

## CHAPTER I

*Writing and Theorising the Irish Working Class**David Convery\**

In *Labour in Irish History* (1910), James Connolly complained that ‘Irish history has ever been written by the master class – in the interests of the master class.’<sup>1</sup> Strong words, but at the time there was more than an element of truth about them. In 1910 Ireland was a primarily agricultural country with an underdeveloped labour movement. The Labour Party would not be founded until 1912 and the dramatic growth in membership and influence of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU), formed in 1909, was still some way in the future. The Irish labour movement, for the most part, did not attract or develop an intelligentsia as did its counterparts in Germany, France and, to a lesser extent, Britain. Unlike those countries, however, Ireland had another issue that dominated radical, as well as mainstream attention: the national question. Ireland’s relationship with Britain was the central issue of the day. As such, when introducing his aforementioned work, Connolly could argue that:

It is in itself a significant commentary upon the subordinate place allotted to labour in Irish politics that a writer should think it necessary to explain his purpose before setting out to detail for the benefit of his readers the position of the Irish workers in the past, and the lessons to be derived from a study of that position in guiding the movement of the working class to-day.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin: New Books edition, 1983), p. 1. This work was originally published in book form in 1910 by Maunsel & Co., Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. For more on this work, see Fintan Lane, ‘James Connolly’s *Labour in Irish History*’, in *Mobilising Classics: Reading Radical Writing in Ireland*, ed. by Fiona Dukelow and Orla O’Donovan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 38–53, and Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, ‘James Connolly and the Writing of *Labour in Irish History* (1910)’, *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 27 (2002), pp. 103–8.

Connolly's book was a pioneering study, even though, despite its name, it dealt less with the place of labour in Irish history than with the national struggle as seen from the perspective of labour. The first real history of the labour movement came a few years later with W. P. Ryan's *The Irish Labour Movement from the 'Twenties to Our Own Day* (1919). Like Connolly's, Ryan's work had a political as well as an educative purpose. Writing in the midst of a revolutionary upheaval, when membership of the labour movement was surging into the hundreds of thousands, he declared that 'Irish Labour, after a shattering and inhuman history, is being called to come forth and work with mind and soul as well as body', poetically looking to the coming time when the longed-for 'Commonwealth' was no longer a 'dream of the departing night' but 'a fact of the rising day', where 'Life to those who will it can be allied with Beauty, and Work with Wonder.'<sup>3</sup> It was not to be. The works of Connolly and Ryan heralded a false dawn, for the 'co-operative commonwealth' and labour history alike, the latter not finding solid footing until the 1970s, the former still a distant dream.

This chapter investigates how the Irish working class has been written about and theorised. This is potentially a vast subject, so it has been limited for the most part to a consideration of academic works, rather than overtly political tracts or governmental reports, for instance. To begin with, it will provide a brief overview of the development of Irish labour historiography, which forms the bulk of academic works about the Irish working class, followed by a discussion on the nature of class in Ireland, informed primarily by works in sociology and anthropology.<sup>4</sup> It will conclude with some thoughts on developing a theoretical framework to better conceptualise the nature of the Irish working class through history to the present day.

### Irish Labour History – An Overview

Most early works on Irish labour history originated outside of Ireland itself. The first academic study was arguably *Labour and Nationalism in*

<sup>3</sup> W. P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement from the 'Twenties to Our Own Day* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1919), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed reflections on Irish labour historiography, see Fintan Lane, 'Envisaging Labour History: Some Reflections on Irish Historiography and the Working Class', in *Essays in Irish Labour History: A Festschrift for Elizabeth and John W. Boyle*, ed. by Francis Devine, Fintan Lane and Niamh Puirseil (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), pp. 9–25; and Emmet O'Connor and Conor McCabe, 'Ireland', in *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, ed. by Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McLroy (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2010), pp. 137–63. The former is particularly good on the development of labour history pre-1960, the latter post-1960.

