census as agricultural work had it been mainly domestic service.<sup>38</sup> In terms of recording the 'precise' branch of a personal occupation, the census schedule was very specific that persons working in agriculture would record the correct description of their role for that particular industry more than any other.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, for the employment section, it was also very specific that those employed in connection with an employer's farm would state the area of the farm in statute acres.<sup>40</sup> For domestic servants in personal service, on the other hand, details of the employer were not required, instead their employment was recorded as 'private'.<sup>41</sup> Concentrated in counties Cork, Limerick, Kerry, Tipperary and Donegal, the rate of decline of the female agricultural labourer living in was similar to those living out between 1926 and 1936. While Cork, Limerick and Tipperary recorded minute increases in 1946 to echo the wider trend, with much fewer numbers overall the complete demise of the female labourer living in was evident in most counties by 1966.

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<sup>38</sup> The Agricultural Wages Acts, which prevailed from 1936 until 1976, defined an agricultural worker as 'a person employed under a contract of service or apprenticeship whose work under such contract is or includes work in agriculture. A person whose work under such contract is mainly domestic service is not an agricultural worker.'

<sup>39</sup> *Census of Population 1926*, vol. ii, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 1.14** Female agricultural labourers living in in five principal counties, 1926-66

Census Years	Cork	Limerick	Kerry	Tipperary	Donegal
1926	62	48	46	41	28
1936	31	16	19	15	8
1946	32	29	19	24	7
1951	25	17	7	6	3
1961	7	4	2	1	0
1966	0	0	1	4	0

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4m ; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

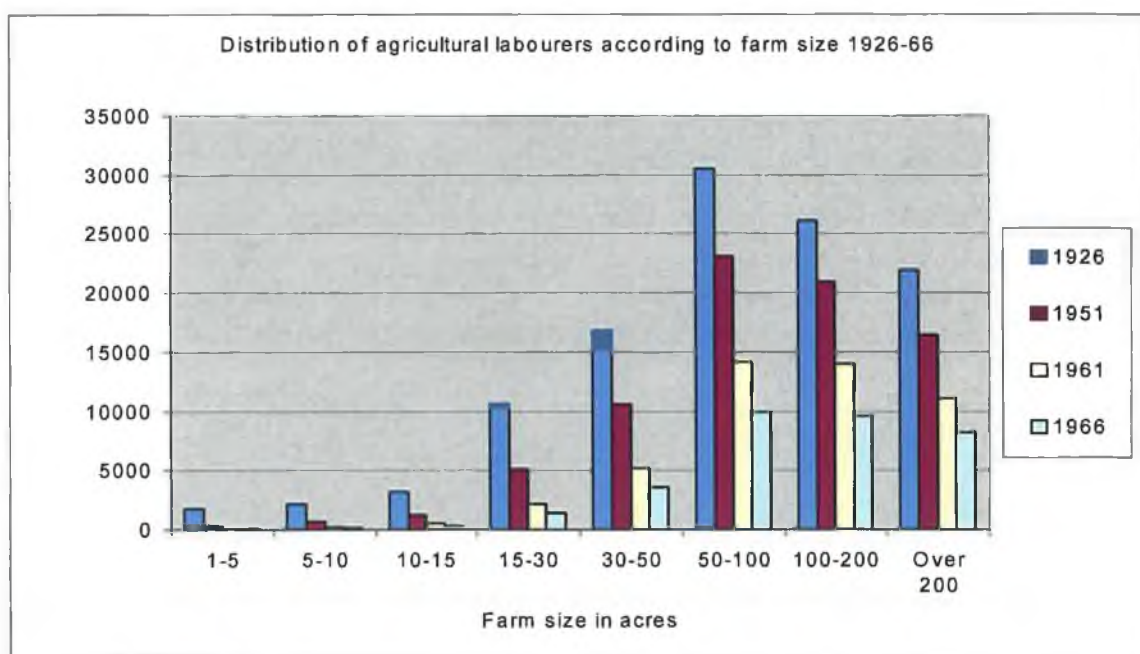
Nonetheless, there was evidence in the provinces to suggest that female labourers living out were increasing ever so slightly to counter the complete disappearance of this group by 1981. For instance, although female labourers living out in Munster had reached as low as 0.1 per cent of male labourers by 1961, subsequent censuses recorded steadily rising figures so that by 1981 they equalled almost the same proportion of male labourers as recorded in 1926. Likewise with Ulster and Leinster. Both provinces recorded increases between 1971 and 1981 which were significant enough to substantially raise their proportions of male labour to levels more in line with those at the beginning of independence.

Having identified the distribution of agricultural labourers on a regional and a county basis, it is now useful to establish their distribution according to farm size. Figure 1.10 proves instructive in this regard.<sup>42</sup> This chart illustrates the distribution of this class according to farm size in 1926, 1951, 1961 and 1966. In so doing it clearly

<sup>42</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.14 in Appendix 1.

demonstrates that agricultural labourers were concentrated on farms of 50 acres and over for the periods under review. It also indicates that a minute and ever dwindling proportion of these workers existed on farms of less than 15 acres, constituting a maximum of from 1.5 to 2.8 per cent of the total in 1926 and from 0.2 to 1.2 per cent in 1966.

**Figure 1.10** Distribution of agricultural labourers according to farm size, 1926-66

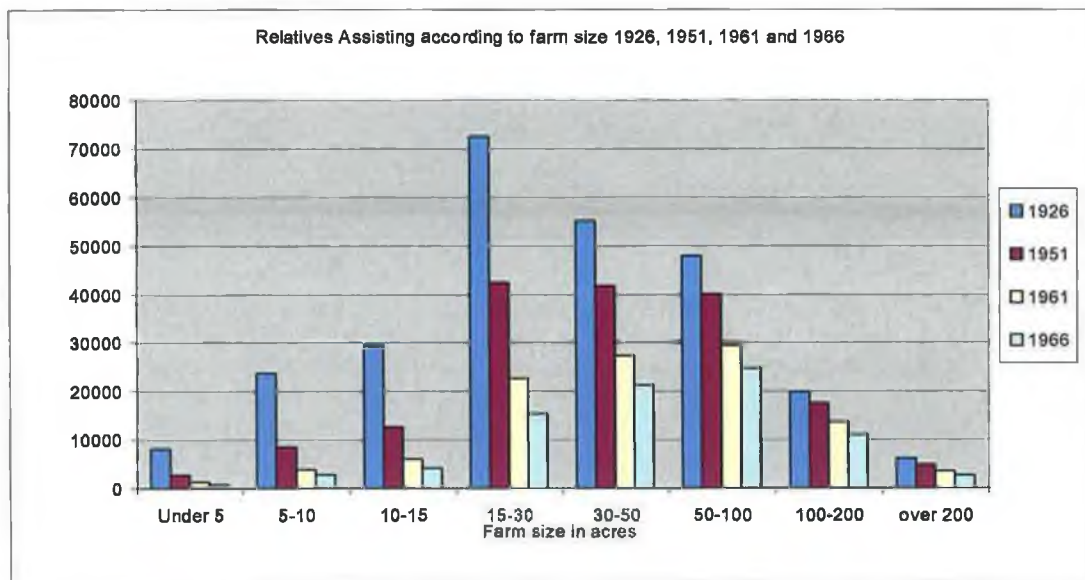


Sources: *Commission of Inquiry into De-rating 1929*, appendix a table 1, pp 94-95; *Census of Population 1951*, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. v table 2, p. 4; 1966, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

The maximum proportions on the 15-30 and 30-50 acre farms in 1926 were 9.4 and 14.8 per cent respectively. Those on the 15-30 acre farms recorded a greater decline in the subsequent period, dropping to 4.9 per cent in 1966 compared to 12.6 per cent on the 30-50 acre farms. The 50-100 acre farm had the greatest concentration of agricultural labourers in 1926, constituting 26.9 per cent of the total employed, with the 100-200 acre farm not far behind with 23 per cent, and the 200 acre plus farm comprising 19.3 per cent.

While a decline in the numbers employed on each farm size is evident, equally so is the tendency for labour to become concentrated on farms of 100-200 acres and 200 acres plus by 1966. Even though the 50-100 acre farm had recorded increases in the proportion of labour employed until 1961, its predominance in this regard was steadily challenged by employment on the 100-200 acre farm. The decline was less drastic on the larger farms, falling from 13,958 to 9,455 on the 100-200 acre farm, and from 10,995 to 8,152 on the 200 acre plus farm. At the same time there was a pronounced rise in the proportion of labourers employed on these farms with 33.9 per cent concentrated on farms of 100-200 acres and 29.2 per cent on farms of over 200 acres. That the distribution of relatives assisting was at variance with that of agricultural labourers can be discerned from Figure 1.11.

**Figure 1.11** Relatives assisting according to farm size during certain years, 1926 – 66



Sources: *Commission of Inquiry into De-rating 1929*, appendix a table 1, pp 94-5; *Census of Population 1951*, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. v table 2, p. 4; 1966, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

The extent to which relatives assisting were concentrated on the small to medium size farms is apparent from this chart.<sup>43</sup> In 1926 numbers were greatest on farms of 15–30 acres, where some 72,504 relatives assisting were concentrated. There were more on farms of 5-10 and 10-15 acres than on farms of 100–200 acres, and more again on farms from 1–5 acres than on those greater than 200 acres. While the greatest concentrations were still on farms of 15–30 and 30–50 acres by 1951, there was clearly a great depletion in numbers, especially on the smaller sized farms. The most dramatic reduction would appear to be on farms of 15–30 acres where a loss of some 41.4 per cent was recorded. However reductions were even greater on farms from under 5 to 15 acres, with a decline of 57 per cent on the 10–15 acre farm and some 64 per cent on both farms of under five and 5–10 acres. In fact it is evident that a swing towards the slightly larger farm had begun by 1961 with numbers increasingly concentrated on farms of 50–100 acres. Nonetheless, a considerable proportion was still concentrated on farms of 30–50 acres.

As Table 1.15 indicates, the distribution of relatives assisting was consistent with the concentration of agricultural holdings. This table outlines the number of agricultural holdings exceeding one acre classified by size for the years 1933, 1945, 1955 and 1970. It is evident that for the duration of the period concerned holdings of 15-30 acres predominated, followed by farms of 30-50 and 50-100 acres. It is also apparent that while most holdings were undergoing consistent decline, holdings of 50-100 and 100-200 acres were increasing in number. This movement is also reflected in the increased concentration of relatives assisting on farms of 50-100 acres by the 1960s.

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<sup>43</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.15 in Appendix 1.



**Table 1.15** Number of agricultural holdings exceeding 1acre classified by size during selected years, 1933-70

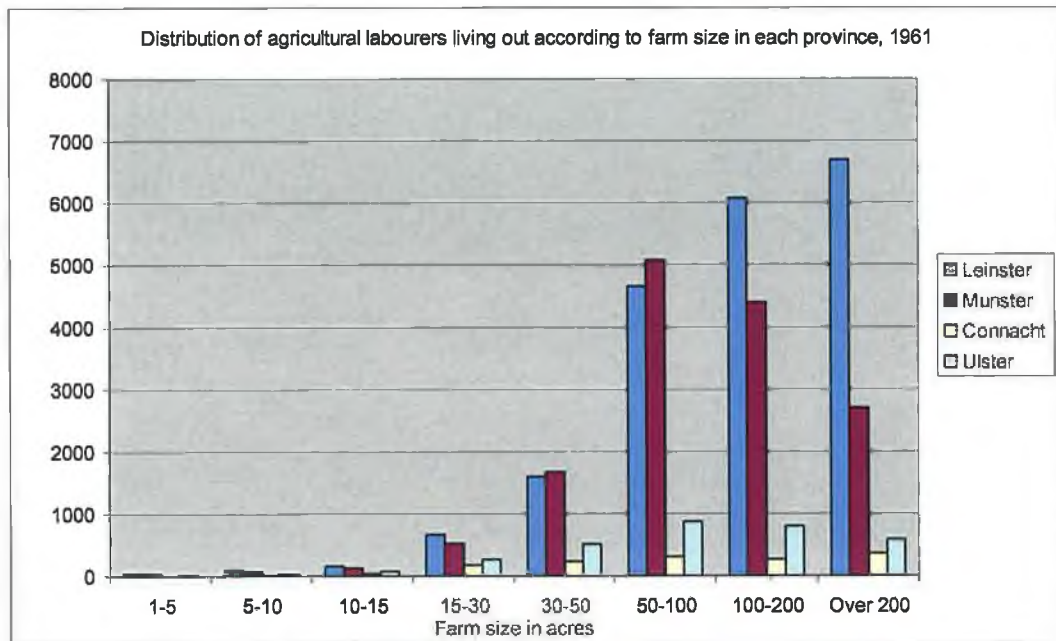
	1-5 Acres	5-10 Acres	10-15 Acres	15-30 Acres	30-50 Acres	50-100 Acres	100-200 Acres	200+ Acres
1933	29,555	34,448	36,703	89,807	62,369	50,120	21,203	7,921
1946	26,631	32,191	31,597	88,139	62,600	51,007	21,723	7,304
1955	25,893	30,044	29,022	83,896	63,080	52,270	21,930	7,152
1970	23,095	22,898	21,116	65,773	60,235	56,238	23,351	6,744

Sources: *Statistical Abstracts* 1934 (Dublin, 1934) table 58, p. 42; 1947-8 (Dublin, 1949) table 64, p. 60; 1957 (Dublin, 1957) table 73, p. 91; 1974-5 (Dublin, 1977) table 62, p. 93.

Unlike agricultural labourers, however, the overall trend of distribution for relatives assisting tended more towards the smaller farm sizes than those of 100 acres or more. To put it plainly in proportionate terms, 72 per cent of relatives assisting were concentrated on farms of less than 50 acres in 1926 compared to only 30 per cent of agricultural labourers. On the other hand farms of over 50 acres accounted for 28 per cent of relatives assisting compared to 70 per cent of agricultural labourers. In effect, the trends of both groups were again the inverse of each other. While over two thirds of relatives assisting were concentrated on smaller farms, over two thirds of agricultural labourers were to be found on larger farms. By 1966 farms of less than 50 acres still accounted for some 54 per cent of relatives assisting compared to 17 per cent of agricultural labourers. Farms of over 50 acres accounted for 46 per cent of relatives assisting compared to 83 per cent of agricultural labourers. Although the overall trend was towards farms of 50 acres or more, relatives assisting still had more than half their numbers concentrated on smaller farms compared to less than one fifth of agricultural labourers. This tendency was also reflected on a regional basis. Figure

1.12 illustrates the distribution of agricultural labourers living out in each province in 1961.<sup>44</sup>

**Figure 1.12** Distribution of agricultural labourers living out by farm size and province, 1961



Sources: *Commission of Inquiry into De-rating 1929*, appendix a table 1, pp 94-95; *Census of Population 1961*, vol. v table 2, p. 4; 1966, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

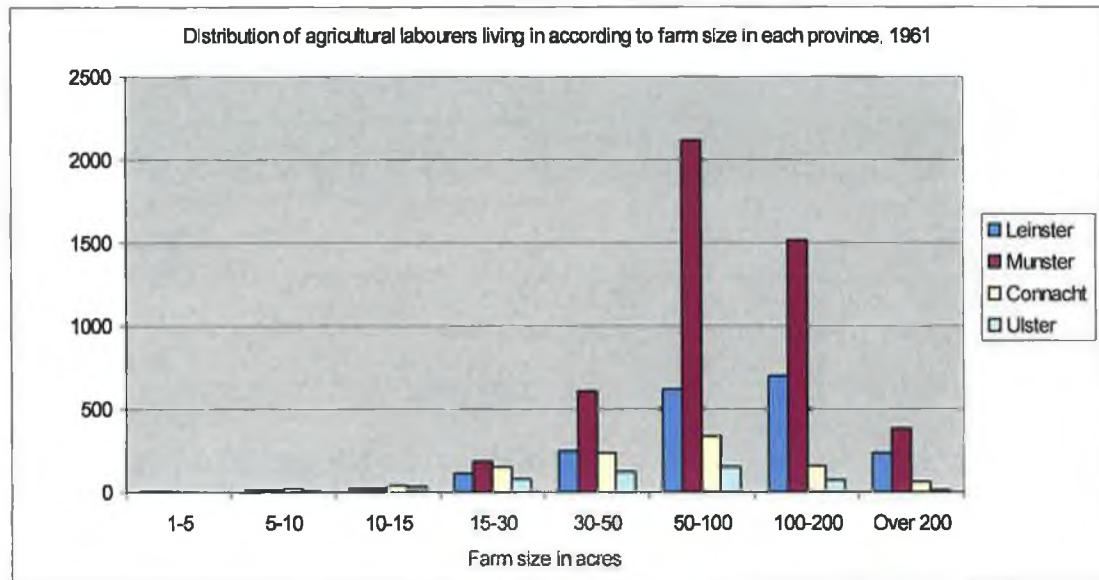
In Leinster, labourers living out were overwhelmingly concentrated on the larger farms of over 200 acres and then on farms of 100-200 acres, whereas in Munster the pattern was reversed. Labourers were concentrated primarily on the 50-100 acre farm, and then on farms of 100-200 acres. It is evident from Figure 1.13 that agricultural labourers living in reflected the pattern of agricultural labourers living out in Munster in that they were concentrated on farms of 50-100 acres, and then on holdings of 100-200 acres.<sup>45</sup> There was a greater proportion on the 30-50 acre farm, however, than on farms of over 200 acres. Labourers living in in Leinster on the other hand were

<sup>44</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.16 in Appendix 1.

<sup>45</sup> For data on this chart see Table A1.17 in Appendix 1.

concentrated on the 100-200 acre farm and then followed the trend of distribution in Munster in so far as the remainder were concentrated on farms of 50-100 acres, 30-50 acres, 200 plus and 15-30 acres.

**Figure 1.13** Distribution of agricultural labourers living in by farm size and province, 1961



Sources: *Commission of Inquiry into De-rating 1929*, appendix a table 1, pp 94-95; *Census of Population 1961*, vol. v table 2, p. 4; 1966, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

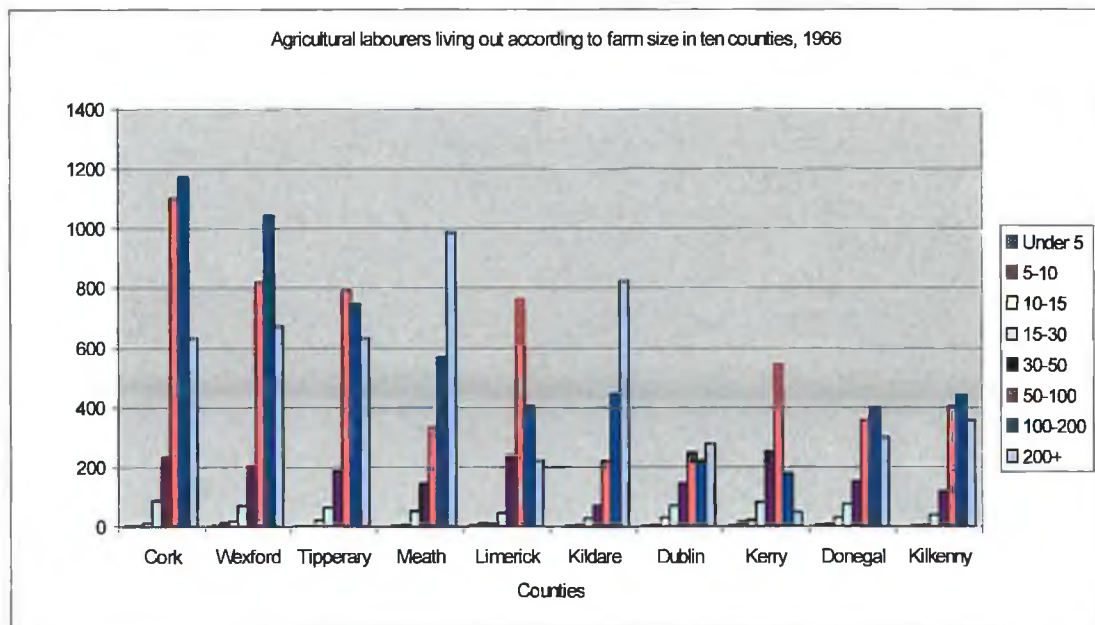
The pattern in Munster is not surprising when the provincial distribution of agricultural holdings is considered.<sup>46</sup> Not only was it the region with the most holdings, but contrary to national trends the largest concentration of the latter were those of 50-100 acres in extent. Reflecting this tendency, the county figures suggest that holdings of 50-100 acres were also most predominant in six of the ten counties selected.<sup>47</sup> What is particularly interesting in this regard is that despite the small concentrations of holdings of greater than 100 acres in all counties, this is where agricultural labour mainly thrived. This is particularly striking for some of the

<sup>46</sup> See Tables A1.18 and A1.20 in Appendix 1.

<sup>47</sup> See Tables A1.19 and A1.21 in Appendix 1.

Leinster counties where even holdings of 50-100 acres were scarce. For instance, even as late as 1970 Meath and Dublin both had larger concentrations of farms of 15-30 acres than the more common 50-100 acre farm in Wexford, Kilkenny and many of the Munster counties, with Kildare not far behind. Figures 1.14-15 are instructive in this respect. Using 1966 as an example, they indicate the distribution of agricultural labourers living in and out according to farm size on a county level.<sup>48</sup> As Figure 1.14 demonstrates, of the five Leinster counties selected Meath, Dublin and Kildare had labourers concentrated on farms of 200 acres or more.

**Figure 1.14** Distribution of agricultural labourers living out by farm size in ten counties, 1966



Source: *Census of Population 1966*, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

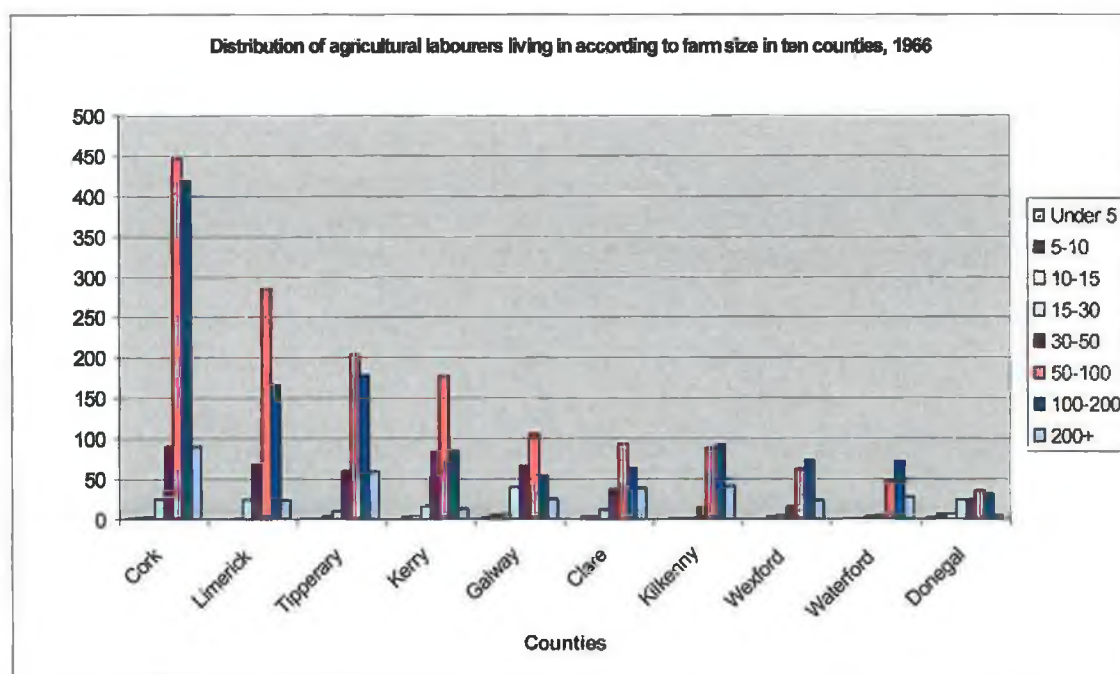
With the exception of Connacht, farms of 100-200 acres had the largest concentrations across the provinces with Cork, Wexford, Donegal and Kilkenny all tending to have the greatest numbers on holdings of this size. These counties also shared a similar trend in that labourers were concentrated on the 100-200 acre farm

<sup>48</sup> For data on these charts see Tables A1.16-17 in Appendix 1.

and then on farms of 50-100 acres. Although this was a trend also reflected in Cork, the remainder of the Munster counties recorded the largest concentration of labourers living out on farms of 50-100 acres.

As Figure 1.15 illustrates, agricultural labourers living in in the counties selected were concentrated on farms of 50-100 acres, and then generally on farms of 100-200 acres.

**Figure 1.15** Distribution of agricultural labourers living in by farm size in ten counties, 1966



Source: *Census of Population 1966*, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

This tendency permeated every province but Leinster, with Kilkenny and Wexford also being the exceptions in this regard. The tendency of labourers living out in these counties to be concentrated on farms of 100-200 and 50-100 acres also extended to labourers living in, in 1966. Therefore, of over 279,450 holdings in 1970 (excluding those less than 1 acre), agricultural labour was generally concentrated on the larger but less numerous farms, representing from 10 to 30 per cent of total holdings

depending on county and region, a small yet highly significant portion of the entire agricultural sector.

That the importance of these figures extended far beyond the statistical shall be revealed in subsequent chapters when the ability of the employing farmer to meet wage increases would be coloured by arguments relating to the distribution of the agricultural labourer according to farm size. In this connection it should be noted that even though the Central Statistics Office collected information on the distribution of the agricultural labourer according to farm size at every Census since 1926, it only published this information in reports for 1951, 1961 and 1966.<sup>49</sup> No such omission was made with regard to family workers, with farmers' sons and daughters assisting and other relatives assisting classified according to farm size in each census report since 1926. It could be argued that this practice is a prime example of how concern for the agricultural labour force has been directed primarily towards the family farm and the nature of its labour supply. The consideration accorded to relatives assisting by the census reports compared to that of the agricultural labourer clearly indicates the importance with which the former were viewed. And while such distinction in classification could be explained had there been a great divergence in the size of this hired labour supply compared to that of family workers, this chapter has proven that such was not the case. In fact, contrary to suggestions that the agricultural labourer had disappeared by independence, this chapter confirms that as the twentieth century advanced, the rate of decline of agricultural labourers decelerated sufficiently to allow them to remain not only a sustained presence in the agricultural labour force but to

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<sup>49</sup> The information used for the 1926 figures in his chapter had to be drawn from the 1929 *Report of the Commission on De-Rating*.

also represent an ever increasing alternative to the dwindling labour supply provided by family workers.

This chapter has also proven that the distribution of hired agricultural labour was very much at variance with the greatest concentrations of family labour in terms of location and farm size. Moreover, in establishing the predominance of agricultural labourers as a wage earning group, the shortcomings inherent in any approach which considers this class solely in terms of the family farm workforce, or even in terms of total occupied persons, has been demonstrated. Indeed, the extent to which their numbers exceeded the largest individual groups of male workers in non – agricultural occupations, not only at the beginning of the Free State but through the decades right up to the 1970s, puts paid to any suggestions that this class had disappeared by the advent of independence, virtually, relatively or otherwise. As to the contention that agricultural labourers became more and more integrated within the humbler strata of the farming class as they were replaced by small farmers and relatives assisting labouring part time, this chapter has demonstrated not only their survival alongside the rapid decline of the latter, but their continued predominance as a socio economic group in those counties where their presence had always been greatest.

As to how many agricultural labourers were actually small farmers, farmers' sons or other relatives assisting, at times outside the scope of the census, it is impossible to determine with accuracy. The annual agricultural census compiled by the Department of Agriculture provides a breakdown of males actively engaged in farm work on 1 June each year. As Tables AI.22-5 in Appendix I indicate, in distinguishing between family members and other workers, this source provides data on permanent and

temporary workers. In counties with most labour, with the exception of Cork, permanent and temporary workers combined were generally half that of family members, including farmers. 'Other workers', regardless of whether temporary or permanent, tended to be more numerous in counties with greater concentrations of larger holdings. Temporary workers were only more predominant than permanent workers in counties with smaller holdings such as Donegal and Kerry. Moreover, as Table 1.16 indicates, the ratio of permanent to temporary workers remained quite constant over three decades despite the reduction in absolute numbers.

**Table 1.16** The ratio of permanent to temporary male workers engaged in farm work in ten counties on 1 June, 1937 and 1967

	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Wexford	Meath	Kerry	Donegal	Kildare	Kilkenny	Dublin
<b>Year</b>										
<b>1937</b>	1.9	1.8	2.4	2.4	1.9	1	0.89	1.4	1.9	2.1
<b>1967</b>	1.7	1.6	1.7	2.1	1.7	0.8	0.75	3	2	2.75

Sources: *Statistical Abstracts* 1937 (Dublin, 1937) table 53, p. 50; 1947-8 (Dublin, 1949) table 61(a), p.58; 1967 table 61, p. 85.

This suggests that just as there was little reduction or indeed growth in the demand for permanent workers, there was little change in the proportion of temporary workers at work in June of each year. And while in certain counties temporary workers constituted almost half of the returns for 'other workers' for any one year, it can by no means be suggested that these were all relatives assisting or small farmers. What should be noted, and will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, is that agricultural labour was the least attractive form of rural work available in terms of wages and hours. For much of the period in question the government invested huge amounts of funding each year in local authority road works and temporary relief works such as drainage schemes, land reclamation etc. to relieve the serious problem of



underemployment which prevailed in the rural areas, particularly in the off peak farming seasons. For social and economic reasons, road work was a particularly attractive form of temporary employment for small farmers and other relatives assisting. Table 1.17 is instructive in this regard. Taken from the 1961 census, it lists the subsidiary occupations of 12,918 male farmers and 5,427 male relatives assisting who returned themselves as having subsidiary occupations to their principal occupation of farming.

**Table 1.17** Male farmers and farmers' relatives classified according to subsidiary occupation, 1961

Subsidiary Occupation	Farmers (12,918)	Farmers' Relatives Assisting on Farm (5,427)
Agricultural labourers	697	626
Agricultural contractors	194	121
Foresters and forestry labourers	278	81
Fishermen	591	-
Smiths and forgemen	185	-
Carpenters and joiners	286	-
Building and construction workers – skilled	467	82
Builders', bricklayers', plasterers' and masons' labourers	438	538
Contractor's labourers, road labourers and navvies	3,277	1,621
General labourers	1,199	985
Drivers of self propelled road goods vehicles	249	-
Postmen	240	-
Proprietors in wholesale or retail trade	2,283	149
Publicans	488	-
Other subsidiary occupations	2,046	1,224

Source: *Census of Population* 1961, vol. v table 10, p. 152.

This table suggests that of the farmers returned as having subsidiary occupations, only 5 per cent were employed as agricultural labourers compared to some 25 per cent as contractors' labourers, road workers and navvies, and a further 9 per cent as general labourers. This tendency was also evident among the relatives assisting who

recorded subsidiary occupations. Compared to 12 per cent of secondary work returned as agricultural labour, 30 per cent were returned as contractors' labourers, road workers and navvies, 18 per cent for general labour and 10 per cent for builders', bricklayers', plasterers' and masons' labourers. Nonetheless, despite the relatively small proportion of farmers and relatives assisting labouring for hire in agriculture as suggested by this table for 1961, it should be acknowledged that the cumulative effect of any proportion of the farming class working as agricultural labourers over a sustained period, even if at irregular intervals, would hardly have helped the homogeneity of agricultural labourers as a group or contributed to the development of the distinct class consciousness necessary for improving their lot such as trade union agitation.

The greatest indication, however, that the integration of the small farmer, relatives assisting and the agricultural labourer was far from complete, or indeed even desirable, was in the actions of the government itself. Subsequent chapters will deal indirectly with how the workers in this sector moved beyond the traditional confines of their industry and demanded incomes and entitlements in line with those in non-agricultural occupations. How successive governments perceived this group, vis a vis the farm labour force and as wage earners with similar entitlements to other wage earners, will be addressed more directly, and essentially form the hub of this study.

The peasant's name was Donovan, but he was universally known as Mat the Thresher. He excelled in all kinds of work as a farm labourer, and never met his match at wielding a flail. As a consequence, he was in great request among farmers from October to March; and, indeed during all the year round – for Mat could turn a hand almost to anything, from soleing a pair of brogues to roofing and thatching a barn. His superiority as a ploughman was never questioned.

Extract from Charles J. Kickham, *Knocknagow or, The Homes of Tipperary 1879* (Dublin, 1879)

## Chapter II

### **Independence and decline: the changing fortunes of the agricultural labourer, 1917-32**

Those who went before us in the struggles of this noble country and who fought for your emancipation in harder times than these did not dream of an Ireland in which Mat the Thresher should be an Outcast.<sup>1</sup>

This appeal came not from a novelist in the middle of the nineteenth century but from a high ranking civil servant at the turn of the twentieth and would prove extraordinarily prescient as the new nation state emerged. These were the sentiments of T.P. Gill, secretary to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, in an address delivered to the Tipperary Farmers Society in February 1908.<sup>2</sup> Gill was speaking at a time of exceptional transformation in the pattern of Irish land owning and in the structure of rural society generally, as the landlord class progressively surrendered the ownership of the land to the tenants who worked it. Excluded from the benefits of land legislation introduced since 1881, the agricultural labourers were becoming increasingly alienated from the emerging class of land owners as the social gulf between landed and landless became more pronounced.<sup>3</sup> Mindful of the importance attached to agriculture now that the country's greatest natural resource was being vested in a single class, Gill was wary of growing tensions between the farmer and labourer and sought to awaken both groups to their common interests:

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<sup>1</sup> T.P. Gill, 'The farmer and the labourer: a talk with farmers' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, viii, no.3 (1908), p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Patrick Gill, a former Nationalist MP, was associated with Horace Plunkett in his pioneering work for co-operation. He was later chosen on Plunkett's recommendation to be the first permanent secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland. He served in this capacity until his retirement in March 1923, having worked for less than a year under the first Free State administration.

It is because one sees estrangement rather than drawing together taking place between these two classes who cannot get on without each other, and who can bring about the ruin of the country as well as their own ruin if they do not become linked together as one interest ....[that] there is some urgency about this question.<sup>4</sup>

That he had grounds to be concerned became apparent less than a decade later when both groups suddenly began to organise on an unprecedented scale. As one war superseded another in the years leading to the establishment of the Free State, the farmer and agricultural labourer waged their own battle in the countryside. Yet within months of the advent of the first native administration to power, all signs of overt conflict and trade union organisation had disappeared from agriculture. In fact, its disappearance had been even more dramatic than its rise. Given that trade unionism had provided agricultural labourers with the leverage to finally acquire a stakehold in the country, the consequences of its disappearance were potentially disastrous. The role played by the Cumann na nGaedheal government in these events and its implications for the agricultural labourer in the new Free State will form the focus of this chapter. First it is necessary to explore the rise of trade unionism itself and the response of Gill's administration to this new challenge for agriculture.

Tensions between farmers and agricultural labourers were age old and violent conflict was commonplace in pre-Famine times.<sup>5</sup> Although these tensions persisted in the aftermath of the Famine, the seismic reduction in the numerical strength of the labourers meant that the antagonism was rarely so blatantly overt. There were several attempts at

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<sup>3</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': The land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Gill, 'The farmer and the labourer', p. 411.

more open and formal organisation amongst the labourers from 1873 but the difficulties of organisation and the tendency for their discontent to be subsumed and subordinated within the objectives of larger campaigns, such as the land league and the national and labour movements, militated against any prolonged success, leaving labourers frustrated and powerless to address their grievances in any unified or systematic manner.<sup>6</sup> The events of the period 1917 to 1923 marked a significant departure from this trend with the organisation of this class on trade union lines an unmitigated success. The most obvious reason for this was that the issue central to the labourers' demands during this period concerned wages. During earlier years, despite the fact that labourers were entirely underpaid, issues such as housing and plots of land took supremacy over agitation for better pay. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 was climactic in contributing to conditions which turned the attention of all agricultural labourers, along with most other workers, to the question of wages. The shortage of man power combined with a growing demand for foodstuffs placed the labourer in an especially strong position to improve his conditions.<sup>7</sup> The passing of government orders making it compulsory to turn a certain amount of land over from pasture to tillage which was labour intensive inflated the

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Clark and James Donnelly (eds), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983) p. 278.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel G. Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1986); Ross M. Connolly, 'A rightful place in the sun: the struggle of the farm and rural labourers of County Wicklow' in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds), *Wicklow: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1994), pp 911-25; Pamela Horn, 'The national agricultural labourers' union in Ireland, 1873-9' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 17 (1971), pp 340-52; Pdraig G. Lane, 'Agricultural labourers and rural violence, 1850-1914' in *Studia Hibernica*, 27 (1993), pp 77-87; Pdraig G. Lane, 'The agricultural labourer in Ireland, 1850-1914' (Ph.D. thesis, University College, Cork, 1980); Emmet O' Connor, *A labour history of Ireland 1824-1960* (Dublin, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Emmet O' Connor, 'Agrarian unrest and the labour movement in Co. Waterford 1917-1923' in *Saothar* 6 (1980), p. 40.

labourers' scarcity value.<sup>8</sup> But while the war may have increasingly focused the labourer on the wages issue he still remained powerless to seek better remuneration. The emergence of a more vigorous campaign by the state to secure increased food production was to inadvertently change all that.

By guaranteeing minimum prices to farmers for cereals such as wheat, oats and potatoes, the Corn Production Act 1917, which became law in August 1917, was primarily designed to induce farmers to bring more land under the plough and increase corn production.<sup>9</sup> A secondary consideration related to the fact that many agricultural labourers had hitherto failed to benefit from the gains attained by farmers in meeting the demands of Britain's war economy.<sup>10</sup> In a bid to ease the heightened resentment of the labourers, and more importantly secure their co-operation, provision was also made under this act for the introduction of a guaranteed minimum wage. The absence of a system of collective bargaining from agriculture necessitated the establishment of special machinery to ensure all labourers actually received the minimum rate. Agricultural wages boards in England, Scotland and Ireland were subsequently established for this purpose.<sup>11</sup> The Irish Board, which was based in Dublin, was composed of six employer and six labourer representatives nominated by their respective trade unions, in addition to four appointed members and a chairman. Meeting for the first time in September 1917, it fixed its first minimum wages order for the entire country for adult male agricultural labourers over 21 and female agricultural labourers over 18 years of age with effect from

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. xcii), 24 Apr. 1917, col. 2255.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 2261.

10 November 1917.<sup>12</sup> This wage fixing machinery had its origins in the Trade Boards Act of 1909 which had been introduced in an attempt to remove sweating from industry and ensure that fair wages were paid. It sought to achieve this goal by providing for the establishment of statutory wage regulating bodies in industries where there was little or no organisation to carry out this critical function.<sup>13</sup> The extension of this machinery to agriculture had been advocated as the draft trades board legislation passed through the House of Commons in March 1909.<sup>14</sup> That its provisions were only extended to agriculture eight years later, and after most of World War One had passed, was an indication of the political expediency surrounding the introduction of this system to agriculture. Such expediency was also reflected in the fact that unlike the trades board act, this machinery was given an end date of 31 December 1922, unless further statutory provision was made.<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, however, the actual guarantee of a statutory minimum wage was to spur a level of trade union activity in agriculture that was and has since been unparalleled.

For instance, it was no coincidence that the first moves towards serious organisation amongst Irish agricultural labourers should have occurred during the later war years, which tallied with the introduction of the minimum wage to agriculture. The minimum wage provided inducement to organise on two fronts. Initially, it was stimulated by the need to compel farmers to carry out their legal obligations and then by the need to ensure

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<sup>11</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917* (7 & 8 Geo. V, c. 46, [G.B.]) 21 Aug. 1917, section 5(2).

<sup>12</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, during the period September, 1917 to September, 1921' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, (1920-1), pp 318-9 and p. 327.

<sup>13</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. iv), 28 Apr. 1909, col. 405.

<sup>14</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. ii), 24 Mar. 1909, cols 1788-92.



that this minimum did not become the maximum wage. The guarantee of a minimum wage meant that labourers could afford to subscribe to trade union membership for the first time. It was this development which appears to have largely encouraged Thomas Foran, the acting general secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), to embark on the organisation of this sector. Having successfully organised agricultural labourers in the Dublin region in 1913, the ITGWU were aware of the potential benefits of organising one of the largest groups in the country on a nationwide level.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the government announcement of its intent to establish an Irish agricultural wages board on 9 March 1917 was followed four days later by a suggestion from Foran that the union embark on the large scale organisation of this class.<sup>17</sup> Wasting little time, the impact of the endeavours of the union in this regard were indirectly noted a few months later by the chief secretary for Ireland, Mr Duke, during the committee stage of the debate on the Corn Production Bill in July 1917. The increased propensity of these groups to organise and undertake collective bargaining over the previous months was forwarded as a justification for not fixing a predetermined and retrospective 25s. rate for Ireland as was being introduced for England and Wales:

In Ireland, however, during the greater part of this year, the farmers and labourers have been meeting together – the farmers are associated in farmers unions and they are very much masters of their own proceedings, and the labourers have become very much more masters of their own destiny than they were – and have arrived at a result which encourages me in believing that I was not wrong in thinking that a minimum wage of 25s. was not the best thing for Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 19(2).

<sup>16</sup> C.D. Greaves, *The Irish transport and general workers union: the formative years 1909-1923* (Dublin, 1982), pp 89-91.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 179-80.

<sup>18</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. xcvi), 31 Jul. 1917, col. 2017.

The extent to which the ITGWU was successful in mobilising agricultural labourers was evident from the rapid increase in the numbers joining its ranks between 1917 and 1920. A census of its membership on 31 January 1920 showed that agricultural workers accounted for the largest numbers in the union, with agricultural labourers constituting 30,292 persons.<sup>19</sup> In 1918 only 24 per cent of the union members had been employed in agriculture. In 1920 the proportion had risen to 37.5 per cent.<sup>20</sup> Such expansion was very striking given that statutory intervention in 1917 had been based on the very absence of trade unionism from agriculture and the slender chances of its likelihood. As the president of the Board of Agriculture, Rowland E. Prothero, noted when introducing the Corn Production Bill to the House of Commons in April 1917, it was the unorganised position of the agricultural labourer which rendered the statutory regulation of his wages particularly necessary, ‘...as far as I can see they cannot have much chance of being successfully and permanently organised, and it is for that reason that wages boards are so necessary in their case’.<sup>21</sup> With organisation so defective at that time as to render mutual bargaining between farmers and labourers impracticable, Prothero later argued the wages boards would at least provide a new opportunity for both parties to meet and discuss wage issues:

I am not an advocate for wages boards being called into being on any other ground than that I believe they will help to bring employers and employees together, as they have never been hitherto....Wages Boards will be a boon in this country if they are properly worked without political or social bias. They will impart into the hard economic laws of this country something of morality and something of conscience.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Annual report of the ITGWU* (1919), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 259-60.

<sup>21</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. xcii), 24 Apr. 1917, col. 2261.

<sup>22</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. xcvi), 19 Jul. 1917, col. 622.

He had felt that such a regulatory mechanism would prove conducive to greater consensus between both parties, not confrontation. He could hardly have anticipated the rapid deterioration in agricultural labour relations which the introduction of such machinery would indirectly facilitate in Ireland.

In agitating for better wages and conditions, the potentially disruptive farm strike became the most effective tactic used by the ITGWU to extract the concessions demanded. It actually derived major impetus from the steps taken to compel farming employers to pay the minimum wage.<sup>23</sup> In places like counties Dublin, Meath and Kildare, where it was the tendency of farmers to regard the minimum wage as the maximum, the union used the strike method to successfully negotiate rates in excess of the minimum rate. The annual report of the ITGWU for 1918 reported that a rate 7s. in excess of the legal minimum wage was obtained for farmers in Co. Dublin, with local movements carried out successfully in other areas.<sup>24</sup>

By 1919 the situation in agriculture had deteriorated considerably, with the main industrial disputes of that year actually occurring on the farm. There was a general tendency for these struggles to be more bitterly fought than those of the preceding year.<sup>25</sup> Farmers were beginning to join the Irish Farmers Union and to offer organised resistance. A growing problem in this regard was that many farmers in refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the labour unions obstructed pre-strike negotiations.<sup>26</sup> These developments

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<sup>23</sup> Greaves, *The Irish transport and general workers' union*, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> *Annual report of the ITGWU (1918)*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Greaves, *The Irish transport and general workers' union*, p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

did not fail to make an impact on the Irish Agricultural Wages Board. While the Board's function was to prescribe minimum wage rates for agricultural labourers throughout the country, it also had power to establish district wages committees to make wage recommendations for their areas and to report on proposals to vary or cancel existing minimum rates. These committees consisted of equal numbers of farmer and labourer representatives with one member of the Board or nominated person. When the Board took steps to establish these committees at its first meeting in September 1917, it invited the public to submit nominations for the appointment of members.<sup>27</sup> However, the response was so poor that the number of nominations received was deemed insufficient to admit a proper selection on behalf of either the employers or the labourers and so the proposal was subsequently adjourned.<sup>28</sup> The rapid organisation of agricultural labourers from 1918 dramatically changed this situation. Recognising the usefulness of such local machinery, the Board was inundated by demands for their establishment from labour spokesmen in both Ireland and England.<sup>29</sup>

Correspondence between the Board's chairman, Charles O'Connor, and the vice president of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, Sir Thomas W. Russell, in September 1918, suggested that the regional character of these bodies was viewed by labour as a means of further enforcing the payment of minimum rates:

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<sup>27</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland', p. 321.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Charles O'Connor, AWB to T.P. Gill, DATII, 13 Jun. 1919 (AGI/G4021/21).

I think that the opinion of labour generally throughout the country is that these districts committees would be a local means of ensuring that the minimum wage was paid in their different areas, and although I think this can be done more effectively by a good staff of inspectors, still, if public opinion is very much in favour of the establishment of district committees the board may find it hard to resist appointing them.<sup>30</sup>

As this statement reveals, the Board was no longer so favourably disposed towards establishing the district committees. This reticence was shared by Russell. He feared that since the committees would have no power to fix wages they would be used purely for agitational purposes.<sup>31</sup> However, it became apparent that the Board was under considerable pressure to accede to these demands given that it had received representations from several quarters, all of which had the support of a considerable volume of opinion throughout the country.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, in an attempt to 'obviate' the necessity for appointing the committees, the Board proposed instead that a certain number of members should occasionally hold meetings in various districts with a view to looking into wages questions on the spot.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the Board managed to withhold conceding this demand for a further eight months. However, by June 1919, it was apparent that labour would no longer accept this procedure as a substitute for workmen having a formal voice in determining minimum wages at a district level. It was the possibility that labour would actually withdraw their presence from the Board which eventually obliged the latter to acquiesce.<sup>34</sup> So notwithstanding the apprehension that the district committees would 'ultimately produce chaos and confusion with a variety of

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<sup>30</sup> O'Connor, AWB to Sir Thomas Russell, DATII, 18 Sep. 1918 (AGI/G4021/21).

<sup>31</sup> Russell to O'Connor, 18 Sep. 1918.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Departmental minute to Walsh, DATII, 15 Oct. 1918.

<sup>34</sup> O'Connor to Gill, 13 Jun. 1919.

different wages over small areas', the demand for their establishment was finally acceded to because of the pressure exercised by labour.<sup>35</sup> Given the escalation in the number of disputes erupting at this time, the withdrawal of labour representation from the Board would have critically undermined the effectiveness of its operations, something which the Board was determined to avoid.

The Board's effectiveness in light of the recently organised state of the agricultural industry had already been questioned by the newly established Irish section of the Ministry of Labour a few months previously. This had been expressed as part of a rising concern over the government's ability to meet the increasing demands for arbitration in agricultural labour disputes. In fact, the head of the section, (and eventually secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce), Gordon Campbell, had been so taken aback by the backlash resulting from the increasing trade unionism that he sought direction from the London office which had been experiencing a similar tendency.<sup>36</sup> A memorandum subsequently issued to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, reveals how unprepared Labour and indeed the government were for any level of organisation in agriculture:

Owing to the extremely rapid organisation both of farmers and their workpeople within the last two years, the Wages Boards which were admirably suited to the conditions prevailing in 1917, have since lost a considerable amount of their effectiveness...both farmers and labourers in many parts of Ireland have become so well organised as to have passed beyond the Wages Board, or Trade Board

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<sup>35</sup> O'Connor to Gill, 13 Jun. 1919 (AGI/G4021/21).

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Labour memorandum on farm labour disputes to secretary, DATII, 25 Apr. 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

stage and to have entered the stage at which machinery analogous to the effective joint industrial councils is more appropriate and more effective.<sup>37</sup>

Joint industrial councils replaced trade boards only when there was strong trade union presence at both employer and worker level, as their decisions were enforced not by legislative sanction but through their own organisations. Influenced by similar developments in Great Britain, the Irish Ministry of Labour suggested that some parts of the country had arrived at this level of organisation within just two years of the introduction of statutory regulation to agriculture. Indeed, so extensive was the trend in Great Britain that it had been the subject of conferences between the Ministry of Labour, the Board of Agriculture, the farmers associations and the trade unions in London. The main issue to emerge from these talks was concern over the lack of adequate machinery to allow discussions on issues other than wages consequent to the newly organised condition of the industry. Accordingly, it was suggested that a system of conciliation boards be adopted whereby disputes could be referred for settlement before any use was made of the court of arbitration. These boards would have been composed of equal representatives of the employer associations and trade unions and would have involved referral at local, district and national levels. It was only when the national board failed to agree that the dispute would have been referred to arbitration. It was a system of this character that the Ministry of Labour recommended as means of settling disputes in agriculture in Ireland, 'an alternative to the wages board on the one hand and the court of

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Labour memorandum on farm labour disputes to secretary, DATII, 25 Apr. 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

arbitration on the other'.<sup>38</sup> To this end it was suggested that the proposal be put before a conference of the farmers associations for their consideration:

The proposal ought to appeal to employers, as it tends to give a real authority to the farmers associations as against any individual farmer in the district and assists the trade union officials to maintain discipline among their members. There is little doubt that it will be welcomed by the trade unions in Ireland.<sup>39</sup>

In making this proposal Labour was driven by a major fear. Under section two of the Wages (Temporary Regulation) Act 1918, trade unions were entitled to ask for what amounted to compulsory arbitration on any difference as to whether a higher rate of wages should be substituted for the prescribed rate of wages. The number of requests for mediation submitted to the Department of Agriculture and Ministry of Labour at this time seems to have fuelled the apprehension that if trade unions started to resort to the right to arbitration under this legislation, the position of the agricultural wages board would have been seriously compromised. As it was, the agricultural labour unions had not yet realised that they were entitled as a right to a court of arbitration.<sup>40</sup> In the event that they did, it was feared that the transition from a body such as the wages board to an independent court of arbitration would have been so abrupt as to leave the agricultural industry devoid of any adequate system of dealing with labour disputes.

However, a meeting between representatives of the Ministry of Labour (Gordon Campbell), the Agricultural Wages Board (Charles O'Connor) and the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (T.P. Gill among others) in May 1919, revealed

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Labour memorandum on farm labour disputes to secretary, DATII, 25 Apr. 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



that not all departments concurred with Labour's assessment of the level of organisation in Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Initial opposition derived from the fact that both Gill and O'Connor had interpreted Labour's proposal to mean the replacement of the board with conciliation committees. They cited the lack of organisation amongst farmers and their refusal to negotiate with the labour unions as major obstacles for the establishment of such machinery. While Campbell eventually concurred that farmers were insufficiently organised to warrant alternative conciliatory machinery at that stage, he emphasised his view nonetheless that it was of extreme importance that there should eventually be regularised machinery by which representatives of the farmers and labourers could meet regularly to discuss matters.<sup>42</sup> In this regard it was noted that:

...to his mind one great difficulty was the fact that employers in Ireland were not yet ready to recognise unions of labourers. That was a line which they could not long continue to take, and if they had a feeling that the wages board was not sufficient protection to them the sooner they got other machinery the better and avoided the trouble and the difficulty of strikes. Conciliation boards properly worked should act as a check on haphazard applications being sent into farmers for increased wages.<sup>43</sup>

The apparent refusal of employers to recognise the labourers' unions, or even for farmers' associations to get farmers to acknowledge their unions, made it difficult to facilitate moves towards discussion. The situation was complicated further by indications from labour that they favoured the establishment of some form of conciliation machinery. For instance, Campbell noted that Foran had been keen on establishing joint committees of labourers and employers in the various districts with a view to pre-

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum of an interview between representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the AWB and the DATIL, 2 May 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

empting strikes through constructive discussion. Underlining this demand was the claim that the union was losing control over the number of strikes erupting.<sup>44</sup> In rural areas especially, success in strikes was coming to rely increasingly on co-ordinated violence and sabotage.<sup>45</sup> Gill concurred with Campbell that ultimately a system of conciliation was far preferable to arbitration:

Leaving aside whether things are ripe for this, the chief question here is that of the desirability of supplementing compulsory methods, whether those of the Wages Board or the Ministry of Labour, by voluntary methods...My own view is that to promote, whether by the Wages Board or the Ministry of Labour, a plan for bringing in an element of conciliation before strikes took place would be a better method than an appeal to an arbitration board.<sup>46</sup>

However, when Campbell queried whether it was worth suggesting to farmers that they should set up regular machinery for discussion with the unions, Gill advised against it on the grounds that 'farmers who are fighting it out are in the mood that they believe they will win if they are left alone. That may not turn out to be what they believe but so long as they are in that frame of mind they would regard any interference as injurious'.<sup>47</sup>

This was another indication of how volatile relations in agriculture had become by this time. Since farmers were just beginning to organise they were militant and uninclined to welcome any unsolicited intervention by government. As such it was finally agreed that more would be done for conciliation through publicity, by encouraging both sides to think about the concept, than by any official steps to introduce such machinery at that

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<sup>43</sup> Memorandum of an interview between representatives of the ministry of Labour, the AWB and the DATII, 2 May 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Memo of interview between Labour, the AWB and the DATII, 2 May 1919 (AGI/G2863/19).

stage. The Board's decision to concede the introduction of district wage committees around this time was no doubt strongly influenced by this debate and was possibly even reluctantly considered as a step in the conciliatory direction.

The reactions of both Campbell and Gill to the repercussions of trade unionism on the farm at this critical time, in the midst of the Anglo Irish war, exemplifies how they attempted to deal objectively with the concerns of both farmer and labourer. Even though the rapid spread of trade unionism among agricultural labourers subsequent to the board's establishment was completely unanticipated by the authorities, every means was taken to facilitate conciliation and arbitration in the huge number of agricultural labour disputes during this period. Both departments, acutely sensitive to the danger of alienation, took every precaution to intervene in a dispute only when approached by both sides. A case in point is Agriculture's response to threats of further strikes in Dublin in March 1920.<sup>48</sup> During discussions which the department had with representatives of the Irish Farmers Union (IFU) and the Co. Dublin Farmers Association, a representative of the IFU stated that:

at a meeting of the executive complaints were made as to the manner in which they had been treated by the Labour Department in certain disputes last year, and the impression conveyed was that they would be better pleased if a conference was conducted by this department.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the perception was that their demands would be treated a little more sympathetically by Agriculture. Notwithstanding the seriousness with which Agriculture viewed this strike, and the intimations from employers that they were willing to negotiate

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<sup>48</sup> Memorandum issued by DATII, 19 Mar. 1920 (AGI/A10983/20).

if the latter supervened, Agriculture insisted that it was not prepared to move unless it got a clear intimation from both sides that its intervention would be acceptable. Consequently a letter was issued from the department to both sides inviting them to meet in a conference with a view to seeking a speedy settlement:

The department are convinced that the continuance of the strike under existing circumstances will be fraught with the gravest danger not only to agricultural interests but to the country as a whole. The cessation of the spring farming operations during these weeks would mean without any doubt a corresponding shortage in the food production of the country at harvest time, a national loss which would grievously affect our population in a year when the world is threatened with short food supplies. Furthermore, there are the obvious perils, which all can appreciate if in the present condition of things, a quarrel of this kind were to be prolonged. No advantage which could be gained by either side through fighting it out in the present dispute could weigh against the harm thus involved for both sides and for the country.<sup>50</sup>

In a statement issued to certain newspapers regarding this appeal, the department added that if the situation were prolonged bitterness would grow between both sides and serious injury done 'to that good feeling between farmers and labourers which, notwithstanding the quarrel, still exists'.<sup>51</sup> It appears that while the department's efforts to act as intermediary were initially unsuccessful, an agreement was eventually reached under the guidance of Gill. In a letter to both sides Gill repeated his view that the mutual respect between farmers and labourers was vital to the success of agriculture:

All this is gratifying and of good augury and it will have a favourable influence I believe outside the county Dublin. I look forward to our having some joint conferences during the next few months when with no dispute going on we can

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<sup>49</sup> Memorandum issued by DATII, 19 Mar. 1920 (AGI/A10983/20)

<sup>50</sup> DATII to T. Fitzpatrick, Co. Dublin Farmers Association, 22 Mar. 1920.

<sup>51</sup> DATII statement to the *Irish Times*, the *Freeman's Journal*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Daily Express*, 25 Mar. 1920.

work at the task of settling conditions of work and mutual relations suitable to agricultural life and likely to give us stability in our basic national industry.<sup>52</sup>

Gill perceived representative bodies of farmers and labourers to be integral to the future of agriculture. His words of acclamation suggested that he had already subscribed to promoting this sort of voluntary conciliatory machinery as opposed to the use of more compulsive methods of arbitration. It should be recalled, however, that with the exception of the Dublin area the unprecedented levels of organisation in agriculture had developed against a background of state intervention.<sup>53</sup> A change in government policy was therefore capable of having grave repercussions for the inroads made in this sphere.<sup>54</sup>

The beginnings of such change emerged in late 1920. Massive expansion in the world's productive capacity during world war one followed by a further increase in output to meet the first demands of a peace time market led to a crisis of overproduction in the autumn of that year.<sup>55</sup> Food prices were the first to tumble causing a severe depression in agriculture.<sup>56</sup> The depression altered the circumstances under which the labourers' agitation had expanded. Up to 1920 employers had been on the defensive. From the autumn of 1920 they took the offensive for wage reductions and clamoured for the restoration of pre-war wage levels.<sup>57</sup> The system of wartime controls was eventually dismantled with statutory intervention in agriculture coming to a close. The

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<sup>52</sup> DATII statement to the *Irish Times*, the *Freeman's Journal*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Daily Express*, 25 Mar. 1920 (AGI/A10983/20).

<sup>53</sup> Greaves, *The Irish transport and general workers union*, p. 260.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, pp 108-9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

discontinuance of compulsory tillage orders ensured the disappearance of the agricultural labourer's scarcity value. The abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board in October 1921 resulted in the withdrawal of his guaranteed minimum wage and the statutory regulation of his wages and working conditions.

That the Board had made a great impact on agricultural wages is evident from Table 2.1, which outlines the main increases passed during the period 1917-21. With the average weekly cash wage paid to the ordinary farm labourer 12s. in 1914, 12s. 10d. in 1915 and 14s. 9d. in 1916, the increase to an average of 19s. 3d. in 1917 was considerable and directly attributable to the first wages order passed by the Board.<sup>58</sup> For the purposes of fixing minimum rates the country was initially divided into three wages groups, with two groups sufficing after 1920.<sup>59</sup> Each wage group contained certain districts from each county in every province.

**Table 2.1** Minimum rates of wages for adult male workers fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, 1917-21

Order Dated:	10 November 1917				19 December 1918				9 April 1920		5 May 1921	
	54 hour week		60 hour week		54 hour week		60 hour week		54 hour week		54 hour week	
Wages Area	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Group I	24	0	25	0	27	0	28	6	32	6	34	0
Group II	21	6	22	6	24	6	26	0	30	0	32	0
Group III	19	0	20	0	22	0	23	6	-	-	-	-

Source: 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, during the period September, 1917, to September, 1921' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland* (1920-1), p. 327.

<sup>58</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland', p. 325.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 319-26.

For instance, Group I generally consisted of the areas adjacent to the cities and urban districts. By 1920 the wages prescribed for Group II would have applied to most areas in the country. Wages were fixed for male workers aged from 16 upwards and for female workers aged 18 years and over. Although the Board initially provided rates for a 9 hour and 10 hour working day, it had stopped prescribing wages for a 10 hour day by 1920, another positive sign of advancement in the labourer's working conditions.<sup>60</sup> Minimum hourly rates of overtime were provided with special rates for Sunday work and an additional inclusive weekly rate to cover overtime and Sunday work in the case of such classes as ploughmen, cattlemen, yardsmen, milkers and herds.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, by 1920 provision was made whereby the worker and employer could agree so as to arrange the working week to include a weekly half holiday.<sup>62</sup>

Notwithstanding the success of trade unionism in enforcing the minimum rate, and in negotiating wages greater than the prescribed minimum, arrears of wages amounting to £40,255 in respect of 9,002 workmen were recovered by the Board's inspectors over the brief period of its operations.<sup>63</sup> Proceedings were instituted in 1,579 cases by the police for infringement of the Board's orders, resulting in 406 convictions.<sup>64</sup> Clearly many workers still operated outside the sphere of trade unionism and needed the protective net of statutory regulation to safeguard their basic interests. Nonetheless the government still proceeded to abolish the entire wage board system when it repealed the Corn Production

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<sup>60</sup> 'The agricultural wages board for Ireland (constitution and proceedings) regulations, 1920' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (1919-20)*, pp 310-1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland', p. 320.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Act in October 1921. This effectively meant that the employing farmer was free from any further legal obligation to pay wages fixed by the Board. He would have been at liberty from this time forth to fix whatever wage he desired at whatever conditions he stipulated had it not been for the prevalence of trade unionism in agriculture. While the district wages committees were left to act in England, Scotland and Wales, pending the establishment of joint conciliation committees, the issue was left as a matter entirely for voluntary settlement in Ireland, or as a question for the new government about to be established to settle.<sup>65</sup>

That there would be little prospect of employers and workers in Ireland voluntarily agreeing to establish joint machinery for determining agricultural wages became apparent as violence and sabotage assumed even more importance in farm strikes, and played a crucial role in enabling the ITGWU to settle four major disputes in Dublin, Meath, Cork and Waterford.<sup>66</sup> The abolition of agricultural wage regulation did not have to dramatically affect the ameliorated position of the labourer so long as he remained organised. This meant that more than ever trade unionism became his only bastion for restraining the advances of employers demanding reductions in wages. Given the latter alternative or trade union membership it was hardly surprising that October 1921 was characterised by fresh recruitment in agriculture.<sup>67</sup> Despite the defensive nature of the strikes during this period, success was invariably achieved by the labourers who

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<sup>65</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland', p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, p. 112.

<sup>67</sup> Greaves, *The Irish transport and general workers union*, p. 304.



managed to retain the wage levels acquired before the onset of the depression. The clarification of the political situation in 1923, however, was to change all that.<sup>68</sup>

By Autumn 1922 the provisional government had established its authority over virtually all of the 26 counties.<sup>69</sup> Its new found confidence revealed itself in its willingness to face strike action in the civil service.<sup>70</sup> In September it rejected the findings of its own commission of enquiry into the cost of living for postal employees and fought a tough eighteen day strike to enforce pay cuts.<sup>71</sup> Agricultural labourers employed on farms at the institutes and colleges of the Department of Agriculture were not immune from the government's decision to confront strike action and reduce costs. Committed to retrenchment in government spending, in 1922 the Ministry of Finance had established an interdepartmental wages advisory committee to oversee the wages and conditions of employment of all workmen and artisans employed by government departments.<sup>72</sup> This committee immediately set about querying why wages for labourers at the department's farms were in excess of local wage rates.<sup>73</sup> In preparing a response to Finance on this matter, a departmental minute to Gill in February 1923 clearly indicates that while Agriculture had been moving in that direction in 1922, the extent of labour organisation had hindered any action:

We have for some time been considering the question of reducing the wages paid to labourers on our farms. We had hoped to take action in this direction about this time last year when the agreement between the Dublin farmers and Transport

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<sup>68</sup> O'Connor, 'Agrarian unrest', p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Idem, *A labour history of Ireland*, p. 113.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Gregg, Ministry of Finance, to the secretary, Department of Agriculture, 14 Sep. 1922; Circular 168/8 to all departments from W. O'Brien, Finance, 27 Sep. 1922 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>73</sup> Gregg, Finance, to the secretary, Agriculture, 20 Feb. 1923 (AGI/A11668/23).

Workers Union came up for revision. At that time everyone expected that a reduction in the rate of wages current in 1921-2 would have taken place but, as you will recollect, the negotiations resulted in a strike which lasted for some weeks and caused very serious losses to farmers who in the end agreed to continue the rate of wages paid by them in the previous year. In view of the outcome of this County Dublin dispute the department did not consider it advisable to attempt a reduction of the rate of wages paid on their farms.<sup>74</sup>

That the continued strength of the labourers had resulted in the department focusing on obtaining reductions at institutions where trade union agreements no longer existed can be ascertained from the following minute to the assistant secretary on 6 November 1922:

The wages paid at Albert College and the Munster Institute are the rates fixed for the surrounding districts under agreements between the Transport Union and the Farmers' Associations, but in the cases of Clonakilty, Athenry and Ballyhaise, no general agreements as to standard rates of wages are in operation and wages paid to the men employed on the Department's farms are considerably in excess of those paid by local employers of agricultural labour...in view of the substantial drop in wages of farm workers all over the country during the past twelve months a reconsideration of rates of pay not only at Clonakilty but at Athenry and Ballyhaise seems called for.<sup>75</sup>

As elsewhere, however, the organised position of the workers continued to hamper the wage cutting offensive of government, if only for a brief period. For notwithstanding the absence of trade union agreements at farms such as Ballyhaise and Athenry by this time, the existing rates had nonetheless been exacted from the department 'as a result of strikes, the continuance of which threatened serious consequences'.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, these rates were much higher in proportion to the Dublin rates than they had been before the war. Consequently, when it came to seeking wage reductions it was submitted in the departmental note to Gill that it was 'very unlikely' that they would be able to reduce wages at Ballyhaise and Athenry by much more, if any, than the amount of the reduction

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<sup>74</sup> Departmental minute to the secretary, 27 Feb. 1923 (AGI/A11668/23).

<sup>75</sup> Minute to the assistant secretary, 6 Nov. 1922.

agreed in respect of Co. Dublin.<sup>77</sup> So while reductions were being contemplated, it was in line with rates of reduction in Dublin which would have been post rather than pre-war standards:

So soon as a decision is come to in respect of the Co. Dublin we shall be in position to deal with the other centres but not, I am afraid, before then. It must be remembered that the workers at all our farms are so linked up through their unions that any change in wages made at one place is known at the others within a few days.<sup>78</sup>

The potential repercussions of any attempt to impose reductions in wages was still to the forefront of the department's considerations. However, under pressure from Finance, and indeed some of its management at the institutions in question, it was clear by March 1923 that the department had decided to override the threat of strike action. Wages at Athenry, Ballyhaise and Clonakilty were to be reduced in most cases by a considerable 10s. per week in two phases between June and September. A minute from McAuliffe, who represented the department on the interdepartmental wages committee, clearly reveals that not all members of Agriculture were enthusiastic proponents of such sweeping cuts:

...the Treasury ordered reductions of a drastic nature to be made. The cut in wages is excessive in a number of cases, but I consider the procedure adopted in applying the reductions is even more serious, and likely to create disorganisation at the department's agricultural stations.<sup>79</sup>

In view of the certainty that strikes would erupt should the second phase of the reductions proceed in September, at the height of the harvesting season, Finance agreed

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Minute to the assistant secretary, 6 Nov. 1922 (AGI/A11668/23).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> McAuliffe to J.R. Campbell and the minister for Agriculture, 23 Jun. 1923 (AGI/A12475/23).

to suggestions from Agriculture that the second cut be postponed until November, after the harvest had been saved.<sup>80</sup>

The ITGWU were absolutely outraged by the government's action in seeking wage reductions on its farms. Agriculture was accused of adopting 'a policy of savaging down the wages' of its 'employees (whose work is more skilled than that of ordinary farm workers) to the lowest standard of living'.<sup>81</sup> The ITGWU proceeded to attempt to defer the second wage cut from November to January. In letters to the department at the beginning of October they warned that serious unrest would result from the implementation of the second cut in November:

...in face of the fact that they are skilled agricultural workers of long experience seems to gall them into a condition of mind which, as far as we can see, will render it extremely difficult for us to avert a collapse of our control over them.<sup>82</sup>

Implicit in this argument was the by now almost customary inference on the part of the union that should their demands not be met, it could not guarantee any control over the resulting disorder which would probably ensue on the part of the workers. And while the department did take this threat seriously, to the extent that it contacted the managers of the agricultural stations in question, it was generally determined to proceed with the reductions. For instance, in the case of Clonakilty, the reductions sought would reduce wages from 40s. to 30s. The ITGWU claimed that the rate paid by local employers of union labour in Clonakilty was from 36s. to 40s., with only 30s. per week paid by small

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<sup>80</sup> Agriculture to Ledwith, manager of Athenry Agricultural Station and captain McCarthy, manager of Clonakilty Agricultural Station, 6 Sep. 1923 (AGI/A12475/23).

<sup>81</sup> Tom Foran, ITGWU to the secretary, Agriculture, 7 Sep. 1923 (AGI/A11668/23).

<sup>82</sup> Foran to secretary, 3 Oct. 1923 (AGI/A11668/23)

farmers to non-union labour.<sup>83</sup> In response to two separate enquiries from the department, the manager of Clonakilty Agricultural Station, captain McCarthy, claimed just after the first wage reduction in September had been effected that the local rates varied from 30s. to 40s., while in October, as the second reduction was imminent, he gathered evidence to suggest it was 24s.<sup>84</sup> The following reply to the department revealed that McCarthy was clearly more concerned with the interests of the local employers than the men under his care:

I may add that we are the 'laughing stock' of the country owing to the rate of wages paid to our men. It is quite unfair to the agricultural community here, this unnecessary inflation of the agricultural labour market.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, confirmation that the department was sufficiently content with his reports despite their inconsistencies was evidenced in its decision to proceed with the second wage cut in November. That the government proceeded to reduce the wages of state employees by such considerable amounts solely to tally with the levels paid by private employers was the first indication that the interests of the agricultural employer were paramount in the government's mind. Although the organised position of these workers had seriously impeded its action for most of 1922 and early 1923, the determination to override the threat of strike activity had definitely emerged by mid 1923. That such action on the part of the government would have ominous implications for all agricultural labourers became evident later that summer when the first native government intervened in a farm strike in Co. Waterford on the side of employing farmers.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Sep. 1923.

<sup>84</sup> McCarthy, Clonakilty Agricultural Station to the Agricultural branch, 3 Sep. 1923; 19 Oct 1923.

<sup>85</sup> McCarthy to Campbell, 19 Oct. 1923.

Like all strikes at this time the strike concerned was essentially defensive in nature, centring on the attempts of agricultural labourers to prevent the farmers in this county from reducing their wages.<sup>86</sup> Waterford farmers had sought to reduce their workers' wages from May 1921, an objective wholeheartedly resisted by the labourers who believed that whilst wage increases were unrealistic, reductions would threaten their status and standard of living.<sup>87</sup> Strikes launched to maintain the 1920 rates had been successful in May of 1921 and 1922. However the strike which began in May of 1923 operated under different conditions than had existed previously. This transformation was not effected by either of the parties to the strike, but by the government's partisan extension of the resources of the state to aid the farmers in the transport and movement of agricultural products.<sup>88</sup> Nor did military intervention end with the partisan use of the army. By the end of June, in fulfilment of an undertaking given to the IFU by the minister for Home Affairs, 600 members of the Special Infantry Corps, whose job was essentially to act as 'armed police' in the combat against agrarian irregularism, had made their presence felt in the county.<sup>89</sup>

The intervention of the military created an entirely different situation to that operating in 1922, effectively pitting the balance of power heavily in the farmers' favour.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the committed government backing, implicit in the intervention of the Corps, was a vital factor in bolstering the farmers' morale.<sup>91</sup> Its influence was evident in their rejection of

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<sup>86</sup> O'Connor 'Agrarian unrest', p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

attempts by the ITGWU to put the case to arbitration under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>92</sup> In declaring that they would only negotiate with labourers directly, the farmers clearly conveyed that this strike had been transformed from a dispute about wages and conditions into an offensive against the very existence of trade unionism in agriculture.<sup>93</sup> In December 1923, it was the ITGWU executive who finally decided to withdraw from the strike, claiming that it could no longer carry the burden of £1,500 per week dispute pay.<sup>94</sup> By this time the strike was entering its seventh month and had become very bitter taking on all the appearances of a microscopic civil war between the landed and the landless. With little sign of resolution during the harvest time, both sides were prepared for the strike to continue indefinitely. But the ITGWU had other ideas. Since agricultural labourers no longer constituted the bulk of its membership it decided to withdraw financial support for their cause.<sup>95</sup> No doubt the union executive was concerned that the declining wages of this class would once again make it impossible for them to maintain membership subscription which would give the union little return for the serious financial outlay involved in supporting strike pay. But by backing down from a strike with such principles at stake, this retreat by the ITGWU effectively signalled the collapse of trade unionism on the farm. Not only did it mark its collapse in Co. Waterford but its effects ricocheted throughout the country. For most labourers it meant that there would no longer be any question of bargaining or

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51 and p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>95</sup> O'Connor 'Agrarian unrest', p. 54.

negotiation on wages or conditions. They would once again be subjected to the unregulated wages and conditions set by individual employers.

There is no question but that the government played an unequivocal role in contributing to the destruction of trade unionism on the farm. Had it not extended full and sustained military backing to the farmers it was highly unlikely that defeat would have occurred at this stage, as strikes had been settled in Wicklow, Cork, Dublin, Meath and Louth earlier that year with little difficulty.<sup>96</sup> Yet their intervention was hardly surprising. Following the railway crisis of 1922 it became apparent that the employers' wage cutting offensive depended on the assistance of the state.<sup>97</sup> The implementation of the recommendations of the Carrigan Tribunal on this occasion, which supported employer demands for wage reductions and an extension of working hours, had only been postponed at the intervention of the state given the precarious political climate and the need to curb social unrest.<sup>98</sup> Following the general election of August 1923 the government had little need for restraint and refused to enter discussions with strikers when a plethora of disputes in sectors such as the docks and building trades erupted in the autumn.<sup>99</sup> An inauspicious end to the dockers strike that November signalled for industry and transport what the collapse of the Waterford strike signalled for agricultural labourers in December. The power of trade unionism had been broken. It was to have major implications for the benefits attained by all workers but for some more than others, especially the agricultural labourers.

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>97</sup> O'Connor, *A labour history of Ireland*, p. 110.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.



For instance, it would seem that the government's decisive action in the Waterford strike was not a spontaneous reaction to the conditions invoked by the strike. In November of the previous year it had appointed a commission to enquire into the causes of depression in agriculture, and to examine ways in which its future expansion and prosperity might be assured.<sup>100</sup> Completely excluded from the scope of the enquiry was the entire question of labour. For the government to disregard an issue that was so central to the stability of the industry and its future expansion was peculiar. For it to do so at a time of heightened unrest and agrarian agitation was ominous. It could mean only one thing. This issue was not considered germane to future agricultural policy in the Free State. Had the commission been permitted to investigate the question and thereupon make recommendations, the issue of relations between employer and employed or the reestablishment of statutory wage regulation may have become matters for serious consideration. The exclusion of the labour question had pre-empted the possibility of such likelihoods. This would suggest that even before the new government consolidated its power official policy on agricultural labour had been decided. The demands of agricultural labour would not be permitted to detract from the government's determination to secure the buoyancy of the agricultural sector. That this would have implications for the place of trade unionism in agriculture at this time was evidenced in the decisive action taken by the government during the Waterford strike of 1923. Its decisive intervention in support of the farmers through sustained military backing must be viewed as an unequivocal attempt to obliterate the effectiveness of this movement.

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 115-6.

<sup>100</sup> *Reports of the Commission on Agriculture* (Dublin, 1924).

Had trade unionism on the farm persisted it would have militated against the execution of any policy which sought to ignore the demands of labour in this sector. Such a contention suggests that the government was determined to remove all threats to agriculture by extracting those elements which were perceived to be confrontational, opportunistic and draining on the well-being of the farmer and hence of agriculture. Trade unionism on the farm was viewed as being the epitome of all these things.

Signs that the new government would not look favourably on agricultural trade unionism had been evident from the reaction of the Dáil government and the Irish Republican Army to the disruption caused by strikes during the war of independence and the civil war.<sup>101</sup> The increasing dependence on intimidation and agrarian violence for success in strikes had been especially condemned. At a time when the government was almost militant in its determination to restore stability to the country, this was a lethal combination which could not be condoned. By linking the power of trade unionism with agrarian agitation and the destruction of property, the agricultural labourers had therefore largely contributed to the destruction of their own movement. The ITGWU were equally culpable. Not only did they fail to remove this element from their organising endeavours from the outset, but they fuelled its existence by utilising the threat of lack of control over their men to frighten employers into making new agreements. The seriousness with which the latter practice was viewed can be ascertained from the comments of Kevin O'Higgins, minister for Home Affairs, when speaking in the Dáil in 1923. In referring to

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<sup>101</sup> Art O'Connor, 'A brief survey of the work done by the agricultural department from April 1919 to August 1921' in *Dáil Éireann 1919-1921*.

the inflammatory language of the *Voice of Labour*, the official mouthpiece of the ITGWU, he declared:

Personally, if I were in the farming line, and if in the early spring I was laying my plans for the year...if that journal were to fall into my hands occasionally, and if I took from it the general tone and outlook of organised labour in the country...I would consider it was questionable whether I would reap what I sowed or not, whether I would have a disastrous strike that would leave my produce caught by the weather, and if not caught by the weather, and if I had cut it in safety and got it into stooks, whether there might not be some disastrous spontaneous combustion that would leave things equally bad...<sup>102</sup>

The new Irish government was not alone in this aversion to the existence of trade union organisation in agriculture. As mentioned previously, the rapid organisation which occurred in Ireland in the later war years was not an isolated incident. Similar levels of unprecedented organisation in agriculture also took place in many European countries following the social unrest of 1919 and 1920, when trade union membership rose to exceptional levels in all areas.<sup>103</sup> These developments were the subject of much debate at the first post-war meeting of the International Institute of Agriculture, which was a forum on agricultural matters for representatives of governments, in Rome in November 1920. In the commitment to improved working conditions espoused under the negotiation of the peace treaties in the aftermath of the war, it was provided that the conditions of industrial workers should be subject to international regulation by the International Bureau of Labour (later to become the International Labour Organisation).<sup>104</sup> The Bureau subsequently proposed that the remit of such protection should also be extended to

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Daniel.G. Bradley, 'The organisation of agricultural labourers in Ireland 1900-1976', (MA thesis, University College, Cork, 1984), chapter 4.

<sup>103</sup> 'Collective agreements in agriculture' in *International Labour Office Studies and Reports, Series K (Agriculture)* no.11 (1933), p. 26.

<sup>104</sup> 'The representation and organisation of agricultural workers' in *International Labour Office Studies & Reports, Series K (Agriculture)* no. 8 (1928), p. 5.

include agricultural labourers.<sup>105</sup> This proposal sparked much debate among the delegates at the Rome meeting. It represented an ominous indication to most of just how extensive trade unionism in agriculture had become over the past few years. The major apprehension expressed related to those who formulated the demands of agricultural labour. Their non-agricultural basis led to suggestions that they did not understand the conditions of agricultural work, and therein lay the danger for agriculture.<sup>106</sup> The person to chiefly profess this view happened to be none other than T.P. Gill, whom on this occasion acted as delegate for Great Britain and Ireland. He claimed that:

in his own experience-and he found that the same fact had been recognised by all the delegates at that Assembly- the greatest danger for agriculture at that moment consisted in the extraordinary ignorance as to agricultural life and work of the organisers of movements of the workers in the towns who were formulating agricultural labour demands. These organisers, however able they might be in other respects, had a tendency to carry the same ideas and the same systems into the sphere of agricultural labour as they were accustomed to in the case of labour in urban conditions.<sup>107</sup>

He felt that the demands for the regulation of labour on the farm had no true relation to the realities of agricultural life. In this connection he argued:

They thought of agricultural labour as being primarily a matter of wage-paid workers and of employers, whereas in agriculture, questions of the relations between paid workers and employers, of limitation of hours, of labour, and so on, occupied the very smallest and most negligible part of this problem. The fact was, in most of the countries of the world those who did the agricultural work were not wage earners, they were small proprietors.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> 'Report of the fifth general assembly of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome in november 1920' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, xxi, no. 1-2 (1921-2), p. 17.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> 'Report of the fifth general assembly of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome', p. 15.

The threat was perceived to lie not so much in the perception as in the potential of urban trade unionists to make non-agricultural related labour issues and demands matters of primary importance in agriculture. The outlandish nature of such a prospect was emphasised through the claim that only a fraction of the entire agricultural labour force was actually wage paid, and consequently such questions as concerned hired labour naturally had no relevance whatsoever for the majority of those engaged in agriculture.

Nevertheless, the potential strength of agricultural and urban labour combined had already been demonstrated in the proposals to apply international regulations to farm work. The suggestion that the responsibility for such issues on an international level be removed from the auspices of the International Institute of Agriculture and vested in the International Bureau of Labour based in Geneva, 'a body almost entirely inspired by urban labour', was perceived to have connotations of complete chaos for agriculture, as it was felt such issues would have been allowed to assume disproportionate significance.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, the general assembly of the institute felt so strongly in their opposition to these proposals that it resolved that the report of the debate should be specially published and sent to the ministers for agriculture and home affairs in every country.<sup>110</sup> The object of such an exercise was to call attention to what the general assembly considered 'the danger to agricultural production, of any endeavour to apply international regulations to farm-work at present, especially by a body dominantly concerned with urban and factory labour'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>111</sup> 'Report of the fifth general assembly of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome', p. 13.

There was no question but that the new Irish government subscribed wholeheartedly to the view that trade unionism in agriculture posed a threat to agricultural production. It had witnessed first hand the 'profound trouble to production' incurred by the actions of agricultural labourers during times not just of food shortage but of national struggle, as they held farmers to ransom at the point of production. Likewise their maximisation of the unstable political situation existing during the revolutionary years to advance their own ends had not been overlooked. Strikes in agriculture were regarded differently to those in other sectors. They were viewed far more gravely because of the threat they posed to the economic health of the nation.<sup>112</sup> The 'question of hunger', however, which had been the principal preoccupation of agricultural policy for many governments over this period in their quest to secure optimal food production, was irrelevant by the time the new Irish government acceded to power. Nonetheless, the buoyancy of agricultural production having been transformed into the engine of economic growth was still all important. That this government was not willing to allow the demands of labour to impair the drive for optimal agricultural production was revealed in its refusal to permit the Commission on Agriculture to even consider their interests, and subsequently in its involvement in breaking the power of trade unionism on the farm in the Waterford strike.

Even when strikes were at their most prevalent under the previous British administration, there was never any indication to suggest that such drastic measures would have been considered to immobilise the agitation of this class. For instance, in August 1919 prolonged strikes in South Kildare and in certain areas in Co. Meath led to speculation

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<sup>112</sup> 'Collective agreements in agriculture', p. 19.

that the government was going to intervene to support the farmers. The *Irish Independent* reported on 21 August 1919:

The rumour that the government intends to intervene and save the crop by outside labour is gaining credence and many farmers who would undoubtedly have settled long ago are simply holding out for a definite assurance one way or another on this point. A defeat of the labourers in Kildare would completely shatter the influence of the ITGWU in rural Ireland. On the other hand the strike committee claim that they have the full resources of the ITGWU with its members of 10,000 at their back and that the union is prepared to accept Kildare and Meath as the battleground for the settlement of this dispute which concerns the entire country.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly the repercussions of any partisan intervention by the government had been apparent to all just as the strikes were gaining momentum in 1919. Although it was expected that the British government would intervene at this time to put an end to the trade union agitation on Irish farms, it does not appear to have been a suggestion that was ever mooted at an official level, despite the onset of the Anglo Irish War. As previous evidence has shown, the approach at this stage was to promote better relations through voluntary conciliation. For instance, even though Gill had expressed reservations about the urban nature of trade union demands on agriculture, he publicly supported the need for representative bodies on both sides. In a speech delivered to the Irish Council of Agriculture in 1921, Gill had continued to reflect on the concerns voiced at the meeting of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome in 1920. In addressing the issue of relations between farmer and labourer he nonetheless expounded:

A...question of vital concern to the prosperity of agriculture and rural life is that of labour. This question requires careful and sympathetic handling. Farmers and labourers are now joining their respective unions, and it is well that it should be so. It gives an opportunity of bringing in the best and most moderate men, whose

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<sup>113</sup> Extract from the *Irish Independent*, 21 Aug. 1919 (AGI/A13029/21).

counsel and guidance in labour difficulties are of inestimable value. I would like these two essential classes who are concerned with the land to set before their minds the idea of settling this question between themselves.<sup>114</sup>

Despite his qualms about the proposal under consideration, Gill encourages both sides to come together in their organised capacities to address this and others issues. In this regard he counselled:

labourers must not drive too hard or unsuitable a bargain. At the same time their rights must be properly recognised. They must receive adequate pay and reasonable relaxation at times and seasons suited to the type of farming and the classes of work on which they are engaged. With a little good will on both sides it should be perfectly possible to arrive at a satisfactory arrangement, and it is desirable that all moderate men on both sides should work to this end. Everything depends on the right state of feeling.<sup>115</sup>

It was evident from this and earlier addresses that Gill was genuinely interested in the welfare of both the farmer and the labourer, still viewing their interests to be both synonymous and symbiotic. The ideal solution was held to lie within the scope of both groups since they were principally concerned with the prosperity of their industry and hence their own well being. He sought to encourage the organisations to resolve problems as issues for settlement between the farmer and labourer, rather than involving any outside influence.<sup>116</sup> His reservations related to the urban influence on the formulation of labour demands, not the principle of organisation itself or indeed the labourer per se. Unfortunately for the agricultural labourer, however, the first native government made no attempt to distinguish between the two. Nor did it view the interests of farmers and labourers to be synonymous, indeed quite the contrary. The importance

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<sup>114</sup> T.P. Gill, 'An address to the Council of Agriculture' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, xx, no.1 (1920-1), p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*



with which it viewed the landholders of Ireland can be gauged from the magnitude of the debt the new state was willing to incur to complete the process of land purchase, a sum which Patrick Hogan had estimated to be in the region of £30 million in May 1923.<sup>117</sup> While the destruction of trade unionism on the farm removed the threat of labour agitation to the development of the agricultural industry, this was not the end of the subjugation of this class's interests. The decision of the Free State government to view the overall prosperity of the economy to depend on agriculture, and the prosperity of agriculture to depend on the export market, was also to have major implications for the agricultural labourer.<sup>118</sup> That this was to be the case was first indicated in the Report of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee, published in 1923.

The Fiscal Inquiry Committee had been appointed, ostensibly, to examine the whole question of introducing tariff protection to foster the development of industry. However, in claiming that 'agriculture is and must be for a long time the principal Irish industry', its conclusions served only to affirm the subordination of industrial development to the demands of the all important agricultural sector.<sup>119</sup> For instance, in rejecting the proposal to introduce protective tariffs it was their supposed reverberations on agriculture that was clearly the deciding consideration:

Agricultural pursuits absorb the greatest volume of Irish capital and labour, and the effect upon their interests must be considered as of paramount importance in estimating the result of any proposal to protect Irish industry.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Dooley, 'The land for the people', pp 57-8.

<sup>118</sup> K.A. Kennedy, T. Giblin and D. McHugh, *The economic development of Ireland in the twentieth century* (London, 1988), p. 34.

<sup>119</sup> *Final report of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee* (Dublin, 1923), p. 42.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The significance of this point lies not only in that it confirmed industry's relegation to second place after agriculture, but in its relevance for the agricultural labourer.<sup>121</sup> In the process of disparaging the desirability of introducing these tariffs, the report emphasised on several occasions that their imposition would have tended to increase money wages and that this in turn would have led to greater costs of production, or rather costs of labour:

This tendency to higher wages will affect the cost of labour not merely in the protected industries, but even in such industries as do not receive protection, and in particular in agriculture. The cost of production being thus enhanced, the cost of the exported article will increase, to the detriment of the industry in competition with its foreign rivals....The great bulk of Irish exports are agricultural products. If the wages of the agricultural labourer rise the cost of the products of agriculture will rise with them, to the detriment of the sale of these products in external markets.<sup>122</sup>

Evidently, it was the supposed effect which the introduction of tariffs would have on agricultural wages that was chiefly opposed. Opposition on these grounds had also found expression earlier in the report when it was declared that 'protective duties designed to aid other industries would probably raise the cost of living and compel the farmer to pay higher wages'.<sup>123</sup> Obviously these views had serious implications for agricultural labour. For the committee to equate any increase in the wages of the latter with significant reverberations on the farmers' export of agricultural products was to effectively suggest that such increases were at odds with the interests of the farmer and consequently the agricultural industry. It was held that since agriculture was the economic basis of the state and it depended upon exports for its well being, then it was essential that farmers'

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<sup>121</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: politics and society* (Great Britain, 1989), p. 119.

<sup>122</sup> *Report of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee*, p. 54.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

costs be kept low. The pronouncement of a definite negative correlation between agricultural wages and farmers' costs meant that a reduction in these costs essentially meant a reduction in labourers' wages, and not just in the short term. This report effectively suggested that the interests of the agricultural labourer in the new state were directly at odds with the interests of the farmer and the rest of the community.

The publication of the report of the Commission on Agriculture in April 1924 did not challenge these assumptions. When the Commission came to presenting its final report on the aims of agricultural production, the views expressed were so sharply divergent that it had been obliged to publish two separate reports, one supported by the majority and the other by a minority. Signed by the chairman J.P. Drew, Professor of Agriculture in UCD, the economist George O'Brien and the farmer representatives, the majority report upheld the inclination of the native government to view the interests of the farming community as vital, and the maximisation of their income as the necessary precondition of general prosperity.<sup>124</sup> Offered as 'most convincing proof of this fact' was the estimate that farm produce accounted for 68 per cent of exports from the country in 1922. This compared to exports of 15 per cent for manufactured goods and 13 per cent for drinks and tobacco.<sup>125</sup> Agriculture was accordingly claimed to be 'the foundation on which the commercial and business life of the country' was based, with the 'circumstances that affect agriculture' reacting 'sensibly through the entire economic life of the nation'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 523.

<sup>125</sup> *Reports on Agriculture*, p. 26.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

The minority report, compiled by Michael Duffy and Thomas Johnson of the Labour Party, sharply dissented from this view. It criticised the majority report for its tendency 'to view agriculture and all the operations connected therewith as a means of making money, and to test the prosperity of agriculture by the amount of the balance at the end of a period lying to the credit of the farmer'.<sup>127</sup> They were adamant that when it came to a great national resource like the land, individual self interest should have been subordinated to the national welfare which required that the soil be made to give the largest return in production.<sup>128</sup> While both reports shared this objective, they sharply diverged in their views as to the type of agriculture best suited in this regard. For instance, the tendency of the Free State government to favour the type of agriculture which Ireland had shown itself to have the greatest comparative advantage, namely the raising of dry cattle, was endorsed by the majority.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand it was their opinion that no form of tillage was a paying proposition at that time with the exception of crops for consumption on the farm by cows, pigs, poultry, etc. In this connection it was submitted that 'while the tillage operations taken separately may lose, the whole farm working may prove profitable'. Referring to hired labour in this regard it was expounded:

Casual labour is never satisfactory and often unobtainable. If permanent men are kept, a proportion of tillage makes the problem of management much easier, because it affords not only a more varied occupation but a more even labour load factor. It is an undoubted fact that a percentage of the land of certain farms could be broken, without any increase in the permanent labour bill of those farms, by a better organisation of work. Frequently, even if all tillage were abandoned, the same staff would have to be retained to carry out feeding, milking and other day

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

to day services. In such cases, the greater production which the tillage affords means a larger turnover, and, consequently, reduced overhead charges.<sup>130</sup>

This mentality was at great variance with that of the minority report, which claimed:

...land well tilled produces greater national wealth than the same land under grass. It does not follow, however, that tillage pays the individual farmer better than grazing. The wealth that is produced by the tillage farmer is shared by the nation as a whole. As compared with grazing, tillage provides a livelihood for farm workers and helps to make a livelihood for traders, shopkeepers, artisans, manufacturers, carriers and so forth.<sup>131</sup>

Interestingly, these comments were the sentiments of none other than J.R. Campbell, assistant secretary to the Department of Agriculture, who further expanded:

Let me illustrate this by taking the case of a farm of (say) 350 acres, of average quality in a country district. Under grass this farm will provide employment for perhaps a couple of men, and the outlay would be chiefly confined to the purchase of feed stuffs...If one third of this holding were put under a rotation of usual crops it would employ five to six times the number of farm workers required to run it as a grazing farm, while the employment for artisans and traders would be very considerable.

These sentiments were obviously in marked contrast to those of the majority who recommended against the cultivation of tillage except for domestic purposes. Even at that, tillage was viewed only as a useful method of optimising hired labour on the farm to maximise agricultural production, thereby offsetting to a degree the costs of such labour. As the above comment would indicate, the majority report tended to view labour and agriculture solely in terms of profit, without taking the wider picture into account. The livelihood of the agricultural labourer was of minor consideration when the economic prosperity of the greater community was at issue. The minority report however was

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<sup>130</sup> *Reports on Agriculture*, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

totally opposed to the 'increase in cattle at the expense of men'.<sup>132</sup> Condemning the policy approved by the majority it proclaimed:

The inducement to revert to the raising and grazing of cattle for export alive comes from the fact that it is a branch of the industry by which more money has been made with less care, less labour and less risk. But the loss to the community, due to the decline of tillage and of the rural population, more than offsets the advantages that individual enrichment and a leisurely life may bring.<sup>133</sup>

They were convinced that the prosperity of agriculture and the national welfare would depend upon promoting an increase in the acreage under the plough. They therefore recommended that rates on pasture land be increased and that the state guarantee a minimum price for limited quantities of wheat, a measure which might have led to the reintroduction of a minimum wage for the agricultural labourer.<sup>134</sup> While concurring with the majority in recommending reforms in breeding policies and in marketing, both matters on which the fortunes of the export trade depended, they refused to give any priority to that trade.<sup>135</sup> Notwithstanding these sentiments the future of Free State policy not only on agriculture, but on economic and social development generally, was to be based on the report of the majority committee.<sup>136</sup> That this was to have implications for the agricultural labourer was obvious firstly in the committee's recommendation against the provision of direct aid to farmers. The mentality of the majority in this regard was revealed in their inclusion of a quotation by Edmund Burke:

To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of government...The people maintain them, and not they the people. It is in the power of government

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>134</sup> James Meenan, *The Irish economy since 1922* (Liverpool, 1970), p. 95.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> O'Connor, 'Agrarian unrest', p. 47.

to prevent much evil, and it can do very little positive good in this or perhaps anything else.<sup>137</sup>

It was considered 'the overwhelming stimulus for betterment' would only 'come from voluntary effort, collective and individual, on the part of the people themselves'.<sup>138</sup> Opposition to the granting of direct assistance through tariffs, subsidies or guaranteed prices was based on the view that ultimately the costs of this support would come out of the pockets of the farming community itself. It was claimed that since no relief could be obtained by shifting the burden onto other industries, 'agriculture must find its salvation from within or perish'.<sup>139</sup> Since the guarantee of a minimum wage had in the past been linked with price guarantees for grain for the farmer, the discouragement of the latter was unlikely to enhance the prospects of intervention on wages.

