

James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland

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by Priscilla Metscher

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To Fiona and Thomas

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Preface

The conquest of Ireland had meant the social and political servitude of the Irish masses, and therefore the re-conquest of Ireland must mean the social as well as the political independence from servitude of every man, woman and child in Ireland.

—James Connolly¹

As socialists we have ever taught that National Freedom could not be won by a population resigned to industrial slavery; and as believers in National Freedom we have ever taught that the real re-conquest of Ireland necessarily implied the redemption of the Irish worker from the slavery of the capitalist system.

—James Connolly²

Most historians who have written on James Connolly would agree that he was one of the outstanding figures of the British/Irish labor movements at the turn of twentieth century. When it comes to assessing his actual contribution to labor history, opinions vary. Connolly's political career corresponded to the life span of the Second International, and his writings reflect both the strength and weaknesses in the left wing of the International. One controversial issue at the time that still occupies us at the present day was the question of the right of nations to

self-determination. Whereas the major European states had resolved their national questions by the beginning of the century, Ireland was still a colony with an unresolved national question. Connolly was aware that any socialist strategy in Ireland must necessarily take into account the status of Ireland as a colony; socialists must realize that “a socialist movement must rest upon and draw its inspiration from the historical and actual conditions of the country in which it functions and not merely lose themselves in an abstract ‘internationalism’ (which has no relation to the real internationalism of the socialist movement).”³

Concerning this very point of the national question, the mainstream tradition of Irish historical scholarship, as developed since the 1930s, has, under the guise of “value-free” interpretation, sought to “revise” the Irish historical experience. This, as Brendan Bradshaw points out, is nothing more than a negative bias where “a corrosive cynicism is brought to bear in order to minimize or to trivialise the significance of transcendent aspirations or dynamisms.”⁴ This “revisionist” approach is particularly apparent in the “iconoclastic assault” upon the “so-called apostolic succession of national heroes,” depicting such figures as Tone, Davis, Pearse, and Connolly “as politically inept and intellectually confused ideologues.”⁵

With reference to Connolly, Austen Morgan’s recent book, *James Connolly, A Political Biography* is an excellent example of this kind of historiographic revisionism. From the outset Morgan poses the question “why a man who lived as a socialist . . . died an Irish nationalist,” his conclusion being that on this account labor in Ireland lost a leader. Morgan works on the assumption that Connolly had feet in two very different movements: “international socialism” (being alien to Ireland) and “militant nationalism” (canceling out the idea of internationalism). He bases his thesis on his own interpretation of Connolly’s writings, scarcely providing any original quotations. He judges Connolly from the high chair of academia, or as Bradshaw so aptly puts it, places him in the dock and conducts the case for the prosecution.⁶ He judges Connolly as not measuring up to something that he never aspired to be—a professional intellectual and

theoretician of the labor movement—and also takes him to task for failing to write on certain issues.⁷

In contrast to this lack of sensitive response to material at hand, Bradshaw pleads for a more imaginative and empathetic approach in dealing with historical subject matter. Concerning socialist historiography, I think this comes close to E. P. Thompson's "socialist humanist" approach. *Empathy* is essential—the ability to "listen" or to "tune in" to people in the past without imposing a moralizing tone from above.⁸

In an attempt to assess Connolly's contribution to socialism and the national question the difficulty again seems to lie in the point of approach. A significant recent work on Connolly is Helga Woggon's well-researched book, *Integrativer Sozialismus und nationale Befreiung: Politik und Wirkungsgeschichte James Connollys in Irland*. It begins with an abstract model, "integrative socialism," understood as a special form of socialist politics within a situation of national or colonial dependence that derives socialist concepts from national tradition and tries to fuse them with that tradition.⁹ Her conclusion that "integrative socialism" in Ireland was bound to fail as it was not a suitable basis for practical political strategy in the labor movement derives from her understanding of socialism and nationalism as traditionally and basically two contradictory forces in Ireland. Together with Eric Hobsbawm, she sees Connolly as making concessions to nationalism at the expense of socialism: "With the aid of 'hibernicized Marxism' he wanted to create a social revolutionary movement out of nothing and transform nationalism in a socialist manner."¹⁰

To my mind, however, it is not a concept of "hibernicized Marxism" that emerges from Connolly's writings, and that he demonstrated in his political activities in Ireland. The significance of the term *socialist republicanism* has, I think, often been overlooked, for the emphasis is undoubtedly on the word "republicanism." Connolly understood socialism in Ireland as carrying on and developing the tradition of republicanism established by the United Irishmen:

Wolfe Tone¹¹ was abreast of the revolutionary thought of his day, as are the Socialist Republicans of our own day. He saw clearly, as we see, that a dominion as long rooted in any country as British dominion in Ireland can only be dislodged by a revolutionary impulse in line with the development of the entire epoch.¹²

The concept of a socialist republic was in keeping with the democratic ideals of past republicans, including United Irishmen, Young Irelanders, and Fenians.¹³ Connolly emphasized, “A socialist republic is the application to agriculture and industry; to the farm, the field, the workshop, of the democratic principle of the republican ideal.”¹⁴ Does the nonrealization of the establishment of such a socialist republic under the given historical circumstances in Ireland make the concept any less legitimate? At a time when the national question has once more assumed an important role in Europe and beyond, James Connolly’s stand on the question of socialism and nationalism is indeed relevant.

NOTES

1. James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (Dublin and Belfast: New Books Publications, 1972), x.

2. James Connolly, ed., *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 209.

3. *Ibid.*, 87. In 1926, in an article in the *Communist International*, just ten years after the Easter Rising, Schüller points to Connolly as a foremost revolutionary Marxist thinker of his times. To him it was essential to combine the national revolutionary struggle in Ireland with the class struggle of the Irish working class. Connolly, according to Schüller, was not a nationalist in the narrow sense, but, on the contrary, was active both in theory and practice as a Marxist Internationalist (George Schüller, “Jim Connolly and the Irish Rising of 1916,” 88).

4. Brendan Bradshaw, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland,” *Irish Historical Studies* (Nov. 1989): 343.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. “The people of the ‘non-civilized’ world are totally missing in Connolly’s writings, appearing only rhetorically in nationalist references to the British Empire” (Austen Morgan, *James Connolly, A Political Biography* [Manchester Univ. Press, 1988], 210).

8. See Richard Johnson, "Critique: Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, Socialist Humanist History," *History Workshop* 6 (autumn 1978), 85.

9. Helga Woggon, *Integrativer Sozialismus und nationale Befreiung: Politik und Wirkungsgeschichte James Connollys in Irland* (Göttingen/Zürich, 1990), 11.

10. *Ibid.*, 21.

11. Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763–1798), one of the founders of the largely Protestant-based Society of United Irishmen, sought to build a democratic republican movement that would embrace both Protestants and Catholics in a united struggle for Irish independence. His goal was an independent democratic Ireland with a secular state free from clerical influences. During the Irish Rising of 1798, he led a French force in an abortive landing in Ireland, was captured by the British, and sentenced to be hanged. He cut his own throat on the morning of the day he was to be hanged, dying several days later on 19 November 1798.

12. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 40–41.

13. See, for example, James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week* (Dublin, 1966), 74.

14. James Connolly, *The Workers' Republic* (Dublin, 1951), 50–51.

PART I

James Connolly and Socialist Republicanism, 1896–1903

1

Connolly and the Founding of the Irish Socialist Republican Party

James Connolly was born in Edinburgh in 1868 of Irish immigrant parents and spent his early life in the slums of that city.¹ He started work at the age of ten or eleven, working as a printer's devil until a factory inspector discovered his real age and he was sacked, then in a bakery, and later in a tiling factory. At the age of fourteen he enlisted in the first battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment, and in July 1882 he was sent to Ireland.² His biographer Desmond Greaves estimates that he served with the battalion until its return to Aldershot, England, in February 1889. It is possible that during that period Connolly got some insight into the conditions of oppression of the Irish people, which were to occupy him so much in his later political career. On his return to Scotland, Connolly became active in the Scottish labor movement, joining the Edinburgh branch of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), and by 1892 was an extremely active member of the Scottish Socialist Federation.³ He had his political baptism in Scotland, where, in November 1894, he came in third out of four candidates when he stood as a socialist for St. Giles ward in the Edinburgh municipal elections.

As a member of the Irish immigrant community in Edinburgh, Connolly was acquainted with the struggle of the Irish people for national self-determination. He was familiar with the activities of the Land League in Ireland and as a socialist realized the importance of British workers' support of the fight for freedom in Ireland. At the outset of his political career, Connolly came under the influence of John Leslie, a native of "Little Ireland" in Edinburgh, poet, socialist propagandist, first secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation, and later secretary of the

of the Edinburgh branch of Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party (ILP).⁴ Leslie published a series of articles in *Justice*, organ of the SDF, between 24 March and 5 May 1894, under the title "Passing Thoughts Upon the Irish Question." Shortly afterwards the articles appeared in pamphlet form with the title *The Present Position of the Irish Question*. The pamphlet is important in that it underlined the relationship between the struggle of the working people for a better life and the fight for Irish freedom. Above all, it convinced Connolly of the necessity of an independent organization of the working class in Ireland. Quoting from Fintan Lalor to underline the fact that the national question is basically a social question, Leslie deals briefly with the Fenian movement, maintaining that although it was "the first spontaneous movement of the Irish democracy,"⁵ it nevertheless "had no more than a small conception of the great truth without which democracy is but a bottle of smoke, a fraud, a delusion and a snare," for nationality alone is not freedom.⁶ The history of the Land League is, according to Leslie, the story of how the Irish people's revolutionary struggle for land was successfully diverted into the mere political channel by "the adoption of the single-plank platform of Home Rule."⁷ Summing up the present situation, Leslie explains that he does not believe "that the Alpha and Omega of the Irish Question consists in the hoisting of the green and gold banner above the old Parliament House in Dublin," or that the Irish Parliamentary Party represents the interests of the Irish working class.⁸ The Irish working class should organize its own working-class party.⁹

James Connolly took up this challenge on being offered the job as full-time organizer of the Dublin Socialist Club in 1896.¹⁰ He saw it as his prime task to establish a genuinely *Irish* socialist party that recognized the needs of the Irish nation as distinct from Britain. In an introduction to the U.S. edition of his article "Erin's Hope," published in 1909, Connolly explains why the name "Irish Socialist Republican" was adopted for the new party:

The Irish Socialist Republican Party was founded in Dublin in 1896 by a few workingmen whom the author

had succeeded in interesting in his proposition that the two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland—the Socialist and the National—were not antagonistic, but complementary, and that the Irish Socialist was in reality the best Irish patriot, but that in order to convince the Irish people of that fact he must first of all learn to look inward upon Ireland for his justification, rest his arguments upon the facts of Irish history, and be the champion against the subjection of Ireland and all that it implies. That the Irish National question was at bottom an economic question, and that the economic struggle must first be able to function freely nationally before it could function internationally, and as Socialists were opposed to all oppression, so they should ever be foremost in the daily battle against all its manifestations, social and political.¹¹

In its inaugural manifesto, the ISRP laid down as its object:

Establishment of An IRISH SOCIALIST REPUBLIC based upon the public ownership by the Irish people of the land, and instruments of production, distribution and exchange. Agriculture to be administered as a public function, under boards of management elected by the agricultural population and responsible to them and to the nation at large. All other forms of labour necessary to the well-being of the community to be conducted on the same principles.¹²

This was to be achieved by “the conquest by the Socialist Democracy of political power in Parliament, and on all public bodies in Ireland.”¹³ The insistence of the ISRP on “the conquest by the Social Democracy of political power” through the ballot-box was in keeping with the primary importance Marxists in the Second International attached to the workers’ parties gaining control of the national legislatures by electoral organization and propaganda.¹⁴ At the Zurich Congress in 1893, for example, a resolution was passed that made the meaning of “political action” clear:

By “political action” is meant that the working-class organisations seek, in as far as possible, to use or conquer

political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering of the interests of the proletariat and the conquest of political power.¹⁵

Previously Marx and Engels had worked out a “revolutionary model” for the working class of the bourgeois democratic republics of the nineteenth century (including the constitutional monarchies with a strong middle class, such as England). The struggle for bourgeois democracy as a prerequisite for the success of socialist revolution is underlined in the *Communist Manifesto*. In such “advanced” states, the proletariat should constitute itself as a political party and by means of the existing democratic institutions (such as elections to parliament) win control of the democratic majority by the conquest of political power and, having reached the position of hegemonic force in the state, carry out the necessary revolutionary changes in society.¹⁶ It is this model that the Marxists of the Second International generally adopted. Marx believed in the possibility of achieving the socialist revolution by peaceful means, but only if the bourgeoisie refrained from employing counterrevolutionary measures to annul the majority decision.¹⁷ The situation in feudal absolutist states, he considered, demanded different strategy and tactics. In such cases, the primary concern was the carrying out of the bourgeois revolution, during the course of which the proletariat, in alliance with the democratic petty bourgeoisie, would come to power, and during a process of “permanent revolution” would assert its hegemonic position by violent suppression of the previous ruling classes.¹⁸ The remnants of feudal absolutism as well as bourgeois society could then be finally destroyed within a relatively short period.¹⁹

This latter “revolutionary model” was taken up by V. I. Lenin and developed for the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party in his article “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.” Lenin understood the establishment of a democratic republic to be the necessary prerequisite for the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, which under the conditions of feudal absolutism could only be possible by using revolutionary force.²⁰ The bourgeois revolution would not be

able to go beyond the capitalist economic structure of society, but the more radically democratic this revolution, the greater would be the benefit to the working class and the easier the task of completing the socialist revolution. Only the proletariat, together with the peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie, would be capable of winning a decisive victory over czarism and of erecting the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” that, he believed, would lay the foundations for the revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism.²¹

In the program of the ISRP, the achievement of socialism by constitutional means is underlined, but the question of national self-determination and its role in the establishment of socialism in Ireland—a question of prime importance for an oppressed nation—is not developed. Greaves remarks that as far as the immediate program of the ISRP is concerned, and also the phraseology it adopted such as “the forces of Democracy,” the influence of the SDF manifesto of 1883, “Socialism made plain,” can be discerned.²²

The immediate program was as follows:

1. Nationalization of railways and canals.
2. Abolition of private banks and money-lending institutions and establishment of state banks, under popularly elected boards of directors, issuing loans at cost.
3. Establishment at public expense of rural depots for the most improved agricultural machinery, to be lent out to the agricultural population at a rent covering cost and the management alone.
4. Graduated income tax on all incomes over £400 per annum in order to provide funds for pensions to the aged infirm and widows and orphans.
5. Legislative restriction of the hours of labour to 48 per week and establishment of a minimum wage.
6. Free maintenance for all children.
7. Gradual extension of the principle of public ownership and supply of all the necessaries of life.
8. Public control and management of National Schools by boards elected by popular ballot for that purpose alone.

9. Free education up to the highest university grades.

10. Universal suffrage.²³

It is interesting to compare this program to the earlier *Communist Manifesto*. The closeness is striking, although the program of the ISRP is more detailed in certain points with a specific relevance to the Irish situation, such as points 3 and 8. The program set out in the *Communist Manifesto* is a general one for the most developed countries. It would have to be altered in accordance with the conditions in the individual countries.²⁴ The measures in the program refer to the situation *after* the proletariat has risen to the position of hegemonic force in the state.²⁵ The function of the ISRP program, on the other hand, was twofold: 1) as a means of organizing the forces of democracy for the coming struggle, and 2) as a palliative: reform measures to alleviate “the evils of our present social system.” Thus there is not a clear division between immediate demands in the present struggle and those measures that could effect a revolutionary change in society; a distinction is not made between reform and revolution as is the case, for example, in the draft program of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party.²⁶

One point in which the ISRP program formed a striking contrast to SDF policy was the national question. Whereas the SDF pursued the policy of “Home Rule” for the British colonies and dependencies, the ISRP clearly spoke out against British imperialism in support of self-determination:

The Irish Socialist Republican Party holds . . . that the subjection of one nation to another, as of Ireland to the authority of the British Crown, is a barrier to the free political and economic development of the subjected nation, and can only serve the interests of the exploiting classes of both nations.²⁷

From this point of view, as Greaves maintains, “the programme of the I.S.R.P, was thus more advanced than that of the most advanced party in Britain.”²⁸ The ISRP program may have lacked the political sharpness of that of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party, 1895–96:²⁹ the very minimum has

been inserted into the ISRP program. There is no mention of the economic situation of the Irish working class, nor of the nature of the class struggle in capitalist society on the economic as well as on the political level. The radical democratic principle of “by the people, for the people, solely in the interests of the people” is inserted side-by-side with the socialist principle of the rejection of private ownership, by a class, of the land and instruments of production, distribution, and exchange as “the fundamental basis of all oppression, national, political and social”³⁰—and both are clearly seen within the context of the struggle for national independence.

In 1903 Connolly assisted in drawing up a manifesto for the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) of Scotland. In comparison with the ISRP program, this manifesto is more decisive in its formulations concerning the role of the working class in effecting its own emancipation. The manifesto expresses the need for a working-class party, recognizing the concept of the class struggle. Stressing that the efforts of the working class must be directed towards gaining control of the political state and wresting power from the capitalist class, it also puts forward a program of “immediate demands,” including the introduction of the eight-hour working day, abolition of child labor, universal adult suffrage, and a national referendum on foreign affairs.³¹ On its own, the ISRP program hardly provides us with sufficient material to understand fully Connolly’s ideas on an Irish socialist republic. His political writings of that period, however, do throw considerable light on the subject.

NOTES

1. These condensed biographical details are taken from C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972).

2. *Ibid.*, 26.

3. *Ibid.*, 45–48.

4. *Ibid.*, 39.

5. John Leslie, *The Present Position of the Irish Question* (Dublin and Belfast, 1969), 5. Originally published 1894.

6. *Ibid.*, 6.

7. Ibid., 9.
8. Ibid., 2.
9. Ibid., 13, 17.
10. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 70.
11. James Connolly, *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (London: Cape, 1973), 166.
12. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 184.
13. Ibid., 186.
14. See G. D. H. Cole, *The Second International*, part 1, vol. 3 of *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1970), 11.
15. Ibid., 26.
16. Dieter Kramer, *Reform und Revolution bei Marx und Engels* (Cologne, 1971), 162.
17. Ibid., 157.
18. Ibid., 156.
19. Ibid., 161.
20. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, in vol. 9 of *Collected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 112.
21. Lenin, *Two Tactics*, 56.
22. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 77.
23. Ibid., 76.
24. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in vol. 6 of *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 504–5.
25. Ibid.
26. Vladimir I. Lenin, “Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party, in vol. 2 of *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972): 102–4.
27. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 77.
28. Ibid., 78.
29. Ibid.
30. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 185.
31. See R. M. Chewter, *The History of the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain from 1902–1921, with Special Reference to the Development of Its Ideas*, B. Litt. Thesis, Oxford Univ., 1965.

2

The Political Writings of James Connolly, 1896–1903

James Connolly was one of the first socialist theoreticians to come from the working class. He was mainly an autodidact—his insight into Marxist economics was derived mostly from classes run by the Social Democratic Federation in Edinburgh and his extensive knowledge of the history of Ireland and of the early Christian Church from avid reading during hours spent in the National Library, Dublin.¹ He was not, as Greaves explains, primarily a theoretician, for “he lacked the philosophical equipment for the fine analysis of concepts.”² Many of his articles, written hastily, for the need of the moment—to give direction to the socialist movement in Ireland—lack subtlety of reflection. Thus, in trying to understand Connolly’s concept of an Irish socialist republic and the course of action he worked out to achieve this end, it is primarily a question of reconstructing his thought from statements made in various articles and pamphlets.

As a socialist, Connolly was primarily concerned with working out a strategy and tactics that would lead to the establishment of a socialist republic in Ireland. Right from the beginning of his political career, he insisted on the close connection between socialism and nationalism in an oppressed country. As late as 6 April 1916, ten days before the Easter Rising, he was to draw attention to the significance of this relationship between the two forces:

The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dissevered.

Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seek that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil. Labour seeks to make the free Irish nation the guardian of the interests of the people of Ireland, and to secure that end would vest in that free Irish nation all property rights as against the claims of the individual, with the end in view that the individual may be enriched by the nation, and not by the spoiling of his fellows.³

How then should the Irish socialist republic be achieved? On several occasions Connolly speaks of the “re-conquest of Ireland” by the Irish people, but this implies more than mere political independence; it also entails a complete revolutionary change in Irish society. Just as Wolfe Tone conceived of an Irish republic in the form of the establishment of a radical bourgeois democracy in keeping with the advanced revolutionary thought of the eighteenth century, so Connolly saw the establishment of an Irish republic in line with the most advanced scientific socialist ideas of his century. “A dominion as long rooted in any country as British dominion in Ireland,” he maintained, “can only be dislodged by a revolutionary impulse in line with the development of the entire epoch.”⁴

Considering Connolly’s early political writings as a whole, one could say that he understood the Irish socialist republic as the final phase of a revolutionary process that could be divided into the following progressive stages: 1) preparation for the social revolution within the given framework of Irish society; 2) national independence; 3) the achievement of the social revolution through the conquest of political power as the transitional stage to socialism; 4) the establishment of a socialist republic.

Although considering national independence as “the indispensable ground-work of industrial emancipation,”⁵ Connolly was aware that preparation for the social revolution must begin before the realization of national liberation; in other words, it was a question in the first instance of the struggle to turn the working class into a potential ruling class. Connected with this arises the problem of Connolly’s concept of the role of the

working-class party at this stage and his understanding of the working class as hegemonic force. In his early writings, Connolly makes clear that “the freedom of the Working Class must be the work of the Working Class.”⁶ This can only be realized by an independent working-class political party as leader and organizer of the revolutionary struggle. In an election address in January 1903, he maintained that there was only one way of finally attaining a socialist republic:

And that way is for the working class to establish a political party of its own; a political party which shall set itself to elect to all public bodies in Ireland working men resolved to use all the power of those bodies for the workers and against their oppressors, whether those oppressors be English, Scotch, or sham Irish patriots.⁷

On another occasion he referred to the working-class party as an “army in preparation,” “the army of class-conscious workers . . . strong in their knowledge of economic truth and firmly grounded in their revolutionary principles.”⁸ An essential function of the party was thus to educate the working class in the principles of socialism. Connolly adopted the slogan of Thomas Davis, “Educate that you may be free,”⁹ referring to the propaganda function of the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP).

Connolly did not indicate the form that the working-class party should take in Ireland; whether he had in mind a mass working-class party on the model of the German Social-Democratic Party or a cadre party like that Lenin evolved is not clear. It is probable, however, that because of his close ties with British socialism, together with the fact that the ISRP could work openly (consider the mass open-air meetings, etc.), Connolly aimed at a party that would organize all the revolutionary forces in Ireland. He stressed the importance of “conviction,” or “moral sanction,”¹⁰ as a prerequisite to revolutionary change. The working-class party, by calling into action on its side “the entire sum of all the forces and factors of social and political discontent”¹¹ and by becoming “representative of the will of a majority of the nation,” would finally be in a position as the dominant

national party to take possession of the *internal government* of Ireland. The conquering of local government by the working class is thus part of the gradual socialization of Irish society.

In 1896, when the ISRP manifesto was issued, this was not considered a probability, but with the passing of the Local Government Act in 1898 establishing household suffrage for the municipalities and local governing bodies, it was possible for Labour to break through the strongholds of the “orthodox political parties,” and Connolly supported the Trades Councils and the Dublin Trade Unions in running Labour candidates.¹² It was Connolly’s firm opinion that the workers,¹³ being in the majority although a subject class, could by voting together “oust from every public board the majority of their masters, and replace them by a majority of class-conscious workers.”¹⁴ Another step that Connolly suggested was that this majority of class-conscious workers should vote to take every industry out of the hands of the capitalist class and “vest it in the hands of associations of workers, serving under the public bodies.”¹⁵ It is by no means clear, however, if this latter step belongs to the preparatory stage of social revolution or if it is part of the revolutionary measures to be adopted with the establishment of the socialist republic.

In like manner, Connolly drew up a rough draft of a scheme of reform in agriculture, whereby the competitive system should be replaced by a cooperative system under the “control of boards of management elected by the agricultural population (no longer composed of farmers and laborers, but of free citizens with equal responsibility and equal honor).”¹⁶ He saw this measure, which he maintained could also be applied to industry, as preparing the ground “for that revolutionary change in the structure of society which can alone establish an approximation to an ideally just social system.”¹⁷ Yet he did not indicate how, under the existing system, it would be possible to place agriculture and industry under the cooperative organization of workers. In the same article (“Erin’s Hope, the End and the Means”), Connolly suggested palliative measures of social reform to alleviate the condition of the working class, some of which were laid down in the ISRP program.¹⁸ Using the slogan “agitate, educate, organise,”

Connolly saw in the preliminary stage the main issue to be the organization of the forces of discontent and the spreading of working-class power by all constitutional means available, through election to local governing bodies and the British Parliament.¹⁹ He was aware that in Ireland, a subject country, the election of a majority of Socialist Republicans to parliament would not herald the dawn of the socialist republic; it would, however, represent “the *moral* insurrection of the Irish people”: “their desire for separation from the British Empire,”²⁰ which could be converted into a military insurrection by the use of “a small expeditionary force and war material.”²¹ “The fight for complete independence,” he said, “will be taken up by the working class already in possession of the internal government of the country.”²²

Concerning the question of political independence, Connolly rejected the conspiratorial methods of the republican movement, stressing that the popular mind must be prepared for revolution. This accounts, he explained, for the failure of both the Young Irelanders and the Fenians. The principle of republicanism should not be identified with physical force, for “it is not republicanism, but the counsel of insurrectionary effort to realize republicanism, which gave to previous Irish movements their odor of illegality.”²³ The reversion to conspiracy that still characterized the republican movement of his day was thus not the line of strategy for the revolutionary movement, for “to counsel rebellion without first obtaining the moral sanction of the people would be an act of criminal folly which would only end in disaster.”²⁴ One of Connolly’s aims was to make republicanism a *public* issue in Ireland, to take from it the “odor of illegality,” and to change Irish republicanism from the “politics of despair” into the “Science of Revolution.”²⁵ The medium for accomplishing this was the Irish Socialist Republican Party. Looking back on the achievements of the party, Connolly wrote in 1909 that the policy of the ISRP “completely revolutionized advanced politics in Ireland.”

When it was first initiated the word “republic” was looked upon as a word to be only whispered among intimates; the

Socialists boldly advised the driving from public life of all who would not openly accept it. The thought of revolution was the exclusive possession of a few remnants of the secret societies of a past generation, and was never mentioned by them except with heads closely together and eyes fearfully glancing around; the Socialists broke through this ridiculous secrecy, and in hundreds of speeches in the most public places of the metropolis, as well as in scores of thousands of pieces of literature scattered through the country, announced their purpose to muster all the forces of labor for a revolutionary reconstruction of society and the incidental destruction of the British Empire.²⁶

At this stage the question of alliance with other democratic forces had not yet been posed. Connolly had not yet fully realized the potential within the national democratic forces of the country. In 1897, he wrote that

no revolutionists can safely invite the co-operation of men or classes, whose ideals are not theirs and whom, therefore, they may be compelled to fight at some future critical stage of the journey to freedom. To this category belongs every section of the propertied class, and every individual of those classes who believes in the righteousness of his class position.²⁷

The context in which this was written must be borne in mind. Connolly was acutely aware of the fact that in the past all revolutionary movements of the Irish people had been betrayed by middle-class leadership and he was concerned, above all, about wresting the Irish working class from the influence of the nationalist party. Thus he condemned it and the policy of home rule in no uncertain terms:

Home Rule in all its phases is now but a cloak for the designs of the middle class desirous of making terms with the Imperial government it pretends to dislike. It is but capitalist Liberalism, speaking with an Irish accent. As

such it is the enemy of every effort at working-class emancipation.²⁸

Condemning the first Home Rule Bill as a proposal to establish in Ireland a domestic legislature that would be divested of the powers of government in all essential spheres, and the second Home Rule Bill as a “sham” by the Liberal government, never seriously intended to be enforced, Connolly comes to the conclusion that Home Rule “is simply a mockery of Irish national aspirations,”²⁹ and that Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill “would not, in any sense, be a step towards independence, but would more likely create effectual barriers in the way of its realization.”³⁰

Although venting his anger against the nationalist parties in Ireland, Connolly nevertheless made a clear distinction between nationalists such as Redmond (leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party) and anti-imperialists or “advanced nationalists” such as Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith, realizing that “the Irish Nationalist even with his false reasoning, is an active agent in social regeneration, in so far as he seeks to invest with full power over its own destinies a people actually governed in the interests of a feudal aristocracy.”³¹ At this stage, however, it was not so much a question of forming an alliance with republicans, as trying to convince the latter that their proper place was in the ranks of the Irish Socialist Republican Party. In his enthusiasm, Connolly tried to convert advanced nationalists to socialism: “Therefore, I say to our friends of the Gaelic movement—your proper place is in the ranks of the Socialist Republican Party fighting for the abolition of this accursed social system which grinds us down in such a manner.”³²

In advocating that republicans use the institutions of constitutionalism to reach revolutionary ends, Connolly underestimated the strength of republican opposition on this point, expressed by Alice Milligan, that any conscientious republican would refuse to take the oath of allegiance in the British Parliament.³³

National independence, as we have seen, was to be achieved with the “moral sanction” of the great majority of the Irish people, but probably not without a conflict with the capitalist

imperial government. Apart from mentioning the possibility of military insurrection, Connolly did not elaborate this point, except to state that the use or nonuse of force would be determined “by the attitude, not of the party of progress, but of the governing class opposed to that party.”³⁴

The realization of national independence is essential for the completion of the social revolution, as it creates the conditions for the “conquest of political power by the revolutionary party.”³⁵ It is, however, an intermediate stage. Connolly is vague about the exact nature of the Irish republic. For example, is it the completion of the democratic revolution in Ireland begun by the United Irishmen? This would seem to be the case; in an article in the *Workers’ Republic* (5 August 1899) entitled “Wolfe Tone and His Admirers,” Connolly speaks of the Irish Socialist Republicans fighting for “the realisation of that freedom for which the United Irishmen fought.”³⁶