*Ireland* (1925), written by an American, J. Dunsmore Clarkson.<sup>5</sup> Another American, Emmet Larkin, would publish the first scholarly biography of that giant of the Irish labour movement, Jim Larkin, in 1965.<sup>6</sup> Irish labour history also attracted the interest of a number of British socialists. R. M. Fox in particular, was a prolific writer in the genre, with his *Green Banners: The Story of the Irish Struggle* (1938), *Years of Freedom: The Story of Ireland, 1921–1948* (1948), a history of the Irish Citizen Army (1943) and biographies of three major trade union leaders, James Connolly (1946), Jim Larkin (1957) and Louie Bennett (1958), to his credit.<sup>7</sup> These were generally outline histories, however, written in a journalistic style from a sympathetic position and lacking systematic objective research. Other examples include T. A. Jackson's *Ireland Her Own* (1946) and Peter Berresford Ellis's *A History of the Irish Working Class* (1972).<sup>8</sup> It was the works of C. Desmond Greaves, however, which were to prove the most influential, as well as the most scholarly. *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (1961) stood well above previous biographies of Connolly and marked a new departure for studies of Irish labour history. Greaves would also later publish important texts on Liam Mellows (1971) and the ITGWU (1982).<sup>9</sup> Overall, the Irish works of all four of these British socialists tended to shape a simplified historical narrative that married nationalism and socialism in a teleological 'people's struggle' against imperialism, rather than viewing historical events, actors and ideas in their own complex and often conflicting context. This approach drew heavily on, and may even have originated with,

<sup>5</sup> J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York: Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. 20, 1925). See also Conor McCabe, 'Labour Classic: J. Dunsmore Clarkson, Labour and Nationalism in Ireland (1925)', *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 42 (2017), pp. 117–20.

<sup>6</sup> Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader, 1876–1947* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965). Author and subject were not related.

<sup>7</sup> R. M. Fox, *Green Banners: The Story of the Irish Struggle* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938); Fox, *Years of Freedom: The Story of Ireland, 1921–1948* (Cork: Trumpet Books, 1948); Fox, *The History of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin: J. Duffy & Co., 1943); Fox, *James Connolly: The Forerunner* (Tralee: Kerryman Ltd., 1946); Fox, *Jim Larkin: The Rise of the Underman* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1957); Fox, *Louie Bennett: Her Life and Times* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> T. A. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own: An Outline History of the Irish Struggle for National Freedom and Independence* (London: Cobbett Press, 1946). There have been numerous further editions and reprints of this book by the publisher Lawrence & Wishart. Peter Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1961); Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, The Formative Years: 1909–1923* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1982). See also Adrian Grant, 'Labour Classic: C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1961; London, New York & Berlin, 1972, 1976, 1986), pp. 448', *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 41 (2016), pp. 139–44.

the aforementioned works by Connolly and Ryan. Despite their drawbacks, however, they offered a distinct and important corrective to the elitist ‘great men’ approach to Irish history.

Within Ireland, publications had appeared intermittently since the 1920s, but these mostly took the form of agitational and/or commemorative pamphlets and short books produced by left-wing political groups or trade unions. The 1970s brought a significant change to Irish labour historiography. That decade saw the first serious scholarly studies of labour politics and trade unions in Ireland in the form of *Labour in Irish Politics, 1890–1930* (1974) by Arthur Mitchell, who, like Clarkson and Larkin before him, was an academic from the United States; and Charles McCarthy’s *Trade Unions in Ireland, 1894–1960* (1977).<sup>10</sup> The most significant development, however, was the creation of the Irish Labour History Society in 1973 and its journal, *Saothar*, in 1975. Since its first issue, *Saothar*’s annual release has been a boon to the study of working-class history in Ireland.<sup>11</sup> Its mere existence has acted as a pole of attraction and has encouraged and provided support to generations of scholars, publishing hundreds of articles, many of which, as one of its former editors Fintan Lane convincingly argues, may otherwise have remained unpublished.<sup>12</sup>