Moreover, any hopes of acquiring land as a substitute for wages that the labourers might have nursed through the war and revolutionary years were also decisively quenched by the majority report. While much of the east and south east had been riddled by agricultural labour agitation in the years preceding independence, other parts of Ireland, especially the west and south west, had been seething with land related agrarian unrest. Emigration had fallen off during the war years and many young landless men, mainly the sons of small farmers and the owners of uneconomic holdings, had clamoured for land.<sup>140</sup> In this regard the land act of 1923 was very much a measure to secure agrarian peace.<sup>141</sup> There still remained about 100,000 tenants on about 3 million acres as well as many large

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<sup>137</sup> *Reports on Agriculture*, p. 27.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

untenanted estates which were poorly managed.<sup>142</sup> By defining small holdings as those on which the owner or occupier worked mainly with the aid of his family, and large holdings as those on which a substantial proportion of paid labour was employed, the majority report equated tillage farming with the small farm and grass farming with the larger farm. By a process of deduction it conveyed its stance on land distribution to agricultural labourers as follows:

Grave risk of loss to the state will be incurred if land is allotted to persons...whose previous experience has been merely on grass farms...must be drawn from men and from families in whom the habits of industry and hard work attaching to tillage farming have been strongly implanted....We would strongly deprecate the allotment of land to persons merely because they are contiguous to the land to be divided...<sup>143</sup>

The inference was clear. In recommending against extending the provisions of the land act to include people merely contiguous to the land to be divided, it was targeting agricultural labourers most of whom would also have worked on grass farms. But perhaps the worst ramification of the majority report for the labourer was its failure to remark on the significance of the exclusion of the labour question from the ambit of its enquiry until the very end:

We have, moreover, been restricted in our discussion by the exclusion from the terms of reference of the question of the relations between employers and employed, without a consideration of which it is extremely difficult to reach any satisfactory conclusion on many of the problems which it was our duty to examine.<sup>144</sup>

Its neglect to acknowledge the centrality of this question to agricultural problems until the concluding paragraph of its final report served only to undermine the importance of

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<sup>142</sup> D. Hoor, *The department's story – a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 1971), p. 137.

<sup>143</sup> *Reports on Agriculture*, p. 35.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



this pronouncement. From the outset the commission had remarked on how ‘the wide and comprehensive scope’ of its terms of reference indicated the far-reaching importance of agriculture in the Free State.<sup>145</sup> Had they really sought to convey the importance of the labour question to agriculture they would surely have qualified their terms of commendation then, rather than when concluding the report. Because the commission failed to sufficiently question the importance of the exclusion of this question for agriculture, the government was effectively able to continue disregarding the interests of this class. It did not help their cause that the two most senior officials in Agriculture, T.P. Gill and J.R. Campbell, both of whom had been at least sympathetic to their plight down through the years, retired in 1923 and 1924 respectively. As subsequent chapters will reveal, their departure marked the arrival of a mentality which evinced little consideration for advancing the interests of the agricultural labourer.

Even had the commission urged the government to give this issue greater consideration, the likelihood was that it would have been of little consequence. It was clear from a memorandum issued to government in January 1924 that Patrick Hogan, the minister for Agriculture, had already formulated his policy before the commission had published its report.<sup>146</sup> Anticipating the views of the majority committee on the aims of agricultural production, Hogan announced that ‘national development in Ireland, for our generation at

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>146</sup> Patrick J. Hogan was minister for Lands and Agriculture 1922–1932. He was the lawyer son of a senior Land Commission official. He died tragically in a car accident in 1936.

least, is practically synonymous with agricultural development'.<sup>147</sup> In this regard he argued:

If 75 per cent of exports from the Free State are farm produce, it may be assumed that at least 75 per cent of the wealth produced in the country is farm produce. These figures show that so far as the Free State is concerned, any depression in agriculture is serious, and if farmers went out of production to any large extent it would not only be serious, but disastrous.<sup>148</sup>

In establishing whether agriculture was paying, the minister argued that the question could be approached from two points of view. The first was overhead charges and the second the price of agricultural produce. That the position of the labourer in Free State policy was viewed as nothing more than a source of cost to the farmer was confirmed when Hogan included the labourers' wages in the farmers' overhead charges along with rents, rates, freights and the cost of agricultural plant implements, feeding stuffs and fertilisers. In calculating the average agricultural wage per week as a source of cost to the farmer, he forwarded an initial figure of about 25s. including perquisites. However, conceding that it was extremely difficult to strike an average he reconsidered this figure:

the average agricultural wage would be even less than 25/-; it would be nearer to £1. This would leave the index figure for the agricultural labourer between 60 and 80 per cent, while the cost of living figure is 80, that is to say, the agricultural labourer is on the border line. Wages do not affect, however, to any great extent the very small farmer - himself and his family do the work. In fact, they do not affect seriously the position of the 30 or 40 acre farmer. They do not affect the position of any farmer under 50 acres, especially if he tills his land and is endeavouring to increase production<sup>149</sup>

Notwithstanding the obvious implications of this low wage for the labourer, the minister immediately discarded its relevance for anyone other than the farmer. In this respect it

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<sup>147</sup> Minister for Agriculture memorandum for government, 'An analysis of the economic aspect of agriculture in the Irish Free State', 25 Jan. 1924 (S 3557).

was almost ruefully acknowledged that these low wages would in fact have no relevance for most farmers. This admission aside, it soon became evident that the minister was not preoccupied with the interests of the average farmer, but with the remaining 30 per cent. Since that was the minority which actually employed hired labour, the repercussions for the agricultural labourer were obvious:

The farmer who employs one labourer pays him £62 a year. Compare the payment of such a farmer, say a farmer of 50 acres, with the payments he makes in respect of either rents or rates. Rent would be about £35; rates would be about £20. The farmer who employs two, three or four labourers is in a different case. There is no comparison between his charges for labour and his charges for rent and rates, even though he is only paying a wage to his labourers which leaves them at a pre-war standard of living.<sup>150</sup>

Confirmation of the decline in the standard of wage received by the agricultural labourer within a year of the government's advance to power exists here on two occasions. The first indicated that their wages had been on the verge of dropping below the cost of living index, the second that wages had deteriorated to pre-war standards. On neither occasion was concern expressed for the labourer's deteriorating economic position. On the contrary, wages were still viewed to be insufficiently low to meet the needs of the less numerous, but all important larger farmer:

However, no more than 60 or 70 per cent of farmers employ more than one labourer, and hence from the point of view of the Industry as a whole, labour is not such a serious item of overhead expense as one might suppose. As I said, however, the larger farmer is in a totally different case. It is a serious item for him. As far as 30 per cent of farmers are concerned they will employ less than half their normal quota of labour and their production will fall off about one-third.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> 'An analysis of the economic aspect of agriculture in the Irish Free State', 25 Jan. 1924 (S 3557)

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

Obviously the primacy attached to agricultural production rendered such an outcome very undesirable. The minister was not so concerned about the smaller farmer because it was felt he would pull through given his lower overheads. However, it was submitted that the situation was somewhat worse for the larger farmer, and hence for the economy if the depression in agriculture persisted:

The big farmer is in a very serious position. While the small farmer may not decrease his production to any great extent, the big farmer will and must decrease his production. He can only do a very small proportion of the work himself. He cannot afford to pay labour; he cannot afford to buy the necessary implements and machinery; he has not educational or organisational ability sufficient to enable him to make a really intelligent use of machinery, or to organise his industry with a view to the comparatively speaking, high labour rates, freights and prices of fertilisers and feeding stuffs.<sup>152</sup>

In this regard it was the difference between what the farmer paid for purchases he could not produce, such as clothes, sugar, household requisites etc., and the prices he received for his own produce that was perceived to underscore his poor income:

at least 75 per cent of the real wealth produced within the country is agricultural produce, and that while the cost of living figure is 80 and the index figure for what the farmer buys to produce is between 80 and 100, the index figure for the price which he receives for his produce is between 40 and 45....This is a statement of fact, and reveals a state of affairs which undoubtedly constitutes the most serious and far reaching problem which the government is faced with.<sup>153</sup>

The potential consequences of the farmer's poor economic position for the wider community was stressed by Hogan who reminded the government that 'for almost a generation, national development in Ireland must mean, to at least 60 or 70 per cent, agricultural development'.<sup>154</sup> Since the buoyancy of agriculture was supposed to be

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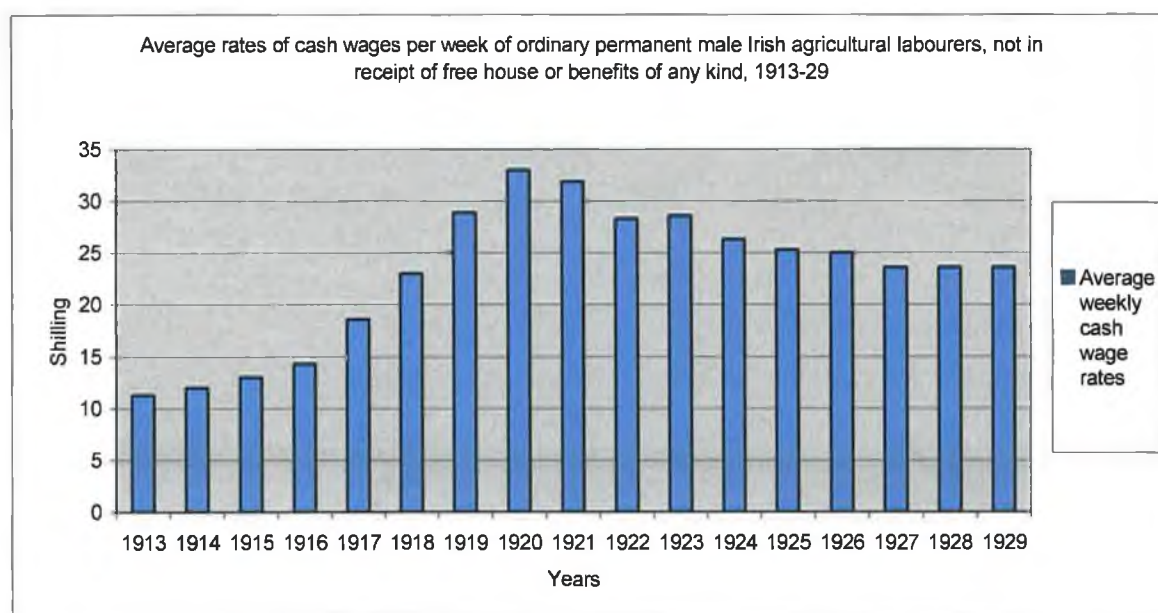
<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

reflected in the increased incomes of the farming community, and the farmers' profit was the difference between costs of production and selling prices, and selling prices were considered to be, in most cases, outside the control of the Free State government, policy became focused on reducing farmers' costs of production.<sup>155</sup> That this became synonymous with systematic wage reductions for the agricultural labourer became apparent over the subsequent decade. Figure 2.1 is instructive in this regard.

**Figure 2.1** Average rates of weekly cash wages for ordinary male agricultural labourers not in receipt of any benefits, 1913-29



Source: Director of Statistics memorandum to the secretary, Department of Agriculture, 26 Apr. 1930, p. 3. Figures based on returns received from the police 1913-19 and from crop reporters' returns 1920-29, (AGI/G2486/37).<sup>156</sup>

This figure illustrates the average rate of cash wages per week of ordinary permanent male agricultural labourers, not in receipt of allowances of any kind, in the period 1913–

<sup>155</sup> George O'Brien, 'Patrick Hogan' in *Studies*, 25 (September 1936), p. 358.

<sup>156</sup> For the years 1913 to 1918 inclusive the rates refer to persons of 18 years of age and upwards and for subsequent years to persons 20 years of age and upwards.

29.<sup>157</sup> The most striking features of this chart are the pronounced rise in wage levels in the period from 1917 to 1920 and their equally pronounced decline from 1921 to 1929. While the war time conditions had produced a slight increase from 1914 to 1916, it was the activities of the Irish Agricultural Wages Board combined with the impact of trade unionism which effected the dramatic rise from 1917 to 1920. Wages increased in leaps and bounds from a level of 14s. 3d. in 1916 to 28s. 9d. in 1919, peaking at 33s. by 1920. The marked decline in wages between 1921 and 1922 reflected the onset of depression, the Board's abolition, and the demands of employers for lower wages. Although there was a negligible increase in 1923, wages underwent persistent decline from 1924. It was no coincidence that such incessant decline began just as the first native government was consolidating its power. By 1927 the average wage levels of this class had dropped to a rate prevalent almost ten years previously, and hovered at that level until at least 1929.

Further illustration of this decline is evident from Table 2.2. Using 1925 as the base year, this table indicates the index numbers of average earnings during a week in July 1926-31 of permanent male adult agricultural labourers receiving purely cash wages. These figures in aggregate therefore indicate the decline in wages experienced by agricultural labourers over the period of the first independent government's administration.

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<sup>157</sup> For data on this chart see Table AII.1 in Appendix II.

**Table 2.2** Index numbers of average earnings during a week in July of permanent male agricultural labourers over 21 years who were not stated to have had free house or allowances of any kind, 1926-31

Week ended July	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
Index number July 1925=100	97.2	97.2	94.1	95.2	93.3	92.4

Source: *Statistical Abstract* 1934 (Dublin, 1934) table 56, p. 41.

While the incomes of farmers had also been subject to decline with for instance ‘the value of net output – the closest proxy for farm incomes at this time – being 5 per cent less in 1929/30 than in 1924/5’, it made little difference to the position of the agricultural labourer.<sup>158</sup> The circumstances of the average farmer had little impact on these workers given their employment mainly on larger farms, as acknowledged by Hogan in 1924. But in his determination to avoid placing burdens on the farming community, the minister was responsible for propounding another principle in his memorandum which would have lasting reverberations. This related to the wages of county council road workers, which were partly funded by the local government rates levied on agricultural land. A negative link between road and agricultural wages had been enunciated by farmers during the years immediately preceding the advent of native government. Rising road wages were blamed for the increasing cost of local authority rates and agricultural wages to the point that the agricultural community’s refusal to pay the rates had severely undermined local authority finances.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Kennedy *et al*, *The economic development of Ireland*, p. 37.

<sup>159</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), pp 81-8.

It was hardly surprising therefore that Hogan, in alluding to the fact that there had been a 150 to 200 per cent increase in the rates burden since before the First World War, made special criticism of road workers' wages:

There is further the fact - and this is a very bitter cause of complaint with the farmers - that these exorbitantly high rates are used to pay labour on the roads a wage which is out of all proportion to the agricultural wage in the district. Co. Dublin farmers are paying the agricultural wage of 45/-. The wage paid to road workers is 53/-, and the farmers allege that not only is this wage keeping up the wage of agricultural labour, but that when their men go on strike they get temporary employment on the roads at 53/-. This state of affairs must be altered, and I am very strongly of the opinion that some relationship must be established between agricultural wages and wages to road workers.<sup>160</sup>

The logic was that since the farming community contributed greatly to the funding of local government services through the payment of rates and thus indirectly to the wages of road workers, the payment to the latter of wages in excess of the local agricultural wage inadvertently raised their own labour costs, in addition to inducing a drift from agriculture to road work where better wages prevailed. Hence the need to correlate the road workers' wage with the local agricultural wage. However, by 1926 it was clear that not only had 'some relationship' been established between the wages of these groups, but that this practice had also extended to include other rural workers in state employment. In October of that year the interdepartmental wages advisory committee recommended that:

agricultural labourers in government employment should be paid the local agricultural rate, and road labourers, drainage labourers and forestry labourers the local agricultural rate plus a differential in each case related to the extent to which the work of these classes is superior to, or more onerous than, the work of agricultural labourers.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> 'An analysis of the economic aspect of agriculture in the Irish Free State', 25 Jan. 1924 (S 3557).

<sup>161</sup> Minutes of an interdepartmental wages advisory committee meeting, 2 Apr. 1935 (SR 48/32, Part I).



Although this link was established with the farming community in mind, this recommendation was also directed towards utilising the agricultural wage as a means of effecting further reductions in government expenditure on rural employment. However, this practice was considerably impeded by the statistics available to the interdepartmental wages committee, which had the responsibility of guiding the various departments in this matter. In forming its recommendations the committee had followed the principle of basing wages for the different types of labour in country districts on the average wages paid to agricultural labourers in each county, as disclosed by returns furnished by the statistical branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce.<sup>162</sup> This policy gave rise to difficulties from the outset. For instance, when the committee made its first attempts to establish this principle in late 1925 it proposed that all wages paid by Agriculture at its various stations, including the forestry branches, be reduced to the scales returned by the statistical branch.<sup>163</sup> This proposal aroused the opposition of Agriculture who objected to using these returns as the basis for wage cuts on the grounds of their inaccuracy.

Until 1919 data on agricultural wages was based on returns received from police enumerators. From 1920 this data was based on information supplied in the returns received from the crop reporters.<sup>164</sup> These were agricultural instructors and overseers who originally supplied voluntary reports of crop conditions to the Department of Agriculture. At the beginning of each year these individuals would visit farms in each of four to six different districts in their counties, which were considered fairly typical of the

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<sup>162</sup> Minutes of an interdepartmental wages advisory committee meeting, 2 Apr. 1935 (SR 48/32, Part I).

<sup>163</sup> McAuliffe to Smith, 7 Nov. 1926 (AGI/G3270/26).

<sup>164</sup> Director of Statistics to secretary, Agriculture, 26 Apr. 1930 (AGI/2486/37).

farms in the particular district, and make enquiries as to wages paid to agricultural labourers during the preceding year.<sup>165</sup> From May 1925 the statistical branch, in conjunction with Agriculture and the commissioner of the Garda Síochána, began to use the Gardai to gather information on agricultural wage rates for a certain week in July of each year.<sup>166</sup> This initially involved Gardai furnishing particulars for two labourers paid weekly and one labourer paid half yearly in each district electoral division.<sup>167</sup> The two systems coexisted until 1930 when due to the decline in the number of crop reporters it was decided to use only the Gardai for data collection.<sup>168</sup>

The Garda returns were generally considered to be much superior to any method previously used.<sup>169</sup> Whatever its merits in recording rates on a national level, where the average figures were considered to be 'reasonably' accurate, a major shortcoming was that it failed to 'measure reliably' changes in county or provincial rates.<sup>170</sup> While it was considered that the number of returns received were insufficiently numerous to facilitate the collation of reliable statistics of wage rates in some counties, the crux of the problem was the excessive variation in wage rates across each county.<sup>171</sup> Those agricultural labourers employed near the towns and on large farms were usually returned as receiving wages very much higher than the average for the county.<sup>172</sup> On the other hand a number

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<sup>165</sup> Circular to the agricultural instructors, Nov. 1923 (AGI/2486/37).

<sup>166</sup> Hooper, Statistics to McAuliffe, Agriculture, 11 May 1925; Statistics to secretary, Agriculture, 10 Sep. 1925.

<sup>167</sup> Director of Statistics to secretary, Agriculture, 17 Nov. 1933.

<sup>168</sup> Barry, Statistics to secretary, Agriculture, 8 Jan. 1931.

<sup>169</sup> Statistics to Agriculture, 11 Jan. 1931.

<sup>170</sup> Departmental memorandum, 17 Nov. 1933.

<sup>171</sup> Director of Statistics to secretary, Agriculture, 30 Oct. 1935.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1932.

of very low rates were also returned especially in the more remote districts.<sup>173</sup> For this reason, the statistics branch had been adamant that the annual county figures returned by the Gardai could not be used for publication. Although five yearly weighted averages were occasionally published in the Irish Trade Journal, in general, publication was confined to averages for the provincial and national data.<sup>174</sup>

Hence the Department of Agriculture's concern over basing wage reductions on the county returns. A departmental note on 8 December 1926 echoed this view, stating that it would appear to 'be extremely difficult to deduce from Garda returns any sound criteria for adjusting wages at the department's institutions and forestry centres'.<sup>175</sup> That officials were concerned with the likely ramifications of such a proposal for labour unrest was illustrated in the statement below:

The view hitherto laid down by the interdepartmental committee was that we may pay rates of wages at our schools and institutions as high as any individual farmer in the district in which the schools and institutions are situated, pays for agricultural work. Do I understand that this basis is to be disallowed and that our wages in future are to be calculated on the average rates in the districts? If so I may say at once that there will be trouble.<sup>176</sup>

That the existing policy had already caused sufficient tension was further evidenced in a minute to the secretary of the department, F.J. Meyrick, on 15 December:

It is bad enough to have to give rise to considerable friction and trouble at our various institutions and forestry centres through reductions of existing wages, but to do so on insufficient data would be doubly unfortunate.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Director of Statistics to secretary, Agriculture (AGI/2486/37).

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Apr. 1930, p.6; 15 Sep. 1930; 12 Sep. 1931.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1926.

<sup>176</sup> Walsh to Smith, 11 Dec. 1925.

<sup>177</sup> Minute to the secretary, 15 Dec. 1925.

So opposed were Agriculture to this proposal that they convinced the committee at its next meeting of the inaccuracy of the returns, thus preventing the implementation of the latter's recommendations.<sup>178</sup> While the committee annually referred to these county returns and made recommendations for reductions in the wages of rural labourers employed by government departments in subsequent years, it never made recommendations specific to the county agricultural rates. Instead it used them as a guide with which to ascertain the general decline in wages, making a more all round recommendation based on these findings. For instance, in 1926 the committee noted that the returns for that year recorded a fall in agricultural wages of from 1s. to 4s. per week throughout the Saorstát.<sup>179</sup> Accordingly, it recommended that government wages to labourers employed in rural districts be adjusted by all round deductions of 1s. per week.<sup>180</sup> But in attempting to carry out its function even the committee admitted that the returns available to it severely hampered this process:

In some counties the proportion of true agricultural labourers is very small and in these cases the statistics branch figures for the average weekly earnings of agricultural labourers cannot be regarded as representative of reliable rates, and the committee feel that in such cases it is undesirable that the wages of workers on government schemes should be based on average figures which, by reason of the small proportion of true agricultural labourers in the county are necessarily removed from reality. Also, anomalies have arisen in many cases where government works, such as drainage schemes, have been in progress in close proximity but in different counties, and different rates of pay have been applied to the same class of work within a small area.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Minute to the secretary, 15 Dec. 1925 (AGI/2486/37).

<sup>179</sup> McAuliffe to Smith, 30 Oct. 1926.

<sup>180</sup> Minutes of interdepartmental wages advisory committee meeting, 2 Apr. 1935.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

So while the first Free State government was responsible for enunciating a policy which sought to subject rural wages to the vicissitudes of the agricultural wage as standard practice, rural workers were actually protected from substantial reductions because of the drawbacks of the government's data collection system.<sup>182</sup> Agricultural labourers had no such protection, however, and were completely vulnerable to the whims of their employers as evidenced in their constantly dwindling wages over this period.

The most blatant sign that the first native government had decided to disregard the interests of agricultural labourers during the period of its administration was its failure to re-establish a system of statutory wage regulation similar to that operating between 1917 and 1921. This neglect was accentuated by the steps taken in England and Wales to maintain some form of wage regulation for this class. For instance, notwithstanding that the introduction of the wages board system had originally been a war time expedient, a fact that was confirmed with its abolition in 1921, and the subsequent attempts at local voluntary conciliation in these countries, the British government had deemed it necessary to re-establish statutory regulation in 1924 to ensure agricultural labourers received a decent minimum wage.<sup>183</sup> This possibility was never considered by the Free State government. Apart from its association with the rise of trade unionism on the farm, and the government's aversion to state intervention, it would have been completely at odds with a policy which sought to avoid placing burdens on the larger, export oriented farmer. Moreover, with the links now established between agricultural and other rural state wages, it would have been contrary to its attempts to keep government expenditure

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<sup>182</sup> See Table AII.2 in Appendix II for data on road workers wages during the period 1924-32.

down. Consequently, notwithstanding the benefits attained in the period 1917 to 1922, the fortunes of the agricultural labourer were considerably reversed in the period after the advent of independent government.

That the repercussions of native government were just as drastic for many of the weaker groups in Irish society at this time must also be acknowledged. However this class lost more than monetary gain. They lost the opportunity afforded by trade unionism to acquire a stake in their country for the first time ever. Combined with the failure to re-establish a wage board system the new government ensured that any vestiges of the empowerment which trade unionism had presented to this class on a social, political and economic level were completely obviated. Following its election in 1932 the subsequent Fianna Fáil government were to considerably redress the interests of many of the weaker groups which had fared so badly under the Cumann na nGaedheal administration. It remains to be established how they proceeded to deal with agricultural labour, whether they would redress or institutionalise a neglect initiated by the first Free State government.

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<sup>183</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924* (14 & 15 Geo.V, c. 37 [UK]) 7 Aug. 1924.

## Chapter III

### One Step Forward Two Steps Back

The state pledges itself to safeguard with especial care the economic interests of the weaker sections of the community...<sup>1</sup>

Fianna Fáil acceded to power in March 1932 with a slender majority dependent upon the support of the Labour Party. Having espoused self sufficiency as the cure to the country's demographic and economic problems, its election heralded the likelihood of change for many spheres of government policy. By immediately declaring its intention to withhold the half yearly land annuity repayments due under the Irish land acts and consequently risking the wrath of the British government so early in its tenure, it was clear that this administration meant business.<sup>2</sup> Encouraged by the general global protectionist trend of the early 1930s, the determination to reduce dependence on the British market and to stimulate native industry was demonstrated in the introduction of almost forty three new duties in its first budget.<sup>3</sup> The provision for increases in housing grants, old age pensions, and pensions for the blind, suggested that this was a government with a conscience, intent on undoing some of the hardships incurred under the previous administration.<sup>4</sup> Focused on reducing the rural exodus which was decimating the countryside whilst mindful of the dangers unemployment posed at a time when the traditional outlet of emigration was restricted, the government increased expenditure on road works,

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<sup>1</sup> *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Dublin, 1937), Article 45(4)(1), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (Great Britain, 1971), p. 611.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (Great Britain, 2004), p. 360.

employment schemes and housing programmes.<sup>5</sup> This desire to preserve rural society was reflected most in the attempt to alter the structure of Irish agriculture to accommodate the greatest number of farm families on the land and to provide optimum agricultural employment. Steps were taken to reverse the practice of extensive farming by introducing legislation to promote an expansion in the amount of land under tillage and a reduction in the cattle herd. Guaranteed prices were given for crops such as wheat and beet.

Given such active commitment to conserving the 'rural character of the nation' and the extent of government intervention in agriculture and indeed elsewhere, the agricultural labourer was naturally optimistic that he too would benefit from the changes in policy.<sup>6</sup> This expectation had been fuelled by Fianna Fáil during its election campaign when it had pledged that a move towards self sufficiency in the country's requirements of wheat, oats and barley would increase the earnings of agricultural labourers as well as small farmers.<sup>7</sup> With statutory intervention through the provision of price guarantees being linked to the introduction of a minimum wage in 1917, the re-introduction of some such similar measure had been expected following Fianna Fáil's election. By this time Ireland was almost unique in European terms for the absence of some form of agricultural wage regulating mechanism. Systems of collective bargaining to survive since the First World

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<sup>5</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The buffer state: the historical roots of the Department of the Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Industrial development and Irish national identity 1922-1939* (Dublin, 1992), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland: nation and state* (Dublin, 1994), p. 60.



War existed in countries such as Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Germany, Scotland, Italy, Poland, Sweden and the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup>

In countries where collective agreements did not exist, other forms of action or regulation on something more than the individual basis prevailed. There was a statutory minimum wage system in England, Wales and Hungary, the industrial arbitration systems in Australia and New Zealand, and the working conditions established by local custom on the labour market in many districts in France.<sup>9</sup> However, another half decade would pass before agricultural labourers in Ireland would once again benefit from the provision of a guaranteed minimum wage. In the meantime, these workers bore the brunt of the effects of the economic war as their wages underwent renewed decline from 1932. Despite the long wait, the eventual concession of a guaranteed minimum wage under the Agricultural Wages Act 1936 would suggest that the dramatic policy departure pursued by the new government was genuinely extended to include the bona fide interests of the agricultural labourer. A review of the events surrounding the introduction of this measure and the legislation itself reveals a reality that was not so ideal.

Although Fianna Fáil's ascent to power marked a whole new era of statutory intervention and subvention, the decision to re-introduce wage fixing machinery to agriculture did not actually originate with the government itself. Instead this demand came jointly from the Irish Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party. Following the collapse of trade unionism in the farm strikes of 1923, trade unionists had generally given agricultural

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<sup>8</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol 174), 6 Jun. 1924, cols 1593-5; 'Collective agreements in agriculture' in *International Labour Office Studies and Reports, Series K (Agriculture)*, no.11 (1933), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

labourers a wide berth. Apart from the difficulties of organisation, their paltry wage levels meant that these workers could no longer afford to even subscribe to union membership making unions shirk the responsibility of effecting improvements in their wages. As the report of the ITGWU for 1932 stated:

In spite of all the relief and help given by the State and the generous encouragement of tillage by legislation, there was no appreciable increase in the employment of wage labour on farms during the year. The wages, too, of such labourers as are employed on the land have fallen so low that they provide these workers with a very miserable existence indeed. For these reasons the union has been compelled to discourage organisation amongst these workers, recognising that their position would not enable them to maintain continuous membership.<sup>10</sup>

However, by 1933 trade unions were becoming increasingly concerned over the repercussions of low agricultural wages for their own members. Though agricultural wages in most provinces had shown signs of increasing slightly between 1930 and 1931, they underwent renewed decline between 1931 and 1933. Average wages in Munster declined from 25s. to 22s. 9d., with wages in Ulster declining from 22s. to 20s. 6d. and in Connacht from 22s. 6d. to 21s. 3d.. Wages in Leinster on the other hand, which had been falling since 1930, declined from 24s. 6d. in 1931 to 22s. 3d. in 1933.<sup>11</sup> As agricultural labourers flocked to the towns and cities seeking better paid employment, the surplus demand concomitantly reduced the competitiveness of non-agricultural wages. Comments made at the annual meeting of the ITUC national executive in 1932 suggest that statutory intervention was perceived as the only instrument capable of effecting the improvements required on a countrywide level. For instance, A. Heron of the C.S.C.A. (Dublin) observed:

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<sup>10</sup> *Annual report of the ITGWU (1932)*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> See Table 3.3 later in the chapter.

He did not see why the state should not do some of the work of the Trade Unions. Under present conditions, it was almost impossible outside the immediate vicinity of the larger urban centres to organise agricultural labour, and they knew that the present conditions of the agricultural industry made it very difficult for small farmers to employ labour and to pay trade union rates of wages.<sup>12</sup>

L.J. Larkin of the Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks (Limerick) remarked:

The condition of the agricultural worker is so bad that in many districts they constituted a serious menace to the trade union movement, because they had an influx of them to the towns, competing with urban workers. That was a very serious position.<sup>13</sup>

And E.P. Hart of the ATGWU (Dublin) commented:

He was in Clonmel recently and the rate of wages of a ploughman was set down at 14s. a week. There were forty applicants for the job from all parts of Tipperary. This was a state of affairs that was really appalling.<sup>14</sup>

These statements signalled the threat which the uncompetitive agricultural wage had assumed not just for the agricultural labourer but for the level of wages prevailing in organised urban areas. Furthermore, the extent to which both unemployment and underemployment featured in rural life is an indication of the impossible position faced by many an agricultural labourer during this period. Accordingly, on 31 October 1933 the ITUC passed a unanimous resolution calling for the establishment of an agricultural wages board.<sup>15</sup>

That the government had devoted little if any thought to the notion of regulating agricultural wages at this time emerged from the responses of the Departments of Agriculture and of Industry and Commerce to this resolution. In the first instance, it became apparent that there was some confusion within both departments as to whose

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<sup>12</sup> *Annual report of the ITUC (1931-2)*, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Annual report of the ITUC (1933-4)*, p.110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

remit the issue properly belonged to, indicating a complete lack of discussion on the matter up to this point.<sup>16</sup> Since the previous agricultural wages board had been associated with the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, the ITUC had initially submitted their resolution to the minister for Agriculture, Dr James Ryan.<sup>17</sup> However, the minister's department was quick to convey to the ITUC that it was no longer concerned with agricultural wages.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the ITUC was advised to communicate with Industry and Commerce on the matter.<sup>19</sup> This was in keeping with the practice established by the first Dáil government when it created a Department of Labour to deal specifically with labour and employment issues. Although this department was demoted to a division of Industry and Commerce under the Cumann na nGaedheal government, reflecting its general disregard for labour matters, under the stewardship of the new minister for Industry and Commerce, Sean Lemass, labour policy would attain an unprecedented eminence.<sup>20</sup> However, despite established practice in this regard, there was a complete departure from standard policy on labour related matters over the ensuing months. It seems that following discussions between Ryan and Lemass, responsibility for agricultural wages was actually returned to Agriculture.<sup>21</sup> That this was not of good

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<sup>15</sup> ITUC to secretary, Agriculture, 31 Oct. 1933 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>16</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 16 Jan. 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. James Ryan (1891-1970) was born in Taghmon, Co. Wexford. The son of a farmer, he was a medical doctor by profession. He was a founder member of Fianna Fáil in 1926, and represented Wexford 1918-65. He was minister for Agriculture for fifteen years, 1932-47. Other ministerial portfolios included Health and Social Welfare 1947-8 and 1951-4, and Finance 1957-65.

<sup>18</sup> Smith to Ryan, 23 Mar. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>19</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to Eamon Lynch, ITUC, 5 Apr. 1934.

<sup>20</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: politics and society* (Dublin, 1989), pp 126-7; Sean Lemass was born in Dublin in 1899 the son of a successful hat manufacturer. A leading founding member of the Fianna Fáil party, he was a major advocate of progressive economic and labour policies throughout his career in government. He was minister for Industry and Commerce 1932-9; 1941-8; 1951-4; 1957-9; Minister for supplies 1939-45; Taoiseach 1959-66.

<sup>21</sup> Lynch to the secretary, 21 Sep. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

augury for the agricultural labourer may be ascertained from the response of this department to a report by the International Labour Organisation on collective agreements in agriculture, in relation to which Industry and Commerce had sought its opinion earlier in 1933.<sup>22</sup>

The ILO had been formed in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles as part of an international commitment to increasing social justice in the workplace.<sup>23</sup> Composed of representatives of governments, employers and workers, the remit of the ILO was to formulate labour standards in the form of conventions and recommendations for ratification by member states, thus striving to regulate international work conditions and safeguard basic labour and human rights. Its 1933 report on collective agreements in agriculture was principally concerned with the fact that in many states the social protection accorded to agricultural labourers was inferior both in quantity and quality to that enjoyed by industrial workers.<sup>24</sup> It claimed that differences in the processes of production could not justify such an inferiority of rights for this class.<sup>25</sup> Pending better social legislation, it was recommended that governments should encourage the use of collective agreements as an alternative regulatory mechanism. This system was held to be partly responsible for the improved conditions of life on the land in many countries since the war.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 30 Mar. 1933 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>23</sup> 'ILO history' ([www.ilo.org/public/english/about/history.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/about/history.htm)) (18 Nov. 2002).

<sup>24</sup> 'Collective agreements in agriculture' p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

While the report appeared to have little relevance for Irish conditions in this regard given that trade unionism in agriculture was virtually extinct, it was nonetheless very significant. In emphasising the extent to which organised systems of agriculture existed in many parts of Europe, it highlighted how unusual the absence of some form of regulating mechanism was from Irish agriculture. It also accentuated how the state actively intervened in other countries to ameliorate the position of this class, whether through facilitative measures or arbitration. But most importantly, it indicated that the statutory regulation of agricultural wages was viewed by the general body of organised workers to be expedient only in the direst circumstances:

Statutory regulation of wage rates in agriculture comes into consideration only where there is some doubt as to whether wages are falling or threaten to fall below a certain minimum considered by society as a whole as essential to the bare existence of agricultural workers.<sup>27</sup>

That such extenuating circumstances prevailed in Irish agriculture by this time was unquestionable. The constantly dwindling wage levels rendered the resurgence of trade union organisation improbable, not to mention a system of collective agreements. In light of these considerations this report should have acted as a stimulus for some form of remedial action.

However, the response of Agriculture suggested that it had little intention of taking any initiative in this regard. In a reply to Industry and Commerce, the department secretary, F.J Meyrick<sup>28</sup>, declared it was the minister's opinion that the report did not call for any

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<sup>27</sup> 'Collective agreements in agriculture', p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> F.J. Meyrick succeeded T.P. Gill as Secretary to the Department of Agriculture in 1922, and acted in this capacity until 1934.

action so far as the Free State was concerned.<sup>29</sup> This was based on the premise that existing agricultural conditions did not favour a system of collective agreements. While reference was made to the earlier agricultural wage board system, the importance of this precedent was undermined by stressing that its establishment and abolition centred entirely around the abnormal conditions prevailing during the First World War. No allusion was made to the fact that this special machinery had been established to ensure agricultural labourers received a minimum wage in view of their deficient levels of organisation. Nor was it mentioned that its abolition in Ireland in 1921 had not been followed by any official conciliation system, such as operated in England until 1924, on the premise that the new native government might have wished to implement its own measure. Instead, it was simply emphasised that since that time agricultural wages in Ireland had not been governed by any system of state control or collective agreements. In a similar vein, the strength of the trade union movement just before the advent of native government was trivialised:

An attempt was made some years ago by the ITGWU to organise farm labourers and to enforce changes in the rates of wages and conditions of agricultural labour. Labour troubles ensued in certain districts and the activities of the union did not prove very successful and soon sank into abeyance. In these circumstances it would not appear that existing agricultural conditions in Saorstát Éireann are such as to favour a system of collective agreements in regard to agricultural wages.<sup>30</sup>

The suggestion that trade union organisation had never been successful in Irish agriculture and as a consequence sank into decline, belied the success of the agrarian agitation which operated to the great advantage of agricultural labour between 1917 and 1923. It also disguised the fact that it was principally because of government interference

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<sup>29</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 30 Mar. 1933 (AGI/G2486/37).

in the early stages of the Free State that the influence of trade unionism collapsed on the farm, and not the failure of trade unionism per se. Not only did this reply misrepresent the conditions under which the previous minimum wage and trade union machinery had existed and declined in Ireland, it misconstrued the significance of the ILO report for Irish conditions. It chose to state the obvious, remarking on the unsuitability of Irish conditions for collective agreements, rather than allowing for the possibility that in the absence of such conditions it was the duty of the state to provide some form of alternative regulation to safeguard the interests of this class. But as discouraging as this reaction was, other stated reasons for not acting on the tenets of the report revealed a far more disturbing mentality:

Paid agricultural labourers constitute only a very small proportion of the total number of persons engaged in farm work in Saorstát Éireann. The official statistics show that out of 459,201 males of 18 years and over permanently engaged in farm work in the whole of Saorstát Éireann in the year 1932, as many as 374,704, approximately 82 per cent were members of the farmers' families.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard great emphasis was placed on the 'small extent' to which permanent hired agricultural labourers were employed on the classes of holdings which constituted the great majority of farms.<sup>32</sup> Table 3.1 was used to add weight to this argument. It illustrated the proportion of males engaged in farm work on each size of holding in June 1931, according to whether workers were family members or employed on a permanent or temporary basis. In proffering this information as a reason for not taking any action on the report, Agriculture was effectively implying that since agricultural labourers constituted only a fraction of the total numbers engaged in agriculture and that proportion

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<sup>30</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 30 Mar. 1933 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



was concentrated on the least number of farms, little statutory action was necessary or perhaps even justified. Obviously such logic would have serious ramifications for the agricultural labourer if attempts to improve his existence were to be measured on this basis.

**Table 3.1** Percentage of males, 18 years of age and over, engaged in farm work on each size of holding in Saorstát Éireann on 1 June, 1931 who were members of family, other permanent workers and temporarily employed

Acres	Members of family	Permanent labourers	Temporarily employed	Total
1 - 5	80	7	13	100
5 - 10	87	5	8	100
10 - 15	88	5	7	100
15 - 30	86	6	8	100
30 - 50	79	11	10	100
50 - 100	65	22	13	100
100 - 200	48	37	15	100
Above 200	27	56	17	100

Source: Memorandum from the secretary, Agriculture to the secretary, Industry and Commerce, 30 Mar. 1933 (AGI/G2486/37).

Moreover, notwithstanding the implications of these sentiments for the country's largest single group of male employees, Industry and Commerce proceeded to relinquish all responsibility for agricultural wages to Agriculture in mid 1934. Confirmation that this was the case may be inferred from the following correspondence from the ITUC to Agriculture regarding its 1933 resolution in September of that year:

...in your communication you stated the subject was one not coming within the purview of the Department of Agriculture, and that I should communicate with the Department of Industry and Commerce. In a communication dated 14 July last the Department of Industry and Commerce stated that the minister of that department has discussed the matter with the minister for Agriculture and 'that the minister for Agriculture is now making arrangements to receive a deputation from your national executive.' I am to ask that the minister for Agriculture will indicate a date when he will receive a deputation from my national executive to discuss the subject.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Lynch to the secretary, 21 Sep. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

This decision, when the interests of labour in every other sector were supervised by Industry and Commerce, hardly boded well for the agricultural labourer. As it was, in the absence of any communication from Agriculture about receiving the promised deputation from the ITUC, the latter had been obliged to pursue Agriculture for a date. When the ITUC were finally given the opportunity to put their grounds for an agricultural minimum wage to the minister in October 1934, it became apparent that they had been busy making a case over the intervening year. As was to be expected, the major argument underlining their demand centred on the uneconomic wages of the agricultural labourer. Less predictable, however, was that they would focus on contending that these wages were actually far less than the official statistics suggested and moreover that they would have gathered considerable evidence to substantiate their claim.<sup>34</sup> In this regard they submitted wage returns collected by the Labour Party from different parts of the country. Table 3.2 sets out those findings.

In terms of payment, agricultural labourers received either purely cash wages, or wages which were part cash and part benefit in kind. The labourer living on the farm with his employer received full board (breakfast, dinner, supper and afternoon tea) and lodging on a seven day week ongoing basis, the value of which would have been computed in the negotiation of his half yearly cash wage.

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<sup>34</sup> O'Connell, Agriculture to director, Statistics branch, on the ITUC meeting with the minister, 11 Oct. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

**Table 3.2** Labour Party returns submitted to the minister for Agriculture regarding the rates of wages of agricultural labourers in Saorstát Éireann in 1934

Area	Rate per week <u>without board and lodging</u>	Rate per week <u>with board and lodging</u>
Arigna	15/- (12 - 14 hour day)	9/-[same]
Arklow	20 - 22/-	8 - 10/-
Athlone	18 - 35/-	8 - 12/-
Ballinkillen (carlow)	12 - 18/-	4 - 8/-
Ballinrobe	4/-per day casual	5 - 10/-
Bandon	-	8 - 12/-
Belmullet	25/-	10/-
Belturbet	15/-	9/-
Blanchardstown	25/-	12/6/-
Blarney	20/-	9/-
Bray	24/-	-
Buttevant	1/-	18/- (2 meals)
Cahir	20 - 25/-	7 - 10/-
Callan	20/-	10/-
Carlow	24/-	10/- (with perqs)
Carrick on Shannon	12/6 - 15/-	5 - 7/6
Carrick-on-suir	18/-	12/-
Cavan	25/-	12 - 14/-
Clondalkin	25/-	-
Cobh	9/-	-
Dungarvan	-	15/-
Dunmanway	20/-	9 - 10/-
Enniscorthy	16/-	6 - 10/-
Fermoy	20/-	7 - 12/-
Galway	-	9/-
Graignamanagh	-	7 - 10/-
Kilkenny	16 - 20/-	3/6 - 10/-
Kilrush	30/-	-
Longford	18/-	8 - 10/-
Lucan	27/-	5 - 10/-
Mallow	18 - 22	7 - 10/-
Middleton	10 - 20/-	6 - 15/-
Mitchelstown	-	10 - 12/-
Mullingar	25/-	10/-
Naas	20 - 28/-	10 - 20/-
Navan	15/- (with perqs)	-
Nenagh	24/-	7 - 10/-
Portarlinton	20 - 27/-	8 - 12/-
Rathdrum	20 - 24/-	8 - 10/-
Rathfarnham	24 - 45/-	15/-
Skerries	15 - 25/-	-
Thomastown	18 - 20/-	8 - 10/-
Thurles	-	7 - 10/-
Togher	-	12 - 15/- (2 meals)
Tralee	-	15/-
Waterford	15 - 20/-	8 - 10/-
Westport	24 - 27/-	6 - 7/-
Wexford	-	7/-
Youghal	12 - 24 [7 days]	10 - 12/- [7 days]

Source: Department of Agriculture report to the Statistics branch, Industry and Commerce, on the ITUC meeting with the minister, 11 Oct. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

Labourers living off the farm may also have received full or partial board for six days of the week, the value of which would have been deducted from their gross weekly or monthly wage. Apart from board and lodging, benefits in kind could also consist of other perquisites in lieu of payment in cash such as rent for a house or garden, land, potatoes, fresh butter or skimmed milk, grass for a cow, sheep, donkey or goat. The value allotted to each of these varied according to the estimated value of the perquisites involved, with the value of these differing considerably according to county or district.<sup>35</sup> It was generally considered that the majority of agricultural labourers received some form of benefit in kind rather than just purely cash wages.<sup>36</sup> Those who received purely cash wages were found mainly on very large farms and even then, although not in receipt of board, may have received perquisites such as milk and fuel in the form of wood or turf.<sup>37</sup>

Table 3.2 was used by the ITUC to corroborate their claim that there was considerable diversity in agricultural wages within and between regions. It suggested that pure cash wages, without board and lodging, as low as 9s. and 10s. per week existed in some parts of the country, with rates as high as 45s. in parts of Dublin. The unusually high rates recorded for western seaboard areas such as Kilrush and Westport and the extremely low rates recorded for areas such as Buttevant in Cork, undermined the accuracy of the returns. This excessive variation also extended to those receiving part cash and part benefit in kind, with rates as low as 3s. 6d. suggested for some areas, peaking at 20s. in others. Since 21s. was the average official wage computed from the returns of the Garda

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<sup>35</sup> MacAuley to Egan on the findings of the agricultural instructors and the figures submitted by the ITUC, Jan. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> McGrath, Agriculture to Barry, Statistics branch, 14 Jun. 1935.

Siochana for a week in July 1934, there was obviously a significant discrepancy between both sources.<sup>38</sup> However, the importance of this table was not so much the accuracy of the returns as the fact that overall it reflected a trend that Agriculture had been encountering for years in trying to collate average county wage data for agricultural labourers.

The Department of Agriculture had been aware of the generally precarious nature of agricultural wages for some time given that it had been compiling data on agricultural wage rates on an annual basis since before the First World War. Moreover, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it was also aware of the problems associated with collecting accurate information on county agricultural wage rates. It will be recalled that the excessive variations within counties prevented the collation of a truly typical average rate to the point that the Statistics branch had even been averse to publishing five yearly weighted averages as was done for the national and provincial figures. Table 3.3 outlines the weekly rates of agricultural wages for adult male workers not receiving benefits of any kind as returned by the Garda Siochana during a week in July, 1929 to 1936. By comparing the wage data returned by the Labour Party for certain counties or even districts, with the county figures returned for 1935 by the Gardai, it is possible to see the discrepancies between the official rates and the Labour Party returns.

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<sup>38</sup> See Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3** Statement showing for each county in Saorstát Éireann the weekly rates of wages of adult male agricultural labourers not in receipt of any benefits in kind as returned by an Garda Síochána during a week in July, 1929-36<sup>39</sup>

<b>Week Ended:</b>	<b>13 July 1929</b>	<b>12 July 1930</b>	<b>11 July 1931</b>	<b>16 July 1932</b>	<b>15 July 1933</b>	<b>14 July 1934</b>	<b>13 July 1935</b>	<b>18 July 1936</b>
Carlow	24/3	24/9	23	21/-	20/3	20/-	20/-	20/-
Dublin	33/3	32/6	31/9	32/6	31/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
Kildare	25/-	25/9	25/9	22/9	21/6	20/-	20/-	20/-
Kilkenny	24/6	23/6	24/3	24/6	23/-	22/-	22/-	22/6
Offaly	23/-	23/9	22/9	21/9	20/3	20/-	20/-	20/-
Longford	22/6	22/-	22/3	20/9	19/9	20/-	20/-	20/-
Louth	24/-	24/6	23/6	21/-	20/3	20/-	20/-	20/-
Meath	23/9	24/9	22/9	21/9	19/9	20/-	20/-	20/-
Laois	24/3	23/6	23/6	23/6	21/6	20/-	20/-	20/-
Westmeath	23/6	23/6	22/-	21/9	20/3	20/-	20/-	20/-
Wexford	22/9	23/6	22/6	21/3	19/9	19/9	18/-	19/-
Wicklow	26/6	27/3	26/-	24/6	23/6	22/6	22/-	22/-
<b>Leinster</b>								
<b>Weighted average</b>	<b>25/-</b>	<b>25/3</b>	<b>24/6</b>	<b>23/6</b>	<b>22/3</b>	<b>21/6</b>	<b>21/3</b>	<b>21/6</b>
Clare	24/9	23/9	24/-	22/-	23/-	22/3	24/-	24/-
Cork	25/3	24/6	24/6	24/3	22/6	20/-	21/-	22/-
Kerry	24/9	24/-	26/-	24/6	23/9	21/-	20/-	20/-
Limerick	26/6	23/9	25/3	25/6	23/3	22/-	22/-	23/-
Tipperary	26/3	25/6	25/3	24/6	22/-	21/-	22/-	22/-
Waterford	26/9	25/3	24/3	23/9	22/6	22/-	22/6	24/-
<b>Munster</b>								
<b>Weighted Average</b>	<b>25/9</b>	<b>24/6</b>	<b>25/-</b>	<b>24/3</b>	<b>22/9</b>	<b>21/-</b>	<b>21/9</b>	<b>22/3</b>
Cavan	22/9	22/3	22/3	22/-	20/3	20/-	21/-	22/-
Donegal	22/3	21/9	21/3	20/9	19/-	18/-	18/-	19/-
Monaghan	23/6	20/9	22/6	23/9	22/9	20/-	20/-	22/-
<b>Ulster</b>	<b>22/9</b>	<b>21/9</b>	<b>22/-</b>	<b>22/-</b>	<b>20/6</b>	<b>19/-</b>	<b>19/6</b>	<b>20/9</b>
<b>Average</b>								
Galway	24/-	22/3	23	22/3	21/3	20/-	20/-	20/-
Leitrim	21/9	21/6	22/9	19/-	21/6	18/-	20/-	22/-
Mayo	23/6	22/-	21/9	22/9	21/-	20/-	20/-	20/-
Roscommon	22/6	22/3	22/3	21/9	21/-	21/-	21/-	21/-
Sligo	23/9	22/6	22/6	22/6	21/9	20/-	18/-	20/-
<b>Connacht</b>								
<b>Weighted Average</b>	<b>23/3</b>	<b>22/3</b>	<b>22/6</b>	<b>22/-</b>	<b>21/3</b>	<b>20/-</b>	<b>19/9</b>	<b>20/6</b>
<b>Saorstát Éireann</b>								
<b>Weighted Average</b>	<b>25/-</b>	<b>24/6</b>	<b>24/3</b>	<b>23/6</b>	<b>22/3</b>	<b>21/-</b>	<b>21/3</b>	<b>21/9</b>

Sources: Memoranda for the secretary, Agriculture from the director of Statistics, Industry and Commerce, 12 Sep. 1931; 2 Feb. 1935; 30 Oct. 1935; 19 Oct. 1936; Departmental report for the minister, 31 Jan. 1935 (AG1/G2486/37).

<sup>39</sup> For data on half yearly rates for agricultural labourers living in see Table AIII.1 in Appendix III.

For instance, the latter returns for Kilkenny in 1935 hovered between 16s. and 20s. The Garda returns suggested an average of 22s. The Labour Party returns for Waterford suggested the existence of rates varying from 15s. to 20s. The Garda returns suggested an average of 22s. 6d. In making the wide discrepancy between local and official (provincial and national) figures the basis of their claim, the deputation had therefore focused on an issue that the department could not refute with impunity. It would have been impossible for the minister to simply dismiss the claim given that the deputation had provided sufficient statistical information to at least merit an investigation on the accuracy of the findings. Likewise the lengths gone to in gathering this data could have left the minister in little doubt as to the determination of both the ITUC and the Labour Party to pursue this matter to its conclusion. Accordingly Ryan had little option other than to retain the matter for further consideration. In order to ascertain if the wages set out in the returns furnished by the deputation were representative of wages paid in the respective districts, the department's agricultural instructors were directed to obtain returns as to the weekly rates of wages paid throughout the Saorstát to adult bona fide agricultural labourers.<sup>40</sup> The returns were available for the department's review by January 1935. Table 3.4 indicates the findings of the agricultural instructors for each county. The average rate throughout the country was found to be around 20s. per week without board and lodging, and about 10s. per week with board and lodging or other perquisites.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> O'Connell, Agriculture to director, Statistics branch, on the ITUC meeting with the minister, 11 Oct. 1934 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>41</sup> MacAuley to Egan on the findings of the agricultural instructors and the figures submitted by the ITUC, Jan. 1935.

**Table 3.4** Agricultural instructors' returns showing the average rates of wages for agricultural labourers in each county in 1935

County	Average rate per week without board and lodging or other perquisite	Average rate per week with perquisites		
		Cash	Estimated value of perquisites	Estimated gross wage
Carlow	19/- (18-20/-)	7/1 (6-8/-)	9/9 (8-12/-)	16/10 (14-20/-)
Cavan	18/- (16-20/-)	9/6 (8-12/-)	7/8 (6-8/-)	17/2 (14-20/-)
Clare	21/8 (21-25/-)	11/6 (6-19/-)	6/11 (1-10/-)	18/5 (16-20/-)
Cork	19/- (15-24/-)	10/3 (6/6-21/-)	11/10 (1/6-19/-)	22/1 (16-31/-)
Donegal	19/2 (18-21/-)	14/- (10-15/-)	7/- (3/9-10/-)	21/- (19/9-22/-)
Dublin	26/7 (22/6-30/-)	10/-	15/-	25/-
Galway	18/10 (17-21/-)	13/- (8-18/-)	5/4	18/4 (16/6-20/6)
Kerry	-	11/2.5 (9-12/-)	10/- (9-11/-)	21/2.5 (20-23/-)
Kilkenny	20/2 (20-21/-)	9/9 (9-10/-)	12/-	21/9 (21-22/-)
Laois	20/10 (17-22/-)	10/6 (8-12/-)	9/11 (9-10/-)	20/5 (17-22/-)
Leitrim	-	9/4 (8/6-10/-)	4/8 (4-5/-)	14/-
Limerick	27/3 (24-30/-)	11/7 (9-12/-)	10/3 (5-12/-)	21/10 (15-24/-)
Longford	21/- (20-24/-)	11/7 (10-12/-)	11/10 (10-12/-)	23/5 (20-24/-)
Louth	18/- (14-25/-)	9/7 (5-15/-)	9/1 (5-14/-)	18/8 (12/6-24/-)
Mayo	18/7 (18-20/-)	10/9 (8-13/-)	10/1 (7-12/-)	20/10 (20-22/-)
Meath	20/- (15-25/-)	12/6 (10-15/-)	10/- (8-15/-)	22/6 (20-25/-)
Monaghan	20/7 (16-25/-)	8/8 (4-14/-)	10/3 (7-13/6)	18/11 (12/6-25/6)
Offaly	18/6 (18-20/-)	9/2 (8-10/-)	9/6 (9-10/-)	18/8 (18-20/-)
Roscommon	33/- (18-45/-)	12/- (10-14/-)	11/8 (10-14/-)	23/8 (20-27/-)
Sligo	16/4 (12-18/-)	8/4 (7-10/-)	15/-	23/4 (22-25/-)
Tipperary	21/4 (18-25/-)	8/10 (7-12/-)	15/6 (12-22/6)	24/4 (19-31/6)
Waterford	22/6 (20-27/-)	11/6 (10-14/-)	12/4 (10-15/-)	23/10 (20-26/-)
Westmeath	18/8 (18-20/-)	9/- (8-12/-)	10/-	19/- (18-20/-)
Wexford	18/7 (15-21/-)	13/6 (7-20/-)	7/8 (2/6to15/-)	21/2 (18-25/-)
Wicklow	19/3 (14-25/-)	8/8 (6-12/-)	11/11 (10-15/-)	20/7 (16-28/-)

Source: MacAuley to Egan on the findings of the agricultural instructors and the figures submitted by the ITUC, Jan. 1935, sheet A (AGI/G2486/37).



The range of cash only rates varied greatly from 12s. to 45s. per week, with an even greater diversity in the rates with perquisites from 1s. to 22s. 6d. per week.<sup>42</sup> The returns compiled by the Labour Party were not quite as comprehensive as those returned by the department's instructors. For instance, information was not available for counties such as Donegal, Leitrim, Limerick, Monaghan, Offaly or Sligo. Likewise, the Labour Party returned figures for a only few centres in each of the twenty counties, while the instructors returned rates for six representative areas in each county.<sup>43</sup> Notwithstanding these shortcomings, a departmental report on the findings significantly conceded that the average national rates arrived at from the Labour Party figures did not differ greatly from the rates recorded by the inspectors' reports, the average rates being respectively:

	<b>Rate without perquisites</b>	<b>Rate with perquisites</b>
<b>Labour Party returns</b>	21s.	9s. 10d.
<b>Instructors' returns</b>	20s. 9d.	10s. 5d. <sup>44</sup>

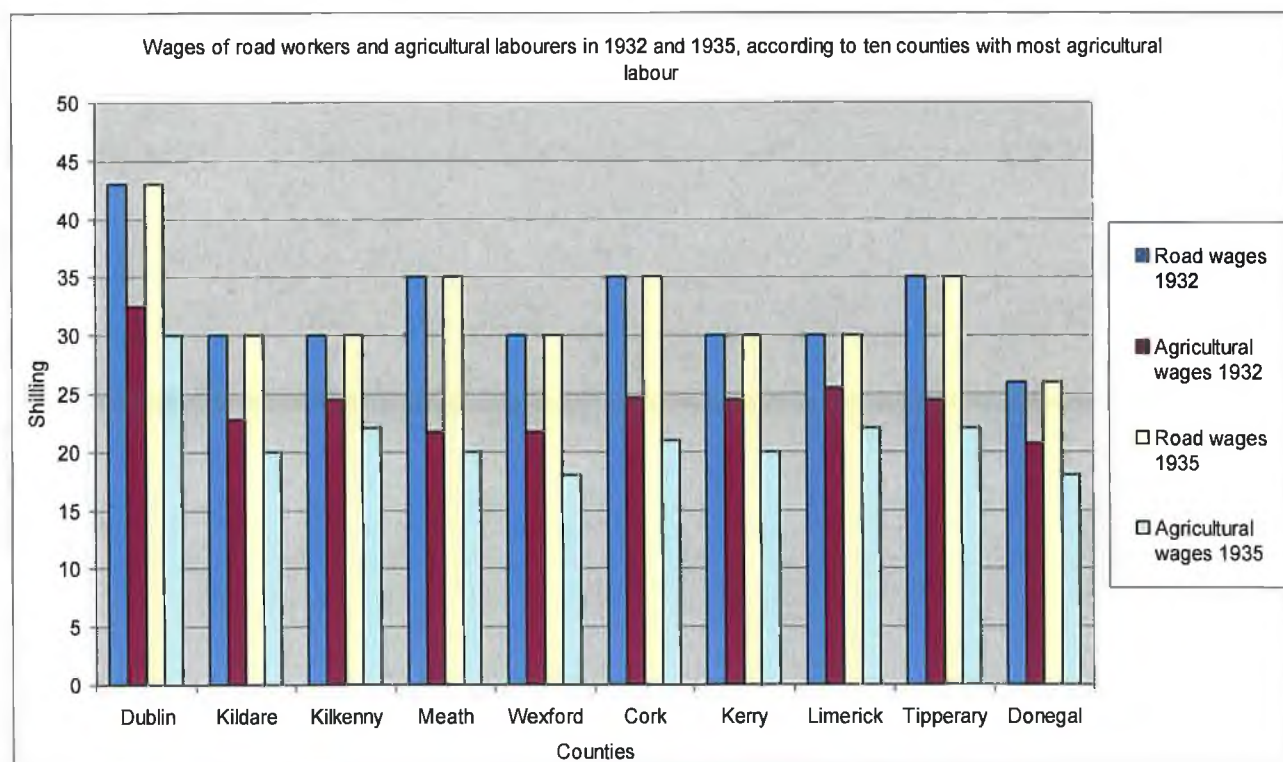
The corresponding average rates for the individual counties differed appreciably, however, in many cases. For instance, the Labour Party figure for Clare (without perquisites) was 30s. per week, and the corresponding instructors' figure only 18s. 8d. It was claimed that these discrepancies were probably due to the fact that the same districts were not taken for each county. Even the figures for the districts for which comparative data was available, comprising a total of fourteen counties, were in no way identical, and in a few cases there was a considerable variation in the rates, especially in relation to wages with perquisites. Nonetheless, in most cases the discrepancy between the two

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<sup>42</sup> MacAuley to Egan on the findings of the agricultural instructors and the figures submitted by the ITUC, Jan. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

sources was not too pronounced leaving the overall result the same, poor wages. This was the conclusion eventually reached by the departmental report also, when it was acknowledged that ‘on the whole the wages of agricultural labourers seemed to be comparatively low’.<sup>45</sup> In this regard it was mentioned that instructors from Galway and Cork had pointed out that the wages of agricultural labourers in those counties did not compare favourably with those of road workers. Figure 3.1 is instructive in this connection.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 3.1** Weekly wage rates for road and agricultural labourers in each county in Saorstát Éireann, 1932 and 1935



Sources: *Annual reports of the Department of Local Government* (1931-2) appendix lviii, p. 306; (1934-5) appendix lxxiii, p. 445; Departmental report for the minister for Agriculture, 31 Jan. 1935; Memorandum for the secretary, Agriculture from the director of Statistics, Industry and Commerce, 30 Oct. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> For data on this chart see Table AIII.2 in Appendix III.

This chart illustrates the widening gap between the level of the road and agricultural wage in the ten counties with most agricultural labour between the years 1932 and 1935. While the road labourers' wage remained constant during the period subsequent to Fianna Fáil's election to power, it is apparent that the agricultural labourer was not so fortunate. A steady rate of decline in wages is discernible for most counties, regardless of the level prevailing. A Department of Agriculture report on export bounties in 1934 had already alluded to this 'serious' deterioration in their earnings.<sup>47</sup> Agricultural wages which between 1929 and 1933 had undergone decline ranging from 12 to 25 per cent according to district, were compared to an average wage decline of 5 per cent for groups such as builders' labourers, carpenters, brick layers, painters, electrical fitters and tram drivers.<sup>48</sup> The earnings of urban and industrial workers were not reported to have undergone any change during this period. In view of these considerations, therefore, it was a positive sign that the departmental report on wages in 1935 should have at least acknowledged that the wage rates of the agricultural labourer were 'comparatively low'. However, notwithstanding the implications of such poor wage levels for this class, it became apparent that Agriculture were not about to rush into making any decision on statutory regulation or indeed even share the significance of their findings.

Despite the attempts of the ITUC to obtain some feedback on the returns submitted in October 1934, Agriculture had shed no further light on the issue by March 1935. In an attempt to expedite matters, the Labour Party submitted a substantial memorandum on

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<sup>47</sup>Department of Agriculture memorandum on export bounties, 9 Feb. 1934 (S 7456).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

the subject with a view to the minister receiving a deputation from them.<sup>49</sup> The official statistics published by the government were again the subject of scrutiny. On this occasion the Labour Party had collected even further evidence of the agricultural labourer's paltry wage levels. Referring to particulars of wages collected by Labour Party secretaries from branches in seventeen counties, it was submitted that in only two instances did they report that the rates exceeded 20s. per week; in Ballycumber, Co. Offaly and Blanchardstown, Co. Dublin. It was found that wages were as low as 14s. per week in Co. Wexford and 10s. in Counties Westmeath and Sligo. Based on this information it was held that nowhere did the majority of workers earn wages nearly approaching the average rates quoted in the official statement published by the government.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in taking the official figures at their face value, it was declared that 'even these returns, tending as they do to exaggerate the level of wages for agricultural workers, confirm the allegation that wages are unreasonably low and that in fact, they are steadily falling'.<sup>51</sup> Moving on to address means of redressing this situation the power of trade unionism was effectively ruled out. In the absence of an alternative mechanism of regulation, the necessity for statutory intervention was again accentuated:

Having noted the fact which is not in question that the wages of agricultural workers are dangerously low in an Saorstát and that in existing circumstances no effective machinery is available to them to bring about an improvement in their conditions, it must follow that the duty lies upon the government to find the means of protecting them against the exploitation to which they are subjected.<sup>52</sup>

In emphasising that this did not involve the enunciation of any new principle, allusion

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<sup>49</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers dated 14 Mar. 1935, submitted to the minister for Agriculture, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

was made to Article 427 of the Treaty of Versailles which declared that it was the duty of a member of the League of Nations to secure 'payment to the employed of a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of life as it is understood in their time and country'.<sup>53</sup> Addressing precedent, it was noted that the state actively intervened in other countries to secure a living wage for agricultural workers. Echoing the ILO report on collective agreements, allusion was made to the arbitration courts in Australia and the systems of state facilitated collective bargaining in France, Denmark, Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands. Of course, reference was also made to the precedent set by the British government in setting up minimum wage fixing machinery in both agriculture and industry in Ireland. Alluding to the trade boards legislation, it was held that if the conditions in agriculture prevailed in industry, the existing law would have entitled the minister for Industry and Commerce, without any other investigation, to establish a trade board empowered to fix minimum rates of wages and to prescribe generally the conditions of employment that should have been observed in the industry. In this regard the positive impact which the re-establishment of the wages board system had on agricultural wages in England in 1924 was noted:

At the time the board was reconstituted the wages of British agricultural workers were very low indeed - varied according to district from 20 to 25/-. The Board which is assisted by a number of county committees raised the level of wages immediately it was established and under its direction the standard of remuneration for agricultural wage earners in Great Britain has been raised from time to time...it now reaches an average rate of 30/9½ for the whole country.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from outlining the ethical duty of the state to cater for the economic interests of its

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<sup>53</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers dated 14 Mar. 1935, submitted to the minister for Agriculture, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

weaker members, it was clearly conveyed that given the unprecedented level of state intervention in agriculture under this government, there was in fact no excuse for it having thus far neglected the needs of this class:

One wonders why it is that in all the legislation relating to agriculture which has passed through the Oireachtas in recent years the condition of the propertyless worker in agriculture was overlooked. The tillage farmer, the dairy farmer, the poultry keeper, in fact every type of person who owns property capable of being utilised for agricultural purposes has had bestowed upon him whatever advantages a generous state could confer. The agricultural worker, however, has not shared in these advantages.<sup>55</sup>

The considerable subventions granted to the farmer represented for Labour the greatest sign of neglect given that none of this money had tended to find its way into the pocket of the agricultural labourer.<sup>56</sup> The government's attempt to reduce dependence on the British export oriented cattle trade by stimulating the export of other agricultural commodities such as poultry and dairy products, while concomitantly reducing dependence on imported products such as flour and sugar, had initially been facilitated by the economic war. All sorts of legislative measures were used to try and re-orientate agriculture such as a guaranteed price for wheat, import controls on flour and bacon, export subsidies on butter, bacon and sheep offal, the compulsion to use a quantity of home produced grain in animal feeding stuffs, bounties on calf skins, the development of the sugar beet industry.<sup>57</sup> Once the government began to realise in mid to late 1933 that the economic war was seriously affecting the cattle industry it introduced bounties on

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<sup>55</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers dated 14 Mar. 1935, submitted to the minister for Agriculture, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, p. 620.

cattle exports.<sup>58</sup> This intervention came at a price. State expenditure on agriculture increased from 1.6 per cent of the value of agricultural output in 1930 to 15.7 per cent in 1935.<sup>59</sup> Though much of this expenditure served only to offset the worst effects of the economic war, there was no question but that farmers were still the recipients of considerable state aid, regardless of whether its effects were tangible or not. Therefore, in the view of labour spokesmen, there appeared to be little justification for depriving agricultural labourers of statutory wage regulation, especially since it would cost the exchequer nothing other than the cost of administering the board.

Despite this detailed submission by the Labour Party, there is no evidence to suggest that the minister acceded to their request for a meeting. Indeed, correspondence to the leader of the Party, William Norton TD<sup>60</sup>, in March 1935 suggested that it would be some time before the matter was even considered:

As you can realise the higher officers of this department have been extremely busy for some time past, and we have not been able to give the full and detailed attention to agricultural wages that we would like to. I am afraid that it will take us some considerable time yet before we are in a position to formulate a policy for the future. I would ask you therefore not to press me to receive a deputation from your party before the end of May.<sup>61</sup>

Clearly the pitiful economic conditions of some 145,898 adult labourers working in agriculture, 84,916 of which were returned as permanent in 1935, had been afforded little

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<sup>58</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), pp 170-2.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 186.

<sup>60</sup> William Norton (1900-63). Born in Kildare, Norton entered into politics via the trade union movement and held various executive positions in the Post Office Workers' Union for 37 years. He was leader of the Labour Party 1932-60, represented Kildare 1926-7, 1932-7, 1948-63 and Carlow-Kildare 1937-48. He was the first Labour Party leader to be appointed Tánaiste in 1948-51 and 1954-7. Ministerial portfolios while Tánaiste were Social Welfare and Industry and Commerce.

<sup>61</sup> Agriculture to Norton, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

if any consideration by this government since its entry to office.<sup>62</sup> Yet it still managed to ensure that every conceivable measure which would facilitate the small holder was introduced over the same period. Although agricultural labourers had not been ignored, benefiting from a series of legislative initiatives such as the Unemployment Assistance Act 1933, the Land Act 1933 and the Labourers Act 1936, the scope of this legislation seems to have been principally introduced with the small holder in mind.<sup>63</sup>

Agricultural labourers had been one of the largest groups of workers excluded from the scope of the Unemployment Insurance Act 1920 and the compulsory contribution to insurance against unemployment.<sup>64</sup> This meant that in the event of unemployment they were not entitled to claim unemployment benefit. Speaking during the introduction of the Unemployment Assistance Bill 1933 to the Dáil, Sean Lemass, the minister for Industry and Commerce, noted that unless agricultural labourers were able to secure work through their local employment exchange, they were completely dependent upon their local authority for home assistance which, apart from being tainted with associations of pauperism and destitution, was notoriously inadequate.<sup>65</sup> Under the Unemployment Assistance Act 1933 the government assumed the responsibility for providing relief to able bodied, unemployed, uninsured workers and their dependants.<sup>66</sup> This meant that in periods of involuntary unemployment, agricultural labourers were entitled to claim unemployment assistance, or 'dole' payments as they became known. Since the value of

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<sup>62</sup> *Statistical Abstract* 1935 (Dublin, 1935) table 53 p. 40.

<sup>63</sup> *Unemployment Assistance Act 1933*, 1933/46[Éire](16 Nov. 1933); *Labourers Act 1936*, 1936/24 [Éire](29 Jun. 1936).

<sup>64</sup> *Unemployment Insurance Act 1920* (10 & 11 Geo. V, c. 30[G.B.]) 9 Aug. 1920.

<sup>65</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 49), 27 Sep. 1933, col. 1652.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1665.



home assistance provided under the poor relief acts had varied from each local authority, the introduction of a centrally controlled uniform rate was envisaged to considerably alleviate the plight of the agricultural labourer.<sup>67</sup> However, in departing from the strictest definition of the term 'unemployment' to include the self employed under the umbrella of this legislation, it was clear that the government had the conditions of the small farmer foremost in mind.<sup>68</sup> Lemass had felt that the provision of relief through public works on which so many of the latter relied, especially in the congested districts, was insufficient to meet the needs in all areas.<sup>69</sup> As a result large numbers of small farmers whose holdings did not provide an economic full time occupation were entitled to claim assistance.<sup>70</sup> This was subject to the provision that along with agricultural labourers without dependants, relatives assisting and rural occupiers of land above a certain valuation, usually about £4, could be excluded from making claims for assistance at certain times of the year when it was expected that these groups would be engaged on work on their own holdings.<sup>71</sup> While the introduction of this measure by necessity pointed to the inability of agricultural labourers to make insurance contributions during periods of employment due to the inadequacy and unpredictability of their wage levels, no attempt was made to address this issue until the ITUC and Labour party pursued it in 1936.

Instead the next legislative endeavour to encompass the agricultural labourer was the Labourers Act 1936, which was introduced to facilitate the purchase of labourers'

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Reports of the Department of Social Welfare (1947-9).*

<sup>69</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 49), 27 Sep. 1933, col. 1653.

<sup>70</sup> *Reports of the Department of Social Welfare (1947-9).*

cottages. The foundation of the rural housing code commenced with the first Labourers (Ireland) Act 1883.<sup>72</sup> Focusing on the insanitary and desperate living conditions of tens of thousands of agricultural labourers, this legislation sought to provide improved dwellings and allotments to permanently employed members of this class as the ownership interests of tenant farmers were being catered for by land legislation. By 1932 over 42,000 labourers cottages had been provided under the Labourers (Ireland) Acts 1883-1919.<sup>73</sup> The cottages were let at rents averaging 1s. 2d. to 2s. per week but no provision had been made for the sale of the cottages and plots to tenants.<sup>74</sup> In fulfilment of Fianna Fáil's housing promises during its election campaign, it appointed a commission to enquire into the cottage purchase issue which reported just before the snap election of 1933. Based on its recommendations, the Labourers Act 1936 provided a purchase scheme where the tenant would pay an annuity the equivalent of 75 per cent of his rent. As laudable as the underlining tenet of this legislation was, that its introduction should have preceded an attempt to regulate the wage levels of this class, even if only by a number of months, was quite bizarre. There had been no real widespread demand from agricultural labourers for such legislation at this stage, the majority of whom had for some time been finding it difficult to make ends meet.<sup>75</sup> As it was, labourers were clearly struggling to make their normal rental payment with local authority rent arrears increasing from £34,440 in 1932

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 49), 27 Sep. 1933, cols 1663-4;

<sup>72</sup> Frederick H.A. Aalen 'Ireland' in Colin G. Pooley (ed.) *Housing strategies in Europe, 1880-1930* (Leicester, 1992), p. 160.

<sup>73</sup> *Annual report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health, (1928-9)* appendix xxvi, p. 104.

<sup>74</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 59), 20 Nov. 1935, col. 1163.

<sup>75</sup> Anne-Marie Walsh 'Cottage schemes for agricultural labourers' in Joost Augusteijn (ed.), *Ireland in the 1930s* (Dublin, 1999), p. 63.

to £51,303 in 1937.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, previous investigations into the matter had very much suggested that the terms of the purchase annuities at 75 per cent of the rent would be considered harsh.<sup>77</sup> This was supported by the opposition of labourers to its draft terms when it was first mooted by local authorities in 1927.<sup>78</sup> Bearing these considerations in mind, the introduction of a measure of this nature at this point in time seems highly unusual when more remedial initiatives were clearly required by these workers. It should be noted that the government had not even announced its intention to re-introduce the minimum wage to agriculture at this point. Ostensibly this legislation was part of the government's programme to anchor the labourers on the land. But the fact that the housing needs of the small farmer, whose poor conditions had been noted by the commission of inquiry in 1933, were clearly accommodated in this legislation for the first time suggested that this had been a driving consideration.<sup>79</sup> This was evident in the extension of the definition of 'agricultural labourer' for the purposes of the act to include all rural persons working for hire at the time they became tenants.<sup>80</sup> This definition had been extended a number of times as the legislation evolved since 1883.<sup>81</sup> As noted by the minister for Local Government and Public Health, Sean T. O Ceallaigh, when introducing the Labourers Bill 1935 to the Dáil in 1935:

At first this definition referred only to persons doing agricultural work for hire. In 1903 the expression was extended to include other persons working in a rural district whose wages did not exceed 2/6 per day and who were not in occupation of more than one quarter of an acre of land. In 1919 the limit of 2/6 per day was removed and the definition further extended to include any person who worked for

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<sup>76</sup> Walsh 'Cottage schemes for agricultural labourers', p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 60-1.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> P.J. Meghen, *Housing in Ireland* (Dublin, 1963), pp 19 and 50.

hire in a rural district or any person not working for hire but working in a rural district at some trade or handicraft without employing any persons except members of his own family. The one-quarter acre limit for land holding was preserved.<sup>82</sup>

Under the 1936 act tenants who were no longer agricultural labourers but who had been so defined when they first became tenants were also entitled to purchase their cottages.<sup>83</sup>

But most significantly, the one quarter acre limit for land holding was removed. A considerable number of cottages were built on the lands of small farmers during earlier schemes due in large part to the overrepresentation of larger farmers on site selecting committees.<sup>84</sup> The expansion in the definition of those eligible to purchase cottages and the removal of the landholding limitation meant that a substantial number of small farmers or their relatives who had been labouring on the land or on public works when they first became cottage tenants were now also possible candidates for buying their cottages.<sup>85</sup>

The terms of the Rates on Agricultural Land (Relief) Act 1935 also reflected this tendency.<sup>86</sup> This was another measure introduced as a means of encouraging labour intensive agriculture and of favouring small holdings. While it provided that relief on holdings with a valuation of £15 or more should be contingent on farmers providing full time employment for one adult male per every £10 valuation, this male could actually be a relation. Purporting to encourage agricultural employment, it was heavily biased in the direction of relatives assisting. Since all this legislation took precedence over tackling the

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<sup>82</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 59), 20 Nov. 1935, col. 1161-2.

<sup>83</sup> Walsh 'Cottage schemes for agricultural labourers', p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Rates on Agricultural Land (Relief)(No.2) Act 1935*, 1935/30[Éire](2 Aug. 1935).

blatant deterioration in the wages of the agricultural labourer, the thrust of these measures would appear to have been far more small farmer than labour focused.

By October 1935 Agriculture had still given no indication that it had any intention of committing itself to the introduction of wage fixing legislation. In fact, when replying to a question in the Dáil that month, the minister for Agriculture stated unequivocally that there were no proposals for legislation to establish an agricultural wages board in contemplation.<sup>87</sup> The government's inaction in this regard led Norton to suggest to the ITUC that it should take steps to revive trade union organisation amongst agricultural labourers.<sup>88</sup> Speaking at a meeting of congress in August 1935, he blamed the absence of trade unionism for this group's 'deplorable living conditions'.<sup>89</sup> He felt that it was up to the congress to ensure that agricultural labourers would get some return for their work instead of being allowed to remain in their current appalling condition.<sup>90</sup> However, it was apparent that not all the members of congress agreed with the sentiments expressed by Norton. For instance, Senator Duffy of the ITGWU was not as optimistic as to the effects of trade unionism in agriculture. Duffy's attitude to the organisation of this class seems to have been more representative of the general feeling on organisation in this area, which was ultimately one of reluctance:

When they realised that, in so far as agricultural workers were concerned, they were dealing with a group of individuals who were individually segregated one from another in the vast majority of instances throughout the country, and whose conditions of employment were different to those in any other industry, the

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<sup>87</sup> Parliamentary question 4523/35, 31 Oct. 1935 (AGI/G2010/36).

<sup>88</sup> *Annual report of the ITUC* (1934-5), p. 123.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.124.

difficulties of effective organisation on trade union lines at once became apparent.<sup>91</sup>

He made it abundantly clear that the scattered and isolated conditions of these workers was not the only hindrance to their effective organisation:

Generally speaking, in other industries they had a larger number of workers under the one manager or under the one office, but in the case of agricultural workers they often had a 'boss' for every worker and in some cases the 'boss' had two or three able - bodied sons to come to his assistance in a dispute. They could realise the difficulty of organising where the workers were brought into close contact with their employers, who were often relatives and school chums, and attended the same church, who in extremities helped each other, and were closely associated in their everyday life on and off the farm.<sup>92</sup>

It was these peculiar characteristics of the agricultural labourer's occupation which rendered him almost impervious to the lines of development pursued by the working class movement. It led Duffy and others to believe that the establishment of a minimum wage would meet the position better than any attempt to organise these workers on trade union lines.<sup>93</sup> In seeking to leave the responsibility for this class to the state, unions such as the ITGWU, who had both championed and abandoned their cause in the past, sought to put in place political help for industrial action. Given the difficulties of organisation on a national scale, it was obvious that the ITUC greatly depended on an assurance from government that they would undertake to regulate the livelihood of the labourer.

The concerns of congress in this regard were not unusual. It was the significance of the widely acknowledged absence of the trade union element which moved the British, Scottish and Northern Ireland governments to introduce new legislation regulating the agricultural wage levels of their workers between 1924 and 1939. Although the repeal of

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<sup>91</sup> *Annual report of the ITUC (1934-5)*, p. 123.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

the Corn Production Act in 1921 made provision for the formation throughout Great Britain of local joint conciliation committees, they proved quite ineffective and led to demands for the re-introduction of statutory regulation.<sup>94</sup> Recognising that agricultural trade unionism was insufficiently strong to facilitate such collective bargaining, the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill was introduced in 1924 by the Labour minister for Agriculture, Noel Buxton.<sup>95</sup> Underpinning the minister's criticism of the conciliation system was the acknowledgement that the agricultural labourer was not only poorly organised but incapable of ever being effectively organised. In alluding to the general 'helplessness of the labourers by collective bargaining to get their rights', he clearly perceived this underlying weakness as a huge contributor to the hardships of this group.<sup>96</sup> In this regard he predicted that statutory regulation would be needed for some time because of the difficulties of organisation and the absence of strong trade union structures in agriculture.<sup>97</sup> The political expediency which had surrounded the first attempt at statutory regulation during the war period had now been replaced by a genuine long term commitment to safeguarding the economic interests of the agricultural labourer. On introducing the agricultural wages bill for Northern Ireland in 1939, Sir Basil Brooke's comments are quite representative of the motivation underlining similar measures in England and Scotland:

It must be remembered that the agricultural labourers working on the scattered farms in Northern Ireland, very often working alone as the only paid employee on a farm, or with only two or three colleagues, must of necessity, be in a somewhat

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<sup>93</sup> *Annual report of the ITUC* (1935-6), p. 145.

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 174) 2 Jun. 1924, col. 913.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 914.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 922.

isolated position. He has not the opportunities for collective action and collective bargaining which is possessed by the factory worker who is employed in large numbers. The fact of his isolation may mean he is in a much weaker position to bargain with his employer than is the case in other industries. For this reason the desirability of establishing statutory machinery for the regulation of agricultural wages has been recognised in other countries.<sup>98</sup>

Whether this universal recognition of the vulnerability of the agricultural labourer was the driving force behind the decision of the Irish government to intervene in the farmer-worker relationship is a matter for exploration.

Although government intent to introduce an agricultural wages bill was finally announced in April 1936, come July the minister was still reluctant to concede a date for the introduction of the measure, stating that he was not yet in a position to do so.<sup>99</sup> Only following pressure from William Norton did he admit the possibility that it would be introduced before the Dáil adjourned for the summer. Therefore, from the time the proposal for statutory wage regulation was first mooted by the ITUC it had taken the government three years to commit to guaranteeing agricultural labourers a minimum wage level. That it finally addressed the notoriously low wage levels of this class only due to outside pressure, and then avoided conceding its statutory responsibility over a prolonged period, clearly implied a deep seated reluctance to grant this measure. This reluctance was even more flagrant when compared to the initiatives taken by Industry and Commerce at this time to regulate the conditions of employment of industrial workers. On introducing the Conditions of Employment Act 1936, Fianna Fáil took the

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<sup>98</sup> *Hansard N.I. (Commons)*, (vol. xxii), 18 May 1939, col. 1618.

<sup>99</sup> Parliamentary question from Brendan Corish for the minister for Agriculture, 1 Jul. 1936 (AGI/G2010/36).



first steps towards establishing a modern labour code for Irish workers.<sup>100</sup> Focusing initially on industrial workers, they introduced a maximum working week of 48 hours for adults and a 40 hour week for juveniles. They also enshrined for the first time the legal entitlement of workers to 6 days holidays annually with pay. In establishing this holiday code for industrial workers, Fianna Fáil were the pioneers of much needed legislative change in this whole area of workers' statutory rights not just in Ireland but in the world.<sup>101</sup>

Speaking during the introduction to the Dáil of the Conditions of Employment Bill 1935, Lemass declared that this measure was instituted on the grounds that the 'state must exercise the function of maintaining supervision over the conditions in which its citizens are employed'.<sup>102</sup> He claimed there was a general consensus that in modern conditions the employment of workers and their remuneration could no longer be regulated solely by trade unionism or determined solely by the laws of supply and demand.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately this principle was not extended to include the conditions of agricultural labourers. So while in 1935 Industry and Commerce set about instituting machinery to regulate the working conditions of non agricultural workers, agricultural labourers had not even been conceded the benefit of a statutory controlled minimum wage.

When the minister for Agriculture did eventually submit a memorandum on the draft scheme of an agricultural wages bill for the consideration of the Executive Council in 1936, it certainly did not hint of any of the social advancement of Lemass' legislation. In

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<sup>100</sup> *Conditions of Employment Act 1936*, 1936/2[ Éire](14 Feb. 1936).

<sup>101</sup> Brian Hillery and Patrick Lynch, *Ireland in the International Labour Organisation* (Dublin, 1995), p.16.

<sup>102</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 56), 17 May 1935, col. 1264.

fact, quite the opposite. Ryan was quick to point out that the proposal for the legislation came not at his instigation.<sup>104</sup> He then proceeded to outline the arguments advanced in favour and against the proposal. Significantly, only one argument was advanced in its support. It constituted a brief reference to just one of the contentions made by the ITUC and the Labour Party:

Those who urge the setting up of machinery to fix a minimum wage for agricultural workers contend that the measures which have been recently taken by the government ensure for the farmer guaranteed, or at least stabilised, prices for the various products he has to sell....They maintain that the element of stability thus introduced for the farmers benefit should extend to the wages of the workers employed and that, therefore, sufficient grounds exist for the setting up by the state of machinery to prescribe and enforce the payment of a fixed minimum rate of wages for agricultural workers.<sup>105</sup>

Not a single allusion was made to the greatest argument advanced by Labour, the low and disparate wage levels of this class. Nor was there any reference to the necessity for state intervention in the absence of trade unionism as an alternative regulatory mechanism. On the contrary, in a vague allusion to the capacity for trade union organisation, the minister as a counter argument to state regulation had actually suggested that agricultural labourers had the ability to force farmers to pay them better wages:

It might also be contended that agricultural workers are in a position to bring sufficient force to bear on farmers, generally speaking, to compel them to pay a reasonable rate having regard to their resources and that the present is an inappropriate time to put such an obligation on farmers as would follow from the setting up by law of wage fixing machinery.<sup>106</sup>

For the minister to point only to the considerable intervention of the state in support of

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<sup>103</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 56), 17 May 1935, col. 1264.

<sup>104</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on proposed legislation for fixing minimum rates of wages for agricultural workers, 6 Mar. 1936, p. 1 (S 8744).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

farmers and not to the desperate conditions of the labouring class per se, suggested that regulation was being conceded as an inevitable consequence of existing policy rather than stemming from any wider sense of social duty to the agricultural labourer. This view is not challenged when having considered the arguments which might have been advanced against this proposal, it was declared:

The minister is satisfied, having considered the arguments for and against the suggested action for the setting up of a Wages Board, that on the whole the operation of a minimum wage would not impose any undue hardship on the farming community as a whole. The wage to be fixed would, of course, have to be measured by reference to the farmers' eligibility to pay and it would probably be found that in most parts of the country the best and most progressive farmers were already paying up to whatever minimum rate might be prescribed.<sup>107</sup>

For many the reluctance of government to introducing this measure would have been attributed primarily to concern over the financial implications for an agricultural community that was suffering from the general fall in the world price level of agricultural commodities, especially live stock products, but also from the effects of the economic war.<sup>108</sup> And indeed the minister had touched briefly on this by alluding to the fact that notwithstanding the increased state subsidisation for agriculture, there was little tangible increase in agricultural output or incomes:

On the other hand there is the point of view that though the farmer may now know with more definiteness what he is going to get in cash for the products he has to sell, his income – compared with some years ago – is only a meagre one and that, generally speaking, he is finding it difficult to meet all his necessary cash outgoings.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on export bounties, 9 Feb. 1934 (S 7456).

<sup>109</sup> Department of Agriculture memo on agricultural minimum wages, 6 Mar. 1936, p. 2 (S 8744).

By 1935 the value of agricultural output was 40 per cent below its 1925 level.<sup>110</sup> The minister continued:

Moreover, he is under the obligation if he is to derive the maximum benefit of the relief in regard to rates provided by the agricultural grant to employ labour and it may be contended that to put the additional obligation on him of paying a legally fixed rate of wages is to impose on him a disproportionate burden.<sup>111</sup>

Yet, apart from these considerations the reluctance to re-introduce the minimum wage had clearly not stemmed from any major concerns over the financial implications for farmers. This was possibly explained by the fact that farmers themselves could voice little objection to regulation given that they had been benefiting from a system of fixed prices for several years. As noted by the *Farmers' Gazette* in regard to the official announcement of statutory intervention in this area:

Once the principle of guaranteed prices for farm produce was accepted, it was obvious enough that this would lead later to demands for a minimum wage for the rural labourer. The logic of the situation is that where the producer is assured of a market and a minimum selling price, the worker is entitled to a proportionate share of these benefits. We cannot see, therefore, any force in the opposition of those who may instinctively oppose the re-establishment of the wages boards - unless they are prepared also to scrap the whole system of controlled production which has grown up in recent years.<sup>112</sup>

This would suggest that there were issues of far greater concern to the minister in conceding this legislation than the actual minimum wage. That this was the case was revealed in the following statement in the memorandum for government of 6 March 1936:

There is one important respect in which difficulty might arise in putting through the suggested legislation for the setting up of an agricultural wages board. It is quite possible that if a measure for the purpose is introduced there would be

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<sup>110</sup> Daly, *The buffer state*, p. 173.

<sup>111</sup> Department of Agriculture memo on agricultural minimum wages, p. 2 (S 8744).

<sup>112</sup> *Farmers Gazette*, 23 May 1936, p.461.

strong pressure brought to bear on the government to extend its scope so as to deal with such matters as conditions of employment, hours of work, the fixing of a weekly half holiday, etc. The Conditions of Employment Bill which has now passed both houses of the Oireachtas might conceivably be extensively relied on as a pattern of what should be done for agricultural workers. It is doubtful whether the representatives of labour in the Dáil could be fully persuaded of the distinction that must necessarily exist between conditions in industrial occupations and conditions in agriculture, and it might accordingly not be easy to confine the measure to one providing for the fixing of minimum rates of wages. The minister is definitely of the view, however, that at the present time the proposed legislation should embrace nothing more than what is indicated in the attached memorandum...<sup>113</sup>

This was highly significant. Given the recent passage of the Conditions of Employment Act it was inevitable that labour spokesmen would demand that the new statutory machinery would regulate the working conditions of agricultural labourers as well as their wages. It had been a demand inherent in the proposals of the ITUC and the Labour Party.<sup>114</sup> However, in recommending the establishment of an agricultural wages board, Ryan had confined the functions of the latter to fixing only minimum rates. He had precluded from the bill any powers which would have allowed the board to consider issues relating to the conditions of the labourer's employment such as maximum hours of work or holidays. That the minister should have pre-empted any demands made by Labour Party spokesmen in this regard as the bill passed through the Dáil, indicated his resolve to confine the scope of this machinery to a minimum. It also suggested that the tardiness of Agriculture in introducing the bill was strongly related to a disinclination to have it coincide with the passage of the Conditions of Employment Bill. The pressure to regulate the working conditions of agricultural labourers in line with that being provided

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<sup>113</sup> Department of Agriculture memo on agricultural minimum wages, 6 Mar. 1936, pp 2-3 (S 8744).

<sup>114</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers dated 14 Mar. 1935, submitted to the minister for Agriculture, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

for non agricultural workers would have been huge and resistance difficult to justify. Since even the suggestion of such concessions would have been capable of provoking a very negative reaction from the farming community, jeopardising the all important farming vote, the extent to which the government would uphold this decision and its repercussions for the agricultural labourer over the ensuing decades will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Notwithstanding the limited nature of the concession it proved too much for Sean MacEntee, the Minister for Finance.<sup>115</sup> So opposed was MacEntee to Ryan's proposal that he submitted a nine page memorandum to the cabinet counter-arguing it.<sup>116</sup> The minister criticised everything from Ryan's lack of argument in advancing the proposal to the necessity for the measure in the first place. In the latter instance he reiterated the argument advanced by the Department of Agriculture in 1933 when recommending against the necessity for any action on the ILO report on collective agreements in agriculture. By downplaying the precedent of the earlier agricultural wages board established under the Corn Production Act 1917, he focused on the fact that, with the exception of the war period, the British government had not established new boards in Northern Ireland or Scotland as it had in England and Wales in 1924. This, he claimed, was most probably due to the fact that, as in Ireland, small farms were more predominant in these countries with the farmers' own family playing a considerable role in the

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<sup>115</sup> S.F. MacEntee (1889-1984) was born in Belfast and was a founder member of Fianna Fáil in 1926. He represented Dublin Co. 1927-37; Dublin Townships 1937-48; Dublin South-East 1948-69. His ministerial portfolios included Finance 1932-43 and 1951-4; Local Government and Public Health 1943-48 and Health 1957-65. He was notorious for being one of the most conservative Fianna Fáil ministers.

<sup>116</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for the Executive Council on the proposed Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936, 21 Mar. 1936 (S 8744).

working of the farms. By contrasting this system with the larger farms in England and Wales, where hired agricultural employment was on a large scale basis, it was inferred by implication that paid labour was only a fraction of the entire farming population in Ireland and statutory regulation not so necessary. The real preoccupation of the minister was eventually revealed in the following statement:

It may be a fact that in this country agricultural labourers in places are paid relatively low wages and it is probably true that they would have the sympathy of every section of the community for any reasonable effort to improve their conditions. The really important matter, however, is the ability of the farmers to pay and the consumers to bear the cost of better wages than they are doing and the case for an elaborate system of a central wages board and regional wages committees stands or falls on that.<sup>117</sup>

MacEntee complained that the Department of Agriculture had 'made no effort whatever to elucidate that supremely important aspect of the problem'.<sup>118</sup> These comments confirmed that the mentality of this key department had not changed since 1922 when the interests of the agricultural labourer were subordinated to those of the farming class. This was corroborated further in the minister's assertion that although the wages of agricultural labourers had fallen, they were 'still between the 1917 and 1918 level' and were '9s. a week above the 1914 level'.<sup>119</sup> So despite a fall from their post war peak of 32s. 2d. in 1920 to 21s. 3d. by 1935, the fact that labourers were now in receipt of wages approximating to those received almost two decades previously was acceptable to MacEntee given that they were all of 9s. above the 1914 level. And while the minister denigrated Ryan for introducing this machinery without first establishing whether

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<sup>117</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for the Executive Council on the proposed Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936, 21 Mar. 1936, p. 3 (S 8744).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

farmers could afford to pay better wages or the consumer such costs, likewise he made no attempt to address this 'supremely important aspect of the problem'. Instead he proceeded to issue a litany of undesirable effects which would allegedly result from the bill's introduction in the precise unsubstantiated manner for which he had criticised the minister for Agriculture. Huge uncorroborated claims were made which sought to exaggerate the effect an increase in wages would have on every sector of the economy.