On another occasion Connolly speaks of Socialist Republicans adhering to “the high ideal of national freedom, sought for in the past,” going beyond it “to a fuller ideal which we conceive to flow from national freedom as a natural and necessary consequence.”³⁷ An Irish republic “would show in the full light of day all those class antagonisms and lines of economic demarcation now obscured by the mists of bourgeois patriotism.”³⁸

The establishment of independence would be followed by “the peaceful conquest of the forces of Government in the interests of the revolutionary ideal.”³⁹ This implies the election of a majority of Irish Socialist Republicans to parliament. Connolly did not understand the conquest of political power to be the revolutionary act itself, but rather as clearing “the field of action for the revolutionary forces of the future.”⁴⁰ After establishing itself as hegemonic power through the consent of the great majority, the working class would secure the forces of government (the military and police forces of the state) as “a weapon in its fight against such adherents of the privileged orders as strove to resist the gradual extinction of their rule.”⁴¹ From such statements one can deduce that Connolly understood the state as an executive

authority. He wished to use the state “created by the propertied classes for their own class purposes”⁴² in the interests of the new social order that would be established. In other words, it was a question of remaking the state, transforming it into an instrument of the workers’ cause:

The first duty of the revolutionary working class after the dethronement of class government, and abolition of class robbery, must be to divest the State of its power of political ruler, and place it upon its true basis as industrial administrator.⁴³

G. D. H. Cole points out that this was the position of Marxists in the Second International: electoral victories were seen as paving the way for revolution, the outcome of which would be the overthrowing of the existing bourgeois state as executive power and the erection in its place of a Workers’ or People’s State.⁴⁴ Connolly understood the army and police force as an instrument of the state, as part of the state apparatus that would automatically “become the ally of revolution.”⁴⁵ He did not consider the possibility of winning the support of those democratic forces within the army and police before the conquest of political power.

Concerning the revolutionary act itself—the point at which the working class would take over the forces of government and start erecting the socialist republic—Connolly does not commit himself to the use or nonuse of force. “The governing power,” he said, “must be wrested from the hands of the rich peaceably if possible, forcibly if necessary.”⁴⁶ He had, however, no illusions: the question of the use or nonuse of force, as he again and again emphasized, was a matter “to be settled by the enemies of progress.” On the role of the ruling class in the South African War, Connolly commented:

How can we expect the entire propertied class to abstain from using the same weapons, and to submit peacefully when called upon to yield up for ever all their privileges? Let the working class democracy of Ireland note that

lesson, and, whilst working peacefully while they may, keep constantly before their minds the truth that the capitalist class is a beast of prey, and cannot be moralized, converted, or conciliated, but must be extirpated.⁴⁷

The establishment of a socialist republic, the “revolutionary reconstruction of society” was, according to Connolly, to be carried out by the working class alone:

They, and they alone are capable of that revolutionary initiative which, with all the political and economic development of the time to aid it, can carry us forward into the promised land of perfect freedom, the reward of the agelong travail of the people.⁴⁸

Again it is not clear what Connolly understands here by working class. It would seem that he does not mean simply the industrial workers, but includes the rural peasantry. The ISRP, however, was an urban organization, concentrated in Dublin and Cork, and although representing the interests of the peasantry in its manifesto, carried out little propaganda work in the countryside. Connolly’s only contact with the peasantry was in 1899 when he visited Kerry during the famine in that county and together with Maud Gonne, who was waging a relief campaign, issued a manifesto, “the Rights of Life and the Rights of Property,” proclaiming the right of the starving peasants to prevent the export of food.⁴⁹ Lack of agitation among the peasants can be partially explained by Connolly’s attitude to the land question. The development of the capitalist system of farming in the United States, South America, and Australia in the form of huge trusts and mammoth farms would, Connolly believed, put an end to the system of small-scale farming in Ireland, as the farmers would not be in a position to compete with the overseas markets:

The day of small farmers, as of small capitalists, is gone, and whenever they are still found, they find it impossible to compete with the improved machinery and mammoth farms of America and Australia.⁵⁰

This economic inevitability, spelling doom for the small Irish farmers, would leave them with no choice but “socialism or universal bankruptcy.”⁵¹ The only answer could be cooperative farming on a large scale. Connolly believed that the process of undermining the position of the Irish farmer would be as swift as it was ruthless, but this was a rather mechanistic approach.

We do not need to fight peasant proprietary, we only need to allow free scope for the development of capitalist enterprise in order to see the system of small farming crushed out by the competition of the great farms and scientific cultivation of America and Australia.⁵²

Hence it would not be necessary to convince the farmers of a socialist alternative; conviction would come automatically as a result of the economic situation. Whether an overall system of large-scale cooperative farming is a viable socialist alternative in a country where, for centuries, the struggle for land had become identifiable with the desire for peasant proprietorship is still a debatable point. Another reason for the lack of socialist propaganda among the peasantry was the situation of the ISRP as an extremely small party; its members were constantly engaged in agitational work in Dublin and had scarcely the time or the energy to devote to propaganda work in the countryside.

Concerning the transition to a socialist form of society, Connolly was convinced that the progression to monopoly capitalism, bringing with it the socialization of the productive forces, would create the objective conditions for the transition to socialism. In 1899 he wrote:

The same economic development which will create the necessity for revolt will also provide the conditions in so far as it will have forced out of business the multitude of small capitalists, and replaced them by huge Companies, Stores, and Trusts—huge aggregations of Capital under one head, a unification of industry, requiring only the transference of the right of ownership from the individual

to the democratic community to bridge the chasm between capitalism and socialism.⁵³

Connolly believed that the further development of capitalism would finally render the capitalist system unworkable. Considering the fast rate of industrial growth in the advanced industrial states at the end of the nineteenth century, he came to the conclusion that the discrepancy between production and consumption (diminishing world markets) would inevitably lead to the destruction of capitalism, a situation in which “the workers must choose between starvation and revolt for socialism.”⁵⁴ Thus the exhaustion of world markets would deal the final deathblow to the capitalist empires. Connolly’s “optimism” in this point lies in the fact that he could not have foreseen, at the beginning of the twentieth century, how the intensified exploitation of colonies and underdeveloped countries would lead to prolonging the life of monopoly capitalism. He believed that the advance of industrially underdeveloped nations into the capitalist stage of industry was something to be highly desired, since such an advance would breed a revolutionary proletariat in such countries and force forward there the political freedom necessary for the speedy success of the socialist movement.⁵⁵

He stressed the importance of the development of capitalism in Russia for this reason, as this “breeds there the revolutionary working class.”⁵⁶ How did Connolly see the situation in Ireland? He believed that under the capitalist mode of production and exchange it was impossible for Ireland to become a highly industrialized state for two reasons: “The first is the possession of the wherewithal to purchase machinery and raw material for the equipment of her factories, and the second is customers to purchase the goods when they are manufactured.”⁵⁷ In a world market already glutted with commodities, Ireland would be unable to create new markets.⁵⁸ If this is true, how then in Connolly’s estimation would it be possible to establish socialism in Ireland, unless the victory of socialism in the industrially advanced countries would make the transition to a socialist form of society in Ireland possible despite the insufficient

development of capitalism there? Connolly did not develop this point further.

Concerning the nature of the Irish Socialist Republic, Connolly gives in his writings a somewhat more detailed account of his concept than we find in the ISRP manifesto. In the “New Evangel,” he insisted that “socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production.”⁵⁹ Connolly stressed the cooperative system as fundamental to the socialist republic. He conceived a democratic system whereby the principal councils would be the executive body representing all the industries and supervising the industrial affairs of the population. Management in the various industries would be carried out by men elected by the workers. A similar system would apply to agriculture, as indicated in the ISRP manifesto, emphasis again being on public control and management.

Then when the land is the property of the people in the fullest sense (all the people whether in town or country), then all the aids to agriculture which science supplies, but which are impossible to the poverty-stricken peasant, will be utilised by the national administrators and placed at the service of the cultivators of the soil.⁶⁰

In none of his early writings does Connolly contemplate the role of the workers’ party in the socialist republic, nor that of the trade unions. In fact he does not seem to regard the trade unions as an active force in the struggle for socialism at this period, apart from their function as an electoral auxiliary. This is possibly due to the form of “old unionism” prevalent in Ireland at the time. On several occasions, Connolly drew attention to the clan system of communal ownership in Ireland in order to draw parallels and to illustrate the form socialism in Ireland would take. The socialist republic, he explained,

is a system of society in which the land and all houses, railways, factories, canals, workshops. and everything necessary for work shall be owned and operated as common property, such as the land of Ireland before

England introduced the capitalistic system amongst us at the point of the sword.⁶¹

In the “New Evangel,” Connolly explained the clan system of communal ownership, concluding that the Irish people then were “as Socialistic as the industrial development of their time required.”⁶²

Connolly did not believe that socialism in Ireland should simply follow the pattern of communal ownership in Gaelic society. He was too much a historical materialist not to realize that with the development of civilization, the socialist republic must necessarily be a more highly developed form of society: “A re-organisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of that common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin.”⁶³ Why does Connolly use the comparison at all? In the first place, it was the most vivid and understandable manner in which he could present the concept of the socialist republic to the Irish. Secondly, the reconquest of Ireland was also the reconquest of its national heritage whereby the Irish people would come into their own; it was the realization of a nation—both the negation and the fulfilment of the past.

The whole of Ireland for the people of Ireland—their public property, to be owned and operated as a national heritage, by the labour of free men in a free country.⁶⁴

NOTES

1. Maud Gonne MacBride, in *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences* (London, 1974, 98), refers to James Connolly making great use of the library.
2. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 429.
3. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week, 1916* (Dublin, 1966), 175.
4. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 40–41.
5. *Ibid.*, 29.
6. James Connolly, *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (London: Cape, 1973), 189.
7. James Connolly, *The Workers' Republic* (Dublin, 1950), 45.
8. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 56.

