Workers Solidarity Movement
1913 Lockout replayed at Pat the Baker
1993

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dan's "works committee", a gang of thugs paid by the boss to break the union. The workforce there is afraid. They remember that two years ago twenty six joined the union and all of them were fired. However a victory in Cherry Orchard can turn things around and provide the confidence to unionise.

When the Industrial Relations Act was introduced, organisations like Trade Union Fightback and the Workers Solidarity Movement were dismissed as alarmists. Now even 'moderate' union officials are making noises about the restrictions the Act places on what used to be normal trade union practices. In the run up to a new PESP, however, the possibility that these people will make any serious attempt to get rid of the Act is remote.

Pat Higgins is not some giant multinational. He is a gombeen boss with a £3 million a year turnover and a profit of £300,000. He could have been brought to his knees within a few weeks if the traditional methods of industrial action had been used. Secondary pickets (on Pat the Baker suppliers and customers), blacking and openly seeking support from other trade unions; these were the teeth drawn by the Act.

If we don't want every tin pot dictator running a small business believing he can smash unions with impunity we have to make a decision. Do we meekly surrender and live with the Act? Do we wait for the Dáil to amend it (and remember that means trusting the same people who brought in the Act)? Or do we break it? Anarchists prefer to break the Act than see our unions broken.

of action from the union has led to the others moving on in search of jobs elsewhere. The fourteen strikers who have stuck it out since the Spring have to survive on £36 a week strike pay plus whatever donations arrive when rank & file union members take up collections in their jobs.

POVERTY AND PERKS IN SIPTU

Workers on strike for this length of time and fighting for union recognition should now have their full wages paid by the union. SIPTU can well afford it. £1 million is taken in every three weeks in members subscriptions. The three general officers are believed (union members are not allowed to know the exact figure) to earn at least £90,000 annually in salary and expenses.

Above all, SIPTU could have made a stand early in the dispute and broken the Industrial Relations Act's prohibition of effective picketing and blacking of tainted goods. If the biggest union in the country won't do it in a recognition dispute, what hope is there that a smaller union will? It is beyond doubt that if the union had its funds seized by the courts for breaking the Act that enough trade unionists would answer a call to take immediate action and force the state to back off.

A support group exists in Dublin to help the strikers and has been active in leafletting Quinnsworth and Crazy Prices supermarkets asking shoppers to boycott Pat the Baker bread. Similar support groups are needed in other cities and towns, especially in County Longford.

BREAKING OUR UNIONS OR BREAKING THE ACT?

The strikers have visited the Granard plant to try to talk to the workers there. They were beaten up by supporters of Frank Sheri-

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Last March twenty five workers at Pat the Baker's Cherry Orchard plant in west Dublin joined SIPTU. They wanted to improve their lousy pay and conditions. The company, owned by Pat Higgins and based in the Longford town of Granard, responded by sacking them.

A bitter battle has gone on ever since. Management has used all the tricks at its disposal including employing two public relations firms to vilify the strikers, 24 hour video filming of the picket, and the invention of a "works committee" for Cherry Orchard. SIPTU has responded with an expensive publicity campaign. A newsletter, Breadline News, have been delivered to homes all over the country. Tens of thousands of leaflets and stickers have been printed.

However, this kind of response has had very little effect. Despite what many union officials think, publicity alone, without wider industrial action, does not win disputes. The 1990 Industrial Relations Act is crippling the workers' ability to strike back at management.

NO SUPPORT ALLOWED

It forbids secondary picketing, lays down long procedures for getting blacking (which include giving seven days to the employer so that he or she can make alternative arrangements), and even bans having supporters on the picket line.

It must be obvious to everyone who has taken any interest in this strike that the SIPTU leadership is using the excuse of the Act to avoid taking any effective action to win. Only after six months did they begin to ballot members to black Pat the Baker bread in the five Midlands supermarkets which are organised by SIPTU. This should have been the one of the first things done, not one of the last.

As this article is written the number on strike has been reduced to fourteen. Financial hardship and demoralisation caused by lack