

Hackett, Rosanna ('Rosie')

by Lawrence William White and Maeve Casserly

Hackett, Rosanna ('Rosie') (1893–1976), trade unionist, was born 25 July 1893 at 14 Prebend Street, off Constitution Hill in the Dublin north city centre, elder of two daughters of John Hackett, described as a labourer at his marriage (October 1891) but working by Rosie's birth as a barber, and his wife Rosanna (née Dunne). Her mother, who was widowed by 1901 and worked as a housekeeper, married secondly (1903) Patrick Gray, a labourer and latterly a warehouse caretaker, with whom she had three sons by 1911. Documentation of Rosie Hackett's early working life and trade-union activism is sketchy, and accounts in secondary sources vary considerably. In April 1911 she was living with her family in a five-room cottage on Old Abbey Street and working as a packer in a paper stores. By August 1913 she was employed in Jacob's biscuit factory on Bishop Street and was probably a member of the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU), which had been launched in September 1911 (on foot of a successful strike over pay by Jacob's male and female workers) as an auxiliary to the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), owing to the reluctance of James Larkin (qv) to recruit women directly into the latter union; Big Jim's sister Delia Larkin (qv) was the IWWU general secretary.

In the early days of the 1913–14 lockout, Hackett was among the 303 Jacob's women workers (mostly IWWU members, and representing fourteen per cent of the factory's female workforce; two-thirds of the factory's 3,000 employees were women) who on 1 September 1913 joined 670 male colleagues in striking in support of three men who had been dismissed for refusing to handle flour from a mill that was blacked by the ITGWU for locking out its unionised workers, and to protest a recently promulgated prohibition against wearing union badges in the workplace (regarded by Jacob's management as intimidation of non-union employees). Since most of the strikers worked in the factory's bakehouse, production was severely disrupted, and Jacob's closed the factory for two weeks, reopening in mid September with imported and newly hired replacement labour. Hackett never returned to her job in Jacob's. The great majority of Jacob's women strikers remained out for the duration of the long, bitter dispute, applying for reinstatement in their jobs only in March 1914, among the last of the city's striking and locked-out workers to do so. Jacob's was one of the most reluctant of the city's employers to reinstate their striking employees, and stringently vetted the suitability of applicants. Some sources attest to Hackett's militancy and to her leadership role among the Jacob's women strikers, factors that would have been detrimental to her reinstatement. (The 1901 and 1911 censuses document that several male members of her extended family were carmen, an occupation highly organised by the ITGWU, thus suggesting the possibility of a trade-union tradition in her family.)

Hackett secured alternative work in the women workers' co-operative started by Delia Larkin in the ITGWU headquarters in Liberty Hall to provide employment for women who were victimised as a result of the lockout. The co-operative comprised a small workroom and shop for the manufacture and sale of various items, especially textiles, specialising in a stout workman's shirt called the 'red hand' (after the ITGWU insignia); the shop also stocked labour and separatist literature. Though working at times in the workroom, Hackett seems to have borne the primary responsibility for overseeing the shop. She also oversaw a refreshments stand at the frequent entertainments (concerts, dances, theatricals) held in Liberty Hall. Along with the other co-operative workers (who numbered eight to ten in 1915–16), Hackett also joined the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), therein participating in route marches and taking lessons in first aid from Dr Kathleen Lynn (qv); she assisted as part of her instruction in the treatment of minor cases in Lynn's regular Liberty Hall clinic.

When Delia Larkin resigned in 1915 as IWWU secretary owing to tensions with the ITGWU leadership, James Connolly (qv), who was ITGWU acting secretary during James Larkin's absence in the USA, replaced her with Helena Molony (qv). In the early months of 1916, Hackett and her fellow workers assisted in the intensive preparations for the Easter rising that were conducted within Liberty Hall. Molony described the women's co-operative as a 'tigress in kitten's fur' (quoted in Jones, 15) for its role as a cover for insurrectionist activities. The workroom produced clothing, haversacks, first-aid satchels, cartridge belts, flags (including that which flew over the GPO), armbands and badges, while also functioning as a reception depot for small caches of arms and ammunition. From her post in the shop, Hackett was Connolly's receptionist when other members of the IRB military council arrived for meetings.

A month before the rising (24 March 1916), Hackett was alone in the shop when police arrived to seize seditious literature; she instructed the men in the adjoining print shop to notify Connolly of the intrusion. On observing the policemen behind the shop counter with bundles of papers in their arms, Connolly drew a revolver and commanded: 'Drop them, or I will drop you.' Molony also arrived, and covered Connolly with her own firearm. The police withdrew on Connolly's insistence that a warrant was required to search the premises. During their absence, Hackett cleared the shop of any incriminating material. When the police returned, Connolly insisted that their warrant allowed them to search the shop, but was insufficient to permit entry to Liberty Hall itself. The incident induced the necessity of maintaining a permanent armed guard in the Hall over the ensuing weeks, owing to the presence on the premises of much material and activity related to the coming insurrection.

Hackett participated in the final, feverish preparatory activity during Holy Week, equipping haversacks and first-aid kits, and preparing food rations. On Easter Sunday, she took part in the last ICA route march, along which a bugle was sounded outside every building that was to be seized by the insurgents on the following day. That evening she conveyed messages between Connolly and the Liberty Hall print shop, where the type was being set to print the proclamation of the republic.