9. Ibid.
10. “A revolution can only succeed in any country when it has the moral sanction of the people” (Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 169).
11. Ibid., 191.
12. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 67. See also Connolly, *Workers’ Republic*, 49.
13. It would seem that Connolly used the term “working class” in a broad sense that included not only wage-workers in the towns but also tenant farmers and agricultural laborers. See Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 23.
14. Connolly, *Workers’ Republic*, 2 September 1899.
15. Ibid.
16. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 187.
17. Ibid., 186.
18. Ibid., 188–91.
19. Payment of M.P.’s was not introduced until 1911, and the ISRP had little funds available; it was hardly likely, therefore, that a working-class candidate, even if elected, would be in a financial position to become M.P.
20. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 30.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 20.
23. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 169–70.
24. Ibid., 171.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 167.
27. Ibid., 189.
28. Ibid., 207–8.
29. Ibid., 178.
30. Ibid., 168.
31. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 34.
32. Ibid., 59.
33. See Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 31.
34. Ibid., 55.
35. Ibid., 30.
36. Connolly, *Workers’ Republic*, 5 August 1899.
37. Ibid., 23 June 1900.
38. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 36.
39. Ibid., 33.
40. Ibid., 194.
41. Ibid., 30.
42. Ibid.
43. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 334.
44. See G. D. H. Cole, *The Second International*, part 1, vol. 3 of *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1970), 11, 12.
45. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 30.
46. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 251.

47. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week 1916*, 28.
48. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 193–94.
49. See Greaves, *James Connolly*, 101–4.
50. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 181.
51. Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 38.
52. *Ibid.*, 35.
53. *Ibid.*, 42.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 35.
56. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 228–29.
57. *Ibid.*, 178.
58. *Ibid.*, 179, 180.
59. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 194.
60. Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 36.
61. *Ibid.*, 45.
62. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 175.
63. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 25.
64. *Ibid.*, 32.

3

The Role of the ISRP in Radical Politics in Ireland, 1896–1903

The ISRP: Party of the Irish working class

From the beginning, the Irish Socialist Republican Party was beset with insuperable difficulties. The minutes of the 9 October 1899 meeting mention that in its early infancy the party consisted of hardly a dozen members. The original members are listed as follows: James Connolly, Thomas J. Lyng, Murtha Lyng, Alex Kennedy, Alf Stone, Robert Dorman, Mark Deering, Peter Marmion, Peter Cushen, Peter Kavanagh, and John Brady. Although a party branch was formed in Cork¹ and, following Connolly's proposal (21 November 1898), the Belfast Socialist Society was formed as a branch of the ISRP, it would seem that membership in Belfast was confined to a very small group, which also had difficulties, as Greaves points out, in assimilating the republicanism advocated by the ISRP.² On the whole, the party and its influence were generally confined to Dublin and the affairs of that city. Those active in the party from the beginning, especially its principal propagandists, were not recruited from the industrial working class. James Connolly was an unskilled worker and the others generally belonged to the growing class of petty clerks and shop assistants, the "black-coated proletariat."³ Murtha Lyng, secretary of the party, was a clerk in a soap works, later rising to the position of sanitary inspector in the Dublin corporation. Lyng's brother Tom was a shop-assistant. E. W. Stewart, originally a tailor apprentice, had become a wareroom assistant in a tailoring establishment in Grafton Street. Daniel O'Brien, after having been a temporary sorter in the Post Office, was appointed sanitary inspector with the Dublin corporation.

O'Brien's brother Thomas, who had worked from 1895 in the Revenue Commissioners in the Dublin Customs House, was promoted assistant clerk in the Board of Works establishment in St. Stephen's Green and finally went to the Berlitz school of languages in Como, North Italy to teach English and French.⁴

It is difficult to give an accurate account of party membership, but one can ascertain from minutes that there was a small group of about fourteen officials and active members around Connolly. The minutes indicate that there were at least forty-five paying members in 1896–97, and that from November 1898 to 20 November 1899 a total of thirty-one (plus a possible 12) new members were enrolled in Dublin. These figures are not very accurate, since it seems possible that members over three months in arrears with dues may have been deleted from the list following recommendations of Lyng and William O'Brien in the quarterly report of 10 July 1899. From the evidence given in the minutes, there would appear to have been no women party members, at the early stage anyway, although the party was by no means averse to women joining, as is indicated by the positive reaction to Maud Gonne's interest in the party.⁵ It must also be pointed out that ISRP membership was not confined to Ireland alone. Dr. Aveling (son-in-law of Karl Marx) was admitted to membership,⁶ and the minutes of 31 December 1896 reveal that the Socialist Labor Party of America was propagating ISRP membership in the United States.

The ISRP suffered continuously from a chronic lack of funds, as the quarterly auditors' reports indicate. The critical situation is indicated in Connolly's resignation from the post of party organizer and editor of the *Workers' Republic* (4 December 1900), based on the recognition that his salary was absorbing almost all the funds. So sporadic was the payment of Connolly's salary that he was forced to rely on loans from friends, and no doubt this was a determining factor in his decision to emigrate to the United States in 1903. The following letter from Connolly to Daniel O'Brien on 11 March 1899 asking for a loan of £2 reveals the predicament of the Irish socialist:

So I have now reached the end of my financial tether. . . . My reason for writing to you is to tell you that the organiser business is a failure—7/ [7 shillings] per week—and as I don't like to be drawing money from a few comrades—some of whom can ill afford it, perhaps, I am wishful, as a last resort, before shaking the dust of Ireland from my feet, to try again my luck at the pedlars pack. . . . It lowers me in my own opinion to ask this (i.e. for loan of £2) but it would tear my heart strings out to leave Ireland now after all my toil and privation—and unless I succeed in this instance the welfare, nay the mere necessity of feeding my family will leave me no alternative.⁷

Connolly complained of the lack of assistance and cooperation by members in the printing of the *Workers' Republic* (12 June 1899). There was a lack of volunteers acting as speakers at public meetings (both indoor and outdoor), and party meetings were characterized by a nonattendance of the majority of members. The quarterly report of 10 July 1899 is revealing in this respect.

We consider those [comparisons] already made more than sufficient to demonstrate that there has [been] a most extraordinary lack of activity on the part of the Members of the Party, and that as a result the Party is tottering to ultimate ruin and disaster. The least intelligent must know that as a revolutionary party pledged to take its part in the destruction of the present social organization a great amount of revolutionary self sacrificing effort is needed to keep it in existence, and to make its performance and aims known and understood by the Irish proletariat and that therefore if the members are not prepared to expend the amount of effort necessary it would be better for them and those who look to the Party as the one destined to accomplish the freedom of the working class, to resolve to

disband, and thus dissipate an illusion and leave the field open to more determined, and energetic men.

As late as 1903, it was regretted that members did not have a better knowledge of socialism; this was attributed to the discontinuation of economic classes since 1897.⁸ In addition, internecine petty fighting and personal squabbling developed among party members and on 5 March 1900 Connolly tendered his resignation as organizer and secretary as “protest against the growing practice of introducing personal dislikes into the business meetings of the party and making every little fault on the part of members the occasion for prolonged smarting and bickering.”

In spite of Connolly’s emphasis on the vital function of the *Workers’ Republic* for the further existence of the party, it would seem that this was not appreciated by many of the active members. Ill-feeling within the party came to a head in 1903 when Connolly tendered his resignation of membership as a protest against the fact that U.S. subscription funds £54 to the *Workers’ Republic* had been used to pay off party expenses at a time when they were badly needed to keep the paper in circulation. Moreover, as he pointed out, the party was under an obligation to the U.S. subscribers. Connolly criticized the “lack of foresight and business capacity” of the members. A fortnight later, when Connolly was readmitted to the party, a section of the membership resigned in protest (including William O’Brien, E. W. Stewart, Brady, and Allen) and proceeded to set up a splinter organization. This action was strongly condemned by the remaining party members in a resolution on 27 August 1903:

Resolved that in the opinion of this meeting the best appreciation of Connolly’s work for socialism in this country we can offer him is to carry on the work of socialist propaganda by the Party which he founded and for which he sacrificed so much. Be it further resolved that we consider the action of those men (desirous of showing their appreciation of Connolly’s work for socialism) who

have set about forming another Party treacherous to the interests of Revolutionary Socialism and an insult to the man and the principles he believes in.

The resignation of a number of active members had a serious effect on the continued existence of the ISRP, for it was questionable whether the party could continue as an independent organization with only a small group of activists. Thus it was decided at the meeting of 4 September 1903 to proclaim the ISRP the Irish section of the International Socialist Labor Party and to affiliate it to the SLP of Great Britain “as the nearest representative of that party, and to be represented at all future annual conferences of that body.” This was indeed a severe blow to Connolly, when one considers that a few years previously he had secured *independent* Irish representation at the International Socialist Conference in Paris (1900). It was notably one of the principal factors that urged him to emigrate to the United States in 1903.

In spite of difficulties and setbacks, the ISRP made an impact on the radical political scene in Ireland far greater than its numerical strength could possibly indicate. This was no doubt due to Connolly’s insight into the nature of a socialist party in Ireland. As he noted in 1901, “It is not that there must be an especially Irish form of socialism, but that there must be in Ireland, as elsewhere, a system of socialist teaching based upon the economic and political conditions of this country.”⁹ An Irish socialist party must thus be very much alive to the peculiar historical development and social-cultural traditions of that country. From its inception, the ISRP was looked on with favor and approval by “revolutionary nationalists.”¹⁰ The radical and youthful nature of the party attracted especially those young nationalists of the literary and Fenian movements. Maud Gonne,¹¹ active at this time in the amnesty movement for the release of Fenian prisoners, wrote to the secretary of the ISRP expressing her agreement with the republican and socialist ideal of the party.¹²

It is questionable whether Maud Gonne had any intention of actually joining the party. Her autobiography bears evidence of a spontaneous and emotional nature that led her to support a physical force policy in the national question,¹³ but she had no deeper understanding of, or interest in, the theoretical side of the socialist question. Hence her main purpose in requesting an interview with the secretary was to clarify points concerning her *public* identification with the ISRP.¹⁴ There can be no doubt, however, of her admiration for Connolly and his work.¹⁵ Despite his cooperation with Maud Gonne on the Transvaal Committee and in organizing the anti-Jubilee demonstrations, Connolly in no way sympathized with her opinions. However, he admired the sacrificial spirit and courage she had in voicing those opinions both in Ireland and the United States.¹⁶ Although Maud Gonne failed to understand Connolly's socialist teachings, she nevertheless gave him an opportunity to publish his thoughts in her Paris journal *L'Irlande Libre*. In his article "Socialism and Nationalism," written in 1897, Connolly gives a clear outline of what he understands by socialist republicanism.¹⁷

Republican Alice Milligan, whose paper the *Shan Van Vocht*, founded in Belfast in 1886, was the main literary expression of the Young Ireland Societies, as front organizations for the Irish Republican Brotherhood,¹⁸ sympathized openly with the ISRP, proposing her willingness to lecture under the auspices of the party.¹⁹ Besides, in the *Shan Van Vocht* Connolly could publish articles on socialism and nationalism.²⁰ The minutes of the ISRP of 23 September 1896 mention that the *Shan Van Vocht* was writing more encouragingly of the prospect of an understanding between "the real Nationalist movement and Socialists." It is also not surprising that members of the party should be invited to the inaugural meeting of the Celtic Literary Society.²¹

At the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, two major events in Ireland aptly illustrate Connolly's anti-imperialist stand and his alliance policy with the radical nationalists—the 1898 centenary celebrations and the anti-Boer War campaign.

