

13.11 Rioting and Resistance to Food Exports

Source: <https://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/food-exports-from-ireland-1846-47/>

Background: British and Protestant landlords, distillers, and merchants controlled the grain produced in Ireland and continued shipments out of Ireland during the famine. In the first nine months of 1847 seventy-five ships sailed from Tralee carrying grain to Liverpool and six vessels sailed from Kilrush in County Clare to Glasgow with over 6,000 barrels of oats. Beer and whiskey made from Irish grain were also exported. During the same time period, 278,658 gallons of Guinness were sent to Bristol and 183,392 gallons of Irish whiskey was shipped to Liverpool. Ships bringing grain to ports and distilleries were guarded by British troops. Requests for a temporary prohibition on whiskey production were refused. Desperate, the Irish responded with attacks on bakeries and food riots.

Questions

1. In your opinion, were British and Protestant landlords, distillers, and merchants justified in exporting grain and grain products that they owned to England and Scotland from Ireland during the famine?
2. What evidence is there that the food riots were spontaneous rather than planned?
3. In your opinion, were rioters justified in attacking bakeries and food depots? Explain.

“A report had gone abroad that ships were freighted to convey grain from Dungarvan for England on last Monday, and this rumour had the effect of arousing the fears of the people; consequently, large masses flocked to Dungarvan for the purpose of preventing such exportation. It is evident that they did not intend to commit any violence, as they came unarmed. Their only object was to make such a demonstration as would prevent the shipping of grain. The force of public opinion was the only weapon they meant to use, for they carried neither pike nor gun. A collision took place between these defenceless and unfortunate people, and several were wounded. If provision depots be not immediately formed in order to reduce the markets to a reasonable price, and the exportation of grain prohibited, it is hard to say what desperation and despair may not do.” - *The Waterford Freeman*, October 1846



Dungarvan Food Riots. *London Pictorial Times*, October 10, 1846

“There was some rather serious rioting at Dublin, yesterday week. About nine o’clock in the morning, a body of men, apparently railway labourers, tolerably well clad, assembled at the foot of Summer Hill, adjoining Lower Gardiner street, Dublin, and they were not long there when two bread-carts approached. A portion of the party, armed with large sticks, drew out towards the carts, addressed threatening terms to the men in charge, while the rest of the mob deliberately rifled all the contents of the carts. Some three or four policemen were attracted to the spot by the commotion, but, from the attitude assumed by the fighting section of the plunderers, they did not consider themselves warranted in attempting the arrest of any of the party; all, in consequence, escaped.

About two hours afterwards, a party, supposed to be the same gang, attacked the shop of Mr. Campbell, of Marlborough-street, and carried off all the bread in his shop. They proceeded down Marlborough-street to Eden-quay and stopped before the door of Mr. Coyne, the bread and biscuit baker residing there, and repeated their demand for bread; but, on seeing the police approaching, they retired, and passed over Carlisle Bridge in the direction of Westmoreland street. A mob surrounded the shop of Mr. Jeffers, baker, of Church street; but, the police being in the vicinity, they were called on, and succeeded in dispersing the mob. Several bread-carts were stopped in the outlets of the city, and their contents taken. The rioters continued their depredations up to ten o’clock at night, and, owing either to the inequality of numbers, or want of energy in the police, succeeded in plundering a great number of bakeries in the neighbourhood of the Liberty, as well as in the northern ends of the city.” - *London Pictorial Times*, October 1846