Aside from *Saothar*, the study of Irish labour history has advanced considerably in recent decades. There is a small-scale industry in Connolly studies and there is now a well-developed literature on the glory days of Larkinism and the ITGWU from 1907–23.<sup>13</sup> In the latter category can be counted, alongside Greaves’s 1982 work cited earlier, John Gray’s *City in Revolt* (1985); John Newsinger’s *Rebel City* (2004); Pádraig Yeates’s *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (2000); and Emmet O’Connor’s *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917–1923* (1988), *James Larkin* (2002) and *Big Jim Larkin: Hero or Wrecker?* (2015).<sup>14</sup> O’Connor has also written the standard general history

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1890–1930: The Irish Labour Movement in an Age of Revolution* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1974); Charles McCarthy, *Trade Unions in Ireland, 1894–1960* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society* has appeared each year, bar 1985, since its first issue in 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Lane, ‘Envisaging Labour History’, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Examples of work on Connolly include Samuel Levenson, *James Connolly: A Biography* (London: Martin Brian & O’Keeffe, 1973); Ruth Dudley Edwards, *James Connolly* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1981); Austen Morgan, *James Connolly: A Political Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly* (London: Pluto Press, 1990); Donal Nevin, *James Connolly: ‘A Full Life’* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005); and Lorcan Collins, *James Connolly* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin and the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985); John Newsinger, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement*

of the Irish labour movement, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824–2000* (2011), although John W. Boyle's *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (1988) is equally indispensable for the pre-Larkin years.<sup>15</sup> The experience of the labour movement in Ulster has received attention in studies such as Henry Patterson's *Class Conflict and Sectarianism* (1980); Austen Morgan's *Labour and Partition* (1991); Graham Walker's *The Politics of Frustration* (1985); and Aaron Edwards' *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party* (2009).<sup>16</sup>

The history of working-class women is a developing field, although, as with women's history in general, much scope for expansion remains. In regard to the position of women within the workforce and the wider working class, important book-length studies include Marilyn Cohen's *Linen, Family, and Community in Tullylish, County Down* (1997); Joanna Bourke's *Husbandry to Housewifery* (1993); Maria Luddy's *Prostitution and Irish Society* (2007); and a significant oral history by Elizabeth Kiely and Máire Leane, *Irish Women at Work, 1930–1960* (2012). Works on women in the labour movement include Mary Jones's *These Obstreperous Lassies: A History of the Irish Women Workers' Union* (1988); and Rosemary Cullen Owens's biography of trade union leader *Louie Bennett* (2001).<sup>17</sup> It should be noted too that the study of many other areas of women's history contains a strong working-class element, even if it is not an explicit study of working-class women per se. In this latter category can be counted works on the Magdalen asylums, sexuality, unmarried motherhood, and emigration, for instance.

(London: Merlin, 2004); Pádraig Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000); Emmet O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917–1923* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988); O'Connor, *James Larkin* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002); O'Connor, *Big Jim Larkin: Hero or Wrecker?* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland 1824–2000*, rev. edn (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011); John W. Boyle, *The Irish Labor Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Henry Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working Class and the Belfast Labour Movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980); Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class, 1905–1923* (London: Pluto Press, 1991); Graham Walker, *The Politics of Frustration: Harry Midgley and the Failure of Labour in Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Aaron Edwards, *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party: Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Cohen, *Linen, Family, and Community in Tullylish, County Down, 1690–1914* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997); Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Kiely and Máire Leane, *Irish Women at Work, 1930–1960: An Oral History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012); Mary Jones, *These Obstreperous Lassies: A History of the Irish Women Workers' Union* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988); Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Louie Bennett* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