The 1898 centenary celebrations

The year 1898, climaxing in the centenary celebrations of the Rising of the United Irishmen, was to bring Connolly and the ISRP into closer contact with republicans.²² As a prelude to the celebrations, torchlight processions were held on the last night of 1897 in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Belfast,²³ but preparations had already been underway months previously. The Fenian John O'Leary was president of an executive committee formed by members of the IRB to make arrangements for the centenary.

On 4 March 1897, Robert Emmet's birthday, eighty-three people came together in the chamber of the city hall for the purpose of constituting an executive committee; of these, thirty-seven belonged to secret organizations, most of them members of the Young Ireland League.²⁴

Names such as Wolfe Tone, Father Murphy, Oliver Bond, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Napper Tandy, the Sheares Brothers, and Michael Dwyer were adopted.²⁵ In a circular on 13 April 1897, the executive committee had called for the formation of '98 committees, each with two delegates represented on a national basis. This, however, did not develop, since the Gaelic League refused to work together with the committee. The formation of local committees in the countryside occurred spontaneously and without aid from Dublin, carrying on their work independently. Many more committees existed outside Dublin than in the capital itself (26 in Wexford, 19 in Belfast, 12 in Limerick, 10 in Tyrone, with 22 in Dublin).²⁶ In Belfast an Ulster '98 Committee existed from April 1897, consisting of the Volunteer Amnesty Association and the Joy McCracken Literary Society, together with local committees. In the individual committees there was an IRB majority.²⁷ Members of the ISRP also contributed their share to the celebrations by founding the Rank and File '98 Club on 3 May 1897, the main purpose of which was to disseminate the true aims of the United Irishmen.²⁸ The Home Rulers²⁹ were not slow to make use of the situation. Undoubtedly afraid of the threat of republican and socialist

unity, they set out to stifle the initiative of the working class and petty bourgeoisie by sinking their own fractional differences and publicly equating the cause of the United Irishmen with their own extremely limited brand of nationalism.³⁰ In so doing they contrived a split in the commemoration movement. In September 1897 the Home Rulers called a meeting of '98 clubs for the purpose of electing a committee to organize a demonstration on 4 October.³¹ This was done without consulting the Commemoration Committee. Those who gave addresses at the demonstration: Dillon, Harrington, O'Brien, and Joseph Devlin, are an apt indication of the Catholic sectarianism and limited nationalist outlook of the leaders of the Home Rule movement.³² Moreover, with their interpretation of the aims of the United Irishmen as "a union of all classes,"³³ they brought confusion into the ranks of the nationalist forces; some, such as the poet William Butler Yeats, welcomed their efforts to sweep over class differences; other republicans such as Alice Milligan saw through the superficiality and opportunism of the Home Rulers and interpreted their efforts as a means of achieving popularity among the Irish electorate.³⁴

James Connolly was not deceived by the intrigues of the Home Rulers. He was later to comment in the *Workers' Republic*:

I have observed that in Ireland, and in the mouths of our politicians, the class interests of the capitalist are treated as if they represented the highest form of patriotism. (8 July 1899)

To counteract the propagation of a "union of classes," it was decided that the ISRP should broaden the basis of its '98 Club by opening it to the general public, with the intention in mind of attracting the support of the republicans. Meetings of the Club were to be held about 8:30 p.m., following the general meeting of the ISRP.³⁵ In addition Connolly edited a series of '98 *Readings*, the purpose of which was, as explained in the introduction to the first issue, to:

allow the men of '98 to present in their own language the principles and ideas which animated them . . . it is the aim of this publication to present to the people of Ireland a complete picture of the men and ideas of 100 years ago.³⁶

Connolly was aware that the “post-mortem hero-worship” indulged in by the Home Rulers deliberately smoothed over the social problems of the present by focusing attention on the glories of the past. In his article “Wolfe Tone and His Admirers,” written after the centenary celebrations, Connolly reveals his general attitude to the Home Rulers. The motivation for writing it lay in the squabble between those in favor of erecting a monument to Wolfe Tone and those in favor of a monument to Charles Stewart Parnell. Connolly, with brilliant rhetoric, casts his verdict on the outcome of the centenary celebrations:

It is because the men who so loudly profess their adhesion to the faith of Wolfe Tone are so hopelessly incapable of appreciating the originality of his genius and the broadness of his outlook, that the advanced Nationalist movement has been narrowed down from the revolutionary promise of its inception to the limits of a squalid squabble over precedence in collecting the coppers of a nation of slaves, in order to erect a monument to the memory of a free man.

He succinctly points out that the United Irishmen, far from wallowing in the “glorious memories of the past unweariedly insisted upon the necessity of a change for the sake of the present.” In fact, as Connolly notes, a study of the literature of the United Irishmen reveals that they “turned the attention of the people, not to the “glorious past, but to the shameful and hateful present, to the pregnant and fateful future.”

Concerning the question of a monument to Wolfe Tone, Connolly comments that it could only be erected by a free people (the same standpoint as Thomas Davis in his poem “In Bodenstown Churchyard”). Moreover, it is an insult to the memory of Tone, as also to the intelligence of the Irish people, for the

Home Rulers, who publicly repudiated half of his principles, to “pose as the inheritors of his cause.”³⁷

Connolly was anxious to reveal through the '98 *Readings* that the movement of the United Irishmen arose as a “response to the demand of the people for a political and social order more suited to the needs of industry than the corrupt and antiquated despotisms of Europe would permit of.”³⁸ The first issue of the *Readings* included a section from Wolfe Tone’s pamphlet “An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland” and the original minutes of the inauguration meeting of the first Dublin Society of United Irishmen, both of which stress the need for parliamentary reform. Texts in other issues were chosen to underline the class struggle of the period. In the fourth issue, for example, following the poem “Paddy’s Advice” by Jamie Hope, the Belfast weaver, condemning the landlord system, are extracts illustrating the struggle of the Defenders against the authorities. The “Report of Secret Committee of House of Lords 1793,” by no means sympathetic to the United Irish movement, reveals that the struggle, far from being ignited by religious sectarianism, was on the whole a war carried on by the agricultural laboring classes against landlordism, in the hope “of being relieved from hearth money, tithes and county cess,³⁹ and of lowering their rents.”

Besides propagating the republican ideas of the United Irishmen, Connolly and the ISRP were active in organizing an anti-Jubilee demonstration to counteract the celebrations in preparation in Dublin for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. In her autobiography, Maud Gonne gives a lively rendering of the episode, as well as of her own part in the organization and carrying out of the demonstration. It had been decided to attract crowds on the evening of Jubilee Day by showing on a huge screen from the window of the National Club in Parnell Square eviction scenes and photos of men who had been executed or who had died in prison during Victoria’s reign.⁴⁰ With the help of corporation workmen, it had been arranged to cut electric wires to blackout decorations displayed by the Unionist shops. James Connolly made arrangements for the making of a coffin, symbol of the British Empire, and the demonstration was to be led by a

workers' band, whose instruments Maud Gonne comments, "were old and battered [so] that if they were broken by the police it would be no great loss."⁴¹ Black flags to be carried at the demonstration were inscribed by Maud Gonne illustrating the numbers of those who had died in the Famine, the numbers of houses destroyed in the evictions, the number of men jailed—all in the reign of Queen Victoria.⁴² It had also been arranged that the convention of the '98 Centenary Committee should be held at the City Hall on Jubilee Day and that the delegates should join the procession as it passed. Maud Gonne comments on the event:

It had crossed Capel Street bridge in safety, James Connolly leading. A rickety hand-cart had been draped in the semblance of a hearse and was pushed by members of the Socialist Party. When we came out on the steps of the City Hall it was being got into shape and the coffin of the British Empire disclosed and the distributors of the black flags were busy placing them advantageously. Willie Yeats and I and many of the '98 Centenary delegates joined the procession, which moved off down Dame Street to the strains of a Dead March played on the cracked instruments of the band.⁴³

The police were not slow to interfere with the procession and at O'Connell Bridge, as the coffin was in danger of being captured by the police, Connolly ordered it to be thrown into the Liffey, while the crowds shouted, "Here goes the coffin of the British Empire. To hell with the British Empire!" The skirmish with the police led to Connolly's arrest.⁴⁴ At the National Club, where the lantern slides were being shown, an old woman was killed in a completely unprovoked baton charge by the police. Following this, the irate crowd smashed the glass in every shop window in O'Connell Street containing Jubilee decorations. The outcome of the anti-Jubilee demonstration was to open the eyes of the general public to the fact that Dublin as a center of loyalty to the British Empire was a myth that once and for all had been destroyed.

Two months after this event, Connolly and the ISRP were in collision with the police once more. This time the occasion was the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of York in Dublin coinciding with the landing of the French at Killala one hundred years previously. Connolly astutely made use of the situation by organizing a meeting, not purposely to protest against the arrival of the Duke and Duchess in Ireland, but to commemorate the landing of the French at Killala. The meeting at Foster Place was dispersed by the police, but took place the following Sunday amidst police baton charges.⁴⁵ Once again the ISRP had succeeded in demonstrating the bias of the authorities against republicans and socialists and the working people of Dublin.