During Easter Week, Hackett was assigned to the first-aid unit of the ICA's St Stephen's Green garrison under the supervision of Madeleine French-Mullen (qv). A slight, diminutive woman, beneath five feet in height, Hackett recounted the amusement of onlookers when she first donned her white medic's coat which came down to her heels, necessitating hasty alterations. The first-aid post, located in a summerhouse on the Green, came under heavy fire on the Tuesday morning, notwithstanding the display of a red-cross insignia. When later that day the garrison evacuated to the Royal College of Surgeons, Hackett and several other nurses took temporary shelter from the withering rifle fire in the caretaker's lodge before making a run for the college building. On the garrison's surrender (Sunday 30 April), she was marched with her fellow prisoners through a hostile crowd to Dublin Castle, where the women were separated from the men and sent briefly to Richmond Barracks before transfer to Kilmainham jail. Along with most of the women prisoners, she was released ten days thereafter.

Hackett participated in the post-rising reorganisation of the separatist and trade-union movements. Amid a restructuring of IWWU offices in February 1917, she was appointed clerk, under Molony's general secretaryship. By year's end, the union claimed some 2,300 members, situated in printing, box-making, laundries and textiles. On the first anniversary of Connolly's execution, a banner proclaiming 'James Connolly Murdered May 12th 1916' was displayed on the façade of Liberty Hall, but was quickly removed on police order, whereupon Hackett, Molony and two other women ascended to the building's roof, barricaded the approaches, and unfurled a similar banner; they remained thus situated for several hours, attracting a large assemblage of onlookers, before some 400 police broke through the barriers and removed the banner. The episode aggravated tensions between the ICA and ITGWU, which feared the repercussions to union activity occasioned by close association with such provocative separatist demonstrations.

In 1918 the IWWU formally separated from the ITGWU and registered as a separate union, while the ITGWU revised its rules to allow the admission of women as full members. Hackett served for some time as official in charge of a women's section of the ITGWU no. 1 branch, based in Liberty Hall. During the troubles of 1919–21, her office was an IRA message centre and meeting place, and a safe house for volunteers on the run. For many years she ran the ITGWU news agency and tobacconist shop on Eden Quay around the corner from the main entrance to Liberty Hall. In this conspicuous situation, she was widely known and esteemed throughout the ITGWU and the trade-union movement generally; the shop was especially popular as a gathering place for busmen whose routes terminated in the vicinity. In her memoir of working in Liberty Hall as a young clerk in 1947, May O'Brien relates vignettes of Hackett's warm, spirited and engaging personality, describing her physically as 'a little wispy woman ... the image of the little spinster teacher in the cowboy films: small, slight, grey hair in a bun with stray bits falling to her face, wire-rimmed glasses ... and a rather prim expression' (pp 50–51). Hackett retired when

the shop closed in 1957 in advance of the demolition of the building to make way for the new Liberty Hall.

Hackett was presented a gold medal by the ITGWU in 1970 in recognition of her long service and commitment. Unmarried, she lived with her half-brother Tommy Gray at 115 Brian Road, Marino. She died 4 July 1976 at St Vincent's hospital, Fairview, Dublin. After a funeral from the Roman catholic Church of the Visitation, Fairview, she was buried with full military honours (owing to her ICA service) in Glasnevin cemetery. In September 2013, during the centenary of the great lockout, the new light-rail bridge in Dublin, linking Marlborough Street and Hawkins Street, and close to Liberty Hall, was named after Rosie Hackett. Opened in May 2014, it is the first of the twenty-one Liffey bridges within the city boundaries to be named for a woman.

GRO (birth, death certs.; mother's marriage certs. (1891, 1903); sister's birth cert. (1894)); Census of Ireland, 1901, 1911, www.census.nationalarchives.ie; Helena Molony, witness statement (19 May 1950), BMH (WS 391); Rose Hackett, witness statement (26 May 1951), BMH (WS 546); Petronella O'Flanagan, 'The story of Rosie Hackett', *Liberty Magazine*, xii, no. 3 (Mar. 1957), 25, 32; *Fifty years of Liberty Hall: the golden jubilee of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union 1909–1959* (1959), *passim*, esp. photos between pp 40–41 and 84–5; C. Desmond Greaves, *The life and time of James Connolly* (1972 ed.); *Ir. Independent*, 5, 6, 16 July 1976; *Liberty*, xxxi, no. 1 (Aug. 1976), 1, 12; C. Desmond Greaves, *The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union: the formative years 1909–1923* (1982); Mary Jones, *These obstreperous lassies: a history of the Irish Women Workers' Union* (1988); Patricia McCaffrey, 'Jacob's women workers during the 1913 lock-out', *Saothar*, xvi (1991), 118–29; Ruth Taillon, *The women of 1916: when history was made* (1996); May O'Brien, *Clouds on my windows: a Dublin memoir* (2004), 23–4, 50–51, 125, 128–30, 146–8, 189–90; Francis Devine and Manus O'Riordan, *James Connolly, Liberty Hall and the 1916 rising* (2006), 48, 52, 75–84 (includes annotated reprint of Hackett's BMH witness statement); *Ir. Times*, 2, 3 Sept. 2013; 20 May 2014