Focusing initially on the position of the farming community he asserted that any considerable increase in the aggregate of agricultural wages would tend to drive the farmer out of production in so far as the recovery of the cost could not be passed on to the home consumers.<sup>120</sup> Moving his prophesies from the confines of the agricultural community to the nation as a whole he submitted that 'any possible transfer to the cost of the home consumers will have the consequence of sending up the cost of various services, central and local, due to the increase in the cost of living figure'.<sup>121</sup> Thus the premise of the previous government, that the farmers' prosperity was the foundation of the economy and consequently what affected the farmer reverberated on the rest of the community, was once again reiterated. Although the logic on this occasion was exaggerated beyond all proportion:

At present it is necessary to subsidise our agricultural exports in order to sell them abroad and it would be manifestly absurd to increase the cost of producing these articles, if our agricultural exports fall off due to increased cost of production not counterbalanced by extra state bounties, our currency position will be considerably weakened and devaluation will become an increasing menace to

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<sup>120</sup> Department of Finance memo on the proposed Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936, 21 Mar. 1936, p. 5 (S 8744).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*



owners of mobile capital, who will seek to safeguard their possessions against that danger by transferring them abroad.<sup>122</sup>

Most pertinent of all, however, was the acknowledgement by the minister that the bill was actually restricted in its terms. Yet despite this awareness, it was clearly conveyed that such constraint was insufficient guard against the likely demands from the Labour Party for further concessions:

The Labour Party, which is not likely to be faced in the near future with the task of taking office and assuming responsibility, is very free with suggestions of this kind, and the irresponsible manner in which they are made and the large number of them would appear to render it all the more advisable to offer resistance now. No matter how restricted the terms of the Bill as presented may be, concession after concession will be extracted during its passage through the Oireachtas with increased cost to the Exchequer and the farming community.<sup>123</sup>

This suspicion of the Labour Party did not stop short with the minister for Finance. It was clear from the *Farmers Gazette* that the instrumental role played by the party in effecting the introduction of this machinery did not go unobserved by the farming community. The fact that it was the Labour Party with its small numbers that instigated this move towards official control was an ominous indication to them of the strength of labour in general and its danger for agriculture.<sup>124</sup>

When such strident opposition on MacEntee's part is considered, even the limited proposals advanced by the minister for Agriculture seem relatively momentous. Nonetheless, the memoranda of both ministers are testimony to the existence of an official mindset which not only exhibited a pronounced aversion to intervening in the

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<sup>122</sup> Department of Finance memo on the proposed Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936, 21 Mar. 1936, p. 6 (S 8744).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>124</sup> *Farmers Gazette*, 7 Mar. 1936; *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1936.

agricultural industry on the labourers' behalf, but in conceding action advocated a minimalist approach in dealing with their interests.

First, it should be noted that the minister for Agriculture duly observed the criticisms of the minister for Finance when introducing the Agricultural Wages Bill for debate in the Dáil in November 1936. The lack of argument supporting the introduction of the measure so conspicuously absent from the memorandum submitted to government, was replaced with tremendous statistical detail, intended no doubt to overwhelm any dissenters. On this occasion the minister did not fail to forward the huge disparity in agricultural wages as the greatest argument for regulation. He went into this issue in great depth noting how in 1935 compared with the official average of 21s. 3d. recorded for permanent labourers receiving no allowances of any kind, almost a third received wages under 20s., 45.5 per cent earned wages between 20s. and 25s., with only 24.5 per cent receiving wages over 25s.<sup>125</sup>

To further illustrate the downward spiral of this worker's income he focused on the wage deterioration in Co. Cork between 1931 and 1935. He pointed out that the earnings of a large number of labourers during this period fell from over 20s. to under 20s. and from over 17s. to under 17s.<sup>126</sup> This, he claimed, was reflected in the proportion of those receiving less than 17s. increasing from 3.2 per cent in 1931 to 9.8 per cent in 1935, and of those earning from 17s. to 20s. increasing from 5.6 per cent to 16.9 per cent.<sup>127</sup> While there was little change in the percentage of those earning between 20s. and 25s., those

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<sup>125</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 206.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

receiving wages ranging from 25s. to 30s. decreased by 13.8 per cent, with a decrease of 4.9 per cent also recorded for those earning from 30s. to 35s.<sup>128</sup> Addressing the issue of wages according to farm size, the minister reported that on farms under 50 acres in counties Meath, Cork, Wexford, Galway and Tipperary, the average wage paid in 1935 was 22s., while on farms over 50 acres, regardless of size, the average paid was only 20s.<sup>129</sup> Given that the majority of labourers were concentrated on farms of 50 acres plus, this tendency was partly accounted for on the basis that:

The small farmer usually employs only one man, a good man, a man who is able to look after machinery and other things, whereas the larger farmer, in addition to employing a ploughman and stockman, may employ three or four others who are not as highly qualified or trained.<sup>130</sup>

However, Ryan soon dispelled the plausibility of this reasoning as an excuse for larger farmers paying less wages by tying it into the question of whether farmers could afford to pay a statutorily determined minimum rate. He contended that out of an income pool of £59,250,000 available to all those engaged in agriculture in the period 1926-7, farmers and the relatives employed on the land received on average £93 each and labourers £66 each.<sup>131</sup> Allowing for the decline in the value of agricultural output in the intervening period he estimated that by 1934 the average farmer and his relative assisting was receiving less than the agricultural labourer, suggesting £51 to the labourer's £55 12s.<sup>132</sup> Given the increase in the value of agricultural output between 1935 and 1936, he calculated that the sum available to farmers and relatives assisting had increased to an

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<sup>128</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 206.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 209.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 203.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 211-2.

average of £65 each per annum.<sup>133</sup> However, he argued that this income was not distributed to all farmers evenly. Alluding to the fact that more than half the agricultural population occupied holdings under £10 valuation he postulated:

Whether they are in receipt of unemployment assistance, getting work under a local authority, getting the old age pension or a widows' and orphans' pension, all these things would go to show that they are not in receipt of £65 per year, and if the statistics I have quoted, showing that there is a sum of over £35,000,000 in a pool for those people are correct, the people in the bigger farms must be getting more than £65 a year out of the pool.<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, as to whether farmers could afford to meet the demands of this measure, Ryan contended that since the employers who paid lower wages were generally those on the 50 acre plus farms, and these were also the same farmers who received a larger share of the farm income pool than most, then these people could afford to pay better wages than they were currently paying. Moreover, this argument was compounded by the fact that agricultural prices were increasing, with a 12.5 per cent increase between 1935 and 1936, as also reflected in the slight increase in the average agricultural wage.<sup>135</sup> Thus, he cajoled, by regulating wages the government was really only 'helping the farmer 'to do in a regular legal way what he was going to do in any case' given the improved outlook for agriculture.<sup>136</sup> At the same time he assured the farming community that any increase in agricultural wages would not result in the agricultural labourer being 'better off than the farmer'.<sup>137</sup> To this end he reasoned:

I think, finding, as we have found, that there are farmers who are paying less than half what others are paying, and also that there are many farmers who appear to

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<sup>133</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 213.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 214.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 216.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 210.

be able to pay a much better wage, there is a case to be made for regulating the industry, for fixing some wage....It cannot be denied that certain classes of agricultural labourers are much more valuable than others....With that great disparity, however, there would appear to be, at least, ground for discontent, if not for a sense of injustice amongst certain of the labourers.<sup>138</sup>

The contribution of low wages to the drift from rural to urban areas was also advanced as a strong determinant for the introduction of the legislation. It was argued that the more 'ambitious' and 'efficient' worker would leave agricultural employment if the farmers were not prepared to pay decent wages:

If the lower wages continue, we possibly may have to face the situation of seeing the country stripped of its best men, who will make for the towns, and we may be left with a less efficient, a worse type of worker, who will be content with the lower wage.<sup>139</sup>

In this regard it should be noted that there were certain similarities between the reasons advanced by Prothero and Buxton when introducing their 1917 and 1924 bills to the House of Commons, and Ryan in Ireland when introducing the 1936 bill. All three pinpointed low wage levels and a disparity in wages between districts as contributing significantly to the drain of skilled workers from the agricultural industry.<sup>140</sup> There was one conspicuous difference, however, and that was the failure of Ryan to address the weak and unorganised position of the agricultural labourer and how this factor had contributed substantially to the precarious existence of the latter. Both Prothero and Buxton forwarded this as the cardinal reason for the introduction of wage regulation to the agricultural industry, as did Basil Brooke later in 1939 when introducing similar

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<sup>138</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, cols. 210 and 215.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 210.

<sup>140</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 96), 23 Jul. 1917, col. 957; *Ibid.*, (vol. 174) 2 Jun. 1924, cols 914-5; *Ibid.*, (vol. 176), 28 Jul. 1924, col. 1798.

machinery to Northern Ireland.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, Ryan barely concealed his low esteem for the ordinary, less skilled agricultural labourer, making it very clear that he placed little value on his contribution to the agricultural economy or rural society. This, coupled with his conscious efforts to reassure the farming community that the proposed legislation would not result in a deterioration of the average farmer's economic position vis a vis the labourer, renders it necessary to establish what sort of measure the minister introduced to Dáil Éireann and eventually became law.

Like most wage fixing legislation, the main purpose of the Agricultural Wages Bill 1936 was to place a floor under the wages of agricultural labourers by providing for the establishment of machinery to prescribe minimum wage rates, in this instance an agricultural wages board.<sup>142</sup> The board was to be constituted by the minister for Agriculture and to consist of twelve members: a chairman and eleven ordinary members; namely four employer and four labour representatives and three neutral members. The scheme also provided for the setting up of a number of regional agricultural wages committees, with the chairman of the board chairing each committee. The function of these committees was to make recommendations to the board in regard to the fixing of minimum rates for the districts comprised in their areas. The board could not pass a new wages order without first consulting with the committees.

In formulating this legislation the minister for Agriculture had precedent in the machinery established under the British Corn Production Act 1917 and the more recent

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<sup>141</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. xcii), 24 Apr. 1917, col. 2261; *Ibid.*, (vol. 174), 2 Jun. 1924, col. 914; *Hansard N.I. (Commons)*, (vol. xxii), 18 May 1939, col. 1618.

<sup>142</sup> Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill, 1936 (S 8744).

Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924.<sup>143</sup> Table AIII.3 in Appendix III is instructive in this regard. It outlines the main duties, functions and powers of the various bodies operating under the auspices of the latter two codes of legislation and the Irish Agricultural Wages Act 1936. It is evident that all three systems shared a common thread. Apart from being instituted with a view to prescribing minimum wage rates for the agricultural labourer, they were also required to carry out several other functions. For instance, they were obliged to issue permits exempting certain workers from the terms of wages orders on the grounds of mental or physical incapacity. They were also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the terms of the wages orders passed by the Board were observed by employing farmers, prosecuting in respect of offences under the act and taking civil proceedings on behalf of workers for the recovery of wages due. This was the extent of their similarities however. In drafting the terms of the Agricultural Wages Bill 1936, the minister for Agriculture actually looked back to the Corn Production Act 1917 as a model and not to the more recent scheme operating in England since 1924.

The provisions of the 1924 act practically mirrored those of its predecessor except in one important and vital respect. The effective power for wage-fixing was transferred from the national or central agricultural wages board to individual county wage committees.<sup>144</sup> It is worth noting in this connection that such a devolution of power had not been the scheme originally intended for introduction by the British government in 1924. Instead the bill as

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<sup>143</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917* (7 & 8 Geo. V, c. 46, [G.B.]) 21 Aug. 1917; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924* (14 & 15 Geo. V, c. 37 [U.K.]) 29 Aug. 1924.

<sup>144</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 2.

originally sponsored had to be fundamentally amended in this respect before it was passed because a majority of the House of Commons rejected the attempts to introduce a system on the lines of the Corn Production Act.<sup>145</sup> Even though the powers of the area committees had been substantially augmented under the terms of the initial bill in that they could, subject to confirmation by the board, fix, vary or cancel minimum wage rates for their areas, a centralised system on the lines of the 1917 agricultural wages board was still renounced.<sup>146</sup> It was argued that the previous central board in London had no knowledge of local affairs and that it 'rode rough shod over any suggestions made by the local boards'.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, the British government had been obliged to decentralise their wage fixing system by divesting the wages board of all its wage fixing power, distributing it instead to the various county committees. As a result, the only function played by the board in this system was to formally ratify the decisions made by the committees.

Unlike the English government in 1924, when James Ryan decided to re-introduce a system based on the 1917 act he made no attempt to augment or increase the powers of the area committees. In fact, the minister even deprived the committees of some of the powers available to these bodies under the 1917 system. For instance, the power to appoint sub-committees for carrying out additional reports or duties was withheld from both the area committees and the board.<sup>148</sup> Nor did the curtailment end there. It had been provided in the draft bill that on application by a committee the agricultural wages board

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<sup>145</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 176), 28 Jul. 1924, cols. 1796, 1800-1, 1843.

<sup>146</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 174), 2 Jun. 1924, cols. 920-1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 925.

<sup>148</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 12(3).



could reconsider any minimum rate which had been fixed.<sup>149</sup> Its inclusion would have enabled the area committees to query claims made by the board and would therefore have compelled the latter to be far more accountable to the committees. That the government had thought better of providing such a measure was demonstrated in its deletion of the provision from the final bill circulated to the Dáil in August 1936. In addition, the stipulation that required each area committee to submit an annual report of their proceedings to Dáil Éireann and the minister for Agriculture had been removed by the government, unopposed, during the bill's committee stage. As remarked by the minister in this regard:

These committees are merely advisory committees and I do not think there would be any use in keeping a provision in the Bill that they should send in an account of their proceedings. I think by getting an annual report from the Board we will have covered all the activities of the board and the committees.<sup>150</sup>

The emphasis placed on the 'merely advisory' character of the committees was significant. While it was never suggested that the committees be given power equal to that proposed initially by the British government in 1924, they had enjoyed a little more autonomy under the original draft terms of the 1936 bill than that which resulted from the final measure. It seems that the government in undermining further the powers of the committees was taking steps to vest all wage fixing power in the board, but to an extent unprecedented in either the 1917 or 1924 acts. In this connection it is worth observing that, unlike the members of parliament in the UK House of Commons, the Irish deputies appear to have been oblivious, even indifferent, to the failure of the government to increase the powers of these committees.

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<sup>149</sup> Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill, 1936, head 17 (S 8744).

This indifference can largely be accounted for when the precedent set by the first agricultural wages board is considered. Unlike the 1936 bill, where the establishment of area committees was a matter for the minister, the power of the boards in 1917 had been underlined by the optional provision which authorised them to establish subsidiary area committees.<sup>151</sup> The boards established in Ireland and England differed with regard to how they implemented this option. The Irish board decided to curtail the powers and functions of the area committees to a greater extent than that of the English board. As noted in the Irish board's final report:

In England the matter of considering and granting applications for exemption from the operation of the minimum wages scheme were delegated to district committees by the English Board, but our Board considered it desirable, having regard to Irish conditions, that they should deal direct with such applications, and that the work of the committees should be confined to the primary duty of submitting recommendations as to minimum rates of wages for their respective areas, and reporting on proposals to vary or cancel existing minimum rates.<sup>152</sup>

Therefore the Irish board, due to the extensive labour agitation at this time, had chosen to retain the optimum level of power in relation to wage determination issues by confining the function of the area committees to an advisory capacity. In England, the board had chosen to delegate certain of its powers to the local committees, thus extending the role of the area committee beyond that of mere adviser. So, while the English system from 1917 to 1921 facilitated a move towards a more localised system, this was prevented in Ireland by the board's decision to uphold its centralised powers. Such moves towards more active local wage committees in England was reflected in the increased powers of

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<sup>150</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 26 Nov. 1936, col. 1061.

<sup>151</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, sections 12(1) and (3).

<sup>152</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, during the period September, 1917 to September 1921' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland* (1920-21), p. 321.

the area committees under the original 1924 bill, and ultimately in the decentralisation of the wage board system under the 1924 act. In Ireland, the trend which centralised power in the wages board under the 1917 act was perpetuated under the 1936 act, with increased steps taken to undermine the role of the area committees. Even though the Irish deputies had been informed during the bill's passage through the Dáil that the functions of the area committees were different to those operating in England and Wales, it did not appear to concern them. There had been little response to the minister's query as to:

whether the board is properly constituted and whether the powers given to the board are right and proper, and whether the house agrees that it is better to make the committees advisory rather than executive.<sup>153</sup>

They were far too preoccupied with the extensive powers vested in the chairman of the board. These powers were little short of absolute when compared to the position of chairman under the other systems. The most unequivocal indication of this was the provision which allowed the chairman to constitute a quorum.<sup>154</sup> This effectively allowed him to decide matters without reference to the other members. This power was very much in contrast with the 1917 act where at least one third of the whole number of the representative members and at least one appointed member had to be present in order to constitute a meeting.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, with regard to the determination of wages orders by the board, it was provided that the chairman could actually make a wages order even if none or only one of the worker, employer or neutral members were present.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, had there not been unanimous agreement among members regarding a question, or a

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<sup>153</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 221.

<sup>154</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, 1936/53[Éire](28 Nov. 1936), section 12(3).

<sup>155</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 11(6).

<sup>156</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 13(a).

question remained undetermined due to a tied vote, it was provided that the chairman could either adjourn the making of the order until the next meeting or make the order himself. In the latter event such an order was deemed to be a board decision.<sup>157</sup> This section was particularly ominous as it effectively allowed the chairman to fix the rate himself in the absence of unanimous agreement between the worker and employer members. That the minister did not expect such agreement was made abundantly clear from the outset in the Dáil:

It is felt that there may be disagreement between the representatives of the farmers and the representatives of the labourers, and the chairman will have the deciding voice after he has heard their views.<sup>158</sup>

So while the members of the House of Commons debated the powers of the area committee vis á vis the central board, the members of Dáil Éireann voiced concern about the far-reaching powers vested in the board's chairman, with some deputies going so far as to allege that the chairman was to be endowed with the powers of a dictator. For instance, as noted by Michael Keyes, a Labour TD for Limerick:

I have very great doubt as to the wisdom of entrusting the chairman with the supreme and complete power with which he is to be invested. It means, practically, that in all cases the chairman will be the dictator, except the miracle happens of there being unanimity amongst all the people constituting the committee....It is very difficult to anticipate unanimity among representatives of the farmers and of the labourers and the neutrals.<sup>159</sup>

Such allegations were not appeased by indications from the minister that this officer was perceived by government to be of paramount importance to the board's operations. Indeed, he made it clear that the appointment of neutral members was to primarily facilitate the work of the chairman:

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<sup>157</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 13(ii).

If there were no neutral members the chairman would listen to a very exaggerated case put forward on each side and he might frequently find it difficult to make up his mind. If we have three neutral members on the board they will act as sort of jury. They will make up their minds independently and the chairman will have the benefits of their wisdom. They will be very helpful to the chairman in deciding what will be a very difficult question.<sup>160</sup>

That the minister unequivocally viewed the chairman as the decisive element on the board and that the other members were there simply to convey their viewpoints to him was further expounded:

The board should be able to give the greatest help to the chairman, both representatives of the interests concerned and the neutral members, and in addition to that, the advice he gets from the committees during his tour of the country before making the final order should enable him to give a decision that I hope will always be marked by prudence and justice....He will decide absolutely on his own responsibility, unless there is unanimity, and then he must decide with the whole board. As far as I understand these terms, he should be termed a compulsory arbitrator.<sup>161</sup>

Therefore, as these comments indicate, the minister was fully convinced that the chairman would constitute the stalwart element on the board, a conviction which had ominous connotations given the extensive powers vested in this position. This consideration was not alleviated by the stipulation which required that the chairman would also preside at meetings of each area committee.<sup>162</sup> The 1917 system left it open to any member of the board, or other person nominated by the Board of Agriculture & Fisheries, to attend such meetings, whereas it was usual for each committee to appoint its own chairman under the 1924 system.<sup>163</sup> Nor did the minister limit the extent of his alterations to increasing the powers of the chairman and curtailing the functions of the

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<sup>158</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 217.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 270.

<sup>160</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 217.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, cols 218 and 221.

<sup>162</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 4(8)(b).

area committees. Some major revisions in the terms of the draft bill were also effected with regard to the functions of the board itself by the time it reached the Dáil.

The foremost revision concerned the principal function of the agricultural wages board. Initially, this function in the draft bill had been the same as that for the 1917 act, as noted below (the differences in the 1917 act are noted in parentheses):

The Agricultural Wages Board shall fix by Order minimum rates of wages for workers [workmen] employed in agriculture for timework and may also, if and so far as they think it necessary or expedient, fix minimum rates of wages for workers employed in agriculture for piece work.<sup>164</sup>

However, by the time the bill was introduced to the Dáil this provision had been replaced with the terms noted below, which were eventually incorporated into the 1936 act:

17(1) The Board shall...*from time to time as they think proper*, by order fix, in respect of each wages district, the minimum rates of wages for agricultural workers for time work, and may, if and so far as they think it necessary, fix, in respect of such district, the minimum rates of wage for agricultural workers for piece work.<sup>165</sup>

Although the primary duty of these wage fixing bodies was similar, there was a major deviation in the final 1936 bill. The Irish government had provided that the fixing of minimum rates was to be left to the discretion of the board to a much greater extent than was the case in the English legislation. Its obligation to fix rates was mitigated considerably by the words 'from time to time as they think proper'. This qualification of the verb 'shall' did not exist under the terms of the 1917 act or indeed under the terms of the 1924 act. Revisions were also made with regard to the terms of reference guiding the board in its wage fixing function. In line with the provisions of the 1917 and 1924 acts,

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<sup>163</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 12(2); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 5(2); *Agriculture Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936*, section 12 (S8744).

<sup>165</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 17(1).

the board and committees established under the original draft of the 1936 bill would have been obliged to operate under the terms of reference outlined below:

In fixing minimum rates [the board] shall, so far as practicable, secure for able-bodied men such wages as, in the opinion of the Board, are adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation.<sup>166</sup>

These terms of reference were quite limited. The board was not directed to consider providing a wage comparable with workers in other occupations, rather they were restricted to the consideration of a wage appropriate to the conditions of the agricultural industry and the occupation in which the worker was employed. When the limitations of these terms of reference are considered it could be argued that the omission of this provision from the 1936 act was a positive move on the part of the Irish government. It could be suggested that the Irish board had been endowed with greater autonomy in terms of prescribing a decent wage for the agricultural labourer. What was particularly peculiar in this regard, however, was that this very rubric had been included in the draft bill.<sup>167</sup> It seems that an objection to the inclusion of such a proviso by the minister for Finance contributed to its deletion from the final measure:

From Head 15, which is copied practically verbatim from the British Act, it looks as if the standard to be aimed at is what will keep a married man with a dependent family on a reasonable standard of life and promote economy 'so far as practicable'. Logically, such a standard would appear to be too high for a single man with no dependent family. It was not known how this problem was disposed of in the operation of the British Act however.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 5(6); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 2(4); *Agriculture Wages (Regulation) Bill 1936*, section 15 (S 8744).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Department of Finance memorandum to the Executive Council, 21 Mar. 1936.

The minister's objection to the inclusion of this section was that although it obliged the board to fix a minimum wage in line with a standard that was adequate to keep a married man and a dependant family, this standard was viewed to be excessive for the needs of the single man. The government dealt with this 'problem' not by inserting a provision as to what constituted an adequate wage for the single man, but by choosing to dispose of the entire section. As a result the board was free to set whatever standards it wished. The only criteria by which the board was governed was embodied in the words 'as they think proper', and the obligation to consider the area committees' recommendations but being under no obligation to implement them. And while attempts were made during the passage of the bill to impose on the board an obligation to fix an economic and a living wage, Ryan rejected such endeavours stating that:

If we were setting up a Board for the purpose of trying to fix the proper economic rate that the farmer could pay or to fix the proper rate that the labourer should get in order to live, then we probably would have a very different type of Board - a Board that would be qualified to judge those particular questions and come to an intelligent conclusion on them.<sup>169</sup>

This reply overturned the most basic conjecture as to what a wages board would consider when determining a minimum wage. It became even more apparent that this board was being established for one limited purpose. As the minister noted:

The scheme of the bill is to set up an arbitration board...It is felt there may be disagreement between the representatives of the farmers and the representatives of the labourers, and the chairman will have the deciding vote after he has heard their views...neutral members on the board would be very helpful to the chairman...they will act as a sort of jury.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 26 Nov. 1936, col. 1026.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1936, cols 217-8.



The role of the independent members and the chairman on the board was to adjudicate between the rates recommended by the employer and worker members. There was no suggestion that the independent members and the chairman might actually be knowledgeable in any economic sense, in that they might lead the way in suggesting a decent wage based on economic or other factors. That was not the purpose of the board. It was merely to intervene in the voluntary wage fixing process by arbitrating between worker and employer. Therefore, should the obligation to consider a rate in line with what was adequate for the workers' occupation have entered into the equation, it would have served only to tamper and even prejudice this whole process.

When the removal of the directions which guided the board in its functions and their replacement by 'from time to time as they think proper' are considered in conjunction with the minister's description of the board as being solely arbitrary in function, the concluding deduction suggests a wage fixing mechanism far more restricted in scope than that operating under the older 1917 act. This contention is also substantiated by the restrictions in the powers of the area committees at this time. Moreover, the removal of the obligation on the Irish board to notify the public of its intention to fix, vary or cancel a minimum rate must also be taken into account. Before fixing any minimum rate of wage the boards and committees under the 1917 and 1924 acts had been obliged to give public notice of their proposals and consider any objections lodged to them within timeframes varying from a month to a minimum of 14 days.<sup>171</sup> The 1936 board differed in

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<sup>171</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 5(4); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 2(6).

that it was confined to notifying only the area committees.<sup>172</sup> This meant that the general public were prevented from submitting their views on any proposed wage rates and also that the board was in no way accountable to the public for orders fixed. Not only did they differ in regard to their notification procedures but also in relation to the time limit within which objections and recommendations could be received. The time scale involved in the procedures of the 1936 board was by far the longest, slowing any wage making decision down over a minimum two month period.

Further anomalies existed in the constitution of the board. There was a blatant divergence between the procedure adopted by the English acts and the 1936 act with regard to the appointment of representative members to the board and committees. While the English acts allowed for the appointment of representative members through election or nomination, the Irish bill vested exclusive control of appointments in the office of the minister.<sup>173</sup> Moreover, the suitability of nominees representative of employers or workers was determined according to whether in his 'opinion' a candidate was suitably representative. This meant that no provision had been made to facilitate the request of the Labour Party that the representatives of the workers be nominated by the trade union movement, with three being residents of the province of Leinster, two of Munster, one of Connacht and one of Ulster.<sup>174</sup> Likewise, this dereliction also applied to the representatives of employers. During the debate in the Dáil the minister accounted for this decision by stating almost immediately:

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<sup>172</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 17(6)(a).

<sup>173</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917*, section 13(3); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 2; *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 4(8)(d)-(e); section 5(3)(b).

Unfortunately there is no organisation that can claim to represent fully these classes and these members must, therefore, be nominated. As they must be nominated, they are going to be nominated by me.<sup>175</sup>

Accordingly, he suggested asking the county committees of agriculture to suggest names for a panel from which the employer representatives for the committees and the board could be formed and asked the TDs to submit names to represent agricultural labourers.<sup>176</sup> What is important to note is that no provision was made to facilitate trade union nomination or representation on the board or committees, even had a body representative of farmers or workers emerged. Under the terms of the English acts regulations were provided to allow for trade union representation and nomination, as well as ministerial appointments. Under the 1936 act complete control was retained in the hands of the minister. Such action strongly inferred an aversion to the presence of trade union representation on the board or committees. In fact it implied that the minister had taken steps to ensure that should trade unionism have revived itself amongst this class he would have still retained authority over the all important issue of representation. Recalling the war years when the introduction of the first minimum wage had led to unparalleled levels of organisation among these workers, many felt that its re-introduction would encourage a revival of trade unionism. Indeed claims made in this regard by the Labour Party in their statement of 1935 suggested that the introduction of the minimum wage would do precisely that. For while it was acknowledged that trade unionism as a general force in agriculture was virtually non-existent, it was implied that

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<sup>174</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers dated 14 Mar. 1935, submitted to the minister for Agriculture, 20 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>175</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, col. 217.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, cols. 368-9.

sufficient contacts had been maintained in certain areas to allow for the resurgence of this element consequent to the reintroduction of a minimum wage:

It is suggested that these contacts are of considerable value now inasmuch as they provide the nucleus of a machine which can be set in motion without delay if legislation is enacted to fix minimum rates of pay in agricultural employment generally. They have had the effect also of preserving certain standards of employment which would provide a head line for any authority charged with the duty of prescribing minimum standards throughout the country.<sup>177</sup>

While this prospect was viewed by the Labour Party as a positive recommendation for reintroducing a minimum wage scheme, the comments of the minister for Finance indicated that this was not how such a development was viewed in government. In a manner which echoed the views of the previous government, he declared in his memorandum opposing the bill that:

The scheme will have the effect of handing over the agricultural industry to the trade unions with effects somewhat similar to what have been seen in towns where labour is often highly paid but inefficient, and where, in many trades, the level of wages is higher than in Great Britain or Northern Ireland.<sup>178</sup>

This mentality was very much shared by the farming community assuming the *Farmers Gazette*, which had been representing farmers' views since 1832, was an accurate barometer. Initially farmers were apprehensive that the new machinery would provoke or exacerbate tensions instead of promoting a unity of interests between farmer and worker.<sup>179</sup> However, the phobia shared by the government that the minimum wage would mean the return of the agitator type to agriculture was soon proclaimed.<sup>180</sup> It was evident that based on the events of 1917-23, farmers associated wage regulation with the likely revival of trade union agitation and its potent association with strikes:

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<sup>177</sup> Labour Party statement on minimum wages for agricultural workers, 14 Mar. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>178</sup> Department of Finance memorandum to the Executive Council, 21 Mar. 1936 (S 8744).

Within a few months it seems certain that the agricultural wages boards of war days are to be re-established; and this mania for threatening or calling strikes may well lead responsible employers to ask whether the new situation is going to mean that in addition to being told what to sow and what stock to keep by the government they are to be further restricted in scope and opportunity by the lack of a sense of responsibility and a knowledge of economic realities amongst those who may represent organised labour? If so - it is not unreasonable to ask at this stage that the wages board bill should be so amended as to secure landowners against the dangers that are obvious.<sup>181</sup>

That no provision had been made to facilitate trade union nomination or representation on the board suggested that the government sought to defuse any stimulus to organise which such machinery might have encouraged. It would also have appeased the fears of the farming community to a certain degree. For the farmers' greatest apprehension seems to have been that despite the unorganised position of the agricultural labourers they would have no shortage of union representation on the board. The problem with this was that it would have been of industrial or urban origin. Initially they were not so much concerned with this as with their own lack of organisation and the disadvantages attending their sector because of the failure to unite in a common front. As stated in the *Farmers Gazette*:

A situation...requires to be considered in which the unorganised farm labourers may not lack spokesmen to the same extent as the individually-disposed farmers; for the extraordinary fact emerges that if needs be the industrial union leaders in the towns will readily undertake the task of raising wage levels for the rural employees.<sup>182</sup>

It was claimed that even the businessmen and manufacturers in the cities had more of an interest in keeping food costs at a low level than in securing fair profits for the farmer; for the higher the wage level of farm workers, the stronger became the case of the urban

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<sup>179</sup> *Farmers Gazette*, 23 May 1936.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Sep. and 17 Oct. 1936.

<sup>181</sup> Department of Finance memorandum to the Executive Council, 21 Mar. 1936 (S 8744).

employees for consequential increases. It was apprehended that the influence of industrial labour on the wages board would result in factory conditions being applied to agriculture:

We fear greatly that this new and well intentioned effort to improve the lot of the rural labourer may in effect result in further depression of agricultural standards and a reduction of the opportunities for both farm owners and farm workers. This is particularly likely to happen if, as seems possible, the representation of rural labour on wages boards is to be influenced largely by machine-individualists and if the farmer is to remain unorganised. There is the real danger that instead of allaying discontents the new legislation may ultimately increase the actual embarrassments and cause additional irritations.<sup>183</sup>

By retaining the control over the nomination and appointment of labour representatives in the hands of the minister for Agriculture it would seem therefore that the objective was to mollify the concerns of the farming community to a certain extent.

But perhaps the most effective step taken to avoid upsetting the farming community more than was absolutely necessary was evidenced in the exclusion from the board's governing legislation of the proviso that it would 'so far as is reasonably practicable secure a weekly half holiday for workers'.<sup>184</sup> This direction had been included in section 2(2) of the English act of 1924 which delineated the committees' wage fixing powers. It was the committee's ability to fix rates for varying hours of work and to provide differential rates for overtime that enabled it to indirectly secure a weekly half holiday for these workers. The earlier wages board in Ireland had provided for a weekly half day under its wages order of 1920 by standardising the working week at 54 hours instead of having rates for both a 54 and 60 hour week, with overtime rates commencing for any

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<sup>182</sup> *Farmers Gazette*, 19 Sep. 1936.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

hours worked over 54. While this essentially meant a shorter working week for the same pay, in practice it was aimed at providing the worker with an opportunity to take an afternoon off once a week, rather than splitting the shorter week over the six days, subject to the agreement of the employer. As noted by the AWB in its order of 19 April 1920:

The employee and the worker shall be at liberty so as to arrange the working week of 54 hours that it will consist of one short working day and five longer working days, provided that, in the absence of any such agreement, the working day, for the purpose of this Order, shall be deemed not to consist of any more than nine working hours.<sup>185</sup>

The 1924 act had then built on a practice that had also been prevalent in England and Wales by including a stipulation in section 2(2) that the committees would continue to regulate wages and hours so as to facilitate workers achieving this benefit through arrangement with their employers. That the minister for Agriculture should have excluded this important proviso from the 1936 act was not a positive step. While the wage fixing powers of both the Irish and English legislation were identical, subsequent chapters will reveal that from the outset both the Irish board and government took a very limited view of the board's ability to regulate hours to the extent that additional legislation on the government's part was considered necessary before the agricultural labourer would be able to avail of a weekly half holiday. So while steps were being taken to guarantee non-agricultural workers a week's holidays annually with pay under the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 and a maximum working week of 48 hours,

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<sup>184</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 2(2).

<sup>185</sup> 'The agricultural wages board for Ireland (constitution and proceedings) regulations, 1920' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (1919-20)*, p. 310.

provision was being made to ensure that the agricultural labourer would not even get a Saturday afternoon off to attend to his personal chores, a practice which stemmed back to the Factory Act of 1850, and which for which the last board had made provision.<sup>186</sup> The implications of this action were far-reaching and shall be explored extensively in chapter five.

In view of these considerations it can be concluded that as significant as the concession of a minimum wage was to agricultural labourers, the machinery introduced for its regulation seemed to compromise substantially its long term benefits. In fact, in introducing machinery so limited in scope, the Fianna Fáil government effectively institutionalised a mentality which advocated catering to the interests of this class as little as possible. While it might have differed from the Cumann na nGaedheal government in that it conceded statutory regulation, it did so only because it had left itself with no other alternative given its extensive subsidisation of the farming community. And then it took major steps to temper the potential impact of such machinery for agriculture, the farming community, and of course the government itself. In effect not only had this government barely conceded its statutory duty to safeguard the economic interests of this class, but it had taken steps to ensure that little else would be introduced to ameliorate their position. Given that this system of wage regulation was to operate over the next four decades the subsequent chapters will explore its effectiveness and whether subsequent administrations subscribed to or modified the policy institutionalised by Ryan.

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<sup>186</sup> *Report of the committee on holidays with pay*, p. 283 [Cmd. 5724] H.C. 1937-8, vol. xii, p.15.



## Chapter IV

### The record of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1936-76

A trade board will place an unorganized or poorly organized trade in a position of equality with well organized trades and enable it to claim a share in the increased wealth of the community<sup>1</sup>.

Wages are not generally regulated by law, but in recent times concerns over low pay and the number of working poor has resulted in eighteen European Union member states, including Ireland, instituting a national statutory minimum wage.<sup>2</sup> This has effectively meant that the 'living wage' movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which set out to regulate low wages in specific high risk industries, has now extended to encompass the workforce of entire nations, setting floors below which no wages can sink. As such it is testimony to the success of the minimum wage system which first evolved in Australia and New Zealand in the 1890s. Whilst this system was subsequently adopted in Great Britain in 1909, it also partly stimulated the adoption of various measures at state level in the United States until the Fair Labor Standards Act was introduced in 1938.<sup>3</sup>

A statutory minimum wage system now also underpins pay in Japan and in many European countries, with collectively agreed minimum wage systems applying in most

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<sup>1</sup> B.F. Shields., 'The minimum wage' in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, 87th session, xv, (1933-4), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> A national minimum wage of £4.40 (€5.59) per hour was first introduced in Ireland in April 2000 under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, 2000/5 [R.I.](31 Mar. 2000); European Industrial Relations Observatory Online (Eironline), 'Low wage workers and the working poor' (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2002/08/study/TN0208101S.html>)(12 Mar. 2003); (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2005/07/study/tn0507101s.html>)(11 Apr. 2007).

<sup>3</sup> John Kennan, 'Minimum wage regulation' (<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~jkennan/palgrave.htm>)(12 March 2003).

others.<sup>4</sup> That this system has also worked successfully in Ireland can be ascertained from the fact that at present, in addition to the national minimum wage, there are no less than nineteen industries regulated by minimum wage fixing bodies.<sup>5</sup> They range from sectors as diverse as shirt making and provender milling, to security, law clerks and hairdressing. On 22 April 1937, the Irish Agricultural Wages Board became the twelfth minimum wage fixing body to operate in the Free State.<sup>6</sup> With operations spanning four decades, this body would be responsible for safeguarding the livelihood of the country's largest and poorest male wage earning group by determining the standard of wages prevailing in agriculture until 1976.

The Agricultural Wages Board consisted of a chairman and eleven ordinary members.<sup>7</sup> Table 4.1 outlines the Board's membership over the duration of its existence, with the longest serving members highlighted in blue. The chairman of the Board held office at the pleasure of the minister for Agriculture, which resulted in the Board being governed by a total of three chairmen. All three had links with Fianna Fáil. William O'Leary, a native of Co. Kerry, played a prominent part in the national movement and was a Fianna Fáil TD from 1927 to 1932. Moreover, he was farming in Co. Dublin right up to his appointment to the Board in 1937.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eironline, 'Industrial relations in the EU, Japan and USA, 2001 (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2002/12/feature/TN0212101F.html>)(12 Mar. 2003).

<sup>5</sup> (<http://www.labourcourt.ie/labour/labour.nsf/LookupPageLink/HomeAnnualReport>)(11 Apr. 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1946-7), pp. 27-8; *Report of the proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1937-8* (S 11689A).

<sup>7</sup> The first meeting of the AWB was held on 29 April 1937.

<sup>8</sup> *Irish Press*, 20 Apr. 1937.

**Table 4.1** Membership of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1936-76

Chairmen	Period on Board	Neutral	Period on Board	Employer	Period on Board	Worker	Period on Board
<b>William O'Leary</b> , Dublin	<b>1937-55</b> (Died 1955)	<b>Eilís Nic Eachnaidh</b> , Dublin, M.A.	<b>1937-76</b>	Cornelius Ryan, Limerick	1937-49	Patrick Whelan, Wicklow	1940-9
Sean O'Broin, Dublin	1955-64	Senator Seamus Johnston, Monaghan	1940-49	<b>Daniel O'Gorman</b> , Wexford	<b>1937-63</b>	Denis Lehane, Cork	1940-52
Sean Lee, Cavan	October 1964-76	Bernard Dooley, Dublin	1940-49	John N. Greene, Kildare	1940-46	Seamus O'Dubhlaigh Abbeyleix	1940-49
		Mrs E. Parkinson-Hill, Waterford, B.Agric, M.Sc	1949-52	Martin Neilan, Galway	1940-49	Hugh O'Donnell, Sligo	1940-49
		T.J. Gallagher, Dublin	1949-53	Christopher Cosgrave, Meath	1946-49	Michael O'Donovan Cork	1949-51
		Patrick O'Keefe, Kilkenny	1952-54	James Hilliard, Meath	1949-53	<b>Patrick Murphy</b> , Dublin (FRW)	<b>1949-76</b>
		James Mahony, Dublin B.Sc. A.R.C. Sc I	1953-60	Patrick J. Kehoe, Kildare	1949-52	Patrick Durcan, Sligo	1949-66
		Thomas McQuin, Galway	1954-57	John MacNamara, Limerick	1949-52	<b>Con Moynihan</b> , Cork (FRW)	<b>1951-76</b>
		Owen O'Reilly, Cavan	1958-62	Eamon Ahern, Cork	1952-53	John Fahey, Carlow	1952-54; 1963-72
		<b>Edward Cassidy</b> , Monaghan	<b>1961-76</b>	John Donohoe, Kilkenny	1952-53	Thomas Hayden, Carlow	1955-62
		Eamon Mac Bhloscaidh, Laois	1963-69	Kevin O'Callaghan, Cork	1953-54	Patrick Doran, Donegal	1967-70
		Eugene Boland, Laois	1969-70	Michael Gibbons, Kilkenny	1953-54	John Burke, Galway	1971-6
		Jeremiah O'Donoghue, Kilkenny	1971-76	Brendan Clarke, Dublin	1953-63	Thomas Kavanagh, Wexford	1972-6
				Thomas Fielding, Kilkenny	1955-60		
				Timothy Kiely, Cork	1955-66		
				<b>Nicholas McCabe</b> , Louth	<b>1961-76</b>		
				Thomas King, Galway	1964-76		
				Robert McCulloch, Dublin	1964-70		
				Batt Donegan, Cork	1967-76		
				James Kelly, Kilkenny	1971-76		

Sources: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

Sean O'Broin, a native of Co. Clare, had worked for many years in the Department of Agriculture. He was assistant secretary in the years surrounding the Board's establishment, spending eight years in the secretariatship before retiring to replace O'Leary on the Board in 1955, following the latter's death. As such he was an ideal mouthpiece for departmental policy. These were hardly the most impartial arbitrators for an agricultural wage fixing body. The ordinary members comprised three 'neutral' or independent members, and four each of worker and employer representatives, all selected and appointed by the minister for Agriculture. They held office for a period of three years subject to being eligible for re-nomination at the end of that period, with most being re-appointed for several periods unless they chose to withdraw from the process or died.<sup>9</sup> It was 1949 before the minister for Agriculture decided to unofficially appoint trade union representatives to the Board. In the case of the worker members, two Federation of Rural Worker (FRW) representatives, Patrick Murphy and Con Moynihan, were to play a critical role in propounding the cause of the labourer.<sup>10</sup> Other than one neutral member, Eilis Nic Eachnaidh, a lecturer in the Department of Education at University College Dublin, they were also the longest serving members on the Board. This fact notwithstanding, surviving evidence indicates how hard they worked to gain concessions at Board level. From 1957, at least, the worker representatives inundated the Board with

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<sup>9</sup> The chairman of the Board was the only person on the board in receipt of a salary. Each member was entitled to travelling and subsistence allowances and the worker representatives received, in addition, compensation for loss of wages. See AGI/G2315/37 and AGI/G155/46 for further details.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Murphy was a founder member and eventually President of the FRW. He was also a member of the national executive of the ICTU and the Employer Labour Conference and made a significant contribution to the negotiations which led to the national wage agreements in the late sixties and seventies. He represented Irish trade union interests on the Economic and Social Committee of the EEC from 1973. He was also elected to Dublin County Council and acted as Chairman of the Council's Housing Committee. Con Moynihan was a founding member of the FRW, serving as a Trustee for some time. He was also elected to Cork County Council.

endless memoranda researched in the offices of the FRW, to substantiate claims for better increases and for the revision of certain of the practices to be explored later in this chapter, most notable amongst which, until 1964, was the demand for an adequate minimum wage capable of supporting a family.

Under the terms of the Agricultural Wages Act 1936, the Board was faced with a number of duties and powers. Its principal obligation was to fix orders prescribing minimum wage rates for agricultural labourers. It was also required to carry out several other related functions. For instance, it was obliged to issue permits exempting certain workers from the terms of its wages orders, on the grounds of mental or physical incapacity. It was also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the terms of its orders were observed by employing farmers, prosecuting in respect of offences under the act and taking civil proceedings on behalf of workers for the recovery of wages due. Other than the administration of these provisions, the Board was completely autonomous in its wage fixing procedures, subject to one stipulation. The Board was required to consult a number of regional wage committees regarding the terms of its wages orders. For this purpose the minister for Agriculture had declared each administrative county to be an 'agricultural wages district'. These districts were subsequently grouped into 'agricultural wages areas' under section 4 of the act.<sup>11</sup> Table 4.2 indicates the counties represented by each area committee and their respective meeting places.

**Table 4.2** Agricultural wages area committees established under the Agricultural Wages Act 1936

Area Committees	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
<b>Counties</b>	Cavan Donegal Leitrim Monaghan Sligo	Galway Longford Mayo Offaly Roscommon Westmeath	Dublin Kildare Laois Louth Meath Wicklow	Clare Cork Kerry Limerick Tipperary (N.R.)	Carlow Kilkenny Tipperary (S.R.) Waterford Wexford
<b>Meeting Place</b>	Bundoran	Athlone	Dublin	Limerick	Waterford
<b>Number of ordinary members</b>	12	16	14	16	10

Source: (AGI/G799/46).

The geographical location of the 'districts' appears to have been the factor taken into account when grouping them into areas.<sup>12</sup> Each area committee consisted of not less than one member representing employers and workers from each wages district in the area.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the chairman of the central board presided at meetings of each committee. The ordinary members held office for one year but were eligible for re-nomination and were also nominated and appointed by the minister for Agriculture.

The Board was precluded from fixing minimum rates of wages for any 'wages district' without first consulting the wages committees for the area in which the district was included, and taking into consideration any recommendations that committee may have made. However, the Board was not obliged to concur with these recommendations. So

<sup>11</sup> (AGI/G437/48). For earlier records on the establishment of the wages areas see (AGI/G881/39).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In a few cases owing to the size of the county and the extent to which agricultural labour was employed, it was deemed advisable to have a larger representation and accordingly provision was made for representation of each of the wages districts of counties Donegal, Galway, Mayo, Dublin and Kerry by two members and Co. Cork by three members of each category. See the *Report of the AWB, 1937-8* (S 11689A).

even in the execution of this primary function, the Board was in duty bound to do very little under the terms of its governing legislation. The considerable latitude extended to the Board in this regard was also extended to it in the matter of its wage fixing powers. Section 17(2) of the act allowed the Board to vary the scope of its minimum rates so as to apply universally to one area, or to different parts, according to the requirements of the area concerned, in addition to catering for different classes of agricultural labourer within all or certain districts. Furthermore, the presence of the conditional ‘may’ ensured that the Board had complete leeway in the exercise of these powers. Depending on how the Board was inclined, the excessive freedom granted to it in the exercise of this function meant that it could extensively use these powers to the advantage of the workers, or hardly use them at all, effecting minimal improvements. Of all the provisions in the Board’s governing legislation, therefore, this section was capable of having huge implications.

In the first of two chapters evaluating the Board’s operations and performance, this chapter will focus on the results of the Board’s minimum wage fixing decisions with a view to establishing the standards set by the Board and how these compared with wages in related sectors. The overall record of the Board in this regard can be gleaned from Figure 4.1. It illustrates the wages prescribed by the Board for adult male agricultural labourers in various parts of the country, classified according to numerous wage groups, over the period 1937 to 1976.<sup>14</sup> While increases were moderate in the forties and fifties, they were dramatic from 1965, indicating that a review of the Board’s operations can be divided into two distinct phases, pre-1965 and post-1965.

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<sup>14</sup> Data for this chart is based on Table AIV.1 in Appendix IV.

**Figure 4.1** Agricultural minimum wage rates prescribed by the AWB for adult male agricultural labourers by wages group, 1937-76



Sources: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).



Prescribing its first wages order in 1937, the Board set a minimum rate of 24*s.* for a 54 hour week for male adult labourers.<sup>15</sup> Adults were classified as those aged 20 years and over, with male juvenile workers aged between 16 and 20 years divided into classes according to age and a separate minimum rate fixed for each class. Given that the average adult agricultural wage for the country was almost 22*s.* in 1936, the inaugural rate hardly signified drastic improvements in the basic level of the agricultural wage. Considering the wide divergences at county level, however, it did introduce badly needed uniformity to agricultural wages in many rural areas across the twenty six counties. The Board proceeded to award increases in the minimum rate constantly over the subsequent decade and steadily raised the level of the floor placed under agricultural wages. In fact, the Labour Court in its first annual report in 1947 drew attention to the ‘very marked change’ in agricultural wages since before the war, with increases in the minimum wage over the 1939 rates ranging from 82 to 107 per cent according to area.<sup>16</sup> Compared with increases of between 44 and 60 per cent for non agricultural workers, this suggests that agricultural labourers benefited more than most from the emergency conditions invoked by the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> Further corroboration of this development may be inferred from the fact that, for most of this period, agricultural labourers were in the highly unusual position of receiving fractionally better wages than road, forestry, land commission and minor employment scheme workers.<sup>18</sup> However, as chapter six will demonstrate, the reality was a little different.

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<sup>15</sup> *Report of the AWB 1937-8* (S 11689A).

<sup>16</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court (1946-7)*, p.19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> This development is explored extensively in Chapter VI.

Firstly, agricultural wages were increasing from an incredibly low base rate compared to other sectors. Secondly, the only reason the agricultural minimum wage exceeded other rural wages at this time was as a direct result of government control and not because of the level of the increases passed by the Board. And while the Board effected steady increases during this period there was still a huge gap between agricultural and small town, urban industrial wages, a fact which the Labour Court also emphasised in its first report. For instance, the statutory minimum rate for an adult male agricultural labourer in September 1947 was 60s. for a week of 54 hours in Dublin and adjoining areas, and 50s. in the lowest paid areas. This compared with a wage of 72s. for a 48 hour week for the lowest paid builders labourers, negotiated by collective agreement outside the Court, in the rural areas of counties Cavan, Kerry, Kilkenny, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon and Wexford.<sup>19</sup> The lowest minimum rate awarded for workers protected by joint labour committees in 1947 was 73s. 4d. for shirt makers in Co. Donegal, and 74s. 2d. for button makers in areas outside Dublin.<sup>20</sup> Despite the Court's admonishment that agricultural wages were still 'appreciably below' the wages paid to industrial workers even when employed in small towns or rural areas, the Board made no attempt to breach the gap. In fact, quite the opposite. Increases were not only much more infrequent during the fifties but there were several years during the latter part of this decade when no increases whatsoever were passed. Moreover, certain questionable practices emerged in this regard. For instance, before an increase became applicable there was the all important issue as to the wages area to which a worker belonged. Table 4.3 is useful in this respect. It indicates

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<sup>19</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court (1946-7)*, p.19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix iii, pp 27-8.

how at various stages between 1940 and 1955 the Board divided the country into wages districts for the purposes of fixing different wage levels. In making these divisions, the Board set higher wages for those regions surrounding the major cities and their hinterlands than it did for the remainder of the country. The problem was that some of the most fertile agricultural regions such as Wexford, Tipperary and the golden vale region of Cork, along with counties such as Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow and East Limerick, were assigned to the same wages district as disadvantaged and congested counties as Leitrim, Sligo and Monaghan.

**Table 4.3** County breakdown of the wages districts established by the AWB in 1940, 1946 and 1955

From 4 March 1940			From 24 June 1946				From 12 September 1955		
Group A	Group B	Group C	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group A	Group B	Group C
Dublin county & UD & Bray	Counties Dublin & Kildare, of the county boroughs of Clare, Cork, Limerick & Waterford, Wicklow excluding the southwest and Bray	Remainder of the country: 22 counties	Formerly Group A	Co. Dublin excl. those areas in Group 1 & Co. Dublin bordering districts of Counties Kildare & Meath	Dublin Same as Group B excluding Co. Dublin also including counties Meath, & Louth	Remainder of the country	All of Co. Dublin & Bray	Formerly Group 3	Formerly Group 4

Sources: *Reports of the AWB* 1940 (S 11689A); 1946 (S 13503A); 1955 (S 13503D).

This meant that male workers in these counties dependent on the minimum wage for their entire income, received far less than their employers were capable of paying. This was a disturbing fact given that these were also the regions with the highest concentration of agricultural labour. So while adult labourers in counties such as Wexford should have

been receiving minimum wages at least on a par with those in Meath or Kildare, which for example in 1954 would have amounted to 87s. 5d. per week, in reality they received 84s.<sup>21</sup> This was 3s. 5d. a week less, some 13s. 8d. a month. Moreover, compared to their colleagues working in the fields of Dublin they received 10s. a week less, some 40s. a month.

Added to this anomaly was the value accorded to board and lodging allowances. As with the 1917 Agricultural Wages Board, the practice of paying wages to agricultural labourers partly in cash and partly in kind was sufficiently prevalent for the 1936 Board to define the 'benefits or advantages' which could have been reckoned as payment of wages in lieu of payment in cash from the outset.<sup>22</sup> The Board provided a scale of values for such perquisites as board and lodging, cottage rental with or without garden, land for potatoes, fresh milk and grass. In 1935, it was reported in the Department of Agriculture that:

The commonest practice at the moment in the case of labourers who are not actually boarded and lodged is that these men live in poor law cottages, attend at their employers' place in the early morning, work for an hour or so before breakfast, get breakfast, dinner and tea from the employer, and return home in the evening. As a rule these men do not perform any duties on Sunday and do not therefore get their meals from the farmer.<sup>23</sup>

For twenty three years the Board did not distinguish between the values accorded for board and for lodging, calculating the same rate for full board as it did for full board and lodging. An inclusive rate of full board and lodging was provided on a per day basis, as was a separate value for breakfast, dinner, supper and afternoon tea. However, should a

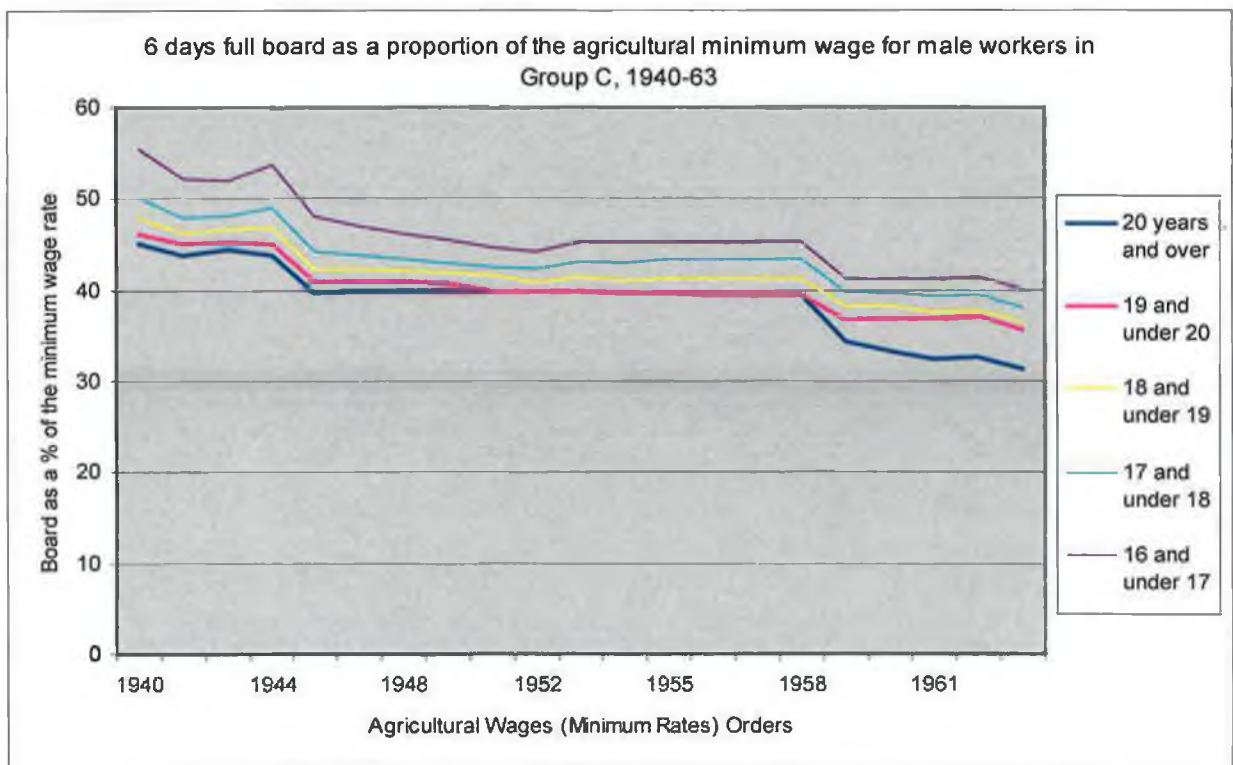
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<sup>21</sup> *Report of the AWB 1954*, appendix no. 2, pp 1-4 (S 13503D).

<sup>22</sup> (AGI/A15114/21).

worker have had all four meals, the four rates added together amounted to the same value as the board and lodging rate. Therefore the value allocated to each meal obviously included a little more to cover lodging. This meant that workers, even if they partook of only one or two meals per day, were paying more than they should have been for this level of board. Consequently it is hardly surprising to find that a considerable proportion of the worker's wage could be legally deducted by employers each week. In this regard Figure 4.2 is pertinent.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 4.2** Six days full board and lodging allowance as a proportion of the weekly agricultural minimum wage for male workers in Group C, 1940-63



Sources: *Reports of the AWB* 1940 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62).

<sup>23</sup> McGrath, Agriculture to Barry, Statistics branch, 14 Jun. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>24</sup> See Table AIV.2 in Appendix IV for the data on this chart.

This chart indicates the weekly board and lodging allowance as a proportion of each age group's actual minimum wage rate. Initially there were three juvenile classes; those aged 19 and under 20, 18 and under 19, and 16 and under 18. In its second order, in 1939, the Board divided the latter classification into two classes; 16-17 years and 17-18 years.<sup>25</sup> For the greater part of this period the proportion of a worker's wage legally deductible for full board (and lodging) ranged from as much as 45 to 39 per cent for adult workers, and from as much as 55 to 45 per cent for the youngest workers. Not only did juvenile workers receive smaller wage increases than adults, but a larger chunk of their wage was also deductible for food. A reduction in the ratio for all groups is evident from 1959, especially the younger workers. This reflected the decision of the Board to finally separate the allowance for board and lodging. Resulting in immediate reductions of 3 to 4 per cent, it signified how the workers had been unfairly charged for such allowances over a period of two decades. Notwithstanding the apparent decline in the amount allocated to board, a considerable proportion of the worker's wage was still deductible for this perquisite. Those aged between 16 and 17 could still have 41 per cent of their wages deducted in this regard, while adults were liable for a 34 per cent deduction. As Table 4.4 indicates, this contrasted sharply with the values placed on board and lodging allowances by the AWB in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>25</sup> Memorandum of Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Order, 1939 (S 11689B).

**Table 4.4** Seven days full board as a proportion of the adult minimum wage in Northern Ireland and the Republic during certain years 1940-64<sup>26</sup>

7 days full board as a proportion of the weekly adult minimum wage in selected counties representative of wages districts in Northern Ireland and the Republic during certain years 1940-64 <sup>27</sup>							
Year	Belfast Co. Borough	Co. Derry	Co. Armagh	Co. Fermanagh	Dublin Co. Borough	Co. Kildare <sup>28</sup>	Co. Wexford <sup>29</sup>
1940	45.0	50.8	52.5	54.3	50	51.7	52.5
1942	29.7	41.2	41.9	42.8	49.3	50.7	51.2
1947	30.8	32.8	33.2	33.6	42.6	44.6	46.6
1951	33.2	35.1	35.5	35.9	43.6	45.0	46.6
1952	32.2	33.9	34.3	34.6	43.7	46.0	46.6
1954	33.0		35.0	35.0	44.0	46.0	46.4
1961	31.6	32.6	32.8	33.0	38.7	40.6	42.4
1964	28.0	28.8	28.9	29.1	33.0	34.8	34.8
1966 <sup>30</sup>	22.1	22.7	22.8	22.9	25.2	26.3	26.3

Sources: *Reports of proceedings under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland) 1939* for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1949; 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1951; 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1953; for the years 1956-61 in *Ministry of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (NI P55)*. *Reports of the Irish AWB* 1940 (S 11689A); 1942 (S 13503A); 1947 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954 (S 13503D); 1961 (S 13503E/62); 1964 and 1966 (CMP).

Like the Irish Board, the Northern Ireland AWB divided the six counties into several wages districts following its establishment in 1939. Most of those districts are represented above, with the exception of Co. Down and the remainder of Antrim excluding Belfast. Although the Northern Ireland board initially distinguished between the values accorded to board and lodging, it just prescribed an all inclusive seven days board and lodging rate between 1947 and 1964, catering for a six days board only rate again from 1965.<sup>31</sup> Despite the lack of distinction between board and lodging between 1947 and 1964, an

<sup>26</sup> For data on this table see Table AIV.3 in Appendix IV.

<sup>27</sup> Northern Ireland data includes lodging until 1964; Irish data includes lodging until 1954 only.

<sup>28</sup> Data for this county is based on wages Group B rates for 1940 & 1942; Group III from 1947 to 1954 and Group B for 1961.

<sup>29</sup> Co. Wexford was upgraded to the same wages group as Co. Kildare, Group B, in June 1964.

<sup>30</sup> Based on 6 days full board only for all counties.

<sup>31</sup> *Report of proceedings under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland) 1939 to 1956*, for the two years ending 1965, p. 6.

indication that the Irish Board had not been unique in this practice, the values allocated to this allowance were much less than in the south. The average ratio in the Republic was almost 46 per cent of the adult's weekly wage in 1954, while it comprised only 34 per cent in the North. This pattern was maintained right into 1961, when a marked reduction was evident in the south owing to the separation of the rates for board and lodging, narrowing the gap between the two regions from 12 per cent to 8 per cent. Yet had the worker availed of this perquisite in the south, almost a quarter of his weekly wage was still liable for deduction by the employer.

Of even greater concern, however, during this period was that the Irish Board did not reflect the high values accorded to board in the wages awarded to workers for their families. For example, in 1954 the minimum agricultural wage in Wexford for an adult male labourer was 84s. For a full week's board the employer was allowed to deduct 39s. from this man's take home pay, leaving him a net amount of 45s. to feed and clothe a family of on average four other persons.<sup>32</sup> At the costs calculated by the Board for one person for a week, and allowing for just one other adult in the labourer's family, this would leave the labourer with 6s. to feed at least three children before other essential living costs such as clothes, shoes, fuel and rent were even considered. To put this in context, Table 4.5 outlines the cost of some staple food items in the summer of 1954.

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<sup>32</sup> Department of Local Government and Public Health, *National Nutrition Survey 1946-8*, p. 7. This survey calculated the average farm worker's family to consist of 5.4 persons.



**Table 4.5** The cost of some staple food items in August 1954

<b>National Average Food Prices August 1954</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Shilling</b>	<b>Pence</b>
28 Ib. Potatoes	5	4½
2 Ib. Farmers Butter	7	2
1 Ib. Lard	1	7
1 Ib. Tea	4	10¾
1 Ib. Sugar		7
14 Ib. Oatmeal	8	5
14 Ibs. Flour – Household	4	2½
2 Ib. Fresh Herring	1	7
Doz. Eggs	4	3½
Pig's Head	1	0
Shoulder of Bacon	2	4½
1 Ib. of Pork Sausages	2	7½
3 Gallons of Fresh Milk <sup>33</sup>	4	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>

Source: Central Statistics Office, *National Average Prices 1954*

According to this table the basic food costs for a family for a week amounted to 48s. 6d. Cottage and land rental at rates calculated by the AWB would have been an additional 5s. 7d.<sup>34</sup> Most labourers would rent half an acre from their employer on which they would keep hens for eggs, fatten a pig for bacon and grow their own vegetables, so many of the costs above would not have fully applied. Taken at face value, however, these costs were only 9s. 6d. above that prescribed by the Board for full board for an adult labourer, for 6 days work, over most of the country. Moreover, if the labourer in Wexford partook of full board and had 39s. deducted from his wage, at the food costs estimated above he was short 3s. 5d. to meet his weekly food bills before other costs were even contemplated.

<sup>33</sup> As determined by the AWB in the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Order 1954.

<sup>34</sup> *Report of the AWB 1954* (S 13503D).

This can only lead to two conclusions. The Board overcharged workers for board by enabling the employer to deduct almost half a labourer's wage for one week's food while expecting the remainder to be sufficient to feed an entire family. The other alternative is that if the Board had not been deliberately overcharging for this 'benefit' and considered it a fair estimate of the cost to the farmer for feeding an adult for a week, it was culpable of failing to calculate the value of the labourer's wage on the same basis, effectively leaving him underpaid and in many cases incapable of supporting a family. Modification of this practice was evident from the mid 1960s when the proportion of board deductible from the adult worker's take home pay was substantially reduced and brought more in line with the standards operating in Northern Ireland. For instance, by 1966 six days full board for male adult workers was reduced to 27.4 per cent of total take home pay in Group C, 26.3 per cent in Group B and 25.2 per cent in Group A. This compared to a proportion of on average 22 per cent for six days board only in the north. By 1975 the proportion in the south had been reduced to 19.7 per cent for male adult workers in Group B, which by this time constituted almost the entire country.<sup>35</sup> As welcome as these revisions no doubt were, such progress so late in the Board's operations served only to accentuate its lack of commitment to a decent family wage for almost three decades.

Another questionable practice to emerge during the fifties followed the Board's decision to deprive some age groups of wage increases for longer periods than others. When the Board was first established wages were set with a 3s. differential between each age group, so that while an adult male worker received 24s. for a 54 hour week in 1937, the next age group would have received 21s. and the youngest group would have received

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<sup>35</sup> *Report of the AWB 1975 (CMP)*.

15s.<sup>36</sup> In 1944 a practice began to emerge where despite the standard increases hitherto granted the level of the increase passed was also reduced proportionately. For instance, while each age group had received a uniform increase of 3s. in 1942 and 1943, increases varying between 2s. and 4s. were awarded in 1944. In this regard adult workers received a 4s. increase, and as the age groups descended pro rata increases of 3s. 6d., 3s., 2s. 6d., and 2s. were awarded to workers aged between 16 and 20. This pattern did not fully evolve until 1953, by which time the qualifying age for the adult worker had been reduced from 20 years and over to 19 years plus. This move had the effect of endowing all those workers previously allocated a rate in the 19 and under 20 age group with the full adult minimum rate, and hence expanding the numbers receiving it.

The Board's attempt to balance out the impact of this increase on the rates of those aged between 17 and 19 was apparent the following year, as larger increases were allocated to these classes than the adult and youngest juvenile groups.<sup>37</sup> However, no sooner had the Board granted these uncharacteristically large awards than it embarked on a practice of depriving the juvenile groups of any further increases. Those aged 16 and under 17 were deprived of increases for some eight years between 1953 and 1961, with workers aged between 17 and 19 having increases withheld for a period of six years, between 1955 and 1961.<sup>38</sup> Adult workers were also affected, being deprived of increases for the years 1957 and 1958. When the Board decided to resume increases for adults in 1959, it reduced its effect on employers by once again raising the qualifying age to 20 years and over, thus immediately excluding from its benefits a significant number of workers who would have

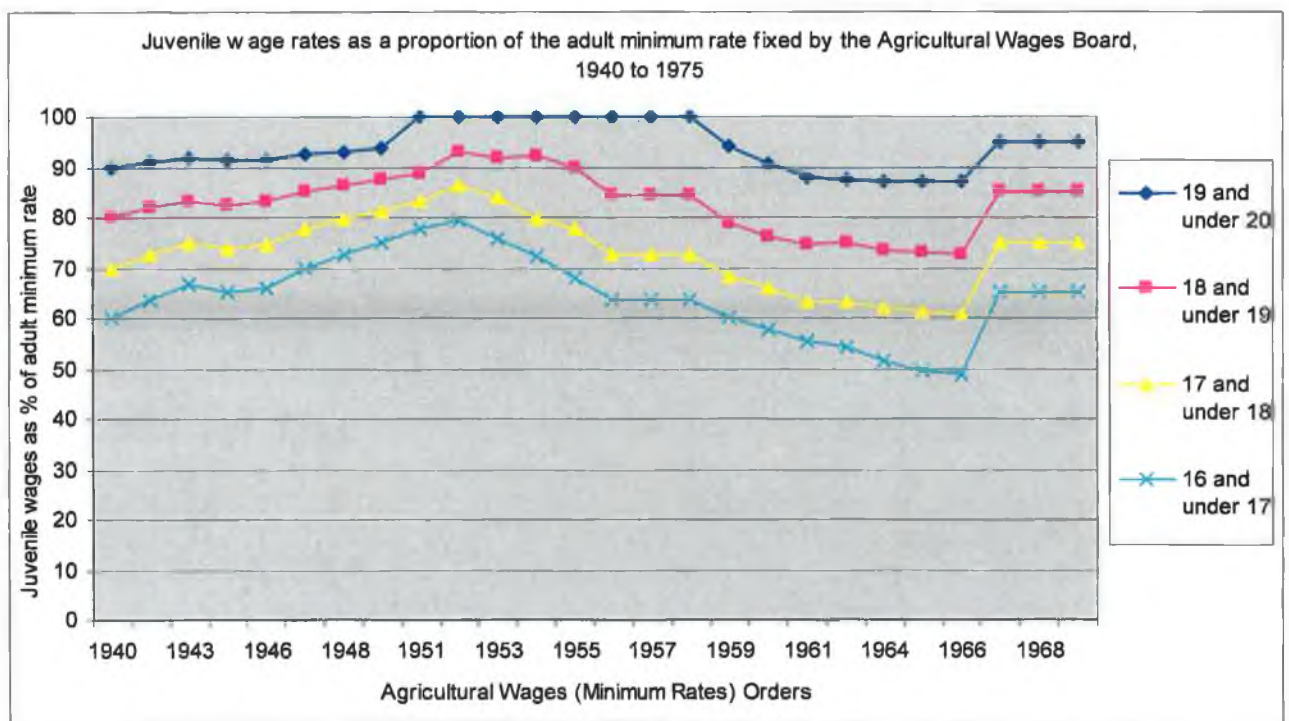
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<sup>36</sup> *Reports of the AWB 1937-8* (S 11689A).

<sup>37</sup> *Report of the AWB 1954* (S 13503D).

qualified for this rate under the previous order. By the time the Board resumed granting increases to all workers in 1961 the level of the minimum wage received by all, but especially the younger age groups, had been seriously affected. In the first instance the differential between each age classification had been substantially widened. The standard 3s. differential introduced between each group initially had extended to 6s. 6d. by 1953. It expanded considerably from this point and not on a uniform basis. The effect of the Board's actions on the proportion of the adult rate received by the juvenile age groups over this period may be observed in Figure 4.3.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 4.3** Juvenile wage rates as a proportion of the weekly adult minimum agricultural wage rate, 1940-75



Sources: *Reports of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

<sup>38</sup> *Reports of the AWB* 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62).

<sup>39</sup> For data on this chart see Table AIV.4 in Appendix IV.

The proportion of the adult minimum wage awarded to each juvenile group in 1940 was 90, 80, 70 and 60 per cent respectively. These proportions increased slightly until 1952 when peaks of 93, 86 and 79 per cent were attained, with the largest proportionate increase actually acquired by the youngest age group. By 1962 these proportions had plummeted to 87, 75, 63 and 54 per cent of the adult rate and as such were even less than the ratios assigned in 1940. In monetary terms this meant that while there had only been a 9s. differential between the adult rate and the youngest age group in 1937, it had increased to 55s. by 1962. By withholding increases from younger workers for such an extensive period, the Board had therefore created a huge disparity between the juvenile and adult rates that had not existed from the outset. The Board's decision to extend the minimum wage rate to workers aged between 14 and 16 in 1963 made little initial impact on these ratios.<sup>40</sup> By 1966 those in the 16 and under 17 group received only 48.8 per cent of the adult rate, its lowest ratio yet.<sup>41</sup> However, some balance was finally reintroduced to this relationship in 1967, when ratios of 65, 74, 85 and 95 per cent were restored to those aged between 16 and 20, a pattern which was maintained until the Board's dissolution.<sup>42</sup> This was the direct result of the Board's decision to divide the youngest age group into two further classes of 15-16 and 14-15 years.

What should be noted in this regard is that the Board had previously announced its decision to introduce an even more generous scheme which had been due to become

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<sup>40</sup> *Report of the AWB 1963* (S 13503E/62); Draft minutes of the 125<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AWB, 10 Oct. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>41</sup> *Report of the AWB 1966* (CMP).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1967-76.

effective in June 1966, but never materialised.<sup>43</sup> This would have been based on just four age classifications, with the adult age beginning at 19 years plus and then three additional groups of 17-19, 15-17 and 14-15 years. Instead the revised scheme, which became effective in 1967, retained the adult age at 20 years plus and divided the youngest group into two further categories. Table 4.6 outlines the two schemes. Young workers would clearly have fared better under the system agreed in May 1966, with the considerable increase in wages being reflected in each group's greater share of the adult rate. Under the scheme agreed in January 1967, however, which incidentally had been drafted and propounded by the chairman, Sean Lee, the younger workers, especially those aged between 14 and 18, were to be deprived of a substantial proportion of these benefits

**Table 4.6** Proposed revision of age classifications for Group B in 1966 and 1967<sup>44</sup>

<b>Impact of age classification revisions on the proportion of the adult wage received at the various age points</b>			
<b>Age Classification</b>	<b>Proportion of adult wage</b>		
	<b>1966</b>	<b>Revisions agreed in May 1966<sup>45</sup></b>	<b>Scheme agreed in <i>January</i> 1967 and <i>subsequently</i> implemented</b>
20 years +	<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>
19-20	<b>87</b>	100	<b>95</b>
18-19	<b>73</b>	89	<b>85</b>
17-18	<b>62</b>	89	<b>75</b>
16-17	<b>50</b>	77	<b>65</b>
15-16	<b>39</b>	77	<b>55</b>
14-15	<b>39</b>	48	<b>40</b>

Sources: Draft minutes of the 138<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AWB, 14 Jul. 1966; 141<sup>st</sup> meeting, 26 Jan. 1967 (CMP).

<sup>43</sup> Press notice issued by the AWB, 5 May 1966 (CMP).

<sup>44</sup> Group B was chosen for this table because from 1964 it contained the counties with the greatest proportion of agricultural labour.

<sup>45</sup> Draft minutes, 137<sup>th</sup> meeting, 5 May 1966.

Although the proportionate revisions introduced were slightly more favourable than those operating in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland at the time, it did not alter the fact that for almost eighteen years the Board had deprived thousands of younger workers of larger increases and greater wages than they could have received.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, when the decision to ameliorate the wage levels at the various age points was finally made, the Board reneged on an earlier commitment which would have substantially improved and made good the hardships of the previous decade and a half. The reduction of the qualification age for adults to 19 years and over would have resulted in initial increases of up to 40s. more for those aged 19 to 20 in Group B.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the consolidation of the younger age groups would have meant minimum wage increases ranging from 43s. to 74s.<sup>48</sup> This compared to initial outlays of 14s. to 28s. for all non adult groups in Group B under the scheme which was eventually implemented.<sup>49</sup> Considering that by 1967 there were slightly more than 9,000 male teenage workers still employed in agriculture, the Board's revisions saved employing farmers from a significant increase in their wages bill for these groups.<sup>50</sup>

Another group to receive less than equitable treatment were female agricultural labourers. Although the 1936 census recorded 806 of these workers, 639 of whom lived out, the Board did not extend regulation to this class until 1952 and then it confined the benefit of the minimum rate to female workers in Co. Dublin, incorporating Kildare in 1954.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> Draft minutes, 138<sup>th</sup> meeting, 14 Jul. 1966 (CMP).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Draft minutes, 143<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 15 Jun. 1967; AWB Memorandum, 31 Jul. 1967 (CMP).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *Reports of the AWB* 1952 (S 13503C); 1954 in (S 13503D).

1951 census had returned 63 female workers as living out in Dublin and 40 in Kildare, with 21 in Cork, 19 in Limerick and many other counties also recording a presence.<sup>52</sup> Yet the Board did not extend full regulation until 1967, even though the 1917 board had catered for females from the outset. The FRW had been calling for the Board to extend its provisions to females since at least 1949.<sup>53</sup> Its delay in extending the protective umbrella of the minimum wage to this group was not unique, since the Northern Ireland Board did not take such action until July 1961.<sup>54</sup> What was unusual was that the Irish Board saw fit to introduce a minimum wage for selected counties and made no attempt to introduce a rate for the remainder of the country. It did not even decide to investigate the extent of female employment outside of Dublin and Kildare until 1961.<sup>55</sup> Reporting in 1962, the findings of the inspectors were that only a small number of females were permanently employed either whole or part-time at agricultural work, possibly as few as a dozen.<sup>56</sup> It found that any employment which did exist was concentrated in counties where the soft fruit industry prevailed, but only seasonally for a few weeks and at a piece rate basis. The report played down the necessity for extensive regulation by suggesting that notwithstanding the piece rate nature of payment, the average earnings of these workers exceeded the minimum rates prescribed for female workers in Counties Dublin and Kildare.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>53</sup> FRW memorandum for the minister for Agriculture, 6 Sep. 1949 (AGI/G1195/49).

<sup>54</sup> *Report of proceedings under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, (Northern Ireland) 1939 to 1956, 1956-61 inclusive*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Draft minutes, 115<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AWB, 27 Sep. 1961 (CMP).

<sup>56</sup> Draft minutes, 116<sup>th</sup> meeting, 21 Feb. 1962.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



It was also suggested that the number of 'genuine' female agricultural workers was even less than it appeared. In this regard allusion was made to information supplied by officers of the Department of Social Welfare, who claimed that insurance stamps appropriate to agricultural workers were occasionally affixed to the cards of workers who were not wholly or mainly engaged in agricultural work for the reason that the cost of the agricultural stamp was less than that of the domestic worker – 4s. 3d. against 5s. 9d.<sup>58</sup> There was clearly little encouragement in the report for any further action. Yet it had confirmed that female agricultural employment did exist, even if it was on an ad hoc and minute basis. The Board could have simply introduced a uniform rate for the remainder of the country just to protect those workers who did exist, but it made no attempt to do so until June 1967 when it also improved the rates of teenage workers.<sup>59</sup> In this regard the similarities between the rates of juvenile and female wage rates was striking. All received a smaller proportion of the male adult rate, including adult females, even when allowance was made for the slightly shorter hours worked by females.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the female proportion of the male adult rate was as set at as low as 60 per cent for adults in Kildare in 1956 and when regulation was eventually extended to all females in 1967, the adult minimum rate was set at 68 per cent of the male adult rate. This was similar to the ratio allocated to juvenile male workers aged between 17 and 19 until 1967. Varying between 65 and 71 per cent for much of the intervening period, this was the same ratio of the male adult rate allocated to male juvenile workers aged between 17 and 19, except that from 1967 the ratios for the latter were increased to 75 and 85 per cent of the adult rate. The

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<sup>58</sup> Draft minutes, 116<sup>th</sup> meeting, 21 Feb. 1962 (CMP).

<sup>59</sup> Draft minutes, 143<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 15 Jun. 1967.

<sup>60</sup> See Table AIV.5 in Appendix IV for data on female minimum wage rates from 1952-76.

female adult rate remained at 68/69 per cent of the male rate until 1970, when it was increased to 73 per cent, and the Board gradually began to reduce the gap between the male and female rates. Yet it made no attempt to fully equalise rates for male and female workers until compelled to comply with the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 in 1976.

Of all the groups covered by the Board's activities adult male workers were the most conspicuously affected. By the onset of the sixties the value of the minimum wage had reached its lowest point since the Board's establishment and mainly because of its restrictive activities during the fifties. The most obvious indication of this was non agricultural rural wages. Although the agricultural minimum wage had exceeded the wages of local authority road workers and rural state employees between 1942 and 1947, by the onset of the fifties rural wages had begun to outpace those paid in agriculture and continued to do so as government departments sought to establish links instead with the road wage.<sup>61</sup> To illustrate, the wages of local authority road workers are outlined in Table 4.7. Counties Dublin, Kildare and Wexford have been chosen to represent the three main wages districts established by the Board.

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter VI.

**Table 4.7** The weekly wage rates of local authority road workers and the weekly agricultural minimum wage rates of male adult workers in certain counties, 1938 to 1959

Year	Dublin		Kildare		Wexford	
	Road wages <sup>62</sup>	Agricultural min. rate	Road wages	Agricultural min. rate	Road wages	Agricultural min. rate
	<i>Shilling</i>					
1938	48	33	30	27	30	27
1948	74	65	58/6	58/6	55	55
1949	80	70	63/6	63/6	60	60
1951	85	77/6	80	71	70	67/6
1952	95	82/6	80	76	80	72/6
1953	105	90	92/6	83/6	82/6	80
1954	110	94	96/6	87/6	87/6	84
1955	112/6	100	96/6	94	91/6	89
1956	121	106	111	100	96/6	95
1957	125/6	106	114	100	105	95
1958	131/6	106	121	100	111	95
1959	131/6	112	124	106	111	101

Sources: *Annual reports of the Department of Local Government*, 1938, vol. 13 appendix lviii, p.251; 1948-9, vol. 23 appendix vii, p. 61; 1950, vol. 24 appendix vi, p. 62; 1951-2, vol. 26 appendix ix, p. 68; 1953-4, vol. 28 appendix xi, p. 84; 1955, vol. 29 appendix ix, p.65; 1956-7, vol. 31 appendix viii, p.62; 1958-9, vol. 33 appendix vi, p. 61. *Reports of the AWB* 1938 (S 11689A); 1948-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D).

Although parity was maintained in Wexford and Kildare until 1950, in the space of one increase between 1949 and 1951 the agricultural minimum wage had dropped to 88 per cent of the road wage in Kildare and 96 per cent in Wexford. The gap continued to grow throughout the fifties, with the lack of increases awarded by the Board between 1957 and 1958 causing the greatest impact, especially for workers in counties such as Wexford. Combined with the fact that the level of awards granted to road workers increased substantially over these years, something which the Board failed to match when it resumed increases, it meant that a differential of 1s. 6d. in Wexford in 1956 had increased

to some 10s. by 1959. Likewise an 11s. difference in Kildare in 1956 had increased to 18s. by 1959, and a 15s. difference in Dublin had increased to 19s. 6d. So, in ten years the weekly agricultural minimum rate in these counties had deteriorated from being on a par with the road wage to constituting only 85 per cent of its former value in Dublin and Kildare, and 91 per cent in Wexford. And while this represented the same proportion of the road wage for Wexford as it did in 1938, it actually constituted 5 per cent less for Kildare. In effect, twenty years after the Board's establishment the gap between the road and agricultural minimum wage was still the same if not worse. Nor was this an isolated trend. The wages of other rural workers were also considerably higher than the agricultural minimum rate at this time. For instance, in 1960 wages for ESB manual workers in all counties were 127s.<sup>63</sup> Forestry workers received wages varying from 117s. to 128s. 6d. and road workers from 118s. 6d. to 142s.<sup>64</sup> This compared with agricultural minimum wage rates ranging from 101s. in Wexford and most other counties, to 106s. in Kildare, Louth and Meath to 112s. in Dublin.<sup>65</sup>

Yet despite these trends, the index of wage increases for this period suggests that increases for agricultural labourers continued to be much greater than those awarded to industrial workers.<sup>66</sup> Outlining the average level of the weekly wages prevailing in agriculture and in industry between 1938 and 1963, Table 4.8 reveals the reality.

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<sup>62</sup> As of 1 April each year.

<sup>63</sup> FRW/worker representative claim for AWB, 10 Mar.1960 (CMP).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *Report of the AWB 1960* (S 13503E/61).

<sup>66</sup> See Table AIV.6 in Appendix IV.

**Table 4.8** Average earnings per week for male adult workers in all industrial occupations and in agriculture, 1938-63

Year	Average earnings per week for male wage earners (18 years and over) in all industries <sup>67</sup>	Average earnings per week for adult male agricultural labourers computed on the basis of the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Orders, 1953-63 <sup>68</sup>	Average agricultural minimum wage as % of average industrial wage
			<i>Shilling</i>
1938	54/11	27/3	49.6
1953	134/4	81/6	60.6
1954	138/6	85/6	63.0
1955	146/2	85/6	58.5
1956	153/8	96/9	62.9
1957	157/10	96/9	61.3
1958	167/2	96/9	57.8
1959	172/5	102/9	59.6
1960	186/4	106/9	57.3
1961	202/9	109/9	54.1
1962	220/2	122/6	55.6
1963	231/2	122/6	52.9

Sources: *Statistical Abstracts of Ireland*; Industrial data: 1938-62 in 1964 (Dublin, 1964) table 123, p. 140; 1963 in 1966 (Dublin, 1966) table 116, p.132; Agricultural data: 1938 in 1943 (Dublin, 1943) table 61, p. 73; 1953-63 in 1964 (Dublin, 1964) table 69, p. 93.

Though a gap of some 50 per cent had existed between the earnings of both sectors from the outset, with industrial wages amounting on average to 54s.11d. in 1938 compared to 27s. 3d. in agriculture, increases in the latter sector had kept pace with those in industry until 1956 so that the gap did not become any larger. For instance, wages in industry in 1956 were 153s. 8d. compared to 96s. 9d. in agriculture. Agricultural wages as a proportion of industrial wages had actually increased from 49.6 per cent in 1938 to 62.9

<sup>67</sup> Figures based on a week in October of each year.

<sup>68</sup> Figures based on a week in July of each year for permanent labourers who did not have free house or allowances of any kind.

per cent in 1956. However, 1956 was a turning point in that the gap became much larger from this point. Between 1957 and 1963 the agricultural wage as a proportion of the industrial wage experienced a drop of 8.4 per cent, falling from 61.3 per cent in 1957 to 52.9 per cent in 1963. While it is evident that the minimum agricultural wage increased from 1959, the level of the increase was insignificant compared to the advances in industrial wages during the years of the wage freeze imposed by the Board. Moreover, an additional pay pause imposed between 1962 and 1963 resulted in agricultural labourers receiving just slightly more than half that being paid to industrial workers, 3 per cent more than the 1938 ratio.<sup>69</sup>

Even the average minimum weekly wages prescribed by joint labour committees for the weaker, unorganised groups of workers in industry expanded substantially compared to the average minimum wage prescribed for agriculture during this period. Table 4.9 outlines the minimum weekly wages of the various sectors covered by joint labour committees in the years 1946, 1955 and 1962. When joint labour committees replaced trade boards in 1946, the average agricultural minimum weekly wage was only 70 per cent of the average minimum rate prescribed by the new committees for workers in various industries. Between 1949 and 1955 this proportion had gradually increased to 78 per cent. The effect of the Board's wage freeze, however, combined with the poor increases granted to adult workers, was to widen the gap again between the two ratios so that by 1962 the average agricultural minimum weekly wage was only 72 per cent of the average joint labour committee rate.

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<sup>69</sup> Draft minutes, 117<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 May 1962 (CMP).

**Table 4.9** Minimum wage rates prescribed by various joint labour committees for certain industries and by the AWB for agricultural labourers in the years 1939, 1946, 1955 and 1962<sup>70</sup>

Regulated Industry	1939	1946	1955	1962
			Shilling	
Aerated Waters	51/-	69/-	119/-	161/-
Boot and Shoe Repairing*	58/6	73/-	117/-	178/-
Brush and Broom*	60/6	91/-	140/-	199/-
Button Making*	-	68/-	119/-	154/-
Creameries*	-	-	91/-	129/6
General Waste Materials Reclamation	46/-	60/6-	130/-	150/-
Law Clerks*	-	-	144/-	191/6
Messengers*	-	-	58/-	72/-
Packing	50/-	63/-	123/-	164/6
Paper Box	54/-	57/-	122/-	181/-
Provender Milling*	-	-	-	173/-
Shirtmaking*	47/-	70/-	110/-	164/-
Sugar Confectionary and Food Preserving	54/-	75/-	141/-	183/-
Tailoring	48/-	68/-	136/-	187/-
Tobacco	50/6	70/6	116/6	143/-
Women's Clothing and Millinery*	55/-	77/-	137/6	193/-
<b><i>Average joint labour committee minimum rate</i></b>	<b>52/6</b>	<b>70/-</b>	<b>120/-</b>	<b>164/-</b>
(Average working hours per week)	(45)	(45)	(45)	(43)
Average hourly rate	1/2	1/7	2/8	3/10
<b><i>Average agricultural minimum wage rate</i></b>	<b>30/-</b>	<b>49/-</b>	<b>94/-</b>	<b>119/-</b>
(Working hours per week)	(54)	(54)	(50)	(50)
Hourly rate	7d.	11d.	1/11	2/5

Sources: *Annual reports of the Labour Court* (1953), appendix v, pp 18-20; (1962), appendix vi, pp 29-32.

As such it was only 72 per cent of the lowest rates prevalent in industry, just 2 per cent greater than the 1946 ratio. Even creamery workers, whose rate of 91s. was 3s. less than the average agricultural minimum rate in 1955, received 10s. more than the average

<sup>70</sup> The figures for those groups marked with asterisks are calculated by averaging the wage data for each specific group for the years in question. Anything over 6d is rounded upwards to the next shilling or anything under 6d is disregarded for all data in the table.

agricultural rate in 1962. Moreover, all non agricultural workers enjoyed a shorter working week of on average 46 hours or less, and also benefited from an additional six days annual leave, being legally entitled to church or public holidays.<sup>71</sup> In the case of joint labour committee workers, on average they appeared to work 8 hours a week less than that prescribed by the AWB for agricultural labourers in 1962, in addition to receiving much larger wages. Calculated on an hourly basis, this meant that agricultural labourers were entitled to a minimum rate that was 1s. 5d. less per hour than the average hourly minimum rate for joint labour committee workers. In 1939 the gap had been 7d. All in all, the evidence suggests that as most workers were advancing towards better wages and conditions towards the onset of the sixties, agricultural labourers were in fact regressing to a position more reminiscent of the late thirties and due principally to the standards set by the AWB.

Yet, between the years of 1965 and 1976 there was a dramatic change in the Board's wage fixing practices. As Table AIV.1 in Appendix IV indicates, wages increased enormously over this decade. While workers in Group B received wage levels ranging from 100s. in 1956 to 127s. in 1962, over the subsequent seven year period they received increases amounting to 105s., resulting in a wage of 232s. by 1969. By this time the country had been effectively divided into two halves for wage fixing purposes. Group B contained counties Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Limerick, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath, Wexford, East Cork, most of Co. Wicklow and certain

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<sup>71</sup> *Statistical Abstract* (1966), table 116, p.132.



electoral divisions in Clare.<sup>72</sup> Group C was comprised of counties Cavan, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo and parts of Co. Cork and Co. Clare not included in Groups A and B. Group A consisted of Co. Dublin, the urban district of Bray and Cork city area. These increases continued into the 1970s with a minimum wage of 730s. prescribed for workers in Group B in 1976, which since 1975 comprised all counties other than Dublin and Cork City. These increases were very substantial compared to those passed by the Board in the period 1936 to 1964. However, it is apparent from Table 4.10 that the increases still failed to effect any significant narrowing of the gap between industrial and agricultural wages.

As a proportion of the average industrial wage, the average agricultural minimum rate hovered between 55 and 60 per cent for much of this period, reaching as low as 50.7 per cent in 1976. Moreover, in addition to shorter working hours, most non agricultural workers now gained from benefits such as pensions and service pay. So, despite the change in the Board's wage fixing practices over the course of its final decade, the agricultural wage was as poor relative to the wages of other workers as it had been when the Board was first established. This was hardly a compelling record for the only statutory wage fixing body to operate outside the realm of the Labour Court. That the government also shared this view was confirmed in its eventual decision to abolish the Board and replace it by a joint labour committee in 1976.

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<sup>72</sup> The following counties were upgraded in their entirety to Group B from 1 June 1964: Limerick, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Tipperary and Wicklow with the exception of UD Bray. As before this group also contained the county borough of Cork and the eastern portion of the county and the county borough of Waterford with certain electoral divisions. From 24 May 1965 Cork city area was upgraded to Group A and Co. Waterford in its entirety was upgraded to Group B.

**Table 4.10** Average earnings per week for male adult workers in most industrial occupations and for agricultural labourers, 1963-76, in decimal currency

Year	Average earnings per week for adult male workers in most industries <sup>73</sup>	Average earnings per week for adult male agricultural labourers computed on the basis of the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Orders, 1963-76 <sup>74</sup>	Minimum agricultural wage as % of average industrial wage
1963	11.55	6.13	53.0
1964	12.77	7.26	56.8
1965	13.35	8.04	60.2
1966 <sup>75</sup>	14.73	8.67	58.8
1967	15.48	9.03	58.3
1968	17.20	9.79	56.9
1969 <sup>76</sup>	20.81	11.56	55.5
1970	23.38	13.07	55.9
1971	27.22	16.27	59.7
1972	31.79	17.77	55.8
1973	37.37	19.78	52.9
1974	42.79	24.78	57.9
1975	54.47	30.42	55.8
1976	65.17	33.07	50.7

Sources: *Statistical Abstracts*; Industrial wages: 1963-68 in 1969 (Dublin, 1971) table 117, p.134; 1969-70 in 1970-71 (Dublin, 1974) table 115a, p.137; 1971-3 in 1972-73 (Dublin, 1976) table 111a, p. 147; 1974-76 in 1976 (Dublin, 1978) table 109, p.133. Agricultural wages: 1963-75 in 1974 -5 (Dublin, 1977) table 61, p.92; 1976 in 1977 (Dublin, 1980) table 61, p.90.

The subsequent chapter will explore why the Board's wage record was so unimpressive and if ultimately the Board was disbanded because it carried out too effectively the duties that had been assigned to it in a different era.

<sup>73</sup> Figures based on a week in October of each year for workers aged 18 years and over 1963-68. Data for 1969-76 is based on a week in September of each year for adult male workers.

<sup>74</sup> Figures based on a week in July of each year for labourers who did not have free house or allowances of any kind.

<sup>75</sup> Data for 1966-68 is for all industries except the building and construction industry.

<sup>76</sup> Data for 1969-76 is the average of total weekly earnings for adult males in mining, quarrying and turf, and in manufacturing industries for a week in September of each year. It does not include service type industries or building and construction.

## Chapter V

### An analysis of the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1936-76

When this principle [of a legal minimum wage] is acted upon in the interests of those who are considered most to need protection, because they are in the greatest danger of being overridden through the stress of industrial competition, I think there is an overwhelming balance of opinion in favour of legislation directed to that end. The standard of a race is felt to be at stake, and there is what amounts almost to a national determination to guard, if necessary, and if possible by legislation, against at least the grosser forms of underpayment. Of these there has been some slight taste; but of them more is known and heard from the experience of older countries. Thus it has become part of the better conscience, alike of the Commonwealth and New Zealand, to insist on decent industrial conditions, and, if necessary, to pass measures framed to avoid the repetition in a new land of at least this particular form of old - world trouble.<sup>1</sup>

These were the comments of Ernest Eaves, who had been appointed by the British government in 1907 to investigate the wages and arbitration boards recently established in some of the Australian colonies to prevent the development of dire working conditions, such as sweating, prevalent in Europe at the time. His report to parliament in 1908 was soon followed by the introduction of the Trade Boards Act 1909, the foundation of the statutory wage fixing system in the British Isles.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the last century the most vulnerable and disadvantaged workers of many a country, including Ireland, have benefited from the 'new world' ideals which inspired the living wage movement in Australia and New Zealand in the 1890s. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, it is possible for statutory machinery to prevail which does not operate to the optimum advantage of the workers concerned. In Ireland, the exception to the overall success of the regulatory machinery to operate here since the first trade boards were introduced was the Agricultural Wage Board system which operated from 1936 to 1976. The aim of this

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<sup>1</sup> *Report on the wages boards and industrial conciliation and arbitration acts of Australia and New Zealand*, by Ernest Eaves, p.326 [Cmd. 4167] H.C. 1908, lxxi, p. 10.

chapter is to explore why, apart from its poor wages record, this system was so distinctive.