In January 1898 a split occurred in the Executive Committee, and a Centennial Association was formed that practically took over the republican clubs. The Rank and File Club disaffiliated in protest and continued as an independent organization. It was obvious that the Home Rulers were gradually gaining control of the whole centennial proceedings, deliberately ousting republicans from positions of influence in the movement.⁴⁶ The hypocrisy of the Centennial Association, led by the parliamentarians, was underlined at a meeting at the end of March, on the platform of which were, among others, Dublin's biggest capitalist, William Martin Murphy, and representatives of the clergy.⁴⁷

The Wolfe Tone demonstration in Dublin on 15 August 1898 was the climax to the centenary celebrations. It was, as León Ó Broin comments,

the biggest thing of its kind seen in Dublin for years. Some thirty thousand people lined the streets to watch a procession organised by Fred Allen that took over two hours to pass from the General Post Office to the site of the projected memorial at the top of Grafton Street. . . . The newspapers gave elaborate accounts of the IRB demonstration and the speeches, one of which by William Rooney, was unique, being given entirely in the Irish language.⁴⁸

The first issue of Connolly's *Workers' Republic* (13 August) appeared opportunely for the Wolfe Tone demonstration; copies being sold to crowds coming into Dublin on the day of the demonstration. On the eve of the demonstration, the paper was sold at a meeting at which Connolly spoke on "Wolfe Tone and the Irish Social Revolution." Connolly, probably more than any other member of the ISRP, saw the essential role of a party newspaper for the socialist movement. In this he was following a tradition in British socialism established by the Chartist movement in the 1840s. Within the British socialist movement there was a tendency, however, to overstress the propagandistic function of the paper, a tendency to stress enlightenment of the masses as in itself a sufficient means to achieving a socialist society. (See, for example, Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*.) Although understanding the enlightening function of such an organ, Connolly was at the same time aware of the significance of the *organization* of the working class. Thus, apart from acting as "a literary champion of Irish Democracy," advocating "an Irish Republic, the abolition of landlordism, wage-slavery, the cooperative organisation of industry under Irish representative governing bodies";⁴⁹ apart from defending the principles of socialism and laying bare the hypocrisies and undemocratic principles of the nationalist parties, the *Workers' Republic* was also important as a means of *organization*, as a means of communication between the various branches of the party. It gave added impact to the open-air meetings of the ISRP and raised the morale of the party members.

The *Workers' Republic*, entirely dependent on voluntary contributions, was constantly in financial difficulties, and in the minutes of the ISRP (24 October 1898) it was announced that "amidst signs of general regret . . . owing to lack of funds it was impossible to continue the publication of the paper at present."⁵⁰ Publication was not resumed until 12 May 1899, when Connolly put all his energies into the printing and publishing of the paper. In fact, as Greaves comments: "He was the editor, contributors, composing room staff and, except when he could get help,

machine room staff as well.”⁵¹ Its republication was to play an important role in the anti-Boer war campaign. From May 1899 to May 1903, when it finally ceased publication, it appeared monthly. From May 1915 to April 1916, it appeared once again as a weekly. In the first issue Connolly cast his venom on the Home Rule Party. He accused the “bogus organisation engineered by Mr. Tim Harrington” of misrepresenting the teachings and principles of the United Irishmen:

We are told the '98 men desired a “union of class and creed” although the words are nowhere to be found in their official publications; and the same men who admit the organising genius and revolutionary insight of Wolfe Tone tell us that he was fool enough to believe in the feasibility of uniting in one Movement such discordant elements as rack-renting landlords and starving peasants, under-paid labourers and over-paid masters.⁵²

Connolly was convinced that Wolfe Tone, were he alive, would have been repudiated as a “dangerous malcontent” by those Home Rule leaders who “push forward most arrogantly to burn incense at the alter of his fame.” Published in the same issue were a poem by John Leslie in praise of Wolfe Tone, “The Farmer’s Boy,” and another article by Connolly entitled “Wolfe Tone on Landlordism and Revolution.”

Connolly used the pages of the *Workers’ Republic* not only to present his ideas of socialist republicanism to the general public, but also as a weapon directed against the Home Rule party and the United Irish League, as a means of exposing the capitalist class interests of those organizations and their attempts to associate their interests with the high ideals of patriotism. In the article “Socialism and Political Reformers” (8 July 1899), he warns the working class: “Home Rule in all its phases is now but a cloak for the designs of the middle class desirous of making terms with the Imperial government it pretends to dislike; it is but capitalist-liberalism speaking with an Irish accent. As such it is the enemy of every effort at working class emancipation.” He condemns the Home Rulers’ hero worship of Tone and Parnell, which he sees

as a dangerous diversion from “earnest discussion of fundamental principles,” and as a means of diverting the working class from a trust in their own initiative.⁵³ Writing about “Socialism and Revolutionary Traditions” (23 June 1900), Connolly comments:

We know . . . that all during the centennial year of 1798 the Home Rule gentry traded without scruple upon the memory of the heroes of that revolutionary year, and lost no opportunity of declaring that they themselves would have been rebels under similar conditions, ignoring the great truth—the recognition of which forms the point of difference between their attitude and that of the Socialist Republicans—that, while changed conditions do necessitate changed methods of realizing an ideal, they do not necessarily involve the abandonment of that ideal, if in itself good.

The United Irish League equally comes under attack. Connolly criticized its propaganda as being purely agrarian, “agrarian in the narrowest and pettiest sense.” Its aim was to break up the large grazing farms to let out the land for tillage to small farmers or cottiers, but, as he points out, this economic program, even if immediately realized, would leave untouched the social status of the laborer in town and country.⁵⁴

On the whole the centenary of the '98 Rising proved a disappointing affair to radical republicans and socialists. It had been hoped that a stream of visitors from the United States and France would be present at the '98 celebrations. But the outbreak of war between the United States and Spain prevented this and the influx of necessary funds for the celebrations and for the erection of the Wolfe Tone monument.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Home Rule factions had managed to engineer the celebrations to their own political advantage and to distort completely the original radical democratic principles of the United Irishmen. The ISRP was too small in number to influence a wide section of the Irish people. Connolly, however, had managed to create a closer bond

between republican socialists and the younger nationalists by organizing and participating in joint activities. The anniversary of the Rising had given rise to a revival of interest and sympathy with the demand for Irish independence, especially among the youth of Ireland.⁵⁶ The '98 literature that had been distributed from one end of the country to the other with vivid descriptions of the various risings and eulogies of the United Irish leaders had an impact on radical circles⁵⁷ that was to influence the course of events leading to the Easter Rising.

Campaign against the Boer War

The outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 was an event that drew the advanced nationalists and socialists in Ireland together in a common campaign against British aggression in the Transvaal and enlistment into the British army.

The very first public meeting of protest against the war was held by the ISRP in Foster Place on 27 August 1899. Among the speakers invited was Maud Gonne, and invitations were also extended to various '98 clubs and the Celtic Literary Society.⁵⁸ The resolution drafted by Connolly and passed at the meeting condemned British imperial policy in the colonies, denouncing specifically "the interference of the British capitalist government in the internal affairs of the Transvaal Republic as an act of criminal aggression." It was hoped that the Boers would defend the young republic "by force of arms if necessary."⁵⁹ A report of the Transvaal meeting is given in the *Workers' Republic*, 2 September 1899. Maud Gonne sent a letter to the meeting expressing her sympathy with its object and regretting her inability to attend. The full text of the resolution was also published. It is interesting that the wording is slightly different from the hand-written resolution in the minutes of the ISRP (27 August 1899), which was subsequently published in *Labour and Easter Week*.⁶⁰ The last part of the resolution appearing in the *Workers' Republic* is more direct in its tone against British policy:

Therefore be it resolved: That this meeting condemns the proposed war upon the South African Republic as an act

of criminal aggression, wishes long life and success to the Boer Republic and trusts that our countrymen in the Transvaal will avail themselves of the opportunity to take up arms against their old oppressors—the British capitalist government—and in defence of their adopted country.

Further meetings were to follow. The minutes of the ISRP (26 October 1899) mention a monster demonstration held under the auspices of the party at which a resolution was passed congratulating the Boers on their heroic stand. It is also reported (2 October 1899) that Maud Gonne had managed to get a report of protest about the Transvaal into some of the French newspapers. On 10 October 1899, an Irish Transvaal Committee was formed in the offices of the Celtic Literary Society, with Maud Gonne presiding.⁶¹ It consisted of diverse national and working-class elements including John O’Leary; Michael Davitt; Pat O’Brien, M.P.; William Redmond, M.P.; and James Connolly.⁶²

Although Connolly was highly critical of Davitt’s political activity in Ireland—his ambiguous connections with the United Irish League—he nevertheless praised Davitt’s stand on the Boer War, especially his declaration that if offered Home Rule or an Irish Republic in exchange for his vote in favor of the war, he would not do so (see “Mr. Davitt and the War” in *Workers’ Republic*, 4 November 1899). Davitt resigned his seat in the British parliament in protest against British aggression. He went to the Transvaal and wrote a book on the Boer War.⁶³

In addition to her activities against the Boer war and her propaganda in support of the ISRP, Maud Gonne founded a women’s organization, *Inghinidhe na h’Eireann* (Daughters of Ireland), which among other activities carried on its own propaganda against the war, such as an “intense campaign against enlistment in the British army.”⁶⁴ So successful in fact was the campaign that the British government arranged for a visit of Queen Victoria to Ireland to stimulate recruiting. Maud Gonne humorously depicts the antiroyalist feeling of the Dublin crowd who battered the gilded coach of the Lord Mayor and his secretary, “who were barely saved by the police from a dip in the

Liffey.”⁶⁵ The anti-British propaganda methods adopted by *Inghinidhe na h'Eireann* were quite original: A patriotic children's party was organized for all the children who did not participate in Queen Victoria's treat. Maud Gonne estimated that some twenty thousand children responded.⁶⁶ She describes the event:

Headed by beflagged lorries piled with casks of ginger beer and twenty-thousand paper bags containing sandwiches, buns and sweets, that wonderful procession of children carrying green branches moved off from Beresford Place, marshalled by the young men of the Celtic Literary Society and the Gaelic Athletic Association on the march to Clonturk Park.⁶⁷

Another center of pro-Boer propaganda that replaced Alice Milligan's *Shan van Vocht* as the literary center of advanced nationalism was the *United Irishman*, the first issue of which appeared on 4 March 1899. The editor was Arthur Griffith, a young journalist recently returned from South Africa, where he had worked with John MacBride as machine operator in the Langlaarte gold mine in the Transvaal.⁶⁸ Griffith began his career at the age of fifteen as an apprentice printer.⁶⁹ He founded the *United Irishman* together with William Rooney of the Celtic Literary Society. John MacBride, a member of the IRB and Celtic Literary Society, remained in the Transvaal, becoming second-in-command of a small Irish Brigade fighting against the British army. Later, in 1903, he entered into an unsuccessful marriage with Maud Gonne and was executed in 1916 for his part in the Easter Rising. The *United Irishman* was published as a weekly from 4 March 1906. Although the policy advocated in the paper generally reflected the ideas of its founder, namely the reestablishment of the constitution of 1782 by nonviolent means, its columns were nevertheless open to republicans who voiced a physical-force policy, as well as to socialist republicans such as James Connolly and Fred Ryan.