Radical working-class politics in the form of socialist republicanism and communism before the Second World War has been of considerable interest to historians, as seen in works such as Henry Patterson's *The Politics of Illusion* (1989); Richard English's *Radicals and the Republic* (1994); Adrian Grant's *Irish Socialist Republicanism* (2012); Emmet O'Connor's *Reds and the Green* (2004); Seán Byers' *Seán Murray* (2015); plus numerous biographies of Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan.<sup>18</sup> Post-war radicalism has yet to receive the same objective treatment, although *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (2009), by Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, shows the potential for outstanding work in this area.<sup>19</sup> Most curious, however, is the absence of a developed historiography on the Irish Labour Party, Michael Gallagher's *The Irish Labour Party in Transition, 1957–82* (1982) and Niamh Puirseil's *The Irish Labour Party, 1922–73* (2007) being the substantial exceptions.<sup>20</sup> Thus far, it seems that attempts at radical change as opposed to measured reform have caused the most excitement for historians. As the study of working-class politics develops, however, it must also consider and attempt to explain what may be the more mundane – but also more mainstream – working-class support for the aforementioned Labour Party, and also, perhaps more importantly, Fianna Fáil. In this respect, Kieran Allen's *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour* (1997), but also Richard Dunphy's *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland 1923–1948* (1995), are the works to follow.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Henry Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989); Richard English, *Radicals and the Republic: Socialist Republicanism in the Irish Free State, 1925–1937* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Adrian Grant, *Irish Socialist Republicanism, 1909–36* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012); Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals, 1919–43* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004); Seán Byers, *Seán Murray: Marxist-Leninist and Irish Socialist Republican* (Sallins: Irish Academic Press, 2015). There have been four book-length studies of O'Donnell, the best of which is Donal Ó Drisceoil's *Peadar O'Donnell* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001). The three book-length studies of Frank Ryan all offer something valuable, but the best is still arguably Seán Cronin's original study *Frank Ryan: The Search for the Republic* (Dublin: Repsol, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Gallagher, *The Irish Labour Party in Transition, 1957–82* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party, 1922–73* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour: 1926 to the Present* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland, 1923–1948* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

### Conceptualising Class

The term ‘labour history’ can itself be a bit of a misnomer. What has traditionally been classified internationally as the study of the history of the labour movement – trade unions, trades councils, co-operatives, strikes, political parties, etc. – has in recent decades expanded to study the working class as a whole. Issues such as working-class culture, religion, identity, mentalities, the family, gender, entertainment, discourse, and everyday life are now topics of serious consideration in Western European and North American labour historiography.<sup>22</sup> A number of suggestions have been forwarded to overcome the arising misconceptions. For instance, Fintan Lane, a former editor of *Saothar*, has suggested that ‘a strong argument could be made for dispensing altogether with the term “labour history”, which seems to exclude rather than include, and referring instead to the “history of the working class” or “working-class history”.’<sup>23</sup> In the absence of any agreement, however, it is convenient to refer to the schema adopted by Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss of ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ labour history; ‘narrow’ referring to the study of the labour movement, and ‘broad’ to the wider study of the working class.<sup>24</sup> The study of labour history in Ireland has, with some notable exceptions, been overwhelmingly of the ‘narrow’ type, focussing on labour organisation, strikes and politics. There are numerous reasons why this has been the case, which are beyond the scope of this current study, but the small numbers involved in labour history, its historically limited support from institutes of higher education and the weakness of labour in the realm of politics are noteworthy. This is not to detract from the quality of the work that has been done, however, which is often exceptional. It is largely due to the consistent publication of *Saothar* that even a general outline of the key events, individuals and institutions in the field of ‘narrow’ labour history has been made possible, arguably a necessary requirement before more in-depth analysis can be attempted of the areas concerning ‘broad’ labour history. However, an unintentional consequence of this focus on ‘narrow’ labour history is the general lack of theorisation concerning class from Irish historians, even Marxists, who have tended to focus instead on

<sup>22</sup> This may also be the case elsewhere, though it is beyond the scope of the author’s expertise.