The Agricultural Wages Board was surrounded by controversy from the outset. For many years the inadequacies of its governing legislation were the focus of debate. Much of this stemmed from the advances in comparable machinery both at home and abroad that the government refused to extend to this legislation.<sup>3</sup> Despite introducing several private members bills to Dáil Éireann between 1958 and 1965, worker spokesmen were unsuccessful in their attempts to force the government to upgrade the provisions of this legislation.<sup>4</sup> By 1962 their criticisms had extended to the activities of the Board itself. Dissatisfaction with the Board had become so strident that attempts to expand its powers were abandoned and instead its complete abolition and replacement by a joint labour committee under the Labour Court was sought. Although the government initially rejected these demands, the decision to abolish the Board was eventually conceded in 1976. The Board, however, did not simply pass discreetly into history. The most critical indictment of its activities was yet to come, and not from worker spokesmen as might have been expected, but from the Board's appointing body, the government. Instead of announcing the introduction of new wage fixing machinery to agriculture on the grounds that the existing machinery was outmoded, the reason advanced was performance related.

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<sup>2</sup> *Trade Boards Act 1909* (9.Edwd VII, c.22 [GB & Ireland]) 20 Oct. 1909.

<sup>3</sup> These advances will be explored further in chapter seven.

<sup>4</sup> The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958; The Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1960; The Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961; The Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961; The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962. For details on this draft legislation see Table AVII.1 in Appendix VII.

On introducing the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1976, the minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary, stated:

I am confident that future agreements arrived at by utilising the procedures of this Bill will lead to the elimination of the conditions differential that has been allowed to develop down through the years resulting in a growing gap between the work conditions of the farm workers and those of other industrial employees.<sup>5</sup>

As the AWB was the statutory body charged with the responsibility for regulating agricultural wages, the implication was that it had 'allowed' this gap between agricultural and industrial wages to deteriorate over the course of its operations. Such sweeping censure on the eve of the Board's dissolution effectively undermined the entire history of its operations. While this criticism of the Board was far from unfounded, this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate that it was nevertheless highly inequitable coming from a government which for four decades had perpetuated this wage fixing structure in its entirely unamended state. The previous chapter presented a bleak synopsis of the results of the Board's wage fixing activities. To truly understand this legacy, and establish if the Board's ignominious dissolution was justified, it is necessary to take a broader overview of its activities and explore how the Board interpreted its responsibilities and arrived at its decisions.

Wage fixing bodies are usually guided by certain criteria in deciding what constitutes an adequate minimum wage. Traditionally, minimum wage fixing machinery comes into play when the rates of wages prevailing in a specific trade are exceptionally low compared with that in other employments. The system is therefore essentially underlined

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<sup>5</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 288), 25 Feb. 1976, col. 670.

by the need to be cognisant of outside wage movements to ensure that the minimum wage is moving realistically in line with comparative wages. This tenet was earmarked by the ILO in 1951 when it adopted a recommendation on wage fixing machinery in agriculture.<sup>6</sup> It recommended that ‘the wages paid for similar or comparable work under collective bargaining agreements in agriculture, and the general level of wages for work of a comparable skill in other industries in the area where the workers are sufficiently organised’ be considered when fixing a minimum rate.<sup>7</sup>

The British government had actually subscribed to this principle in 1947. Under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act of that year the power for fixing a national minimum wage for England and Wales was vested once more in the agricultural wages board.<sup>8</sup> It will be recalled from chapter three that under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924 the county wages committees had fixed minimum wages for their areas and the board had been merely advisory. In re-establishing the wage fixing power of the wages board, the British government also removed the restrictive terms of reference which had sought to define the circumstances the board and committees took into account when reaching their wage fixing decisions. Under previous legislation these bodies had been obliged to fix wages which were reasonable in relation to the nature of the labourer’s occupation in agriculture.<sup>9</sup> During the debate on the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1947, the British minister for Agriculture, Thomas Williams,

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<sup>6</sup> ILO, *R89, Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1951; R30, Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery Recommendation, 1928*, A.III.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.2

<sup>8</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 15 [U.K.]) 11 Mar. 1947.

<sup>9</sup> *Corn Production Act 1917* (7 & 8 Geo. V, c. 46, [G.B.]) 21 Aug. 1917, section 5(6); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924* (14 & 15 Geo. V, c. 37 [U.K.]) 29 Aug. 1924., section 2(4).

recommended the removal of this provision on the grounds that it was 'far too reminiscent of 'God bless the Squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper places'.<sup>10</sup> It was considered objectionable in so far as it could have been thought to suggest that agricultural wages should always have been at the bottom of the scale. In providing under section 1(2) of the act that the board would 'not be limited to the consideration of any particular matters' in fixing a rate, the objective was to leave it 'with full powers to take into account all relevant factors'.<sup>11</sup> In taking this action the British government actually emulated the Irish Board's governing legislation in this one respect.<sup>12</sup> Despite this latitude, the Irish Board failed to take outside wage movements into consideration for almost thirty years. The huge increases passed from 1965 were no coincidence. It reflected the fact that the Board, for the first time ever, began to consider outside wage movements in its deliberations, a decision which obviously had a huge impact on the level of the minimum wage. Not only did the Irish Board not consider this a prerequisite for over thirty years, but for much of this period it seems that it was even averse to fixing decent minimum wages.

Apart from considering wages trends for similar or comparable work, the ILO recommendation of 1951 had also urged that factors such as the cost of living and the value of services rendered be considered when determining a minimum rate.<sup>13</sup> The obligation to secure a wage that was sufficiently adequate to maintain a labourer and his

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<sup>10</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 430), 25 Nov. 1946, col. 1271.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 15 [U.K.]) 11 Mar. 1947, section 1(2).

<sup>12</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947*, section 1(2).

<sup>13</sup> ILO, *R89, Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1951*, par 1.2.

family, which governed the British machinery until 1947 and continued to govern the Northern Ireland Board from 1939, has already been mentioned. The latter Board was also guided by the stipulation that ‘every effort should be made to pay higher wages’, while having regard to the economic conditions of agriculture in Northern Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Each annual report duly referred to the trends in agricultural prices, wages, and cost of living, to demonstrate that the minimum rate was moving in line with changes generally. In practice, this board also seems to have kept the frequency of increases in line with increases in the minimum rate for agricultural labourers in England and Wales.

In contrast, the annual reports of the Irish Board give little indication as to how it arrived at its wage fixing decisions. They do not allude to Board meetings in detail until 1958, and even then the information provided is minimal. The minutes of its proceedings provide more insight, but surviving information is confined to post 1961.<sup>15</sup> The Board’s activities had been shrouded in such secrecy that members were not only prohibited from discussing its deliberations with the public or the media, but for many years were also prevented from retaining minutes or any other such documentation submitted for discussion. Fortunately the Board’s second chairman, Sean O’ Broin, relaxed the latter proscription on a strictly confidential basis in 1961, following several requests from the worker members.<sup>16</sup> As a result, thanks to the diligence of Con Moynihan, who retained most of his documentation, some analysis of the Board’s operations is possible from this

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<sup>14</sup> *Report of proceedings under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, (Northern Ireland) 1939, (1949)* p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Neither the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Enterprise & Employment accept any responsibility for the whereabouts of the Board’s official records. See the Introduction.

<sup>16</sup> Draft minutes of the 112<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Agricultural Wages Board, 22 Mar. 1961 (CMP).



junction.

The ambiguity surrounding the Board's proceedings combined with the absence of terms of reference meant that for years there was speculation as to how the Board arrived at its wage fixing decisions. As early as 1943 the Commission on Vocational Organisation remarked that its attempts to ascertain the principles on which the Board acted had proved quite futile. It came to the conclusion that the Board 'made its determinations, not on any definite principles or as the result of detailed enquiry into prices and production costs, but by averaging the recommendations of the regional committees'.<sup>17</sup> Making little allusion to any of these factors successive ministers for Agriculture, on the other hand, claimed that the Board was primarily guided by the ability of farmers and the agricultural industry to meet wage increases.<sup>18</sup> In fact, a Department of Agriculture memorandum on a series of resolutions passed by the FRW at its 1949 annual delegate conference shed further light on this practice. It stated unequivocally that the Board was required 'to take into account' not just the ability of the employing farmers en masse to pay minimum wage rates but specifically the 'ability of the poorest employers'.<sup>19</sup>

The first evidence to suggest that this was indeed the driving consideration for the Board appears from a claim made by the worker members in March 1960. It should be recalled that by this time there had been no increase in the wages of juvenile workers for seven years, and the Board had also imposed a freeze on the wages of adult workers in 1957

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<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation 1943*, p.136.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on proposed minimum wage fixing legislation for agricultural workers, 6 Mar. 1936 (S 8744); *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 119) 7 Mar. 1950, col. 1312; *Ibid.*, (vol. 198) 5 Dec. 1962, col. 754; *Ibid.*, (vol.218) 20 Oct. 1965, col. 131.

<sup>19</sup> Departmental minute on an FRW letter dated 6 September 1949, 22 Sep. 1949 (AGI/G1195/49).

and 1958. Although an increase of 6s. had been awarded to adult workers in 1959, with a further 4s. agreed in February 1960, it was a difficult period for workers and their representatives on the Board. In a memorandum submitted to the Board in March demanding a larger increase than 4s., the worker members urged the Board 'to discontinue its practice of relating farm wages to the economic conditions on the small farms'.<sup>20</sup> Not only was it suggested that wage decisions were primarily based on agricultural conditions, but that they were actually measured by the ability of the small farmer to meet increases rather than the typical employer of hired labour, the large farmer.<sup>21</sup> The extent to which this was a guiding criterion can be gauged from the fact that instead of attempting to substantiate this claim, every effort was made to disprove the premise for such a practice. This was done by attempting to prove that hired workers were mainly employed on large farms. Had this argument been advanced before 1960, worker members would have been dependent upon the 1951 *Census of Population*, which was the first census report to include figures on the distribution of agricultural labourers according to farm size. It confirmed that the presence of hired labour on farms of less than 30 acres and from 30-50 acres was marginal compared to those on farms of 100 acres or more, with the greatest proportion on farms of 200 acres and over and then on farms of 100-200 acres in size.<sup>22</sup> By 1960 the worker members had at their disposal a document of even greater value, the *National Farm Survey* of 1957-8, which had also been compiled by the Central Statistics Office.

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick Murphy claim to the AWB on behalf of the worker members, 10 Mar. 1960 (CMP).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter I.

The *National Farm Survey* was the first major survey of farm income and the distribution of employment in agriculture undertaken in the Republic. Its findings reflected the trends revealed by the 1951 census in so far as the distribution of agricultural labour was concerned. For instance, Table 5.1 below indicates the average man weeks per farm derived from the records of all the farms included in the survey for 1957-8.

**Table 5.1** Average man weeks per farm for all regions as reported in the National Farm Survey 1957-8

Size group (acres)	No. of farms	Family Labour	Hired Labour
		Man Weeks	Man Weeks
5-15	161	51	1
15-30	410	71	3
30-50	462	79	8
50-100	469	86	21
100-200	286	90	50
Over 200	133	87	121

Source: *Dáil Éireann deb.*, parliamentary question 76, (vol. 180)\*2 Mar. 1960, cols 1025-6.

A 'man week' was defined as an adult male working for one week. On this basis, it was clear that there was not even sufficient work for hired casual labour on the smaller farms, ranging from a week on farms from 5-15 acres, to eight weeks on farms 30-50 acres in size. There was barely sufficient work on farms from 100-200 acres for one man for a full year, while farms over 200 acres in size could cater for at least two workers all year round, in addition to providing work for casual labour. Reflecting this tendency the survey, outlining the distribution of hired labour expenses, indicated that the major costs in this regard were incurred on farms of over 200 acres. As Table 5.2 illustrates, this was especially so for farms in the East & Midland region and to a lesser extent in the South.

On the basis of this evidence, the worker members plausibly argued that farmers who employed hired labour could well afford to pay higher wages since the vast majority of small farms and over thirty per cent of medium sized farms employed no hired labour, with the over 200 acre farms providing most of the full time employment for agricultural workers.

**Table 5.2** Total hired labour costs per farm for the year 1957 as calculated in the National Farm Survey

Size Group (Acres)	All Regions	East & Midland	South	North & West
	£	£	£	£
<b>5-15</b>	6.2	6.7	10.3	4.0
<b>15-30</b>	13.0	15.5	20.1	7.2
<b>30-50</b>	42.3	50.2	55.8	16.9
<b>50-100</b>	114.8	112.6	134.7	53.3
<b>100-200</b>	272.5	289.0	274.2	167.9
<b>Over 200</b>	672.3	966.4	458.6	75.9

Source: *Final Report of the National Farm Survey 1955-8*, table 17, p. 125.

Significantly, the findings also suggested that employment prevailed to a greater extent in some areas than in others. To corroborate this point, a summary of the net farm income and extent of hired labour on large farms derived from the *National Farm Survey* was submitted in Table 5.3. This suggested that farmers in the east and midland regions enjoyed a much higher income than farmers in the south, north and west regions. This obviously had major implications for the manner in which the Board grouped its wages districts. Lending credence to claims previously made by worker members in this regard, it would result in further demands for revision and eventual concessions at a later date.

**Table 5.3** Summary of net farm income and the extent of hired labour on large farms as derived from the National Farm Survey

Regions	Size group (acres)	Net farm income clear of farm expense per week	Hired labour employment per annum
All regions combined	Over 200	£38.12	117 weeks
	100-200	£26.15	50 weeks
East and Midland	Over 200	£42.13	165 weeks
	100-200	£27.7	56 weeks
South region	Over 200	£36.0	82 weeks
	100-200	£28.4	48 weeks
North and West	Over 200	£19.5	-
	100-200	£13.11	47 weeks

Source: Patrick Murphy claim to the AWB on behalf of the worker members, 10 Mar. 1960, appendix 5 (CMP).

The worker members appear to have assumed that given the respected source upon which their claims were based, the majority of the Board would have little option other than to concede, or at least consider, revising their stance on further increases.<sup>23</sup> This confidence was reflected in the suggestion that the CSO be invited to clarify the findings of the survey had any member 'the slightest suspicion that agricultural income and employment was misrepresented in the memorandum'.<sup>24</sup> In an act which spoke volumes, the majority of the Board did in fact seek the observations of the CSO on the data used. In writing to the Director of the CSO, Dr. M.D. McCarthy, the secretary of the Board made particular reference to the figures on farm income and distribution of employment on farms.<sup>25</sup> He

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Murphy claim to the AWB on behalf of the worker representatives, 10 Mar. 1960, appendix 5 (CMP).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Secretary, AWB to director, CSO, 15 Mar. 1960 (CMP).

also emphasised that the data had been submitted by the worker representatives in support of claims for larger increases for agricultural labourers.

The partial nature of this request was not welcomed by the CSO. In responding to the Board, McCarthy made it clear that it was inappropriate for his office to be put into a position where its observations could be regarded as either directly supporting or opposing a case made by any sectional interest.<sup>26</sup> Notwithstanding this proviso, McCarthy did not deny that the material used in the memorandum was taken from data prepared by his office:

In so far as the material in the document has been derived from data prepared by this Office, explanations of the content and compilation of the statistics are contained in the source documents which are available to the board and its members.<sup>27</sup>

That there was no question of any misrepresentation in that regard became obvious when he was obliged to acknowledge that:

It would seem quite impossible to offer any general observations, or to comment on the relevance of the statistics quoted, without dealing with the main problems raised, which are primarily those of a social and economic nature, which fall within the terms of reference of your Board.<sup>28</sup>

Again, it was evident that the emphasis was not on the validity of the statistics used but rather on their pertinence to the issue at hand and the implications of those findings, which ultimately was the responsibility of the Board. Therefore the Board's attempt to use the CSO, regardless of whether to clarify, authenticate or undermine the validity of worker claims, had failed. With the onus of responsibility reverting to them once more,

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<sup>26</sup> Director, CSO to the AWB, 29 Mar. 1960 (CMP).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

how they chose to deal with the implications of the survey for their wage fixing practice was now of the utmost importance.

Meanwhile, the Board's response to the increasingly compelling arguments of the worker members since the late 1950s had not gone unheeded in government. It was perceived to be a sign of looming trouble in the Department of an Taoiseach. That these claims were the source of growing apprehension can be gauged from the following departmental minute to the secretary on the subject:

The real cause of the trouble is presumably that the workers' representatives on the Agricultural Wages Board, bespeak, or welcome, the help available in the P.U.T.U.O. offices for the Federation of Rural Workers in making out a considered case on behalf of farm labourers. The number of parliamentary questions in connexion with the Farm Survey etc. which seems to originate in those offices is an indication of the research which goes into making these cases. The employers on the other hand have no economists or statisticians to assist them apart from whatever help is provided by the association and the association is not representative nor has it resources comparable with the P.U.T.U.O.<sup>29</sup>

The P.U.T.U.O was the provisional united organisation of the Irish trade union movement. This body has been jointly established in 1956 by the congresses of the ITUC and the CIU, to prepare for the establishment of a single unified trade union centre capable of providing all the central services required by the trade union movement in Ireland.<sup>30</sup> The benefits of this centralised service to a small union like the FRW were clear from the level of comprehensive data now produced in support of their arguments. Established since 1944, the Agricultural Association of Ireland was still the only organisation to formally represent the interests of farming employers, but its sphere of influence was limited. Confined to the counties of Dublin, Wicklow and Meath, its

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<sup>29</sup> O'Sullivan to secretary, an Taoiseach, 24 Mar. 1960 (S 15848A).

membership in 1958 was estimated at a thousand.<sup>31</sup> Although worker spokesmen were clearly making a good case for the revision of the Board's wage fixing practices, which affected some 82,000 agricultural labourers in 1960, this was not of concern to government.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, their ability to make such plausible arguments was perceived as 'trouble' because employer spokesmen lacked both the resources and the inclination to make counter-arguments. In fact, it was feared that 'a stage might be reached where the Board may find itself in serious difficulties because of the inequality of the contesting parties'.<sup>33</sup> In that event, it was felt that since the AWB had been set up to take the responsibility of fixing minimum wages, it would be 'injudicious for a government office even to appear to intervene in the manner suggested by the Board'.<sup>34</sup> Instead it would call for a formal submission by the Board to the minister for Agriculture. The significance of this stance will become apparent later in the chapter.

That the actions of the Board suggested such a stage had almost arrived was clear. However, for this to happen would have required a majority of the Board to support worker demands, or at least some neutral members. That this had not occurred for some time can be surmised from the sparseness of the increases passed by the Board during the previous decade.<sup>35</sup> That it would not happen for some time to come is obvious from Table 5.4, which outlines the voting pattern on the Board for wage increases over the final sixteen years of its operations. It will be recalled that when the Board's governing

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<sup>30</sup> Report of the ITUC national executive to congress, 1956 (ICTU File, ITUC ADC's 1951-7 (2000)).

<sup>31</sup> Secretary, Industry and Commerce to secretary, an Taoiseach, 6 Feb. 1960 (S 15848A).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For details on the minimum wages of adult male agricultural labourers, see Table AIV.1 in Appendix IV. Table AIV.4 provides details on the wages of male juvenile workers in Group C from 1937 to 1976.



legislation was passing through the Dáil, the minister for Agriculture acted on the premise that the major wage fixing decisions would be made by the chairman, due to the envisaged lack of agreement amongst the worker and employer representatives, and that the neutral members would be there principally to help the chairman arbitrate disagreement. In reality, there is no evidence to suggest that the chairmen ever exercised the extensive overriding powers vested in them. Instead, an alliance of consensus emerged between the chairman, employer and neutral members. Table 5.4 indicates just how critical the relationships on the Board were to the outcome of a wage fixing decision, with voting taking three phases: from 1958 to 1964; 1965 to 1971; and 1972 to 1976.

It is clear that on balance, unless decisions were unanimous, there was little neutral/worker support. Accusations of employer/neutral complicity had been a grievance of worker spokesmen since the forties, and would be one of the main tenets underlining the demands for the revision of the machinery in the Dáil.<sup>36</sup> That this accusation was not without foundation for the period leading to 1965 can be ascertained from their response to the import of the information submitted by the worker members regarding the *National Farm Survey*. Notwithstanding its submission to a meeting of the Board in March 1960, the sum result of this and additional memoranda covering three subsequent meetings in April, May and August, was a 3s. increase proposed by a neutral member.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, this increase was not only confined to adult workers, but on the proposal of an employer member the qualifying age for adults was raised from 20 years and over to 21 years plus.

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<sup>36</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 119) 28 Feb. 1950, col. 855; (vol. 198) 5 Dec. 1962, col. 744; 12 Dec. 1962, col. 1230.

<sup>37</sup> *Report of the AWB 1960* (S 13503E/61); Patrick Murphy, FRW to secretary, AWB, 4 Apr. 1960 (CMP).

**Table 5.4** Pattern of voting on wage increase proposals on the Agricultural Wages Board, 1958-76

AWB Meetings		Wage increase proposals for male adult workers			Voting Pattern				Outcome
No.	Date	Worker	Employer	Neutral	Employer - Neutral	Worker - Neutral	Unani mous	Majority of all three	
	7 Aug. 1958	10/- in Grp C			✓				Rejected
	29 Jan. 1959	15/- and 7/6	Confine increase to 20 years +	6/-	✓	✓			6/- increase confined to 20 years +
	11 Feb. 1960	13/-	4/-		✓				4/- to 20 years +
	25 Aug. 1960		Confine increase to 21 years +	3/-	✓	✓			3/- increase confined to 21 years +
114	9 Aug. 1961	10/-			✓				No increase
115	27 Sep. 1961	15/-; 12/-; 10/-	6/-	7/6	✓				6/-
117	3 May 1962			10/-, 8/- & 6/- for Groups. A, B & C			✓		10/-, 8/- and 6/- for Groups A, B & C.
125	10 Oct. 1963			10/- & 3/- for Grps. A & B				✓	10/- & 3/- for groups A & B
128	16 April 1964		15/-		✓				15/-
132	1 April 1965	44/50 hour week in winter & summer	15/-				✓		15/- & 44/50 hour week in winter and summer
137	5 May 1966	20/-	20/- phased increase				✓		20/- phased increase

147	15 Feb. 1968	20/- phased increase				✓		20/- phased increase
151	6 Mar. 1969	40/-		30/-			✓	30/-
155	19 Feb. 1970	40/-	30/-	35/-	✓			30/-(2 neutrals present 1 for 1 against)
158	23 Jul. 1970			30/-			✓	30/-
162	15 Apr. 1971		25/-	34/-			✓	34/-
166	16 Mar. 1972	40/-	30/-		✓			30/-
172	22 Mar. 1973		40/-		✓			40/-
175	20 Sep. 1973	54/- plus other proposals in line with nwas	30/-	40/-				Neutrals & chairman 40/-
178	11 Apr. 1974	48/- plus other proposals in line with nwas	60/-	60/-	✓			60/-
181	12 Dec. 1974	52/- plus other proposals in line with nwas	40/-		✓			40/-
183	8 May 1975	280/- on a phased basis		70/-	✓			70/-
185	30 Oct. 1975	52/-					✓	52/-

Source: *Reports of the proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board 1958-1976*; Draft minutes of the meetings noted above (CMP).

This meant that since 1956 the Board awarded total minimum wage increases of 16s. to adult agricultural workers. This compared to Labour Court announcements of pending increases for industrial workers ranging from 12s. to 15s. for the period 1959-60 alone.<sup>38</sup>

While there is no precise evidence to indicate what influenced the majority on the Board to pass such low increases, the poor state of agriculture since 1953 seems to have played a critical part. The value of net agricultural output had decreased substantially on three occasions during the 1950s, in 1954, 1956 and 1958, setting farmers back considerably in terms of income. It was hardly any coincidence, therefore, that younger agricultural labourers had been deprived of increases for this entire period, with adult workers affected in 1957 and 1958. However, as Table 5.5 indicates, although agricultural prices were down marginally between 1958 and 1960, that portion of agricultural income available to farmers and their families was on the ascent from 1959, a trend that continued into the sixties, with an increase of £7 million between 1960 and 1961. Yet the Board was still averse to passing more substantial increases for adult workers or even to resuming increases for juveniles. With farming organisations such as the AAI against substantial increases, the Board's meagre response was again too much of a coincidence. For instance, the AAI had requested a meeting with the Taoiseach in January 1960 when a new increase had been pending on the Board.<sup>39</sup> The union was granted a meeting on 1 March on the grounds that the purpose was to discuss means of meeting the cost of any increases in the minimum wage, rather than the merits of an increase.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1960), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Secretary, AAI to an Taoiseach, 22 Jan. 1960 (S 15848A).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 5.5** Breakdown of the annual agricultural price index 1953-65, and the total income arising in agriculture, 1957-65

Year	Annual Agricultural Price Index	Of total income arising in agriculture (net output minus total expenses)	
	Base 1953=100	Income from self employment and other trading income <sup>41</sup>	Wages and salaries
1952	93.6		Million
1953	100.0		
1954	98.7		
1955	103.1		
1956	93.5		
1957	99.8	109.9	15.4
1958	102.5	99.4	15
1959	102.4	109.3	15.2
1960	99.6	111.8	15.5
1961	100.0	118.4	15.2
1962	101.7	121.9	15.5
1963	102.2	119.9	15.2
1964	113.1	141.6	16.6
1965	117.7	141.2	18.1

Source: *Statistical Abstract of Ireland*; Agricultural Price Index: 1968 (Dublin, 1968) table 326, p.326; 1976 (Dublin, 1978) table 311, p.290. Total Income: 1959-65 in 1967 (Dublin 1967) table 69, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> Total income arising in agriculture is derived from the net output figure by deducting rates and all other non factor inputs and by adding the rent element in the portion of the land annuities met by way of subsidy under the land acts. The total income arising in agriculture is then allocated between the rent element in the land annuities, wages and salaries paid to employees and income from self employment and other trading income. The latter item represents the amount available to remunerate farmers and members of their families for their labour and management and to cover interest on capital.

With the Board having passed a 4s. increase in the interim which was due to come into effect on 28 March, media reports on 2 March following the meeting announced how even this minimal increase would cost farmers in the region of £750,000 a year.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it was estimated that if farmers, their sons and relatives were to receive a similar increase, it would cost the agricultural economy in the region of £3 million.<sup>43</sup> What was not emphasised in the press was that this was symptomatic of a wider campaign by farming organisations to seek a greater share of national income. Although not opposed to increases in agricultural wages, it was not unusual for organisations such as the AAI or the National Farmers Association to use the cost of imminent increases as leverage to argue for more subsidies and state aid to secure better prices for farmers.<sup>44</sup>

Responding to the general wage agitation amongst the non agricultural workforce since the fifth wage round in 1955 and the consequent improvement in the incomes of workers in other sectors of the economy, the National Farmers Association had been established in 1955 to represent farmers needs on a national level.<sup>45</sup> Using 1953 as the base year, farmers argued that family farm incomes were deteriorating relative to the rest of the community, although their output in terms of volume had grown.<sup>46</sup> Influenced by recent awards to public sector employees, by 1961 they were demanding £83 million to restore farmers to their 1953 position.<sup>47</sup> It was hardly surprising that in such a climate any increase in the minimum agricultural wage would be keenly watched. Yet agricultural

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<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times, Irish Press*, 2 Mar. 1960

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Sean Dunne, FRW to Con Moynihan, 26 May 1950 (CMP).

<sup>45</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1955), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Extract from the budget speech, 10 Apr. 1962, p. 46 (S 11563E/62).

<sup>47</sup> *Irish Independent*, 13 Apr. 1962.

wages still comprised only a fraction of total agricultural income, declining from 12 to 11 per cent between 1957 and 1963, when wages hovered between £15 and £15.4 million. During the same period the portion of total agricultural income available to farmers and their families increased by £10 million. Moreover, minimum wages affected employers of only 82,000 workers, 48,000 of which were full time and were concentrated in the more prosperous farming regions of the country. Nonetheless, that the Board was heavily influenced by employer opposition was confirmed further in 1961 when in attempting to get increases resumed for younger workers the worker members encountered even more opposition.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, the worker members at two separate meetings in 1961 sought to convene the area committees to ascertain their views on revising the minimum rates.<sup>48</sup> Meeting in August to discuss the outcome of the committee meetings, employer and neutral members refused to make a decision on the granting of an increase until the harvest arrived.<sup>49</sup> Deferring the application of any new wage increase until the harvest season was over meant that the thousands of casual workers employed during the summer months and harvesting period would not benefit from any new order introduced by the Board. Such obstinacy on this occasion contributed visibly to deteriorating relations, a relationship which the reaction of the worker members clearly indicated was at crisis point. Having already produced an excerpt from the financial statement made by the minister for Finance on the budget in April 1961, claiming that the total cash income

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<sup>48</sup> Draft minutes, 112<sup>th</sup> meeting, 22 Mar. 1960 (CMP); Draft minutes, 113<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 May 1961.

<sup>49</sup> Draft minutes, 114<sup>th</sup> meeting, 9 Aug. 1961.

of farmers was £16 million greater in 1960 than in 1959, this further vacillation by the Board was too much.<sup>50</sup> Not only did they leave the meeting in protest but they decided to use an alternative means of redressing the current impasse on the Board, the newspapers.

An article appeared in the *Evening Mail* on 10 August 1961 dramatically entitled '90,000 Farm Hands Serve Strike Notice'.<sup>51</sup> It was alleged that the harvest was 'threatened' by a strike of farm labourers, the responsibility for which was laid firmly with the Board, having 'turned down flat' claims for increased wages and a shorter working week. Although the chances of a nationwide strike on this basis were highly remote, the complete disenchantment of the worker members was nonetheless palpable from the comments made by Murphy to the press. The events of the August meeting were laid bare with employer members painted in a less than flattering light. Of greatest significance was the allegation that the opposition of farmer organisations to any increase was the main objection in the employer/neutral opposition to an increase:

The discussion broke down when the Board announced that three of the farmers organisations were opposing any increase in farm wages. At this stage the worker representatives on the Board, Mr. P. Murphy and Mr. P. Durcan...left the meeting in protest.<sup>52</sup>

Given the Board's emphasis on confidentiality this article and the medium it represented blatantly accentuated how poor relations had become and indeed the extent of worker member desperation, as they sought to draw attention to the inequitable practices of the Board. Considerable attention was drawn to this press coverage at the subsequent meeting

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<sup>50</sup> Draft minutes, 113<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 May 1961, appendix a (CMP).

<sup>51</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 10 Aug. 1961.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



in September.<sup>53</sup> Although dismayed at the breach of confidence, instead of matters being further exacerbated the majority were far more inclined to a revision of rates than they had been for years. A 6s. increase was eventually passed on the proposal of AAI employer representative, Brendan Clarke.<sup>54</sup> At the instigation of the chairman, and on the proposal of Nic Eachnaidh, the adult age was once again applied to those aged 20 years and over. Moreover, Clarke was also responsible for recommending that increases be granted to juvenile workers. This meant that the freeze which had been imposed on the younger age groups since 1953 and those aged 18 to 19 since 1956 was now at an end.<sup>55</sup> It was even agreed that the Board should investigate the position of females working in agriculture.

It could only be concluded therefore that Murphy's use of the media had been successful, a point which did not escape his attention. This new level of co-operation appeared to continue into 1962 when at a meeting on 3 May it was unanimously agreed on the proposal of a neutral member, Edward Cassidy, to pass increases of 10s. for Area A, 8s. for Area B, and 6s. for Area C.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, at a meeting in October the vexed issue of wages areas was finally addressed. It was decided that on the occasion of the next wages order, Group B would be extended to embrace counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Limerick, Tipperary and East Cork.<sup>57</sup> Yet, despite this dressing of co-operation the shallowness of the Board's integrity soon became apparent. It had already been evident at

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<sup>53</sup> Draft minutes, 115<sup>th</sup> meeting, 27 Sep. 1961 (CMP).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Reports of the AWB* 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62).

<sup>56</sup> Draft minutes, 117<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 May 1962 (CMP).

<sup>57</sup> Draft minutes, 120<sup>th</sup> meeting, 25 Oct. 1962.

the May meeting when the new award was qualified by the adoption of a motion supported by all neutral and employer representatives to freeze wages at the new minimum rate for twelve months from June 1962. By March 1963 it was clear that the Board had little intention of honouring the terms of the freeze by taking the necessary steps to introduce a new increase by June 1963, its due end date.<sup>58</sup> For instance, when the worker members sought to convene the area committees with a view to revising the 1962 wages order, they encountered complete opposition not just from the employer members but also from the chairman of the Board. Before discussion on the proposals had even commenced, O'Broin had reminded the Board that adoption of the proposal would set in motion the procedure for giving effect to an increase in the minimum rate. Then he proceeded to give decisive support to employers in their opposition to Murphy's claims by referring, amongst other factors, to the index of agricultural prices which he argued had shown little change in recent years.<sup>59</sup> As Table 5.12 indicates, other than a slight decline in 1960, it had been quite stable since 1958 and in fact increased from 99.6 in 1960 to 101.7 in 1962, with further growth imminent for 1963. When voting on the issue was deadlocked, the chairman succeeded in declaring the matter adjourned until the next meeting.

The opposition of the chairman and the employer members to this proposal was highly significant. With the pay pause implemented on the occasion of the last increase in June 1962 due to end shortly, the refusal of the Board to consider a revocation order at this meeting meant considerable delays in getting a new increase passed. The Board's wage

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<sup>58</sup> Draft minutes, 122<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 7 Mar. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

fixing machinery was so cumbersome that at least one month would pass before the Board would meet again, an additional two months would elapse before a new wages order could be made since the area committees would have to be convened, and then there was the time lapse between the passing of the order and its coming into effect. Both the employer members and the chairman had therefore succeeded for the moment in delaying the introduction of any further wage increases to agriculture. The opposition of the employer members was to be expected, but the fact that the chairman should have participated in such blatant disregard of worker member claims destroyed the last vestige of trust in the system on their part. It resulted in them submitting a letter to the Taoiseach professing little confidence in the Board in April 1963.<sup>60</sup>

Expressing serious concern about the low minimum wage, which it was argued applied to about 73 per cent of the adult agricultural workers in the State at that time (the revision of the wages groups was not due to take effect until the next wages order came into effect), it was declared:

Despite our best efforts on behalf of the many thousands of farm workers represented by us, the Board has refused in recent years to fix an adequate minimum wage for agricultural workers...We have with reluctance decided to inform you that we have now very little confidence in the Agricultural Wages Board.<sup>61</sup>

Not only was the Board accused of having 'refused' to provide an adequate minimum wage, but it was also claimed that the 'wage adjustments awarded by the Board were very much below the increases in unemployment benefit payable to the average farm worker

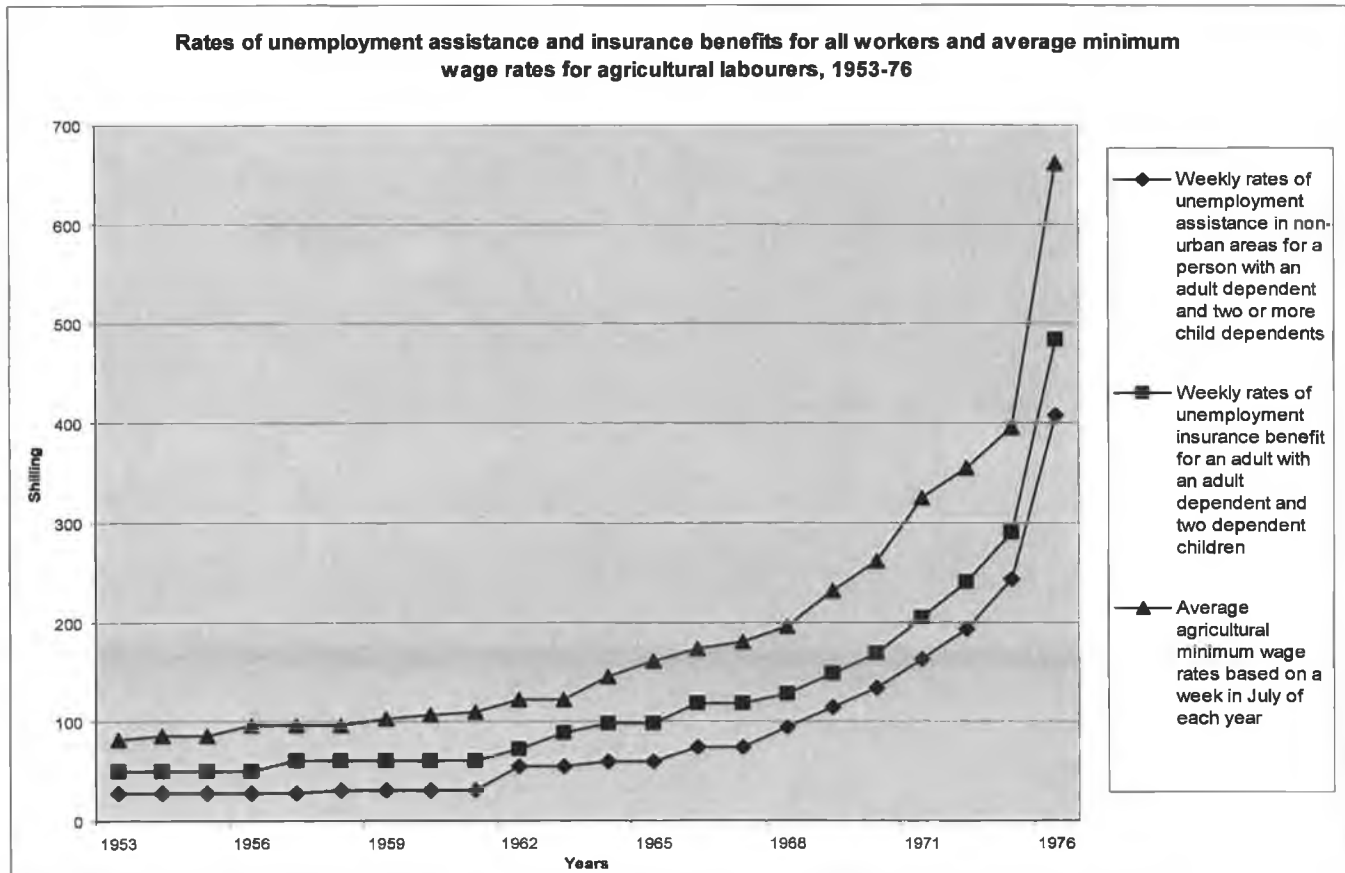
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<sup>60</sup> Patrick Murphy to an Taoiseach on behalf of the AWB worker representatives, 2 Apr. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

with family responsibilities'.<sup>62</sup> Figure 5.1 indicates the rate of unemployment assistance and benefit for all workers, and the average agricultural minimum rate for agricultural labourers, during the period 1953-76.<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 5.1** Comparison of the average agricultural minimum rate with the rate of unemployment assistance and insurance benefit for all workers, 1953-76



Sources: *Annual reports of the Department of Social Welfare* (1953) pp 4-5 and 16-17; (1954) *Ibid.*; (1957) pp 6-7 and 16-17; (1958) pp 8-9 and 16-17; (1962) pp 10-11 and p 20; (1963) pp 10 and 21; (1964) pp 10 and 21; (1966) pp 10-11 and 23; (1968) pp 23 and 59; (1969) pp 21 and 55; (1970) pp 21 and 55; (1971) pp 27 and 69; (1972) pp 27 and 71; (1974) pp 13 and 51; (1976) pp 16 and 42. *Statistical Abstracts of Ireland: 1953-69* in 1969 (Dublin 1971) table 65, p.88; 1970-76 in 1977 (Dublin 1980) table 61, p.90.

The most striking element of this chart is the narrowness of the gap between the average minimum wage and the rate of unemployment benefit until the mid 1960s. While the

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Murphy to an Taoiseach on behalf of the AWB worker representatives, 2 Apr. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>63</sup> For data on Figure 5.1 see Table AIV.7 in Appendix IV.

worker members may have been correct in stating that the level of increases passed by the Board were less than those passed on to unemployed workers in rural areas, this was so only for 1962 and 1963. Increases in unemployment insurance benefit of 11s. 6d. in 1962 and 16s. in 1963 were indeed far greater than the increases in the agricultural minimum rate, which ranged from 6s. to 10s. in 1962, and eventually to only 5s. in 1963. This meant that unemployed farm workers in Group C in receipt of unemployment insurance benefit received allowances, which as a proportion of the minimum agricultural wage, increased from 53 per cent in 1961 to 70.8 per cent in 1963. Notwithstanding this fact, the increases in agriculture were periodically on a far more frequent basis than for unemployment benefit, with the latter increasing from an even lower base point than agricultural wages. However, the chart does indicate that the gap which had existed between the two forms of remuneration in 1953 was still the same, if not less, ten years later. That the worker members had cause to be concerned at this trend may therefore be concluded from these figures. Instead of agricultural minimum wages considerably exceeding those rates being paid to unemployed workers who did not work 50 hard hours per week in all sorts of weather, there was a narrower gap than ever before between the rates of both. Furthermore, it should be noted that the figures for unemployment benefit included in these tables related to the rates for an adult, an adult dependent and two children. From 1962 a recipient was entitled to 5s. extra for each child in excess of two, while this figure was increased to 8s. from 1963.<sup>64</sup> Information on these lines had already been made available to the Board at the March meeting in 1963, but made little impact. Hence the decision of the worker members to inform the Taoiseach of their concerns.

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<sup>64</sup> *Annual reports of the Department of Social Welfare* (1962), pp 10-11; (1963), p. 10.

These concerns focused primarily on attaining a minimum wage that was capable of adequately supporting a family. Evidence of this demand extends back to before 1957 when claims were submitted to the Board requesting that the level of the adult minimum wage be increased to a family wages standard.<sup>65</sup> It was felt that this standard should have been proportionate to the board and lodging allowances which agricultural employers were allowed to legally deduct from the weekly wage, and much data was introduced to support this claim.<sup>66</sup> Having made little headway with the Board on the matter over the subsequent years, the worker members now submitted proposals which they believed would help to ameliorate the position of the agricultural labourer financially. In the absence of an adequate minimum wage it was requested that married farm workers be given a social welfare supplement paid weekly or monthly through the social welfare system. It was claimed that 'this would help to ease the problems (and even hardships) of the married farm worker struggling to provide for a family on about £6 a week'.<sup>67</sup> Failing the provision of a wages supplement, the diversion of the employment allowance, paid as part of the agricultural grant, to farm workers was requested.

In making these suggestions and in seeking a meeting with the Taoiseach, it seems the worker members were following the example set by the AAI in 1960. However, unlike the AAI, there is no evidence to suggest that the Taoiseach ever met this deputation.<sup>68</sup> This was hardly surprising given the unofficial stance adopted in March 1960 on matters arising from the AWB, noted earlier. The position of the government on supporting the

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<sup>65</sup> Draft minutes, 99<sup>th</sup> meeting, 21 Nov. 1957 (CMP).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Patrick Murphy to an Taoiseach, 2 Apr. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>68</sup> Private secretary, an Taoiseach to Murphy, 3 Apr. 1963.

Board had also been reaffirmed only a few months previously in December 1962 when the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill of that year, which had been privately sponsored by members of the Labour Party, had been under discussion in the Dáil.

The deep dissatisfaction of the Board's worker representatives with the lack of progress for agricultural labourers had been finding expression in the Dáil for some time, through labour spokesmen. As most workers benefited from the increases derived from the national wage rounds from the late fifties, they watched in frustration as the Board placed any advancement in the basic level of agricultural wages at a standstill.<sup>69</sup> Several years of parliamentary agitation culminated in the introduction of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962, which sought the outright abolition and replacement of the Board by a joint labour committee under the Labour Court.<sup>70</sup> During the debate on the bill in December 1962 the necessity for this action had been dismissed categorically by the minister for Agriculture, Patrick Smith:

It might be argued that it would be desirable to have all wages determined by the same authority, which would have detailed information as to the wage rates payable in all sectors. Such an argument would not be valid, in my opinion, since ultimately the wages of agricultural workers are determined by the capacity of farmers to pay. In any event, information is always available to the Agricultural Wages Board, if they need it, regarding the wages paid in comparable fields of employment.<sup>71</sup>

For an autonomous body with no specific terms of reference, the minister was incredibly didactic about how the Board fixed its rates. The flippant allusion to trends in other fields of comparable work suggested it was highly unlikely that such movements ever surfaced

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<sup>69</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1955), p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Issued 4 Jul. 1962 (IR 7A).

<sup>71</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 198) 4 Dec. 1962, col.754.

as a consideration with the Board, especially if it took its direction from the minister. Smith implied that the main criterion governing the Board's decision making process was the ability of farmers to meet wage increases, a claim which worker members had already proven to be flawed. What was of concern was that this was the primary consideration of the majority at all times instead of considering also what was necessary for the agricultural labourer to maintain a decent standard of living, a standard which the worker members sought, at the very least, to equate with a family wage for married workers.

Obviously safeguarding a family standard had also been basic to the British and Northern Ireland legislation under the limitation clause. And while this raised as many questions as it answered, at least there was some attempt to set a guiding standard.<sup>72</sup> It will be recalled that when the Irish Board's governing legislation was being devised in 1936 the minister for Finance at the time had objected to including this clause on the grounds that single workers would have benefited from a standard aimed at the married worker.<sup>73</sup> Its omission from the legislation left the Board complete freedom to fix the wages at any level it sought fit. Clearly the worker members had been dissatisfied with that level for some time. This had also been reiterated during the 1962 Dáil debate when Brendan Corish, a Labour TD for Wexford, challenged the stance taken by the minister:

The case should not rest entirely on the ability of the farmer to pay. The cost of living for a man and his wife and four or five children should be the most important factor.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Barbara A. Wootton, *The social foundations of wages policy: a study of contemporary British wage and salary structure* (London, 1962), p.84.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter III.

<sup>74</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 198) 11 Dec. 1962, cols 1075-6.



The balanced consideration of these and other factors would certainly have been recommended by the ILO and would have constituted the basic tenets of the living wage movement.<sup>75</sup> But the proposers of this bill were not only confronted with the opposition of government to any suggestion that the Board was not performing adequately but also with that of Fine Gael. James Dillon, in his capacity as a former minister for agriculture, rejected the criticism of the Board's activities on the grounds that the wage it fixed was only a minimum rate below which it was a 'criminal offence for any employer to pay his worker'.<sup>76</sup> He maintained that less than ten per cent of agricultural labourers were actually working for the basic minimum rate.<sup>77</sup> This was a wide claim given that the paucity of agricultural wages in the past had required the introduction of statutory regulation in the first place. Moreover, since 1936 the Board had recovered more than £88,793 in wage arrears for workers whose employers had not even paid the minimum rate.<sup>78</sup> Corish also challenged Dillon's claim, asserting that the minimum wage was in fact generally regarded as the standard wage:

I do not know a great number of farmers paying more than the minimum wage. They honestly believe their only obligation is to pay what they call the standard wage - they never describe it as the minimum wage. In their innocence or ignorance, they believe they fulfil all their obligations when they pay what is laid down by the Agricultural Wages Board.<sup>79</sup>

Support for this contention is available as early as 1949 from the Department of Agriculture memorandum on the FRW resolutions noted earlier. Commenting on the

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<sup>75</sup> B.F. Shields, 'The minimum wage' in *Journal of the Statistical Social Enquiry Society of Ireland*, 87<sup>th</sup> session (1933-4), pp 62-82.

<sup>76</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 198) 5 Dec. 1962, cols 757-8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 759.

<sup>78</sup> See Table AIV.9 in Appendix IV.

<sup>79</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 198) 11 Dec. 1962, cols 1074-5.

length of the working week, it was stated:

There is no need, in theory, for the Board to prescribe a 48 hour week as it is open to the workers to achieve it by negotiation. In practice, however, it would probably be impossible without action by the Board, as what the Board prescribes as a minima and maxima seem to be accepted as standards.<sup>80</sup>

This tendency was also confirmed in a memorandum from the office of the minister for Industry and Commerce to the secretary of an Taoiseach in February 1960. Responding to the request from the AAI for a deputation to meet the Taoiseach regarding a possible increase in agricultural wages, it was noted:

The minister understands that outside the counties of Dublin, Wicklow and Meath neither agricultural workers or employers are well organised so that in effect the wages paid are the minima determined by the Agricultural Wages Board and any question of an increase in wages for agricultural workers throughout the country generally would, therefore, be primarily a matter for the Board.<sup>81</sup>

Should this have been the case it meant that the wages prescribed by the Board represented more than just the floor below which no employer could legally go, but were the rates received by most hired workers. However, that the majority of the Board, especially the employer members, shared the same stance as Dillon and viewed the minimum as precisely that, a base upon which employers voluntarily fixed better wages, would become increasingly apparent over the subsequent decade when it was required to defend its wage fixing decisions. What was unsettling about this view was that when at a meeting in April 1963 the worker members suggested that steps be taken by the Board to ascertain the average amount of wages paid in excess of the minimum, the request was rejected. The minutes reported that it was 'generally felt that the Board had not the

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<sup>80</sup> Departmental minute on an FRW letter dated 6 September 1949, 22 Sep. 1949 (AGI/G1195/49).

<sup>81</sup> Industry and Commerce to secretary, an Taoiseach, 6 Feb. 1960 (S 15848A).

resources to undertake a study of this kind'.<sup>82</sup> This meant that should the Board have continued to operate on the premise that the minimum was just the minimum, they were content to continue determining the livelihood of thousands of workers on the basis of an unproven assumption.

Having had their reputation upheld by the government and main opposition parties alike during the Dáil debate in December 1962, it was obvious from this and earlier meetings in 1963 that the Board felt little need to pander to worker member demands. Despite the latter introducing evidence to refute claims that agricultural prices had shown little change, they made little progress. Following prolonged discussion on the 'economic position of farming', the motion that an increase was due was rejected by 6 votes to 5 even though a neutral member, Eamonn McCluskey, had voted with the workers.<sup>83</sup> A further motion that the provisions of any new order in 1963 would be retrospective from 3 June, the alleged expiration of the pay pause, was defeated by 6 votes to 4. Two final motions seeking to convene the next Board meetings in April and May were also defeated by 6 votes to 4. Instead a motion by Brendan Clarke that the next meeting be held on 20 June was carried by 6 votes to nil. Indicating employer/neutral complicity at its finest, at least two neutral members had voted with the employers on every occasion. The decisions made by the Board at this meeting meant that regardless of when it decided to introduce a new order, it had failed to honour the commitment given when the pay pause was introduced in June 1962.

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<sup>82</sup> Draft minutes, 123<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 4 Apr. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

That this was of little consequence to the majority was conveyed further at the next meeting on 20 June 1963.<sup>84</sup> While it was finally agreed to convene the area committees on the proposal of McCluskey, Murphy's attempt to expedite the process by seeking the convention of the next Board meeting in August was frustrated when on the proposal of Clarke it was deferred to October. Once again this effectively meant that any increases passed would not become effective until after the harvest was saved and the least number of workers would benefit. However, the Board surpassed even its own poor record at the October meeting.<sup>85</sup> Not only was an increase deferred until 30 December, ensuring that a total of eighteen months would pass between increases, but those workers in Group C, who received the lowest rate of the three wages groups, were not allocated any increase whatsoever. Moreover, on the proposal of Edward Cassidy adult male workers in Group A and Group B were to receive increases of only 5s. and 3s. respectively.

With the transfer of certain counties from Group C to Group B, noted earlier, due to become effective with the next increase, the smaller increase for Group B was designed to facilitate farmers in these counties who already faced a substantial outlay to place workers on a par with those in Group B. Of course, this was of little solace to workers already in this group. Yet, they were fortunate to receive any increase given that those workers remaining in Group C who like their colleagues in other counties had been waiting for an increase since June, were awarded nothing. Since this was the first time that an entire wages group had been deprived of an increase, the worker members were concerned at the precedent being set.

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<sup>84</sup> Draft minutes, 124<sup>th</sup> meeting, 20 Jun. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>85</sup> Draft minutes, 125<sup>th</sup> meeting, 10 Oct. 1963.

Accordingly, Murphy sent a letter to the chairman demanding that an immediate meeting of the Board be held to rescind the decisions made and to review farm wages in all districts.<sup>86</sup> However, in replying to Murphy on 15 October, O'Broin made it clear that he was not favourably disposed to this request:

To rescind them would mean throwing the whole thing into the melting pot again. I think that such a procedure would be open to grave objection. It would mean that in future the Board could never be sure that there would be any finality to any decision they reached, should dissatisfaction with it be expressed by either the workers' or employers' members. It would be a bad precedent.<sup>87</sup>

With regard to Murphy's concern about the position of workers in Group C, the chairman added:

It is understandable that the position of Group C gives rise to comment but I think that most, if not all, the members of the Board were much impressed by the figures recently published by the ESRI showing the average income per male employed in agriculture in the western part of the country. These figures from a responsible source seemed in most cases to be less, and in some cases considerably less, than the existing minimum wage applicable to Group C and appeared to point to the advisability of leaving the minimum for Group C unchanged for the present.<sup>88</sup>

Although it took the Board over three years to act on the information presented by the worker members to argue for better wages in most counties, as soon as an opportunity arose to deprive workers of an increase it was grasped without hesitation. Consequently, the chairman concluded that he was not 'disposed to accede to the request for another meeting of the Board immediately', preferring instead to let effect be given to the decisions reached.<sup>89</sup> And while the chairman had implied that the next meeting of the Board would not take place until the New Year, he clearly reconsidered this stance when

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<sup>86</sup> Patrick Murphy to chairman, AWB, 11 Oct. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>87</sup> Chairman to Murphy, 15 Oct. 1963.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

a special meeting was convened on 14 November 1963 for the purposes of considering Murphy's proposal.

The events at this meeting would not serve to encourage Murphy to make such a request again. Although the increases awarded at the previous meeting were rescinded in favour of a standard 5s. increase for all wages groups, the Board went one step further.<sup>90</sup> On the proposal of Brendan Clarke, the resolution adopted by the Board on 25 October 1962 to transfer certain counties from Group C to Group B was rescinded, with the transfer deferred until June 1964. In taking this action the employer and neutral members had therefore succeeded in further delaying the upgrading of the wages areas, which by this time constituted a total delay of almost two years. Murphy was clearly being taught a lesson. Demands for rescinding decisions could mean the withdrawal of the concession altogether, thus ensuring that such a precedent would not be encouraged again. The sum total benefit of the worker members' agitation over the previous eighteen months had been a 5s. increase for adult male workers in all wage areas. This compared to increases of at least 20s. for industrial and manual workers under the eight wage round which spanned from 1961 to 1963.<sup>91</sup>

Yet having reached this new low, the Board's approach to pay increases was about to be dramatically transformed. The catalyst was the recommendations emerging from the Employer/Labour Conference (ELC) between the Federated Union of Employers, the Joint Consultative Committee of Employer Organisations and the ICTU, in January

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<sup>90</sup> Draft minutes, 126<sup>th</sup> meeting, 14 Nov. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>91</sup> *Annual reports of the Labour Court* (1961), p. 3; (1962), p. 3; (1963), p.3.

1964.<sup>92</sup> The accelerated movement in the wages of all non agricultural workers since the fifth wage round meant that increases which in 1957 began as 10s. for adult male workers, had turned into awards varying from 20s. to 25s. by 1961.<sup>93</sup> With wage claims spiralling out of control and an escalation in the number of strikes, the ELC recommendations of January 1964 signalled a concerted attempt to reach an agreed basis for further increases having regard to productivity and cost of living factors.<sup>94</sup> The Board was obliged to consider the significance of the ELC recommendations when on 4 February 1964 the ICTU requested that it receive a deputation from representatives of each of four trade unions at its next meeting on the sixth.<sup>95</sup> Although the Board declined this request, the intervention of the ICTU acted as a stimulus for discussion on the matter, preventing the Board from simply ignoring the significance of what was happening for wages on a national basis. While Patrick Murphy attempted to get the Board to pass a motion agreeing to implement the terms of the national wages recommendation in full, this had been rejected outright by employers and neutrals. Instead their position regarding the recommendations and their pertinence to agriculture was outlined in a motion passed at the instigation of neutral member, Edward Cassidy:

The Agricultural Wages Board take the view that the conference...was particularly concerned with wages in industrial and other non-agricultural occupations and the Board are not aware that the deliberations of the conference covered the special position in regard to agricultural employment, the wages in which have always moved independently of industrial wages. Those considerations notwithstanding, the Board, nevertheless, feel it incumbent on them to take account of the situation which has arisen following the recommendations of the Conference and they consider that in addition to the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Annual reports of the Labour Court*, (1957), p. 3; (1963), p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Draft minutes, 127<sup>th</sup> meeting, 6 Feb. 1964 (CMP).

increase in the minimum rates which became operative on 30th December, a further raising of the minimum rates is now called for.<sup>96</sup>

Confirmation that the Board perceived the wage trends in agriculture to operate completely distinct from trends elsewhere was evident from this statement. For it to agree to pass increases in deference to these trends was therefore a sea change of huge proportions. Even though the Board out of principle refrained from passing the full measure of the 20s. increase recommended, it did pass 75 per cent. Agreeing to a 15s. increase, this represented the largest increase ever passed by the Board. This increase marked the emergence of a period in which similar increases of a substantial level were granted unhesitatingly by the employer members, sometimes even at their instigation, until about 1969. Likewise, relations on the Board were to enter into a relatively calm period until the end of the decade. This is reflected in Table 5.4, where the voting patterns reveal largely unanimous increases for the remainder of the sixties.

Although the worker members did not have to battle as much for decent wage increases as they had in the past, it did not mean that they were not campaigning for other concessions. No sooner had the beginnings of better increases emerged than the question of hours of work assumed the importance of an issue that required redress. Agricultural labourers had not received a reduction in their working week since 1949, when the 50 hour week was introduced amid great controversy and considerable opposition from the minister for Agriculture.<sup>97</sup> During the 1950s demands served on the Board by the worker members, courtesy of Patrick Murphy and the FRW, revolved round the reduction of the

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<sup>96</sup> Draft minutes, 127<sup>th</sup> meeting, 6 Feb. 1964 (CMP).

<sup>97</sup> Chapter VI examines the question of holidays with pay in detail.



normal working week from 50 to 48 hours and the payment of a special minimum rate exceeding the normal rate for work on public holidays such as St. Patrick's Day, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, August Monday, Christmas Day and St. Stephen's Day, which had not yet been granted to agricultural labourers by statute.<sup>98</sup> With the general demand for a shorter working week having centred on a five day, 45 hour week by 1962, with some workers even benefiting from a 42½ hour week, the worker members on the Board could hardly have been blamed for seeking similar concessions for the agricultural labourer.<sup>99</sup> However, in making claims for a nine hour day and overtime for any hours worked in excess of the ninth hour, worker members faced not only the opposition of the Board but the opinion of its legal advisers.<sup>100</sup> Invariably this counsel claimed that the Board's function was confined to fixing rates of remuneration, with no power to control or regulate conditions of employment such as holidays or hours of work.<sup>101</sup> It was argued that when making wages orders the Board could not prescribe for conditions which the legislature had refrained from providing for legislatively:

The Legislature in making these enactments did not purport to control the terms or conditions of employment in Agriculture such as has been done in the case of industrial and other work and in shops by the Conditions of Employment Act of 1936, the Shops Conditions of Employment Act 1938 and the Holidays (Employees) Act of 1939.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Draft minutes, 98<sup>th</sup> meeting, 9 May 1957 (CMP); *Ibid.*, 99<sup>th</sup> meeting, 21 Nov. 1957.

<sup>99</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1961), p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Draft minutes, 121<sup>st</sup> meeting, 13 Dec. 1962 (CMP); Sean Gannon S.C. had been the Board's legal adviser until appointed as a judge to the High Court in 1973. His successor, Dermott F. Fitzpatrick, Barrister at Law, was appointed by the chairman, Sean Lee, without reference to the Board on the recommendation of a solicitor (Draft minutes, 173<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 21 Jun. 1973).

<sup>101</sup> Legal opinion of Sean Gannon dated 16 May 1956, circulated for a meeting on 17 Dec. 1964, p. 2 (CMP)

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

This was supposed to reflect the underlining policy of the legislature to safeguard the freedom of contract between the employer and worker.<sup>103</sup> So while it was alleged that the Board could prescribe rates of remuneration in respect of work done on prescribed holidays or half holidays, it had no power to determine when or what holidays or half holidays should have been given as these were matters determined by the legislature in the Holiday Acts of 1950 and 1952.<sup>104</sup> In regard to the reduction of working hours and the prescription of rates of remuneration for conditions such as overtime, it was claimed that the Board's governing legislation did not allow it to prescribe, define, specify, vary or create terms of employment which gave rise to reduced hours or overtime, as these were matters left by the legislature to be arranged between employer and worker.<sup>105</sup> It could not create a limitation of employment within minimum hours so as to create a period of excess employment which might be termed overtime, as this would have constituted interference in the contract of employment by actually dictating adherence to certain conditions.<sup>106</sup> Accepting this counsel, the Board operated on the basis that it could only regulate wages strictly in accordance with the pre-existing terms and conditions found to operate in contracts between employer and worker. So, when the worker members sought to pass a motion allowing for the introduction of a 45 hour week in December 1962, it was overwhelmingly rejected without the convening of the area committees for their recommendations.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Sean Gannon legal opinion, 26 Nov. 1964 (CMP).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1956, pp 2-3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Draft minutes, 121<sup>st</sup> meeting, 13 Dec. 1962 (CMP).

Given that the Agricultural Wages Act was conspicuous for the lack of obligation it placed on the Board, such a restrictive view of its powers suggested that this interpretation of the legislature's intention was more a projection of government policy than a legal certainty. The greatest corroboration of this was the activities of neighbouring boards, whose perception of their powers was in stark contrast to the Irish Board. Although the remit of the board in England and Wales had been extended in 1947 and 1948 to allow more extensive regulation of conditions such as holidays, the tenets of each board's governing legislation in regard to hours remained practically synonymous with the Irish Board. Yet, the Irish Board was the only body to have a 50 hour week still prevailing in 1962 on the basis that it could not reduce or vary the hours of work to which its rates related.

This was highly irregular given that as early as 1917 the first Irish board had varied hours of work to provide for summer and winter time and had also provided for 8, 9 and 10 hour working days with minimum hourly rates for overtime.<sup>108</sup> In 1946 the Northern Ireland board had varied the hours of work for male workers to 50 per week for the four months from November to February inclusive; 52 per week for the six months from March to October inclusive, and 54 per week for the two months August and September.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, in 1960 the hours of work to which the minimum rates applied were reduced to 47 hours per week.<sup>110</sup> There was a similar movement towards the

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<sup>108</sup> 'Report on the operations of the Agricultural Wages Board for Ireland, during the period September, 1917, to September, 1921' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland* (1920-1).

<sup>109</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland), 1939 to 1942*, order no. 11, (1946), 23 Jan. 1946.

<sup>110</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland), 1939 to 1956*, order no. 28, (1960), 22 Feb. 1960.

reduction in hours of work in Britain, where the board for England and Wales had reduced the weekly hours of labour from 52 to 48 in 1946, to 47 hours in 1949, to 46 hours in 1960 and 45 hours in 1963.<sup>111</sup> Given that the 48 hour week had prevailed in these countries since 1946 it was hardly surprising that the worker members were quite frustrated at the refusal of the Irish board to introduce such hours to Irish agriculture even in 1962.

To undermine the Irish Board's claim that it could not vary or reduce the hours of work unless such conditions were found to already exist in agriculture the worker members, led by Patrick Murphy, pointed out that the Board had in fact on numerous occasions fixed and varied the hours of work to which the minimum rates applied.<sup>112</sup> For instance, in an order of 3 January 1949 the hours of work were varied from 54 to 50 universally, just as an order of 28 April 1952 had varied the hours of work to which monthly rates applied so as to exclude Sunday work.<sup>113</sup> In addition, orders of 4 February and 28 July 1952 had varied the hours of work for female workers in Co. Dublin to 44 and 48, while in an order of 1 March 1954 the hours of female workers in Co. Kildare had been varied to 44 and 48.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, it was emphasised by Murphy that when the hours of work were universally varied from 54 to 50 in January of 1949, the 50 hour week did not prevail in contracts of employment for more than 10 per cent of the agricultural workers in the country, and had only prevailed in parts of the Group 1 and Group 2 areas.<sup>115</sup> He further

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<sup>111</sup> Agricultural wages: history sheet, appendix 1, Jun. 1998 (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, national statistics section).

<sup>112</sup> Patrick Murphy claim to the AWB on behalf of the worker members, 30 Nov. 1962 (CMP).

<sup>113</sup> *Reports of the AWB* 1949 (S 13503B); 1952 (S 13503C).

<sup>114</sup> *Report of the AWB* 1954 (S 13503D).

<sup>115</sup> Murphy to the AWB, 30 Nov. 1962, p.16 (CMP).

submitted that until the scope of section 17 of the Agricultural Wages Act 1936 was defined by the courts, decisions made by the Board and other boards operating under identical legislation were the only reliable guides to its powers.<sup>116</sup>

Despite issuing many motions on the subject, the worker members made little progress until October 1964. The stimulus for change on this occasion derived from Murphy's decision to once again resort to the press to acquire publicity for his demands.<sup>117</sup> Alleging 'persistent 'official' opposition to any reduction in the 50 hour week', Murphy's intention had no doubt been to place the Board under the pressure which such adverse publicity would inevitably impose.<sup>118</sup> That it produced the required result was evident when the Board's legal counsel was consulted a few days later. No doubt mindful of recent allegations, Gannon finally conceded that while the Board could not define specific periods of employment such as overtime, it could prescribe minimum rates of wages for any number of hours in a given wages period.<sup>119</sup> For example, it could prescribe rates for any period of seven consecutive days in which only 30 hours work was done under the contract of employment and prescribe a different rate of wages for any hours worked in excess of 30 hours in the same period.<sup>120</sup> This was subject to the usual criterion that before making such changes the Board should have regard to existing conditions, practices and circumstances. And while it was held that it would be 'an abuse of the powers of the Board' to prescribe minimum rates for a number of hours less than that

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<sup>116</sup> Murphy to the AWB, 30 Nov. 1962, p.15 (CMP).

<sup>117</sup> Draft minutes, 129<sup>th</sup> meeting, 15 Oct. 1964 (CMP).

<sup>118</sup> Murphy to the AWB, 12 Oct. 1964; 15 Oct. 1964 (CMP).

<sup>119</sup> Sean Gannon legal opinion, 26 Nov. 1964, p.2 (CMP).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

known to prevail in practice in contracts of employment, this was the legal counsel's interpretation of the Board's powers as laid out by the government rather than an outright illegality.<sup>121</sup> So while the sanctity of the contract of employment which required that the Board did not initiate new conditions of employment was repeatedly and unequivocally emphasised by the Board's legal adviser, the admission that the Board did indeed have the power to vary hours of work, as had been propounded by the worker members over the years, was of vital significance. While still upholding the importance of the contract of employment in the Board's considerations, the acknowledgement that it could fix, vary or reduce working hours effectively meant that the latter could no longer proffer arguments that it was powerless in this regard. This in turn meant that the worker members could desist from trying to prove that the Board could in fact perform such a function, enabling them instead to concentrate on persuading the Board of the prevalence of certain conditions to warrant the invocation of such power.

That the battle would no longer be as difficult became apparent when the employer members indicated at a meeting in December 1964 that they were prepared to agree that agricultural workers did not work a 50 hour week during the winter months.<sup>122</sup> This view was claimed to be based on the absence of 50 hours daylight each week during the winter period for outdoor work and also on the prevalence of a fairly widespread practice where employers allowed their workers off earlier in the evenings during the winter months than during the remainder of the year. While they argued that the minimum rates would more closely reflect reality if they were related to 47 hours a week in winter, the workers side

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>122</sup> Draft minutes, 130<sup>th</sup> meeting, 17 Dec. 1964 (CMP).

put forward a strong case for a 45 hour week. Over the course of the subsequent meetings in January and April 1965, the matter was ironed out.<sup>123</sup> This was facilitated by the chairman, Sean Lee, who had joined the Board in August 1964. He agreed to Murphy's suggestion that data on the hours of work performed by agricultural workers be made available for consideration.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Board's figures and the committee's recommendations suggested that it was the greater practice to work a 50 hour week all year round, it was unanimously adopted at the Board's subsequent meeting in April 1965 that the minimum weekly rates of wages for male agricultural workers be related to 44 hours in winter and 50 hours during the remainder of the year for the whole state, without reduction in wages during the winter period.<sup>124</sup> Minimum rates for female workers were also related to 44 hours during winter and 48 hours for the remainder of the year. The winter period was defined as November to February inclusive. Although a 45 hour week had been the ultimate aim, worker members were content to have the 48 hour week introduced for now. No doubt Murphy had effectively deduced that his press leak of 13 October 1964 had once again proved effective in spurring the Board into decisions it might not have otherwise taken for quite some time.

At the beginning, Murphy's use of the media was occasional and to great effect. By raising the Board's public profile it was instrumental in leading to certain decisions on the Board. It contributed indirectly to the emergence of better relations in the late sixties, as greater attempts were made by all members to seriously consider the demands of each

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<sup>123</sup> Draft minutes, 131<sup>st</sup> meeting, 28 Jan. 1965 (CMP); Draft minutes, 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 1 Apr. 1965.

group. It also strongly influenced the Board's decision to appear responsive to outside wage movements as the recommendations of the ELC emerged in 1964. As a result, the minimum wage increased in leaps and bounds over subsequent years. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, it was insufficient to bridge the gap between industrial and agricultural wages. The Board's refusal to pass the benefits of the full recommendations of the national wage agreements to agricultural labourers did not help matters. This issue would become the focus of worker member demands from 1970 when they not only sought to have the Board honour the national wage agreement increases in full, but to award arrears for previous shortfalls.

For instance, at a meeting of the Board in June 1970 Murphy drew attention to pay proposals for manual workers in the public service mainly employed in rural areas.<sup>125</sup> He alleged that the proposed pay increases reflected the twelfth round pay adjustments in industry and in employment in the private sector. These pay rises consisted of a phased increase of 84s. for a period of 21 months ending 31 December 1971, with 50s. payable from April 1970 and 34s. payable from January 1971. They affected mainly forestry, drainage and farm workers employed by the state, and road and allied workers employed by the local authorities. Murphy submitted that in order for agricultural labourers to retain parity with wage increases generally, an increase of 25s. a week was still due in respect of 1968/9. In addition to the 30s. increase payable since April 1970, a further increase of

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<sup>124</sup> Draft minutes, 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 1 Apr. 1965 (CMP).

<sup>125</sup> Patrick Murphy to secretary, AWB, 25 Jun. 1970 (CMP).



20s. a week was due in respect of 1970 and furthermore, an increase of 34s. a week would become due on 1 January 1971 for that year.<sup>126</sup>

The neutral and employer members conveyed unequivocally that the demands for 1970 had been exorbitant enough without the additional claims for 1968/9 and 1971. Nonetheless, despite the chairman trying to dissuade the Board from considering a further increase for the Autumn, the neutral and employer members indicated that they would be willing to consider a 20s. increase which would in fact have levelled wage adjustments in 1970 to parity with the twelfth round increases for that year. On meeting in July 1970 to consider the area committee proposals, a 30s. increase had been unanimously passed on the proposal of Edward Cassidy, an increase which had in fact been 10s. above that originally suggested in June.

Murphy's zeal reflected how the increased momentum for higher increases elsewhere was beginning to spiral out of control. It was generally acknowledged that the increases passed during the eleventh wage round had been much higher than those negotiated in earlier years.<sup>127</sup> Widespread concern over the risk which the wage rounds were posing for inflation and the economy led to the convening of a national employer/labour conference in late 1970 and the consequent formulation of a national wage agreement in December.<sup>128</sup> This new national agreement was greatly welcomed by employers, workers and government alike as a means of controlling the level of increases being passed by collective agreement on a national level. Its emergence not only guaranteed that Murphy

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<sup>126</sup> Draft minutes, 157<sup>th</sup> meeting, 25 Jun. 1970 (CMP).

<sup>127</sup> *Annual report of the Labour Court* (1969), pp 5-6.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, (1970), pp 3-4.

would have even more demands for the Board, but added substantial weight to their importance.

Since the Board had not provided any increase for 1971, at its next meeting in February 1972 Murphy gave a choice of a 40s. first phase increase under the terms of the new agreement, or a 34s. second phase increase under the terms of that governing increases for manual workers in the public service under which a 30s. increase had been effective since October 1970.<sup>129</sup> The response of the Board members indicated that they were becoming alarmed at the pace of the increases now demanded. The employer members withheld their support for further increases at this meeting for the first time since 1963.<sup>130</sup> Significantly, however, Edward Cassidy supported an increase on the grounds that the 'wage level for agricultural workers should move, if not in step, at least in sympathy' with manual workers in the public service.<sup>131</sup> Although no decision on an increase was made pending the recommendations of the area committees, Cassidy reiterated this proposal in April, overriding the 25s. proposed by the employer members.<sup>132</sup> This was not the first time that this neutral member had intervened on the side of the worker members, particularly in more recent years. On this occasion, he claimed to operate on the premise that neutral members had a 'moral obligation' to ensure agricultural workers were treated properly.<sup>133</sup> In speaking like this Cassidy left Eilis Nic Eachnaidh, the other neutral member present, with little option other than to support his motion for a 34s.

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<sup>129</sup> Draft minutes, 161<sup>st</sup> meeting, 18 Feb. 1971 (CMP).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Draft minutes, 162<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 15 Apr. 1971.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

increase, and consequently this increase was passed.

But relations were on the verge of an irrevocable change. The source of this change revolved around an article which appeared in the *Irish Press* the previous month, entitled 'Pay Rise for Farm Workers'.<sup>134</sup> It predicted that more than 20,000 farm workers throughout the country were likely to receive an increase of up to £2 a week in the near future.<sup>135</sup> The involvement of Murphy in the press leak was indisputable given the reference to an FRW statement which intimated that they 'would be satisfied with either kind of settlement', a blatant echo of Murphy's approach to the proposal for an increase at the meeting in January.<sup>136</sup> Clearly Murphy had been attempting once more to ensure the passage of a decent increase by drawing public attention to the Board's proceedings and thus pre-empting any vacillation on the Board's part. However, once again this action had been gravely viewed by the Board members. Although Murphy had never been accused of being responsible for these breaches of confidence, his culpability was assumed. That Murphy had gone too far on this occasion was revealed in a letter sent by the chairman to the editor of the *Irish Press* on 17 April 1971.<sup>137</sup> Despite Lee alleging that the Board wished 'to register a strong protest at the publication' of the article at a time when it could possibly have placed the negotiations between employers and workers in jeopardy, this was not the principal objection.<sup>138</sup> The Board took major offence to the claim in the article which stated:

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<sup>134</sup> *Irish Press*, 25 March 1971.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Chairman, AWB to TP Coogan, *Irish Press*, 17 Apr. 1971 (CMP).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

While agricultural workers are commonly regarded as 'lower paid workers', the system for negotiating for wages increases over the past few years has ensured that increases in agricultural wages have been keeping in step with wage increases for general workers in industry, and for manual workers in public service.<sup>139</sup>

This statement was accurate in substance since the Board had in fact been passing increases in synchrony with the wage round trends of recent years, instead of passing them without any heed to outside wage movements as they had in the past. Yet this observation was not appreciated by the Board. On the contrary, it was claimed that such a statement sought 'to associate the Board with wage agreements with which the Board have no connection and which apply to industrial and other non-agricultural workers'.<sup>140</sup>

For a while now the Board had been quite willing to pass increases in line with national wage movements. However, the public suggestion that its wage fixing process was not independent of such trends was perceived to undermine both its autonomy and its necessity. In fact, this breach was so gravely viewed that the majority of the Board felt obliged to reassert the independent, discretionary basis of their operations from all wage movements and matters non-agricultural in nature. They did this by issuing the following statement with the subsequent official press release announcing new awards:

In view of the recent publication of a newspaper article which purported to give information about matters which were mentioned at Board meetings, the Board wish to make clear that it is their special responsibility under the governing legislation to fix minimum wages for agricultural workers, as they think proper. The Board are not bound by any wage agreements separately negotiated and applicable to industrial and other non-agricultural workers.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Chairman, AWB to TP Coogan, *Irish Press*, 17 Apr. 1971 (CMP)

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Press notice issued by the AWB, 15 Apr. 1971.

That a Board which for decades had deliberately and studiously refrained from interacting with the public other than the formal notification of new awards should have altered an age old practice to make such an announcement was not a positive development. It meant that it was now on the defensive and was wary of any encroachment on its wage fixing function. This tendency was not alleviated by a more proactive approach by the steering committee of the ELC who were committed to making the new wage agreement a success. So when at a meeting on 16 March 1972 the Board still continued to honour only 75 per cent of the new agreement by passing a 30s. increase instead of the 40s. that would have been indicated, their decision was soon queried in a letter from the joint secretaries on 28 April.<sup>142</sup> The ELC had been aided in this regard by the FRW who had brought their attention to the fact that the new order had failed to provide a termination date and provision for a second phase increase.<sup>143</sup> Naturally this request was viewed ominously by the Board given that for the duration of its existence it had never been asked to explain a wage fixing decision. As far as it was concerned it was an autonomous wage fixing body that was accountable only to the minister for Agriculture. It now felt the need to assert its distinctiveness from the entire process. In an attempt to preserve its independence the Board, led by the chairman, went so far as to argue that it was not bound by the national agreement.<sup>144</sup> To validate this claim Lee resorted once again to the reliable opinion of the Board's legal adviser, who accordingly confirmed this fact on 3 June 1972.<sup>145</sup> As a result, the Board subsequently adopted the

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<sup>142</sup> *Report of the AWB 1972*; Draft minutes, 167<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 Jun. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>143</sup> *Report of the AWB 1972*; TA Bunyan, ELC to the secretary, AWB, 28 Apr. 1972.

<sup>144</sup> Draft minutes, 167<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 Jun. 1972.

<sup>145</sup> Sean Gannon legal opinion, 3 Jun. 1972.

stance that the national wage agreement was by its nature incompatible with the Board's governing legislation and therefore inconsistent with its wage fixing orders.<sup>146</sup>

Moreover, to compound this opposition to the national agreement, the chairman moved to alienate the neutral members from supporting the worker members. In referring to a recent Dáil question on the government's attitude to the Board's refusal to implement the national agreement, Lee reported:

It had come to his notice that in the course of the debate a reference had been made to 'the so-called neutrals who swayed the decision against the farm workers' and that it had been stated that the 'proposal by the workers' side for the national increase of £2 had been turned down on the combined votes of the farmers and the neutrals, including the chairman'. The chairman stated that he had taken exception to these remarks which he considered a most unjust attack on the neutral members, reflecting on their integrity and impartiality as members of the Board.<sup>147</sup>

The chairman's pointed allusion to the disparagement of the neutral members should be particularly noted. The neutral members had been the subject of criticism in the Dáil on many occasions since the Board's establishment but this was the first time, at least on record, that the chairman had brought the Board's attention to specific comments made. Given that one of these members, Edward Cassidy, had recently played a crucial role in effecting the considerable increases awarded despite employer opposition, this censure appeared most inequitable. Therefore, by introducing such information at this critical stage, Lee ensured that the one neutral member who was inclined to support worker member demands was left in no doubt as to how their actions would be interpreted,

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<sup>146</sup> Draft minutes, 167<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 Jun. 1972; Chairman, AWB to the joint secretaries, ELC, 8 Jun. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>147</sup> Draft minutes, 167<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 Jun. 1972.

regardless of their direction. That it had reached its mark was obvious from Cassidy's reaction:

It was most unfair that anyone in a privileged position should criticise the neutral members who had no way of defending themselves. He particularly resented the use of the expression 'so called neutrals'. They gave of their time gratuitously and discharged conscientiously the duties entrusted to them and he wished it placed on record that they took grave exception to the remarks.<sup>148</sup>

Notwithstanding their disgruntlement, however, the majority had no real choice other than to appear to co-operate with Murphy since he proceeded to canvass for a further increase by using the pending expiration of the existing agreement at the end of June as a means of exercising pressure on the Board to honour the terms of this agreement. He alleged that the future of a second national agreement could have been severely compromised by the Board's refusal to honour in full the terms of the first agreement, since there was 'strong opposition in certain quarters'.<sup>149</sup> So with a view to strengthening his hand for the ICTU conference that month, they agreed to convene the area committees to consider an increase. Yet it was obvious from comments made that the Board would not greet demands for further increases so readily as in the recent past. For instance, Eilis Nic Eachnaidh took major exception to any indication of further co-operation, claiming that the Board was 'giving away their position in regard to outside wage agreements'.<sup>150</sup> To facilitate Nic Eachnaidh's objection, it was decided to convene the area committees without making any reference to a specific sum, such as the 60p sought by Murphy, or

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<sup>148</sup> Draft minutes, 167<sup>th</sup> meeting, 8 Jun. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

any reference to the national agreements. So while Murphy might have thought that an increase was now guaranteed, events at the next meeting would prove otherwise.

Meeting on 3 August 1972, it became immediately apparent that the employers' tendency to resist further increases was now being displayed by the neutral members.<sup>151</sup> Leading the opposition to this increase was Edward Cassidy. Referring to the indications of an increase given at the last meeting, he declared:

while the Board had agreed to have another look at agricultural wages in order to help out Mr. Murphy in the National Agreement talks this had been done without any commitment on the Board's part. While in the past the Board had given phased increases he considered that to give another increase in September after the £1.50 in May would be contrary to the spirit of the National Agreement.<sup>152</sup>

Evidently this member's affiliation to the cause of the farm worker had run its course. This was particularly obvious when it came to voting on the issue given that one of the other neutral members, Jeremiah O'Donoghue, had actually sided with the worker members in their support of the increase.

The significance of this action only emerges when it is realised that two of the area committees had actually recommended an increase. Moreover, one of the employer members, Thomas King, had drawn attention to this point at the meeting when he enquired to what extent the Board should take 'cognizance' of the committees' recommendations.<sup>153</sup> King had been a member of the Board since 1964.<sup>154</sup> That he could make such an enquiry after serving almost three terms on the Board was quite incredible

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<sup>151</sup> Draft minutes, 168<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 Aug. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> See Table 4.1, Chapter IV.



and hardly suggested that the area committee recommendations were ever taken seriously. Further corroboration of this tendency can be garnered from the fact that detailed reports of the area committee meetings were only made available to the Board following a decision on 16 April 1964.<sup>155</sup> In making this query King had also inadvertently touched on the disgruntlement of the area committees themselves, some of whom appear to have been questioning the relevance of their existence for some time. Failing to see their recommendations reflected in the Board's wages orders, minutes of the committee meetings around this time indicate that many were beginning to query how the Board arrived at its decisions and the significance of their contribution, especially area committee three which represented areas such as Dublin and Meath.<sup>156</sup> An employer member of the latter committee wrote to the secretary of the Board outlining his concerns in 1972:

We are, rightly or wrongly, held accountable in our counties for the Board's decisions. We are not aware of what body of information or statistics, if any, are in the hands of the Board when a decision is taken. I personally find it hard, on occasion, to reconcile such information as I have, with the decision.<sup>157</sup>

As they were not even provided with the minutes of their own committee meetings not to mention those of the other area committees or the central board, some members were becoming frustrated.<sup>158</sup> That they were right to be so was reflected in the chairman's reply to King:

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<sup>155</sup> Draft minutes, 128<sup>th</sup> meeting, 16 Apr. 1964 (CMP)

<sup>156</sup> Draft minutes, 168<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 Aug. 1972.

<sup>157</sup> MJ Bruton to secretary, AWB, 13 Oct. 1972.

<sup>158</sup> Minutes of the agricultural wages area committees, Jun.- Jul. 1972, 31 Aug. 1973; Following a meeting of the Board on 20 Sep. 1973 it was agreed to provide each area committee with a summary of its recommendations (CMP).

the area committees made their arguments and then put forward their recommendations. It could happen however that during the course of the committee meetings set attitudes would be adopted and recommendations carried on this basis rather than on the basis of the arguments advanced.<sup>159</sup>

Such a reply suggested that the recommendations of the committees were more an accident of attendance than of agreement, implying that they were therefore not very reliable as authentic statements on the local situation. Effectively dismissing the validity of the area committee recommendations, this reply hardly encouraged members of the Board to take them seriously. O'Donoghue undermined the generality of this statement, however, when he pointed out that at two separate committee meetings in Athlone and Cork an increase of 50p had been carried, even though workers had been outnumbered by employers. The vote on the increase consequently proved very informative given that King and O'Donoghue voted with the two worker members present for the increase, with two of the neutrals voting with the remainder of the employer members against the increase. However, notwithstanding the support of an employer and a neutral member for the increase in conjunction with the recommendations of two of the area committees, the chairman declared 'that the question of a further increase later this year is ruled out as it would be detrimental to the workers' interests to increase the minimum wages during the winter months'.<sup>160</sup> That he should have taken such decisive action so early in the year spoke volumes, for there had been many instances in the past where increases had been passed during the winter months, despite the opposition of worker members. He had clearly been pushing against the tendency to support wage increases for some time now and finally used his prerogative to postpone a new wages order. Moreover, the indications

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<sup>159</sup> Draft minutes, 168<sup>th</sup> meeting, 3 Aug. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

were that this increase had been withheld by the latter out of determination to flout the national agreement rather than due to any great consideration of whether a further increase was warranted. The effect of the Board's refusal to grant the 50p increase meant that they had disregarded the terms of the first national agreement, and therefore had in their view managed to uphold their independence of this movement. That this had been the underlining motivation became apparent at the October meeting.<sup>161</sup> In response to Murphy's attempts to urge the Board to reconsider its August decision, employer member, Nicholas McCabe, declared:

if Mr Murphy's arguments on the implementation of the national agreement were to be followed to their logical conclusion the duty to fix the minimum rates of wages for agricultural workers, would in effect, be taken out of the hands of the Board and both the Board and the wages area committees would cease to have any function in regulating agricultural wages.<sup>162</sup>

This effectively epitomised the concerns of the Board members regarding their future. There was no question but that the agreements were perceived to be a threat to its continued existence and its normal operations. Hence the attempts to dissociate the Board from the trends set by the agreements, which Cassidy stated the Board 'was not bound to slavishly follow'.<sup>163</sup> But the Board also operated on the premise that it was perfectly lawful to act in this manner since it was a statutory body and therefore not subject to an outside body. In this regard McCabe contended that since the Board was responsible to the minister for Agriculture:

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<sup>161</sup> Draft minutes, 169<sup>th</sup> meeting, 26 Oct. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

If the minister were not satisfied that the Board were performing in the national interest he would have made this known to the Board.<sup>164</sup>

For the remainder of its operations, the Board would come to rely on this assumption more and more desperately as an assurance of the validity of its stance. It was only a matter of time before the erroneousness of such a judgement, and its cost, would be revealed.

As it was the Board was being pushed into a position which was becoming increasingly intransigent, thanks in large part to the chairman. For in response to a query from Murphy, it transpired at this meeting that the Board had received further correspondence from the joint secretaries which Lee had not brought to their attention. Concerned over the implications of the Board's actions for a new agreement, the joint secretaries had sought clarification of its response to their April letter in two further letters of 21 July and 11 September 1972.<sup>165</sup> Lee denied that there had ever been any intention to suppress the correspondence, claiming that the information already available from the previous meetings and from the advice sought from its legal advisers had been adequate to enable replies to be prepared without further formal consideration by the Board.<sup>166</sup> What he did not communicate was the extent to which the conference did not accept the stance taken by the Board. For instance, although their letter of 11 September had accepted that the Board could not comply with the precise procedures laid down in the agreement, they felt that it would not have been contrary to the provisions of their governing legislation for

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<sup>164</sup> Draft minutes, 169<sup>th</sup> meeting, 26 Oct. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>165</sup> ELC joint secretaries to secretary, AWB, 21 Jul. 1972; *Ibid.*, 11 Sep. 1972.

<sup>166</sup> Secretary, AWB to joint secretaries, ELC, 2 Aug. 1972.

the Board to have regard to the intention and spirit of any existing national pay agreement.<sup>167</sup> In a more conciliatory tone it was added:

We regret to trouble you again in this matter but, if, for any reason, such a large and important section of employees as agricultural workers appeared to be unable to gain the full benefits of a national pay agreement, the whole concept of such an agreement would be seriously undermined.<sup>168</sup>

Resonant of similar pleas made by Murphy, the Board was left in no doubt as to the possible implications of their actions for the agreements as a whole. Notwithstanding the gravity of this warning, in a reply on 5 October the secretary, Jerome Malone, in claiming to write on behalf of the Board stated:

The interest of agricultural workers is of paramount importance to the Board and the Steering Committee will appreciate that while the Board are completely free to use their statutory powers to fix minimum rates of wages they must, from the practical point of view work within certain limits.<sup>169</sup>

In refusing to acquiesce to the demands of the conference, Malone submitted that while the Board would have 'regard' to the agreements and would 'endeavour to act in the spirit' of them, it was only in so far as it was considered appropriate. Notwithstanding the liberties taken by the secretary and chairman in claiming to express the wishes of the Board and in even failing to inform the Board of the continued correspondence with the conference, all members other than the worker members rallied to the support of the chairman when attacked by Murphy.<sup>170</sup> The matter dragged over to the subsequent meeting in November when Murphy still pursued the argument that the chairman should

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<sup>167</sup> Joint secretaries to secretary, 11 Sep. 1972.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Secretary, AWB to joint secretaries, ELC, 5 Oct. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>170</sup> Draft minutes, 169<sup>th</sup> meeting, 26 Oct. 1972 (CMP).

have put the ELC correspondence before the Board first.<sup>171</sup> On this basis he held that the Board had not in fact replied to the correspondence from the conference. The thinking of the chairman on the whole issue was finally revealed in his reply to Murphy. He declared:

The issue in question was not whether the Board could give effect to the terms of the national agreement but whether, in the circumstances of the national agreement, the Board could continue to exercise their statutory function of deciding if and when an increase in minimum rates was warranted and the amount of such an increase.<sup>172</sup>

Clearly there was never any doubt as to the ability of the Board to give effect to the terms of the agreements, the issue of concern having pertained instead to the future of the Board and its autonomy in continuing to decide if, when, and how much. Further corroboration of this mentality was revealed when the chairman explained the circumstances surrounding the previous increase of £1.50:

While the Board had seen fit to increase the minimum rates by £1.50 with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> May last, there was no question but that they had the power to grant an increase of £2 and a further increase of 4% plus cost of living adjustment six months later provided, of course, they were satisfied that in all the circumstances such increases were justified.<sup>173</sup>

This confirmed that the refusal of the Board to grant the 50p increase sought by Murphy in June, to augment the £1.50 passed earlier in the year, had been an exercise in proving their independence of the national agreements. Although allegedly justified on the basis that the increase had not been warranted, this factor had been undermined by the recommendations of two area committees. In the final analysis it was the Board who would decide whether and if increases were warranted, and not the dictations of an

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<sup>171</sup> Draft minutes, 170<sup>th</sup> meeting, 16 Nov. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

outside movement. They were now clinging to the one provision which distinguished them from all other wage fixing bodies, the 'as they think proper' proviso. That this was the case was further indicated by the chairman, who declared:

The correspondence from the Employer/Labour Conference puts at question the Board's function in determining the circumstances under which an increase in minimum rates was warranted. The legal advice clarified the position and the letters issued to the Employer/Labour Conference sought to bring out the point that it was a matter for the Board to determine the circumstances under which an increase was warranted and that if they were to blindly follow the terms of the National Agreement they would not be acting in accordance with their obligations under the legislation.<sup>174</sup>

Failing his attempts to have the Board reject the correspondence sent by the secretary and chairman to the ELC joint secretaries, Murphy referred to the government's decision to seek the advice of the ELC in relation to the pay of persons fixed under statute and in the public sector. He implored the Board to follow the government's example and seek the advice of the ELC in regard to the application of the national agreements.<sup>175</sup> However, the chairman refused to consider this request. He was adamant that 'the Board could work only within the framework of the existing legislation'. He refused 'to go against the legal advice'.<sup>176</sup> By now the Board were creating a situation where their refusal to co-operate, if it persisted, would leave those in power with limited options, especially if all other statutory wage fixing bodies were following the terms of the agreement and even the government had subscribed to it. But instead of being mindful of these developments, the Board continued to blindly isolate itself in obduracy.

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<sup>174</sup> Draft minutes, 170<sup>th</sup> meeting, 16 Nov. 1972 (CMP).

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

At the next meeting of the Board in January 1973, the majority managed to remove any further consideration of ELC correspondence from its meetings.<sup>177</sup> Murphy had raised the issue of the ELC correspondence again in a letter to the chairman on 8 January 1973.<sup>178</sup> Unable to attend the meeting himself, having been recently appointed to the Social and Economic Committee of the EEC, the chairman still raised the matter of Murphy's letter despite the opposition of the worker members present. The neutral and employer members proceeded to criticise Murphy's correspondence with the chairman to the extent that remarks made by Cassidy resulted in the two worker members leaving the meeting in protest. Cassidy had stated:

Mr. Murphy's letter was a challenge to the chairman's integrity and to the authority of the Board. The matter of the correspondence had already been dealt with by a majority decision of the Board. Mr. Murphy's difficulty was that he was representing two separate organisations but he could do only one job.<sup>179</sup>

Clearly this issue was taking its toll on relations on the Board. The worker members had taken particular exception to the fact that a neutral member could make such a personal attack on a worker member. But instead of postponing proceedings until the next meeting, the remaining members took advantage of the worker member absence to unanimously adopt a motion confining the relevance of any further correspondence from the ELC as an administrative matter for the chairman and secretary. It was no longer to be brought to the Board's attention. Moreover, on the occasion of its next increase decision, instead of passing the £3.13 per week from May 1973 required to give full effect to the first agreement with provision for a 'net' additional increase of £1.70 from October, an

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<sup>177</sup> Draft minutes, 171<sup>st</sup> meeting, 25 Jan. 1973.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*



increase of only £2 was conceded.<sup>180</sup> This led Murphy to once again draw the attention of the joint secretaries to the Board's activities, claiming 'it had no qualms about undermining the national agreement'.<sup>181</sup> When the joint-secretaries sought the observations of the Board regarding this complaint, the secretary responded on 19 April stating:

In discharging their statutory duty the Board would have regard to the national agreement but it would be their responsibility also to take into account that some agricultural employers might not be able to pay wages above a certain level. In this connection it should perhaps be stressed that the Board only fixes the minimum wage rates (and not the standard rates) for agricultural workers, subject to which the actual rates are, of course, negotiable in accordance with conditions ordinarily applicable to other employments.<sup>182</sup>

That the Board had in the past based their wage increases upon the ability of the poorest and least number of employers to pay was finally corroborated in this comment. These were the 'certain limits' within which it operated its wage regulating function. It was unfairly assumed that the majority would pass on greater increases to their workers on a voluntary basis, and that it was these wages and not those set by the Board that would comprise the standard wage. Given that attempts by the worker members to enquire how realistic a premise this was for fixing the minimum wage had been rebuked on the grounds that the Board did not have the resources to carry out such investigations, this was a very imprecise and indeed inequitable way of implementing their statutory duty, even if a slightly more scientific and analytical approach was eventually adopted towards

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<sup>180</sup> Draft minutes, 172<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 22 Mar. 1973 (CMP).

<sup>181</sup> Patrick Murphy to W. Farrell, ELC, 27 Mar. 1973 (CMP).