<sup>23</sup> Lane, ‘Envisaging Labour History’, pp. 22–3.

<sup>24</sup> Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss, ‘Introduction’, in *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*, ed. by Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 1–39.

the national question and its intersection with labour organisation and socialism.

In a recent historiographical overview written by Emmet O'Connor and Conor McCabe, it is argued that much Irish labour historiography over the past few decades has modelled itself on a 'value-free' approach to the past which steers away from ideology. The authors argue that, in practice, however, it is 'strongly shaped by liberal idealism and modernization theory.' This leads to an emphasis on the influence of ideas and people, 'rather than material forces, in determining labour behaviour.' In line with modernisation theory, it sees the slow progress of labour as a result of late industrialisation and the 'enduring power of those three villains of socialist demonology, the priest, the peasant and the patriot.'<sup>25</sup> This trend is evident, but the criticisms can go even further. The existence of the working class is, for the most part, taken for granted by labour historians. It is not explained what is meant by the working class, how it formed and re-forms, how it relates to other classes and if and how it thinks for itself. To take a well-known example, there is, for instance, no Irish equivalent of E. P. Thompson's famous preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), where he theorises the working class not as 'a descriptive term', but as 'a historical phenomenon', an 'active process' with the working class being 'present at its own making'.<sup>26</sup>

If labour historians take class for granted, the flip side of this is for others to downplay class or even to deny its existence. In a chapter titled 'Inequality, poverty, and class', the authors of the third edition of *A Sociology of Ireland* (2007), observe that:

Irish society is often thought of as a classless society. Irish people tend to treat one another fairly informally, preferring, for example, to use first names even with relative strangers rather than titles and surnames. Holding a certain job or speaking with a particular accent is not widely regarded as entitling a person to special respect. Irish social life is characterised by an egalitarian ethic that rejects attempts by some groups to claim social honour from others. There is also a widespread belief that opportunities for social betterment have increased and that anyone can study hard, get good educational qualifications and move into a better position in society if they want to.

This does not mean that people have no sense of inequality as a part of Irish society; rather, inequality tends to be understood in terms of a gross differentiation between the majority – the 'more or less middle classes' – and

<sup>25</sup> O'Connor and McCabe, 'Ireland', p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pelican edition, 1968), p. 9.



an ‘underclass’ made up of the poor, the long-term unemployed, substance abusers and marginalised groups such as Travellers.<sup>27</sup>

This book was published just before the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and perhaps might read differently today. The chapter was cut, however, from the subsequent shorter edition published in 2012.<sup>28</sup>

This denial of class or smoothing out of class divisions is not just a recent phenomenon that can be put down to the Celtic Tiger boom. As Liam Cullinane notes, in 1955, the opinion of a French writer that Ireland was ‘financially stable and practically classless’ was described by the *Irish Times* as ‘well-informed’, and, in 1964, the idea that education in Ireland was ‘class-ridden’ was condemned by the president of University College Dublin as ‘the intervention of pseudo-problems’; instead he argued that Ireland was ‘extremely classless’.<sup>29</sup> Cullinane also notes an example provided by Diarmaid Ferriter of a district court judge in Limerick in 1963 refusing to accept the counsel’s argument that farmers and farm labourers were representative of different social classes.<sup>30</sup> The body of work published by labour historians clearly demonstrates the existence of an Irish working class. Empirical studies on issues such as social mobility also show the continuing existence of an Irish working class to the present day.<sup>31</sup> Why then this denial? Could the issue be one of self-identification?

Peter Mair investigated this question through an analysis of the 1989 European Election Study, which surveyed respondents throughout what was then the European Community.<sup>32</sup> As Mair remarked, ‘The results are

<sup>27</sup> Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, 3rd edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), pp. 170–98. The quote is taken from p. 170.

<sup>28</sup> Perry Share, Hilary Tovey and Mary P. Corcoran, *A Sociology of Ireland*, 4th edn (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012). Class is discussed in this edition of the book, although as part of wider issues. See, for instance, chapter 5, ‘Who Rules Ireland?’, pp. 91–115, and chapter 6, ‘Work and Livelihood’, pp. 116–44.

<sup>29</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 July 1955 and *Irish Independent*, 29 June 1964, cited in Liam Cullinane, ‘“As If You Were Something Under Their Shoe”: Class, Gender and Status among Cork Textile Workers, 1930–70’, in *Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life*, ed. by David Convery (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013), pp. 175–91. The citations are from p. 175.

<sup>30</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900–2000* (London: Profile, 2005), p. 7, cited in Cullinane, ‘Class, Gender and Status’, pp. 175–6.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Richard Breen and Christopher T. Whelan, *Social Mobility and Social Class in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Peter Mair, ‘Explaining the Absence of Class Politics in Ireland’, in *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland: The Third Joint Meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy, Oxford, 1990, Proceedings of the British Academy*, 79, ed. by J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 383–410. The book can be viewed online here: [www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/proc/volumes/pba79.html](http://www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/proc/volumes/pba79.html) [accessed 25 April 2016]. Material on the 1989 and other European Election Studies can be found at <http://eeshomepage.net/home/> [accessed 25 April 2016].

striking and, in some senses, surprising.<sup>33</sup> He found that although almost 9 per cent of the Irish respondents ‘refused or were unable to assign themselves to a social class’, 41.9 per cent assigned themselves to the working class. This figure was second only to Britain’s (45.9 per cent), and far ahead of countries such as Denmark (21.9 per cent), Germany (21 per cent), Italy (22.9 per cent) and Spain (12.1 per cent). As Mair argued, ‘In sum, these figures not only suggest that class categories mean something to the vast majority of Irish voters, but also that Ireland is characterised by a relatively high level of working-class self awareness [*sic*].’<sup>34</sup> Recent surveys tend to show that working-class self-identification has endured for the most part since then, despite the dramatic social and economic changes in the intervening years. For instance, in a 2005 survey conducted by Amárach Research, 35 per cent of respondents assigned themselves as working class, while in 2011, a few years into the economic crisis, this figure had gone up to 41 per cent.<sup>35</sup> In these surveys, when asked explicitly whether people thought of themselves as working class, the result was clear. In this regard, it is instructive to look at those who do the denying. All three examples cited by Cullinane concern people in positions of authority and influence, unlikely in any circumstance to describe themselves as working class. Part of the problem may also lie in the differences between the academic and the vernacular language used to conceptualise class.

As Cullinane also noted, ‘Terms like working class and middle class are, to some extent, British importations and may not necessarily be a natural part of the Irish lexicon.’<sup>36</sup> Discussing his oral histories of female textile workers in Cork, he observed that ‘more insular terms like “grandies”, “big people”, “cottage people”, “money people”, etc. appear as indicators of social class. Similarly, geographical representations of class are often employed’.<sup>37</sup> Wealthier areas in Cork such as Montenotte were contrasted with working-class Gurrabraher, for instance.<sup>38</sup> An equivalent in Dublin might be the images conjured in the mind when one hears references to D4 or to Tallaght. Historians of Ireland have been relatively slow to deal with the issue of language. However, studies conducted by a number of anthropologists over the years have echoed Cullinane’s findings, and demonstrate

<sup>33</sup> Mair, ‘Explaining the Absence of Class Politics in Ireland’, p. 389.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> The surveys had a sample size of 1,000. A graph of the results can be viewed here: [www.turbulenceahead.com/2011/02/comrades-in-debt.html](http://www.turbulenceahead.com/2011/02/comrades-in-debt.html) [accessed 25 April 2016]. Unfortunately, the survey is no longer available on Amárach Research’s own page.

<sup>36</sup> Cullinane, ‘Class, Gender and Status’, p. 188.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180–2, 188–9.