<sup>182</sup> Joint secretaries to secretary, AWB, 13 Apr. 1973; Secretary to joint secretaries, 19 Apr. 1973.

the end, at both area committee and Board level.<sup>183</sup> In referring to these 'certain limits' in a letter on 28 June, spurred on by the FRW yet again, the joint-secretaries observed:

These limits appear to be set by the fact that, as you say, 'some agricultural employers might not be able to pay wages above a certain level'. While the Steering Committee appreciate the point being made, they feel that an unfortunate situation could be created if the vast majority of agricultural workers were to be deprived of increases laid down in the national agreements because of the economic position of a small minority of the employers of such workers. Your Board will no doubt appreciate that, since the national agreements are negotiated on a voluntary basis, the consequences of such a large and important group of employees as agricultural workers being unable to obtain the full benefits of the agreements could extend well outside the agricultural sector.<sup>184</sup>

Despite these very weighty remonstrations the Board still refused to budge on its position at the subsequent meeting in August.<sup>185</sup> It became apparent from this meeting that the majority were becoming even more obstinate in their refusal to submit to the requests of the ELC. Although Murphy drew attention to the fact that legislation recently passed made it clear that the national agreement was intended to apply to all sections of the community, irrespective of whether they were party to it or not, the majority completely overlooked the significance of this development. Leading this disregard were the neutral members, with Nic Eachnaidh reminding the Board that it had agreed at previous meetings that they were not bound by the national agreements. The final position of both neutrals and employers was enunciated in no uncertain terms:

They were responsible only to the minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and were carrying out the duties entrusted to them. If their powers were to be eroded by an outside body, or if they were not carrying out their duties to the satisfaction of the

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<sup>183</sup> Draft minutes, 178<sup>th</sup> meeting, 11 Apr. 1974 (CMP). At the request of area committee three, statistical data on the cost of living, agricultural output and income, comparable wages for local authority workers and agricultural workers in Northern Ireland and England, had been collated by the secretariat to the Board and made available to all area committees and the Board.

<sup>184</sup> Joint secretaries to secretary, AWB, 28 Jun. 1973 (CMP).

<sup>185</sup> Draft minutes, 174<sup>th</sup> meeting, 9 Aug. 1973.

minister, it was up to the minister to say that they were no longer needed and to dissolve the Board.<sup>186</sup>

That this was indeed their defining stance on the issue was confirmed when in response to Murphy's attempt to encourage some of the members to seek a meeting with the ELC, O' Donoghue, a neutral member, declared that he was against the Board taking the initiative in seeking a meeting with the conference, stating that it was for the government to call for such a meeting if it was considered necessary. Although its statutory origins was similar to every other wage fixing body which now, like the government, subscribed to the terms of the agreements, the Board seems to have had an inflated perception of its remit given that it reported directly to the minister for Agriculture rather than the minister for Labour. It now operated under the assumption that should change have been necessary, the directive would have come from government or more specifically the minister for

Agriculture. And it was in fact this expectation that would lead to their undoing. For it will be recalled that in 1960 it was made perfectly clear in a memorandum to the Taoiseach that the government could not be seen to intervene in any way with the Board's autonomous operations. That this was to be the case emerged in September 1973 after the Board, at a meeting on the twentieth, failed yet again to implement in full the terms of the agreements of 1970 and 1972.<sup>187</sup> Taking decisive action the government issued a public statement several days later expressing concern at the Board's decision to grant increases that fell short of the 1972 agreement:

The government has noted the decision of the Agricultural Wages Board not to implement the national agreement in respect of agricultural workers. The

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<sup>186</sup> Draft minutes, 174<sup>th</sup> meeting, 9 Aug. 1973 (CMP).

<sup>187</sup> Draft minutes, 175<sup>th</sup> meeting, 20 Sep. 1973.

legislation which determines the pay of agricultural workers is presently being considered by the government in consultation with the organisations concerned.<sup>188</sup>

That such a clear statement of the government's position was finally stated reflected the fact that for the first time since 1957 a non Fianna Fáil government was in place. A Fine Gael/Labour coalition had been elected in February 1973 with the labour portfolio in the capable hands of Michael O'Leary, a Labour Party TD.<sup>189</sup> The responsibility for agriculture was given to Mark Clinton of Fine Gael.<sup>190</sup> Although the government had intimated to the Board their unfavourable view of the stance taken by them on the national agreements, there had been no attempt to communicate directly with them in this regard, a point which caused great consternation on the Board. That they felt a directive of some sort would not have been remiss from the minister for Agriculture or his department at this stage was clear but the new minister for Agriculture made no attempt to contact them.<sup>191</sup> The chairman was in no doubt as to the significance of the government's statement, nor did he waste any time in awaking the others to its import:

Mr. Murphy's thinking was that the Board should bring agricultural wages up to the level of industrial wages as laid down in the national agreements and apparently this also was the government thinking.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Government press statement, 27 Sep.1973 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>189</sup> Michael O'Leary (1936-2006) was a native of Cork and a barrister when elected as a Labour Party TD for Dublin North in 1965. He was forty when appointed minister for Labour in the coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour in 1973. He became leader of the Labour Party and Tanaiste in another coalition government with Fine Gael in June 1981 and defected to Fine Gael before the election of November 1982.

<sup>190</sup> Mark Clinton (1915-2001) came from a farming family in Meath. He served as a member of Dublin county council from 1955 and represented various County Dublin constituencies as a Fine Gael TD from 1961 until his retirement in 1981. His first ministerial portfolio was Agriculture in 1973 in the Labour/Fine Gael coalition government headed by Liam Cosgrave. Clinton was responsible for negotiating Ireland's entry into the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

<sup>191</sup> Draft minutes, 176<sup>th</sup> meeting, 6 Dec.1973 (CMP).

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

This realisation coupled with the failure of the minister for Agriculture to make any attempt to address the Board directly on the matter led to much confusion. The employer members were shocked that the government could have supported the claims being made by Murphy and the ELC. Still clinging to the ethos which had reigned supreme for most of the Board's operations, Thomas King pointed out in disbelief:

The Board had been established for the express purpose of putting a floor under agricultural wages having regard to the special conditions to be found in agriculture and it was completely unrealistic to expect the Board to be bound to wage levels which had been decided on by an outside body.<sup>193</sup>

Cassidy's reaction was that the Board should immediately disband. And though the other neutral members agreed with him, Thomas King forestalled any sudden decisions by suggesting 'that until such time as the minister told them they were no longer needed it was premature to talk about the abolition of the Board'.<sup>194</sup> Again, the Board assumed that a directive of some sort would be forthcoming from the minister for Agriculture. While they had obviously no alternative other than to resign themselves to the fact that the Board's future was now seriously in question, until they heard from the minister they were still confident that they were acting in accordance with their duties. And while some communication from the minister or his department might have made all the difference at this point, it was not forthcoming despite all past contact. Accordingly, notwithstanding the government rebuke, they still refused to implement in full the terms of the national

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<sup>193</sup> Draft minutes, 176<sup>th</sup> meeting, 6 Dec. 1973 (CMP).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

agreements. In fact, by December 1974 the Board had even refused to respond to further correspondence from the ELC.<sup>195</sup>

In a letter of 4 December, the conference had informed the Board of further complaints received from the FRW in this matter. Alluding to the economic arguments advanced by the employer and neutral members opposing the application of the agreements to agriculture, it was submitted:

It is assumed from these and other comments that it was on the grounds of economic circumstances that the Board decided not to apply the full increase provided for in the national agreements to minimum rates for agricultural workers. In this connection, it is desired to invite the attention of the Board to the terms of Clause 17 of the National Agreement of 1974, which provides that certain prescribed procedures should be followed in cases where firms or industries are unable because of special economic circumstances to apply the terms of the National Agreement and remain viable.<sup>196</sup>

It was recommended that the Board should, in accordance with the principle incorporated in Clause 17, refer the matter to the Labour Court for a recommendation. In this regard it was pointed out that it was the government's view that the terms of the national agreements should have been applied to all groups of workers without exception. And while at the Board's meeting on 12 December Murphy had demanded that the Board reply to this letter, this was rejected in favour of a motion to mark the correspondence 'read'.

Despite its refusal to co-operate fully, it should be noted that the Board continued to pass substantial wage increases in the face of considerable opposition from some of the area

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<sup>195</sup> Draft minutes, 181<sup>st</sup> meeting, 12 Dec. 1974 (CMP).

<sup>196</sup> Joint secretaries, ELC to secretary, AWB, 4 Dec. 1974.

committees and from employers corresponding with the Board.<sup>197</sup> By December 1974, it was being reported that farming costs had risen 66 per cent over the previous twelve months.<sup>198</sup> On the other hand the Board's decisions were not well received by either Murphy, the ELC, or the government. Table AIV.8 in Appendix IV indicates how the average agricultural minimum rate compared with various joint labour committee rates at certain stages during this period. Between 1965 and 1970 the nominal weekly agricultural minimum rate made great strides, increasing from 86 per cent of the average joint labour committee rate in 1965 to 96 per cent in 1970. However, the shortening of the average working week for joint labour committee workers from 43 to 40 hours in 1970 had a significant impact on the value of the agricultural minimum wage, as evidenced in the hourly rate. The five hour difference in the average working weeks of both was now extended once more to eight hours for the agricultural labourer. As a result, the narrowing gap between the hourly rates which in 1965 consisted of 1s. had increased to 1s. 4d. in 1970 and to 2s. 10d. per hour by 1974.

With a view to keeping pressure on the Board, Murphy resorted to further press leaks following the December meeting in 1974. It led to widespread condemnation of the Board's activities.<sup>199</sup> The adverse publicity was bemoaned by all members at the subsequent meeting in March 1975. Batt Donegan, an employer member, protested that the publicity was misleading:

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<sup>197</sup> Drummin Growers Ltd. to secretary, AWB, 16 Dec. 1975; Cappoquin Estate Company to secretary, AWB, 12 Feb. 1976 (CMP).

<sup>198</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 Dec. 1974.

<sup>199</sup> *Irish Times*, 12, 14 and 16 Dec. 1974.

It gave the impression that the Board was standing in the way of farm workers getting a decent wage. This was a completely false impression. It ignored the fact that the Board prescribed only a minimum or floor rate below which an employer could not pay his workers and did not preclude a worker from negotiating with his employer for higher wages.<sup>200</sup>

That Edward Cassidy had become totally disillusioned with the whole process was conveyed when he astutely declared that the 'publicity is obviously part of a calculated campaign to get rid of the Board'.<sup>201</sup> While he had no objection to this, he resented very much the tactics employed which he claimed were particularly unfair to the neutral members:

It was a complete distortion of facts to insinuate or suggest that neutral members were in league with employers. Neutral members had always acted independently of employers in deciding on what amount of increase the situation warranted.<sup>202</sup>

Supporting this argument, Nic Eachnaidh complained that 'it was giving the impression that neutral members were the villains of the piece'. While O' Donoghue defensively claimed:

The neutral members had always been disposed to favour the workers. At the same time they had to be realistic and they found themselves dealing with employer members who came up with offers which the neutral members honestly considered to be reasonable and fair in the situation obtaining.<sup>203</sup>

Notwithstanding the upset of the Board, they agreed to convene the area committees for the purpose of revising the minimum rates. At the Board meeting on 8 May the employer members withdrew a proposal of a £3.20 increase in favour of the £3.55 proposed by the neutral members. Since this increase was to be effective from June, this meant that no

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<sup>200</sup> Draft minutes, 182<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 20 Mar. 1975 (CMP).

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*



less than two increases had been passed within the first six months of 1975. In addition it had also been decided at this meeting to reduce the adult age to 19 years and over and to upgrade all Group C areas to Group B. This meant that from 23 June 1975 only two wage groups would prevail, with counties Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo and the western part of County Cork upgraded to Group B. Moreover by October the Board had also agreed to a further increase becoming effective from December.

By the next meeting in January 1976 members were aware that it was only a matter of time before the Board would be dissolved. Leave to introduce the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1975 with the view to replacing the Board with a joint labour committee had been granted in the Dáil on 17 December 1975.<sup>204</sup> Notwithstanding this reality, the Board proceeded as normal. In fact, given McCabe's admission that the past year had not been a bad one for farmers, the worker members did not even have to battle for the convening of the area committees since he proposed it for them despite general talk of a wages standstill.

However, when the Board met again the following month little consideration was given to the proposals of the area committees. By this time the second stage of the Industrial Relations Bill had passed through the Dáil, during which the Board came under much ridicule. It was not the disparagement of their activities by the deputies in the Dáil that had so offended the Board but that such criticism was initiated by a member of government, the minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary. O'Leary had accused the Board

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<sup>204</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.* (vol. 286) 17 Dec. 1975, col. 1756.

of allowing a conditions differential to develop over its operations which had widened the gap between agricultural workers and industrial employees.<sup>205</sup> Although this disparity was advanced as grounds for the Board's abolition, previous governments could have taken action on similar grounds at any stage over the previous forty years but failed to do so. They were as complicit in the creation of this gap as the Board. The latter had never been given any indication by any minister for Agriculture that it should breach the differential between agricultural and other wages. On the contrary, at every opportunity successive ministers reaffirmed that the Board's primary consideration was the ability of the farming community to meet increases. It was ironic therefore that the real cause underlining the Board's disbandment actually revolved around how it had historically perceived its wage fixing function. Viewing itself as a body apart from all other statutory bodies for an industry distinct from all others, the Board's reaction to the national wage agreements was to epitomise its approach to wage fixing decisions and contribute to its ultimate demise. In this regard a very disheartened Edward Cassidy reported:

the minister had expressed himself as being dissatisfied with the Board's performance and had given the impression that with the setting up of the new wages body the differences in hours of work and rates of pay between farm workers and industrial workers would be quickly eliminated and that the arrears claimed due to farm workers under the national agreement would be made good. In this situation he considered that it should now be left to the new body to redress the alleged shortcomings of the Board and he proposed that the making of a new wages order be adjourned.<sup>206</sup>

As this comment indicates the government had adopted the public stance that the Board had been completely and solely responsible for the divergence in wages which had grown

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<sup>205</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 288) 25 Feb. 1976, col. 670.

<sup>206</sup> Draft minutes, 187<sup>th</sup> meeting, 19 Feb. 1976 (CMP).

between industrial and agricultural workers. In so doing it had dissociated itself and former governments from all past connections with the Board. This was something that was easily accomplished at this stage given the refusal of the Board to enforce the full terms of the national wage agreements. Hence it appeared that the government was actually doing the country and its workers a great service in removing all traces of the Board from agriculture, which of course it was. But it belied the role of government in the creation and maintenance of such an ineffective system for the duration of its operations. It was hardly surprising therefore that in view of such public ridicule Cassidy should have proposed the adjournment of their activities. He had the support of the employer members in this respect. A very unhappy Nicholas McCabe alluded to the fact that an estimated 100,000 workers had not received the full benefits under the national agreements because of the inability of employers to pay and found it particularly unfair that:

the Board, who had stuck to their principles and carried out their duties in accordance with their terms of reference, had been singled out for criticism for not applying National Agreements to the prescribed minimum rates for farm workers.<sup>207</sup>

Thomas King also conveyed his amazement at what he considered a most unjustified attack on the Board by the minister for Labour:

Over the last few years the Board has been subjected to a very one-sided campaign of criticism carried on through the media. The criticism had been particularly unfair to the neutral members and to the employer members on the Board who were as favourably disposed towards farm workers as anyone could be and had, within the limit of powers available, done their best for the farm workers.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Draft minutes, 187<sup>th</sup> meeting, 19 Feb. 1976 (CMP).

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

Clearly certain Board members had still failed to grasp the significance of their failure to comply with the national wage agreements and the fact that they were a wage fixing body the same as any other with responsibility first and foremost to the workers under their care, not the employers or the industry in which they were engaged. Despite the protestations of the worker members at the indications that the majority were going to adjourn the proceedings, and the chairman reminding the Board that the minister for Agriculture had no quarrel with them, a motion was passed adjourning the meeting sine die. Such action on the part of the majority effectively deprived agricultural workers of the increase expected for that month. In fact most of 1976 passed before they received another award as the Board did not meet again until October. And in the process of making what transpired to be their last wages order, they proceeded to leave their mark with one last controversial act.

Under the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 the Board had been required to equalise pay and hours of work for male and female workers. At this stage there were about 20,000 permanent male agricultural workers with another 10,000 working part time.<sup>209</sup> There were about 500 female agricultural workers.<sup>210</sup> Male workers had to work 50 hours in summer and 44 hours in winter before overtime commenced. Female workers worked 48 hours in summer and 44 hours in winter. Wages were specified on a weekly basis but when a comparison on an hourly basis was made the male worker was receiving 66p per hour in summer for 50 hours, compared to the female rate of 61p for 48 hours.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Departmental note, 16 Feb. 1976, par. 2 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

The male worker in winter received 75p for 44 hours while the female worker received 66p for 44 hours.<sup>212</sup> In order to abide by the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, the Board would have been required to equalise the hours of work and pay received by male and female workers in its next order. However, rather than leaving male and female hours at the winter level of 44 as proposed by the worker members, or reducing the male summer time hours from 50 to 48 which was the female rate, the Board proposed to increase the female summer time hours to 50.<sup>213</sup> It decided against this action on the advice of legal counsel. However the chairman had not resorted to this opinion until the Department of Labour had indicated its opposition to the proposal.<sup>214</sup> While Labour had recommended the reduction of male summer hours to 48 in line with those of female workers, the Board's legal counsel claimed that it was impossible for the Board to alter conditions of employment, unless it found those conditions to already prevail.<sup>215</sup> Both the

Board's secretary and the chairman had been adamant that the 48 hour week did not exist in agriculture for male workers. Consequently when the Board made its order in October it accorded equal pay to women, but did not equalise the hours worked. This effectively meant that the Board's order was valid only in so far as the winter hours prevailed. As soon as summer time hours set in the male worker would have been the subject of discrimination since he would have been required to work two extra hours per week to receive the same wage as female workers. Typically the Board justified its stance in this regard on the grounds that it was not empowered to reduce or vary hours of work unless it

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<sup>212</sup> Departmental note, 16 Feb. 1976, par. 2 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 1.

<sup>214</sup> Departmental note, 17 Feb. 1976.

<sup>215</sup> Patrick Murphy to secretary, Department of Labour, 13 Oct. 1976 (W 459/1 C.9).

found such conditions to already exist. In adopting this attitude it had taken to the fullest extent the strictest and most limited interpretation of its governing legislation. While it could have facilitated the requests made to reduce the hours of work of male workers to 48 given the imminence of its abolition, it chose once more to disregard all claims on grounds of legalities. It was with this final act of obduracy that the Board left its parting mark on the Irish mindset.

Under these circumstances and having deprived agricultural workers of almost £20 in awards since 1970, it would seem that the ignominious demise of the Board was belated but just. Its demise on this basis meant that the role it played in ensuring the payment of minimum rates was completely disregarded. As Table AIV.9 in Appendix IV indicates, the Board's inspectors managed to recover over £206,075 in wages and holidays arrears over the course of its forty year history, affecting some 10,217 workers. They managed this with a limited inspectorate of three for most of this period. That the arrears recovered could have been much greater can be ascertained from the work carried out by a team of eight inspectors before 1940. Following the outbreak of the Second World War the Department of Agriculture had transferred five inspectors to other more pressing duties. It failed to reallocate them once normal conditions resumed and it was 1963 before a fourth inspector was appointed. That the inspectors carried out an invaluable function in ensuring the payment of rates is clear from the amount of arrears recovered compared to the number of complaints received, farms visited and employers and employees interviewed. At the same time their work also pointed to the necessity for continued statutory regulation in this area with many employers still defaulting on paying the basic

minimum rates right in to the seventies. And while the machinery itself inevitably played a vital role in regulating the existence of the agricultural labourer, under the proper stewardship it could have been so much better. Although the Board's record on claiming arrears was not insignificant, and on two occasions it did lead the way in matters of holiday remuneration, overall its legacy was not a positive one. Despite its improved performance in the last decade of its operations, for almost thirty years the adequacy of its minimum rates was questionable. In this regard it would appear that even in 1976 the majority were genuinely dedicated to following the guiding criteria which had governed much of the Board's operations. In determining their decisions overwhelmingly on the basis of the agricultural economy and the ability of the poorest employers to meet increases, with little scientific or economic analysis other than that submitted by the worker members, the Board was by default an instrument of the minister for Agriculture and his department's policies. If anything the Board was guilty of performing its function too well. That this was unfairly balanced against the agricultural labourer for much of this period is incontrovertible. The development of an inflated sense of importance with regard to agricultural wage matters left it thinking it was different to every other statutory body to the point that it felt sufficiently justified to flout government policy. The minister for Agriculture could have intervened to bring it in line but desisted allowing it to flounder on its own merits. While the Board may have had a point, the moment it chose to flout the national agreements to sustain its independence indicated that it was more concerned with its powers than with the interests of the agricultural labourer and the wider community. Its refusal to observe in full the spirit of the national agreements brought the attention of the public to the inequities of this system. Regardless of

whether the increases were spiralling out of control, its actions were symptomatic of a deeper malaise which for two thirds of its operations had not operated to the benefit of the agricultural labourer. It was a case of too little too late. And while there were no guarantees that the new joint labour committee would do any better a job, at least the structures applicable to every other group of workers were in place to avoid abuse. Having been the first agricultural wages board in the British Isles with the latitude to make an impact, despite its limitations with regards to holidays, the Irish AWB consistently chose to do less rather than more. There was nothing enlightened about its proceedings or anything to admire in its legacy. To say it was an anachronism would do injustice to the achievements of the earlier machinery upon which it was based. Ultimately it was testimony to the mentality of the Irish establishment and its abolition marked the advent of a more just society.



## Chapter VI

### Half-days and holidays: the struggle for social parity

In the wake of World War One, and as part of the idealistic process of making the world fit for heroes to live in, representatives of various nations met at Washington in October 1919 and adopted the Washington Hours Convention.<sup>1</sup> The object was to introduce an 8 hour day in all industrial undertakings, a maximum working week of 48 hours. The adoption of this and several other conventions dealing with unemployment, maternity protection, minimum age and night work for young persons and women in industry, signalled the beginnings of concerted international action towards the betterment of labour conditions, which was to be spearheaded by the International Labour Organisation. Twenty five years later Ireland was to give statutory effect to this convention when it introduced the Conditions of Employment Act 1936.<sup>2</sup> Not only did it introduce a maximum week of 48 hours for adult industrial workers and a 40 hour week for juveniles, but in guaranteeing six days holidays annually with pay, it was actually in advance of the standards set by the ILO.

The motivation for this legislation was as much economic as it was social. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and in the midst of the Economic War with England, Ireland, like many European governments, was grappling with the problem of severe unemployment and an unsettled workforce. It was hoped, albeit very tentatively, that a

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, *C001, Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919*; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 56), 22 May 1935, col. 1506.

<sup>2</sup> *Conditions of Employment Act 1936*, 1936/2[Éire](14 Feb. 1936).

reduction in working hours might facilitate greater employment in industrial occupations.<sup>3</sup> More realistically, it was felt that a reduction in hours might militate against future unemployment in the case of further technological innovation.<sup>4</sup> On another level, the statutory reduction in hours and the guarantee of holidays with pay was an acknowledgement that workers were entitled to share in the benefits produced by a more mechanised industry.<sup>5</sup> But it was also expressive of a growing recognition on the part of governments that the state needed to assume a greater role in supervising the working conditions of its citizens.<sup>6</sup> In many cases workers already benefited from these better conditions through collective agreements or by customary arrangements. In enshrining the principles in legislation, governments sought to ensure that all workers would gain.

Fianna Fáil was quite progressive in this regard. In keeping with international trends and, indeed, with moves towards a shorter week than 48 hours on the ground level, provision was made for the registration of agreements in particular industries where shorter hours than the maximum permitted under the act were negotiated between the employer and employed.<sup>7</sup> In providing legal backing to any agreements negotiated by a majority in an industry, this provision also represented a new departure for the Irish government.<sup>8</sup> In the past the absence of legal enforcement meant that a minority who did not concur with an agreement could continue to ignore its provisions, undermining its effectiveness and perpetuating lower standards. The government was even more progressive in their

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<sup>3</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 56), 17 May 1935, col. 1270.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 May 1935, col. 1506.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 May 1935, col. 1264.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1272.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, cols 1273-4.

approach to statutory holidays. Although this issue had been before the ILO in 1919, it was not formally considered again until 1935 and it was 1936 before a convention was adopted.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in making legislative provision for this benefit in 1935, the Irish government took a lead in setting international standards for industrial workers, 'making Ireland the first country in the world to guarantee paid holidays' for this group.<sup>10</sup> Considering that Ireland was one of the least industrialised countries in Europe at the time, such landmark legislation was not insignificant. As the Irish government embarked upon the first major industrialisation drive since the establishment of the Free State, it indicated a desire to create a modern industrial society free from the hardships that industrialisation had inflicted upon workers in the past.

But while Fianna Fáil may have been a leader in advancing the social code for industrial workers, their pioneering vision did not extend to agricultural labourers. Under the Agricultural Wages Act 1936 their working week was set at 54 hours with no provision for maximum working hours or holidays of any sort. Although these conditions contrasted significantly with those of non agricultural workers, they did not diverge greatly from the standards set at international level by the ILO. From the outset the ILO had encountered opposition to the regulation of agriculture on similar lines to industry. It will be recalled from chapter two that in 1919 members of the International Agricultural Institute had opposed proposals to have the ILO's predecessor, the International Labour Bureau, regulate the conditions of agricultural workers. This opposition had been based on the premise that since wage earners in agriculture constituted only a small proportion

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<sup>9</sup> *Report of the committee on holidays with pay*, p. 283 [Cmd. 5724] H.C. 1937-8, vol xii, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Hillery and Patrick Lynch, *Ireland in the International Labour Organisation* (Dublin, 1995), p. 16.

of the entire agricultural workforce it would have been inappropriate to have a body primarily concerned with urban, industrial labour involved in agricultural matters. When the ILO was subsequently established under the Treaty of Versailles, many members contended that its remit did not actually include agricultural workers.<sup>11</sup> It took a ruling from the Permanent Court of International Justice to declare otherwise, on 12 August 1922.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the ILO proceeded to adopt many conventions tackling issues in agriculture common to other sectors such as protection for workers in the case of unemployment, sickness, youth and old age. However, a distinction was always maintained between agriculture and other sectors. In some instances this resulted in agricultural workers lagging behind the advances recommended for other workers. For instance, when the holiday issue was considered by the ILO in 1935, it was decided by the governing body to consider separately how it would affect agricultural workers and seafarers, given that their conditions would require more special consideration than the average worker.<sup>13</sup> And so the convention of 1936 applied only to industrial and commercial workers.<sup>14</sup> By this time the concept of relaxation from work for purposes of physical and mental health, efficiency and overall well being, was becoming increasingly recognised.<sup>15</sup> That the ILO struggled to change a mindset which suggested that the special nature of agricultural employment rendered agricultural workers less needy, or

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<sup>11</sup> '21<sup>st</sup> annual report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland* (1921-2), vol. xxi, no 1-2, p.17.

<sup>12</sup> 'The representation and organisation of agricultural workers' in *ILO Studies & Reports, Series K (Agriculture)* no. 8 (1928), p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Report of the committee on holidays with pay*, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> ILO, *C52, Holidays with Pay Convention, 1936*.

<sup>15</sup> *Report of the committee on holidays with pay*, p. 292; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 56) 22 May 1935, col. 1511.

deserving, of better conditions than their industrial counterparts, can be gauged from the fact that it was 1952 before a convention was adopted recommending the provision of statutory holidays with pay in agriculture.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, some governments had already pre-empted international trends in this regard. Recognising that agricultural labourers were as entitled to a break from work as other employees, the British government had introduced these benefits for the former, largely on grounds of social justice, before the outbreak of the Second World War. In keeping with this principle, they extended the annual holiday code to agricultural labourers at the same time as other workers in England and Wales in 1938, and Northern Ireland in 1939.<sup>17</sup> Given that legislation extending the benefit of a week's holidays to agricultural labourers had been introduced by the first coalition government in Ireland in 1950, it would seem that Ireland had also once again pre-empted international trends.<sup>18</sup> However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the spirit with which the British government had introduced similar benefits to its workers was conspicuously absent. The fact that the Irish government had still failed to allow the Agricultural Wages Board to provide the weekly half holiday by this time was symptomatic of a profound aversion to extending any such benefits to agricultural labourers.

In power since 1932, the Fianna Fáil government had refused to acknowledge the Irish agricultural labourers' entitlement in this area right up to its defeat in the 1948 election.

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<sup>16</sup> ILO, *C101, Holidays with Pay (Agriculture) Convention, 1952*; 'Collective agreements in Agriculture' in *ILO Studies and Reports, Series K (Agriculture)* no.11 (1933), pp 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Holidays with Pay Act 1938* (1&2 Geo. VI, c.70 [U.K.]) 29 Jul. 1938; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1939* (2 &3 Geo VI c. 25[N.I.]) 6 Dec.1939.

<sup>18</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Act 1950*, 1950/21[R.I.] (26 Jul. 1950).

In fact, when the British government were passing legislation to extend statutory annual holidays to agricultural workers in 1938, the Irish government was taking long term steps to completely exclude this class from the benefits of similar legislation. When formulating the Holidays (Employees) Bill 1938, the minister for Industry and Commerce, Sean Lemass<sup>19</sup>, invited the minister for Agriculture, Dr. James Ryan, to consider including agricultural labourers within the scope of the legislation.<sup>20</sup> Expanding on the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 and the Shops (Conditions of Employment) Act 1938, this bill was intended to complete the process of securing holidays with pay for most workers.<sup>21</sup> However, the proposal was unequivocally rejected by Ryan on grounds that the extension of this 'privilege' to agricultural labourers would have been 'undesirable and likely to produce serious reactions among the farming community'.<sup>22</sup> The conditions under which the agricultural labourer had worked up to this point were expounded in a minute in the department:

His work is generally varied and he pursues it under more natural conditions, which of themselves contributes to the maintenance of good health. He may occasionally need to do some work in his own garden or his own house, but good employers will give him time to do this and in addition he will be often supplied with implements and the use of horses to enable him to do the job. Adverse weather conditions often result in broken time which is not usually taken into account on the farm. For example, when a harvest day turns wet, workers are not sent home and docked in pay but are given some normal jobs about the farmyard to complete the day even though the performance of such jobs may be entirely

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<sup>19</sup> A veteran of the 1916 Rising at the age of sixteen, Sean Lemass was a founder member of the Fianna Fáil party and in 1932 was appointed minister for Industry and Commerce in de Valera's first government, a position he held until the outbreak of the second world war in 1939. Taking on the post of minister for Supplies, he also reassumed responsibility for Industry and Commerce from 1941. He was appointed Tánaiste in 1945 and de Valera's successor as Taoiseach in 1959. He retired from this post in 1966 and died in 1971. Always a proponent of change, Lemass is largely considered to have instigated the overhaul of Ireland's economic policies in the post 1945 era.

<sup>20</sup> R. Ferguson, Industry and Commerce to secretary, Agriculture, 26 Mar. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 13 Apr. 1938.

uneconomic from the employer's point of view. Throughout the country agricultural workers do not work on church holidays any more than on Sundays. They have therefore at least 10 working days' holidays already as against 12 working days which it would be proposed to give them by law. In addition, agricultural workers may get days free to go to race meetings, ploughing matches, coursing meetings etc. Then there are throughout the year periods when workers are not very pressed but are nevertheless retained on odd jobs to keep them in employment.<sup>23</sup>

A number of minutes circulated in the Department of Agriculture in response to Lemass' proposal are useful for ascertaining why it perceived the farming community might have reacted unfavourably to providing a guaranteed number of paid holidays to agricultural labourers. On one level, it was regarded as equivalent to an increase in the minimum wage.<sup>24</sup> This was caught up in the whole question of working hours and the fact that in addition to six ordinary days annual leave, the workers would also have six public or church holidays guaranteed with pay. Suggesting that the same total number of hours had to be worked, regardless of the wages, it was argued that more overtime would have to be paid. It was anticipated that the holidays proposal would have the worst implications for dairy farmers because of the extensive and irregular nature of the hours worked on their farms and the fact that workers could not be spared on public or church holidays.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the notion that agricultural labourers would get paid not to work six ordinary days during the year, or accordingly be entitled to special rates for working on those six days or state holidays, was perceived to be a potentially unpopular concept with farmers.<sup>26</sup> In a related argument, it was contended that this proposal was totally unsuited

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<sup>23</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Bill 1946, 13 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>24</sup> Department of Agriculture draft memorandum to secretary, Industry and Commerce, undated (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>25</sup> Ward to Foley, 5 Apr. 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

to the conditions of agricultural work given the seasonal and highly casual nature of a considerable amount of agricultural employment.<sup>27</sup> Apart from suggesting that holidays were less necessary for those working part time, this concern with the casual nature of agricultural work revolved around the fact that if annual holidays were introduced, they would not have been confined to the permanent, all year round worker. Thousands of casual workers would also have been able to claim holiday pay, also known as cesser pay, at the end of their period of employment for time worked on a consecutive basis over a few months.<sup>28</sup> This also had implications for the department's farms and institutes as employers of casual labour.<sup>29</sup>

The issue of taking holidays on a consecutive basis as proposed under this legislation was also envisaged to create problems, especially for farms requiring a daily labour presence. In this regard, a further minute sought to undermine the necessity for statutorily determined annual holidays by emphasising the concessions which already existed through custom.<sup>30</sup> It was predicted that if the six consecutive days annual leave provision was applied to agriculture, all existing concessions would be withdrawn. Allusion was then made to the special nature of agricultural work, where it was maintained 'a certain amount of give and take' was necessary.<sup>31</sup> The relations between the farmer and his worker, it was argued, would not have been improved if 'in view of having to give workers six days consecutive leave, the farmer in self protection has to keep a check on

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<sup>27</sup> Departmental note to the assistant secretary, 8 Apr. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>28</sup> Departmental memorandum, 6 Apr. 1938.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Agricultural director to Section 18, 14 Apr. 1938.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



the hours of time his employees are idle because of bad weather'.<sup>32</sup> Farm work, it was declared, could not be stereotyped and regulated in the manner of industrial work in a factory or mill.<sup>33</sup> The greatest insight into the department's opposition, however, was revealed in a minute which declared that any such proposal would 'undoubtedly increase the discontent existing among farmers who never get a holiday themselves'.<sup>34</sup> This was the first indication that the department was concerned with anything other than the economic implications of this proposal. The prospect of the landless hired labourer being paid to take a break from work for six consecutive working days while most farmers, especially the smaller farmer, would never afford such a luxury, was clearly a moot point.

Although these arguments were entirely positioned from the perspective of the agricultural employer, Lemass indulged the 'definite views' of Ryan by specifically excluding most agricultural labourers from the scope of the bill.<sup>35</sup> He did, however, make certain exceptions. He opposed Ryan's attempt to also exclude workers employed on any form of industrial work as part of the work of a farm or garden, such as gamekeepers, gardeners, nurserymen and groomsmen. He justified their exclusion on the grounds that these workers were more of the "handyman" type of skilled and semiskilled craftsmen' and not genuine agricultural labourers.<sup>36</sup> Agriculture completely opposed this proposal.<sup>37</sup> It argued that even if it were practicable to distinguish clearly between workers employed

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<sup>32</sup> Agricultural director to Section 18, 14 Apr. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> O'Connor to the assistant secretary, 2 Apr. 1938.

<sup>35</sup> Secretary, Industry and Commerce to secretary, Agriculture, 17 May 1938.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 20 Jun. 1938.

on any form of industrial work on a farm and those not so employed, it would have been most objectionable to draw the distinction since:

If the provisions of the Bill as outlined are made operative, the lot of the labourer on the land will become less attractive with a consequent drift to those occupations favoured with holidays and the difficulties of farming accentuated.<sup>38</sup>

This suggested that, as it was, the thousands of labourers employed on the land did not consider their occupation to be any less attractive than those available elsewhere. And while the provision of holidays with pay in other occupations was recognised as the major attraction for workers leaving the land, its provision in agriculture was still rejected. Instead it was preferred to prevent all workers employed in agriculture from receiving such improved conditions so that the drudgery of farming would not have been emphasised. The extent to which the department was primarily preoccupied with the ramifications of this proposal on the farming community was revealed in a further minute:

Any such step would inevitably lead to a demand from the workers excluded from the bill for the same treatment as their more privileged colleagues working side by side with them, and that in turn would give rise to reactions of a most serious character among the farming community.<sup>39</sup>

That Agriculture were more concerned with the social implications of such a development on the large farming community, rather than any political or economic reaction, would become especially apparent over the subsequent decade when the government's commitment to preserving rural Ireland would take a more discriminatory direction. Meanwhile, in the eyes of those desperate to maintain the social status quo, the

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<sup>38</sup> A.P. Hughes to McGrath, 24 May 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>39</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 20 Jun. 1938.

provisions proposed by Lemass threatened to seriously destabilise the delicate equilibrium prevailing in agriculture at that time, especially when the demand for such benefits had not yet emerged among agricultural labourers. As Daniel Twomey,<sup>40</sup> the secretary, remarked in a minute to Industry and Commerce, 'should an agitation among farm workers for holidays with pay arise, it would in the new conditions be difficult to resist the demand'.<sup>41</sup> The necessity of avoiding the provocation of any such agitation or demand was obviously paramount in the view of the Department of Agriculture. Consequently, it was counselled that the only practicable course to take in connection with the proposed bill was to exclude completely all workers of any category employed on farms or gardens.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the extensive representations of Agriculture, Lemass did not accede to their objections. When the heads of the bill were circulated on 13 October 1938, stablemen, groomsmen, gamekeepers, and market and nursery gardeners were to benefit from its provisions.<sup>43</sup> This meant that all rural workers other than agricultural labourers were entitled to twelve days paid leave. Yet, despite this *fait accompli*, Agriculture still managed to derive the maximum advantage from the matter. Notwithstanding its unyielding reaction to the advances made by Industry and Commerce in this sphere, Lemass subsequently ceded responsibility for introducing comparable legislation for the remainder of the agricultural labour force to the minister for Agriculture. As noted by Lemass during the debate on the Holidays (Employees) Bill 1938:

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel Twomey was secretary to the Department of Agriculture from 1934 until 1946. He came from a farming background in the Macroom district of Cork.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary, Agriculture to secretary, Industry and Commerce, 20 Jun. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

If a measure of this kind is to be applied to agricultural workers [i.e. agricultural labourers], then I think that should be done through legislation promoted by the minister for Agriculture after consultation with those who are more familiar with agricultural conditions than I am, or the officers of my Department. We are more familiar with the conditions of urban and non-agricultural workers.<sup>44</sup>

This relinquishment may have been the result of some form of compromise between the two departments in response to Ryan acceding to Lemass' attempts to include the exceptions noted earlier in the Holidays Bill. Whether or not this was the case, such action ensured that henceforth the agricultural labouring class would be treated differently to the remainder of the workforce. Not only were they excluded from the new code of labour legislation, but the regulation of their social entitlements was now completely removed from the auspices of the department responsible for supervising these conditions for the rest of the working population. Moreover, for Lemass to admit that the legislation sponsored by his department was more suited to the conditions of urban workers, further vindicated the disinclination of Agriculture to extend such industrial conditions to agriculture. Perhaps most untenable was Lemass' claim that the agricultural labourer should not have regarded his exclusion from the benefits of this bill as an indication that his interests were viewed to be any less important in the eyes of the state than those of other workers.<sup>45</sup> For despite advancing practical difficulties to account for not applying this legislation to agriculture, Lemass knew too well that the real reason centred on 'the serious reactions of the farming community'. He knew that there would be no speedy attempt to introduce special legislation catering for the specific conditions of agriculture.

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<sup>43</sup> AP Hughes to McGrath, 13 Oct. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

<sup>44</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 73), 26 Oct. 1938, col. 146.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

As recently appointed president of the ILO international labour conference in recognition of his pioneering conditions of employment legislation, Lemass' commitment to improving the lot of the agricultural labourer was disappointing.<sup>46</sup> His relinquishment of responsibility for this class when he had so admirably championed the cause of domestic workers on the holidays issue, especially those employed on agricultural holdings, was particularly unfortunate. The circumstances of the latter's employment had always been considered quite analogous to that of the agricultural labourer, apart from the fact that the domestic worker was occupied inside the farm house on household duties. During the debate on the Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1947, Lemass accounted for the inclusion of domestic workers in the 1939 act on the grounds that:

When the Holidays (Employees) Act was introduced, persons employed as domestic servants were generally speaking, receiving comparatively low wages and on that account they required the protection of the legislation passed by the Oireachtas to an extent greater even than the other low wage workers. It could be even argued, I suppose, that in normal circumstances domestic workers have a special case for protection by means of legislation, because of the circumstances of their employment and because of their rather intimate personal relationship with their employers make their organisation on a trade union basis impossible.<sup>47</sup>

Obviously these same conditions were very much applicable to the position of the agricultural labourer but Lemass had chosen to disregard their plight. The fact that he encountered staunch opposition to including domestic workers was no doubt a consideration. During the debate on the 1938 bill the arguments advanced against the inclusion of the rural domestic worker very much echoed those that were and would be advanced against the inclusion of the agricultural labourer over the subsequent decade.

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<sup>46</sup> Hillery and Lynch, *Ireland in the International Labour Organisation*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> (Seanad Eireann) Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1947 (vol. 34), 16 Jul. 1947, col. 1000 (S 14110).

As succinctly enunciated by Michael Brennan, a farmer and Fine Gael TD for Roscommon:

There are in this country farmers' wives who have been drudging and slaving, carrying on their poultry business, their dairy business and minding families of six or seven children who need someone to help them in this work. Some of these farmers' wives have never had a holiday since their honeymoon, if they had one then, and that is doubtful. When the domestic servants get holidays is it any wonder that the neighbouring girls or the daughters of farmers feel that there is nothing in farming and that they must leave it? <sup>48</sup>

With female emigration matching that of male emigration for much of this period, both before and after the Second World War, there was obviously much concern over what motivated such persons to leave the land.<sup>49</sup> The advancement of the domestic worker, someone who was obviously perceived to be of lower social standing, was a bitter reminder of what little material advantage a lifetime in agriculture would offer compared to other occupations. Nonetheless, Lemass completely dismissed the relevance of Brennan's arguments by bluntly outlining the principles of the labour code:

...Deputies should remember that it is much more pleasant to work as mistress in your own house than as a servant under a mistress, even though you may receive no wages....In the early history of social legislation in this country, the case always arose where you had to ask yourself whether the benefits that were being conferred on one class outweighed the disadvantages that were being inflicted on others...I am prepared to argue in favour of domestic servants getting the privilege, even though, as you go down the scale, you come to the point where it is very hard to distinguish between the domestic worker and the employer so-called. You have to draw the line somewhere, and we will all differ as to where it should be.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 73), 26 Oct. 1938, cols 138-139.

<sup>49</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: politics and society* (Dublin, 1989), p. 376.

<sup>50</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 73), 26 Oct. 1938, cols 143-4.

Unfortunately for the agricultural labourer, neither the minister for Agriculture or his department shared the progressive outlook of Lemass. Indeed, it should be noted that while Agriculture had initially intended to consult with the AWB on the proposal to include agricultural labourers within the legislation, Sean O'Broin, the assistant secretary and later chairman of the Board in 1955, had subsequently noted in a handwritten minute that 'on further consideration I thought that reference to the AWB on this matter was unnecessary and in any event not likely to lead to any useful conclusion'.<sup>51</sup> It hardly set a positive precedent that the statutory body just recently established to regulate the wages of agricultural labourers, with representatives of the employers and workers on the central board and area committees throughout the country, was not considered relevant for input on this important matter. Events would demonstrate that instead of simply distinguishing the employer from the worker, Agriculture drew a line between the worker and an entire community, and favoured the latter. That their policy on this matter would unequivocally reflect the sentiments of farming spokesmen such as Brennan above, would become increasingly apparent over the subsequent decade as they reacted to the growing demands for the concession of holidays at both parliamentary and trade union level. Instead of acknowledging that the widespread emigration of this period was the wholesale rejection of the government's attempt to create a self sufficient, frugal, rural Ireland, the survival of the latter was perceived to rely on keeping the agricultural labourer from advancing to levels comparable with other occupations to preserve some semblance of the social status quo.

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<sup>51</sup> Departmental minute, 4 Apr. 1938 (AGI/G202/44).

The extent to which the government upheld Agriculture's opposition to conceding improved conditions to the agricultural labourer revealed itself over the emergency period. The war time agricultural policy was critically underpinned by the need to retain the greatest amount of labour on the land for optimum food production. Ironically, this was threatened by the unattractiveness of agricultural employment compared to other rural occupations with shorter hours, better pay and more recently, annual holidays. It hardly helped that up to 90,000 domestic servants, many of whom worked on farms with the agricultural labourer, now benefited from this privilege.<sup>52</sup> When faced with a similar labour shortage problem during the First World War, the British government had introduced the minimum wage to agriculture as a means of appeasing the workers and keeping them on the land. When faced with this challenge in 1940, instead of taking obvious steps to make agricultural employment more attractive, a necessity which governments were recognising across Europe, the Irish government tackled the tendency of rural labour to drift to better paid forms of rural employment.

Much rural work, such as relief work and minor employment schemes, was unskilled and sponsored by government departments as a means of tackling severe underemployment in the countryside at certain times of the year.<sup>53</sup> The labour pool supplying these schemes and more essential employment programmes consisted largely of underemployed small holders, relatives assisting and unemployed agricultural labourers.<sup>54</sup> Because of the agricultural nature of this pool, an unofficial link had been established between rural

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<sup>52</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 73), 26 Oct. 1938, col. 123.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for the government, 6 Dec. 1946 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



government wages and the prevailing local rate for agricultural labourers from 1926.<sup>55</sup> The propensity of rural labour to drift to the better paid schemes had for years forced government departments, such as Lands and Local Government, to establish small differentials over the prevailing local rate for agricultural labourers.<sup>56</sup> This was a means of attracting and retaining labour for essential programmes such as road, turf, forestry and drainage work, which were of a more skilled and arduous nature than the relief schemes.<sup>57</sup> The extent to which the government had a vested interest in any rates passed by the Board became blatant in the summer of 1938. Sean MacEntee, the minister for Finance, officially authorised the payment of the minimum agricultural rate, with differentials where necessary, as the basis of subsequent wage rates for manual workers engaged on rural state sponsored projects for a 48 hour week.<sup>58</sup> For Finance, the agricultural minimum rate now constituted a reliable yardstick with which to control government expenditure in these areas and also bring uniformity to rural wages.<sup>59</sup>

However, as soon as the exceptional conditions of the Emergency period emerged, this policy was reversed with even worse consequences for rural workers than the link with the agricultural wage had first represented. The government suspended the wage fixing policies of Lands, Local Government and the Special Employment Schemes Office and actually subordinated the wages of their workers to the minimum agricultural rate, the objective being to make agricultural employment the more attractive alternative, despite

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter II; Also Department of Finance memorandum for government on the application of the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Order 1940, 28 Feb. 1940 (S 11689A).

<sup>56</sup> Department of Lands memorandum for government, 1 Mar. 1940.

<sup>57</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for government, 28 Feb. 1940.

<sup>58</sup> Lands memorandum for government, 1 Mar. 1940.

<sup>59</sup> Finance memorandum for government, 28 Feb. 1940.

the longer working hours. The first indications of this tendency appeared in 1940 when the AWB passed an increase of 3s. for agricultural labourers. Contrary to established policy, Sean T. O' Kelly, MacEntee's replacement as minister for Finance, withheld this increase from those rural workers whose employment was not 'strictly' agricultural under the terms of the Agricultural Wages Act 1936.<sup>60</sup> Forestry and turf workers were exceptions in this regard and continued to receive the appropriate agricultural minimum rate and their differential. Because of the essential need for fuel and the short period available during the year for securing a crop, turf workers in particular were seen as a special case.<sup>61</sup> The effects of this policy reversal were far reaching. For land commission and minor employment scheme workers, it meant that their wages fell 3s. behind the minimum agricultural wage.<sup>62</sup> Finance eased this restriction slightly in 1942 when the 1939 pay freeze was relaxed generally, with the standard AWB increase of that year once again awarded to most rural government labourers regardless of whether their employment was 'strictly' agricultural or not. However no attempt was made to restore the equilibrium that existed prior to the withholding of the previous increase in 1940. Forestry workers were now also affected. The minister for Finance had refused to award them with the full minimum wage increase and as a result they now received 1s. less than the agricultural minimum rate. So, for the first time ever, the agricultural minimum wage actually exceeded that of many comparable rural employments. With the wage gap which had grown between these classes unbridged, the agricultural minimum wage continued to

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<sup>60</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for government on the application of the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Order 1940, 28 Feb. 1940 (S 11689A).

<sup>61</sup> Department of Local Government memorandum for government, 21 Mar. 1947 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>62</sup> Special Employment Schemes Office to Finance, 29 Jun. 1946; Lands memorandum for government, 16 Dec. 1946.

predominate and by 1944 it began to surpass the wages of road workers whose remuneration was normally fixed by local authorities.<sup>63</sup> This practice continued for the remainder of the Emergency period and ensured that agricultural wages were nominally greater, not because of the level of the increases awarded by the Board, but because other rural wages were actually pegged down to a level below the minimum rate.

In alliance with Finance, Agriculture was instrumental in making any increase in rural wages other than the agricultural minimum wage conditional on the sustained dominance of the latter.<sup>64</sup> That this policy had resulted in these departments acquiring a certain hegemony over the interests of other departments became apparent from 1946, when neither department, especially Agriculture, was keen to abandon the control. With the relaxation of the Wages Standstill Orders in the aftermath of the Emergency, many workers sought to increase their wages. However departments were constricted by the supremacy still accorded to agricultural production and the combined opposition of Agriculture and Finance.<sup>65</sup> Other than minor employment scheme workers, parity with the agricultural minimum wage was eventually granted to most rural workers employed by the state in December 1946.<sup>66</sup> Yet, as late as 1948, Agriculture was still opposing the attempts of various departments to increase wages beyond the agricultural minimum wage.<sup>67</sup> It seems that Finance and Agriculture were trying to use this new mechanism of

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<sup>63</sup> Department of Local Government and Public Health memorandum for government, 26 Jan. 1946. (S 11953B).

<sup>64</sup> Agriculture to Finance, 2 Apr. 1942 (AGI/G419/42).

<sup>65</sup> Special Employment Schemes Office to Finance, 29 Jun. 1946 (AGI/G988/46); Departmental minute to Hughes, 28 Aug. 1946; Lands memorandum for government, 16 Dec. 1946.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Finance memorandum for government on the SESO proposal, 6 Dec. 1946; Government decision on SESO proposal, 20 Dec. 1946.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; See also S 11953B and S 11953C/1.

control to standardise wages across rural occupations as a long term policy. Insight into the logic underlining this policy is ascertainable from the following statement:

Agriculture, in which the average net output per man employed in 1945 was £191, cannot meet the wage competition of, and loses workers to, industrial employment in which the average net 1945 output per person was £316. Likewise, agriculture will lose workers to any of the other rural occupations which offers even slightly better conditions. If the delicately adjusted distribution of rural labour is to be preserved there must be a close equalisation of wages and conditions in these rural occupations.<sup>68</sup>

The problem was that such adjustment was to be achieved at the cost of holding back advances in other rural occupations as their standard of living was brought down to the level prevailing in agriculture. As it was, the maximum wage for most rural workers employed by the state was equated to the minimum wage for agricultural labourers. This was particularly objectionable to road workers because their wages were fixed by county councils, many of whom by this time wanted to increase the wages of their workers.<sup>69</sup> Conscious of this development Sean MacEntee in his role as minister for Local Government until February 1948, and who had originally been a strong proponent of this policy, actually sought to have the policy relaxed from 1947.<sup>70</sup> He felt that if the councils wanted to pay better wages than the agricultural minimum rate, then they should.<sup>71</sup> Although his attempts to have this policy relaxed were unsuccessful, his successor in the general election of 1948, TJ Murphy, a labour party TD, took a more uncompromising approach. Attacking the entire premise of Agriculture's arguments, Murphy was to

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<sup>68</sup> Departmental memorandum, 11 Mar. 1948 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>69</sup> Local Government memoranda for government, 26 Jan. 1946 (AGI/G988/46); 31 Mar. 1947 (S 11953B).

<sup>70</sup> Local Government memoranda for government, 21 Mar. 1947 (AGI/G988/46); 31 Mar. 1947 (S 11953B).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

contend that it was 'illogical' to tie the maximum road workers wages to the minimum agricultural wage:

If at the present stage the agricultural industry is unable to bear higher wages that is no reason why other employments should suffer. If the bar applied to road workers were logically extended it should cover all rural employment. The contrary is the case however. For instance builders' labourers, whose working week in a number of counties is the same as that of road workers, are paid in those counties hourly wage rates equivalent to 72s. a week and more.<sup>72</sup>

Tackling the contention that the new rates would cause a diversion of agricultural labour to turf production or roads, he rejoined that considerable sums were expended each year for the carrying out of road works with the express purpose of relieving unemployment in the rural areas.<sup>73</sup> He also pointed out that there could be no question of a shift from farm to road work as the upper limit of road employment was determined by factors other than wage rates. Alluding to turf workers, he noted that a differential in favour of turf workers in the past had not had this effect and that the amount of employment given by turf production, its periodicity and geographical distribution, were not such as to absorb agricultural labour. Moreover, as the revised programme of Bord na Mona provided for the employment of 5,000 instead of 20,000 men in turf production on county council bogs it was contended that this would have the effect of making more not less labour available for farm work.<sup>74</sup> In this connection it should be noted that Agriculture had actually privately admitted in an internal memorandum that the diversion premise of their opposition to greater wages for road workers was not entirely accurate:

As far as that goes we receive in this section as many complaints concerning

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<sup>72</sup> Local Government memorandum for government, 10 Mar. 1948 (S 11953 C/1; AGI/G988/46).

<sup>73</sup> Observations of the minister for Local Government and Public Health, 10 Mar. 1948 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

construction, building and bog work as we do concerning road work. That is of course not to say that road work does not divert workers from the farms or that we should not try to remedy this even though we can do little about other claims of the agricultural labour pool.<sup>75</sup>

As this comment acknowledged, the movement from agriculture was widespread whether to other rural occupations or elsewhere. For Agriculture and Finance to control the wages of other rural state occupations as a means of curbing this drift during the Emergency was bad enough, but to try and prolong this policy after the war was quite incredible, especially in the face of such opposition from other departments. Still, Agriculture refused to concede any ground:

As previously intimated it is considered that no justification exists for the pay to road workers of weekly wages in excess of the minimum rate prescribed for agricultural workers for longer hours of work of a more arduous nature and calling for a greater degree of skill and experience. It is further considered that any departure from the existing relationship between the rates of wages paid to the two classes of workers concerned, if to the benefit of road workers, would most definitely engender discontent amongst the seriously depleted numbers of agricultural workers and cause them to seek road work, to the detriment of the maximum agricultural production which is of paramount importance.<sup>76</sup>

Yet a departmental minute in August 1950 admitted:

We have contended that increasing road workers wages beyond the minimum wage would have adverse effects on agricultural labour. I do not know of any evidence which would show that the increases already granted have had the adverse effects feared.<sup>77</sup>

Had Agriculture really been concerned with keeping hired labour in agriculture throughout any of this period, it could simply have equalised working conditions somewhat by introducing the weekly half holiday, which would have automatically

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<sup>75</sup> Department of Agriculture internal minute, 3 Mar. 1948 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>76</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum to Local Government, 5 Mar. 1948

<sup>77</sup> Minute to O'Shea, 18 Aug. 1950 (AGI/G766/50).

introduced a 50 hour week. The two hour difference between agricultural and rural work would have been negligible at that stage. However, by 1948 the problem was not so much the inability of agriculture to bear better wages, as the effects which breaking this policy would now have on agricultural labourers. It was feared that if road, or indeed other state rural workers, were once more allocated higher rates than agricultural labourers it would cause discontent amongst the latter, who had been enjoying the experience of being on a par with many other rural workers for several years now.<sup>78</sup> Anticipating demands for further increases, it is vital to note that Agriculture were not so much concerned with this as with the effect which the concession of these demands would have on the unpaid workers labouring on family farms:

Increases in wages to 'paid' agricultural workers also makes the large number of members of farmers' families employed on the land, often for little or no monetary return, discontent and drives them to move to towns or to emigrate.<sup>79</sup>

That was not just a minor consideration was reflected in its inclusion in a draft departmental response to the British Ministry for Agriculture regarding its request that Ireland encourage seasonal migration to Britain for the harvest of 1948. In a draft letter declining this request, allusion was made to the already large extent of emigration to Britain and the fact that it had been the principal factor in reducing the number of agricultural labourers, comprising 'two-thirds of the total'.<sup>80</sup> Referring to the consequent shortage of agricultural labour during the war years when increased agricultural and turf production was required, it was noted that various measures had been introduced such as

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<sup>78</sup> Agriculture to Local Government, 5 Mar. 1948 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Draft response from O'Broin to ministry for Agriculture, London, Dec. 1947 (AGI/G1405/47).

the restriction on travel permits to persons from rural districts with experience of agricultural or turf work, which were not extended to seasonal migrants, the establishment of a special register of agricultural and turf workers, permitting the increase of agricultural minimum rates 'when the wages for other classes of workers were pegged down' and introducing schemes to divert surplus labour from the congested districts to other parts of the country where labour was scarce.<sup>81</sup> But also remarked upon was how this shortage had led to demands for improved pay and conditions from the agricultural labourers. In relation to the latter development it was noted gravely:

A further undesirable effect has been the creation of discontent amongst the very many and often poorly remunerated members of small farmer's families working on the land who now feel their position to be very much worse than that of the regular paid workers and who, accordingly, tend to leave the land.<sup>82</sup>

Therefore, Agriculture not only sought to keep the minimum wage paid to agricultural labourers as minimal as possible in order to ensure an adequate labour supply at the least cost to the agricultural community, but even more significantly, it sought to do so to prevent the aggravation of the greatest labour supply of all, the unpaid labour force working on family farms. Although the agricultural workforce had been undergoing depletion since the Famine, the character of this depletion changed after independence. While predominantly agricultural labourers in the past, the sons and daughters of the landed fabric of rural Ireland now began to leave the land to seek better lives elsewhere. The publication of the 1936 census in 1939 had revealed this worrying trend.<sup>83</sup> The number of relatives assisting declined some 7.5 per cent over the previous decade, while

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<sup>81</sup> See AGI/G1619/47 for details on the special register of agricultural and turf workers.

<sup>82</sup> Draft response to ministry for Agriculture, London, Dec. 1947 (AGI/G1405/47).

<sup>83</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p.373.



agricultural labourers actually recorded a slight increase of 1.1 per cent for the first (and last) time in almost a century.<sup>84</sup> So while other countries were also concerned with the number of workers leaving the land, and introduced improved conditions as incentives to keep them there, the Irish government were to view any attempt to improve the conditions of agricultural labour as a threat to the existence of the family farm. This opposition had obviously assumed a new dimension during the Emergency as the government sought to control the livelihood of the wider rural community.

It was hardly surprising that in facing such conviction in 1948 the minister for Local Government, now TJ Murphy, was ultimately driven to denounce this policy on the grounds that it constituted 'a victimisation of rural road workers'.<sup>85</sup> That a government minister should make such a pronouncement on official policy in the interests of workers employed indirectly by his department was in its very essence an approach that was in stark contrast to that pursued by Agriculture. And while this policy was eventually broken when the government agreed to sanction increases to the road worker's wage beyond the minimum rate in 1948, with other departments quickly winning similar concessions over the next two years, the hegemony of Agriculture over agricultural labourers still remained intact.

However, the reaction to this policy on the ground level had already led to the re-establishment of trade unionism in agriculture and the enunciation of demands for improved wages and conditions. That this policy had been part of a broader scheme to

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>85</sup> 10 Mar. 1948 (S 11953 C/1; AGI/G988/46).

keep all rural labour at the same level became unequivocally apparent to the unions in 1946, courtesy of the minister for Local Government. Speaking during the debate on the Local Government Bill on 15 February 1946, MacEntee, in outlining the policy of his department regarding the wages of rural workers, had frankly announced that:

we could not afford to allow a privileged class of employee to grow up in the rural community and we could not afford to allow public authorities to attract from the essential work of food production the men who were required for that by permitting these local authorities to offer and to pay higher rates of remuneration than the basic agricultural industry could afford to pay. Therefore, the Government decided that as a matter of fundamental policy the rates payable to manual workers under public authorities in rural districts would be brought into line with what the agricultural industry could afford to pay.<sup>86</sup>

Up to this point the unions had viewed the low wages of rural state workers as a temporary war time expedient which MacEntee had used to effectively prevent local authorities awarding emergency bonuses to their workers.<sup>87</sup> As such the implications of this pronouncement had been completely unanticipated. As the *Irish People* reported, 'that a decision at Cabinet level had been taken on wages policy was unexpected news; this was the first intimation there was of it. And what a decision'.<sup>88</sup> That the wages of road and other rural workers had been 'purposely fixed at the same level as those of agricultural labourers, the lowest paid category of workers in the country' was bad enough.<sup>89</sup> But even worse was the revelation that local authorities were being prevented from passing wages they judged appropriate not because of the necessity for retrenchment during the emergency period, but because of its implications for the

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<sup>86</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 99), 15 Feb. 1946, col. 1103.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Feb. 1946, cols 1079-94.

<sup>88</sup> *Irish People*, 9 Mar. 1946.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1946.

agricultural industry.<sup>90</sup> While it was accepted that agriculture could not afford to pay its labourers higher than a certain sum, the idea that the government would not 'allow' local authorities to pay higher wages than were paid to agricultural labourers in their area led to unease among the trade unions.<sup>91</sup> There were growing concerns that the government's use of the agricultural minimum wage as a foundation upon which to base local authority and manual public service rates was the beginning of a wider tendency to base urban and town wages on rural wages. This concern was not alleviated when the government, on taking steps to introduce new industrial relations machinery in 1946, attempted to include a section in the Industrial Relations Bill which would have required the Labour Court to use the local agricultural minimum wage as the basis for setting a wages standard for unskilled labour in small towns.<sup>92</sup> Lemass justified this link on the grounds that most towns had workers who were engaged as agricultural labourers during the busy seasons and found other employment about the town for the remainder of the year.<sup>93</sup> He claimed the intention was simply to use the agricultural wage as a yardstick by which variations in local rates could be related.<sup>94</sup> However, the concern over using the agricultural minimum rate to build a general wages policy was so widespread in the Dáil that Lemass had been obliged to remove this stipulation.

Unions had become so convinced that this wages policy held out little hope of a better standard of living for rural and agricultural workers, and ipso facto urban workers, that

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<sup>90</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 99), 15 Feb. 1946, cols 1114-5.

<sup>91</sup> *Irish People*, 23 Feb. 1946; ITUC resolution to the minister for Agriculture on rural wages, Sep. 1946 (AGI/G988/46).

<sup>92</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 101) 25 Jun. 1946, col. 2376.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 2374.

steps were finally taken to organise them on a nationwide scale. The Workers Union of Ireland had already begun to re-organise agricultural labourers in Co. Dublin in 1943.<sup>95</sup> While these workers had been enjoying a scarcity value for the first time since 1921 consequent to the invocation of the war-time compulsory tillage orders, much dissatisfaction had prevailed because in the absence of trade unionism they had been forced to accept the minimum wage passed by the AWB. Consequently the WUI received an enthusiastic response to its organising drive and by 1944 it had spread to counties Wicklow, Kildare and Meath, while also extending its scope to include local authority workers.<sup>96</sup> The WUI had realised by 1945 that a separate union was required to meet the difficulties of organising these workers on an extensive scale, and brought representations to the national executive of the ITUC in early 1946.<sup>97</sup> In this regard it seems that MacEntee's announcement gave great impetus to the drive to establish a more nationwide organisation. As the report of the ITUC noted at this time:

Acting under the stimulus of these declarations and concluding that they formed the basis of the wages policy which the government would desire should operate after the expiration of the Emergency Powers Act, the national executive decided to initiate a movement for the formation of a national organisation of rural workers.<sup>98</sup>

Leading this initiative was James Larkin Jr., who organised a conference of interested unions in the Mansion House on 17 March 1946.<sup>99</sup> The initial members of the provisional

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<sup>95</sup> Daniel G. Bradley, *Farm labourers: Irish struggle, 1900-1976* (Belfast, 1988), p. 74.

<sup>96</sup> Ross M. Connolly, 'A rightful place in the sun: the struggle of the farm and rural labourers of County Wicklow' in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds), *Wicklow: history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1994), pp 917-25.

<sup>97</sup> Patrick Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers 1946-1979*, documents prepared for the 1988 biennial conference of the rural workers' group of the FWUI, p. 18 (CMP).

<sup>98</sup> *Annual report of the Irish Trade Union Congress* (1945-6), pp 48-50; James Larkin Jr. to general secretaries of affiliated unions of ITUC, 1946 (ICTU 3701(2) 1/63).

<sup>99</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, p. 7.

executive council of what eventually became the Federation of Rural Workers came from the ATGWU, the Post Office Workers Union and the Irish Womens Workers Union.<sup>100</sup> Concerned with the conditions of women workers on the land, the latter had been calling for a special conference to discuss the organisation of agricultural workers since the national conference of 1944.<sup>101</sup> Unions affiliated to the ITUC were asked to make financial contributions towards the establishment of a new organisation.<sup>102</sup> Much thought went into the organisational format of the union, given the difficulties encountered in the past. With a view to dealing with the scatted nature of rural employment it was decided to establish a decentralised type of organisation with county branches reporting into a head office.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, since the large amount of seasonal work made it difficult for labourers to make contributions on a regular basis, with the physical difficulties of collection weakening the effectiveness of the union, it was decided to have contributions payable at seasonal intervals.<sup>104</sup> There was no question but that MacEntee's pronouncement in February 1946 contributed immeasurably to this development and the consequent rise in strike activity. For instance, as reported by the *Irish People* in April 1946:

The coolie standard of living for rural workers decided upon by the government as outlined by the minister for Local Government, Mr. Sean MacEntee, in the Dáil last month has kindled a fire of resentment that is spreading over the land like a prairie blaze. From all parts of the country men are asking to join the union and to send an organiser.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, p. 7

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4; *Annual report of the Irish Trade Union Congress* (1944), pp 134 -5; Connolly, 'A rightful place in the sun', p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> James Larkin Jr. to affiliated unions of ITUC, 1946 (ICTU 3701(2) 1/63); see also (ICTU 3701(1) 1/63).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Irish People*, 13 Apr. 1946.

As a result 1946 was marked by many rural strikes, the most important involving agricultural labourers in Dublin in March and in North Kildare in August.

What was significant about these strikes is that rather than wages the issue of increasing importance to agricultural labourers was the question of holidays. In August 1944 the WUI had served strike notice on Dublin farmers for a working week reduced from 54 to 48 hours, implicit to which was a weekly half holiday and payment for either church or public holidays.<sup>106</sup> A sympathetic editorial in the *Irish Times* at the time strengthened their cause:

When once considers the conditions of the farm labourer, indeed, it is hardly necessary to demand any further explanation for the 'flight from the land' which has received so much publicity in the last twenty years....Hitherto the men on the land have not employed the weapon of strike action, and we sincerely hope that their tens of thousands will never reach the point of coming out....but they have more excuse for it than most people and their quietness in the past is a tribute to them.<sup>107</sup>

Strike action was averted on this occasion when an agreement was eventually reached with the Co. Dublin Farmers Association. A 4s. per week increase was granted and a 50 hour week that conceded the weekly half holiday, along with a full day's holidays with pay on each church or public holiday.<sup>108</sup> Although the WUI continued to make individual agreements with farmers in this county throughout 1945, the demand for a full week's annual holidays had emerged by March 1946, with further strikes threatened in Dublin.

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<sup>106</sup> Daniel G. Bradley, 'Speeding the plough: the formation of the Federation of Rural Workers 1944-1948' in *Saothar* 11 (1986), p. 42.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Bradley, 'Speeding the plough'. p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> Bradley, *Farm labourers*, p. 77.

It was highly significant that the first strikes to erupt in agriculture in over twenty years should have been about holidays and not wages, especially during a period when strikes for improved wages were rampant among groups such as national school teachers, and bank and postal workers, and unions all over the country were in a panic over the government's rural wages policy.<sup>109</sup> The principle had become an emotive issue for agricultural labourers. As much as they would have benefited from increased wages, it became especially apparent that their social status vis à vis their counterparts in the towns and cities had become all important. This suggested that some vague sense of a working class identity was beginning to evolve. Since perquisites for many of this class would have included the provision of land cultivated and tilled, or even manured, seeded and crop lifted for potato growing, and the use of grazing for animals, it obscured the line between farmer and labourer, perhaps satisfying on a very basic level any yearnings of the latter for farming their own plot of land. This harked back to the peasant economy of the pre-Famine era when labourers would have sublet plots of land of up to five acres from tenant farmers, on which they would have eked an existence. Having been forced to evolve into a wage earning class by the land consolidations, pastoral farming and free market economy which prevailed in the post Famine period, they were not well positioned to benefit from land purchase when the process was initiated in 1881, and tended to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of allottees.<sup>110</sup> The land act of 1933 however was an exception in this regard in that along with evicted tenants, uneconomic landholders and landless men in the immediate vicinity of the estate to be divided,

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<sup>109</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland: nation and state* (Dublin, 1994), p. 166.

<sup>110</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp 118, 167.

preference was given to labourers who had been discharged from such estates.<sup>111</sup> As a result, 482 ex-employees, such as herds and ploughmen, and landless individuals, many of whom would also have been farmers' sons, received about 25 acres each in the period 1937-9 alone.<sup>112</sup> This policy had slowed down considerably by 1940, however, when only 59 allotments were granted to this group. From then until 1973 a total of 675 ex-employees benefited.<sup>113</sup> From the 1940s the landless were essentially no longer considered in land division schemes.<sup>114</sup> Ultimately the Land Commission had not been inclined to give land to this class because of their lack of capital for investment, their lack of experience in a system that was already creaking with unviable holdings and, most importantly, the realisation by the 1930s that standard 22 acre holdings were insufficient for the economic viability of a family without recourse to outside assistance.<sup>115</sup> As a result land division policy reverted to prioritising uneconomic holders and congests over the allocation of land to the landless.

By the end of the Emergency most agricultural labourers realised that the chances of benefiting from land ownership were incredibly remote, even if they happened to be employed on or contiguous to an estate to be divided. At the same time they were undergoing a change of outlook and were no longer content to live a basic hand to mouth existence of poor wages supported by perquisites. As noted in a rural survey report on Clonmel, Arklow and Wexford by W.A. Honohan as part of the work of the Commission

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<sup>111</sup> Dooley, *The land for the people*, p. 106.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.



on Emigration in 1948:

It may be that in the past when standards were lower and perhaps opportunities for spending money were not so great in certain areas (no cinema, no dance hall, not so much smoking), many of those now emigrating were satisfied with work in large or short spells from time to time. The modern requirement, however, is a pay packet of definite dimensions every week.<sup>116</sup>

Agricultural labourers were beginning to align themselves mentally with other workers. Having enjoyed unprecedented parity in wages with many rural workers for much of this period, it was hardly surprising that they now sought parity in conditions of employment also. Unfortunately for the agricultural labourer, however, it would take several decades before the Irish government would share this perception and grant legislative parity in such matters. In the meantime, the agricultural labourer continued to register his rejection of the distinctive employment conditions and the consequent substandard social identity forced upon him by government by emigrating in increasing numbers, with the figures from 1946-51 the highest in several decades, a trend which continued during the 1950s.<sup>117</sup>

Fortunately for the agricultural labourers, the campaign for their social rights was carried out not just on the farms but at parliamentary level. Just as Jim Larkin was taking steps to establish a new rural workers union in March 1946, both he and other labour spokesman in the Dáil were taking their own parliamentary initiatives to address the conditions of the agricultural labourer. The introduction of the Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946 in March was a major indication that worker spokesmen were no longer

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<sup>116</sup> Rural survey report on Clonmel, Arklow and Wexford by W.A Honohan, 13 Sep. 1948 (Arnold Marsh Papers, MS 8306, s. 5).

<sup>117</sup> Chapter I, table 1.1; Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 182.

prepared to wait idly for the AWB or the minister for Agriculture to take the initiative in this area. It was the first of several private members bills drafted by members of the Labour Party in an attempt to force the government to be more even handed in its treatment of this class. Introduced by William Norton, and supported by Michael Keyes and Jim Larkin, its purpose was to provide agricultural labourers with a week's paid annual leave plus six public or church holidays, as had been granted to non-agricultural workers under the Holidays (Employees) Act 1939.<sup>118</sup> In so doing the intention, as proclaimed by Larkin during the debate on its second stage, was to remove an 'unfair discrimination' against these workers and to remedy the defects in the trend of labour legislation since the introduction of the Conditions of Employment Act 1936.<sup>119</sup>

However, a departmental memorandum on this bill revealed that the agricultural labourer would remain outside the pale of social legislation so long as the Department of Agriculture was the authority responsible for his conditions. Although it was contended that the structure of this measure was incapable of enforcement on a practical level, the importance of this memorandum relates not to these arguments but to those advanced against the introduction of any holiday measure to agriculture.<sup>120</sup> Noting the 'marginal' numeric position of the hired agricultural labourer compared to the preponderance of farmers and relatives assisting engaged in agriculture, emphasis was drawn to the fact that of the 495,000 males of 18 years and over engaged in farm work in 1944, only

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<sup>118</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Holiday (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, 13 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>119</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 99), 13 Mar. 1946, col. 2432.

<sup>120</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Holiday (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, 13 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

135,000, that is one quarter of the total, were employed.<sup>121</sup> In this connection it was unequivocally declared:

The provision of holidays for agricultural employees would therefore mean selecting one out of every four approximately of the persons engaged in agricultural work for privileged treatment and it would be most invidious to proceed on those lines. Indeed a certain amount of irritation might very well be produced among the farmers and members of their families if they saw a minority of workers put in a special position and given legal entitlements to paid holidays which the majority could never provide for themselves. Looking at it in another way there are in the country about 384,000 agricultural holdings. Of these about 242,000 are holdings of less than 30 acres in extent. In other words, two thirds are small holdings, the occupiers of which can never afford holidays for themselves in the sense now recommended for agricultural workers.<sup>122</sup>

This in a nutshell outlined the mentality of the department not just towards compulsory holidays, but towards the concession of any privilege which would have bestowed upon the agricultural labourer an advantage not already enjoyed by the wider farming community. Notwithstanding the strong numerical position of the agricultural labouring class as a sector of the paid workforce, their position was less dominant in agriculture and their demands those of a minority group capable of effecting huge reverberations if granted.

That this mentality reflected the prevailing ideas of the time was evidenced in the comments made by rural deputies such as Patrick Cogan, a farmer and Clann na Talmhan TD for Wicklow, during the debate on the bill. While Cogan observed that there was little likelihood that farmers and their families would ever have the opportunity to avail of holidays, he noted that there was a distinction between the position of the larger and

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<sup>121</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Holiday (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, 13 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

smaller farmers in this connection:

We must remember that we have in this country in the agricultural industry not only employers and employees, but also a very big section who are neither employers nor employees. We have small farmers who work their holdings by their own labour and the labour of the members of their families and it would be disastrous if the standard of living of these people on small farms was...brought below that of the agricultural worker. It would not make for happiness or contentment among the young people who are members of the small farmers' families if they found that the agricultural worker could enjoy a holiday and that they were unable to afford it because of agricultural conditions. That state of affairs would tend to drive more and more of the farming community, particularly the young people, off the land to seek employment elsewhere.<sup>123</sup>

This was an indication of just how important perceived social status was to the farming community. Such social differentiation was often the only line of demarcation between the small holder and the agricultural labourer. Clearly Cogan had touched on a very pertinent point when he acknowledged that this concession could, in fact, have been perceived to lower the standard of living, or rather the social standing, of the thousands of small farmers and their families to a level below that of the hired agricultural labourer. This was a consideration that very much underpinned the concerns of Agriculture. For, as expounded by Cogan, such an eventuality would have unfavourably influenced the legion of younger family members whose unpaid labour effectively kept these farms afloat. That these workers were just as susceptible, if not more so, to the improved conditions prevailing in the towns and cities was evidenced in their huge exodus from rural Ireland over this period. That this prospect had been very much considered by the minister was also confirmed in his formal response to the bill in the Dáil. He was quick to concur with Cogan's sentiments about its effect on the smaller farmer:

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<sup>123</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 100), 20 Mar. 1946, cols. 111-2.

Very few owners of small holdings would have an employee. If this act were to be brought in, it may be argued that very few of them would be able to afford the week's holiday that would be granted to the employee employed on the big farm adjoining them and it might make for a certain amount of discontent amongst these people but, whether it did or not, the point is that the Act would apply only to a certain proportion, say, about 25 per cent altogether of those who are working in agriculture at the moment.<sup>124</sup>

This suggested that the minister was more concerned with maintaining the social status quo, wherein the social and economic position of the agricultural labourer served to reassure the thousands of small farmers that as difficult as their position was, there were others in agriculture in a less attractive position. So the crux of the matter pertained not to the few who would have been affected by the bill in practice, but to the ramifications deriving from the social discontent which would have erupted amongst the 212,000 holdings of the smaller farming class had the state granted the privilege of paid holidays to agricultural labourers. The conviction underlining such a view was further revealed in a departmental memorandum regarding the bill's progress in the Dáil. It was admonished that:

the acceptance of the Bill would establish the position in which a minority of agricultural workers would be placed in a specially privileged position, with the result that there would be unfair discrimination against a large majority.<sup>125</sup>

Of course, the logic of such rhetoric was extraordinary. The extension of improved conditions of employment to a class of workers labouring for pay was being withheld on the grounds that this concession would have constituted unfair discrimination against the property owners and employers engaged in the same industry. This claim would have been inconceivable in almost any other country.

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<sup>124</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 100), 20 Mar. 1946, col. 117.

<sup>125</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, 20 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

Not only was there no attempt to draw a line between the diverging conditions of employer and worker, but the necessity for drawing distinction between the two classes was avoided by extolling the special nature of the farmer-labourer relationship and their ideal working environment. It was suggested that this relationship was under threat from the extension of such formal industrialised conditions to agriculture. In this respect it was admonished:

The relationships between farmers and their workers are often governed by the tradition and customs of the locality and the more it is attempted to regulate these relations by statutory enactment...the more the old basis of such relationships are disrupted with consequences that are not likely to prove in the long run advantageous to the workers or to the community in general. By such measures, the administration of which would be found to engender resentment among the farming community, we may sow the seeds of antagonism between farmers and their workers.<sup>126</sup>

That the signs of such antagonism were already beginning to appear but precisely because this measure was being withheld from agricultural labourers, emerged while the bill was being debated in the Dáil. As mentioned previously, the WUI had launched a strike in Co. Dublin for improved wages and a week's annual holidays with pay on 28 March 1946, the day before the vote on the second stage of the bill was taken.<sup>127</sup> When the debate on the bill resumed on 29 March, Norton drew reference to the fact that the situation was beginning to change at ground level, with agricultural labourers no longer willing to forego their social entitlements.<sup>128</sup> Despite the pressure of the Dublin strike and Norton's attempts to pass the bill based on the principle at stake, and in recognition of the agricultural labourer's 'magnificent contribution to the national effort during the last

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<sup>126</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, 20 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>127</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, p. 29.

<sup>128</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 100), 29 Mar. 1946, col. 928.

six years', the bill was still defeated by 50 votes to 21.<sup>129</sup> With Fianna Fáil returning 50 votes against the proposal, this party contributed overwhelmingly to its defeat. Although this was a strong indictment of government support for the labourer, the Dublin strike ended swiftly and successfully in the first week of April. The National Agricultural Association of Ireland, which had been formed in the lead up to the strike following a government warning that the Co. Dublin Farmers' Association could not negotiate for a settlement without a license, quickly came to an agreement with the WUI.<sup>130</sup> It conceded their demands for a week's annual holidays with pay for each 12 months service, in addition to days off with pay on church or public holidays.<sup>131</sup> Provision was also made for casual workers by providing for a day off with pay for every two months worked in a period of less than 12 months.

Even though the strike in Dublin ran its course quite rapidly, its reverberations were far reaching. The WUI quickly announced the threat of a further strike in North Kildare that August. As was to be expected the demands on this occasion were for wages and conditions similar to those recently granted to agricultural labourers in Co. Dublin.<sup>132</sup> The outcome of the Dublin strike had also been important in the run up to the launch of the new rural workers union, the FRW.<sup>133</sup> Headed by Sean Dunne, who acted as general secretary and had been instrumental in orchestrating the Dublin strike, this union was to play a crucial role in ameliorating the position of the agricultural labourer over the

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<sup>129</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 100), 29 Mar. 1946, cols 932-4.

<sup>130</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, pp 29-30.

<sup>131</sup> AAI to the minister for Agriculture, 18 Jun. 1949 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>132</sup> Strike notice issued by WUI to certain farmers in North Kildare, 1 May 1946 (AGI/G1008/46).

<sup>133</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers 1946-1979*, p. 29.

subsequent decades, both directly and indirectly through trade union and parliamentary agitation.<sup>134</sup> For the next few years it concentrated on the former phase as it used the strike weapon to try and attain better wages and working conditions for agricultural labourers throughout the country. Its launch coincided with the strike which began in North Kildare in August when the main demands sought - a weekly half holiday with a week's annual holidays and church holidays with pay - were rejected.<sup>135</sup>

Before dealing with the importance of this strike, however, it should be noted that it could have been averted by government. During the debate on the Holidays (Employees)(Amendment) Bill 1946, the minister for Agriculture had given an undertaking that should the Board or the area committees make a recommendation to him that holidays with pay were desirable for agricultural labourers, he would give any legal backing that was necessary.<sup>136</sup> It transpired that at meetings of the area committees in May 1946, three committees unanimously recommended that a week's annual holidays with pay be granted.<sup>137</sup> Of even greater moment was that at a meeting of the Board on 5 June, it unanimously recommended that the minister take the necessary steps to provide annual holidays with pay to agricultural workers.<sup>138</sup> The Board had added that it could not see any way in which their recommendation could be implemented under the existing

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<sup>134</sup> Born in Waterford in 1918, Sean Dunne became involved with the labour and republican movements from an early age. He joined the WUI in 1936 and after being interned for the first two years of the Second World War, he became secretary of the agricultural workers section of the WUI, in 1944. He was elected a Labour Party TD for Dublin county in 1948 and was general secretary of the FRW until 1954 when he tried to establish a rival trade union called the Local Authority and General Workers Union. He served as a TD from 1948-57 and from 1961-69.

<sup>135</sup> *The Irish People*, 3 Aug. 1946.

<sup>136</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 100), 29 Mar. 1946, cols 901-2.

<sup>137</sup> Secretary, AWB to minister for Agriculture, 5 Jul. 1946 (AGI/G751/44).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*



legislation, obviously implying the need for its amendment or the introduction of new legislation. Such a positive recommendation on the Board's part was completely unprecedented nor was its significance lost upon the department.

In view of the minister's undertaking earlier in the year, a minute to O'Broin on 26 July pointed out that the demand for holidays with pay for agricultural labourers had 'become too strong to resist any further'.<sup>139</sup> In fact, the introduction of the relevant legislation was now considered such a foregone conclusion that suggestions for appropriate legislative forms were dwelt upon.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, in a further minute the assistant secretary had reluctantly acknowledged that circumstances had changed:<sup>141</sup>

The abundant agricultural labour was now rather scarce; farmers as a whole were more prosperous than they had been before the war; and holidays with pay, plus a weekly half holiday, had been granted to agricultural workers in Northern Ireland.<sup>142</sup>

Developments in comparable fields of employment and in other occupations were beginning to force a revision of mentality:

Increases of wages in industrial employment, accompanied by holidays with pay, tend to add to the unrest amongst agricultural workers and to confirm the vague idea which seems to be growing that conditions in agriculture should be related to those which obtain in industry. It may be assumed that agricultural workers will be able after the end of this year to travel freely to England and to take up employment there and for that reason it may be desirable to make conditions more attractive for them here. This fact may have been in the minds of the employer representatives on the area committees and on the Board when passing their resolutions.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Departmental minute to the assistant secretary, 26 Jul. 1946 (AGI/G751/44).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Assistant secretary to McCarthy, 23 Jul. 1946.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

However, not all officials were willing to acquiesce so easily. Not only was O'Broin surprised at the unanimity of the Board's recommendation, but he was unconvinced of the authenticity of the resolution:

There may be some background to these resolutions which would be of assistance to us in considering this matter further and I think it might be well if a semi-official letter were sent to the chairman of the Board asking him for his personal views on the circumstances which gave rise to these resolutions and for his opinion as to the strength of the workers' demand behind them.<sup>144</sup>

This was not the first time that the department communicated with the Board's chairman in this regard. Area committee two, which represented counties Galway, Longford, Mayo, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath, had in fact passed a resolution recommending that annual holidays be given to agricultural labourers in October 1945.<sup>145</sup>

While the usual objections to this proposal had been reiterated in the department at the time, it was also submitted in a minute to Barry:

Moreover the fact that the question of paid annual holidays for farm workers has been raised only twice in recent years, i.e. on the occasion of the parliamentary question in October 1943 and on the present resolution, appears to argue an absence of any general demand for such holidays. On this point I spoke to Mr O'Leary, Chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board, who was of the opinion that the resolution need not be taken very seriously. He considered that, while there was a kind of vague aspiration among agricultural workers towards parity in the matter of holidays with industrial workers, there was nothing in the nature of a widespread demand.<sup>146</sup>

This interaction between the department and the chairman was not insignificant since it seems that the department was guided by the views of the chairman on the extent of the support for holidays underlining the recommendations from the area committees. With the chairman undermining area committee two's

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<sup>144</sup> Assistant secretary to McCarthy, 23 Jul. 1946 (AGI/G751/44).

<sup>145</sup> Secretary, AWB to Agriculture, 8 Dec. 1945.

<sup>146</sup> Minute to Barry, 14 Dec. 1945.

recommendation in 1945, it was hardly a coincidence that the department also decided against acting upon it.<sup>147</sup> Although there is no evidence to indicate the nature of the chairman's views on the Board's unanimous recommendation in 1946, it was telling that the department should have gone so far as to advise the minister to disregard the recommendation:

As a provision for holidays with pay for agricultural workers would apply to about 85,000 persons out of the total number of nearly 500,000 engaged in agriculture it would be invidious to give legal effect to the proposal which would be bound to create discontent amongst members of the farmer's own family...I recommend your approval of informing the Agricultural Wages Board that it is not proposed to introduce legislation dealing with the matter at present.<sup>148</sup>

Evidently the social ramifications of this proposal were still of primary concern. But what is particularly noticeable here is that it was now being suggested that holiday provisions could only apply to 85,000 permanent workers. This was the extension of a minute previously submitted to O'Broin which claimed:

It seems to me that it would be almost impossible to cater for casual agricultural workers unless it were to be provided that every such worker would be entitled to, say, one day with pay for not less than a specified number of continuous days' work - say, 25-30- and presumably, therefore, the concession would apply only to the 85,000 or so paid and permanent agricultural workers of 18 years and upwards. To single out this small minority of those engaged in agricultural work...will seem very invidious indeed. It will be of course meant that members of farmers families who are now very poorly remunerated will become more and more discontented and, of course, will seek just as other agricultural workers, better pay and better conditions either in industrial work in this country or in Great Britain than they can possibly get on their parents farms.<sup>149</sup>

To argue that it would have been difficult to cater for casual workers had been dubious from the outset given that the machinery operating in England and Northern Ireland had

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<sup>147</sup> Agriculture to secretary, AWB, Jan. 1946 (AGI/G751/44).

<sup>148</sup> Minute to the minister, 5 Oct. 1946.

<sup>149</sup> Minute to the secretary, 30 Jul. 1946.

encountered no such problems with their legislation. It had been rendered even more defunct by the facile manner in which the WUI and AAI had extended their agreements to casual workers in Dublin. But so keen was this official to emphasise the minority position of the agricultural labourer that the other 40 per cent employed temporarily as hired workers were completely omitted from the full picture. In fact the extent to which this consideration was paramount to the department's objections was revealed in its advancement to the minister as a reason for recommending against taking action on the representations of the Board and area committees.

That such a recommendation should have been made in spite of the undertaking given in the Dáil was bad enough. But that the minister should have been advised to flout the recommendations of the AWB in whom he had publicly vested responsibility for initiating the process of introducing legislation in this regard was very serious indeed. Even more unsettling was that the department completely disregarded the representations of a statutory body for its own biased agenda. As it was, failure to act swiftly on the Board's recommendation had led to further strike action over this very issue in North Kildare that August.

Since it was one of the first areas outside Dublin to demand the holiday concessions recently granted in this county, it was hardly surprising that the North Kildare strike quickly assumed national significance.<sup>150</sup> More than the Dublin disputes, this strike was notable for crystallising how important the holiday issue, most especially the weekly half holiday, was to agricultural labourers. It also revealed how deeply opposed some

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<sup>150</sup> Bradley, 'Speeding the plough', p. 46.

members of the farming community were to the principle at stake. With employing farmers, most of whom were members of the County Kildare Farmers Association, regarding the demand for holidays in purely remunerative terms, workers were faced with their staunch opposition from the outset.<sup>151</sup> As far as the employing farmers were concerned, the principle being sought was leave to do less work for more pay. Consequently, notwithstanding several conferences with the Department of Industry and Commerce and even with the minister for Agriculture, in the period from 17 to 23 August, labourers were still on strike with over forty farms affected. When a further informal meeting was held between the minister for Agriculture and the worker representatives on 29 August, a departmental report observed:

It was clear during the course of the discussion that the worker representatives were adamant on the question of the weekly half holiday as they regarded the principle involved as a vital one. On the question of annual leave, they would however be prepared to meet the convenience of employers. The half holiday need not be fixed for any particular day of the week and here again the workers representatives expressed the view that accommodation could be readily reached so as to suit the convenience of employers. They were prepared to modify their demands in respect of annual holidays and to drop the question altogether of an increase in wages.<sup>152</sup>

This development was very significant. It revealed that workers desired the weekly half holiday far more than the concession of twelve days' leave with pay during the year. Despite the accommodating attitude of the worker representatives as outlined above, and indications that they wished to open negotiations again, the farmer representatives would no longer discuss the issues at stake resulting in a serious communications breakdown.

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<sup>151</sup> Conference between the KFA and WUI at the Department of Industry and Commerce, 21 Aug. 1946 (AGI/G1008/1946).

<sup>152</sup> Department of Agriculture meeting with deputations from the FRW and the KFA, undated.

Meanwhile the situation on the ground level had deteriorated considerably with reports that the strikers had embarked upon acts of sabotage and intimidation.<sup>153</sup> This along with the fact that employers were being assisted by flying columns of farmers from outside areas had unsettling echoes of times past. By the beginning of September the dispute had extended to the Dublin cattle market when drovers boycotted farmers with cattle from the strike area and farmers from outside areas who assisted them.<sup>154</sup> However, the workers' cause was dealt a staggering blow by the fifth of September, when following a month of heavy rainfall the country's harvest was in danger of being lost.<sup>155</sup> With both the minister for Agriculture and the Taoiseach calling for volunteers in all areas to help save the harvest, the strikers in North Kildare were left with little option other than to propose a ten day truce to help save the harvest.<sup>156</sup> However it was to no avail. Since farmers now had the assistance of both the army and of volunteer labour, they rejected the proposal.<sup>157</sup> Left with nothing with which to bargain, the FRW tried a completely different tactic to win their cause. Taking advantage of the arbitration machinery provided by the recently established Labour Court, they submitted their case for investigation and advised the 200 strikers to return to work, pending the Court's decision.<sup>158</sup>

This was an interesting development given that agricultural labourers had almost been completely excluded from the ambit of the Court. When the Industrial Relations Bill, which provided for the Court's establishment, was introduced to the Dáil in June 1946,

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<sup>153</sup> Department of Justice to Agriculture, 27 Aug. 1946 (AGI/G1008/1946).

<sup>154</sup> Chief superintendant, Naas Garda Station to Agriculture, 3 Sep. 1946.

<sup>155</sup> Bradley, 'Speeding the Plough', pp 46-8.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

no provision whatsoever had been made to allow the Court to adjudicate on wage claims involving agricultural labourers or even offer conciliation services in cases of dispute. This had been in keeping with the assumption that an industrial tribunal of this sort would have been unwelcome and ill equipped to adjudicate on matters of contention in agriculture.<sup>159</sup> However, unanticipated by government, widespread opposition emerged over their exclusion and even from such rural deputies as Patrick Cogan, who contended that there was as grave a danger of a serious dispute in agriculture as there was in any other industry.<sup>160</sup> For a farming deputy such as Cogan to demand the extension of such industrial machinery to agriculture reflected the impact of the Dublin strike a few months previously and the threat of further strikes in Kildare that August. By the committee stage the minister for Industry and Commerce had decided to amend Part VI to include agricultural labourers, further corroborating the unsettled conditions of the industry.<sup>161</sup>

In fact, it was deeply ironic that one of the first cases to be submitted to the Court for investigation actually arose out of the long term refusal of government to concede the entitlement of agricultural labourers to statutory holidays with pay. This was especially so when account is taken of Lemass' claims on introducing the Industrial Relations Bill:

At this stage in history it should not be beyond the wit of man to devise some means of regulating the conditions of employment of workers without constant recourse to strikes and lockouts, which not merely cause widespread hardships to the workers concerned in them but can also be a serious impediment to national progress.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 101), 25 Jun. 1946, col. 2378.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 2311.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 102), 9 Jul. 1946, cols. 412-3.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 101), 25 Jun. 1946, col. 2293.

The Department of Agriculture was far from enthused that the holidays question at the heart of the North Kildare dispute was raised before the Labour Court and sent an observer to follow its proceedings closely.

Meeting on 14 November 1946, the sitting of the Labour Court was notable firstly for the manner in which the FRW representatives indicated that their primary concern with having their entitlement to a weekly half holiday recognised.<sup>163</sup> This was in keeping with claims made during the strike that the concession of the weekly half holiday was even dearer to the demands of the workers than paid annual holidays or increased wages. Even more notable was the extent to which employers refused to budge from the position adopted during the strike. The proceedings had been marked by a conspicuous absence of any formal representation from the KFA. When the chairman of the KFA did arrive, not only did he refuse to speak for the Association, but he refused to co-operate unless the Court considered the question of holidays and wages simultaneously.<sup>164</sup>

Although the Court adjourned to consider this contention, it eventually decided that it was dealing only with the question of holidays. Moreover, while indicating that it was anxious to have the assistance of employers in considering the matter, it clearly conveyed that it would proceed, if necessary, without it. However, when a request was made for information as to the actual position in Co. Dublin and the practical results of granting holidays there, it encountered more opposition. The chairman of the AAI declined to co-operate unless summoned as a witness. He claimed that the matter was between the FRW and the farmers of North Kildare. His reluctance to give evidence reflected the sensitivity

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<sup>163</sup> Barry to McCarthy, 14 Nov. 1946 (AGI/G1008/46).



of the issue, inferring an apprehension that any comments confirming its success in Dublin would have served only to encourage the spread of such demands to other counties. This was plausible given that the FRW had already indicated that they hoped to enforce the half holiday on the strength of a positive recommendation from the Court. Detracting from this, however, was the fact that the Court was faced with a situation where the employing farmers present refused to oblige unless compelled to do so. That it proceeded to investigate the dispute despite such opposition nonetheless seemed to augur well for the demands of the agricultural labourers.

The Court's decision in this regard unsettled the minister for Agriculture and his officials.<sup>165</sup> The newness of the Court meant that the department was not completely at ease with its proceedings.<sup>166</sup> The fact that it could not make a binding recommendation in this instance seems to have been greeted with relief.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless concern was still expressed in Agriculture over the fact that it was investigating the issues at the core of the strike:

It is unfortunate that this should be the Court's first big case as it will be anxious to create prestige for itself and may go deeply into the whole question of pay and holidays.<sup>168</sup>

No doubt much apprehension prevailed that the Court's investigation could have been the undoing of the department's policy on this thorny issue. As Lemass had noted during the debate on this section of the Industrial Relations Bill:

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<sup>164</sup> Barry to McCarthy, 14 Nov. 1946 (AGI/G1008/46).

<sup>165</sup> Minute to the assistant secretary, 22 Nov. 1946.

<sup>166</sup> Brazil to Barry, 19 Nov. 1946.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Hughes to McCarthy, 20 Nov. 1946.

The award of the Court under that section will not be binding on anybody. However, as a result of the hearing of the dispute by the court, ample publicity will be given to the merits of the claims of the parties concerned in the dispute and there will be an authoritative view on those merits.<sup>169</sup>

So, even though the Court's recommendations were not binding, it was obvious that the department did not want an authoritative view other than their own on the merits of the claims of these workers. The report of the Court's findings, which were published in July 1947, suggested that the minister and his department had worried needlessly in this regard.

The Court effectively made no recommendation in the labourer's favour. Its views from the outset reflected those of government. While agreeing in principle that agricultural labourers were as entitled to a certain amount of free time during the week and to annual holidays as industrial workers, it was firmly of the opinion that:

A farm cannot be shut down as a factory or shop can be shut down; the organisation of the work must be adapted to the vagaries of the weather, animals and poultry have to be fed and tended and cows to be milked. While the volume of work will vary from season to season, some work must be done on every day in the year. The arrangement of hours of work must therefore be flexible and it must provide for continuity.<sup>170</sup>

In this regard it claimed to have 'encountered very great difficulty' in deciding on how to apply the principles in practice to agriculture.<sup>171</sup> It emerged that the lack of co-operation extended to the Court by the farming employers had in fact succeeded in hampering its investigation. While recognising the case made by the FRW that an agreement

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<sup>169</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 107), 31 Jul. 1946, col. 1034.

<sup>170</sup> Labour Court recommendations on a dispute between the FRW and the North Kildare farmers, 10 Jul. 1947 (S 14994A).

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

encompassing holidays was in operation in Co. Dublin, the Court admitted that employers had not given any 'positive assistance' which might have enabled it to examine the practicability of various methods of organising hours of work so as to provide for a weekly half holiday and an annual holiday. Consequently it submitted that:

The Court does not feel that it should make a recommendation of general application which would simply lay down a principle in general terms without giving clear indications of the way in which the principle is to be applied in particular cases, as it is not in a position to give such indications.<sup>172</sup>

Since it was not in a position to express any opinion on similar situations elsewhere, it was not prepared to make a recommendation which even though expressly limited to the North Kildare area, might have been interpreted as applying to other areas, especially if it were expressed in general terms.

As unhelpful as these conclusions were for the workers' demands, even worse was the Court's observation regarding the 'possible effects of holiday arrangements upon the wages of agricultural workers':

As the Board's Orders are now framed, if the working week were shortened by agreement, the effect would be that the legal minimum rate of wages would be reduced. This consideration suggests that the question of a weekly half holiday and an annual holiday for agricultural workers would be best considered in conjunction with the fixing of the legal minimum rates of wages, and this is a matter not for the Court, which is restricted to the investigation of disputes, but for the Agricultural Wages Board.<sup>173</sup>

Such a conclusion validated the argument so persistently made by the farmers in North Kildare, that the question of holidays was bound up with the question of wages and was

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<sup>172</sup> Labour Court recommendations on a dispute between the FRW and the North Kildare farmers, 10 Jul. 1947 (S 14994A).

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

therefore really a matter for the Board. Yet this conclusion was redundant in itself because the Board was prohibited from prescribing for conditions of employment. The only way it could have regulated such conditions would have been through a legislative amendment of its powers. Moreover, this observation could have had far reaching implications for the attempts of the FRW to secure a shorter working week through negotiation. For it effectively implied that notwithstanding any agreements made to introduce a weekly half holiday, employers would have been legally free to reduce the worker's wage had he availed of such leave. Overall the Court concluded that while it supported 'the principle of a week's holiday and a weekly half holiday' it could not 'recommend that farmers should be bound to give these holidays in all circumstances'.<sup>174</sup> Such a proclamation without specifying certain instances served only to corroborate the stance taken by the government on this matter. In effect, the Court's recommendations reflected and reinforced the sentiments of Agriculture in regard to the general imposition of holidays with pay on the farm.

As was to be expected the FRW was disappointed with the Labour Court's report. Given that it had been asked to make a recommendation only and not a binding decision, it viewed as complete 'effrontery' its refusal not only not to make a recommendation but its assertion instead that the working week could not be reduced without a reduction in wages.<sup>175</sup> However, the findings of the Labour Court by no means marked an end to the demand for this concession. Workers in Cork had anxiously awaited the outcome of the

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<sup>174</sup> Labour Court recommendations on a dispute between the FRW and the North Kildare farmers, 10 Jul. 1947 (S 14994A).

<sup>175</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, p. 14.

Court's decision since April 1947 when a strike on the demand for a weekly half holiday and annual holidays with pay had been deferred pending the Court's report.<sup>176</sup> By this time the Cork branch of the FRW accounted for the largest number of agricultural labourers after Dublin and Kildare, approaching some 1,900 persons.<sup>177</sup> Totally appalled with the Court's conclusions, the FRW stepped up its agitation with the result that a strike was threatened on the issue in September.<sup>178</sup> The strike however was averted when some farmers in Co. Cork subsequently granted the half day.<sup>179</sup>

Meanwhile, on 9 October 1947 William Norton once again queried in the Dáil whether the minister intended to introduce proposals for legislation to provide holidays with pay for agricultural labourers.<sup>180</sup> Patrick Smith, Dr James Ryan's recent successor as minister for Agriculture, responded unequivocally that it was not his intention to introduce any such proposals.<sup>181</sup> A note for the minister's information indicated that the objections cited against the implementation of this proposal since the question was formally raised in 1940 were still being reiterated.<sup>182</sup> Despite the threat of another strike in Cork the previous month and the various representations made within the last eighteen months, it was declared:

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<sup>176</sup> Bradley, 'Speeding the plough', p. 51.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51

<sup>179</sup> Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers*, p. 15; Bradley, 'Speeding the plough' p. 50.

<sup>180</sup> Parliamentary question, William Norton, to the minister for Agriculture, 9 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1145/47).

<sup>181</sup> A native of Cavan, Patrick Smith was a farmer and founding member of Fianna Fáil who had served as chairman of Cavan County Council from 1936 until 1941. From 1943-7 he was parliamentary secretary to the minister for Finance, with responsibility for the Office of Public Works. He was appointed minister for Agriculture from 1947-8 and from 1957-64. He had an uneasy relationship with Lemass, and disagreed with his style of consultation government, especially in relation to the national wage agreements and the lobbying of the NFA to be consulted by government on agricultural policy. He resigned from the cabinet on 7 October 1964.

<sup>182</sup> Note for the minister's information, 9 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1145/47).

Even when these representations are taken into account it may be said that there has been no considerable body of public opinion supporting requests for holidays with pay for agricultural workers. Whether this situation will continue will depend to a great extent on the progress of the organisation of the workers themselves.<sup>183</sup>

That such a view could still be entertained after several strikes, considerable labour unrest and an investigation by the Labour Court spoke volumes. It would seem that the Labour Court's report in July had reaffirmed the department's trenchant opposition to extending holiday legislation to agriculture. That the department was still determined to avoid introducing legislation was obvious when it was suggested:

It may be best to leave the issue to be settled by negotiation between workers and employers. Such negotiations, if undertaken in a co-operative spirit, should result in a series of settlements adopted to the circumstances peculiar to each area.<sup>184</sup>

That such a suggestion could have been based on nothing other than wishful thinking became apparent a few weeks later when another dispute erupted, this time in South Kildare. The strike in this area was a hangover from the strike in the north of the county the previous year.<sup>185</sup> The issue of holidays was as pivotal to this strike as it had been in North Kildare, except that on this occasion the entire strike was from the outset devoted to the demand for a weekly half holiday.<sup>186</sup>

Certain workers on six large farms in the Kilkea area decided to take a half day weekly at their own expense, and took off three consecutive Saturday afternoons from 11 to 25 September. However, it seems that as soon as the harvest was completed, employers

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<sup>183</sup> Note for the minister's information, 9 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1145/47).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Departmental memorandum on the South Kildare strike, 22 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1257/47); See M. O'Dubhshlaine, 'The lockout: farm labour dispute in Kilkea, Co. Kildare 1947' (M.A. Local History, N.U.I., Maynooth, 1994) for extensive analysis of this strike.

<sup>186</sup> *The Carlow Nationalist*, 18 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1257/47).

proceeded to give a week's notice following the workers' refusal to desist from this practice, and employment ceased on 11 October, with about 200 workers involved.<sup>187</sup> The stance adopted by the farmers concerned was similar to that adopted by the KFA in 1946. They viewed the demand purely in remunerative terms, arguing that since most labourers would probably be required to work on such half days, the concession of a compulsory paid half holiday each week effectively meant that workers would be paid considerably more for those four hours. As such they argued it was a wages issue and consequently a matter for the AWB to resolve and not the farmers concerned.<sup>188</sup> The farmers were ever mindful of the larger ramifications of any concessions they might make. They were reluctant to be used as a test case to set headlines.<sup>189</sup> It was not insignificant therefore that Dunne, in a letter to the secretary of the department on 27 November, should claim:

the farmers have informed us that they believe that the half day is something which must come. But they have asked us to adopt the line of seeking its introduction by legislation.<sup>190</sup>

This suggested the evolution of a stage where certain farmers were willing to concede the weekly half holiday provided all farmers were obliged to do so. A departmental minute on 1 December confirmed Dunne's claim that while possibly the farmers concerned would eventually grant the half holiday, they favoured prior statutory provision.<sup>191</sup> Yet, on grounds that any statement on the holiday question would be taken amiss by either

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<sup>187</sup> Memorandum on the South Kildare strike, 22 Oct. 1947 (AGI/G1257/47).

<sup>188</sup> *The Irish Press*, 6 Nov. 1947; *The Irish Times*, 8 Nov. 1947.

<sup>189</sup> *The Carlow Nationalist*, 8 Nov. 1947.

<sup>190</sup> Sean Dunne, FRW to secretary, Agriculture, 27 Nov. 1947 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>191</sup> O'Malley to O'Connor, 1 Dec. 1947.

party involved in the South Kildare dispute, Dunne was informed that the minister had no intention of introducing proposals for legislation in this area.<sup>192</sup> Clearly the department was not going to risk invoking the wrath of farming employers around the country on this emotive issue. Consequently after being locked out of their employment for a period of nine weeks, the dispute in South Kildare eventually ended on the condition that the case be referred to the Labour Court in the new year.<sup>193</sup> Even though the men returned to work without the weekly half holiday, most farmers had granted it within a few weeks of resumption, with reports of it also being extended to many labourers in Meath, Cork, Wicklow and Wexford over the subsequent months.<sup>194</sup> Clear signs of an adjustment in mentality at ground level. It was April 1948 before this question was raised again in the Dáil.

Fianna Fáil had been removed from power following their defeat in the general election of February 1948. For over a decade this administration had successfully avoided introducing legislation that would have obliged farmers to give their workers holidays with pay. It was now a question of how the new coalition government would respond to the demand for this concession. It was obvious by April that Sean Dunne, who had been first elected as a Labour TD for Dublin County in the October by-elections of 1947, was going to use his new political position to try to expedite matters in this regard. On 15 April he queried whether James Dillon, the new minister for Agriculture, would

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<sup>192</sup> Minute to McCarthy, undated ; Walsh, Agriculture to Sean Dunne, FRW, 8 Dec. 1947 (AGI/G612/48).

<sup>193</sup> O'Dubhshlaine, 'Farm labour dispute in Kilkea', p.37.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40; Murphy, *The Federation of Rural Workers* p. 15.



introduce holiday legislation for this class.<sup>195</sup> That the first change of government in sixteen years, and the first coalition government in independent Ireland, would make slight difference to the existing unenlightened policy on agricultural labour became very evident from the reply of the minister. Instead of simply conceding statutory annual holidays to the agricultural labourer based on the principle of social justice and the events of previous years, Dillon indicated that he was in the process of consulting with the county committees of agriculture, the stronghold of the farming community.<sup>196</sup>

Reporting between the months of July and August, most committees concurred with the principle that the agricultural labourer was as entitled to six days annual leave with pay as other workers.<sup>197</sup> However, the general consensus was that the granting of those holidays should not have been statutorily determined by the legislature but left as a matter for the farmer and his worker to arrange. In so far as the weekly half holiday was concerned, the majority were completely averse to the idea, considering it to be completely impracticable. The extent to which Dillon subscribed to these viewpoints soon became apparent. Speaking at a meeting of the South Tipperary Agriculture Committee in Clonmel in October 1948, the minister announced that he was going to ask for the authority of government to introduce a bill making it incumbent on every farmer to give a week's annual leave.<sup>198</sup> But the minister declared that he was not going to agree

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<sup>195</sup> Parliamentary question, Sean Dunne TD to the minister for Agriculture, 15 Apr. 1948 (AGI/G909/49); James Dillon was a TD for Co Monaghan and the proprietor of a retail and wholesale business. An advocate of free trade and exports, he served as minister for Agriculture in two coalition governments from 1948-51 and 1954-7. He was an independent TD when appointed minister for Agriculture in 1948 having resigned from Fine Gael in 1942 over the party's support for war-time neutrality. He rejoined Fine Gael in 1953 and in 1959 became leader of the party.

<sup>196</sup> Parliamentary question, Sean Dunne TD to the minister for Agriculture, 15 Apr. 1948 (AGI/G909/49).

<sup>197</sup> AGI/G612/1948.

<sup>198</sup> *The Rural Worker* vol. 1, no. 6, (Nov. 1948) (CMP).

to make it compulsory to provide a weekly half holiday because he did not believe that the people of the country considered it equitable or right to do so. That the minister was speaking of the farming community in this connection there was no doubt. The labourers and their spokesmen had made it abundantly clear over the years that the weekly half holiday was far more important to them than annual holidays.<sup>199</sup>

But then the Agricultural Wages Board complicated matters for the minister. In a completely unpredicted move the Board passed an order at its meeting on 4 November 1948 which reduced the standard working week at ordinary time rates from 54 to 50 hours.<sup>200</sup> The significance of the reduction lay in the fact that workers would automatically work four hours less each week for the same pay. And should they have been required to work additional hours they were entitled to special rates for any time over 50 hours. This effectively constituted the weekly half holiday so desperately sought through legislation. The drawback was that the Board removed the guaranteed weekly wage and replaced it with an hourly rate. This had the effect of reducing many permanent workers to temporary or casual status and allowed employers to cut workers for lost time due to bad weather, illness etc if they so wished. Nonetheless the award was greeted exuberantly by the FRW, who felt that it was Dillon's attempt to unofficially appease labour discontent over his refusal to introduce a statutory half holiday. As reported in the mouthpiece of the FRW, the *Rural Worker*:

This will place a strong weapon in the hands of the union in securing the half day. As the decision had to be sanctioned by the minister, the 50 hour week may be

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<sup>199</sup> *The Rural Worker* vol. 1, no. 6, (Nov. 1948) (CMP).

<sup>200</sup> *Report of the proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board 1948* (S 13503B).

taken as a concession by Mr. Dillon in the face of the storm of protest against his statement not to grant the half holiday by legislation.<sup>201</sup>

However, this exuberance was soon replaced by disbelief when within ten days of the Board's order becoming effective on 3 January 1949 another order had been passed by the Board which reintroduced the 54 hour week with a guaranteed weekly wage.<sup>202</sup> Labourers could now work on an hourly basis for fifty hours a week but with no guarantee they would get a full week's work or pay for any time lost due to bad weather, lack of daylight, customary absences from work such as church holidays etc., or they could work a 54 hour week with a guaranteed wage and no half day. Needless to say the Board's action in this regard was viewed with much suspicion by labour spokesmen. The FRW believed that pressure must have been brought to bear upon its members by the minister for Agriculture who was known to have actively advocated the re-introduction of the 54 hour week especially on the Department's farms.<sup>203</sup> The fact that FRW members Murphy and Moynihan had been unofficially appointed to the Board for the first time in January 1949 as worker representatives, and as such were probably in attendance at the meeting when the new alternative order was agreed, suggests that there may have been some substance to this allegation.

Given the minister's stance on the weekly half holiday, it was hardly surprising that the government should have confined itself to sponsoring a measure that would guarantee a week's holidays with pay, a concession that least aroused the opposition of the farming

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<sup>201</sup> *The Rural Worker*, vol. 1, no. 7 (Dec. 1948) (CMP).

<sup>202</sup> *Report of the AWB 1949* (S 13503B);

<sup>203</sup> *The Rural Worker*, (Feb. 1949); Minister for Agriculture to general secretary, FRW regarding the employment of state paid agricultural labourers at Johnstown Castle, 11 Jun. 1951 (W 459/1 Cont. 4).

community.<sup>204</sup> Nor was it surprising that the provisions of the Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Act 1950 would diverge considerably from the existing code of legislation governing the provision of holidays for non-agricultural workers. For instance, while it provided that this class were entitled to six days holidays with pay each year, a worker was not allowed take them on a consecutive basis unless he was entitled to three or more holidays.<sup>205</sup> Otherwise he had to take them on an individual or staggered basis. Such a provision was in sharp contrast to that of the Holidays act which required that workers under its code take these holidays in aggregate.<sup>206</sup> On the other hand this provision replicated that which had been extended to agricultural workers in the UK under the Holidays with Pay Act, 1938.<sup>207</sup> However, this stipulation had ceased to have effect under amending legislation introduced by the British government in 1947 and 1948 when the agricultural wage fixing body was given the same freedom and powers as its non agricultural counterparts (wages councils) to regulate holidays and holiday remuneration.<sup>208</sup> In fact, in 1951 the agricultural worker in England and Wales had their holiday entitlements increased from one to two weeks.<sup>209</sup> During the passage of the Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Bill 1949 through the Dáil in February 1950, Dillon claimed that the proposed scheme was introduced to meet the needs of the farmer who employed only one worker.<sup>210</sup> The provision of an option which allowed the labourer to

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<sup>204</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Act 1950*, 1950/21[R.I.](26 Jul. 1950).

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, section 3(2).

<sup>206</sup> *Holidays (Employees) Act 1939*, 1939/1[Éire](17 Feb. 1939), section 10(1).

<sup>207</sup> *Holidays with Pay Act 1938* (1&2 Geo. VI, c.70 [U.K.]) 29 Jul. 1938, section 1(2).

<sup>208</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 15 [U.K.]) 11 Mar. 1947, section 1(b); *Agricultural Wages Act 1948* (11 & 12 Geo VI, c.47 [U.K.]) 13 Jul. 1948, section 3; *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 430), 25 Nov. 1946, col. 1271.

<sup>209</sup> *Agricultural wages: history sheet*, p.4, Jun. 1998 (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, national statistics section).

<sup>210</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 119), 28 Feb. 1950, col. 848.

remain at work and receive holiday remuneration in lieu of the prescribed holiday, also diverged from the 1939 act and eventually Convention No. 101 (1952) of the ILO.<sup>211</sup>

Both these measures insisted that a worker had to take the prescribed annual holiday.<sup>212</sup>

Sean Dunne and other members of the Labour Party were dissatisfied with this provision.

Dunne was of the opinion:

The idea of pay in lieu being conditional on the worker agreeing is based upon an unrealistic attitude. The results of the operation of the 50-hour week and the 54-hour week are proof of that....Agricultural workers are in a subject position. It is blinding one's eyes to facts to suggest that an agricultural worker can discuss either his wages or his conditions, or both, with his employer on equal terms.<sup>213</sup>

He was also annoyed that no holiday period had been specified within the employment year. Although such specification was also absent from the 1939 act, Dunne felt that without stipulating a certain period this provision would have ensured the agricultural labourer would have been unable to take holidays during the summer period:

The agricultural worker should have his holidays at the same time as other sections of the community. He has as much right to have his holidays in good weather and under pleasant conditions as has the industrial worker. If no definite period is laid down the bulk of the farm labourers will be told to take their holidays at periods of the year when, in fact, no holidays can be taken.<sup>214</sup>

The greatest divergence from the prevailing legislation for other workers, however, was in relation to the lack of provision for public or church holidays. In addition to six days annual leave, the non-agricultural worker also benefited from six public holidays with pay or church holidays in lieu, with provision for a substitute day should any of those

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<sup>211</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Act 1950*, section 3(7); ILO, *C101, Holidays with Pay in Agriculture Convention, 1952*; *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on agricultural wages and holiday legislation*, 1970, par. 6.20(b).

<sup>212</sup> *Holidays (Employees) Act 1939*, section 6.

<sup>213</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 119), 28 Feb. 1950, col. 857.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, cols 856-7.

days have fallen on a Sunday.<sup>215</sup> No such guarantees were extended to the agricultural labourer. Instead, it was provided that the farmer could substitute six days ordinarily granted to the worker by custom for the six days he was now obliged to extend to the worker by statute. A distinction was made in the free days that could be offset in this regard. Although the farmer could substitute days traditionally allowed to the labourer to attend local race meetings, agricultural shows and other prominent events, he could not offset Sundays, church or public holidays.<sup>216</sup> The minister suggested that the legislature was doing the agricultural labourer a favour by prohibiting the substitution of church holidays especially, because they were so numerous.<sup>217</sup> His argument seems to have been that since most agricultural labourers received many of these days by custom, by allowing employers to substitute other free days which might not have been so prevalent, the state was actually providing for additional days paid leave for this class. In effect he was implying that farmers would continue to grant church holidays in addition to the six statutory holidays even though they were not required to do so.

This was a tenuous claim given that it had been argued on a number of occasions in the department that the provision of statutory holidays would cause farmers to cease providing customary holidays.<sup>218</sup> It is even more so when it is considered that the state felt it necessary to invoke legislation in the non-agricultural sphere to ensure workers received church or public holidays.

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<sup>215</sup> *Holidays (Employees) Act 1939*, section 9.

<sup>216</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Act 1950*, section 3(4).

<sup>217</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol.119), 28 Feb. 1950, cols 849-50.

<sup>218</sup> Foley to Section 18, Agriculture, 14 Apr. 1938 (AGI/G202/44); Department of Agriculture memorandum on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Bill 1946, 13 Mar. 1946 (AGI/G612/48).

Even workers who were not entitled to take public holidays as days of leave had alternative provisions made available to them. For instance, domestic workers were not allowed holidays with pay on public holidays. Instead their holidays were divided into two sets of semi annual leave, seven days consecutive leave for each half of the year.<sup>219</sup> So, while the minister had conceded the statutory entitlement of the agricultural labourer to six days holidays annually with pay, he still withheld their statutory entitlement to church or public holidays, no doubt because to do so would have placed the agricultural labourer on a par with other workers. Yet it is interesting to note that no real opposition was expressed over this aspect of the matter during the debate. Instead labour spokesmen were far more concerned with establishing the minister's position on a weekly half holiday for this class. However, Dillon made it perfectly clear that he was no more disposed to facilitating such a measure now than he had been eighteen months previously.<sup>220</sup> It became equally evident that worker spokesmen were no longer prepared to defer legislative action on this matter. Resorting to parliamentary means once again, the Labour Party introduced their second private members bill on this issue in November 1950.

The purpose of the Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holidays) Bill 1950 was to enshrine in legislation the agricultural labourers' entitlement to a weekly half holiday.<sup>221</sup> Introduced by Sean Dunne TD, general secretary of the FRW, and supported by deputies James Hickey (Cork), Martin O'Sullivan (Dublin) and Daniel Desmond (Cork), it was

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<sup>219</sup> *Holidays (Employees) Act 1939*, section 5(1).

<sup>220</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 119), 7 Mar. 1950, cols 1325-6.

<sup>221</sup> S 14994A.

put forward 'primarily on the plea of justice for men who are at present not being justly treated'.<sup>222</sup> Dunne reiterated on several occasions the basis of this allegation:

The principle of rest from labour, the idea that the worker should not be kept eternally with his back bent, or with his nose to the grindstone, is a principle, an idea, which has been accepted in most parts of this country and, generally, all over the world. Here we have a section of the Irish nation, the largest group of workers following one occupation and employed for wages, the farm labourers, and they have not yet been given, by law, the right to a weekly half holiday.<sup>223</sup>

However it was clear that neither the rural deputies or the minister perceived the demand for the concession in this light. No sooner had Dunne introduced the bill than Patrick Cogan TD moved an amendment that the Dáil decline to give the measure a second reading.<sup>224</sup> Missing the point completely, Cogan made it clear that he could not see why agricultural labourers were so adamant about holiday provisions given the paucity of their wages would scarcely allow them to enjoy them:

The agricultural worker's income is admittedly low, but this Bill will not raise his income. It may give him a little more leisure with which to extend...the small income he enjoys at present. It will add nothing to his existing income and I think that, fundamentally, we should be aiming at doing something to raise the agricultural worker's income rather than tackling this question of reducing the working hours.<sup>225</sup>

Labour deputies such as R.J. Connolly, a representative for Louth, went to great pains to emphasise that the purpose of the bill was not:

directly to benefit the farm labourers or to mulct the farmers by one red halfpenny....The intention of the Bill is to improve the amenities of the farm

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<sup>222</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 123), 15 Nov. 1950, col. 840; Lobbying letter from Sean Dunne, general secretary of the FRW, to members, 12 Jul. 1950 (CMP).

<sup>223</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 123), 15 Nov. 1950, col.489.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 841.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 842.



labourers and to give them more leisure. The intention of the Bill is to give them time.<sup>226</sup>

However, like Cogan, the minister for Agriculture still refused to view the proposal as anything other than a measure to secure for workers four hours a week at overtime rates.<sup>227</sup> While he urged farmers to provide the half holiday he refused to concede that farmers should have been coerced to do so by the state. He held that there was a:

wide difference between considering a particular procedure admirable and desirable, and thinking it to be so indispensable to bare justice that the powers of the Oireachtas should be invoked to enforce it universally....I do not believe, in advising deputies to vote against this Bill on the ground that it is certainly premature to make this half-holiday in a 50-hour week obligatory by statute, that I am being antediluvian.<sup>228</sup>

But, of course, the minister was being precisely that, given that a principle which extended back to the Factory Act of 1850, rendering unlawful the employment of young persons and women in any factory after two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, had been extended to agricultural workers in legislation in England since 1924 and in Northern Ireland since 1940.<sup>229</sup> It should be noted that the weekly half holiday was never a compulsory statutory holiday in the UK. Instead a special stipulation of the various wage fixing legislation was that the wage fixing bodies be directed 'in so far as reasonably practicable to secure a weekly half holiday for agricultural workers'.<sup>230</sup> It was the Board's ability to control overtime and hours that allowed them to indirectly secure a

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<sup>226</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 123), 22 Nov. 1950, cols 1174-5.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1950, col. 1526.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, cols 1526-7.

<sup>229</sup> *Report of the committee on holidays with pay*, p. 283 [Cmd 5724] H.C. 1937-8, vol xii, p.15.

<sup>230</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924* (14 & 15 Geo. V, c. 37 [U.K.]) 29 Aug. 1924, section 2(2); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1939* (2&3 Geo VI, c. 25 [N.I.]) 6 Dec.1939, section 2(2); *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, 1948* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 47 [U.K.]) 13 Jul. 1948, section 3(4).

weekly half holiday, as with the Board which operated in Ireland from 1917-21.<sup>231</sup> The absence of this proviso from the Irish Board's governing legislation allowed the Board to interpret its powers to mean that it could only prescribe wages for hours of work it found to prevail generally. It could not create new conditions of work and enforce penalties for non cooperating employers without the sanction of the legislature. The unprecedented actions of the AWB in late 1948 had nonetheless confirmed that the practice of the weekly half holiday was sufficiently widespread to justify their introduction of a 50 hour week and overtime rates for any work in excess of that maximum.

But what was particularly notable about this debate was the fact that this matter was capable of having reverberations even within government. The government abstained from giving any indication whatsoever of its position on the bill, with Dillon speaking only on his own behalf. This was even more peculiar considering that the Labour Party had three ministers in the cabinet and indicated the divisions within the coalition government. As was to be expected Fianna Fáil exploited this development to the maximum. The only party member to make a contribution was the previous minister for Agriculture, Patrick Smith. While castigating the government for its failure to take a stance on the bill it became obvious that his party was going to use the government's lack of direction as an excuse to abstain from voting on the measure<sup>232</sup>. Before the vote on Cogan's motion was taken, Dunne, reminding deputies that 'every step ever taken to

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<sup>231</sup> 'The agricultural wages board for Ireland (constitution and proceedings) regulations, 1920' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (1919-20)*, p. 310; 'The present regulation of working hours in agriculture' in *International Labour Review*, vol. xv, no. 1 (1932), p. 91.

<sup>232</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 123), 29 Nov. 1950, cols 1527-37.

improve workers' conditions eventually had to receive the backing of law', put great moral pressure on those present to vote for the bill:

Any deputy who does not vote for it, no matter what argument he may put up in regard to government direction or the lack of a lead from the minister, will not excuse him from the fact that it is obvious he is using that as a cover to deprive the agricultural workers of a half-holiday. That will be made plain up and down the country.<sup>233</sup>

That such an appeal proved effective was apparent when the motion to give the bill a second reading was moved, 44 voted for and 21 against.<sup>234</sup> Because the motion went to a free vote, deputies were allowed vote according to their conscience and not the dictates of the party whip. Of the 44 who voted for a second reading, 14 were Fine Gael TDs; 12 Labour; 6 Clann na Poblachta; 5 National Labour; 4 Independent; and 3 Clann na Talmhan. Of the 21 who voted against, 11 were Fine Gael TDs; 5 Independent; 4 Clann na Talmhan; 1 Independent F. Interestingly, the minister for Agriculture was the only member of cabinet present to vote against a second reading. With the exception of Clann na Poblachta and the Labour Party, the party members who voted on this motion were considerably divided on the issue of a weekly half holiday for the agricultural labourer, although the greater number were in favour of supporting the principle at hand. So notwithstanding the failure of government to take a stance on the matter, the personal recommendation of the minister for Agriculture that the bill be rejected, and the decision of the Fianna Fáil party not to vote, the bill made it past the second stage of debate. Subject to review by a special committee of the Dáil, its passage through the House was now assured.

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<sup>233</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 123), 29 Nov. 1950, cols 1870-1.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1873.

However news that the bill had passed this far was not warmly received by members of the farming community, most notably the dairy sector, who would be most obviously affected with the daily need to milk cows. For instance, in January 1951 the KFA and Co. Kildare Milk Producers' Association wrote letters to each TD, farming organisation and county committee of agriculture informing them of their opposition to the bill.<sup>235</sup> They drew attention to the 'disastrous effect' the bill would have on agricultural production if it became law. A letter to an Taoiseach from Ballyclough Cooperative Creamery in Cork in late January 1951 further illustrated the extent of dairy farmer opposition to the introduction of the measure.

Considering the level of opposition from just one sector of the farming community it was hardly surprising that there was so much division in the Dáil on this issue. Nonetheless, subsequent to being reviewed by a select committee, the bill passed its final stage on 21 February 1951 and by an overwhelming 86 votes to 18.<sup>236</sup> Even the Fianna Fáil party voted on this occasion, no doubt because the bill's passage had been assured once it passed through second stage. But the saga had not yet concluded. Although the principle had been conceded in legislation, with agricultural employers required to give one half holiday or short day each week to agricultural labourers, it transpired that the act governing the provision of this measure had not been 'framed in a sufficiently clear and workable manner' to enforce the principle.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> The KFA and Co. Kildare Milk Producers Association to TDs, 5 Jan. 1951 (S 14994A); Ballyclough Co-operative Creamery Ltd., Co. Cork to an Taoiseach, 30 Jan. 1951.

<sup>236</sup> Special Committee on the Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holiday) Bill 1950 (S 14994A); *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 124), 21 Feb. 1951, cols 531-2; *Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holidays) Act 1951*, 1951/13 [R.I](3 Jul. 1951).

<sup>237</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 7 Nov. 1952, cols 1199-1200.

The chief problem was that no provision had been made for its enforcement by either the minister for Agriculture or the Agricultural Wages Board.<sup>238</sup> The sponsors of a private members' bill have, under the standing orders of the Dáil, no authority to include any section or subsection which would entail the expenditure of state money. By virtue of that regulation, the sponsors of the bill were prevented from including any clause imposing upon the Board the enforcement of the act.<sup>239</sup> Consequently, within a year of the enactment of the 1951 act, the Labour Party sought to rectify its inadequacies with an amending private members' bill in February 1952.<sup>240</sup>

This attempt was withdrawn however given the undertaking of Thomas Walsh, the new Fianna Fáil minister for Agriculture, to introduce a government measure dealing with the matter.<sup>241</sup> Introduced in November 1952, it was inevitable that the second stage of the Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holidays)(Amendment) Bill 1952 would be the occasion of much recrimination and accusation as both sides of the House tried to deflect and attribute blame. As succinctly remarked by Cogan, 'it is difficult to know whether it was incompetence, stupidity or political cleverness that was responsible for the fiasco that the previous bill was'.<sup>242</sup> Political shrewdness was the major factor. Walsh and his colleagues had a legitimate argument when they denounced the previous coalition

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<sup>238</sup> Department of Agriculture explanatory memorandum for government on the Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holidays) Bill 1952, 12 Sep. 1952 (S 14994A).

<sup>239</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 7 Nov. 1952, cols 1203-4.

<sup>240</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 129), 28 Feb. 1952, cols. 1294-6; Legislation, Houses of the Oireachtas (<http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/a-misc/leg.htm>) (13 Jun. 2007).

<sup>241</sup> Thomas Walsh was a TD for Carlow-Kilkenny and was first elected to the Dáil in 1948. He was a large farmer and was the first minister for Agriculture to have attended an agricultural college. He was a former member of Kilkenny county committee of agriculture and Kilkenny county council and a member of the Irish Beetgrowers' Association and the GAA. He died suddenly at the age of 55 in 1956.

<sup>242</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 7 Nov. 1952, col.1214.

government for failing to take responsibility for the original bill, claiming that it had been up to the then minister to introduce the money resolution necessary to enforce the provisions of the act.<sup>243</sup> Likewise Dunne and his colleagues were evidently aware that without the necessary money resolution the act was unenforceable.<sup>244</sup> They had membership of a party with three ministers in the cabinet, neither of which seem to have made any attempt to invoke the necessities required to make the act enforceable. It would seem that the importance of having the principle enshrined in legislation overshadowed the practicalities of implementation. No doubt it was hoped that once the principle was conceded by the legislature most farmers would have proceeded to grant this holiday on the assumption that it was now obligatory and that this knowledge would have enabled the FRW to enforce the provision in any case. Therefore, contrary to what the enactment of the measure implied in 1951, ultimately the victory had been Dillon's for a time at least.

Moreover, despite the accusations flung over and back in the Dáil, it was evident from the tardiness with which the Fianna Fáil administration introduced the amending measure that they continued to share the mentality of their predecessor. Despite the fact that Walsh had been minister for Agriculture since June 1951, he made no attempt to introduce an amending measure until the Labour Party took the initiative in February 1952, and it was November before the appropriate amending legislation was introduced for debate. In the interim widespread confusion had prevailed as a result of the

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<sup>243</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 12 Nov. 1952, cols 1350 and 1362.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 134) 7 Nov. 1952, cols 1203-4 and 1206.

impracticability of the 1951 act.<sup>245</sup> The extent to which the two governments had shared the same outlook in the matter of compulsion in the farmer-worker relationship became most pronounced in the terms of the amending act. The Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half-Holidays) Act 1952 barely conceded the principle of the half holiday, the onus being left to the employer and worker to decide whether they wished to provide and avail of it. For instance there was no special week day on which the half holiday was to be granted. That was to be arrived at by mutual agreement between the employer and the employee.<sup>246</sup> In the case of disagreement, the farmer was entitled to appoint the day on which it could be taken. If the farmer failed to fix a day, it was deemed by statute to be Wednesday. In addition a qualifying period was introduced which required a worker to have completed 45 hours work in the previous five week days.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore a clause was provided whereby the farmer and worker could agree that there would be no half-holiday at all and that it would be a question of payment for the four hours to which the worker was legitimately entitled under the act. In this regard if a labourer worked on a half day, he was paid at standard rate and not overtime.<sup>248</sup> During the debate on the bill, the minister openly admitted that:

This bill enables the man who wants a half holiday to get it, but that is about all it does....If we were to set out a compulsory half-holiday, I believe that we would drive agricultural workers out of the country.<sup>249</sup>

The rhetoric of former ministers was once again enunciated. Walsh justified the

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<sup>245</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 7 Nov. 1952, cols 1203, 1206; 12 Nov. 1952, col. 1365.

<sup>246</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Weekly-Half) Holidays Act 1952*, 1952/26 [R.I.](17 Dec. 1952), section 4.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, section 6.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, section 8.

<sup>249</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 12 Nov. 1952, col. 1368.

malleability of this legislation on grounds that the compulsory provision of this concession without allowing each individual farmer to consult with his worker would have destroyed the harmonious relations which existed in agriculture.<sup>250</sup> What this and previous ministers refused to recognise was that it was precisely because of the intimacy of the farmer - worker relationship that statutory protection was necessary on the workers behalf. Regardless of the level of friendship, the worker would always be in a subject position and therefore vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Moreover, Walsh, like his predecessors, continued to ignore the significance of the agitation of the previous years. The outlook of the agricultural labourer had changed substantially. There would be no going back to the way things were. The advance of mechanisation and modern media such as the television and cinema made sure of that. By continuing to resist this reality in support of the employer, the government was in danger of jeopardising that very harmony they allegedly sought to maintain not to mention contravening principles of social justice.

A decade later there was little sign of any progress in mentality. By now collective bargaining had secured an additional week's annual leave for a considerable number of non-agricultural workers.<sup>251</sup> Given that many workers had been unable to secure such improved conditions on a voluntary basis, the government decided to introduce the Holidays (Employees) Act 1961 to bring the holiday allowance of all non-agricultural workers up to an accepted standard.<sup>252</sup> This act provided that all non-agricultural workers

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<sup>250</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 134), 12 Nov. 1952, col. 1369.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 191), 26 Jul. 1961, col. 1814.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*; and (S 14623B).



would have a minimum statutory entitlement to two week's annual leave each year, which was normally consecutive, plus the six public holidays or compensatory leave or pay for workers who were required to work on such public holidays.<sup>253</sup> Although agricultural labourers were to be granted a corresponding increase in their entitlements - without a series of private member bills to force the issue - the fact that they were still viewed as a class distinct from all other workers was evident in the renewal of separate legislation to provide for their entitlements. But most of all it was evident in the failure of government to grant them statutory entitlement to public or church holidays with pay.

That these workers had been fortunate to even benefit from the increases granted to non-agricultural workers was apparent from a memorandum submitted to government by the minister for Agriculture, Patrick Smith. Demonstrating that his stance had changed little since his last period as minister in 1947, he acceded to the introduction of increased holidays for this class only because he felt there was 'no alternative course open to him', in view of the government's decision to increase the holiday entitlements of non-agricultural workers.<sup>254</sup> Smith introduced the second stage of the Agricultural Workers (Holidays)(Amendment) Bill, 1961 on 27 July 1961, a day after the minister for Industry and Commerce introduced the corresponding legislation for non-agricultural workers. Although workers benefiting from the terms of the Holidays (Employees) Act 1961 were to receive the additional annual leave retrospective to the beginning of the employment year current at the commencement of the act, agricultural labourers were not so

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<sup>253</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 191), 26 Jul. 1961, col. 1815; *Holidays (Employees) Act 1961*, 1961/33 [R.I.] (9 Aug. 1961).

<sup>254</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government, 10 May 1961 (S 14623 B/61).

fortunate.<sup>255</sup> Under the terms of their new governing legislation, holidays would accrue to them in the current year at the old rate of one day for every two months of continuous employment up to the date of commencement of the new act, and thereafter at the rate of one day per month.<sup>256</sup> Moreover steps had once again been taken to adapt the measure so as to provide the minimum of disruption to the conditions of the farming industry. For instance, while the bill provided for an increase in the number of annual holidays to which an agricultural labourer was entitled from six to twelve days or, one holiday for each month of continuous employment, provision had been made to prevent the worker from taking the twelve days holidays consecutively. An employer could, at his discretion, limit the number of consecutive holidays to a maximum of six.<sup>257</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, labour spokesmen were far more concerned with the failure of government to address the flagrant discrimination in the area of public and church holidays. An amendment was moved by Dan Desmond TD which sought to place agricultural workers on a par with industrial workers in this regard.<sup>258</sup> Successive ministers had refused to extend into law the agricultural workers' entitlement to these holidays on the grounds that it had been customary throughout the years for workers not to work on church holidays and feast days. However, so far as the law was concerned the worker was not entitled to any pay for not working on such days or indeed to special rates for working when most of the country had the day off. The rejection of this proposal by a majority of the House clearly indicated continued support for Smith, and

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<sup>255</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 191), 26 Jul. 1961, col. 1817.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Jul. 1961, col. 2123.

<sup>257</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays)(Amendment) Act 1961*, 1961/36 [R.I.] (16 Aug. 1961), section 2(2)(c).

<sup>258</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 191), 1 Aug. 1961, cols 2289-97.

his predecessors, in this sustained opposition to the extension of such improved conditions to the agricultural labourer.<sup>259</sup> Defeat notwithstanding, the introduction of the amendment signalled that the agitation to redress this discrimination was underway.

Moreover, significant corroboration of their cause came a year later through the actions of the Agricultural Wages Board. By this time the Board had taken practical steps to ensure that workers, who by their contracts of employment were allowed a holiday on St. Patrick's Day or Christmas Day, would be given special payment for work done on those days.<sup>260</sup> However, its governing legislation prohibited it from prescribing such rates for workers under whose contracts such conditions did not already apply. Accordingly the Board unanimously recommended that, 'in order to put agricultural workers on the same footing as other workers', the minister for Agriculture take the necessary legislative steps to give them parity with non agricultural workers in the matter of church and public holidays.<sup>261</sup>

That the Board should only have prescribed special rates at this stage implied that the practice of employers giving workers paid leave on these public holidays had not been very prevalent up to this point. This seriously undermined the claims of various ministers that church holidays had not required statutory backing because of their customary nature. Notwithstanding the unity of the Board in making this recommendation, the minister for Agriculture made no attempt to honour their request. It seemed that two decades later history was once again repeating itself in this regard. To continuously

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<sup>259</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 191), 1 Aug. 1961, col. 2297.

<sup>260</sup> Extract from opinion by the Board's legal counsel, Sean Gannon SC, Mar. 1963 (CMP).

<sup>261</sup> Draft minutes of the 123<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the AWB, 4 Apr. 1963 (CMP).

ignore the recommendations of the Board in this manner spoke volumes of how this body was perceived by the minister and his department. With little sign of any action on the government's part by 1965, James Tully TD, with the support of the Labour Party, decided to take matters into his own hands by introducing another private members' bill, entitled the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965.<sup>262</sup>

This bill was introduced primarily to give statutory effect to the recommendation made by the AWB in 1963. While a departmental memorandum admitted that the effect of the bill would have been to 'legally standardise practice throughout the country', it was nonetheless opposed by government.<sup>263</sup> However, the minister for Agriculture, Charles Haughey, the first new blood to hold this ministry since the establishment of the Free State, was to make an unprecedented move during the debate on the bill in the Dáil.<sup>264</sup> Although the bill itself was rejected on issues unrelated to the holiday question, the minister intimated that he was having the latter examined and even gave an undertaking to introduce new legislation if he felt it was merited.<sup>265</sup> This consideration aside, two and a half years had already elapsed since the AWB made its recommendation, and it was May 1969 before the government introduced a bill upgrading the holiday entitlements of this class to those of every other worker. This meant that the government had

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<sup>262</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 218), 20 Oct. 1965.

<sup>263</sup> Memorandum for government on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965 (S 17815).

<sup>264</sup> Charles J. Haughey, a Dublin TD, had been minister for Justice when appointed as minister for Agriculture following Patrick Smith's resignation from government in October 1963. He would later serve as minister for Finance under Jack Lynch's government and eventually become leader of the Fianna Fáil party and Taoiseach.

<sup>265</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 218), 20 Oct. 1965, col. 133.

successfully deprived agricultural labourers of this benefit for over thirty years.

The legislation to redress this inequality was finally introduced by Neil Blaney, minister for Agriculture since 1966, in the summer of 1969.<sup>266</sup> The main purpose of the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Wages) Act 1969 was to give agricultural labourers legal entitlement to six public or church holidays, in addition to the twelve working days.<sup>267</sup> The provisions were to put the agricultural labourer on a par with non agricultural workers.<sup>268</sup> Confirmation that existing holiday legislation had served to curtail the number of church and public holidays traditionally provided to agricultural labourers was finally conceded in a departmental memorandum on the bill:

Following the lengthening of the annual holidays and increases in wages, a tendency has been noted for farmers to be less liberal in granting church and or public holidays and it is considered desirable that the matter should now be regulated by statute. In this way the position of agricultural workers would be brought more into line with that of industrial and county council workers.<sup>269</sup>

The responsibility for this being a long term trend was deflected by suggesting it was only a recent development consequent to the introduction of an additional six days holidays in 1961. The minister for Agriculture also took this stance when introducing the bill:

I am aware that perhaps the majority of farmers traditionally give their workers a day off with pay on public or church holidays or at the most do not require them

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<sup>266</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Wages) Act 1969*, 1969/17 [R.I.](15 Jul. 1969); Neil Blaney, a Donegal TD, was the son of a Fianna Fáil TD and a founding member of the party. First elected to the Dáil in 1948, he was appointed minister for Local Government in 1957 by de Valera. Like Haughey, he belonged to a younger political generation than Smith whom he had succeeded as minister for Local Government. When Haughey was appointed minister for Finance in 1966, Blaney was appointed minister for Agriculture and he remained in this post until dismissed by Jack Lynch in 1970, along with Haughey, over their involvement in the arms crisis.

<sup>267</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 240), 20 May 1969, col. 1324.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> Memorandum for government on the agricultural workers holidays legislation, 18 Oct. 1967 (S14623B).

to do more than a couple of hours work on such days. In some areas, however, workers are not always allowed these holidays and the tendency may be for employers to become more exacting in this respect having regard particularly to the general scarcity and rising cost of labour.<sup>270</sup>

Even more noticeable was the assumption that it was acceptable for this class to work on such days without any special rates or compensatory leave in lieu, when they had been earmarked by the state as special days of rest for other workers. Nonetheless on introducing the bill the minister for Agriculture clearly admitted that it was based on the provisions of the 1965 private members bill introduced by James Tully.<sup>271</sup> This was an acknowledgement of great significance and paid homage to the efforts of those who had fought so relentlessly against the opposition of the government and the Dáil itself to establish the right of the agricultural labourer to the same conditions of employment as all others. This measure also represented a faint watershed in the typical approach of government towards the treatment of this class. For instance, a provision of significance related to the amendment of the Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holiday) Act 1952. The amendment proposed took the form of a general provision empowering the minister for Agriculture to prescribe by order, from time to time, the number of hours which a worker had to work in any particular week to entitle him to a half holiday in that week. This was to avoid the necessity for new legislation in the event of further changes in the weekly hours of work to which the minimum wage rates prescribed by the Board related. While this still upheld the notion that the Board was unable to prescribe rates for hours which did not exist, at least it indicated an acceptance of the likelihood of further reductions. Moreover, Blaney also committed to carrying out a review of legislation

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<sup>270</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 240), 20 May 1969, cols 1324-5.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1325.

relating to the wages and holidays of agricultural labourers, the first of its kind in the history of the state. Perhaps a change in mentality was finally in sight.

If the thirties was about Fianna Fáil's attempts to forge an ideal rural Ireland, the Emergency presented them with an opportunity to create exactly that, an artificial rural idyll where emigration was halted, the earnings of waged and landed were harmonised and all lived at a similar standard of frugal comfort. That it perceived the advances of other workers to constitute a threat to the family farm and went to the lengths it did in the belief that this might stop the drift from the land was an indication of how blind it was to the realities of rural Ireland and what it offered its youth. The alienation it accomplished was demonstrated over the next decade as the lifeblood of the countryside, both relative assisting and agricultural labourer, left for Great Britain. The agricultural labourer would continue to struggle with the fall out from the legacy of a blinkered vision which was biased in favour of the majority on the land. Even in the 1960s, when such idealism was no longer so prevalent and farmers were also embarking on their own marches for an increased part of the economic pie, the Department of Agriculture, and by the same token the government, dragged its heels on granting parity to this class in the all important matter of social rights. While it maintained that the special conditions of agricultural employment were accountable for the distinctive treatment, the reality was that it could not put the interests of the agricultural labourer before that of the wider agricultural community. While it should have been conflicted over choosing one group over another, it never was. Without the trade union and parliamentary agitation of the FRW and the Labour Party there is no telling when the lot of this worker would have been improved.

As it was they were allowed to trail behind other workers in modern Ireland and in Great Britain for over thirty years. This was a disappointing legacy for a country which at one time led the world in providing decent statutory conditions for its industrial workers.



## Chapter VII

### Emancipation

Like all workers I was glad to hear on TV on Thursday night that there was a cost of living increase in wages coming up for us but, alas, I found on Friday morning that it was not for agricultural workers as the lords in the Agricultural Wages Board have decided that while every other worker gets over £5 a week increase in wages, we agricultural workers get only £2 per week which by the time your friend Mr Ryan gets his cut of 26p for income tax leaves us the handsome sum of £1.48....Why are we agricultural workers discriminated against and for how long more are we and our wives and families to be ranked as low class citizens?...A few nights ago a film was showed on RTE showing the diabolical treatment that black workers suffered in South Africa. Exactly the same situation exists here. In Africa the blacks are discriminated against because of the colour of their skin. Here we are discriminated against because of our occupation.<sup>1</sup>

For many, the early 1970s are associated with Ireland's entry to the European Economic Community and the anticipation of the economic benefits expected to result from access to a wider international market, or for certain products, such as farming, the price supports resulting from a more regulated market. For women and other disadvantaged groups, this period is resonant of the beginnings of the slow march towards equality, a march that was unequivocally driven by the powerful social directives which EEC membership dictated to government. Identifying with this struggle more than most of his peers was the agricultural labourer. For him it was as outlined above, the sentiments of a very dejected and disheartened Paddy Nolan in a letter to the minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary, in December 1974. Undergoing a quiet metamorphosis since the advent of rural mechanisation in the fifties, this class were more akin to their colleagues in other industries in terms of skillset and outlook than ever before. They now had to be adept at mastering many trades in the course of their daily chores. The horse and cart

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<sup>1</sup> Paddy Nolan to the minister for Labour, 14 Dec. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4).

were not only replaced by the tractor and trailer but by large and complex machinery such as combine harvesters, bailers and milking machines which had to be used effectively and serviced regularly. The focus on increased production and improved farming methods meant that the labourer had to be able to deal with artificial fertilisers, pesticides, animal feeds, diverse quotas, and techniques for increased eradication of disease. The arrival of rural electrification transformed the physical structures on the farm, from buildings to fencing, and required the labourer to have skills to deal with their upkeep.

That even this sophistication of the agricultural labourers' skillset had not transmuted into an improvement in status and remuneration was a fact of which they were only too painfully aware. With pictures of a rapidly changing Ireland zoomed daily into homes since the launch of Teilifis Éireann in December 1961, it was a reality that was increasingly difficult to escape.<sup>2</sup> Although in receipt of relatively large minimum wage increases since 1964, the increased media attention surrounding the Board's consistent failure to honour the full terms of the national wage agreements had accentuated a well founded sense of grievance. Suddenly there were constant reminders of how they were 'among the least privileged and lowest paid workers in the state', with their treatment by the Board even denounced by people other than trade unionists as 'a national scandal'.<sup>3</sup> After four years of blatant disregard the Board's appointing body, the government, was now also being singled out for long overdue criticism. Its failure to discipline or replace the Board was not taken lightly. In criticising the government's 'dilatory' approach to

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<sup>2</sup> J.H. Whyte, 'Economic pragmatism and political pragmatism, 1957-63' in J.R. Hill (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vii: Ireland, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2003), p. 301.

abolishing such an 'anachronistic and reactionary body', an editorial in the *Irish Times* on 16 December 1974 aptly noted:

Here is a sad example of the inattention of successive governments to an industrious and economically highly valuable group of workers, an illustration of how people who lack agitational or industrial power, and are too dispersed to use political pressure, can be ignored.<sup>4</sup>

Previous chapters have revealed the sheer extent of this neglect. How over three decades worker spokesmen sought to break the consensus which, permeating government after government, perpetuated the secondary treatment of this group of workers. This was particularly apparent in the period 1958 to 1965, when a spate of private parliamentary bills introduced to redress the shortcomings of the Agricultural Wages Acts were repeatedly rejected by government and opposition parties alike as unnecessary and irrelevant. Since the trade board machinery for industry had already been overhauled and modernised under the Industrial Relations Act 1946, this refusal to consider extending similar modification to agriculture was highly inequitable. For instance, under the Industrial Relations Act 1946 trade boards operating in industry were transformed into joint labour committees under the aegis of the Labour Court.<sup>5</sup> More significantly, the remit of these bodies, which had formerly been confined to fixing minimum wage rates, were expanded to encompass conditions of employment.<sup>6</sup>

In the commitment to improved labour conditions which prevailed in the aftermath of the Second World War, the English government had also taken steps to revamp their trade board legislation. Under the Wages Council Act 1945, trade boards were renamed as

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<sup>3</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 and 16 Dec. 1974.

<sup>4</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Dec. 1974.

<sup>5</sup> *Industrial Relations Act 1946*, 1946/26 [Éire](27 Aug. 1946), part iv, sections 53-6.

wages councils and a number of changes were made which had a parallel in Part IV of the Irish Industrial Relations Act 1946, except that the powers of the councils were limited to fixing minimum wages and holidays.<sup>7</sup> Under the British Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947 and a consolidating act of 1948, steps were taken to extend similar powers to the agricultural wages board the aim, as the joint parliamentary secretary to the minister for Agriculture expounded during the debate on the 1947 bill in the House of Commons, to:

ensure that agricultural workers shall be put in substantially the same position as other workers in industry in so far as statutory wage regulations are concerned, and that the agricultural wages boards are put in much the same position as any other wage fixing authority.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the wages board was given the same freedom as wages councils with regards to holiday regulation.<sup>9</sup> It was also considered desirable that the board would have the greatest latitude to make provision for special circumstances of other kinds, such as absences from work due to sickness or various other causes.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the definition of agriculture was extended to include under the protection of the act those employed in producing food for sale or for consumption for business purposes.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis was on the worker who produced consumable produce in competition with commercially produced produce, either for consumption on the premises - as in the case of a large hotel

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, section 42(2).

<sup>7</sup> R.J.P. Mortished 'The Industrial Relations Act 1946' in *Journal of the Social and Statistical Society of Ireland*, xvii (1947-8), p. 672.

<sup>8</sup> *Hansard 5 (commons)*, vol. 432, 22 Jan. 1947, col. 273.

<sup>9</sup> *Hansard 5 (commons)*, vol. 430, 25 Nov. 1946, col. 1271; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 15 [U.K.]) 11 Mar. 1947, section 7; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1948* (11&12 Geo. VI, c. 47 [U.K.]) 13 Jul. 1948, section 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard 5 (commons)*, vol. 430, 25 Nov. 1946, col. 1271; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947*, first schedule section 5; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1948*, fourth schedule section 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1947*, section 8; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1948*, section 17.

or within an institution - or, if it was supplied for commercial purposes to enter into some form of trade after it left the garden or estate. The essence of this amending legislation was therefore completely worker focused. Not only did the English government ensure that any modifications in the machinery available to other workers was almost immediately passed on to agricultural labourers, but it also extended the scope of the legislation to encompass workers engaged in the sector who had hitherto been excluded from its benefits under a technicality. In line with this general approach, a time gap of only two years existed between the extension of the improvements from industry to agriculture. This contrasted greatly with the situation in Ireland where in 1945 the one solitary attempt to amend the Agricultural Wages Act 1936 was actually aimed at curtailing the workers' entitlements even further.

An important provision of the general minimum wage fixing legislation introduced in both Ireland and the UK was that the state would protect and enforce the worker's entitlement to the legal minimum rate and prosecute employers who contravened their responsibility in this regard. A crucial part of this process was enabling workers to claim for any arrears owed by the employer due to underpayment. It was universally provided that a worker could take civil proceedings for recovery of any arrears due to him by an employer in respect of any period up to the statutory limitation of twenty years. In the event that an employer had summary proceedings brought against him, a court could also have made an award for arrears. The stipulations of the various legislation diverge here. In the event of conviction for an offence under the Industrial Relations Act 1946, which was partly based on the Trades Board Act 1918, the court had power to order the

employer to pay arrears due in respect of any period up to the statutory limitation of twenty years.<sup>12</sup> The provision was less generous under the English Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924, its amending legislation of 1947-8, and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1939. The court could, whether or not there was a conviction, order an employer to pay arrears for the six months immediately preceding the date on which the complaint was served.<sup>13</sup> The court also had power to make an award for arrears for the eighteen months immediately preceding the aforementioned six months but only in the event of a conviction and if notice of intention to seek arrears for this period had been served with the summons.<sup>14</sup> The Industrial Relations Act 1946 also had an additional provision on these lines. In the event of summary proceedings being taken, workers were allowed to simultaneously apply for the recovery of any sums due during the previous three years so that should an employer have been convicted of the offence, the court could have ordered payment of arrears for this period.<sup>15</sup> In terms of awards under summary proceedings the Irish agricultural labourer actually fared the best. Under the Agricultural Wages Act 1936 the court had power to order the employer to pay arrears due in respect of any period up to the statutory limitation of twenty years.<sup>16</sup> This applied regardless of whether or not there was a conviction. Nor did the worker have to give notice of his intention to claim for arrears when submitting a complaint. Notwithstanding the fact that summary proceedings had to be taken within a year of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Industrial Relations Act 1946*, section 45(2).

<sup>13</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924*, section 7; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1948*, section 4; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1939* (2&3 Geo VI. c. 25[N.I.]) 6 Dec.1939), section 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Industrial Relations Act 1946*, section 45(4).

<sup>16</sup> *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, section 19(4).

last date of the offence, this meant that the Irish agricultural labourer had considerably more leeway to recover arrears than his colleagues under comparative legislation.<sup>17</sup>

However, the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Act 1945 drastically reversed the situation.<sup>18</sup> The time period for which the court could award arrears in the case of summary proceedings was limited to within two years of the date on which the claim was submitted.<sup>19</sup> Since this was in line with comparable legislation there was nothing particularly unfair about this step. However, when taken in conjunction with the decision to also curtail the time period under which civil proceedings could be taken from twenty to two years, both in terms of the recovery period for arrears and the time within which civil proceedings could be taken, the Irish agricultural labourer's entitlements were radically undermined and to an extent unprecedented for other workers.<sup>20</sup> Even the simple contract debt was guaranteed by statute for a period of up to six years.<sup>21</sup> The maximum period for which an Irish agricultural labourer could now claim redress for any abuse of his rights under this act was two years. This compared to twenty for other workers whose customary civil entitlements were still sacrosanct had they resorted to civil proceedings. Moreover, the proposal for such curtailment was instigated not by the Department of Agriculture but by the Agricultural Wages Board. The latter had, in fact, proposed an even shorter claim period of twelve months, with proceedings to be taken within twelve months of termination of employment.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Doherty to Nagle, 13 Sep. 1943 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>18</sup> *Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Act 1945*, 1945/32 [R.I.]( 4 Aug. 1945).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, section 3(1).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, section 4; Jenkins to Hughes, 17 Sep. 1943 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Chairman, AWB to minister for Agriculture, 31 Jul. 1942.

In making representations to the minister for Agriculture on these proposals in July 1942, the chairman of the Board, William O'Leary, had referred to a practice whereby an agricultural labourer, on grounds of various pretexts, would offer his services to a farmer at a wage less than the minimum rate and then after a period of time had elapsed approach the Board to claim the arrears due.<sup>23</sup> It was alleged that this worker, having been successful in his endeavours, would then emigrate to another district with a view to 'repeating the performance'.<sup>24</sup> It was maintained that during the course of their investigations the Board's inspectors had 'constantly come across such cases even to the extent of a worker trying it on for the third occasion'.<sup>25</sup> The chairman submitted that the practice had steadily grown to the extent of assuming such proportions that he brought the matter before the Board. When the issue was raised at a meeting on 28 May 1942 the members had allegedly been 'in full agreement' that the practice should be stopped.<sup>26</sup> O'Leary reported that the area committees had also been in complete unanimity that a time limit be fixed, the only difference being as to what this time should have been with some of the committees favouring six months and others twelve months. Concern had been apparently expressed at these meetings over the effect of this practice on married workers:

apart from having a demoralising effect on all the workers of the districts in which it prevailed, the practice had been known to victimise the married man with a family who, by his married ties, is more or less confined to one district. This married man in order to support his wife and family, requires to be in receipt of wages at not less than the appropriate minimum rate, but finds himself, as a result of this practice, unable in some cases to obtain work in his own district,

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<sup>23</sup> Chairman, AWB to minister for Agriculture, 31 Jul. 1942 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



unless he is prepared to fall in line with the workers who accept a lesser wage than that prescribed by the Board.<sup>27</sup>

While criticism was directed at the farmer who knowingly lent himself to this practice and took the risk of not being found out, it became apparent however that the Board's primary concern was for the small farmer who allowed himself to 'unwittingly' engage such an unscrupulous worker:

they felt that a certain amount of sympathy might be extended to the small farmer, who, through pure ignorance of the Board's Order, unwittingly let himself into engaging such a worker, and, as a result found himself called upon to pay a labourer a sum in respect of arrears of wages running, in some cases, into large amounts, which, in his limited circumstances, he found it impossible to meet.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, as if to further corroborate that it was predominantly the worker's propensity to abuse this section of the act, it was noted that cases had come to the attention of the Board where, without reference to the AWB office, workers had consulted local solicitors and instituted civil proceedings against former employers.<sup>29</sup>

Given that the average employer of hired labour was engaged on holdings of 100 acres plus, such concern for the small farmer suggested that the cases brought to the Board's attention pertained mainly to the latter. This is further corroborated by the particulars of eight cases in the records of the Department of Agriculture where employers had claims for arrears of a substantial sum made against them by former employees.<sup>30</sup> Most of the cases cited pertained to employers of small farms of on average 40 acres with allusion to only one large farmer. Under these circumstances it was hardly surprising that the

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<sup>27</sup> Chairman, AWB to minister for Agriculture, 31 Jul. 1942 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Explanatory note on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1945.

sympathy of the Department of Agriculture would also lie with the employer especially if, as the Board suggested, the livelihood of small farmers was under threat. Although departmental officials conceded that it was 'at first sight difficult to understand why a wage labourer who can presumably insist on the legal minimum should endeavour to misrepresent the position to the employing farmer', ultimately it was concluded that 'the the labourer regards the practice as a convenient means of accumulating savings even though he earns no interest on the deferred payments'.<sup>31</sup> As disconcerting as such a general deduction was, even more unsettling was the lack of evidence to support the basis for this proposal. As Doherty explained in a minute to Nagle:

I spoke to Mr Ross, Secretary of the Agricultural Wages Board, who was unable to produce any statistics regarding the number of cases in which the claims made arose out of this tendency to abuse the benefits of the Act. I gathered from him, however, that the labourers in question are average so to speak and do not contain any considerable proportion of 'home' boys etc in regard to whom the farmer might reasonably plead ignorance.<sup>32</sup>

The only information Ross could apparently produce related to the reports of the AWB inspectors and in this connection it was submitted that the Board's staff was 'insufficient to enable him to summarise these reports so as to give any accurate idea of the prevalence of the practice'.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless that Agriculture was only too willing to accept such an unreliable premise for this amendment became apparent from a minute on 5 September 1942:

If it is agreed to give legal effect to the resolution passed by the Board the existing rights of the worker will be whittled down. As the worker is in normal circumstances the weaker party in the wage bargain we would not agree to his statutory rights being restricted without very good reason. I think that the fact that the Board's resolution was passed unanimously by the five wages area

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<sup>31</sup> Doherty to Nagle, 15 Aug. 1942 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

committees and by the Board itself, in which workers as well as employers have fair representation, indicates that there are very strong reasons for the amendment proposed.<sup>34</sup>

Their logic was that if such abuse prevailed during the Emergency period when labourers were in demand, it would become much more widespread when agricultural employment was reduced.<sup>35</sup> Not only was a draft memorandum accordingly circulated to government departments announcing the minister's intent to amend the 1936 act in the manner proposed by the Board, but it was also suggested that the provisions of the bill be made operative from the date of its introduction to the Oireachtas so as to prevent solicitors from inducing workers to institute civil proceedings before the bill was passed.<sup>36</sup> This was to circumvent the rush of claims it anticipated would result in the intervening period.

The Department of Industry and Commerce had many objections to these proposals. In a letter to Ryan in March 1943, it was intimated that the minister was being less than fair to that very worker in relation to whose protection the agricultural wages legislation was devised. It was candidly stated that although 'some workers may act as is described in your minute, they could only do so with the consent of farmers desirous of evading the law'.<sup>37</sup> By adopting this stance it had immediately launched into a counter argument suggesting that the employer by nature of his position was just as, if not more, culpable of being complicit in such abuses of the law as the employee. Emphasis was placed on the few cases upon which such a drastic amendment was based:

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<sup>34</sup> Jenkins to McGrath, 5 Sep. 1942 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>35</sup> Doherty to Nagle, 15 Aug. 1942.

<sup>36</sup> Minute to the assistant secretary, Sean O'Broin, 14 Sep. 1942; Department of Agriculture draft memorandum for government, 2 Mar. 1943.

<sup>37</sup> Industry and Commerce to Agriculture, 26 Mar. 1943.

The amendment of the Act to meet these very few cases on the lines you propose deprives the bona fide worker of much of the protection given by the Act. Such workers may be tricked by a farmer, or forced by unemployment, to accept less than the minimum wage. This underpayment may last for years before being detected or before the worker becomes aware of his rights or is prepared to enforce them.<sup>38</sup>

Instead of accepting that the genuine agricultural labourer had a propensity for deceit, rational explanations were forwarded to account for such practices when they did occur. As surmised by Doherty in the Department of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce had taken 'the view that the tricking is all on the side of the farmers'.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless the latter department did eventually concede that if there was to be a limitation on the amount or the period over which wages could be recovered, it should not have been less than five years. But it was not alone in its objections. On 15 May 1943, the Department of Finance objected to the proposal to make the provisions of the amendment effective from the bill's introduction to the Oireachtas. It was suggested that any amending act should not become operative until a period of at least three months had elapsed after its passing:

This seems to be particularly desirable in regard to the provision set out under Section 7(2) of the memorandum so as to safeguard existing rights of action of those labourers who may be ignorant of their present legal rights.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that two major government departments, but especially Finance, had felt obliged to object to the nature of these proposals with a view to safeguarding the interests of the agricultural labourer accentuated the inequitable approach adopted by Agriculture. Nonetheless, it refused to back down, defending its stance that the experience of the Board had shown that the absence of any such limitation gave rise to serious worker

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<sup>38</sup> Industry and Commerce to Agriculture, 26 Mar. 1943 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>39</sup> Doherty to Nagle, 29 Mar. 1943.

<sup>40</sup> Fitzgerald, Finance to Agriculture, 15 May 1943.

instigated abuses.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the proposals made by the Board were submitted to the government for approval in principle at a meeting held on 31 August 1943. The Board's proposals were accepted subject to an arrears recovery period of two years instead of the one year period suggested by the Board.<sup>42</sup> And while there were some suggestions in Agriculture that the civil proceedings entitlement be replaced with the statutory limitation of a simple contract debt, this lesser evil was not adopted.<sup>43</sup> It was decided that nothing less than a two year statutory period would curb a practice which 'deliberately' trapped farmers into paying less than the minimum wage.<sup>44</sup>

The Agriculture Wages (Amendment) bill was brought before the Dáil in July 1945. James Larkin TD was outraged at the tone adopted by the minister when addressing the reasons for introducing this measure and the consequent disparagement to which he subjected the agricultural labourer. His argument was that if the farmer was to be assisted because he possibly did not know the law there was a thousand times stronger argument for assisting the labourer who was in ignorance of the law:

The ordinary trader gets the protection of the Statute of Limitations. If he is to be allowed a period of seven years in which to protect himself, surely the agricultural labourer, living possibly in the backward parts of the more outlying counties, very often semi-illiterate, working under the pressure of the economic and physical conditions under which he is forced to live...should be given every facility and every protection, instead of limiting the period of recovery.<sup>45</sup>

It was the facile manner with which the minister so easily labelled the worker as the abuser of this provision that really made this measure stand out. No new evidence was

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<sup>41</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government, 23 Jul. 1943 (AGI/G899/42).

<sup>42</sup> Jenkins to Doherty, 8 Sep. 1943.

<sup>43</sup> Doherty to Nagle, 13 Sep. 1943; Jenkins to Hughes, 17 Sep. 1943.

<sup>44</sup> Nagle to Hughes, 16 Jun. 1944.

<sup>45</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 97), 4 Jul. 1945, cols 1847-8.

introduced during the debates to counter the suggestion that the eight cases alluded to previously constituted the basis upon which this amending legislation was based. In fact, the minister divided the cases into two categories:

I find that, first of all, you can divide employees into two categories, the first being where the employee is mentally or physically incapacitated... There are those who are not either mentally or physically incapacitated, and they again fall roughly into two categories. That is where the trouble arises. In the first category you have the case where the employee is related to the employer, and in the second category the case where an employee is working for an employer who is not altogether a farmer. We have many cases in these two categories.<sup>46</sup>

He then proceeded to confirm that the cases of abuse revolved mainly around 'the man working with a relative' and the 'the man working with a small farmer who also has a shop'.<sup>47</sup> While there were issues here over contract of service, the reality was that these cases did not represent the vast majority of genuine agricultural labourers or employers. Yet it was the former who bore the brunt of the ramifications. As James Larkin noted, instead of an amending bill being brought in to remedy any difficulties which may have been apparent in the 1936 act:

Our expression of sympathy with the agricultural labourer, after five years of strenuous circumstances in this country - is to suggest that they are to blame; that they are trying to take advantage of laws made for their protection; that they are willing to allow themselves to be used as tools by unscrupulous employers, and that, therefore, we are going to limit the protection we will give them to a period of two years.<sup>48</sup>

So while other countries were rewarding labourers for their contribution to the war effort by taking initiatives to introduce improved working conditions, the Irish government showed their appreciation by depriving them of the customary statutory period allocated

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<sup>46</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 97), 12 Jul. 1945, cols 2312-3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 2314.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1849.

for the recovery of arrears on the basis of very whimsical evidence. Once again the security of the small farmer had been elevated above the basic rights of this worker.

It would take another thirty years before the vision underlining the Industrial Relations Act 1946, and indeed its benefits, would be extended to the agricultural labourer. The long term impact on this class by then can be gauged from the comments of Paddy Nolan noted earlier. The continuance of the Board in its unamended state came to epitomise the government's substandard treatment of this large group of workers. It would take nothing less than the Board's replacement to assure them of its best intentions. For that to happen, a major shift in government mentality was required. It was 1969 before signs of such change emerged.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that indications of a softening in attitude had first appeared in 1965 when the minister for Agriculture at the time, Charles Haughey, had agreed, albeit reluctantly, to review the inequalities of the holiday code for agricultural workers.<sup>49</sup> His successor, Neil Blaney, eventually followed through on this review when he introduced the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Wages) Act 1969. By granting agricultural labourers legal entitlement to church or public holidays with pay, parity was finally bestowed on these workers in the matter of holiday legislation. But the debate on this bill in May 1969 led to an announcement of even greater significance. In response to James Tully's dogged pursuit of issues demanding redress, Blaney admitted that 'a complete review legislatively of the whole concept of the Agricultural Wages Board, taking into account the change in circumstances generally

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<sup>49</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 218), 20 Oct. 1965, col. 133.

since the agricultural wages board started off<sup>50</sup> was necessary. When Haughey had been placed under similar pressure in 1965, he had refused to see any necessity for change in the Board's governing legislation.<sup>51</sup> Blaney's response a few years later was symptomatic of a broader shift in outlook. He admitted that:

There are special difficulties, special problems in relation to the farm workers and those who work on the land but that is not to be regarded as it may well have been regarded over the generations that, because they were in special circumstances and because their problems were difficult of solution that the solution should be less beneficial to them. Perhaps this has been a historical, traditional thing but we have been changing it.<sup>52</sup>

This statement signalled a watershed in the historic struggle of the agricultural labourer for parity with other workers. Blaney was the first government representative to acknowledge that agricultural labourers had been the recipients of less favourable treatment than other workers because of the special nature of their employment conditions. Moreover, the minister had not been alone in this conviction. During the passage of the Industrial Relations Act 1969 earlier that year, the minister for Labour, Patrick Hillery, had committed to examining the implications of amendments which sought to repeal the Agricultural Wages Acts and replace the Board by a joint labour committee.<sup>53</sup> He had concurred with the arguments of Labour Party TD, James Tully, that this code of legislation would have to be changed, and committed to having a review

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<sup>50</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 240), 21 May 1969, col. 1491.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 218), 20 Oct. 1965, cols 133-4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, (vol. 240), 21 May 1969, col. 1509.

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Agricultural Wages and Holidays Legislation*, 5 June 1970, p.1; Dr Patrick J. Hillery had a background in medicine. He was elected to the Dáil as a Fianna Fáil TD for Clare in 1951 and was appointed minister for Education from 1959-65. He was the first to hold the newly created portfolio of minister for Labour in 1966. He was considered an innovative reformer during his time in government and was appointed as Ireland's first EU Commissioner in 1973. He served two terms as president of Ireland from 1976 to 1990.



established before the summer recess.<sup>54</sup> Since the undertakings of both Blaney and Hillery related to largely similar questions, it was agreed that the examinations be carried out jointly.<sup>55</sup> With the interdepartmental committee eventually comprising seven members representing the Departments of Agriculture and Fisheries, Finance, Labour, Lands, Local Government and the AWB, its establishment was of great importance. It was the first official enquiry into the conditions of agricultural labour in the history of the state and its findings would indicate to what extent, if any, the consensus had in fact changed.

The committee's terms of reference were to examine prevailing legislation relating to the wages and holidays of agricultural labourers and to report what changes, if any, should be made in the light of changing circumstances.<sup>56</sup> The latter was a reality the committee could not dispute. Rural areas were being defaced by the depopulation resulting from the steep decline in the numbers working in agriculture. The total number of agricultural labourers, both permanent and temporary, had decreased by 39% between 1936 and 1951 and by some 45% between 1951 and 1966, with a further 30% decline projected by 1980.<sup>57</sup> It was of, course, no coincidence that the greatest decline occurred between 1951 and 1966. It was the bleakest period in the history of the AWB, giving agricultural labourers little incentive to remain in an industry where they were so undervalued. The rapid mechanisation which had been occurring since the post war period also threatened

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<sup>54</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 239), 24 Apr. 1969, cols 2155-7; Born in 1915, James Tully was a native of Meath. He became the FRW county organiser for Meath in 1947, and succeeded Sean Dunne as general secretary of the FRW in 1954. He was elected to the Dáil as a Labour Party TD for Meath from 1954-7 and from 1961-82. He was appointed minister for Local Government in the coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour in 1973.

<sup>55</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

the jobs of many, as capital investment in labour saving devices such as tractors became the trend. At the same time the emergence of other technological and scientific advances in the agribusiness sector, such as the use of artificial fertilizers, particularly on the larger farms where hired labour was concentrated, required workers to undertake more highly skilled work.<sup>58</sup> Since most barely had a primary education and, unlike farmers' sons, had little access to formal agricultural training, the drastic transition from a manual labourer whose skillset was based on techniques passed down through the generations, to an agricultural worker au fait with the latest mechanical innovations and scientific products, was not always easy. This was the case especially for the older workers many of whom were sacrificed in the transition.

On the other hand, the number of younger workers entering agriculture was also undergoing decline. There had been over 23,000 males under 18 years of age in agriculture in 1963. By 1973 this proportion had fallen by 75 per cent to 5,900.<sup>59</sup> Fascinated by the world portrayed through the cinema and television, even the wrench of emigration appeared a more attractive alternative than a profession with more hours, less holidays and poorer pay than other occupations. The introduction of free post primary education in 1966 and the availability of jobs in other industries were also mitigating factors. Therefore, it was important that those workers who wanted to remain in agriculture and were capable of adapting to the increasingly complex demands of a more scientific and technological industry, were finally given the incentive to stay. In an age of

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 1.2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 1.7.

<sup>59</sup> 'Recent developments in Irish Agriculture' in *Annual report of the Minister for Agriculture (1973-4)*, p. 17.

drastic transformation and escalating worker demands, their request was shamefully simple; the dignity of being treated the same as other workers. The onus was now on the committee to decide whether it was time to end the distinction long institutionalised by the provision of a separate code of holiday legislation and the perpetuation of an outmoded wage fixing system.

The committee started off on a positive footing in this regard when it took a surprisingly broad interpretation of its terms of reference. By aiming towards the ideal, it focused initially on establishing what precisely the functions of *any* body authorised to fix wages and possibly other conditions for agricultural workers should be.<sup>60</sup> In adopting this approach the committee actually devoted the core of its report to addressing the changes sought by worker spokesmen in the various bills introduced by them over the years.<sup>61</sup> This parliamentary agitation actually occurred over two distinct periods.<sup>62</sup> The first occurred between 1946 and 1952 and focused on attaining statutory holidays for agricultural workers. The second phase spanned from 1958 to 1965 and while also concerned with public holidays, was impelled by severe dissatisfaction with the Board in terms of its poor performance and less than impartial politics. The bills introduced during this period reflected the greatest criticisms of this machinery.

Demands varied from seeking extension of Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 to agricultural workers in 1958, to focusing primarily on upgrading the powers of the Board in 1960. The latter were compounded by more detailed amendments to the

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<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par 2.4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 2.3 and Appendix VI.

<sup>62</sup> See Table AVII.1 in Appendix VII for details of the private members bills introduced.

constitution of the Board in two separate bills in 1961. A year later the attempts to extend and amend the functions of the Board had been abandoned in favour of proposals for its complete abolition and replacement by a joint labour committee under the Labour Court. Not only were these proposals addressed by the committee but its findings tended to support in general the need for the changes demanded, thus endorsing the validity of many of the claims. These fell under three main heads; the powers and functions of the Board, its constitution, and the type of statutory body best suited to agriculture.

Dissatisfaction with the powers and functions of the Board focused mainly on its inability to alter or fix hours of work or to provide regulation for such conditions of employment as holidays and sick pay. Addressing both issues, the committee acknowledged that these limitations had been severely criticised by worker spokesmen on many occasions, a grievance which they noted was exacerbated by their claim that similar boards operating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland had such power.<sup>63</sup> Over the years, the Department of Agriculture had rejected any attempt to widen the Board's powers ostensibly on the grounds that the seasonal nature of agricultural work and the special nature of the farmer worker relationship were inherently unsuited to such extensive, industrial statutory regulation.<sup>64</sup> That this opposition was more complicated than it appeared was fleetingly acknowledged in the committee's report. For instance, when alluding to the question of working hours and the emotive issue of overtime, included with the arguments advanced in favour of continuing the existing practice was the following:

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<sup>63</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 3.3.

(In addition it has been pointed out that the farmer and his family often find it necessary to work for periods (including Sunday) far in excess of the hours worked by agricultural employees).<sup>65</sup>

Echoing the opposition of Agriculture to statutory holidays for agricultural workers over many decades, its inclusion as an argument of even minor consideration, as suggested by the parentheses, was worrying. However, it became immediately apparent that the committee did not consider these arguments as adequate grounds for preventing an agricultural wage fixing body from determining hours of work:

The committee accept the special position of agriculture in this regard but do not consider that these arguments should necessarily preclude the statutory prescribing of weekly working hours as has been found possible in Britain and Northern Ireland. While it is true that, depending on the season, a farmer will require the services of an agricultural worker for an extended number of hours, the committee consider that this situation could best be met by providing for specific weekly working hours varying seasonally if appropriate, possibly with scope for reasonable flexibility, the worker being appropriately compensated for any hours worked in excess of those specified.<sup>66</sup>

Consequently it was recommended that the body charged with the responsibility of laying down minimum agricultural wages should also have the power to prescribe working hours. Despite admitting that it might be difficult for such a body to prescribe daily working hours for farming, it was firmly asserted nonetheless that it should have the prerogative to make such decisions.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, in regard to the contentious issue of overtime, in respect of which the existing Board could only provide a single rate, that is for work done in excess of a stated weekly number of hours viz. 44 hours in winter and 50 hours in summer, it was recommended that this power be extended to provide

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<sup>64</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962, 12 Oct. 1962 (IR 7A).

<sup>65</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 3.4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 3.5.

<sup>67</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 3.5.

graduated rates as had been provided in Britain since the 1940s, and in Ireland since the Conditions of Employment Act 1936.<sup>68</sup>

This progressive attitude was also adopted in relation to the wider issue of conditions of employment. Although statutory holiday legislation was introduced for agricultural workers in Ireland some twelve years later than in the UK, by which time the board in England had been vested with the power to regulate holiday conditions, the Board's function in Ireland was still restricted to prescribing minimum rates of holiday remuneration. This meant that such qualifying periods and conditions as did exist were laid out in legislation. It also meant that legislative action had to be taken by the Dáil to give effect to any changes. The cumbersome nature of this process was revealed in 1963 when despite the Board unanimously recommending that provision for church or public holidays with pay should be made to agricultural labourers, it took six years and a private parliamentary bill before the government gave it effect. The committee set about rectifying this limitation immediately. In making pointed reference to the fact that the board for England and Wales had full competence in the matter of annual holidays, it recommended that amending the legislation to enable the wage fixing body to regulate holiday entitlements, including qualifying conditions, in more detail.<sup>69</sup> This would allow for such issues as age and length of service to be taken into consideration.<sup>70</sup> As mentioned in chapter six, in failing to provide for such considerations in its agricultural workers' holiday legislation, Ireland had been contravening ILO Convention No.101

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<sup>68</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 3.6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 3.15.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

since 1952.<sup>71</sup> Another contravention in this regard was the option in Irish legislation allowing agricultural workers to remain at work taking pay in lieu of holidays.<sup>72</sup> This option was also incompatible with the 1961 social charter of the Council of Europe which required that contracting parties undertake to provide for a minimum of two weeks pay with holidays.<sup>73</sup> Worker spokesmen had always been opposed to the retention of this provision, arguing that it was prone to abuse. Government and farmer organisations on the other hand had stressed the need to retain it on the grounds that many employers had only one or two employees whom it would be difficult to do without in the holiday season; a worker who nevertheless wished to take his holidays, instead of pay in lieu, was entitled to do so; from a health point, it was claimed agricultural workers did not need a break as much as industrial workers.

Allusion was also made to the separate code of legislation governing the holiday entitlement of agricultural workers and the fact that its existence had evoked the criticism that this class were regarded as 'second class citizens'.<sup>74</sup> Agriculture had opposed previous attempts to assimilate the two labour codes on the grounds that the fundamental differences between agriculture and industry necessitated the separate legislation both in terms of working conditions and the close proximity of the working relationship.<sup>75</sup> Dismissing the relevance of these arguments as grounds for differential treatment, the committee recommended that the feasibility of including both agricultural and non

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<sup>71</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee.*, par. 6.21(b).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*; Council of Europe, *European Social Charter 1961* (18 Oct. 1961) (<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/035.htm>)(29 May 2007).

<sup>74</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee.*, par. 3.15.

<sup>75</sup> Minister for Agriculture to the Taoiseach on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961, 27 Nov. 1961 (S 11689 B/61).

agricultural workers under one code in any future legislation be considered.<sup>76</sup> In line with this general approach, the committee also tackled the more recent improvements in conditions of service such as sick leave, pensions and service pay. Signs of an evolving progressive labour code, these benefits were being introduced in most cases as a result of collective bargaining.<sup>77</sup> Although agricultural workers were entitled to the normal disability benefits payable under the Social Welfare Acts when out sick, and the contributory old age pension on reaching 70 years of age, supplementary sick pay and retirement pension schemes were becoming the norm, with most rural workers in the public sector now benefiting.<sup>78</sup> Service pay was also becoming an increasingly common employment condition. Its purpose was to reward workers so much per years of service. Since the cost of these schemes would have been funded by farmers, most of whom would obviously never enjoy such benefits, it was hardly surprising that Agriculture opposed their introduction for agricultural workers. Ostensibly, of course, the immense practical difficulties associated with their introduction, or indeed the regulation of any employment conditions, was advanced as a factor.<sup>79</sup>

Although the committee concurred that there would be considerable practical difficulties in the way of introducing such modern conditions of service to agriculture, going so far as to suggest that in some cases it would seem inequitable for farmers to contribute to a

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<sup>76</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 3.15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 3.17.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 3.16-7.

<sup>79</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1960, 6 Feb. 1960 (S 16788A); Minister for Agriculture to the Taoiseach, 27 Nov. 1961 (S 11689 B/61); Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961, 27 Nov. 1961.



supplementary pension scheme for their workers, it still felt that the wage fixing body should not have been precluded from keeping these questions under review:

the effectiveness of the body would be unduly circumscribed if its powers were limited to prescribing only such conditions as might be specifically mentioned in the enabling Act. Circumstances are constantly changing and evolving and it would be undesirable to have to introduce fresh legislation whenever the need arose for some new requirement.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, it was judged preferable to give the statutory body broad powers to fix conditions of employment in general, at its own discretion.<sup>81</sup> So while the committee did not necessarily recommend the replication or imposition of conditions that existed elsewhere to agriculture, it strongly advocated that any body regulating agricultural wages should have had the option to make changes as and when it saw fit without having to have recourse to the Dáil, thus significantly broadening its remit and making it much more autonomous than the existing body. Distinguishing between employment conditions and the physical working conditions under which a worker had to carry out his duties, the committee did not consider that such issues as occupational health and safety which also affected the wider agricultural community should have been the responsibility of this body but should nonetheless have been legislated for under appropriate legislation and enforced by a government department.<sup>82</sup>

Consideration was also given to criticisms directed by worker spokesmen at the constitution of the Board. Dissatisfaction with this issue concerned the neutrality of neutral members, the powers of the chairman, and the procedure of nominating members

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<sup>80</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, pars. 3.24 and 3.37.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 7.6 (vii) and 4.1.

<sup>82</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, pars. 3.29-31.

to the Board. The neutrality of the independent members first came under ridicule during the Holidays Employees (Amendment) Bill 1946, with allegations that the Board was 'predisposed against the agricultural worker' emerging during the debate on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays) Bill in 1950, when it was suggested that the Board 'always sided in every case with the employer'.<sup>83</sup> This allegation persisted for the course of the Board's operations and as chapter five demonstrated, it was not entirely unfounded. The extent to which neutrals were held accountable for the Board's poor wage fixing decisions was revealed in the proposals for revision advanced by worker spokesmen over the years. When in 1950 the ITUC adopted a resolution calling for the government to hold an enquiry into the constitution and workings of the Board with a view to having it reconstituted as a tribunal, it was recommended that there would be no 'so-called neutrals' in the latter.<sup>84</sup> When in 1954 this developed into a demand for the establishment of an agricultural labour court, again no provision was made for neutral members.<sup>85</sup> This distrust of the latter also fed into the desired nominating procedure. It was provided that the ordinary members would be appointed by the trade unions, with the chairman's appointment by the minister subject to consultation with the nominating trade unions and the employer and worker members of the court.<sup>86</sup> By 1961 proposals had been mooted increasing the number of ordinary members on the Board and providing for the appointment of members other than the neutral members by organisations

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<sup>83</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol.119) 28 Feb. 1950, cols 855-6.

<sup>84</sup> ITUC to the general secretary, FRW, 17 Oct. 1950 (File 4660 ICTU 1/63).

<sup>85</sup> FRW memorandum to the ITUC regarding the proposed establishment of an 'Agricultural Wages Court', 10 Aug. 1954.

<sup>86</sup> FRW memo to the ITUC regarding an 'Agricultural Wages Court', 10 Aug. 1954 (File 4660 ICTU 1/63).

nominated by the minister for Agriculture.<sup>87</sup> The chairman and the neutral members on the other hand were to be appointed on the nomination of the employer and worker representatives or failing such nomination, by the minister as normal. In 1965 a scheme involving an increased number of ordinary members and no neutrals was again proposed.<sup>88</sup>

Although the committee did not address the criticisms directed at the neutral members, it held that any proposal to reduce the number of neutrals while increasing the number of other members could detract from the impartiality of the Board's decisions.<sup>89</sup> The Department of Agriculture would have favoured this assessment since it held that if any change in representation was required it would be best effected by reducing the number of ordinary members and increasing the number of neutrals, on whom it was felt lay the onus of responsibility for wage fixing decisions.<sup>90</sup> It was, however, a potentially unpopular recommendation with the worker spokesmen if the existing machinery was to continue. More detailed allusion was made to the position and powers of the Board's chairman, 'a further matter' that had been 'the subject of frequent adverse comment in the past'.<sup>91</sup> Although it was emphasised that the chairman had exercised his powers with discretion, it was confirmed that his powers were indeed excessive.<sup>92</sup> Referring to the fact that he alone could constitute a quorum, the committee drew comparison with the

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<sup>87</sup> The Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961 (S 16788 B/61); Department of Agriculture memorandum for government, 1 Jun. 1961; Minister for Agriculture to an Taoiseach, 27 Nov. 1961.

<sup>88</sup> The Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965 (S 17815); Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965, 21 Jun. 1965.

<sup>89</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par 6.12.

<sup>90</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961, 1 Jun. 1961, p.4 (S 16788B/61).

<sup>91</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental committee*, par. 5.5.

joint labour committee system where at least one independent member and one third of the whole number of representative members had to be present at a meeting for a quorum to be established. It was also admitted that the chairman's powers were 'undoubtedly wide' in relation to the making of wages orders.<sup>93</sup> In this regard, if no ordinary member or only one such member was present, the chairman could make a statutory order. It was suggested that these powers may not have been unreasonable had their existence helped avoid the risk of frustrating the Board's procedures by either the workers or employers interests, and so long as adequate notice of meetings had been given. Yet it was clearly conveyed that 'the concept of representation and participation' was 'better recognised in the joint labour committee procedure'.<sup>94</sup>

Referring to the emotive issue of representation, the committee noted that considerable objection had been expressed over the absence of any provision which would have given worker and employer organisations a voice in the nomination of members.<sup>95</sup> This was a key component of the both the Industrial Relations Act 1946 and the other agricultural wage fixing machinery operating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>96</sup> It was also identified by the ILO as a means of best representing the interests of the relevant parties involved.<sup>97</sup> Under Sections 4 and 5 of the 1936 act, the minister for Agriculture was the only person to directly select and appoint these members. The act did not require that employer representatives should have been 'persons employing a certain minimum

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 5.7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 5.1.

<sup>96</sup> *Industrial Relations Act 1946* [R.I.] section 41; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1948* [U.K.] first schedule, section 1; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1939* [N.I.] section 1(1).

<sup>97</sup> ILO, R89, *Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1951*, section 5.

number of agricultural workers' or that worker representatives should have been 'genuine' agricultural workers.<sup>98</sup> By the time the FRW began to organise agricultural labourers in 1946, representation was becoming an issue for them. Although the minister was alleged to have intimated to a deputation of the WUI earlier that year that he would consider nominating organised representatives of agricultural labourers to the area committees at the end of 1946, this did not happen.<sup>99</sup> Existing members were re-invited to act on the committees in 1947.<sup>100</sup> A letter to the minister on 12 April 1946 clearly conveyed that Larkin and his colleagues had been unhappy with this decision:

repeatedly over the present year, and even earlier, your attention was drawn to the unrepresentative character of these representatives and you indicated that as and when agricultural workers became organised you might be prepared to consider representatives' names which might be submitted by such organisation of agricultural workers. Accordingly, I wonder that, when the question of the re-appointment of members of the committees was under consideration, you did not have regard to the undoubtedly bona fide claim of the FRW in this matter, and I feel that again we are going to have a repetition of the situation which has existed now for some years in which agricultural workers feel that this national wage fixing machinery is not acceptable to them because of its unrepresentative character, and that the recommendations of these committees will again, as in the past, prove to be out of touch with the actual situation prevailing in agricultural employment.<sup>101</sup>

However the matter was not raised again until April 1947 when the FRW once more sought a meeting with the minister to discuss the wages and working conditions of agricultural labourers in all counties other than Dublin.<sup>102</sup> That the Federation was enjoying increasing success in wage negotiations was apparent from this request and was confirmed in a departmental minute of 22 April:

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<sup>98</sup> (AGI/G799/46).

<sup>99</sup> Sean Dunne, FRW to minister for Agriculture, 21 Nov. 1946 (AGI/G394/41).

<sup>100</sup> Minister to James Larkin TD, WUI, 6 Dec. 1946.

<sup>101</sup> Larkin to minister, 12 Dec. 1946 (AGI/G394/41).

<sup>102</sup> Dunne to minister, 14 Apr. 1947.

it seems likely that the Federation, following the agreement recently reached regarding payment of increased wages in Co. Dublin above the minimum laid down in the current Order for agricultural wages, will seek an improvement on a similar scale in the pay and working conditions of agricultural workers elsewhere.<sup>103</sup>

The minister however refused to grant this petition, stating in a reply to the FRW on 28 April that he could not 'see that any useful purpose would be served by his receiving such a deputation'.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile a memorandum on the question noted how even though the Federation was not representative of the large body of agricultural workers 'there seems no doubt but that it is pushing organisation ahead vigorously'.<sup>105</sup> In this regard reminder was issued of its attempts the previous year to have a number of its representatives nominated on wage committees. It was held that:

Its desire to seek an interview now may be to influence the nomination of these committees at the end of the present year as well as to raise its status amongst the workers.<sup>106</sup>

Despite preventing the FRW from nominating members on grounds of representation, this suggested that the department was equally averse to facilitating the organising drive of this union. Just as the minister agreeing to receive a deputation from the FRW would have contributed greatly to raising its status amongst the workers, the official involvement of the FRW in the nominating process would also have given greater credence to this organisation. There was a slight compromise when James Dillon became minister for Agriculture in the coalition government of 1948 – 51. From 1949, the FRW and the AAI were actually allowed to nominate members to the Board in an unofficial

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<sup>103</sup> Minute to F.M. Walsh, 22 Apr. 1947 (AGI/G394/41).

<sup>104</sup> Minister to Dunne, 28 Apr. 1947.

<sup>105</sup> Minute to Walsh, memorandum 4, 22 Apr. 1947.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

capacity.<sup>107</sup> Yet the fact that the control over these appointments still remained in the hands of the minister for Agriculture continued to be a contentious issue for worker spokesmen, with the former in principle responsible for the appointment of up to 42 worker members without reference to the appropriate trade union or unions.<sup>108</sup> The latter were only too aware that this contrasted greatly with the ability of industrial workers to nominate worker members to the Labour Court.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, as the years advanced they continued to agitate for formal involvement in the nominating process. Agriculture on the other hand refused to compromise further. Such opposition was stimulated mainly by the absence of a comparable level of organisation on the part of the employers. This was partly evident in Agriculture's rejection of the privately sponsored Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958.<sup>110</sup>

Seeking to extend registered agreements to agriculture, even to those not party to them, Agriculture had been concerned with the implications of such agreements for the organised status of the workers, declaring in a memorandum to government that it 'might lead to a very considerable growth in the power of the workers' organisation'.<sup>111</sup> Attempting to belittle the strength of the FRW, confirmation emerged that this was rooted in the lack of similar organisation amongst agricultural employers:

On the employers side the National Farmers Association is known to be reluctant to embroil itself in labour problems and the only other employers' organisation of

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<sup>107</sup> Memorandum on FRW correspondence dated 6 Sep. 1949, 22 Sep. 1949 (AGI/G1195/49); FRW memorandum to the ITUC, 10 Aug. 1954 (File 4660 ICTU 1/63).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958, 26 Nov. 1958 (IR 7A).

<sup>111</sup> Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Department of Agriculture to government opposing the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958, 11 Dec. 1958 (IR 7A).

any size is the Agricultural Association of Ireland which is of rather a specialised character and is confined to a limited area.<sup>112</sup>

As legitimate as this concern may have been it was hardly equitable for the department to deliberately deprive agricultural workers of certain advantages because similar organising tendencies did not exist amongst agricultural employers. But it continued to oppose further requests in this regard precisely for this reason. Proposals under the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961 providing for the appointment of members by organisations nominated by the minister were again rejected. Difficulties in including any organisation in the nominating procedure were related to the absence of any real interest in this question by the farmer organisations:

That difficulty would apply to the farmers' organisations in particular as, though there is a number of organisations which claim to speak for farming interests, none of them seems to interest itself in the matter of agricultural wages, certainly not to the extent of making any representations to the Board in the matter, or of making any public pronouncement when wage increases are announced.<sup>113</sup>

The NFA (IFA from 1972) was the country's largest farming organisation and from its establishment in 1955 it was focused on giving farmers a powerful united voice to negotiate and bargain at the highest level on a par with that of worker organisations.<sup>114</sup> The very fact that it saw farmers as having similar entitlements to 'comparable workers' in other areas, viewed the price for farm produce as their 'wage' and accordingly campaigned for compensation from the state for the improved standards of living being passed on to workers such as those in the public sector, meant that it tended to naturally

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961, 1 Jun. 1961 (S 16788 B/6I).

<sup>114</sup> Louis F. Smith and Sean Healy, *Farm organisations in Ireland: a century of progress* (Dublin, 1996), pp 152-3 and 156-7.



gravitate away from any association with being identified as an employer body.<sup>115</sup> And while the NFA was committed to representing the interests of small and larger farmers, since the latter were disproportionate to the former it could not jeopardise the support of small farmers by being seen to represent large employers in wage negotiations, especially since many of their members may have worked part-time on large farms. This was also an historical issue extending back to the landlord era and later the anti grazier movement which surrounded the establishment of the Free State where the typical employer of labour was perceived to be a large landowner. This aversion to wage negotiations had also been apparent when the AAI and NFA had considered merging in 1955. It had been decided that the AAI should maintain its separate identity given that the major focus of its members concerned wages, an issue the NFA did not intend to concern itself with.<sup>116</sup> The ICMSA was also a large farming organisation formed in 1950 in response to proposals by the minister for Agriculture, James Dillon, to reduce the price of milk.<sup>117</sup> It was more commodity based during its initial years effectively representing milk producers and the dairy industry. The refusal of the bigger farming organisations to become involved with wages issues suggested that a certain stigma was still associated with larger farmers whose interests were perceived to be at odds with the vast majority of Irish farmers and the family farm unit all organisations were committed to protecting. The persistence of this detachment however presented major difficulties for the agricultural labourer. It was apparent that the Department of Agriculture would continue

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>116</sup> Minister for Agriculture memo for government, 24 Feb. 1960 (S 15848A).

<sup>117</sup> Smith and Healy, *Farm organisations*, p. 45.

to deprive them of the benefits of formal representation by the limited organisation that did exist on their behalf. It was admonished that:

To officially invite the Federation to nominate a member or members for appointment to the Board would, therefore, attribute to that body an importance in regard to agricultural workers which would hardly seem warranted.<sup>118</sup>

This line of reasoning was reiterated again in response to the proposals under the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961 which sought to permit worker and employer organisations to nominate ordinary members for appointment to the Board. It was argued that the increased powers which trade unions could exercise in relation to this provision would have enabled them 'to bring undue pressure on workers to join the trade union movement'.<sup>119</sup> So instead of conceding nomination to the union as a means of encouraging greater organisation amongst this class, it was withheld for fear that it would do precisely that. It still regarded any strengthening of this group with alarm.

Nine years later, the interdepartmental committee empathised with the stance adopted by Agriculture to a certain extent. It agreed that there had been 'practical reasons' for the minister retaining the sole power to appoint members to the Board. The fact that farmers' organisations 'had not pressed for participation in the wage fixing machinery' was noted in particular and it was suggested that:

Even if interested organisations of employers and of workers were entitled to nominate members directly to the Board there could be difficulty in deciding what organisations are sufficiently representative to be given this entitlement.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961, 1 Jun. 1961 (S 16788 B/61).

<sup>119</sup> Minister for Agriculture to the Taoiseach on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961, 27 Nov. 1961.

<sup>120</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 5.3.

However, notwithstanding these considerations it still submitted that:

it would be desirable that the machinery should provide for some recognition of organised groups which either take an active interest in the matter of agricultural wages etc. at the moment or may decide to do so in the future. It is possible that farm workers will attain a higher degree of trade union organisation and the farmers' organisations may also be expected to display more interest in the settling of wages and conditions of agricultural workers. These developments would facilitate consultation.<sup>121</sup>

In recommending a greater degree of consultation it was obvious that the committee had the consultation system of the Labour Court in mind. It was noted in particular that in the case of a joint labour committee the Labour Court was required to consult 'so far as is reasonably practicable' with organisations of employers and of workers concerned before appointing the representative members, with the minister for Labour appointing the chairman and other independent members.<sup>122</sup> It was this sort of arrangement which the committee recommended for the statutory body dealing with agricultural workers. This would also have been in line with ILO Convention No. 99 on minimum wage fixing machinery in agriculture.<sup>123</sup> The Irish government had been in contravention of this convention since 1953 because of the lack of provision for consultation with representative organisations in the Agricultural Wages Act.

Once again, therefore, the principal claims of worker spokesmen had been ratified by the committee. Instead of appearing excessive or exorbitant it was evident that the majority had in fact derived from similar conditions existing elsewhere for other workers. This

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 5.4.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 6.21 (c); ILO, *C 99, Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951* (28 Jun. 1951).

would explain why the committee upheld so many of the claims. There was no justification for withholding from this class the same machinery as was available to other workers. It was in acknowledgement of 'the increasing skills and growing comparability of all workers' that the committee in fact recommended that the agricultural worker 'should have the opportunity of having his pay and conditions fixed by reference to broadly based standards'.<sup>124</sup> That this was their guiding criteria was evidenced when it came to taking into account the most appropriate machinery to give effect to their recommendations. It was generally considered that since:

the trend towards increasing comparability with the non-agricultural worker will...continue...the aim should be to secure maximum integration of the agricultural worker into the general labour relations machinery.<sup>125</sup>

From this point of view it was suggested that the most appropriate machinery would have been a joint labour committee under the auspices of the Labour Court.<sup>126</sup> This was of huge importance. Mindful of advances in wage fixing machinery elsewhere, demands of worker spokesmen over the years had vacillated between the pragmatic, an upgrade of the Board's powers, and the ideal, which was the outright replacement of the Board with a joint labour committee under the auspices of the Labour Court. From 1950 to 1961 the FRW and the ITUC had sought to combine the best features of the Board and its governing legislation with the Industrial Relations Act 1946. The introduction of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962 signalled the end of these attempts when the desire to transfer complete responsibility for this machinery to the Labour Court was finally enunciated. As much as this demand was concerned with attempts to attain

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<sup>124</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 4.4.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 4.2.

improved machinery, ultimately it was driven by the need to detach its operations from the control and influence of the Department of Agriculture. As espoused by James Larkin during the introduction of this measure to the Dáil, the main reason advanced for the transfer of the Board's functions to the Labour Court was that it:

would be completely free and removed from any circumstances which might tend to influence the decisions of an agricultural wage fixing body. The same cannot be said of the present agricultural wages board. The present chairman of the Board is a former secretary of the Department of Agriculture; retired inspectors of the department are appointed as 'neutral members'; and the administrative staff of the Agricultural Wages Board are traditionally officers of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>127</sup>

Although this claim was exaggerated, the informal presence of Agriculture on the Board was indeed considerable for an independent wage fixing body, much of which was facilitated by the minister's exclusive powers of nomination and appointment. Suspicion of the department extended back to events regarding the weekly half holiday in 1949. Mistrust of the department was not alleviated over the years. As Larkin pertinently noted in 1962:

there are good grounds to doubt the wisdom of placing the control and the administration of the agricultural wage-fixing authority in the hands of the Department of Agriculture, as the Department is a substantial employer of agricultural employees who are seeking improved conditions of employment.<sup>128</sup>

For this reason alone, Agriculture should not have been vested with responsibility for agricultural employment wages and conditions, not to mention the fact that its broader remit was to cater for the wider agricultural community most of whose interests were in direct opposition to those of agricultural workers. But it seems the committee were also

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<sup>126</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 4.13.

<sup>127</sup> *Dáil Eireann deb.*, (vol. 198), 5 Dec. 1962, col. 734.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

unable to put the interests of the agricultural labourer before that of the agricultural employer, despite its recommendations. Notwithstanding the desire to integrate the agricultural labourer into the national labour relations machinery, it was felt that:

agricultural employers may feel that the time is still not opportune for having precisely the same machinery for determining wages and conditions of agricultural workers as exists for non-agricultural employees.<sup>129</sup>

On this basis it was recommended that the 'more suitable and acceptable solution' would be the retention of the Board, with expanded functions and an appropriate change in title, subject to its proposals being confirmed by the Labour Court.<sup>130</sup> It was claimed that the adoption of this suggestion would not place the agricultural worker at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the joint labour committee system, since the constitution, powers, functions and procedures of both would be essentially the same, except that:

An advantage in retaining the Agricultural Wages Board would be that it is accepted by the farming community and would, therefore, be well suited to initiate future changes in conditions of employment for agricultural workers. The establishment of a link between the new Board and the Labour Court as recommended would facilitate co-ordination in the matter of trends in conditions of employment generally.<sup>131</sup>

This compromise arrangement was advanced on the basis that it could lead to the establishment of a joint labour committee for agricultural workers at a later stage.<sup>132</sup> For the committee to go so far and not recommend the Board's immediate replacement by a joint labour committee had the potential to create more dissension than it did resolution. Having conceded that the ideal was the establishment of a joint labour committee, it could hardly expect worker spokesmen to readily embrace the lesser alternative. On the

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<sup>129</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 4.16.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 4.18.

other hand, the farming organisations were unlikely to reject the opportunity to keep the existing machinery in favour of a more universal system. No doubt the committee's decision in this regard had been tempered by the likelihood that had the farming community been faced with all these changes under a system that had been transferred from Agriculture to Labour, the chances of their recommendations being implemented would have been slight. The retention of the Board in an upgraded form would have made the introduction of such changes seem less threatening to those who feared that agriculture was becoming too industrial. That the committee had been accurate in this perception was demonstrated at subsequent discussions on their report between representatives of certain worker and farming organisations.

Following the presentation of the committee's report to government in June 1970, copies were sent to the IFA, the ICMSA, the ITGWU and the FRW for their views. Representatives of the Departments of Labour and Agriculture subsequently had discussions with these organisations with a view to agreeing how the proposals in the report might be implemented.<sup>133</sup> Although all organisations agreed that there was still a need for statutory machinery to regulate agricultural wages, and that that body should have been empowered to prescribe conditions of employment subject to the establishment of an appropriate link with the Labour Court, both sides were at variance as to their preferred type of body. As was to be expected, the farming organisations

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<sup>131</sup> *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, par. 4.17.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 4.18.

<sup>133</sup> Department of Agriculture & Fisheries memorandum for government on the future of the AWB, 13 Jun. 1975, p. 6 (S 15848B).

supported the establishment of an upgraded version of the existing Board, suitably renamed. However, their agreement was based on a critical stipulation, that the minister for Agriculture still be involved in the entire process. As revealed in a Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the subject:

They were prepared to go along with the idea of a new body with wider powers and a revised constitution and rules of procedure provided the minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and not the Labour Court (on which no farming representation) or the minister for Labour had overall responsibility including the function of appointing the members.<sup>134</sup>

Evidently these organisations had been more than satisfied with how Agriculture had managed to safeguard their interests in the context of the existing machinery. That this level of satisfaction was not shared by those whose interests the machinery was supposed to protect, however, was made particularly blatant when both the ITGWU and the FRW urged the establishment of a joint labour committee precisely because they did not want the involvement of the minister or his department:

They felt that all legislation relating to employment should be the function of the Department of Labour and that any other arrangement would tend to maintain what they claimed to be the inferior conditions of employment of agricultural workers.<sup>135</sup>

The farmer organisations however remained completely opposed to this proposal. Such fervent divergence on this fundamental aspect of the new machinery had the makings of a lasting obstacle to agreement. However the trenchant opposition of the FRW was undermined when the ITGWU eventually intimated that they were prepared to accept a compromise arrangement should the joint labour committee system have been strongly

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<sup>134</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government on the future of the AWB, 13 Jun. 1975, pp 6-7 (S 15848B).



resisted by employers.<sup>136</sup> Such action on the part of the ITGWU could have had serious repercussions for the agricultural labourer. With a membership of only 500 agricultural workers by 1974, it had little involvement with this group since the 1920s when it had for many years subsequently actually prided itself on its growth without the membership of this class, who it acknowledged constituted the 'main bulk of the working population'.<sup>137</sup> It had only been included in consultations on the future of the AWB in early 1974 after making a special request to the minister for Agriculture. Its willingness to compromise at this stage would have effectively strengthened any attempt by Agriculture to implement the recommendations of the farmer organisations while simultaneously placing the FRW in an impossible position. But there had been no danger of such an outcome at that point in time. Despite the favourable outlook for Agriculture in these proceedings, it made no attempt to implement the recommendations. Since Blaney and his successor, James Gibbons, were both implicated in the arms trial of 1970, its fall out may have played a part with Fianna Fáil trying to provoke as little additional controversy as possible in the lead up to the general election of 1973.<sup>138</sup> The lack of momentum also suggested that Blaney's replacement by Gibbons had been followed by the reassertion of the old consensus which opposed any modification of the existing system. This was to become

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<sup>135</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government on the future of the AWB, 13 Jun. 1975, p. 6 (S 15848B).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> J. Carroll, ITGWU to the minister for Agriculture, 11 Jan. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4); *Annual report of the ITGWU* (1949), p. 6.

<sup>138</sup> James Gibbons was elected as a Fianna Fáil TD for Carlow-Kilkenny in 1957 and in 1965 he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the minister for Finance, Jack Lynch. In 1969 he was appointed minister for Defence and was subsequently implicated in the arms trial of 1970 when as lead prosecutorial witness his evidence was not believed over that of Charles Haughey and Haughey was acquitted. Gibbons was subsequently appointed minister for Agriculture and played a key role in the agricultural negotiations for entry to the EEC.

apparent from 1973 when notwithstanding the first change of government since 1957 the new coalition minister for Agriculture, Fine Gael TD Mark Clinton, remained opposed to change. That the tide had irrevocably turned, however, was to become equally apparent. The change was heralded in the actions of the new minister for Labour, Michael O'Leary.

In a letter to Clinton on 20 August 1973, O'Leary suggested that the 'time was opportune' to initiate action to establish a new body to deal with the conditions of employment of agricultural workers.<sup>139</sup> This action was symptomatic of the government's rising concern over the Board's failure to comply with the national wage agreements. Now part of the EEC and in the process of agreeing substantial benefits for agriculture, it was no doubt concerned about how the Board's activities would be perceived in Brussels. Clearly the Department of Agriculture did not share this concern or they would have acted on the report in 1970. In a press office release in September 1973 the government publicly noted the Board's failure to comply with the national agreements, while making pointed allusion to the fact that the legislation determining the pay of agricultural workers was being considered in consultation with the organisations concerned.<sup>140</sup> Such action on the government's part was fortuitous for Labour. Since the minister for Agriculture was ultimately responsible for the Board's governing legislation and the wages and conditions of agricultural labourers in general, Labour was prevented from taking any precipitate action on such matters. The controversy surrounding the Board's refusal to implement the national wage agreements significantly altered the

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<sup>139</sup> Note for the minister's information, 20 Mar. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

situation. Combined with their involvement in the interdepartmental enquiry, it presented Labour with the ideal opportunity to intervene. Up to this point neither department had taken a stand on which machinery was the most appropriate for agriculture. In taking the initiative O'Leary forced Clinton's hand. By November it was clear that Clinton would not favour any proposals for a joint labour committee, suggesting that the continued opposition of the IFA and the ICMSA to the latter left him with no alternative but to go ahead with the arrangements to expand the scope and functions of the Board on the lines recommended by the committee.<sup>141</sup> The extent to which both departments would diverge on this issue emerged for the first time at a meeting of their officials in January 1974.<sup>142</sup>

Clashing from the outset, officials from Agriculture, led by M. O'Doherty, were forced into an increasingly defensive position which belied suggestions that their opposition to a joint labour committee was simply in response to farmer opposition. This stemmed from their refusal to even acknowledge that new machinery was necessary as they advanced various reasons to oppose the Board's abolition. In counter-arguing the claims put forward Labour, led by B. MacMaghnus, revealed some of the inaccuracies upon which Agriculture had for so long upheld the present system. For instance, in attempting to verify that the Board had worked well in the past, Agriculture tried to suggest that the wages of agricultural labourers had in recent years increased faster than those of any other group of workers. Although this was true in relative terms, the reality was that they were increasing from a much lower base rate so absolute wages still remained considerably behind those in non agriculture, a point which Labour did not fail to

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<sup>141</sup> Note for the minister's information, 20 Mar. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>142</sup> Report of a meeting between Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974.

communicate. When Agriculture tried to recover some ground by referring 'to the growth in incomes of farm workers', and claiming 'that at present their wages were higher than those of their counterparts in Britain and Northern Ireland', the tenuous basis of the latter claim was revealed when Labour pointed out that:

in Britain and Northern Ireland maximum hours of work for farm workers were statutorily determined and overtime payments applied. Such was not the case in Ireland. In other words, the actual hourly earnings of Irish farm workers were considerably lower than those of their counterparts in Britain and Northern Ireland.<sup>143</sup>

From 1970 the Irish weekly agricultural minimum wage for adult workers appeared to exceed the nominal amount for England and Wales and Northern Ireland for the first time, a pattern that seemed to continue over the ensuing decade. However, once this rate was considered in conjunction with the critical issue of the working hours required to actually qualify for the weekly nominal rate in the various jurisdictions, the wage earning patterns were significantly different. The worker in the Republic had to work much longer hours than his counterparts to qualify for a similar nominal weekly rate. For instance, in 1976 the adult male agricultural worker in the Republic received 734s. for a 48 hour week. In England and Wales, the weekly rate was 730s. for a 40 hour week, and in Northern Ireland the rate was 730s. for a 41 hour week. In effect the worker in the Republic had to work eight hours longer than those in England and Wales and seven hours longer than those in Northern Ireland to qualify for a similar weekly wage. This was effectively an additional day's work per week. In hourly terms, it meant the English worker was receiving a rate of 18s. 3d. compared to the Irish worker's 15s., which would

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<sup>143</sup> Meeting between Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

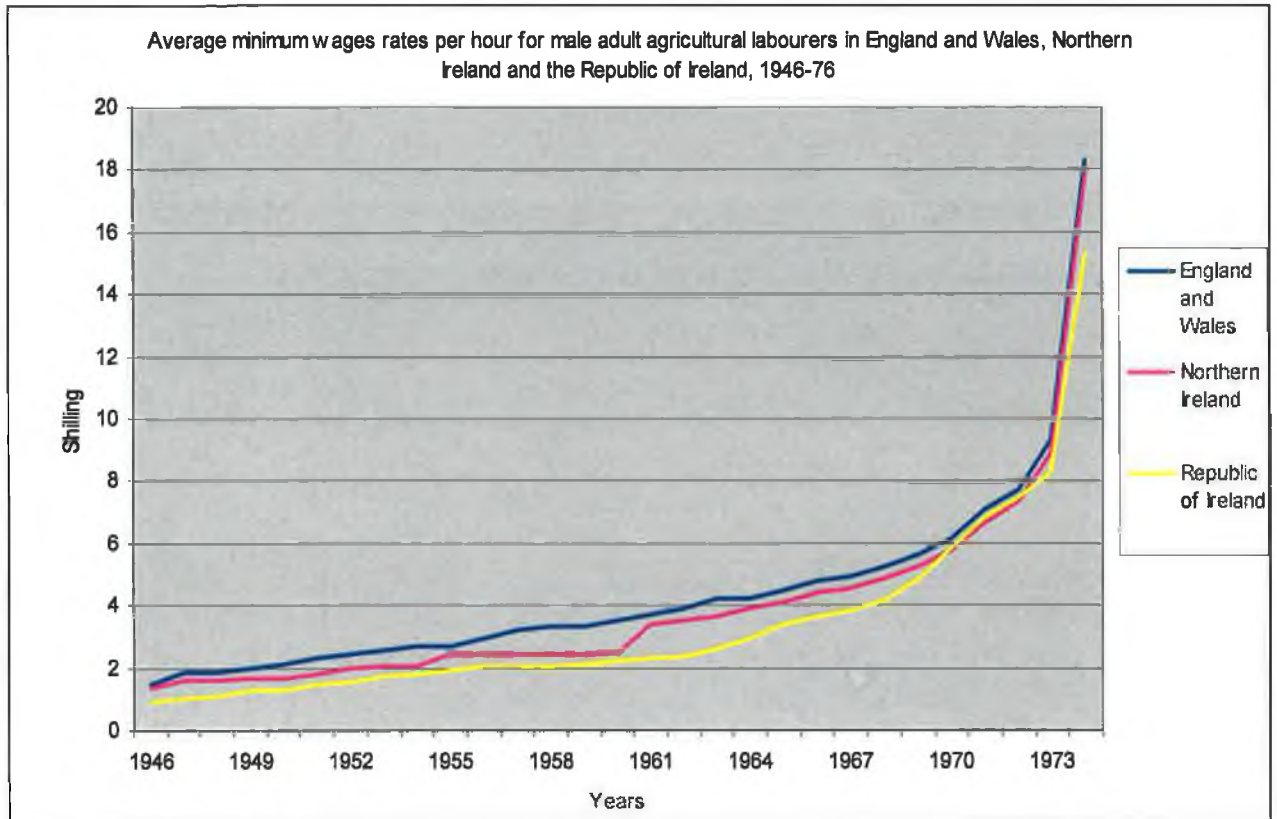
have entitled the English worker to some 120s. more per week if he had worked the same hours as the Irish worker.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the trend of the hourly average minimum rates for male adult agricultural workers in Northern Ireland, England and Wales and the Republic of Ireland during the period 1946-76.<sup>144</sup> It highlights how the hourly rate in the latter lagged consistently behind the rates in the North and in England and Wales during the years 1946-69. For instance, in England and Wales in 1946 an agricultural labourer worked a 48 hour week for on average 70s. or 1s. 5d. an hour. In Northern Ireland his colleague worked 51 hours for on average 69s. 6d. per week or 1s. 4d. an hour. This compared with a 54 hour week in the Republic of Ireland for a sum of on average 49s. or 11d. an hour. Not only did the Irish labourer work 6 hours more than his colleagues in England and Wales to qualify for the average weekly minimum wage of 49s., but he was paid almost 21s. a week or 6d. an hour less. This gap widened even more during the early sixties. While wages for workers in the south and north of Ireland remained almost static during the late fifties, wages continued to improve in England and Wales.

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<sup>144</sup> See Table AIV.10 in Appendix IV for data on this chart.

**Figure 7.1** Average minimum wage rates per hour for male adult agricultural labourers in Northern Ireland, England & Wales and the Republic of Ireland, 1946-76



Sources: England & Wales; *Agricultural wages: history sheet*, Jun. 1998 (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, national statistics section); Northern Ireland: Orders under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland), 1939 to 1956 (Nos. 1-50) (NI Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, AWB Secretariat); Republic of Ireland: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

The Northern Ireland Board made a significant attempt to narrow this gap by 1962. At this point workers in England and Wales received a minimum wage of on average 179s. for a working week of 46 hours, 3s. 11d. an hour; workers in Northern Ireland received 163s. 9½d. for a 47 hour week, 3s. 6d. an hour; and workers in the Republic received 119s. 3½d. for a 50 hour week, 2s. 5d. an hour. The adult agricultural labourers in the Republic were required to work three to four hours more per week and received 60s. less than their colleagues in England and Wales, 1s. 6d. less an hour, and 44s. less than their

neighbours across the border, or 1s. 1d. less an hour. From about 1964 it is evident that the larger increases passed by the Irish AWB began to make substantial inroads on the large gap in hourly rates. Between 1970 and 1973 the hourly rate in the Republic actually slightly exceeded the rate in Northern Ireland for the first time. For instance, in 1972 the average hourly rate for adult agricultural workers in England and Wales was 7s. 9d. an hour; in Northern Ireland it was 7s. 4d.; and in the Republic it was 7s. 5d. However, because the Irish Board failed to reduce working hours in line with trends generally, the gap was renewed from 1973 and the hourly minimum rate in the Republic fell behind again so that while the hourly rate in England and Wales was 18s. 3d. in 1976, it was 17s. 10d. in Northern Ireland and 15s. 3d. in the Republic.

It should also be recalled from chapter four that the agricultural labourers in the Republic who partook of benefits in kind such as full board were liable for deductions from their weekly wages by their employers ranging from 52 per cent in 1940, to 40 per cent in 1959, to 26 per cent in 1970. It was the late 1960s before the values allocated to board by the Irish AWB fell more in line with trends in Northern Ireland, but even at that it was 1975 before the values allocated to full board fell below 20 per cent of the adult worker's minimum weekly wage. So for the Department of Agriculture to claim that the agricultural labourer in the Republic of Ireland earned more than his neighbouring colleagues was a blatant attempt to obscure the facts.

In trying to move the onus back on to the farmer organisations, Agriculture regurgitated the argument that the latter were 'fearful' of becoming involved in a joint labour committee in case it led to the development of a 'them and us' attitude among farm

workers, predicting that it would 'almost certainly' lead to strikes and a high degree of unionisation.<sup>145</sup> Denouncing the former claim, Labour pointed out that despite the alleged relationship of working 'with them rather than for them', the Board had succeeded in collecting considerable arrears of wages and holiday pay due to farm workers.<sup>146</sup> By 1976 this figure would have been in the region of £200,000.<sup>147</sup> As regards the farmer predictions on trade unionism, it was clear that these views were also shared by Agriculture itself when the officials proceeded to speak of its 'dangers' and noted the strike record of workers in the ESB as an example.

Labour challenged these sentiments on grounds of principle as well as practicality, indicating precisely why its remit was completely worker oriented and by implication why Agriculture should not have been responsible for the welfare of agricultural labourers. In referring to the improvements in the conditions of employment of workers which had taken place generally, it was argued that workers would not have been much better off relatively than in 1913, had it not been for trade union activity.<sup>148</sup> Aside from upholding the necessity for trade unionism, however, the fears were dismissed as being groundless given the practical difficulties associated with organising a scattered workforce. That Agriculture could still make such claims when even the representative organisations consulted on the recommendations of the interdepartmental committee had agreed that the necessity still remained for statutory machinery, given 'the apparently weak bargaining position' of both the agricultural labourer and farmer employers,

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<sup>145</sup> Meeting of Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> See Table AIV.9 in Appendix IV.

<sup>148</sup> Meeting of Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974.



indicated the extent to which this department was prepared to rehash the insecurities of employers for their own purposes. In fact, the manner in which it continued to proclaim the opposition of the employing bodies to the joint labour committee system as grounds for retaining an upgraded agricultural wages board, despite the continued opposition of the FRW, led Labour to conclude that:

The Department of Agriculture had decided against the establishment of a joint labour committee simply because the employers had objected to the proposal...if the Department of Labour behaved in similar fashion and listened solely to employer interests there would be no progressive labour legislation.<sup>149</sup>

This was a grave accusation and its implications were widespread. Not only had Labour accused Agriculture of pursuing a less than equitable policy in this matter, but had effectively implied that this mentality had contributed to the less progressive state of agricultural employment conditions by this time. That Labour felt obliged to make such a judgement on this department's activities at this early stage of negotiations was indicative of things to come. Notwithstanding this moment of intolerance however, Labour were sufficiently astute to gather that there was more to Agriculture's objections than employer opposition. It was submitted:

one of the major fears of the farmers seemed to be that a joint labour committee would exclude them and/or the Department of Agriculture from having a say in the operations of a Joint Labour Committee. It was possible to remove these fears.<sup>150</sup>

Under the typical joint labour committee system the appointment of the chairman and independent members was usually the remit of the minister for Labour. In the spirit of

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<sup>149</sup> Meeting of Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

compromise, Labour indicated that they would be willing to relax these procedures slightly to allow the involvement of Agriculture. It was intimated that should a joint labour committee be established, the minister for Labour would appoint the chairman and independent members only following consultation with the minister for Agriculture. In addition it was submitted that the minister for Agriculture would be consulted with regard to the preparation of the two panels submitted to the Labour Court for the selection of employer and employee members of the committee. Labour had deduced that should Agriculture be assured of their continued involvement in the process, they could in turn alleviate employer opposition instead of nurturing it as they no doubt were at that time. However it was not enough. Dismissing the significance of this concession, Agriculture refused to even go to the farming organisations with the proposal, announcing instead their intention to proceed with drafting a memorandum for government recommending the upgrade of the existing system.<sup>151</sup>

The Department of Labour were now encountering the intransigency so frequently encountered by worker spokesmen in the past. What was really at stake here was that the Agriculture did not want Labour interfering in matters agricultural. This opposition had been apparent since 1958 when worker spokesmen had sought to extend Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 to agricultural labourers. Unlike the Department of Industry and Commerce, who opposed this proposal on practical grounds, the Department of Agriculture objected out of principle.<sup>152</sup> In submitting not only one but two memoranda to government opposing this measure, it became obvious that they

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<sup>151</sup> Meeting of Labour and Agriculture regarding agricultural workers, 17 Jan. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>152</sup> Brief for the minister for Labour on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958 (IR 7A).

would trenchantly oppose any attempt to interfere with the existing wage fixing machinery in agriculture.<sup>153</sup> The proposal to change the existing legislation relating to agricultural wages, not by an amendment of that legislation but by an amendment of an act that concerned workers in industry, was severely criticised on a number of levels but most 'undesirable' was that two statutory bodies - the Agricultural Wages Board and the Labour Court - and two ministers should be dealing with agricultural employment conditions.<sup>154</sup> Concerned that the traditional control over this sphere exercised by the minister for Agriculture and his department since 1936 might have been undermined by the involvement of other interests, it was conceded that if modification was necessary 'it would seem more logical to bring it about by means of a fundamental change in the existing functions of the Agricultural Wages Board'.<sup>155</sup> However when worker spokesmen introduced a measure on those lines in 1960 and on two separate occasions in 1961, the opposition to change was just as pronounced.<sup>156</sup> This was particularly obvious in 1961 when, notwithstanding the Taoiseach's intimation that the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961 should have been amended at committee stage and passed, the minister at the time, Patrick Smith, ensured that the necessity for its adoption was also completely undermined and rejected.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958, 18 Nov. 1958; Supplementary memorandum for government, 11 Dec. 1958 (IR 7A).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1960, 6 Feb. 1960 (S 16788A); Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961, 1 Jun. 1961 (S 16788 B/61); Memorandum for government on the Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961, 27 Nov. 1961.

<sup>157</sup> Taoiseach to minister for Agriculture, 17 Nov. 1961; Minister to Taoiseach, 27 Nov. 1961 (S 16788 B/61).

Defence of the existing system was also required the following year when the complete transfer of the system to the Labour Court and the Department of Labour was demanded.<sup>158</sup> On this occasion it was claimed that it would have been 'quite wrong' to think that any betterment of the lot of this class could have been achieved 'merely' by transferring from one body to another the functions of regulating the minimum rates of wages, holiday pay et cetera.<sup>159</sup> While it was considered plausible and desirable to have all wages determined by the same authority, which would have detailed information as to the wage rates payable to all sectors, this proposition was nonetheless rejected since:

ultimately the wages of agricultural workers are determined by the capacity of farmers to pay and besides, information is always available to the Board, if they need it, regarding the wages paid in comparable fields of employment such as county council road workers or forestry workers. In addition the Board has available to it through the area committees, as already mentioned, the views of farmers and workers down the country.<sup>160</sup>

This epitomised precisely why the worker members sought to transfer the functions of the Board to the Labour Court. The department obviously endorsed any method which focused primarily on the capacity of farmers to meet increases. By transferring the procedure for determining wages to the Labour Court, the influence of Agriculture would have been completely removed allowing for the use of a more balanced method. The department was only too aware of the implications of such a transfer for the role it played in controlling agricultural wage trends. In this regard the fact that the Labour Court rather than the minister for Agriculture would have appointed the representative members was

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<sup>158</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962, 12 Oct. 1962 (IR 7A).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

criticised. It was obvious that the department was not in favour of a non-agricultural authority assuming precedence over matters which were agricultural in nature:

It was not clear that the Court would be in a better position than the minister for Agriculture to select persons to deal with matters appertaining to agriculture.<sup>161</sup>

Given these views it was hardly surprising that Agriculture readily embraced farmer opposition to the proposed new system in 1973. This department was completely averse to having its hegemony over matters agricultural undermined by any other body.

In February 1974 Agriculture circulated to Labour its first draft of a memorandum for government on the future of the AWB.<sup>162</sup> As was to be expected this memorandum was notable for its bias in defence of the maintenance of the agricultural wage board system, with employer opposition amplified to justify its stance. However the response of Labour suggested that Agriculture had finally encountered a worthy adversary. The fervent opposition of employers and workers was adopted at government level as both departments went head to head over who would assume ultimate responsibility for this class. This involved the minister for Labour taking a stance on agricultural labour which had been grievously absent back in 1936. Indeed, evidence suggests that as recent as 1962 the then Department of Industry and Commerce had been content for Agriculture to have responsibility for agricultural labour matters. In response to proposals from the ITGWU to extend part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 to agricultural labourers, it was commented in a departmental minute:

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<sup>161</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962, 12 Oct. 1962, p. 5 (IR 7A).

<sup>162</sup> Draft memorandum for government on the future of the AWB, 19 Feb. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4).

The Department of Agriculture is the department concerned with questions affecting the agricultural economy (as we are concerned with the industrial economy) and it is to be assumed that their views on employer/worker relationships in agriculture are correct.<sup>163</sup>

At the interdepartmental meeting in January 1974, Labour officials made it clear that the minister for Labour was not just pitching for new wage fixing machinery. He was seeking the transfer of responsibility for the general welfare of this class to his department. This meeting was the first indication that Labour were becoming more cognisant of what precisely was at stake. This was also revealed in the general departmental reaction to the draft memorandum. While it was conceded that the proposed new agricultural wages board could be just as effective an instrument for improving the wages and conditions of agricultural labourers, the realisation that this needed to be opposed purely on the grounds of principle had now evolved.<sup>164</sup>

For instance, in addressing the minister for Agriculture's claim that he had no option, having regard to the views of the farmer organisations, but to proceed by way of extension of the scope and functions of the Board, it was noted in the observations of the industrial relations section of Labour on 3 May:

If the minister for Labour were to accede in the same way to the views of the employers' organisations none of the recent progressive legislation would now be law. The minister for Labour is not satisfied that agricultural workers, whose interests the Agricultural Wages Board purports to serve, is accepted by the workers as the body best suited to serve their interests. The Irish agricultural worker is the lowest paid male worker relative to the hours worked in the community which is probably one of main reasons why they tend to leave the land and seek industrial employment. In such circumstances the minister for

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<sup>163</sup> Minute to Kennan, 11 Oct. 1962 (IR 7A).

<sup>164</sup> Handwritten minute to MacMaghnuis, 30 Apr. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

Labour considers that the perpetuation of what has the appearance of being an employer biased system for the settlement of claims is unacceptable.<sup>165</sup>

The implications of this statement reverberated through the decades to that point in time when the agricultural wages board system had been first established under the auspices of a Fianna Fáil government. It corroborated the innumerable claims of worker spokesmen that the Board was biased towards the employer in its considerations, a tendency which had only been suspended briefly during the previous decade. But most of all, it finally enunciated in no uncertain terms that the Department of Agriculture had been responsible for perpetuating what appeared to be an employer biased system in the midst of what was supposed to have been worker focused legislation. And furthermore, that this was the premise underlining Agriculture's rejection of a joint labour committee as they sought to perpetuate this system into the future. Not only had Labour detected the underlining motives of Agriculture, but it proceeded to undermine even further the plausibility of any additional arguments the latter could have advanced to rescue their position.

The claim that the views of the farming organisations remained 'substantially unchanged' four years after the first discussions on new machinery had taken place was regarded with a certain amount of incredulity, given 'the dramatic increase in the prosperity of the farming community' since Ireland's entry to the EEC.<sup>166</sup> Trivialising the opposition of the employer organisations to the Labour Court, it was declared that given

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<sup>165</sup> Industrial relations section, observations on Agriculture's draft memorandum on the AWB, 3 May 1974, p. 1 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

its 'status as an impartial body was generally unquestioned', it should have also been acceptable to the farmer employers. It was intimated that:

Their reluctance to accept it suggests that they wish to deny farm workers, who are in the main unorganised, the same criteria, for settlement of claims as applies to other workers.<sup>167</sup>

While this view of employer opposition was indeed accurate, and had been expressed by worker spokesmen on a regular basis, it had never been pronounced by a government department before now. Moreover, abandoning once and for all the contention that the establishment of a joint labour committee would create a 'them and us' situation in agriculture, it was proclaimed:

The 'them and us' situation could arise only if farm workers were unionised so that the normal process of free collective bargaining could operate in their case. Farm workers are not unionised because of their wide dispersal throughout the country, the difficulties of communication and the fact that a person working on his own with an employer is less likely to adopt a militant attitude in pursuit of even the most reasonable claims. It is unlikely that farm workers will ever be unionised to a stage where the process of free collective bargaining could have any meaning for them.<sup>168</sup>

Given the unlikelihood of trade unionism ever emerging in agriculture as a mechanism of protecting the interests of its workers, it was declared:

In these circumstances it is imperative that organisations set up by the State should be oriented to safeguard the position of workers rather than to satisfy the wishes of employers.<sup>169</sup>

The message was clear. The agricultural wages board system prevailing under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture was and would continue to be far more

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<sup>167</sup> Industrial relations section, observations on Agriculture's draft memorandum on the AWB, 3 May 1974, p. 1 (W 459/1 C.3), p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



employer than worker oriented unless a joint labour committee system was established. That this had indeed been the case was evidenced on the many occasions in the past when the various improvements in conditions sought for agricultural workers had been rejected by Agriculture out of concern for their impact on the rest of the farming population. In this instance it was not so much employer focused as seeking to safeguard the interests of the larger farming community. However in confronting this mentality Labour realised that Agriculture would never willingly accept the principle that agricultural labourers were entitled to have their wages and conditions harmonised with the rest of the non agricultural working population.<sup>170</sup> It also came to the conclusion that unless the recommendation for the Board's replacement by a joint labour committee came from Agriculture, the government would not support Labour in its stance.<sup>171</sup> This derived partly from the politics of coalition government, with the balance of power in Fine Gael hands, but also from a historic reluctance to introduce change to agriculture in the face of farmer opposition. Unless Agriculture and the farming community were supportive of a joint labour committee it would never happen. Its outcome would depend on how much Labour were willing to depart from existing procedures to ensure agricultural workers received their due. That it had no intention of abandoning this group to Agriculture once again, however, became apparent in how far it was willing to compromise in an attempt to swing farmer support to the idea of a joint labour committee.

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<sup>169</sup> Industrial relations section, observations on Agriculture's draft memorandum on the AWB, 3 May 1974, p. 4 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>170</sup> Minute to MacMaghnuis, 30 Apr. 1974.

<sup>171</sup> Minute to the secretary, 6 May 1974.

Departing from established practice, Labour suggested that the interests of Agriculture be further accommodated within the appointments process of the joint labour committee system.<sup>172</sup> Instead of the minister for Labour just consulting with the minister for Agriculture on the appointment of the chairman and independent members, it was proposed that these appointments would occur subject to the consultation and *agreement* of the minister for Agriculture.<sup>173</sup> Moreover it was also suggested that this procedure would extend to the minister for Labour's submission of the employer/worker member panels to the Labour Court for appointment. It was instructive in itself that these concessions were viewed as a means of enticing the support of Agriculture. It had obviously been realised that so long as this department was unhappy with its prospects in the joint labour committee system, there was no chance that the farming organisations would modify their opposition.

That this was something which strongly appealed to the sentiments of the minister for Agriculture became immediately apparent at a meeting of both ministers on 30 July 1974.<sup>174</sup> Clinton indicated that the proposal might go a considerable way towards allaying the fears of the farming community and that he would accordingly put it to the farmer organisations as soon as possible.<sup>175</sup> There was no denying that this concession represented a great victory for both interests. It ensured that Agriculture would still play a role equal to that of the minister for Labour in the appointment of members to the committee and hence the determination of such issues was not totally removed from its

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<sup>172</sup> Minute to the secretary, 6 May 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>173</sup> Industrial relations section, observations on draft memo, 30 Apr. 1974, p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> G. Pyke, draft report on meeting of Clinton and O'Leary on 30 Jul. 1974, Aug. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

domain.<sup>176</sup> As momentous and unprecedented as this concession was, Agriculture once again resorted to its delaying tactics. It was October before it informed the farming organisations of these significant developments and despite several requests for expedition from O'Leary in the intervening months, it was April 1975 before any progress was made.<sup>177</sup>

Meanwhile, agricultural labourers had lost parity in holidays with other workers since 1 April 1974. They had been excluded from the scope of the Holidays Act 1973 at the insistence of the Department of Agriculture.<sup>178</sup> Under the terms of the latter measure the annual holiday entitlements of non agricultural workers were increased from two to three weeks, with the first of January granted as an additional public holiday.<sup>179</sup> Under pressure from the minister for Labour to introduce comparable amending legislation for the agricultural labourer since May 1974, as late as December of that year Agriculture were still prevaricating on grounds that a 'government decision favouring the setting up of a joint labour committee would make such amending legislation look silly'.<sup>180</sup> It was May 1975 before the Agricultural Workers (Holidays)(Amendment) Act 1975 was passed and parity restored once again.<sup>181</sup>

In the interim the cumulative effect of the Board's refusal to implement the national wage agreements was beginning to have serious implications for further negotiations. This was fuelled by the increasingly adverse coverage given by the press to the Board's

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<sup>176</sup> Clinton to D. Murphy, ICMSA and S. Healy, IFA, 4 Oct. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>177</sup> O'Leary to Clinton, 27 Nov. 1974; 6 Jan. 1975.

<sup>178</sup> Worker protection branch, memorandum on conditions of employment of agricultural workers, 1 Jul. 1974.

<sup>179</sup> *Holidays (Employees) Act 1973*, 1973/25 ([R.I.](21 Nov. 1973)).

<sup>180</sup> O'Leary to Agriculture, 17 May 1974; Minute to secretary, 31 Dec. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3).

<sup>181</sup> *Agricultural Workers (Holidays)(Amendment) Act 1975*, 1975/7 [R.I.](21 May 1975).

inaction.<sup>182</sup> Both O'Leary and Clinton had come under increasing pressure from the FRW, the ICTU and the Employer Labour Conference in this regard. Since O'Leary was responsible for labour in general, this was an issue of serious concern to his department. Appeals to Clinton to make a decision on new machinery or failing that to at least communicate with the Board fell on deaf ears. When O'Leary had approached Clinton on this subject earlier in the year, the latter had denied that the Board was acting any way reprehensibly:

Suggestions that the Wages Board have ignored or breached the agreement cannot be substantiated. The question turns on interpretation and base lines or starting points and the Wages Board calculate that the difference between the total increases prescribed by way of minimum weekly rate and the total which would result from the application of the national agreement is no more than 50p.<sup>183</sup>

Echoing the Board's approach to the agreements and deliberately missing the point, it was obvious the minister for Agriculture had no intention of conceding that the Board had transgressed the provisions of the national agreements. The steering committee of the ELC had encountered such an impasse also when they wrote to this minister on 5 December. Spelling out that the principle at stake was more than a 50p difference, they left him in little doubt that the continued failure of the Board to apply the terms of the agreements to such a large and important category of workers could seriously undermine the whole concept underlining them.<sup>184</sup> Believing that a communication from the minister would considerably improve matters in the short term, they also appealed to him

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<sup>182</sup> For instance there were articles in the *Irish Times* on 14, 16 and 17 December; the *Evening Press* 13 December 1974.

<sup>183</sup> Clinton to O'Leary, 5 Jul.1974 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>184</sup> Department of Labour memorandum on the AWB and the national wage agreements (W 459/1 C.4).

to raise the matter with the Board. As the previous chapter revealed, this would never happen. For Agriculture to direct the Board on this matter would have been equivalent to admitting that its own policy was wrong and furthermore that it was liable for the Board's activities. Instead it detached itself completely from having any connection with the Board and left it to face public denunciation on its own. Meanwhile, the Board carried on disregarding the agreements on the blind assumption that the minister for Agriculture would have communicated with them had he wished them to act otherwise.

Since the Board had passed another order contravening the agreement on 12 December 1974, the ELC realised that there was going to be little co-operation from Agriculture. Accordingly they wrote to O'Leary on 24 December seeking any additional help that could bring the matter to an 'early solution'.<sup>185</sup> Noting that its correspondence with the Board had failed to have the desired effect, resulting in the minimum agricultural wage continuing to remain substantially below what it would have been had adjustments been made in line with the national agreements of 1970, 1972 and 1974, the conference came to very serious conclusion:

In the light of all the facts relating to this matter, the steering committee of the conference are satisfied that the existing machinery for regulating the minimum rates of pay for agricultural workers is both unsatisfactory and unsuitable in the present circumstances. They accordingly consider that remedial action is urgently necessary so as to ensure that the implementation of the national agreements is made possible in respect of agricultural workers.<sup>186</sup>

Obviously the minister for Labour concurred with these views but his ability to progress matters was being impeded by Agriculture. Consequently, in an attempt to expedite

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<sup>185</sup> Joint secretaries, ELC to O'Leary, 24 Dec. 1974. (W 459/1 C.4)

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

matters further, a fourth personal reminder had to be issued from O'Leary to Clinton in early January 1975.<sup>187</sup> He made it clear that the impetus for this reminder derived from the refusal of the Board yet again to make an order which implemented in full the terms of the wage agreements:

The decision of the Board, apart from the injustice done to agricultural workers, could also have serious implications for the outcome of considerations by the trade union movement of whether to enter into negotiations or to accept a fourth National Pay Agreement. As you know, the ICTU are meeting today to determine our attitudes to a further national agreement. In those circumstances, I feel that it is vital that the present discussion with the farm organisations should be finalised as soon as possible.<sup>188</sup>

Agriculture held that the reason for Clinton's tardiness in this regard related to the fact that 'a clear picture of the IFA's views had not emerged'.<sup>189</sup> Although the IFA were not disposed towards a joint labour committee system for fear of the industrial elements it would introduce to agriculture, its stance on supporting any machinery had apparently been increasingly threatened over its sensitivity at being identified as 'an employer body' or 'a 'big farmer' pressure group'.<sup>190</sup> With such stigma attached to the organisation of employers in agriculture, it was hardly surprising that there had been little initiative in this regard in the past. Despite the farming community constituting one of the strongest lobbying groups in the country at the time, the majority still shirked any connection with agricultural wage negotiations. And while the ICMSA had indicated its willingness to accept a joint labour committee as early as 21 October, the IFA had displayed signs of disengaging from the entire negotiation process over this very issue. Clinton did not seek

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<sup>187</sup> Subnote from Breen to Fitzgerald on a letter from Agriculture regarding correspondence from P. Murphy dated 30 Dec. 1974, 6 Jan. 1975 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>188</sup> O'Leary to Clinton, Jan. 1975.

<sup>189</sup> Paul Cullen note on a conversation with Benner, Agriculture, 9 Jan. 1975.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

ratification of this stance until 8 January 1975 when a meeting was finally convened between representatives of the IFA and himself. Aware of their sensibilities, Clinton hardly assuaged their apprehension over being perceived as an employer organisation or as trade union negotiators when he suggested that wage fixing:

was a process of negotiation between organised employers and workers and the absence of the IFA from the bargaining table would weaken the position of farmer employers.<sup>191</sup>

Despite the assurances from Agriculture that a joint labour committee with the modification in the method of selection of personnel proposed would have been little different from a restructured agricultural wages board, the IFA finally decided against getting involved as an organisation.<sup>192</sup> Yet since Agriculture had been aware of this tendency from the outset, there was nothing surprising about this outcome. But it still did not attempt to ascertain the definitive views of the organisation until after six months had passed from when the proposal was first mooted, despite the solicitations of Labour. So when on 17 January 1975 it indicated to Labour that it would prepare a draft memorandum for government proposing the acceptance of a joint labour committee, the position was in fact no better than it had been in July 1974 when the proposal was first mooted. Labour were still waiting for Agriculture to move matters along.

With the future of the wage agreements increasingly under threat following the renewed criticism of the Board in the wake of its last wages order, and the encouragement it was giving to other dissenters, Labour hoped that an imminent announcement of the Board's

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<sup>191</sup> Clinton to O'Leary, notes on meeting with the IFA on 8 Jan. 1975, 17 Jan. 1975 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>192</sup> Cullen to Fitzgerald, 12 Nov. 1974.

abolition would improve the climate for negotiation.<sup>193</sup> When this would happen would depend on getting a proposal to government for their decision. The frustration of the FRW came in useful at this stage. Since the Board's previous wage increase on 12 December, the FRW had been canvassing all and sundry to prevent this new increase as opposed to the terms of the national agreement becoming effective on 3 February 1975. Letters had been sent to the ELC, the Board, and to the minister for Agriculture in this regard.<sup>194</sup> On 21 January 1975 the minister for Labour received a further letter from this organisation proclaiming that:

The position has become so intolerable that if the National Agreements are not applied to agricultural workers, we would be obliged to put a proposal to the ICTU to defer ratification of any new Agreement until the position has been rectified.<sup>195</sup>

The minister was in no doubt as to the potential strength of the FRW in this regard. The ICTU at its annual delegate conference on 31 October had passed a resolution to the effect that since there 'was a reversion to discrimination against agricultural workers' in the existing holiday code the Department of Labour should take immediate steps to promote legislation to restore parity.<sup>196</sup> The influence of the FRW was very much tangible in these demands since Patrick Murphy had also alluded to the 'disimprovement' of the agricultural labourer's statutory entitlements arising from the failure at that stage to introduce amending legislation for this group.<sup>197</sup> The Federation's ability to exercise influence on such a substantial and representative body as the ICTU

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<sup>193</sup> Minister for Labour, observations on a government memorandum on the role of the government in relation to the 16<sup>th</sup> wage round, 14 Jan. 1975 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>194</sup> Patrick Murphy to Agriculture, copy of letter to AWB, 16 Dec. 1974; Murphy to Clinton, 30 Dec. 1974; Murphy to O'Leary, 10 Jan. 1975.

<sup>195</sup> Murphy to O'Leary, 21 Jan. 1975.

<sup>196</sup> Minute to Fitzgerald on an ICTU resolution, 31 Oct. 1974 (W 459/1 C.4).



did not to go unnoticed. So on the occasion of Murphy's threat in January the minister utilised its potential significance. A letter to the minister for Agriculture on 4 February indicated that he viewed this threat as a useful means of trying to hasten Agriculture in its preparations of a memorandum for government. Referring once again to the Board's decision of 12 December it was noted:

Despite its small numerical strength the FRW holds considerable influence in Congress and if the Federation saw their members as being in a position to benefit from the terms of any such agreement then their influence could well sway the tide in favour of a successful outcome to the discussions. The early announcement of the establishment of a joint labour committee is vital in this context.<sup>198</sup>

Accordingly he requested that the minister would make arrangements to have a draft memorandum for the government prepared as a matter of 'extreme urgency'.<sup>199</sup> That this correspondence from the FRW had in fact been welcomed by Labour as an opportunity to write to Agriculture and subject it to a little pressure, emerges from a perusal of departmental minutes at this time. For instance by 23 January it was being noted:

Unless we can stir them it would be 6 months before the memorandum for the Court grows in the Department of Agriculture. In the light of the imminent negotiations for a national agreement I think that we should ask that Department to move immediately.<sup>200</sup>

By the end of the month, a minute to the secretary of the department recommended:

In light of our experience of the tardiness of the Department of Agriculture in dealing with the question of agricultural workers I think a personal letter from the minister for Labour will be needed to get matters moving at the requisite speed.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Murphy to O'Leary, 18 Apr. 1974 (W 459/1 C.3)

<sup>198</sup> O'Leary to Clinton, 4 Feb. 1975 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Minute to Fitzgerald, 23 Jan. 1975 (W 459/1 C.4).

<sup>201</sup> Minute to MacMaghnais, 31 Jan. 1975.

And when a letter had been duly issued on behalf of O'Leary to Clinton on 4 February, it conveniently used the FRW threat as a means of exerting pressure for haste. Agriculture however refused to be rushed, and it was 3 April 1975 before it submitted its proposed memorandum for government to Labour.<sup>202</sup> Even then it became immediately apparent that Agriculture had made many points in its memorandum with which Labour would take issue.

In a manner which suggested that Agriculture was actually defending the continuance of the existing system it refuted suggestions that agricultural workers had lagged behind industrial workers in the matter of the national pay agreements; it compared the Irish agricultural workers' earnings with those in Britain and Northern Ireland without direct reference to the hours worked by the workers concerned; it claimed that the Board seemed quite acceptable to the general body of workers; it reiterated allegations that the joint labour committee system might lead to change in the special relationship between farmers and workers and bring about confrontation; and finally it noted that there seemed to be no similar demand for substitution in Britain of the wage council system for the agricultural wages board system.<sup>203</sup> Given these arguments, it was hardly surprising that Labour should have concluded:

The overall tone of the memorandum would lead one to expect that the minister for Agriculture and Fisheries was opposed to a joint labour committee system for agricultural workers.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Department of Agriculture and Fisheries draft memorandum for government on the future of the AWB, 3 Apr. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>203</sup> Pyke to Jestin, 7 Apr. 1975.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

It was acknowledged on several different occasions within the department that many of the points made in the memorandum were 'very much open to contradiction' with suggestions that some claims were even 'blatantly dishonest'.<sup>205</sup> Nonetheless it was generally agreed that since Agriculture had ultimately conceded the recommendation for the establishment of a labour committee, 'despite a none too forceful case' being made on the merits of the latter, there would be little advantage in disputing the points at this critical stage.<sup>206</sup> So for the sake of ensuring the speedy passage of the proposal, Labour refrained from criticising the draft memorandum and duly submitted their views to Agriculture by 15 April.

However this was not the end of the matter. Notwithstanding the general views submitted by Labour in support of a joint labour committee, Agriculture complained on 5 June that the 'full quotation of these views would 'upset the balance' of the memo'.<sup>207</sup> They went so far as to demand that Labour omit their detailed comments in favour of a one liner indicating the minister's support for the proposal. It was warned that if they insisted on having their points included in full, Agriculture would have to consider adding further paragraphs countering some of their arguments with which they did not agree. Naturally Labour did not take kindly to such a hostile reaction to comments which had been deliberately muted under the circumstances. The extent to which it had restrained itself, and the inaccuracy of Agriculture's claims, was fully revealed in a note for the minister's

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<sup>205</sup> Minute to N. Fitzgerald, 8 Apr. 1975; Minute to the secretary of the minister for Labour, 10 Apr. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>206</sup> Minute to Fitzgerald, 8 Apr. 1975.

<sup>207</sup> Jestin to Fitzgerald, 6 Jun. 1975.

information on the final memorandum submitted to government.<sup>208</sup> Reference was made to Agriculture's claim that the Board had not allowed agricultural labourers to lag behind industrial workers in the matter of the national pay agreements.<sup>209</sup> It claimed that the difference in increases awarded by the Board since 1970 and the increases they would have received under the national agreements of 1970, and 1972-4 was purely marginal.<sup>210</sup> In contrasting what the existing minimum rate of agricultural wage would have been had the negotiated national agreement increases been applied in full, it calculated an actual increase of £15.75 for the period January 1971 to June 1975 as opposed to £17.37 under the national wage agreements.<sup>211</sup> In taking this stance Labour noted that Agriculture had failed to take the 10% threshold payment due under the 1974 agreement as from 1 March 1975.<sup>212</sup> This alone meant that agricultural labourers had fallen behind other workers by almost £3.00 per week.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, in claiming that criticisms that the Board had allowed wages in agricultural employment to lag behind those in other employments were unsustainable, Labour noted that this was made in the knowledge that while minimum agricultural wages ranging from £26.45 - £27.20 per week became effective from 3 February 1975 for a 48 hour week, the average earnings of workers in transport goods industries in September 1974 was £34.79 for an average week of 41.7 hours and £43.57 for an average week of 43.8 hours in manufacturing industries.<sup>214</sup> Given Agriculture's tendency to manipulate the facts, it was hardly surprising that it also

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<sup>208</sup> Note for the minister's information on Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the future of the AWB, 13 Jun. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>209</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, pars 9 and 12(b) (S 15848B).

<sup>210</sup> Minute to Fitzgerald, 8 Apr. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>211</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, Annex B (S 15848B).

<sup>212</sup> Minute to Fitzgerald, 8 Apr. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> Note for the minister's information (W 459/1 C.5).

claimed that these minimum agricultural wage rates compared favourably with the existing rates in Britain and Northern Ireland which ranged from £28.50 to £31.50.<sup>215</sup> Once again it deliberately omitted to mention the difference in working hours. As noted by Labour:

This comparison is misleading as reference is not made to hours worked. The British minimum rates apply in respect of a 40 hour week while Irish rates refer to a working week of 44 hours in winter and 50 hours in summer. Accordingly to present a true comparison it is necessary to calculate what a British agricultural worker would earn if he worked the minimum hours required of his Irish counterpart. Such a calculation shows that the British agricultural worker would earn £32.78 for a 44 hour week and £39.20 for a 50 hour week. Neither of these rates compare favourably with the Irish worker's £26.45 to £27.20 for such hours.<sup>216</sup>

That Agriculture was aware of the differences in hours was confirmed later in the memorandum when, in discussing working conditions, it was remarked casually that the hours compared 'unfavourably' with those in England and Northern Ireland. While noting that the hours were now based on a 40 and 41 hour week respectively, it was added 'actual hours worked are, of course, much higher'.<sup>217</sup> The most fundamental arguments advanced by Agriculture to endorse the activities of the existing Board were at the very least disingenuous. Nor were its claims confined to wages. Defending further the existing system, Agriculture contended that the relationship between farm incomes and the wages that could be paid to farm workers could not be ignored, emphasising how when revising minimum rates the Board took 'into account the ability of farmers to pay'.<sup>218</sup> Labour dismissed the implications underlining this inference when it pointed out:

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<sup>215</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 9 (S 15848B).

<sup>216</sup> Note for the minister's information, par. 3. (W459/1 C.5).

<sup>217</sup> Note for the minister's information, par. 10 (W459/1 C.5).

<sup>218</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 11 (S 15848B).

if a joint labour committee were to be established for agricultural workers and an order made setting out minimum rates there would be no difficulty in providing for a clause covering an employers' inability to pay. We are aware that provisions of this kind which have been included in the national agreement are being proposed in relation to existing joint labour committees.<sup>219</sup>

In a more desperate attempt to undermine the demand for the Board's replacement, Agriculture asserted that the existing system seemed quite acceptable to the general body of workers, with the main criticisms having come from the small minority of workers who were organised and in a better position than the majority to defend their interests.<sup>220</sup>

Countering this claim, Labour on the other hand submitted:

It could equally be argued that the possible dissatisfaction of a much larger number of workers scattered throughout the country has not fully come to notice precisely because they are not organised and are therefore unable to speak with a unified voice. The Department of Labour receives a considerable amount of correspondence, mainly from individuals, seeking the replacement of the Agricultural Wages Board by a joint labour committee so as to ensure their getting speedily and in full, wage increases negotiated under the national agreements.<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, Labour also wholeheartedly rejected Agriculture's contention that a joint labour committee system might upset the traditional special relationship which existed between farmers and workers and bring about a situation of confrontation between worker and employer<sup>222</sup>:

This is not accepted – the existing joint labour committees cover many small businesses where employers and workers may also be said to have a special relationship and there has been no evidence to the effect that the joint labour committee system in these cases has led to confrontational situations between the parties.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Note for the Minister's information, par. 4 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>220</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 12(a) (S 15848B).

<sup>221</sup> Note for the minister's information, par. 5 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>222</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 12(c) (S 15848B).

<sup>223</sup> Note for the minister's information, par. 7 (W 459/1 C.5).

As regards the claim that there was no similar demand in Britain for replacing the agricultural wage board system with a joint labour committee system, Labour noted that the British government's consultative document on the Employment Protection Bill indicated that it would consult with the agricultural industries and agricultural wages boards as to how far the proposals on wages councils (their joint labour committees) and the provisions of the Bill generally would apply to agriculture.<sup>224</sup> Agriculture could no longer claim that Ireland was unique in seeking to extend comparable industrial machinery to agricultural workers.

Given the extent to which Labour had refrained from countering these tenuous allegations in the draft memorandum, it declared in no uncertain terms that should Agriculture attempt to omit any of its points generally supporting a joint labour committee, their own views would be made known to government.<sup>225</sup> And while Agriculture duly respected this threat it did not hesitate to counter some of Labour's views in the final memorandum, as it had intimated. For instance, it attempted to undermine Labour's claim that the Irish agricultural worker was the 'lowest paid male worker relative to hours worked in the community' stating derogatorily, 'to the trade unionist, of course, hours of work simply mark the point of departure for the calculation of overtime'.<sup>226</sup> The most fundamental strike was the allegation that the national agreements were a major factor leading to the serious economic situation confronting the country at that time.<sup>227</sup> Such an attack was no doubt aimed at destabilising the basis upon

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<sup>224</sup> Pyke to Jestin, 7 Apr. 1975; Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 12(d) (S 15848B).

<sup>225</sup> Jestin to Fitzgerald, 6 Jun. 1975 (W 459/1 C.5).

<sup>226</sup> Department of Agriculture memo for government, par. 17 (S 15848B).

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

which the Board's abolition was being demanded. Regardless of the validity of the claim, it should have had little to do with the attempt to upgrade this machinery and its inclusion was just another instance of Agriculture's complete lack of commitment to the process. Even though agriculture was going through a golden period that was expected to last for some time by virtue of the Common Agricultural Policy, the department could not see fit to extend the same benevolence to agricultural workers. This was the greatest indication that its loyalty was first and foremost to the employer and by extension the farming community.

Since Agriculture barely conceded its support for this proposal the chances are that had the minister for Labour not announced, during a parliamentary question on 6 November 1974, that the minister for Agriculture had written to the farmer organisations involved proposing the establishment of a joint labour committee, it would not have even conceded this recommendation.<sup>228</sup> Agriculture had not wanted any public announcement of its activities until government sanction had been obtained for either proposal. It had not even informed the worker organisations of the revised proposals put forward to the employer organisations at this stage. However, O'Leary's action had eliminated this escape by effectively placing Agriculture in an impossible position. As noted in a communication from Agriculture to Labour on 28 November:

It is somewhat unfortunate that this matter had to be brought in on Deputy Desmond's question relating to the Holiday's Act, particularly as there is no government sanction for the proposals made to the farmers' organisations - nor indeed for the proposed changes in the Holidays code - and it seems to us that the

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<sup>228</sup> Minister for Labour reply to parliamentary question no. 453, 6 Nov. 1974 (W 459/2 C.4).



ministers could be put in an embarrassing position if proposals with which they are publicly associated were ultimately turned down by the government.<sup>229</sup>

It would have brought great censure upon itself had it reverted to the proposal for an upgraded wages board given the bad press the existing Board was getting, and public awareness of Labour's support for a joint labour committee. Hence, what would seem to have been a very reluctant recommendation to the government that the latter system be adopted. This would suggest that Agriculture had hoped the government would decide against their recommendation. It had been apparent even at the end of May 1975 when officials from Agriculture and Labour met a delegation from the FRW that Agriculture had not ruled out the possibility of the government adopting an alternative solution. At this meeting an official from this department, Brenner, had stressed that:

the modified joint labour committee was only one of a number of courses open to government as a solution to criticisms levelled at the Agricultural Wages Board. The possibility of reconstituting and expanding the existing Agricultural Wages Board would be an alternate solution which would have to be carefully weighed. We could not anticipate the decision of government in the matter and could only present various arguments to them in an objective manner.<sup>230</sup>

Nevertheless, even though the arguments advanced by Agriculture flagrantly reeked of their lack of enthusiasm for a new system, a government decision on 15 July 1975 approved the recommendation for the establishment of a joint labour committee subject to the revisions agreed.<sup>231</sup> On 11 December 1975 the government authorised leave to introduce the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill to the Dail.<sup>232</sup> And when the minister for Labour introduced its second stage in February 1976, he did not hesitate to

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<sup>229</sup> Brenner, Agriculture to Fitzgerald, Labour, 28 Nov. 1974 (W 459/2 C.4).

<sup>230</sup> Meeting of FRW, Agriculture and Labour on 27 May 1975, 29 May 1975 (W 459/2 C.5).

<sup>231</sup> Department of Labour memorandum for government on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1975, par. 3 (W 459/2 C.7).

<sup>232</sup> Departmental minute, 11 Dec. 1975.

declare that this bill represented 'the first significant legislative measure to be introduced by a government for the improvement of the general conditions of farm workers for more than 40 years'.<sup>233</sup> There were few who did not appreciate the import of that statement and this minister was certainly in a position to make such a judgement.

Further verification of this stance emerged over the subsequent months. The issue of hours of work, which had dogged the Board in its later years and the minister for Labour in the formulation of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill, was to raise its head once more as a controversial issue before the Board's abolition. In the course of drafting the amending legislation the FRW had attempted to bring pressure on the minister to introduce a 40 hour week for agricultural labourers.<sup>234</sup> Labour had only been too aware that the average weekly hours worked by an industrial employee, 43.3 for men and 37.2 for women, were 'considerably more fair' than the average working week for an agricultural male employee which was 47 hours at that time.<sup>235</sup> However, the efforts of the FRW had been resisted on the grounds that any unilateral action by the minister in this regard would have undermined the responsibility of the joint labour committee in such matters.<sup>236</sup>

It became clear however that the hours of work of the agricultural labourer were to become problematic before the joint labour committee was even established. As noted in Chapter Five, the enactment of the Anti Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 was about to create major problems in this regard. Should the Board have decided to make a new

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<sup>233</sup> *Dáil Éireann dáil deb.*, (vol. 288), 25 Feb. 1976, col. 669.

<sup>234</sup> Murphy to Maghnúis, 30 Dec. 1975 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>235</sup> Note for the minister's information, 2 Feb. 1976.

wages order after 31 December 1975 containing provisions in which differences in rates of remuneration were based on or related to the sex of employees, such provisions would have been null and void.<sup>237</sup> The Department of Labour had not been aware of the impending crisis until their attention was dramatically drawn to it by Patrick Murphy on 16 February 1976.<sup>238</sup> Obviously hugely concerned with the implications of this proposal they contacted the secretary of the Board, Robert Malone, directly.<sup>239</sup> He claimed that while the Board 'appreciated the awkward situation', they considered it necessary to raise female summer hours to 50 in order to give them equal treatment with men.<sup>240</sup> Specifying earnings on an hourly basis was rejected on the grounds that it tended to give permanent agricultural workers the appearance of casual labourers and secondly because when summertime commenced, women would have started earning overtime at 48 hours compared to 50 for men, resulting in discrimination against the latter.<sup>241</sup> On the other hand the suggestion that male hours be reduced was also rejected on grounds that the Board had not the power to do so.<sup>242</sup> So Labour was faced with a mentality which suggested that while hours of work for men could not be legally reduced by 2 hours, the hours of work for women could have been increased by 2 hours. Asked to clarify this discrepancy the secretary claimed that since:

20,000 male workers established the minimum hours for the industry...that farmers on finding themselves forced to give women equal pay would expect

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<sup>236</sup> Jestin to Fitzgerald, 15 Jan. 1976; Note for the minister's information, 18 Feb. 1976 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>237</sup> Note for the minister's information on the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1975 - Hours of Work (Annex 1 to W 459/1).

<sup>238</sup> Departmental note, 16 Feb. 1976, par. 2 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Departmental note, 16 Feb. 1976, par. 2 (W 459/1 C.7).

them to work the same hours and in that way the minimum hours for the industry in relation to women would increase to 50.<sup>243</sup>

When contact was made with the Department of Agriculture on the matter, it denied having any knowledge of the Board's activities and inferred that since 'it knew it would be going out of existence fairly shortly it could have a very independent approach'.<sup>244</sup> Although it was acknowledged that Clinton could exercise personal influence directly with the chairman, there was no offer to do so.<sup>245</sup> So long as the Board operated, the minister for Labour was powerless to do anything. All he could do was express his opposition to Clinton. Accordingly O'Leary outlined his opposition to the Board's proposal in a letter to Clinton:

I want to record my opposition to the proposal that hours of work, at which overtime commences for females should be increased from 48 to 50. Organised industrial workers normally commence overtime after 40 hours and the idea of a retrograde step for women employed in agriculture would be utterly unacceptable. In these circumstances I would ask you to ensure that the Agricultural Wages Board does not make such an order.<sup>246</sup>

The significance of this issue was further emphasised when the minister wrote another letter to Clinton the following day stating that:

postponement of the making of the order will, of course, result in normal summer hours of work coming into operation on 1 March which would be discriminatory against men under the provisions of the Anti Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974. This seems preferable, I think, to the course proposed as it gives some time for consideration as to how the problem is to be solved.<sup>247</sup>

To postpone the making of a new order would have meant that from 1 March a 44 hour week would have resumed for young females, a 48 hour week for adult females and a 50

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<sup>243</sup> Departmental note, 17 Feb. 1976 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>244</sup> Departmental note, 16 Feb. 1976, par. 3.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> O'Leary to Clinton, 17 Feb. 1976.

hour week for males. In this regard it was remarked in a departmental minute to the minister that:

the postponement of the making of an order has the limited advantage of avoiding the emotive issue of raising the hours of work of women with the disadvantage of retaining the normal summer hours which would discriminate against men. A solution to this impasse is needed and must, it seems, be worked out by the Agricultural Wages Board in consultation with the minister for Agriculture and Fisheries.<sup>248</sup>

Evidently to leave matters as they were was perceived to be the lesser evil. Nonetheless O'Leary had advised Clinton that should the Board consult him, he would be prepared to introduce an amendment governing this matter at the committee stage of the Industrial Relations Bill then before the Dáil.<sup>249</sup> Since the Board took the view that it was not legally empowered to apply a 44 hour week, the minister was basically suggesting that provision could have been made in the Industrial Relations Bill to provide for a standard 44 hour week for agricultural workers. However this could only have been done:

if the Agricultural Wages Board (consisting of the social partners) so requested and the minister for Agriculture so approved. Any unilateral action in relation to a reduction in the working hours would probably prejudice the establishment of the joint labour committee proposed in the bill.<sup>250</sup>

Despite Labour's intimations in this regard neither the Board or the minister for Agriculture made any attempt to respond to this suggestion. Instead, it emerged at the Board's subsequent meeting on 19 February that the chairman had in fact resorted to the refuge of the Board's legal advice once again. He was adamant that the Board could not itself decide to vary the weekly working hours to which the minimum rates related and

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<sup>247</sup> O'Leary to Clinton, 18 Feb. 1976 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>248</sup> Minute to O'Leary, 18 Feb. 1976.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

the prevailing working practice did not justify any reduction in working hours. The Board's legal counsel had once again conveniently provided it with a plausible escape route. However the Board failed to take advantage of it on this occasion. Instead the chairman had decided to accept an impromptu proposal advanced by the neutral and employer members to adjourn sine die instead of allowing the business for which the meeting had been convened to be considered.<sup>251</sup> Such action on the Board's part was not welcomed by Labour. As reported in a departmental minute:

Granted goodwill on the part of the Agricultural Wages Board an order could have been made legitimising the situation, (not necessarily conceding P. Murphy's overtures); a reasonable solution would have been a reduction of adult male hours from 50 to 48 and a reduction of male young person's hours from 50 to 44 to equate with girls. These matters are however for the Agricultural Wages Board and the minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. Intervention on the part of this department before a joint labour committee is set up would, I think, be most inadvisable.<sup>252</sup>

Labour was now under even more pressure to get the joint labour committee established as soon as possible. Section 4 of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1975 had already been 'specifically drafted so as to eliminate the normal preliminary procedures leading to the establishment of a joint labour committee which tends to be time consuming'.<sup>253</sup> Moreover it was decided to approach the representative organisations for nominations for the proposed committee before the bill was even passed with a view to enabling the Labour Court to establish the committee within days of the signature of the bill by the President.<sup>254</sup> Otherwise it was feared there might have been a several week

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<sup>251</sup> Murphy to O'Leary, 23 Feb. 1976 (W 459/1 C.7).

<sup>252</sup> Minute to the secretary, 20 Feb. 1976.

<sup>253</sup> Memorandum on the appointment of the representative members to the jlc for agricultural workers, Apr. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8).

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

delay before the Court could establish the committee.<sup>255</sup> However, notwithstanding the department's communication with the organisations involved before the bill was even enacted on 18 May 1976, there was a delay of five months before the first meeting of the joint labour committee took place on 26 October. During this time the minister for Labour came under considerable criticism from the FRW, the ICTU and the ELC. The minister had been relatively powerless in this regard since the delays involved derived from the refusal of certain farmer organisations to co-operate, namely the IFA and the IAOS.

On 6 May 1976 the minister for Labour wrote to the organisations concerned seeking names of persons they wished to have considered for appointment as representative members of the committee.<sup>256</sup> The ICTU were asked to nominate 15 persons; the IFA and ICMSA 8 persons each - with the minister emphasising the desirability of having a broad representation from various parts of the country.<sup>257</sup> The IFA were subsequently in telephone contact with Labour on 11 May, seeking an assurance that 'in accordance with established practice' their nominees would be appointed in the ratio of 2:1 with those of the ICMSA before it would agree to participate.<sup>258</sup> Following consultation with Agriculture, Labour decided that they could not agree to this on grounds of insufficient evidence and instead suggested that the IFA might come to an agreement with the ICMSA as to their respective representation.<sup>259</sup> Although the IFA was not open to the

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<sup>255</sup> Memorandum on the appointment of the representative members to the jlc for agricultural workers, Apr. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8).

<sup>256</sup> Memorandum for the minister, 8 Jul. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8, Annex 2).

<sup>257</sup> Labour to the general secretary, ICTU, 5 May 1976; Letters from Labour to the ICMSA and the IFA, 6 May 1976.

<sup>258</sup> Memorandum for the minister, 8 Jul. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8, Annex 2).

<sup>259</sup> Agriculture to Labour, 25 May 1976; Departmental minute from Jestin to Fitzgerald, 26 May 1976.

idea of negotiating with the ICMSA on this issue, they did indicate that if a 6:4 ratio was decided upon there would be 'no great objection' from them.<sup>260</sup> However the ICMSA was not open to reducing their representation and Labour were faced with a scenario where neither party were 'likely to give way voluntarily on their stated positions'.<sup>261</sup> Nonetheless it was generally felt that if a 6:4 compromise was decided upon by the minister for Labour, neither organisation would have been likely to make anything more than a 'token protest'.<sup>262</sup> However before any further progress could be made the IFA's executive committee had decided to withdraw from the process. They informed Labour by telephone on 3 June that they were dissatisfied about the proposed representative ratio and that they would not nominate any people for the joint labour committee as they did not regard themselves as an organisation representative of employers.<sup>263</sup> The latter was advanced as a formal reason in a letter to the minister for Labour on 9 June:

The nominations submitted to your minister by our Association would be considered as representative of employers on the joint labour committee for agricultural workers under the aegis of the Labour Court. The IFA, as I explained on the telephone, has never been considered nor has it ever considered itself an employers organisation since the majority of our members are small farmers, a large number of whom are in part-employment in industry or are employed on bigger farms.<sup>264</sup>

Although the IFA sought to suggest on a formal level that the reason for withdrawing their representation from the joint labour committee was due to their aversion to being viewed as an employers organisation, events had clearly indicated that the refusal of Labour to concede to their demand for greater representation had ultimately led to their

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<sup>260</sup> Jestin to Fitzgerald, 26 May 1976 (W 459/1 C.8, Annex 2).

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 May 1976.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> Departmental minute, 3 Jun. 1976.



refusal to co-operate any further. Moreover, when the IAOS were subsequently approached in July to nominate 6 persons to the employers panel, they also refused to become involved in the process on the grounds that:

While they did negotiate wages and conditions of employment of people employed in creameries...doubted very much whether the society could, in any way, be regarded as an employer body of agricultural workers.<sup>265</sup>

However, like the IFA, events suggested that concern over being identified as an employer organisation was also a secondary consideration for the IAOS. Their refusal to become involved at this stage seems to have derived from a severe dissatisfaction over having been excluded by Labour from the entire consultative process and only approached to nominate members following the withdrawal of the IFA.<sup>266</sup>

Therefore by August there was major consternation in the Department of Labour over the employer panel for the committee. Not only had both the IFA and the IAOS refused to co-operate on the grounds that they did not want to be viewed as an employers organisation but both organisations also refused to supply names of members who, while not being officially nominated by their respective organisations, might have represented the interests of those organisations on a personal basis.<sup>267</sup> In these circumstances Labour had to resort to approaching five former employer members of the Agricultural Wages Board in the hope that they would allow their names to go forward on a panel of members for the joint labour committee.<sup>268</sup> Consequently the FRW and the ITGWU

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<sup>264</sup> IFA to Labour, 9 Jun. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8, Annex 2).

<sup>265</sup> Labour and IAOS meeting, 20 Jul. 1976.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> IAOS to Labour, 4 Aug. 1976; Labour to IFA 29 Jul. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8, Annex 2).

<sup>268</sup> Note for the secretary's information regarding a P. Murphy complaint about the delay convening the first meeting of the agricultural workers joint labour committee, dated 25 Aug. 1978, undated.

nominated 10 and 5 worker members respectively, with the employer members being constituted by the 8 nominations of the ICMSA and 3 former employer members of the Agricultural Wages Board.

Notwithstanding the extensive modification of this wage fixing machinery to allow for the adequate representation of employer members on the joint labour committee, ultimately the major farming organisations refused to co-operate. Despite the Department of Agriculture's opposition and considerable time wasting in an ostensible attempt to get farmers on board, very few farmer organisations wanted to become involved. The reaction of the IFA in particular, being one of the largest farmer groups, epitomised exactly the kind of government reinforced mentality that agricultural workers had to penetrate for generations. They were simultaneously battling the government who sought to protect the typical family farmer and the farmers who wanted no association with the larger farmer. Workers were penalised for the lack of interest of larger employers in becoming organised and for the disinterest of farming organisations in wage negotiations. Yet both the Department of Agriculture and the IFA still protested against a 'them and us' situation in agriculture when farmers were doing precisely the same with the government. With the industrialisation of the larger farm to an unprecedented scale the fate of the agricultural worker was now almost removed from the hands of those who for so long viewed their advancement as a threat to the majority.

However, because of the delays encountered in establishing the committee, the AWB had met again at the beginning of October 1976 to pass one last controversial order. It proceeded to make an order which though according equality in pay to male and female

workers, made no alteration in the existing hours of work.<sup>269</sup> This meant that from 22 November adult female workers in Group A would receive an increase in wages of £6.90 to place them on a par with the minimum rate awarded to male workers in this group of £36.90. While adult females in Group B would receive an increase of £7.35, so that they would receive the £36.50 awarded to adult males in the same counties. However from 1 March 1977 the hours of work of females would have reverted as in previous orders to 48 per week, while the hours of male workers would have increased to 50. This meant that for the summer period male workers would have had to work two hours more than female workers to receive the same pay. Just as female workers would have been entitled to two hours additional overtime pay to male workers.

This action on the part of the Board was a parting tribute to their interpretation of their powers under the Agricultural Wages Act. Courtesy of the Board's legal adviser, who had informed them that regardless of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act they had 'no authority to alter conditions of employment', as far as they were concerned any illegalities on their part were matters for others to consider.<sup>270</sup> They therefore conveniently disowned any responsibility for the effects of their actions by making it a matter for Labour and the impending joint labour committee to resolve. Although in this regard they had left Labour enough time to deal with the situation since the second part of the order which would be considered 'null and void' was not applicable until 1 March 1977.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Note for the minister's information in response to a Dáil question, 26 Oct. 1976 (W 459/1 C.8).

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

And so exactly forty years subsequent to the establishment of the agricultural wages board the agricultural labourer was emancipated from the stronghold of Agriculture and its machinery, and elevated to the position of a worker with the same entitlements as the remainder of the labour force. That the emergence of the national wage agreements had been crucial to this development was unquestionable. Just as the determination of the Board to pursue to its limits the strictest interpretation of its powers had contributed to a situation which allowed Labour to take the initiative. For had the board honoured even some of these agreements in full, there was no telling how much longer this system might have continued to operate. Although the advance of equal rights legislation would no doubt have eventually brought the anachronistic tendencies of the Board to light, it would never have been on such a public scale. Vindication for the agricultural worker and his spokesmen and vilification of the Department of Agriculture, albeit it to a less obvious extent until now, had finally been achieved.

## Conclusion

### The Irish agricultural labourer 1923-76: citizen or peasant?

...if in front of the farm labourer could be piled up all the work which he had done in his life, what a huge pyramid it would make, and then if it were possible to place him before all the rewards of his life's work, they could be held in a clenched hand, like a nut, so that nobody could see them.<sup>1</sup>

I have a brother in law working for a big farmer...His wages are £26.80 per week. Out of that £26.80 he has to pay his contribution towards the stamping of his card, he has also to pay £4.00 per week for the house he and his family live in which is owned by his employer...He has a wife and six young children between the ages of 2 – 12 years. I ask you in the name of God what good is £20 to him. He has also to pay electricity, gas and fuel bills out of that which leaves him with very little for food or clothing. His only other income is the childrens' allowance. He is a very hard worker and takes the cutting of fences from other farmers which he works on during his half day and even at night. He had a car up to twelve months ago but due to the high rise in the cost of living that had to go. His wife and family now have to walk four miles to mass if they don't get a lift from some of the neighbours. He told me he can only afford meat twice a week for himself and his family which is not surprising. There is nothing he can do for as long as he is in the house the council will not provide him with a house, he cannot leave his present employment as he and his family have no place to live.<sup>2</sup>

The development of agriculture over several thousand years ago marked mankind's first industrial endeavours and its sustainability has since underpinned the rise and fall of many civilisations. In alluding to this oldest human industry in his talks to farmers and labourers in 1908, TP Gill had reminded these groups of their shared noble heritage.<sup>3</sup> At the dawn of a new era of land ownership and all it signified for Ireland as a whole, Gill had appealed to these farmers not to make an outcast of the Mat the Thresher of yore and

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, (vol. 174) 2 Jun. 1924, cols 918-9 (G. Edwards MP, during the second reading of the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Bill 1924 in the House of Commons).

<sup>2</sup> D. Kenneally to the minister for Labour, 26 Feb. 1975 (W 459/1 Cont. 5).

<sup>3</sup> T.P. Gill, 'The farmer and the labourer: a talk with labourers' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, viii, no.4 (1908).

all he represented.<sup>4</sup> But, as this thesis has demonstrated, it would be seven long decades later before the descendants of Mat the Thresher would attain an equal foothold in Irish society, and that was just at a statutory level. In the intervening period Ireland would achieve independence from the United Kingdom, experience civil war, two world wars, twenty changes of Irish government and membership of the European Economic Community.<sup>5</sup> For most of this period Ireland's economy would 'hang from the cow's tail', with successive governments viewing agriculture as paramount to the sustainability and future development of the country more than any other industrial enterprise.<sup>6</sup> Peasant proprietorship was so much entwined in the national psyche that the state also accorded full primacy to the mass of landholders in whom Ireland's largest asset had been vested with a view to achieving its social and economic aims simultaneously. Viewed to be considerably less important, however, was the agricultural labourer similarly engaged. Although one of the oldest and most indigenous groups involved with the country's chief industry and the largest single group of male wage earners until the 1960s, their interests were viewed to be at odds with those of the majority of the agricultural community and relegated accordingly. Indeed, for the formative decades of independent Ireland, the agricultural labourer's most insidious adversary would be not so much his employer or local farmer as the succession of native governments who had pledged to protect his rights as a citizen.

This policy was first enunciated by the Cumann na nGaedheal government in power from 1923 until 1932. Having incurred a £30 million debt to complete the process of peasant

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<sup>4</sup> T.P. Gill, 'The farmer and the labourer: a talk with farmers' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, viii, no.3 (1908).

<sup>5</sup> (<http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/a-misc/election.htm>)(24 May 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Louis F. Smith and Sean Healy, *Farm organisations in Ireland: a century of progress* (Dublin, 1996), p. 38.

proprietorship under the Land Act 1923, the leaders of the new state had been on a collision course towards this class before the first Free State government had even been elected. The agricultural labourer's wages, conditions and sense of power in Ireland had been revolutionised by the introduction of the minimum wage under the Corn Production Act 1917 and the consequent unprecedented level of trade union organisation it stimulated in agriculture. On the cusp of independence, this group was becoming a force to be reckoned with and it threatened many in Irish society, not just because of the latent violence underlining their trade union activism, but because of the social and economic implications of their increasing power. As soon as Cumann na nGaedheal had been elected, it destabilised the tenuous stakehold agricultural labourers had acquired through trade unionism by contributing to its collapse on the farm. It then proceeded to negatively equate the value of agricultural labour and any increase in the wages of the agricultural labourer solely in terms of cost to the farming community, especially the larger employing farmers, and hence a challenge to the productivity of the all important agricultural economy. In a related attempt to reduce the burden of rates on agricultural land, a link was established between agricultural wages and the rural wages of state employees on government and local authority work programmes. The government accordingly welcomed the declining agricultural wage as an opportunity to reduce wages in other areas of rural government employment as part of its policy of fiscal retrenchment. Once the source of the agricultural labourers' strength had been immobilised through the collapse of agricultural trade unionism and their wages no longer a threat to agriculture, the first Free State government was indifferent to this large group's increasingly precarious existence until its defeat in the 1932 election.

Unlike Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil was more concerned with the social rather than the economic implications of any improvement in the agricultural labourer's position. This reflected the ideological focus and power base of both parties at the time, with Cumann na nGaedheal supporting the interests of the larger farmers, the employers of agricultural labour, and Fianna Fáil the bulk of the farming community, the small farmer and his family. Fianna Fáil viewed the family farm as the bedrock of independent Ireland and placed its wholesome values firmly at the core of the young catholic nation state it was trying to build. The extent of its commitment to rooting as many of these families on the land as was economically possible was enshrined for posterity in the 1937 constitution. The agricultural labourer's needs and demands were considered in the context of this fundamental and very pervasive ideology both as a wage earning group and as a fraction of the community engaged in agriculture as a way of life. This commitment to preserving the family farm was not unique to Ireland, with even the EEC confirming its support for safeguarding this unit as the keystone of a vibrant rural community in the early 1960s.<sup>7</sup> More unique perhaps was that a state would attempt to achieve this policy at the expense of another and even more vulnerable social group.

In government for much of the period under question, Fianna Fáil's neglect of the agricultural labourer was not as blatant as that of the first Cumann na nGaedheal administration, but it was no less real in its impact. While the agricultural labourer benefited from important legislative measures dealing with underemployment, unemployment, children's allowances and housing over this period, this was not surprising. Fianna Fáil had no objection to extending the benefits of new social

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<sup>7</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), p. 373.



legislation to the labourer so long as it posed no competition or threat to the wider farming community; in any event the small holder would also have benefited from most of these measures. Fianna Fáil was, however, publicly averse to using the machinery of the state to regulate the 'special' relationship between farmer and labourer and the working conditions of the latter in agriculture, even though it assumed precisely this role for supervising the conditions of all other workers as it tried to ensure the new Ireland would be safeguarded from the hardships industrialisation had inflicted upon workers in the past. This stance concealed a deeper aversion to compelling farmers to provide benefits which would improve the working conditions of agricultural labourers in contrast to those of the remainder of the farming community, and the state went to great lengths to uphold this policy.

This policy was evident in Fianna Fáil's reluctance to re-introduce the statutory minimum wage to agriculture in 1936 which, despite the acknowledged 'serious deterioration' in agricultural wages during the economic war and its extensive subsidization of the farming community, had only been conceded as a direct result of the pressure brought to bear by the ITUC and the Labour Party. Even then, the government introduced wage fixing machinery which was very limited in scope compared to comparable machinery operating in England and Ireland. For instance, no provision was made to allow the public to be notified or respond to proposed wages increases, no provision was made to allow for the appointment of representative members through election or nomination, with the minister for Agriculture retaining exclusive control over determining who would represent farmers and workers, and extreme powers were vested in the chairman of the Board. While these powers were never used, the chairmen appointed were not

independent of the industry or of government policy, with one a farmer and a member of the Fianna Fáil party and the other a retired secretary of the Department of Agriculture, and sufficient evidence exists to suggest that there was considerable interaction between the chairmen and the department, at least up to the 1950s. The greatest drawback of this machinery however was the removal of the stipulation which would have directed the Board to secure a weekly half holiday for agricultural labourers, leaving this a matter for the government to regulate by legislation. This move was symptomatic of Fianna Fáil's refusal to concede the agricultural labourer's entitlement to statutory holidays up to its defeat in the 1948 election, despite granting this entitlement to industrial workers since 1936 and all other workers from 1939.

More than wages, the issue of paid holidays for the agricultural labourer struck at the heart of that precarious rural idyll Fianna Fáil tried so desperately to create within its first two decades of government. Considering from the outset that such a concession would undo the delicate social equilibrium which prevailed in the countryside, it meant the agricultural labourer was excluded from the landmark Conditions of Employment Act 1936 and the Holidays Act 1939, measures which were being pioneered as the country's modern labour code. In a rural economy where thousands of families were under pressure to survive on uneconomic holdings, there was little to distinguish the small farmer from the labourer in terms of economic activity and income, apart from the kudos associated with land ownership. As the largest and most destitute wage earning group in the country, the agricultural labourers served as an important and conspicuous buffer between the smallholder's own frugal existence and the bottom of the rural social hierarchy. The possibility of agricultural labourers benefiting from the privilege of paid holidays when

the majority on the land carrying out similar work for little gain would never do so, was perceived to be the harbinger of unrest that would undermine the foundations of rural Ireland. Of particular concern were the legions of 'relatives assisting'. Unless they benefited from land division or inherited a holding, they were bound to their families for a life of hardship with little or no pay except for the off farm employment gained during the quiet farming seasons. Since their unpaid labour kept many small farms afloat, the repercussions of any discontent arising from the improvement in the conditions of the agricultural labourer was perceived to have major implications for this labour supply and hence the viability of the family farm.

This mentality was given the ultimate expression in the rural wages policy of the Emergency period. At a time of intense food and turf production which required the maximum number of agricultural labourers on the land, the state sought to acquire these workers not by simply making agriculture a more attractive occupation through improved hours of work or holidays, as most governments did throughout Europe, but through subordinating the maximum wages on most local authority and government schemes to the minimum agricultural rate so that agriculture was the best paid occupation in rural areas over the Emergency. This way the state was guaranteed an adequate labour supply for food production without unsettling the agricultural community. Viewing the results of this low wages policy as a successful experiment at maintaining the status quo, the government even naively attempted to make it a permanent arrangement until it was challenged virulently on the ground by the trade unions and then by its own departments, chiefly local government. Even Lemass had unsuccessfully attempted to have the agricultural minimum wage inserted into the Industrial Relations Act of 1946 as a

standard for the Labour Court to fix certain categories of rural wages. Not only did the trade unions successfully resist this attempt by the state to subvert the standard of living of the wider rural community to that prevailing in agriculture but, ironically, this low wage policy also damaged the government's attempt to sustain the rural equilibrium because it revived the agricultural labourers' fight for better conditions.

During the Emergency agricultural labourers had enjoyed nominal wages parity with other rural workers, even though the hours were longer, and resisted reverting back to their substandard position when the policy ended. Apart from the revival of trade union organization amongst their ranks, these years hastened the process whereby agricultural labourers began to mentally align themselves more with workers in other occupations and began to seek a similar standard of living. This was evidenced in the fact that the strikes of this period, the first in twenty years, were focused not on wages but on the principle of the statutory annual and weekly half holiday. Even more than low wages, the withholding of the agricultural labourer's statutory entitlement to holidays was perceived to exacerbate their social stigma. The labourers began to protest against this new form of social inferiority that the state was now imposing on them through its sponsorship of legislation which specifically excluded them and thereby distinguished them further from the rest of the wage earning population.

This thesis has demonstrated that Fianna Fáil's approach to the demands and entitlements of agricultural labour was shared by all political parties, other than the Labour Party, and by a majority of the country's elected representatives in the Dáil up until the late 1960s, as evidenced in their rejection of so many private members bills seeking to address the shortcomings of the legislative code for agricultural labourers in the period 1946-65. This

shared mentality was first demonstrated on a legislative level in the actions of the coalition government which succeeded Fianna Fáil in 1948. Although it granted a limited concession of six days holidays in 1950, it had refused to grant the more eagerly sought weekly half holiday to the extent that it allowed a private members bill conceding this entitlement become law in the knowledge that it was unenforceable by the Agricultural Wages Board. A workable measure was eventually introduced by the Fianna Fáil government following its return to power in 1951, but absent was the underlining social ethic or sense of justice that had characterized the introduction of such entitlements to other workers. This lack of spirit was particularly manifest in the state's withholding of church and/or public holidays from this class until 1969 so that they were entitled to a week's less holidays with pay than other workers. This holiday code contrasted sharply with conditions in England and Wales where the agricultural worker had been given annual holidays since 1938 and since 1940 in Northern Ireland. Moreover the wages boards had been directed to secure a weekly half holiday for agricultural workers since 1924 and 1939 respectively.

The extent to which this policy had failed to make an impact on maintaining the social status quo was almost immediately apparent in the renewed flight from rural Ireland which commenced in the post emergency period, the ultimate rejection of Fianna Fáil's attempt to create a rural idyll of frugal comfort. The focus of their concern, the relatives assisting, declined from 244,197 in 1936 to 52,921 by 1971, with the rate of intercensal decline the highest at 36.9 per cent between 1951 and 1961.<sup>8</sup> The census of 1956

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<sup>8</sup> Table 1.1, chapter 1.

reflected this trend recording the lowest population since 1841.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the accelerated exodus, of which the agricultural labourer was the next group to be most seriously affected, the government refused to change its policy and acknowledge the agricultural labourer's entitlement to the same conditions as other workers or indeed that they were even comparable to other workers. The distinction continued even when Fianna Fáil and the other parties began to appreciate the implications for rural Ireland and the economy of their land division policies, when the viability of the small family farm became the problem and not the solution to the future of agriculture, and hard questions were being asked about how to reconcile the diverging social and economic aims of peasant proprietorship. As early as 1945 James Ryan, the minister for Agriculture, noted:

We are up against a sort of conflict as between the social and economic aim. The social aim is to put as many people as we can on the land, the economic aim is to give the farmer a better living. It is doubtful if we can get the two policies to coincide.<sup>10</sup>

As governments struggled to balance these conflicting objectives even in the aftermath of the more progressive economic policies initiated under the Lemass era, the disadvantaged position of the agricultural labourer continued to be pawned as succour to a restless agricultural community. The agricultural labourer's entitlement to parity with other workers now had to compete with the obvious economic distress of small farmers. The results of the census of 1956 had spurred a major rethink of economic policy and led to the re-orientation of agriculture to the country's comparative advantage in extensive farming, which affected small farmers badly. Leading to a greater emphasis on manufacturing and industry, this successful shift in policy brought with it rising living

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<sup>9</sup> Enda Delaney, 'Emigration, political cultures and post-war Irish society' in Brian Girvin and Gary Murphy (eds), *The Lemass era: politics and society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass* (Dublin, 2005), p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture*, (Dublin, 2002), p. 339.

standards across the country but accentuated the income gap between the farming and non farming sectors. The emergence of farm lobbying groups demanding better prices for produce and seeking supports that would allow their incomes to be comparable to other wage earning sectors resulted in another difficult parallel being drawn to the agricultural labourer and meant that increases in the minimum agricultural wage were keenly watched. The community whose interests the government had put foremost before the agricultural labourer was now accusing the government of neglect and staging strikes around the country. The rising aspirations of the farmers and their demands for better incomes both echoed and exacerbated the unsuccessful attempts of the agricultural labourers to align themselves with other workers. The series of private members bills introduced to the Dáil by the Labour Party between 1958 and 1965, seeking to overhaul the labourers' inferior holiday code and outmoded wage fixing legislation, were repeatedly rejected by government and Dáil alike. By this time the gap between the agricultural minimum wage and the non agricultural wage had widened further, thanks to the statutory body established to protect the labourer's wage earning capacity.

The AWB succeeded in reflecting in wages what the government institutionalized on a social level. For thirty years of its operations it barely provided a floor to agricultural wages. For that period of time, like the government, it refused to see the relevance of comparing the wages of these workers to those in comparable occupations. Decisions on the minimum rate were determined overwhelmingly on the basis of the agricultural economy and the ability of the poorest employers to meet increases, with little scientific or economic analysis other than that submitted by the worker members. As a result, by 1962 the value of the average agricultural minimum rate equated to only 72 per cent of

the average joint labour committee rate for low paid workers in industry, a 2 per cent increase on its value in 1946.<sup>11</sup> In 1938 the average agricultural minimum rate had constituted 49.6 per cent of the average industrial wage, by 1963 it had improved to all of 52.9 per cent.

Moreover, through the practice of providing values for benefits in kind, the Board had for many decades ensured that the cash wages received by the labourer could be reduced even further. For twenty three years the Board did not distinguish between the values accorded for board and for lodging, calculating the same rate for full board as it did for full board and lodging. As a result, until 1959 the proportion of an adult worker's wage legally deductible for full board (and lodging) ranged from as much as 52 per cent in 1940, to 40 per cent in 1959. Of even greater concern, however, during this period was that the Board did not reflect the high values it accorded to the costs of feeding a worker for the employer to the wages awarded to adult workers for their families. Although the cause of much hardship, it was the mid 1960s before the proportion of board deductible from the adult worker's take home pay was substantially reduced and brought more in line with the standards operating in Northern Ireland. Even at that, the adult worker in the Republic could still have 26 per cent of his weekly wage deducted for board in 1970. It was 1975 before the values allocated to full board fell below 20 per cent of the adult worker's minimum weekly wage.

The exposure of the Board's practices to the press through a series of strategic leaks by Patrick Murphy in the early sixties, combined with the emergence of the national wage agreements from 1964, resulted in the Board reforming its wage practices considerably to

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter IV.



take outside wage movements into account over the final decade of its operations. This resulted in agricultural labourers receiving wage increases on a scale never before experienced. But the minimum wage was increasing from such a low base compared to other workers that despite the huge increases over the next decade, the average minimum rate still constituted only 50.7 per cent of the average industrial wage by 1976. So, the minimum agricultural wage was as poor relative to the wages of other workers as it had been when the Board was first established.

Comparison with the almost identical legislation operating in England and Northern Ireland at the time provides further evidence of the poor standard set by the Board not just on wages but hours of work. The hours of work of the agricultural labourer were considerably longer than those of other workers in Ireland but also than comparable workers in England and Northern Ireland. For instance, the English AWB had reduced the working week eight times in the period 1947 to 1976, varying the working week from 48 hours in 1947 to 40 hours by 1976. The Irish AWB had reduced hours twice in the same period, from 54 to 50 hours in 1949 and to 48 hours in 1965. Ultimately, the Board's refusal to comply fully with the national wage agreements indicated just how far removed from the rest of the workforce it viewed the agricultural labourer to be and the special role it viewed itself playing in regulating the conditions of this group, to the point that it even ignored the government rebuke to conform which came in 1973.

This stance also reflected the influence of the Department of Agriculture on the Board's operations and on government policy up to this point. The introduction of statutory wage regulation to agriculture came at the cost of having the responsibility for any further improvements in the conditions of this wage earning class transferred to a department

that proved incapable of striking a balance between an entire community and its minority members. It was a retrograde step which would cost thousands of labourers their future in Ireland. This department drove the policy which refused to concede the principle of holidays for agricultural labourers and the need for parity in the labour code for as long as possible. The natural bias of its policies towards the farming community was demonstrated in how it encouraged certain ministers to flout the recommendations of the AWB on the matter of holidays not just in 1946 but also in 1963; its role in actively downplaying and discouraging organizations seeking to improve the lot of the agricultural labourer such as the FRW; and its refusal to update the Agricultural Wages Board's governing legislation which had been outdated since 1946, to reflect developments in the machinery for non agricultural workers.

The arrival of a new generation of politicians to government in the sixties and a changing economic outlook eventually helped bring some objectivity to this policy and attitudes changed at least in other areas of government, but not in Agriculture. It was telling that although a review of agricultural labour legislation had been agreed and completed under a Fianna Fáil government, the final steps to implement the recommendations which brought about the Board's dissolution came at the instigation of a Labour Party minister for Labour in a Fine Gael/Labour coalition. But even then the Fine Gael minister for Agriculture supported the policies of his Fianna Fáil predecessors and of Agriculture by refusing to acknowledge the inadequacy of the existing machinery, using inaccurate data to support arguments in defence of an upgraded board, and using considerable delaying tactics, including the manipulation of farm organisation uncertainties over representing employers on the new body, to achieve an outcome that would ensure the minister's

equal involvement with his counterpart in Labour in the appointment of members to the new joint labour committee. Likewise, the decision of Labour to depart from established practice to facilitate this not insignificant demand was an indication of how determined it was to bring the overall responsibility for the welfare of this class back under its remit. Right up to the point that the AWB was dissolved, Labour was debunking many of the arguments used by Agriculture to successfully sustain their employer biased attitudes over the years.

Most pivotal to the removal of this systematic distinction of the agricultural labourer from other workers was the constant campaigning of the FRW and the Labour Party. Apart from the trade union strikes of the 1940s, they were responsible for a level of parliamentary agitation for this wage group that had been unprecedented. It was a case of parliamentary agitation actually succeeding for the agricultural labourer where trade union agitation never could, at least at the statutory level. It was primarily due to this sustained agitation that the government brought in measures such as the 1952 Weekly Half Holidays Act, the 1969 Agricultural Workers (Wages and Holidays) Act, and its agreement to review the legislative code dealing with the wages and holidays of agricultural labourers. Indeed that the principal claims of worker spokesmen over the years had been ratified and upheld by the interdepartmental committee pointed to how unexcessive or extreme their demands had been. The FRW grew into a very influential mouthpiece at trade union and parliamentary levels, with general secretaries such as Sean Dunne in 1948 and later James Tully, representing the interests of the agricultural labourer directly in the Dáil. The FRW through Patrick Murphy and Con Moynihan also worked tirelessly on the AWB to argue for better wage increases and improved hours by

providing well researched arguments supported by verifiable data and statistics not just for comparable workers in Ireland, but also in England and Wales and Northern Ireland. Patrick Murphy had also been instrumental in bringing the attention of the employer labour conference to the non compliance of the Board on the national wage agreements, and he campaigned endlessly at Board, government, ICTU and employer labour conference levels to keep issues concerning the disadvantaged position of the agricultural labourer foremost in the minds of all involved. The fact that a member of the Labour Party, Michael O'Leary, became minister for Labour in 1973 also played a critical and timely part in overhauling the labour code for these workers.

By 1976 agricultural labourers as a wage group had very little to show for fifty years of independent government. Their contribution to the national economy had been the least valued in Irish society. This was due in part to their large numbers which made them expendable when there was so much surplus labour and lack of employment. It was also due in part to the derogatory view of their skillset. Because of the menial nature of their work, it seems that only those perceived to use their 'brain' as well as their 'hand' such as ploughmen and cattlemen, were accorded any respect. As Gill expounded on the skills of the ideal agricultural labourer in 1908:

He ought to have a knowledge of stock and horses and all the farm animals, and be able to handle them with art and sympathy....He should have a knowledge of all farm implements and machines. A plough to him should not be a plough merely...he should be a clever hedger and ditcher and drainmaker and pitchmaker and thatcher. He should have a knowledge of cropping and of treatment of land. He should know how to 'humour' land in accordance with the seasons or the weather. Skilled agriculturalists know that the land is as sensitive as any medium in which art or skill can work; that it almost has a personality to man whose instincts have been brought to finest point by training and experience. Perhaps it is in the planning and organising of his work that a good labourer best shows his brain power. How to plan it so that labour will go as far as possible, so that there

will be no waste. All this calls out not merely intelligence, but the highest kinds of intelligence.<sup>12</sup>

The unskilled agricultural labourer was described in less glowing terms:

A man who can only work with his hands at weeding and filling manure into carts and so forth cannot expect to be paid as much as a man who is a good ploughman, who is skilled in the use of agricultural machinery, in the management of horses, in the care of breeding stock and in all the varied arts and lore which a high class agricultural labourer possesses. Neither can a man who will only work when his employer's eye is on him. This is only the universal law of supply and demand. The good man is at a premium. The unskilled, half-skilled inefficient worker is the drag in the market.<sup>13</sup>

The minister for Agriculture, Dr James Ryan, echoed this classification when introducing the Agricultural Wage Bill to the Dáil in 1936:

It cannot be denied that certain classes of agricultural labourers are much more valuable than others...The ploughman and stockman are much more valuable to a farmer than the agricultural labourer who cannot use his brains and who can only use his hands in a very imperfect way.<sup>14</sup>

Addressing the poor standing of the agricultural labourer twenty five years later in the Dáil, William Norton, a Labour Party TD, noted during the debate on the Holiday Employees (Amendment) Bill in 1961:

Agriculture is a first class industry but many people engaging in activities less desirable nationally and socially than agricultural workers would describe them as agricultural labourers as if they knew nothing and were just hewers of wood and drawers of water. There is no such thing as an agricultural labourer in any economic sense. There is the agricultural worker who has to deal with the land and the vagaries of the Irish climate, who can produce crops and who has a considerable reservoir of skill and knowledge at his disposal.<sup>15</sup>

Although agriculture like every occupation had its quota of inefficient and unskilled workers here the exceptions were allowed to make the rule. Workers in low skilled occupations such as factory work, the building trade or unskilled rural employments such

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<sup>12</sup> T.P. Gill, 'The farmer and the labourer: a talk with labourers' in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*, viii, no.4 (1908).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 64), 11 Nov. 1936, cols 207-8.

<sup>15</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 191), 27 Jul. 1961, col. 2125.

as road and relief work or minor employment schemes, were not regarded with the same superiority. Despite little distinction between the work of the labourer on the large farm and that of the small farmers and his relatives assisting on the smaller holdings, the latter were not accorded any disdain. Instead the importance of agriculture and the social value attached to land ownership meant that it was the agricultural labourer who bore the brunt of the inferior status. His landless standing added to the rather desperate perception of his occupation and made him stand out as a loser in the class stakes. As Barry Desmond, a Labour Party TD for Dun Laoghaire, noted during the debate on the Industrial Relations Bill 1975<sup>16</sup>:

It has been always the position in this country that the possession of land, regardless of whether it was as little as six acres, gave the peculiar feeling of power, respectability and superiority in the situation of the rabid class consciousness which still exists in Ireland, much as we may deny this to be so. This attitude, particularly for those who did not possess land and who, consequently, were forced to earn a living by working on land owned by others, has always been a source of much divisiveness. Those who worked in that situation were patronised more than a little down through the years.<sup>17</sup>

In this regard it is interesting to note that agricultural 'workers' engaged in land related activities but not directly in farming, such as gamekeepers, gardeners, nurserymen and groomsmen were not considered as poorly skilled as agricultural labourers and were even allowed to benefit from the 1939 Holidays Employees Act on grounds that they were more of the 'handyman' type of skilled and semiskilled craftsmen.<sup>18</sup> It is also worth noting that the 1917-21 Agricultural Wages Board had catered for several different classes of agricultural labourer when fixing its rates, such as milkers, herdsmen,

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<sup>16</sup> A native of Cork, Barry Desmond was an ITGWU trade union official before elected to the Dáil in 1969.

<sup>17</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 288), 25 Feb. 1976, col. 702.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter V.

ploughmen, yardsmen and cattlemen.<sup>19</sup> These would also have been considered more skilled than the general labourer, who for many years was described as an 'ordinary' labourer in statistical data.<sup>20</sup> As described by Michael O'Hanlon in *Hiring fairs and farm workers in north west Ireland*:

Horsemen filled the top category because a man who could handle horses well was a great asset...they could often earn twice as much as ordinary labourers. Next after horsemen came cowmen. They had total responsibility for all cattle keeping and related activities such as calving. They also fed larger livestock, horses and grown cattle. Cowmen were considered skilled and important workers. General labourers often had the roughest, dirtiest tasks. They did all the spadework: digging drains, cleaning out sheughs – usually in the winter. Yet labourers had messy tasks too like cutting hedges, thatching and turf cutting. They would also have been involved in crop harvesting i.e. cutting oats and hay with scythes and digging potatoes. In wet weather men would tidy up outhouses or clean horse harnesses.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that the AWB did not utilise its powers to provide differential rates or grades for various classes of agricultural labourer allowed the unskilled status attached to these workers to continue unaddressed, especially in the absence of specific education or training courses for agricultural workers on the lines of the farm apprenticeship scheme for farmers' sons, which was introduced in the 1960s.<sup>22</sup> It was the unshakeable stigma attached to farm labouring and the refusal of children of agricultural labourers to accept a lifetime of little value for their work either locally or by the state that drove so many thousands to emigrate to Britain in the post war period.<sup>23</sup> The role of mechanisation and the changes in the technology of agricultural production gradually removed the connotations of unskilled drudgery and toil associated with farm work and allowed the

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<sup>19</sup> 'The agricultural wages board for Ireland (constitution and proceedings) regulations, 1920' in the *Annual general report of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (1919-20)*, p. 310.

<sup>20</sup> AGI/G2486/37; Table AII.1 in Appendix II.

<sup>21</sup> Michael O'Hanlon, *Hiring fairs and farm workers in north west Ireland* (Derry, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The first department: a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), pp 416-21.

<sup>23</sup> Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society* (Liverpool, 2000), pp 242-3.

agricultural labourer to be respected for the more sophisticated skills that are given high prestige in society.<sup>24</sup> But he still had to deal with the stigma perpetuated by the state until the controversial AWB and the distinctive agricultural labour code was abolished. As the minister for Labour significantly commented during the debate on the Industrial Relations bill 1975:

The mistaken social attitudes of the past relegated farm workers to a low place in the esteem of our society and have no relevance today because now, increasingly, the importance of each job is measured by its contribution to the development of the national economy. The increasing mechanisation of the industry means that the role of farm workers, always a skilled job, now requires even higher standards.<sup>25</sup>

The mistaken social attitudes of the past had contributed to a class which had accounted for 126,409 persons in 1926, 18.8 per cent of the agricultural workforce and 9.6 per cent of total occupied persons, declining to 17,775 persons by 1981, 8.9 per cent of the agricultural workforce and 1.3 per cent of total occupied persons. Now that they were considered 'skilled' and their numbers were becoming less plentiful, demands began to finally emerge for positive measures to keep these workers in agriculture.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the agricultural labourer's disadvantaged position in independent Ireland was not only sustained by government but institutionalised through distinctive and less favourable social legislation and wage fixing machinery in the period 1936 to 1973. With its rights viewed to be inferior or less important than those of the remainder of the farming community, the future of almost an entire wage group was sacrificed in the commitment to preserve the family farm on the basis of a mentality which survived from the post Famine era, and which required a new

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<sup>24</sup> Howard Newby, *The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia* (Great Britain, 1977), p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 288), 25 Feb. 1976, col. 670.



generation of politicians to expunge it from the echelons of government policy. This thesis has shown that agricultural labourers had not only not disappeared by independence but that their advancement in a developing society threatened government policy on many levels. Notwithstanding their reduced numbers by the 1970s, by comparison with other wage earning groups they still had the capacity to upset the national wage agreements, and had sufficient capacity for the Department of Agriculture to successfully negotiate its involvement in future appointments to the joint labour committee for agricultural workers. Some forty years after the wages of the agricultural labourers were first regulated by the AWB, they became part of a system of 21 joint labour committees negotiating the wages and working conditions of 42,000 industrial workers.<sup>26</sup> Numbering in the region of 20,000 permanent workers and 14,000 temporary workers in 1976, this single group nearly outnumbered the other twenty one committees combined.<sup>27</sup> Parity in legislation would not necessarily guarantee them equivalent wages to industrial workers but at least they were on an equal footing with them in every other sense, and the distinction instituted and perpetuated at a statutory level since the first labour codes were introduced by native government had finally ended.

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<sup>26</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 288), 25 Feb. 1976, col. 669.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Appendices**

**Table AI.1** The composition of the agricultural workforce, 1926-81

<b>Year</b>	<b>Farmers</b>	<b>Sons &amp; Daughters Assisting<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Other Relatives Assisting<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Agricultural Labourers Living Out</b>	<b>Agricultural Labourers Living In</b>	<b>Agricultural Workers<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>1926<sup>4</sup></b>	268,930	206,382	57,713	89,963	36,446	12,695
<b>1936<sup>5</sup></b>	259,112	191,429	52,768	94,934	32,900	12,686
<b>1946</b>	249,898	160,024	43,436	87,384	26,428	26,483
<b>1951</b>	235,331	132,895	38,190	66,487	18,170	21,437
<b>1961</b>	210,331	80,002	27,998	51,241	8,354	14,749
<b>1966</b>	200,625	60,210	22,937	41,084	5,346	14,806
<b>1971</b>	181,627	34,754	18,167	35,569		18,636
<b>1981<sup>6</sup></b>	138,756	15,562	8,675	17,775		17,745

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-3; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp 4-5; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1966, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp 2-3; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-5.

<sup>1</sup> From 1951 to 1966 the census provided a separate category for farmers sons and daughters in law assisting on the home farm. For convenience the figures for this category have been added to those for sons and daughters assisting.

<sup>2</sup> From 1951 to 1966 the census provided a separate category for farmers brothers and sisters assisting on the home farm. The figures for this category have been added to those for other relatives assisting.

<sup>3</sup> The figures for this miscellaneous group of workers expanded temporarily in 1946 and 1951 when turf workers were added to agricultural occupations. In addition fishermen were included in agricultural occupations from 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Applied to those aged 12 years and over.

<sup>5</sup> Applied to those aged 14 years and over 1936-71.

<sup>6</sup> Applied to those aged 15 years and over.

**Table A1. 2** Male agricultural labourers and several of the largest male groups employed in non agricultural occupations, 1926-81

Census Year	Agricultural Labourers	Carpenters <sup>7</sup>	Fitters & Mechanics <sup>8</sup>	Builders Labourers <sup>9</sup>	Drivers of Road Goods Vehicles <sup>10</sup>	Shop Assistants <sup>11</sup>	Clerks	Teachers
1926	125,161	13,869	10,046	9,975	10,252	20,468	16,643	5,598
1936	127,028	15,709	11,164	19,959	14,665	21,870	17,611	5,964
1946	112,999	14,126	13,011	13,610	15,359	17,576	19,029	5,769
1951	84,294	17,966	16,352	24,249	13,317	22,032	22,481	5,812
1961	59,447	12,857	20,194	14,996	17,263	19,212	31,642	6,581
1971	35,425	18,918	25,274		24,594	23,761	36,036	10,091
1981	17,614	22,061	35,081	33,549	29,796	26,489	38,260	14,949

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 2, pp 2-13; 1936, vol. ii table 2, pp. 4-15; 1946, vol. ii table 2, pp. 4-15; 1951, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-19; 1961, vol. iii table 2, pp 3-9; 1971, vol. iv table 2, pp. 2-7; 1981, vol. vii table 2, pp 4-10.

<sup>7</sup> Recorded as carpenters and joiners from 1951 and carpenters, joiners and cabinet makers in 1981.

<sup>8</sup> This occupational group was labelled metal workers until 1961 when it became known as machinists, fitters and related workers. It was renamed engineering and related trades group in 1971. Fitters and mechanics were recorded as two separate groups until 1961. The figures for the earlier census years have been collated for the purpose of this chart.

<sup>9</sup> Although the figures for labourers involved in local authority building works would generally have been greater than those for builders' labourers in other building and construction works, the latter group have been used to represent the building and construction sector because the figures available are more consistent. The figures for builder's labourers were not recorded in the building and construction group in 1971 or 1981. They were recorded with the figures for general and unskilled labourers instead. The figures are missing from Figure 1.3 for 1971 because the census did not distinguish between the various groups subsumed under the latter.

<sup>10</sup> Recorded as drivers of motor vehicles until 1946. In 1951 they were recorded as drivers of self propelled goods vehicles and tractors – non agricultural. They were renamed drivers of road goods vehicles in 1971.

<sup>11</sup> Figures for salesmen were included with this group until 1961 when they were added to the auctioneers and valuers group; Figures for barmen were added in 1971.

**Table AI.3** Agricultural labourers living in and out according to province, 1926-81

Census Year	Leinster		Munster		Connacht		Ulster (3 Counties)	
	Living Out	Living In	Living Out	Living In	Living Out	Living In	Living Out	Living In
1926	42,115	9,965	32,163	18,106	7,433	3,830	8,252	4,545
1936	42,665	8,678	33,770	17,293	9,057	3,348	9,442	3,581
1946	41,350	6,952	30,103	14,326	7,504	2,907	8,427	2,243
1951	32,749	4,744	23,513	10,133	4,221	2,057	6,004	1,236
1961	25,128	1,969	18,913	4,868	2,856	1,029	4,344	488
1966	20,191	1,291	14,988	2,976	2,379	715	3,526	364
1971	16,023		13,212		2,826		3,508	
1981	8,882		6,062		1,194		1,637	

Sources: *Census of Population*: 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-3; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, p. 32; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-33; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-33; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-25; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-9.

**Table AI.4** Agricultural labourers living out in Leinster according to county, 1926-81

Census Year	Carlow	Dublin	Kildare	Kilkenny	Laois	Longford	Louth	Meath	Offaly	Westmeath	Wexford	Wicklow
1926	2,116	4,410	4,503	3,418	2,907	1,705	2,185	5,888	2,534	3,069	6,323	3,057
1936	2,104	4,421	4,323	3,582	2,973	1,841	2,428	5,630	2,649	2,954	6,847	2,913
1946	2,354	4,429	4,145	3,574	2,817	1,439	2,312	5,573	2,455	2,839	6,604	2,809
1951	1,916	3,445	3,556	2,919	2,111	944	1,835	4,653	1,839	1,974	5,397	2,160
1961	1,495	2,344	2,712	2,459	1,642	602	1,491	3,538	1,191	1,405	4,535	1,714
1966	1,297	1,795	2,212	2,013	1,316	463	1,213	2,758	932	1,010	3,697	1,485
1971	1,010	1,325	1,638	1,548	1,110	396	868	2,170	794	942	3,037	1,185
1981	534	757	968	756	567	186	523	1,477	373	451	1,645	645

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

**Table AI.5** Agricultural labourers living out in Munster according to county, 1926-81

<b>Census year</b>	<b>Clare</b>	<b>Cork</b>	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Limerick</b>	<b>Tipperary</b>	<b>Waterford</b>
<b>1926</b>	2,422	11,458	4,021	4,980	6,378	2,904
<b>1936</b>	2,905	11,414	4,661	5,435	6,440	2,915
<b>1946</b>	1,885	10,429	3,198	4,962	6,763	2,866
<b>1951</b>	1,307	7,872	2,734	3,971	5,352	2,277
<b>1961</b>	887	6,157	2,170	3,557	4,320	1,822
<b>1966</b>	648	4,844	2,031	2,598	3,327	1,540
<b>1971</b>	686	4,208	1,886	2,246	2,923	1,263
<b>1981</b>	264	2,116	608	924	1,366	784

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35; 1971, vol. iv table 5, pp 18-26; 1981, vol. vii table 5, pp 22-31.

**Table AI.6** Agricultural labourers living out in Connacht according to county, 1926-81

<b>Census Year</b>	<b>Galway</b>	<b>Leitrim</b>	<b>Mayo</b>	<b>Roscommon</b>	<b>Sligo</b>
<b>1926</b>	2,432	793	1,395	1,420	1,393
<b>1936</b>	2,417	1,026	2,730	1,394	1,490
<b>1946</b>	2,245	732	2,320	1,051	1,156
<b>1951</b>	1,464	468	851	672	766
<b>1961</b>	985	291	760	357	463
<b>1966</b>	806	245	553	348	427
<b>1971</b>	1,031	314	770	332	379
<b>1981</b>	456	109	326	130	173

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.7** Agricultural labourers living out in Ulster (3 counties), 1926-81

<b>Census year</b>	<b>Cavan</b>	<b>Donegal</b>	<b>Monaghan</b>
<b>1926</b>	2,645	3,937	1,670
<b>1936</b>	3,029	4,746	1,667
<b>1946</b>	2,266	4,619	1,542
<b>1951</b>	1,174	3,213	1,117
<b>1961</b>	1,089	2,520	735
<b>1966</b>	892	1,991	643
<b>1971</b>	799	2,073	636
<b>1981</b>	385	964	288

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.8** Agricultural labourers living in in Leinster according to county, 1926-66

Year	Carlow	Dublin	Kildare	Kilkenny	Laois	Longford	Louth	Meath	Offaly	Westmeath	Wexford	Wicklow
1926	452	492	662	1732	817	438	754	729	822	540	1754	773
1936	467	447	571	1456	769	297	674	629	668	509	1567	624
1946	352	394	590	1207	639	261	438	541	691	416	966	457
1951	260	312	363	869	434	164	283	357	425	289	648	340
1961	96	121	139	323	234	68	107	140	211	105	293	132
1966	72	123	94	238	119	39	49	100	111	78	183	85

Sources: *Census of Population* 1926, vol. ii table 5, pp 32-4; 1936, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-6; 1946, vol. ii table 5, pp 34-5; 1951, vol. iii table 4, pp 32-4; 1961, vol. iii table 5, pp 22-35; 1966, vol. iv table 5, pp 22-35.

**Table AI.9** Agricultural labourers living in in Munster according to county, 1926-66

Census year	Clare	Cork	Kerry	Limerick	Tipperary	Waterford
1926	1,308	5,854	2,290	3,624	3,713	1,317
1936	1,287	5,708	2,135	3,613	3,424	1,107
1946	1,105	4,736	2,037	2,895	2,719	833
1951	805	3,487	1,284	2,061	1,969	527
1961	370	1,747	674	1,047	786	244
1966	253	1,088	386	571	516	162

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.10** Agricultural labourers living in in Connacht according to county, 1926-66

Census year	Galway	Leitrim	Mayo	Roscommon	Sligo
1926	1,269	604	694	668	595
1936	1,151	538	563	612	484
1946	1,068	368	510	563	398
1951	785	222	430	377	243
1961	418	119	188	180	124
1966	306	86	110	124	85

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.11** Agricultural labourers living in in Ulster (3 counties), 1926-66

Census year	Cavan	Donegal	Monaghan
1926	1,229	2,161	1,155
1936	1,097	1,414	1,070
1946	794	721	728
1951	460	347	429
1961	194	142	154
1966	139	136	89

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.12** Agricultural labourers living out according to age group, 1926-71

Census Years	Age Groups						
	14-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +
1926	11,359	11,575	16,886	15,388	17,181	11,063	6,389
1936	11,542	15,275	20,453	14,737	13,543	13,121	6,263
1946	13,600	12,245	19,336	15,640	11,749	9,413	5,401
1951 <sup>12</sup>	9,300	7,510	13,602	13,495	10,763	7,787	4,129
<sup>13</sup> 1961	7,586	4,474	7,711	10,004	10,736	7,702	2,908
1966 <sup>14</sup>	6,009	3,733	5,418	7,010	8,843	7,435	2,515
1971 <sup>15</sup>	3,500	3,725	4,908	5,314	7,690	7,561	2,871

Source: *Census of Population* 1926; vol. v table 4a, p. 10 and table 4b, p. 33; 1936, vol. v part 2 table 4a, p. 10; 1946, vol v part 2 table 4a, p.12; 1951, vol. iii table 4b, p. 40 and table 4a, p. 13; 1961, vol. ii table 2a, p.10; 1966, vol. v table 3a, p. 35; 1971, vol. v table 2a, p. 11 and table 2b, p. 29.

**Table AI.13** Agricultural labourers living in according to age group, 1926-66

Census Years	Age Groups						
	14-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
1926	8,855	6,917	7,007	4,487	4,232	2,663	1,970
1936	6,822	7,639	7,310	3,847	3,263	2,600	1,419
1946	5,180	5,066	5,974	3,455	2,708	2,336	1,709
1951	3,239	2,634	3,693	2,818	2,429	1,900	1,358
1961	1,630	751	1,028	1,291	1,507	1,334	785
1966	792	468	559	713	1,119	1,032	649

Source: *Census of Population* 1926; vol. v table 4a, p. 10 and table 4b, p. 33; 1936, vol. v part 2 table 4a, p. 10; 1946, vol v part 2 table 4a, p.12; 1951, vol. iii table 4a, p. 12; 1961, vol. ii table 2a, p. 9; 1966, vol. v table 3a, p.35.

<sup>12</sup> Age group data for female agricultural labourers was not provided in the 1951 census

<sup>13</sup> Age group data for female agricultural labourers was not provided in the 1961 census.

<sup>14</sup> Age group data for female agricultural labourers was not provided in the 1966 census.

<sup>15</sup> Age group data for female agricultural labourers was included in the 1971 census.



**Table AI.14** Distribution of agricultural labourers according to farm size 1926, 1951, 1961 and 1966

<b>Census Year</b>	<b>Under 5 Acres</b>	<b>5-10 Acres</b>	<b>10-15 Acres</b>	<b>15-30 Acres</b>	<b>30-50 Acres</b>	<b>50-100 Acres</b>	<b>100-200 Acres</b>	<b>Over 200 Acres</b>
<b>1926</b>	1,778	2,133	3,184	10,656	16,833	30,494	26,116	21,938
<b>1951</b>	300	716	1,260	5,112	10,584	23,122	20,912	16,426
<b>1961</b>	106	257	521	2,153	5,205	14,139	13,984	11,015
<b>1966</b>	66	152	340	1,365	3,530	9,859	9,547	8,152

Sources: *Commission of Inquiry into De-rating 1929*, appendix a table 1, pp 94-5; *Census of Population 1951*, vol. iii table 2, pp 4-5; 1961, vol. v table 2, p. 4; 1966, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

**Table AI.15** Distribution of relatives assisting according to farm size 1926, 1951, 1961 and 1966

<b>Census Year</b>	<b>Under 5 Acres</b>	<b>5-10 Acres</b>	<b>10-15 Acres</b>	<b>15-30 Acres</b>	<b>30-50 Acres</b>	<b>50-100 Acres</b>	<b>100-200 Acres</b>	<b>Over 200 Acres</b>
<b>1926</b>	8,203	23,786	29,601	72,504	55,035	47,860	19,895	6,149
<b>1951</b>	2,912	8,459	12,698	42,416	41,723	40,039	17,575	4,900
<b>1961</b>	1,278	3,887	6,034	22,635	27,432	29,418	13,668	3,470
<b>1966</b>	910	2,761	4,235	15,438	21,196	24,691	10,964	2,618

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AI.16** Agricultural labourers living out according to farm size in each province, 1961

<b>Farm Size in Acres</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht</b>	<b>Ulster (3 counties)</b>
<b>1-5</b>	46	31	7	10
<b>5-10</b>	91	66	20	31
<b>10-15</b>	165	126	45	66
<b>15-30</b>	666	518	174	264
<b>30-50</b>	1,597	1,659	229	506
<b>50-100</b>	4,660	5,080	311	863
<b>100-200</b>	6,082	4,401	257	800
<b>Over 200</b>	6,691	2,700	362	574

Source: *Census of Population 1961*, vol. v table 2, p. 4.

**Table AI.17** Agricultural labourers living in according to farm size in each province, 1961

<b>Farm Size in Acres</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht</b>	<b>Ulster (3 counties)</b>
<b>1-5</b>	5	4	1	2
<b>5-10</b>	10	12	21	6
<b>10-15</b>	25	22	38	34
<b>15-30</b>	114	185	154	78
<b>30-50</b>	249	604	236	125
<b>50-100</b>	618	2,118	337	152
<b>100-200</b>	696	1,518	157	73
<b>Over 200</b>	235	382	60	11

Source: *Census of Population 1961*, vol. v table 2, p. 4.

**Table AI.18** Agricultural labourers living out according to farm size in ten counties, 1966

<b>County</b>	<b>Under 5 Acres</b>	<b>5-10 Acres</b>	<b>10-15 Acres</b>	<b>15-30 Acres</b>	<b>30-50 Acres</b>	<b>50-100 Acres</b>	<b>100-200 Acres</b>	<b>200+ Acres</b>
<b>Cork</b>	5	6	13	87	234	1102	1173	631
<b>Wexford</b>	4	12	19	70	205	818	1043	672
<b>Tipperary</b>	2	4	22	63	188	792	746	633
<b>Meath</b>	0	3	9	51	146	334	567	985
<b>Limerick</b>	5	11	8	45	239	763	406	222
<b>Kildare</b>	0	2	10	27	71	220	445	823
<b>Dublin</b>	4	9	30	69	145	249	222	277
<b>Kerry</b>	2	15	22	81	251	543	177	49
<b>Donegal</b>	6	10	29	75	152	358	400	300
<b>Kilkenny</b>	1	4	5	40	117	401	442	357

Source: *Census of Population 1966*, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

**Table AI.19** Agricultural labourers living in according to farm size in ten counties, 1966

<b>County</b>	<b>Under 5 Acres</b>	<b>5-10 Acres</b>	<b>10-15 Acres</b>	<b>15-30 Acres</b>	<b>30-50 Acres</b>	<b>50-100 Acres</b>	<b>100-200 Acres</b>	<b>200+ Acres</b>
<b>Cork</b>	1	2	3	26	90	447	419	90
<b>Limerick</b>	0	0	1	24	69	285	166	25
<b>Tipperary</b>	1	1	3	10	60	204	178	59
<b>Kerry</b>	0	3	5	17	84	177	86	13
<b>Galway</b>	2	6	7	40	66	106	53	26
<b>Clare</b>	0	3	3	12	37	94	64	39
<b>Kilkenny</b>	0	1	1	1	14	88	92	41
<b>Wexford</b>	0	0	3	4	16	62	74	23
<b>Waterford</b>	0	1	1	3	7	48	72	28
<b>Donegal</b>	2	7	7	24	25	36	31	4

Source: *Census of Population 1966*, vol. iv table 2, p. 3.

**Table AI.20** Number of agricultural holdings exceeding 1 acre according to size and province on 1 June 1933

Province	1-5 Acres	5-10 Acres	10-15 Acres	15-30 Acres	30-50 Acres	50-100 Acres	100-200 Acres	200+ Acres	Total per province
Leinster	10,948	8,118	6,931	16,973	14,290	13,983	7,607	3,487	<b>101,303</b>
Munster	8,762	6,744	5,958	18,515	20,275	23,109	10,023	2,960	<b>117,262</b>
Connacht	5,924	12,329	15,738	37,632	19,014	8,002	2,061	951	<b>104,625</b>
Ulster	3,921	7,257	8,076	16,687	8,790	5,026	1,512	523	<b>54,967</b>
<b>Total Ireland</b>	<b>29,555</b>	<b>34,448</b>	<b>36,703</b>	<b>89,807</b>	<b>62,369</b>	<b>50,120</b>	<b>21,203</b>	<b>7,921</b>	

Source: *Statistical Abstract* 1934 (Dublin, 1934) table 58, p. 42.

**Table AI.21** Number of agricultural holdings exceeding 1 acre according to size in ten selected counties on 1 June 1933

Acres	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Wexford	Meath	Kerry	Donegal	Kildare	Kilkenny	Dublin	Total per holding size
1-5	2,097	1,505	1,271	1,307	1,031	2,235	2,484	998	916	1,372	<b>15,216</b>
5-10	1,714	1,142	951	924	907	1,608	3,918	571	536	664	<b>12,935</b>
10-15	1,507	1,087	741	667	777	1,391	3,654	376	508	408	<b>11,116</b>
15-30	4,701	3,044	2,384	1,767	2,106	3,847	6,428	892	1,295	620	<b>27,084</b>
30-50	5,613	3,356	2,698	1,950	1,514	4,026	3,971	745	1,667	485	<b>26,025</b>
50-100	7,694	3,760	3,074	2,347	1,149	4,049	2,855	786	1,977	509	<b>28,200</b>
100-200	3,720	17,75	1,182	1,169	854	1,409	1,082	698	1,047	361	<b>13,297</b>
200+	912	631	254	300	623	477	428	437	319	178	<b>4,559</b>
<b>Total holdings per county</b>	<b>36,001</b>	<b>19,563</b>	<b>16,543</b>	<b>12,828</b>	<b>11,612</b>	<b>21,581</b>	<b>26,381</b>	<b>7,163</b>	<b>9,991</b>	<b>7,476</b>	

Source: *Statistical Abstract* 1934 (Dublin, 1934) table 58, p. 42.

**Table A1.22** Number of agricultural holdings exceeding 1 acre according to size and province on 1 June 1970

<b>Province</b>	<b>1-5 Acres</b>	<b>5-10 Acres</b>	<b>10-15 Acres</b>	<b>15-30 Acres</b>	<b>30-50 Acres</b>	<b>50-100 Acres</b>	<b>100-200 Acres</b>	<b>200-300 Acres</b>	<b>Total per province</b>
<b>Leinster</b>	7,677	5,876	4,201	12,656	13,384	15,087	8,482	3,044	<b>70,407</b>
<b>Munster</b>	7,495	5,313	4,279	14,115	18,243	23,978	10,776	2,543	<b>86,742</b>
<b>Connacht</b>	3,984	6,803	8,168	27,923	20,613	11,313	2,305	648	<b>81,757</b>
<b>Ulster</b>	3,939	4,906	4,468	11,079	7,995	5,860	1,788	509	<b>40,544</b>
<b>Total Ireland</b>	<b>23,095</b>	<b>22,898</b>	<b>21,116</b>	<b>65,773</b>	<b>60,235</b>	<b>56,238</b>	<b>23,351</b>	<b>6,744</b>	

Source: *Statistical Abstract 1974-5* (Dublin, 1977) table 62, p. 93.

**Table A1.23** Number of agricultural holdings exceeding 1 acre according to size in ten selected counties on 1 June 1970

<b>Acres</b>	<b>Cork</b>	<b>Tipperary</b>	<b>Limerick</b>	<b>Wexford</b>	<b>Meath</b>	<b>Kerry</b>	<b>Donegal</b>	<b>Kildare</b>	<b>Kilkenny</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Total holdings per size</b>
<b>1-5</b>	2,111	1,238	1,082	959	666	1,872	2,897	892	591	1,004	<b>13,312</b>
<b>5-10</b>	1,386	824	768	611	879	1,405	3,119	531	358	538	<b>10,419</b>
<b>10-15</b>	1,174	578	550	459	496	1,178	2,198	316	269	285	<b>7,503</b>
<b>15-30</b>	3,713	1,919	1,831	1,119	2,161	3,372	4,420	911	854	566	<b>20,866</b>
<b>30-50</b>	5,125	2,835	2,486	1,407	1,943	3,807	2,984	968	1,297	458	<b>23,310</b>
<b>50-100</b>	8,079	3,973	3,181	2,194	1,552	4,135	2,693	963	1,938	486	<b>29,194</b>
<b>100-200</b>	3,961	2,089	1,314	1,370	955	1,341	1,211	708	1,181	308	<b>14,438</b>
<b>200+</b>	722	572	206	328	496	427	431	399	336	153	<b>4,070</b>
<b>Total holdings per county</b>	<b>26,271</b>	<b>14,028</b>	<b>11,418</b>	<b>8,447</b>	<b>9,148</b>	<b>17,537</b>	<b>19,953</b>	<b>5,688</b>	<b>6,824</b>	<b>3,798</b>	

Source: *Statistical Abstract 1974-5* (Dublin, 1977) table 62, p. 93.

**Table A1.24** Number of males aged 18 years and over engaged in farm work in each province on 1 June during selected years, 1937-74

Year	Leinster			Munster			Connacht			Ulster (3 Counties)		
	Mems of Family	Perm	Temp	Mems of Family	Perm	Temp	Mems of Family	Perm	Temp	Mems of Family	Perm	Temp
1937	82,162	38,039	22,569	117,738	33,232	18,676	117,397	5,786	9,589	57,177	6,025	7,345
1947	76,676	39,269	18,563	111,410	32,432	14,278	107,908	6,097	8,565	50,951	5,486	5,886
1967	56,900	15,700	8,300	81,100	10,600	7,300	72,300	2,100	3,400	32,200	1,600	2,300
1974	48,700	11,000	5,800	70,200	6,300	4,300	60,800	1,200	1,900	26,300	900	1,000

Source: *Statistical Abstracts* 1937 (Dublin, 1937) table 53, p. 50; 1947-8 (Dublin, 1949) table 61(a), p.58; 1967, table 61, p. 85; 1974-5 (Dublin, 1977) table 59, p.91.

**Table A1.25** Number of male family members aged 18 years and over engaged in farm work in ten counties on 1 June during selected years, 1937-74

Year	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Wexford	Meath	Kerry	Donegal	Kildare	Kilkenny	Dublin
1937	35,941	19,121	13,965	10,735	8,957	23,836	28,525	5,008	9,163	2,962
1947	34,135	17,948	13,544	9,553	8,701	22,829	24,956	5,205	8,557	2,793
1955	29,388	15,275	12,608	8,780	7,884	18,672	20,580	3,985	7,471	2,315
1967	24,100	13,400	9,900	7,700	6,800	17,000	15,100	3,700	7,000	1,900
1974	21,500	11,700	9,100	6,600	6,100	13,500	12,100	3,200	5,700	1,500

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table A1.26** Number of male permanent workers aged 18 years and over engaged in farm work in ten counties on 1 June during selected years, 1937-74

Year	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Wexford	Meath	Kerry	Donegal	Kildare	Kilkenny	Dublin
1937	12,304	7,200	5,789	6,243	4,787	3,008	2620	3,782	3,779	4,656
1947	12,063	7,334	5,579	5,852	5,540	2,634	2338	4,114	3,895	5,058
1955	8,367	4,947	4,029	4,260	4,169	1,714	1484	2,958	2,688	3,568
1967	4,000	2,400	1,700	2,400	2,200	900	900	2,100	1,400	2,200
1974	2,400	1,500	1,000	1,600	1,800	400	500	1,500	900	1,600

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table A1.27** Number of male temporary workers aged 18 years and over engaged in farm work in ten counties on 1 June during selected years, 1937-74

Year	Cork	Tipperary	Limerick	Wexford	Meath	Kerry	Donegal	Kildare	Kilkenny	Dublin
1937	6,436	3,830	2,333	2,524	2,493	2,802	2,922	2,647	1,993	2,147
1947	4,286	2,581	2,108	1,961	2,432	2,635	2,412	1,846	1,655	1,807
1955	4,270	2,601	2,432	1,686	2,035	1,972	1,865	1,526	1,563	1,498
1967	2,300	1,500	1,000	1,100	1,300	1,100	1,200	700	700	800
1974	1,300	1,000	800	700	700	500	500	600	500	700

Source: *Ibid.*

**Table AII.1** Average rate of cash wages per week of permanent male agricultural labourers, not in receipt of allowances of any kind, in the period 1913 – 29

Year	Ploughmen	Cattlemen	Ordinary Farm Labourers
		<b>Shilling</b>	
1913	13/-	12/-	11/3
1914	13/9	12/6	12/-
1915	15/3	14/-	13/-
1916	16/9	15/-	14/3
1917	21/3	18/9	18/6
1918	26/-	24/-	23/-
1919	32/-	30/-	28/9
1920	36/3	35/-	33/-
1921	34/6	33/9	31/9
1922	31/-	29/9	28/3
1923	31/-	30/-	28/6
1924	29/-	28/-	26/3
1925	27/9	27/-	25/3
1926	27/9	27/-	25/-
1927	26/3	25/6	23/6
1928	26/3	25/3	23/6
1929	25/9	24/9	23/6

Source: Memorandum from the Director of Statistics, Department of Industry and Commerce to the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 26 April 1930, p. 3. Figures based on returns received from the police 1913-19 and from crop reporters' returns 1920-29 (AGI/G2486/37).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the years 1913 to 1918 inclusive the rates refer to persons of 18 years of age and upwards and for subsequent years to persons 20 years of age and upwards.

**Table AII.2** Weekly wage rates paid to road labourers employed by county councils during certain years, 1914-32

	1914	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1930	1932
	<b>Shilling</b>							
<b>Carlow</b>	13/-	40/-	35/-	35/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Dublin</b>	16/-	46/6	46/6	46/6	46/6	46/6	43/-	43/-
<b>Kildare</b>	13/-	42/6	38/-	38/-	32/-	32/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Kilkenny</b>	15/-	35/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Offaly</b>	12/-	39/-	33/9	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Longford</b>	15/-	36/-	34/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	26/-
<b>Louth</b>	14/-	33/-	26/6	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-
<b>Meath</b>	13/-	40/-	40/-	40/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-
<b>Laois</b>	12/-	35/-	29/-	29/-	29/-	29/-	29/-	30/-
<b>Westmeath</b>	12/-	45/-	32/-	32/-	32/-	32/-	32/-	32/-
<b>Wexford</b>	12/-	38/-	28/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Wicklow</b>	15/-	40/-	34/6	33/9	33/9	33/9	33/9	33/9
<b>Clare</b>	14/-	38/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-
<b>Cork</b>	14/-	38/-	41/-	41/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-
<b>Kerry</b>	15/-	33/-	28/6	28/6	28/6	28/6	30/-	30/-
<b>Limerick</b>	14/-	36/-	36/-	36/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Tipperary</b>	13/-	38/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-
<b>Waterford</b>	15/-	36/-	36/-	36/-	35/-	35/-	35/-	35/-
<b>Cavan</b>	12/-	31/6	30/6	30/-	29/-	29/-	27/-	27/-
<b>Donegal</b>	16/-	30/-	27/6	26/-	26/-	26/-	26/-	26/-
<b>Monaghan</b>	15/-	30/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-	28/-
<b>Galway</b>	15/-	35/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-
<b>Leitrim</b>	15/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-	27/-
<b>Mayo</b>	15/-	30/-	30/-	27/-	27/-	24/-	32/6	32/6
<b>Roscommon</b>	12/-	36/-	31/-	31/-	31/-	31/-	31/-	31/-
<b>Sligo</b>	15/-	30/-	27/6	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-	30/-
<b>Average for 26 Counties</b>	<b>14/-</b>	<b>36/-</b>	<b>32/6</b>	<b>32/-</b>	<b>31/-</b>	<b>31/-</b>	<b>31/-</b>	<b>31/-</b>

Sources: *Annual reports of the Department of Local Government*: (1922-5) appendix q, p. 202; (1926-7) appendix xxxviii, p. 307; (1929-30) appendix lv, p. 264; (1931-2) appendix lviii, p. 306.

**Table AIII.1** Average half yearly wage rates of male agricultural labourers with full board and lodging free in each county in the Free State, during a week in July 1929-36, as compiled from the returns received from the Garda Siochana

County/ Province	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
<b>Rates in pounds, shilling and pence</b>								
Carlow	15.1	14.7.6	13.16	12.0	12.5	13.0	13.0	13.0
Dublin	19.4	17.19.6	17.13	17.1	16.9	18.0	16.5	15.12
Kildare	14.19.9	15.0.6	14.8	14.8	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.0
Kilkenny	14.1.9	14.0.3	14.4	13.12	12.11	13.0	12.10	13.0
Offaly	13.11	14.10	13.15	12.14	12.12	13.0	13.0	13.0
Longford	14.5.9	14.18	13.5	12.7	11.19	11.14	10.10	12.0
Louth	13.7	13.14	13.0	12.14	11.17	11.0	11.14	13.0
Meath	14.19	15.6.6	14.17	13.16	13.3	13.0	12.10	13.0
Laois	13.10.6	14.5.0	14.3	14.6	13.3	13.0	13.0	13.0
Westmeath	15.0.9	13.10	14.0	13.17	12.10	13.0	12.0	12.0
Wexford	12.8.9	13.0.3	13.4	12.16	11.6	10.8	10.8	10.10o
Wicklow	15.0.0	13.13.3	12.8	13.2	12.15	12.0	11.14	11.14
<b>LEINSTER</b>	<b>14.13.6</b>	<b>14.11.9</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>13.15</b>	<b>12.18</b>	<b>12.18</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>12.14</b>
Clare	12.10.6	12.12.3	12.6	11.19	11.3	10.10	11.0	11.0
Cork	14.11.6	14.10	14.11	14.5	12.18	12.0	12.0	12.16
Kerry	15.12	15.19.3	14.19	15.2	13.15	13.0	13.0	13.10
Limerick	16.10	15.11.3	15.2	14.9	13.1	12.0	12.0	12.0
Tipperary	14.16	14.6	14.1	13.17	12.11	12.0	12.0	12.10
Waterford	14.15.3	13.16.9	14.14	14.18	13.1	13.0	13.0	13.0
<b>MUNSTER</b>	<b>14.17.3</b>	<b>14.10.9</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>12.16</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>12.11</b>
Cavan	14.8.9	13.15.9	13.10	12.12	11.0	10.0	11.0	12.0
Donegal	12.13	12.13.9	12.10	12.8	10.17	10.0	10.10	11.0
Monaghan	14.8.9	14.15.9	14.12	12.14	11.10	11.0	12.0	13.0
<b>ULSTER</b>	<b>13.13.9</b>	<b>13.11.6</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>12.11</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>11.17</b>
Galway	14.7	13.8.6	13.4	13.13	12.11	12.0	12.0	12.0
Leitrim	11.1.6	10.5.6	11.11	10.12	10.1	9.0	10.0	9.10
Mayo	14.2.9	13.9.6	14.3	14.3	12.18	13.0	13.0	13.0
Roscommon	12.14	13.3	11.14	12.4	11.11	12.0	12.0	13.0
Sligo	14.6.3	12.18	13.10	13.2	12.7	12.10	12.0	12.0
<b>CONNACHT</b>	<b>13.13</b>	<b>12.19.3</b>	<b>12.19</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>11.19</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.1</b>
<b>SAORSTAT EIREANN</b>	<b>14.11.3</b>	<b>14.6.9</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>13.15</b>	<b>12.13</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>12.11</b>

Source: Memoranda for the secretary, Agriculture, from the director of Statistics, Industry and Commerce, 12 Sep. 1931; 2 Feb. 1935; 30 Oct. 1935; 19 Oct. 1936; Departmental report for the minister, 31 Jan. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).



**Table AIII.2** Weekly wage rates for road and agricultural labourers in each county in Saorstát Éireann, 1932 and 1935.

County	1932		1935	
	Road Wages	Agricultural <sup>1</sup> Wages Shilling	Road Wages	Agricultural Wages
Carlow	30/-	21/-	30/-	20/-
Dublin	43/-	32/6	43/-	30/-
Kildare	30/-	22/9	30/-	20/-
Kilkenny	30/-	24/6	30/-	22/-
Offaly	30/-	21/9	30/-	20/-
Longford	26/-	20/9	28/-	20/-
Louth	28/-	21/-	28/-	20/-
Meath	35/-	21/9	35/-	20/-
Laois	30/-	23/6	30/-	20/-
Westmeath	32/-	21/9	32/-	20/-
Wexford	30/-	21/3	30/-	18/-
Wicklow	33/9	24/6	33/9	22/-
Clare	35/-	22/-	35/-	24/-
Cork	35/-	24/3	35/-	21/-
Kerry	30/-	24/6	30/-	20/-
Limerick	30/-	25/6	30/-	22/-
Tipperary	35/-	24/6	35/-	22/-
Waterford	35/-	23/9	35/-	22/6
Cavan	27/-	22/-	27/-	21/-
Donegal	26/-	20/9	26/-	18/-
Monaghan	28/-	23/9	28/-	20/-
Galway	27/-	22/3	27/-	20/-
Leitrim	27/-	19/-	27/-	20/-
Mayo	32/6	22/9	32/6	20/-
Roscommon	31/-	21/9	31/-	21/-
Sligo	30/-	22/6	30/-	18/-

Source: *Annual reports of the Department of Local Government*: (1931-2) appendix lviii, p. 306; (1934-5) appendix lxxiii, p. 445; Departmental report for the minister for Agriculture, 31 Jan. 1935; Memorandum for the secretary, Agriculture from the director of Statistics, Industry and Commerce, 30 Oct. 1935 (AGI/G2486/37).

<sup>1</sup> The agricultural wages in this table are derived from Table 3.3 in Chapter III, which were computed based on the returns of the Garda Síochána for a week in July of each year.

**Table AIII.3** An outline of the principal functions of the wage fixing machinery established under the Corn Production Act 1917, Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924 and the Agricultural Wages Act 1936.

	<b>British Corn Production Act 1917</b>	<b>English Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924</b>	<b>Irish Agricultural Wages Act 1936</b>
<b>Established:</b>	Agricultural wages board (board had option to establish district committees if so wished)	Agricultural wages committees for each county in England and Wales and an agricultural wages board	Agricultural wages board and agricultural wages area committees
<b>Constitution</b>	The board shall consist of members representative of employers and workers in agriculture in equal proportions and of the appointed members. Representative members shall be elected or nominated by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries or otherwise, or partly elected and partly so nominated, as may be provided by the regulations. The chairman shall be such one of the members as the Board of Agriculture may appoint.	The committee shall consist of members representative of employers and workers in agriculture in the county for which the committee acts, in equal proportions, and of two impartial members appointed by the minister and a chairman. The chairman shall be appointed annually by the committee. Appointment of representative members same as 1917 and constitution of awb same except minister replaces Board of Agriculture and number of appointed members not to exceed quarter of total.	The board shall consist of 12 members, 4 each representative of employers and workers, 3 neutral members and a chairman. The employers' members shall be persons who are, in the opinion of the minister, representative of agricultural employers and the workers' members shall be persons who are, in the opinion of the minister, representative of agricultural workers. The minister shall appoint the chairman.
<b>Meetings of the board</b>	To constitute a meeting of the board at least one third of the whole number of representative members and at least one appointed member must be present.	At every meeting the chairman if present shall preside. At a meeting the chairman or vice chairman in his absence shall be entitled to vote and in case of equality of votes shall have a second or casting vote.	The chairman shall constitute a quorum. No meeting shall be held unless the chairman is present thereat. If no ordinary members or only one ordinary member is present the chairman shall make such order and such order as so made shall be deemed to have been duly made by the board at such meeting.
<b>Principal function</b>	The awb shall fix minimum rates of wages for timework [Option to fix piece rates].	The awc shall fix minimum rates of wages for timework [Option to fix piece rates]	The awb shall from time to time as they think proper fix minimum rates for timework. [Option to fix piece rates]
<b>Powers in determining wages orders</b>	Minimum rates may be fixed so as to apply universally, to any special class, to any special area, to any special class in a special area, subject to any exceptions made by the board for employment of any special character, so as to vary according as the employment is for a day, week, month, or other period, or according to the number of working hours or conditions of employment, or so as to provide for a differential rate in the case of overtime. In fixing minimum rates the board shall, so far as practicable, secure for able-bodied men wages which, in the opinion of the board, are adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such	Same as 1917 act for committee. Plus A committee shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, secure a weekly half holiday for workers. Same for committee	Same as 1917 act

<b>Notice</b>	<p>standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation.</p> <p>Before fixing any minimum rate of wages the board shall give notice of the rate they propose to fix and consider any objections to the rate which may be lodged with them within one month.</p> <p>[Where a district wages committee has been established for any area, it shall be the duty of the committee to recommend to awb minimum rates of wages applicable to that area.</p> <p>No variation or cancellation of such a rate shall have effect within that area unless recommended by the committee, or an opportunity given to the committee to report thereon to the awb and the awb has considered the report.</p>	<p>Before fixing, cancelling or varying any minimum rate, the committee shall give notice of the proposal and the manner and time within which objections to proposals may be lodged, not being less than 14 days from day of the notice.</p> <p>Where a committee have fixed, cancelled or varied a rate, the awb shall be notified of their decision.</p> <p>The awb on receipt of notification shall make such order necessary for carrying out decision of the committee</p>	<p>The board shall before making such order serve notice of their intention to make such order on the area committees. Each such committee may within two months after the date of such service make to the board recommendations. The board shall not make such order until the expiration of the said two months, unless recommendation previously made.</p>
<b>Sub-committees</b>	<p>The board may, and of so required by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries shall, establish district wages committees.</p> <p>They may refer to a district wages committee for their report...and may also, if they think fit, delegate to a district wages committee any of their powers and duties other than the power to fix wages and authorise any such district committee to delegate to a sub committee any of the powers so delegated to the committee</p>	<p>A committee (and the awb) may appoint one or more sub-committees for reports and recommendations any matter which they think it expedient so to refer...and may also, if they think fit, delegate to a sub-committee any of their powers and duties other than the power to fix wages</p>	
<b>Other duties Payment in kind</b>	<p>To define the benefits or advantages which may be reckoned as payment of wages in lieu of payment in cash and values at which to be reckoned</p>	Same	Same
<b>Permits of exemption</b>	<p>To grant permits of exemption from the provisions of the act in cases where satisfied workers are physically or mentally incapacitated</p>	Same	Same

Sources: *Corn Production Act 1917* (7 & 8 Geo. V, c. 46 [G.B.]) 21 Aug. 1917; *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act 1924* (14 & 15 Geo. V, c. 37 [U.K.]) 29 Aug. 1924; *Agricultural Wages Act 1936*, 1936/53[Eire](28 Nov. 1936).

**Table AIV.1 Minimum weekly agricultural wage rates for male adult workers, as prescribed by the Agricultural Wages Board, 1937-76**

Increases and wages of male adult workers according to wages district 1937-76								
Effective Date	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4	
	Increase	Wage	Increase	Wage	Increase	Wage	Increase	Wage
9 August 1937 <sup>i</sup>		24/-						
23 May 1938 <sup>ii</sup>	11/-	33/-					3/-	27/-
4 March 1940 <sup>iii</sup>	3/-	36/-		31/6			3/-	30/-
6 April 1942	3/-	39/-	3/-	34/6			3/-	33/-
1 February 1943	3/-	42/-	3/-	37/6			3/-	36/-
7 February 1944	4/-	46/-	4/-	41/6			4/-	40/-
24 June 1946 <sup>iv</sup>	6/-	54/-	8/6	50/-	7/6	47/6	4/-	44/-
19 May 1947	6/-	60/-	6/-	56/-	6/-	53/6	6/-	50/-
15 March 1948	5/-	65/-	5/-	61/-	5/-	58/6	5/-	55/-
4 April 1949	5/-	70/-	5/-	66/-	5/-	63/6	5/-	60/-
9 October 1950 <sup>v</sup>		70/-		66/-		63/6		60/-
23 July 1951 <sup>vi</sup>	7/6	77/6	7/6	73/6	7/6	71/-	7/6	67/6
28 April 1952	5/-	82/6	5/-	78/6	5/-	76/-	5/-	72/6
23 February 1953 <sup>vii</sup>	7/6	90/-	7/6	86/-	7/6	82/6	7/6	80/-
1 March 1954	4/-	94/-	4/-	90/-	4/-	86/6	4/-	84/-
12 September 1955 <sup>viii</sup>	6/-	100/-	4/-	94/-			5/-	89/-
28 May 1956	6/-	106/-	6/-	100/-			6/-	95/-
2 March 1959 <sup>ix</sup>	6/-	112/-	6/-	106/-			6/-	101/-
28 March 1960	4/-	116/-	4/-	110/-			4/-	105/-
24 October 1960 <sup>x</sup>	3/-	119/-	3/-	113/-			3/-	108/-
30 October 1961 <sup>xi</sup>	6/-	125/-	6/-	119/-			6/-	114/-
4 June 1962	10/-	135/-	8/-	127/-			6/-	120/-
30 December 1963 <sup>xii</sup>	5/-	140/-	5/-	132/-			5/-	125/-
4 May 1964 <sup>xiii</sup>	15/-	155/-	15/-	147/-			15/-	140/-
24 May 1965 <sup>xiv</sup>	15/-	170/-	15/-	162/-			15/-	155/-
6 June 1966	13/-	183/-	13/-	175/-			13/-	168/-
1 October 1966	7/-	190/-	7/-	182/-			7/-	175/-
1 April 1968	15/-	205/-	15/-	197/-			15/-	190/-
30 September 1968	5/-	210/-	5/-	202/-			5/-	195/-
21 April 1969 <sup>xv</sup>	30/-	240/-	30/-	232/-			30/-	225/-
6 April 1970	30/-	270/-	30/-	262/-			30/-	265/-
7 September 1970	30/-	300/-	30/-	292/-			20/-	285/-
31 May 1971	34/-	334/-	34/-	326/-			34/-	319/-
1 May 1972	30/-	364/-	30/-	356/-			30/-	349/-
7 May 1973	40/-	404/-	40/-	396/-			40/-	389/-
27 May 1974	100/-	504/-	100/-	496/-			100/-	489/-
23 June 1975 <sup>xvi</sup>	111/-	615/-	111/-	607/-				
15 December 1975	53/-	668/-	53/-	660/-				
22 November 1976	70/-	738/-	70/-	730/-				

Source: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMC).

<sup>1</sup> The weekly rates in this wages order applied to the entire country for adult workers aged 20 years plus on contracts of employment of less than 6 months duration.

<sup>ii</sup> The country was divided into two wage groups. Group 1 consisted of the Co. Borough of Dublin, the Borough of Dun Laoghaire, the Urban District of Howth, the Urban District of Bray, the District Electoral Division of Howth Rural, Coolock, Malahide, Kinsealy, Swords East etc. Group 2 consisted of the remainder of the country.

<sup>iii</sup> A third wage group was created consisting of certain district electoral divisions in Counties Clare and Kilkenny, districts in and around Cork Co. Borough and Limerick Co. Borough, Co. Dublin, Co. Kildare. Weekly rates now applied to contracts of employment for periods of up to 5 months duration.

<sup>iv</sup> A fourth wages group was created. Group 1 remained the same. Group 2 now consisted of the remainder of Co. Dublin and the bordering districts of Counties Kildare and Meath. Group 3 comprised the remainder of Counties Kildare and Meath, Co. Louth, all of Wicklow with the exception of Bray and the south west and districts surrounding the cities of Cork, Limerick and Waterford. Group 4 consisted of the remainder of the country.

<sup>v</sup> The adult age changed to 19 years plus. Dublin County workers transferred from Group 2 to Group 1. From 18 September 1950 provision is made for six days holidays remuneration.

<sup>vi</sup> Monthly rates prescribed for workers in Groups 3 & 4 only going forward.

<sup>vii</sup> Standard week reduced from 54 to 50 hours.

<sup>viii</sup> The wages groups were reorganised into three groups. Group A (Group 1 for the purposes of this table) consisted of all of Dublin and Urban District of Bray. Group B (Groups 2 in this table) consisted of certain district electoral divisions in Counties Clare and Kilkenny, all of Wicklow with the exception of Bray and the south west and districts in and around Cork Co. Borough, Limerick and Waterford Co. Borough, Counties Kildare, Louth and Meath.

<sup>ix</sup> The adult age changed to 20 years plus.

<sup>x</sup> The adult age changed to 21 years plus.

<sup>xi</sup> The adult age changed to 20 years plus. Provision is made for 12 days holidays remuneration.

<sup>xii</sup> Provision made for holiday remuneration on St Patrick's Day and Christmas Day.

<sup>xiii</sup> The following counties were upgraded in their entirety to Group B from 1 June 1964: Limerick, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Tipperary and Wicklow with the exception of UD Bray. As before this group also contained the county borough of Cork and the eastern portion of the county and the county borough of Waterford with certain electoral divisions. Minimum wage rates were extended to male agricultural labourers aged 14 to 16 for the first time.

<sup>xiv</sup> A 44 hour week is introduced for winter time (1 November to 28 February) and a 50 hour week for summertime. Cork city area is upgraded to Group A and Co. Waterford in its entirety is upgraded to Group B.

<sup>xv</sup> Counties Laois, Offaly and Westmeath upgraded to Group B.

<sup>xvi</sup> Only two wage groups remain. Group 1 consists of Cork City area and the eastern portion of the county, Co. Dublin and the urban district of Bray. Group 2 consists of the remainder of the country. The adult age changed to 19 years plus.

**Table AIV.2** Agricultural minimum wage rates and 6 days full board for male workers in Group C, 1940 to 1963.<sup>1</sup>

Year	20 plus		19 and under 20		18 and under 19		17 and under 18		16 and under 17	
	Shilling									
	Wage	Board	Wage	Board	Wage	Board	Wage	Board	Wage	Board
1940	30	13.5	27	12.5	24	11.5	21	10.5	18	10
1942	33	14.5	30	13.5	27	12.5	24	11.5	21	11
1943	36	16	33	15	30	14	27	13	24	12.5
1944	40	17.5	36.5	16.5	33	15.5	29.5	14.5	26	14
1946	44	17.5	40.25	16.5	36.5	15.5	32.75	14.5	29	14
1947	50	20	46.25	19	42.5	18	38.75	17	35	16.5
1948	55	22	51.25	21	47.5	20	43.75	19	40	18.5
1949	60	24	56.25	23	52.5	22	48.75	21	45	20.5
1951			67.5	27	60	25	56.25	24	52.5	23.5
1952			72.5	29	67.5	27.5	62.5	26.5	57.5	25.5
1953			80	32	73.5	30.5	67	29	60.5	27.5
1954			84	33.5	77.5	31.8	67	28.8	60.5	27.5
1955			89	35.4	80	33	69	30	60.5	27.5
1956			95	37.5	80	33	69	30	60.5	27.5
1957			95	37.5	80	33	69	30	60.5	27.5
1958			95	37.5	80	33	69	30	60.5	27.5
1959	101	34.8	95	34.8	80	30.5	69	27.5	60.5	25
1960	105	35	95	35	80	30.5	69	27.5	60.5	25
1961	114	37	100	37	85	32	72.5	28.5	63	26
1962	120	39	105	39	90	34	76	30	65	27
1963	125	39	109	39	93	34	79	30	67	27

Source: *Reports of the AWB* 1940 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62).

<sup>1</sup> The rate for board included lodging until 1959. From this point a separate rate for full board and full board and lodging was prescribed by the Board. The data in this table refers only to full board from 1959.

**Table AIV.3** Minimum wage rates and 7 days full board for adult male agricultural labourers in certain counties of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland<sup>2</sup>

Year	Belfast Co. Borough		Co. Derry		Co. Armagh		Co. Fermanagh		Dublin Co. Borough		Co. Kildare <sup>3</sup>		Co. Wexford <sup>4</sup>	
	Shilling													
	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L	Wage	B & L
1940	35	15.75	31	15.75	30	15.75	29	15.75	36	18	31.5	16.3	30	15.75
1942	53	15.75	48		47.25	19.8	46.25	19.8	39	19.25	34.5	17.5	33	16.9
1947	83	25.6	78	25.6	77	25.6	76	25.6	60	25.6	53.5	23.9	50	23.3
1951	93	30.9	88	30.9	87	30.9	86	30.9	77.5	33.8	71	32	67.5	31.5
1952	101	32.6	96	32.6	95	32.6	94	32.6	82.5	36.1	76	35	72.5	33.8
1954	106	35		35	100	35	99	35	94	41.4	87.5	40.25	84	39
1961	162	51.3	157	51.3	156	51.3	155	51.3	125	48.4	119	48.4	114	48.4
1964	183	51.3	178	51.3	177	51.3	176	51.3	155	51.3	147	51.3	147	51.3
1966 <sup>5</sup>	201	44.5	196	44.5	195	44.5	194	44.5	190	48	182	48	182	48

Sources: Ministry for Agriculture, Northern Ireland, *Report of proceedings under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, (Northern Ireland) 1939*: for the period to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1949; for the two years ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 1951; for the two years ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 1953; for the years 1956 to 1961; Republic of Ireland: *Report of proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board*: 1940 (S 11689A); 1942 (S 13503A); 1947 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954 (S 13503D); 1961 (S 13503E/62).

<sup>2</sup> Data for the Irish figures is based on the board and lodging rate multiplied by seven days to co-ordinate with the only rate prescribed by the Northern Ireland AWB for the period specified.

<sup>3</sup> Data for this county is based on wages Group B rates for 1940 & 1942; Group III from 1947 to 1954 and Group B from 1961.

<sup>4</sup> Co. Wexford was upgraded to the same group as Co. Kildare, Group B, in June 1964.

<sup>5</sup> Based on 6 days full board only for all counties

**Table AIV.4** Minimum weekly wage rates prescribed by the Agricultural Wages Board for male agricultural labourers in Group C, 1937 to 1975.<sup>6</sup>

Year	20 years plus	19 years & under 20	18 years & under 19	17 years & under 18	16 years & under 17	15 years & under 16 <sup>7</sup>	14 years & under 15 <sup>8</sup>
	<b>Shilling</b>						
1937	24	21	18	15	0		
1938	27	24	21	16.5	0		
1939	27	24	21	18	16.5		
1940	30	27	24	21	18		
1942	33	30	27	24	21		
1943	36	33	30	27	24		
1944	40	36	33	29.5	26		
1946	44	40.25	36.5	32.75	29		
1947	50	46.25	42.5	38.75	35		
1948	55	51.25	47.5	43.75	40		
1949	60	56.25	52.5	48.75	45		
1950	0	60	52.5	48.75	45		
1951	0	67.5	60	56.25	52.5		
1952	0	72.5	67.5	62.5	57.5		
1953	0	80	73.5	67	60.5		
1954	0	84	77.5	67	60.5		
1955	0	89	80	69	60.5		
1956	0	95	80	69	60.5		
1957	0	95	80	69	60.5		
1958	0	95	80	69	60.5		
1959	101	95	80	69	60.5		
1960	108	95	80	69	60.5		
1961	114	100	85	72.5	63		
1962	120	105	90	76	65		
1963							
1964	140	122	103	87	72		58
1965	155	135	113	95	77		61
1966	168	146	122	102	82		64
1967	175	166	149	131	114	96	70
1968	195	185	166	146	127	107	78
1969	225	214	191	169	146	124	90
1970	285	271	242	214	185	157	114
1971	319	303	271	239	207	175	128
1972	349	332	297	262	227	192	140
1973	389	370	331	292	253	214	156
1974	489	465	416	367	318	269	196
1975	529	503	450	397	344	291	212
1976 <sup>9</sup>		730	621	548	475	402	292

Source: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

<sup>6</sup> Group C was also known as Group IV from 1946 until 1955.

<sup>7</sup> This age classification was not introduced as a separate group until 1967. Rates for workers aged 15 to 16 were initially covered by an inclusive rate for the 14 to 16 age group from 1963.

<sup>8</sup> As above. This category is used to refer to the 14 to 16 age group rates from 1963 to 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Counties remaining in Group C were upgraded to Group B in 1976.



Table AIV.5 Minimum wages rates prescribed by the AWB for adult female agricultural labourers, 1952-76

Weekly minimum wage rates of adult female agricultural labourers according to wages district 1952-76				
Effective Date	Co. Borough and County of Dublin		Co. Kildare (All areas outside Dublin from 1967)	
	Increase	Shilling Wage	Increase	Shilling Wage
4 Feb 1952 <sup>10</sup>		60/-		
23 Feb 1953	4/-	64/-		
1 Mar 1954 <sup>11</sup>		64/-		56/-
28 May 1956	4/-	68/-	4/-	60/-
2 Mar 1959	4/-	72/-	4/-	64/-
24 Oct 1960	5/-	77/-	5/-	69/-
30 Oct 1961	5/-	82/-	5/-	74/-
4 June 1962	8/-	90/-	6/-	80/-
30 Dec 1963 <sup>12</sup>	4/-	94/-	3/-	83/-
4 May 1964	12/-	106/-	11/-	94/-
24 May 1965	12/-	118/-	11/-	105/-
6 June 1966	13/-	131/-	13/-	118/-
1 Oct 1966	7/-	138/-	7/-	125/-
31 July 1967 <sup>13</sup>		138/-		125/-
1 April 1968	12/-	150/-	11/-	136/-
30 Sep 1968	4/-	154/-	3/-	139/-
21 April 1969	24/-	178/-	23/-	162/-
6 April 1970	30/-	208/-	30/-	192/-
7 Sep 1970	24/-	232/-	23/-	215/-
31 May 1971	34/-	266/-	25/-	249/-
1 May 1972	30/-	296/-	30/-	279/-
7 May 1973	40/-	336/-	40/-	319/-
27 May 1974	100/-	436/-	100/-	419/-
23 June 1975	111/-	547/-	111/-	530/-
15 Dec 1975	53/-	600/-	53/-	583/-
22 Nov 1976 <sup>14</sup>	138/-	738/-	147/-	730/-

Source: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB* 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

<sup>10</sup> Adult minimum rates applied to females aged 19 years plus for a 48 hour week in Dublin County and County Borough only.

<sup>11</sup> Rates applied to female workers in Co. Kildare.

<sup>12</sup> Provision made for holiday remuneration on St Patrick's Day and Christmas Day.

<sup>13</sup> Minimum wage rates extended to include wages of female workers outside Dublin and Kildare. Kildare is absorbed into rates for the rest of the country outside Dublin.

<sup>14</sup> Cork city area and the eastern portion of the county and the urban district of Bray are upgraded to receive Dublin rates.

Table AIV.6 Index numbers of wage rates, 1953-76

	General 23 Industrial Occupations (Hourly) <sup>15</sup>	Transport(Weekly) <sup>16</sup>	Agriculture(Weekly) <sup>17</sup>
	<b>Base Year 1953 = 100</b>		
<b>1953</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>1954</b>	100.3	100.1	104.9
<b>1955</b>	100.4	101.3	104.9
<b>1956</b>	108.4	110.8	118.7
<b>1957</b>	110.8	111.2	118.7
<b>1958</b>	112.7	118.9	118.7
<b>1959</b>	116.6	119.8	126.1
<b>1960</b>	124.4	129.5	131
<b>1961</b>	126.4	130.5	134.7
<b>1962</b>	145.3	147.4	150.3
<b>1963</b>	147.5	147.8	150.3
<b>1964</b>	166.8	166.1	178.2
<b>1965</b>	169.9	166.4	197.2
<b>1966</b>	173.3	168.2	212.9
<b>1967</b>	191	183.5	221.5
<b>1968</b>	197.2	187.2	240.2
<b>1969</b>	221.1	205.4	283.7
<b>1970</b>	252.9	221	320.9
<b>1971</b>	298.2	275.9	399.3
<b>1972</b>	341.2	317.3	436.1
<b>1973</b>	385.3	335.4	486
<b>1974</b>	444.7	375.6	608.8
<b>1975</b>	521.6	503.3	746.5
<b>1976</b>	609.6	503.3	811.5

Source: *Statistical Abstract of Ireland* 1953-62 in 1964 (Dublin, 1964) table 350, p. 336; 1963-1976 in 1977 (Dublin, 1980) table 328, p.312.

<sup>15</sup> Based on rates obtaining in the early months of the year.

<sup>16</sup> Based on rates obtaining in the early months of the year.

<sup>17</sup> Based on rates obtaining in July of each year.

**Table AIV.7** Rate of unemployment assistance and unemployment benefit for all workers and the average agricultural minimum rate for agricultural labourers during the period 1953-76.

Year	Weekly rates of unemployment assistance in non-urban areas for a person with an adult dependent and two child dependents	Weekly rates of unemployment insurance benefit for an adult with an adult dependent and two dependent children	Average earnings per week for adult male agricultural labourers computed on the basis of the Agricultural Wages (Minimum Rates) Orders, 1953-76 <sup>18</sup>
		Shilling	
1953	28/-	50/-	81/6
1954	28/-	50/-	85/6
1955	28/-	50/-	85/6
1956	28/-	50/-	96/9
1957	28/-	61/-	96/9
1958	31/-	61/-	96/9
1959	31/-	61/-	102/9
1960	31/-	61/-	106/9
1961	31/-	61/-	109/9
1962	54/6 <sup>19</sup>	72/6 <sup>20</sup>	122/6
1963	54/6	88/6 <sup>21</sup>	122/6
1964	59/6	98/6	145/3
1965	59/6	98/6	160/9
1966	74/6	118/6	173/6
1967	74/6	118/6	180/6
1968	94/6	128/6	195/9
1969	114/6 <sup>22</sup>	148/6 <sup>23</sup>	231/3
1970	134/6	168/6	261/-
1971	163/- <sup>24</sup>	204/- <sup>25</sup>	325/-
1972	193/- <sup>26</sup>	240/- <sup>27</sup>	355/-
1973	243/- <sup>28</sup>	290/- <sup>29</sup>	395/6
1976	408/- <sup>30</sup>	484/- <sup>31</sup>	661/-

Sources: *Annual reports of the Department of Social Welfare*, (1953) pp 4-5 and 16-17; (1954) pp 4-5 and 16-17; (1957) pp 6-7 and 16-17; (1958) pp 8-9 and 16-17; (1962) pp 10-11 and 20; (1963) pp 10 and 21; (1964) pp 10 and 21; (1966) pp 10-11 and 23; (1968) pp 23 and 59; (1969) pp 21 and 55; (1970) pp 21 and 55; (1971) pp 27 and 69; (1972) pp 27 and 71; (1974) pp 13 and 51; (1976) pp 16 and 42. Agricultural wages: *Statistical Abstract of Ireland*: 1953-69 in 1969 (Dublin, 1971) table 65, p.88; (1970-76) in 1977 (Dublin, 1980) table 61, p.90.

<sup>18</sup> Figures based on a week in July of each year for agricultural labourers who did not have free house or allowances of any kind.

<sup>19</sup> Claimant entitled to 5s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Claimant entitled to 8s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>22</sup> Claimant entitled to 7s. 6d. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>23</sup> Claimant entitled to 10s. 6d. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>24</sup> Claimant entitled to 10s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>25</sup> Claimant entitled to 13s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>26</sup> Claimant entitled to 15s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>27</sup> Claimant entitled to 20s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>28</sup> Claimant entitled to 25s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>29</sup> Claimant entitled to 30s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>30</sup> Claimant entitled to 42s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

<sup>31</sup> Claimant entitled to 52s. extra for each child dependant in excess of two.

**Table AIV.8** Minimum weekly and hourly wage rates prescribed by various joint labour committees for certain industries and by the AWB for agricultural labourers, 1965, 1970 and 1974<sup>32</sup>

Regulated Industry	1965			1970			1974		
	Hours per week	Weekly Wage (shilling)	Hourly Rate (shilling)	Hours per week	Weekly Wage (shilling)	Hourly Rate (shilling)	Hours per week	Weekly Wage (shilling)	Hourly Rate (shilling)
Aerated Waters	44	181/6	4.13	42.5	287	6.75	40	549	13.73
Boot & Shoe Repairing*	44	200	4.55	42	285	6.79	40	540	13.50
Brush & Broom*	42.5	223	5.25	40	334	8.35	40	592	14.80
Button Making*	42	173/6	4.13	40	294	7.35	40	514	12.85
Creameries*	45	149/6	3.32	0	0	0	0	0	0
General Waste Materials	42.5	192	4.52	40	295	7.38	40	525	13.13
Reclamation									
Law Clerks*	38	215	5.66	38	338.5	8.91	38	593	15.61
Messengers*	44	83	1.89	43	166	3.86	40	345	8.63
Packing	42	185	4.40	40	276	6.90	40	536	13.40
Provender Milling*	45	196	4.36	40	301	7.53	40	565	14.13
Shirtmaking*	42	184	4.38	40	279	6.98	40	488	12.20
Sugar	42.5	213	5.01	0	0	0	0	0	0
Confectionary and Food Preserving									
Tailoring	42	210	5.00	40	325	8.13	0	0	0
Tobacco	42.5	191	4.49	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women's Clothing and Millinery*	42	217	5.17	40	304	7.60	0	0	0
Average joint labour committee minimum hours and rates for the industries above	43	188	4.41	40	290	7.17	40	525	13.13
Average agricultural minimum hours and rates	48	162	3.38	48	279	5.81	48	496	10.33

Sources: JLC rates from *Annual reports of the Labour Court* 1965 in (1965), appendix vi, pp 23-5; 1970 in (1971), appendix v, pp 24-8; 1974 in (1976), appendix v, pp 52-55; Agricultural minimum rates derived from data in the *Reports of the proceedings of the AWB, 1965-76 (CMP)*.

<sup>32</sup> The figures for those groups marked with asterisks are calculated by averaging the wage data for each specific group for the years in question. Anything over 6d is rounded upwards to the next shilling or anything under 6d is disregarded for all data in the table.

**Table AIV.9** Summary of the activities carried out by the inspectors appointed to assist the AWB in the enforcement of the minimum rates orders passed under the Agricultural Wages Acts, 1936-45

Year	Minimum Wage Arrears		Holiday Remuneration Arrears		Complaints Received	Legal Proceedings	Farms Inspected	Interviewed by Inspectors		Permits Granted by the AWB
	Amount Recovered £	No. of Workers Involved	Amount Recovered £	No. of Workers Involved	No.	No.	No.	No. of Employers	No. of Employees	
1937 <sup>33</sup>										
1938					1500	8	12,000			
1940 <sup>34</sup>					662	18	14,255	12531	17929	426
1941 <sup>35</sup>					700	4	2661	2039	3073	108
1942	4472				902	6	2417	1662	3088	105
1943	6012				830	4	2605	1791	3379	116
1944	5629				1145	4	2822	2244	3938	167
1945	4311				1066	1	2646	2059	3699	139
1946	3272				915	3	2225	1648	3242	152
1947					889	1	2552	1941	3583	135
1948	5580				627	2	2417	1836	3144	121
1949					402	5	2393	1816	3285	150
1950	4858		29	446		1	2780	2232	3430	132
1951	3582	406	2427	967		2	2498	1982	3513	117
1952	3580	473	1480	442	1900	4	2628	2118	3227	118
1953	4463	376	908	231	2800	2	2370	1883	2803	136
1954	5937	342	872	227	2400	3	2345	1840	2524	96
1955	5894	312	882	200	1850	0	2400	1952	2448	124
1956	5915	372	1147	241	1900	3	2265	1856	2547	124
1957	4637	248	948	224	1300	0	1715	1313	1696	118
1958	4920	265	1342	268	1250	1	2074	1687	2016	135
1959	4709	323	1317	272		3	1858	1518	1791	139
1960	6498	313	1285	247	1700	2	1943	1589	1875	138
1961	4524		943	380	2000	2	1744	1384	1537	
1962	3279	158	1384	198	1975	1	2506	1984	1964	213
1963 <sup>36</sup>	2889	156	2148	224	1639	3	3194	2633	2575	156
1964	3918	182	2122	198	2363	3	3595	2910	2653	226
1965	5008	154	2099	172	2558	4	3457	2786	2311	168
1966	5125	122	1407	128	1856	5	3224	2528	2056	199
1967	3297	111	1249	97	1650	3	3032	2443	1905	161
1969	3718	60	860	65	3620	4	2942	2399	1495	164
1970	7332	99	1647	76	3012	2	3273	2747	1552	148
1971	8698	71	1738	53	3210	2	3195	2638	1372	142
1972	10219	50	1666	43	2474	1	3398	2894	1366	128
1973	9742	60	1448	39	3192	3	3272	2706	1358	121
1974	9136	43	2423	30	3120	1	2933	2688	1239	139
1975	9447	29	1703	24	2726	2	3472	3031	1667	119

<sup>33</sup> Inspectors were appointed to assist in the administration of the Agricultural Wages Act and the orders made thereunder.

<sup>34</sup> From 1 January 1940 to 23 November 1940, 8 inspectors and a supervisory inspector were appointed to assist the Board. From 23 November 1940 this number was reduced to 2 inspectors and a supervisory inspector.

<sup>35</sup> The supervisory inspector was withdrawn from 25 January 1941.

<sup>36</sup> An additional inspector was appointed from April 1963 bringing the total to 4.

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<b>Total</b>	<b>170,601</b>	<b>4,569</b>	<b>35,474</b>	<b>5,648</b>	<b>60,133</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>117,106</b>	<b>85,308</b>	<b>101,280</b>	<b>4,924</b>
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Source: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB*, 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

**Table AIV.10** Average agricultural minimum wage rates for adult male agricultural workers in England & Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, 1940-76

Country	England & Wales			Northern Ireland			Republic		
Year	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per week (shilling)	Hours	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per hour (shilling)	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per week (shilling)	Hours	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per hour (shilling)	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per week (shilling)	Hours	Average agricultural minimum wage rates per hour (shilling)
1940				34.54	54		32.5	54	
1941				44.47	54		35.5	54	
1942				49.72	54		35.5	54	
1943				52.72	54		38.5	54	
1944				55.72	54		42.5	54	
1945				59.72	54		42.5	54	
1946	70	48 <sup>37</sup>	1.46	69.6	51 <sup>38</sup>	1.36	48.87	54	0.91
1947	90	48	1.88	79.6	51	1.56	54.87	54	1.02
1948	90	48	1.88	79.6	51	1.56	59.87	54	1.11
1949	94	47 <sup>39</sup>	2.00	83.6	50 <sup>40</sup>	1.67	64.87	50 <sup>41</sup>	1.30
1950	100	47	2.13	83.6	50	1.67	64.87	50	1.30
1951	108	47	2.30	89.6	50	1.79	72.37	50	1.45
1952	112.5	47	2.39	97.6	50	1.95	77.37	50	1.55
1953	120	47	2.55	102.6	50	2.05	84.87	50	1.70
1954	127	47	2.70	102.6	50	2.05	88.87	50	1.78
1955	127	47	2.70	116.6	48 <sup>42</sup>	2.43	94.33	50	1.89
1956	138	47	2.94	116.6	48	2.43	100.33	50	2.01
1957	150	47	3.19	116.6	48	2.43	100.33	50	2.01
1958	156	47	3.32	116.6	48	2.43	100.33	50	2.01
1959	156	47	3.32	116.6	48	2.43	106.33	50	2.13
1960	160	46 <sup>43</sup>	3.48	116.6	47 <sup>44</sup>	2.48	110.33	50	2.21
1961	169	46	3.67	159	47	3.38	113.33	50	2.27
1962	179	46	3.89	163.8	47	3.49	119.33	50	2.39
1963	190	45 <sup>45</sup>	4.22	171.8	47	3.66	129.83	50	2.60
1964	190	45	4.22	178.8	46 <sup>46</sup>	3.89	147.33	50	2.95
1965	202	45	4.49	188.8	46	4.10	162.33	48 <sup>47</sup>	3.38

<sup>37</sup> From 7 April 1946 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 48 hour week all year round.

<sup>38</sup> From 4 March 1946 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 50 hour week for the months November to February inclusive; a week of 52 hours for the months March to July and October and a week of 54 hours for the months of August and September.

<sup>39</sup> From 13 March 1949 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 47 hour week all year round.

<sup>40</sup> From 15 March 1949 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 50 hour week for the ten months from October to July and a 52 hour week for the months of August and September.

<sup>41</sup> From 3 January 1949 the Irish AWB introduced a 50 hour week at hourly rates. It was 23 February 1953 before it introduced a guaranteed weekly wage for a 50 hour week.

<sup>42</sup> From 25 February 1955 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 48 hour week for the ten months from October to July and a 50 hour week for the months of August and September.

<sup>43</sup> From 22 February 1960 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 46 hour week all year round.

<sup>44</sup> From 22 February 1960 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 47 hour week all year round.

<sup>45</sup> From 18 November 1963 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 45 hour week.

<sup>46</sup> From 6 January 1964 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 46 hour week.

<b>1966</b>	210	44 <sup>48</sup>	<b>4.77</b>	196.8	45 <sup>49</sup>	<b>4.37</b>	175.33	48	<b>3.65</b>
<b>1967</b>	216	44	<b>4.91</b>	202.8	45	<b>4.51</b>	182.33	48	<b>3.80</b>
<b>1968</b>	231	44	<b>5.25</b>	217.8	45	<b>4.84</b>	199.83	48	<b>4.16</b>
<b>1969</b>	248	44	<b>5.64</b>	234.8	45	<b>5.22</b>	232.33	48	<b>4.84</b>
<b>1970</b>	263	43 <sup>50</sup>	<b>6.12</b>	251	44 <sup>51</sup>	<b>5.70</b>	277.2	48	<b>5.78</b>
<b>1971</b>	296	42 <sup>52</sup>	<b>7.05</b>	284	43 <sup>53</sup>	<b>6.60</b>	326.2	48	<b>6.80</b>
<b>1972</b>	324	42	<b>7.71</b>	314	43	<b>7.30</b>	356.2	48	<b>7.42</b>
<b>1973</b>	390	42	<b>9.29</b>	380	43	<b>8.84</b>	396.2	48	<b>8.25</b>
<b>1976</b>	730	40 <sup>54</sup>	<b>18.25</b>	730	41 <sup>55</sup>	<b>17.80</b>	734	48	<b>15.29</b>

Sources: England & Wales: England & Wales; *Agricultural wages: history sheet*, Jun. 1998 (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, national statistics section); Northern Ireland: NI Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, AWB Secretariat: Orders under the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act (Northern Ireland), 1939 to 1956 (Nos. 1-50); Republic of Ireland: *Reports of proceedings of the AWB*: 1937-40 (S 11689A); 1941-6 (S 13503A); 1947-50 (S 13503B); 1951-3 (S 13505C); 1954-9 (S 13503D); 1960 (S 13503E/61); 1961-3 (S 13503E/62); 1964-76 (CMP).

<sup>47</sup> From 24 May 1965 the Irish AWB introduced a 44 hour week for the four months November to February inclusive and a 50 hour week for the eight months from March to October.

<sup>48</sup> From 3 January 1966 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 44 hour week.

<sup>49</sup> From 3 January 1966 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 45 hour week.

<sup>50</sup> From 2 February 1970 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 43 hour week.

<sup>51</sup> From 10 February 1970 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 44 hour week.

<sup>52</sup> From 4 January 1971 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 42 hour week.

<sup>53</sup> From 4 January 1971 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 43 hour week.

<sup>54</sup> From 22 January 1974 the AWB for England and Wales prescribed a 40 hour week.

<sup>55</sup> From 4 February 1974 the Northern Ireland AWB prescribed a 41 hour week.



**Table AVII.1 Bills sponsored by private members of Dáil Éireann to improve the position of the agricultural labourer, 1946-65**

Private Members Bill	Labour Party Sponsors	Key Demands	Purpose	Outcome
Holidays (Employees) (Amendment) Bill 1946 <sup>1</sup>	Sponsor: William Norton Supporters: James Larkin Jr.	Amendment of Section 2 of the Holidays (Employees) Act 1939 to include agricultural workers.	To extend 6 days annual holidays and 6 public holidays to agricultural workers as provided to non agricultural workers under the Holidays (Employees) Act 1939.	On the recommendation of the minister for Agriculture, the government decision to oppose a second reading of the bill was upheld by a majority of the Dail; 50 votes to 21. <sup>2</sup>
The Agricultural Workers (Weekly Half Holidays) Bill 1950 <sup>3</sup>	Sponsor: Sean Dunne Supporters: James Hickey, Martin O'Sullivan and Daniel Desmond	Provision of a statutory weekly half holiday to agricultural workers	To provide agricultural workers with one half holiday of 4 hours in each weekly period of 50 hours	Passed based on a free vote; 86 votes to 18 and signed by the President on 3 July 1951. <sup>4</sup>
The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958 <sup>5</sup>	Sponsor: Brendan Corish Supporters: Daniel Desmond, Denis Larkin and Thomas A. Kyne	Extension of Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 to agricultural workers; Extension of the definition of 'agriculture' and 'agricultural worker' under the terms of the Industrial Relations Act 1946	To enable agreements concerning the wages and conditions of employment of agricultural workers to be registered at the Labour Court; To extend the definition of agricultural worker to encompass workers engaged in any contract of service or apprenticeship in agriculture.	On the recommendation of the minister for Agriculture, the government decision to oppose a second reading of the bill was upheld by majority of Dáil.
The Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1960 <sup>6</sup>	Sponsor: Daniel Desmond Supporters: Denis Larkin, T.A. Kyne and Brendan Corish	Upgrading the powers of the AWB to regulate holidays and hours; Extension of the definition of agricultural workers.	To endow the Board with the power to direct conditions of employment; to reduce the chairman's powers; the giving of public notice of the Board's intention to revise wage orders; the keeping of records by agricultural employers; and the right of an official of a trade union of which a worker was a member to institute proceedings to recover wages on his behalf.	On the recommendation of the minister for Agriculture, the government decision to oppose a second reading was upheld by a majority of the Dáil.
The Agricultural Wages (Amendment) Bill 1961 <sup>7</sup>	Sponsor: Daniel Desmond Supporters: Denis Larkin, T.A. Kyne and Brendan Corish	Similar to previous except increased provisions regarding the constitution of the Agricultural Wages Board and the keeping of	To increase the number of ordinary members on the Board and provide for the appointment of members, other than the neutral members, by organisations nominated by the minister for	Although a second reading of the bill was opposed by government, the bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Dáil before getting a first reading. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (AGI/G612/48)

<sup>2</sup> Dáil Éireann deb., (vol. 100), 29 Mar.1946, cols 933-4.

<sup>3</sup> (S 14994A)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1958, 26 Nov.1958 (IR 7A).

<sup>6</sup> Private members bill issued 3 Feb.1960 (S 16788A).

		records by employers. <sup>8</sup>	Agriculture; To appoint the chairman and the neutral members on the nomination of the employer and worker representatives, or failing such nomination, by the minister as normal.	Opposed by government but withdrawn by sponsors before public vote.
The Agricultural Wages (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 1961 <sup>10</sup>				
The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill 1962 <sup>11</sup>	Sponsor: James Tully Supporters: T.A. Kyne, Daniel Desmond, Brendan Corish and Seán Treacy	Replacement of the Board by a JLC and transfer of its functions to the Labour Court.	To make better provision for regulating the wages, holiday remuneration and conditions of employment of agricultural workers.	On the recommendation of the minister for Agriculture, the government decision to oppose a second reading was upheld by a majority of the Dáil; 68 votes to 13. <sup>12</sup>
The Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965 <sup>13</sup>		To give statutory effect to a resolution passed by the AWB in April 1963, with regard to public and church holidays	To expand the powers of the Board to enable it to fix conditions of employment; To provide for the payment of overtime in excess of 48 hours per week; To provide for an increase in the Board's membership.	On the recommendation of the minister for Agriculture, the government decision to oppose a second reading was upheld by a majority of Dáil; 64 votes to 43. <sup>14</sup> The minister for Agriculture undertook to examine holiday provisions but refused to examine conditions in agriculture & legislation

Sources: (AGI/G612/48); (S 14994A); (S 16788A); (S 16788 B/61); (IR 7A); (S 17815).

<sup>7</sup> Private members bill issued 24 Feb. 1961 (S 16788 B/61).

<sup>8</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government, 1 Jun. 1961.

<sup>9</sup> Minister for Agriculture to an Taoiseach, 27 Nov. 1961.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Private members bill issued 4 Jul. 1962 (IR 7A).

<sup>12</sup> *Dáil Éireann deb.*, (vol. 198), 12 Dec.1962, cols 1238-9.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Agriculture memorandum for government on the Agricultural Workers (Holidays and Conditions of Employment) Bill 1965, 21 Jun. 1965 (S 17815).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

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- S 13503D *Reports of the proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1954-59.*
- S 13503E/61 *Report of the proceedings of the Agricultural Wages Board, 1960.*
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- S 14994B Government response to Dáil motion from the Labour Party to provide for increased holidays for workers, August 1962.
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