As a political party, Sinn Fein remained, prior to 1916, completely ineffective, being overshadowed by the Home Rule Party.

As a political theory (the claim of Ireland to be a nation), however, Sinn Fein had considerable influence on the forces of advanced nationalism.

Although a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Griffith was never a revolutionary separatist. His aim was not a republic, but a national constitution under an Irish crown, a theory he later elaborated in a series of articles, “The Resurrection of Hungary.” Griffith was anxious to form a new political organization to unite those national forces in the country dissatisfied with the policy of the Home Rulers. An organization was needed, he maintained, that would “take practical steps to preserve our Irish nationality, foster our industries, protect our commerce and keep our people at home. If we wait for these things until the present warring parliamentarians have made Ireland a Nation, the country will either be a grass farm or a desert.”⁷⁰

Griffith represented the small-trading class, the petty bourgeoisie, in Ireland that, although aware of the damage big cross-channel mercantile interests were doing to industry in Ireland, was nevertheless not interested in abolishing the capitalist system, but in getting a share in the pickings. On the other hand, as Greaves points out, a certain fear of animosity toward the militant working class arose from the feeling that the concessions that the trade unions were wringing from big business would, in fact, ruin the small employer, the shopkeepers, etc.⁷¹ On the whole it was Griffith’s aim to rehabilitate the urban small middle class economically along “progressive” capitalist lines.

On 30 September 1900, at the instigation of Griffith, an organization—*Cumann na nGaedheal*—was founded, a loose combination of already existing national bodies working broadly on the basis of Tone and Davis. It was to contest local elections. The nucleus of this organization was the Irish Transvaal Committee with John O’Leary as president.⁷² Its objects were: “a.) diffusing the knowledge of Ireland’s resources and supporting Irish industries; b.) the study and teaching of Irish history, language, music and art; c.) the encouragement of Irish national games and characteristics; d.) the discountenancing of everything leading to the Anglicization of Ireland.”⁷³

The aims of Cumann na nGaedheal were vague—cultivation were a spirit of self-reliance and attainment of moral independence was only one aspect of the political question. The actual means of achieving national independence was left open. An answer was supplied by Griffith in a series of articles in 1904, “The Resurrection of Hungary,” in which he developed his idea of a dual monarchy. Analyzing the Hungarian situation of the 1840s in which the Hungarians under Deak withdrew their representatives from the Austrian imperial parliament to their native land and won the concession of a dual monarchy, Griffith held up the political tactics of the Hungarian deputies together with the setting up of Grattan’s parliament in Ireland in 1782 as the political objective for twentieth-century Ireland—in other words a national constitution under an Irish crown.⁷⁴ He proposed to constitute a Council of Three Hundred—a de facto Irish parliament.⁷⁵ Griffith also evolved an economic doctrine based on the economic nationalism and protectionism of the German economist Friedrich List. In the case of Ireland, he proposed support for native industry and the boycott of English goods. His idea of building up an industrial and agricultural country completely reliant on its own resources could only be illusionary as long as Ireland remained politically and economically dependent on Britain. Griffith’s own position concerning separatism and constitutionalism is somewhat ambiguous. The 1908 constitution of Sinn Fein stated that the object was the reestablishment of the independence of Ireland with Grattan’s constitution of the dual monarchy *as the minimum amount acceptable*.

It is difficult to ascertain whether Griffith’s advocacy of a dual monarchy was a tactical move, in the belief that under the circumstances in Ireland a constitutional position would win more widespread support. It would seem, however, that Griffith was personally very impressed by the “Patriot Parliament” of the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Within its ranks Sinn Fein had both separatists and constitutionalists; differences of opinion concerning parliamentary action caused a section to withdraw after the January 1910 meeting of the National Council and to establish its own newspaper, *Irish Freedom*.⁷⁷ The evolution of Sinn Fein to

a political party was quite a prolonged process. A National Council, a loose association of individuals, had been set up in 1903. At its first annual conference on 28 November 1905, Griffith publicly launched his Sinn Fein program. In 1906 the Sinn Fein League was founded with the amalgamation of the Dungannon Clubs (established in Belfast in 1905 by the republicans Bulmer Hobson and Denis McCullough and also among the students at University College, Dublin), and Cumann na nGaedheal. Finally in September 1908 the National Council amalgamated with the Sinn Fein League to become Sinn Fein. The president was John Sweetman; vice-presidents were Griffith and Hobson.⁷⁸

What was the relationship between Sinn Fein and the ISRP? Connolly was later to comment on Sinn Fein in an article entitled “Sinn Fein, Socialism and the Nation.”⁷⁹ Connolly did not sympathize with its economic doctrine—the encouragement of native capitalism—“as it appeals only to those who measure a nation’s prosperity by the volume of wealth amongst the inhabitants.”⁸⁰ With its political doctrine of self-reliance, of teaching respect for Irish traditions, history and culture, Connolly could not only identify himself, but maintained that this had also been the doctrine of the ISRP from 1896 onward. It was this latter aspect of Sinn Fein that brought Griffith and Connolly closer together in the arena of practical politics.

For Connolly, the socialist republican Griffith had the greatest respect, as is illustrated in the pages of the *United Irishman*. On 11 January 1902, during the Dublin municipal elections, Arthur Griffith wrote the following:

There is no man in the council chamber for whom, personally, we have more respect than councillor (P. J.) McCall, but we believe the return of a man of Mr. (James) Connolly’s honesty, ability and intelligence to the corporation would be a gain to the workingmen of Dublin and therefore, we would prefer to see him elected.

On 10 January 1903, the *United Irishman* comments on Connolly as candidate in the Wood-Quay ward, “We are not

Socialists, but we would be intensely gratified to see a man of Mr. Connolly's character returned to the Dublin Corporation."⁸¹

The ISRP was also commended by Griffith in the *UI* for its insistence on being allowed to sit as representative of a separate nation at the International Socialist Conference in Paris in 1900.⁸² Griffith was keenly aware of the miserable social conditions of the Dublin slum dwellers and was contemptuous of the "shooneens, the tenement-house rack-renters of the poor,"⁸³ but he did not commit himself to a comprehensive policy to alleviate the conditions of the working class. Griffith believed all forces must be concentrated on the national struggle—the structure of the future Irish society could be decided on after Ireland had "regained her political independence."⁸⁴ The duty of the workingman to his class, according to Griffith "can never transcend his duty to his country . . . the interests of Ireland are above the special interest of any of its classes."⁸⁵ Thus, while accepting the economics of capitalism as a *fait accompli*, he rejected trade unionism and later the new unionism personified by James Larkin in Ireland as imported from England, directing industrial conditions in Ireland, and placing Ireland commercially under the control of England.⁸⁶ He saw the Irish trade-union policy of affiliation to British unions as "the subservience of the Irish workingman's interests to the interests of England."⁸⁷ His national "chauvinistic" attitude to the Irish labor movement was undoubtedly substantiated by the jingoistic attitude toward the Irish of certain British socialists and their complete lack of understanding of the national question. Griffith's attitude during the wave of strikes and lockouts in 1911–1913 and his ranting and raving against the "damned Englishman" Larkin caused the Sinn Féiner Eamonn Ceannt to dissociate himself publicly from Griffith's position. Ceannt criticized the fact that Griffith did not bother to analyze any of the principles for which Larkin stood, and although condemning the workers' action, did not condemn the activities of the Employers' Federation.⁸⁸

Working on the Transvaal Committee along with Connolly and Maud Gonne, Griffith devoted his energies to the anti-Boer war campaign. The most spectacular demonstration of the

Transvaal Committee took place shortly before Christmas on the occasion of Joseph Chamberlain's visit to Dublin to receive an honorary degree from Trinity College.⁸⁹ Among the speakers to be present at the demonstration were Michael Davitt and William Redmond. Shortly before it could take place, however, the government issued a proclamation forbidding the meeting. The Transvaal Committee decided to defy the police and to hold the meeting in Beresford Place. The episode that followed on 17 December is described in the *Workers' Republic* (30 December 1899) under the heading "Diary of the 'Troubles.'" A more personal account of the events is given by Maud Gonne in her autobiography.⁹⁰

On the critical day, masses of police were in tactical positions in all the streets converging on Beresford Place. The military were confined to barracks, in readiness to turn out should the occasion arise. According to the *Workers' Republic*, Dublin was wild with excitement, and thousands thronged to the meeting. At the decisive moment, the Home Rulers "funked," leaving the people to face the police and taking, as is picturesquely described, "their miserable carcasses to the seclusion of a back room." The situation was saved by Connolly, Griffith, Maud Gonne, Lyons of the Oliver Bond '98 Club, John O'Leary, and Pat O'Brien, who drove down to Beresford Place to hold the meeting. Following baton charges in which the hired driver of the brake was arrested, Connolly seized the reins and a procession was organized through the main streets. Two meetings, the final one at College Green, outside Trinity College, were held, at which proclamations of sympathy with the Boer Republic were read, followed by further police baton charges. On the following day Connolly was arrested. He was fined £2 or given the alternative of one month in prison. Moreover, he had to find bail in the sum of £10 or go to prison for another month. The fine was paid, however, and security for the bail found (possibly by Maud Gonne).⁹¹

Through the medium of the *Workers' Republic*, Connolly elaborated on the phenomenon of imperialism and modern war:

“The influence which impels towards war today is the influence of capitalism. Every war now is a capitalist move for new markets, and it is a move capitalism must make or perish.”⁹² As a result of technological developments in industry, supply had outstripped the demand for goods. Unable to dispose of their products in the home market, the great industrial nations of the world were forcing them on the undeveloped countries in the Far East. This is, according to Connolly, the explanation for the war with China.⁹³ The exploitation of the natural resources of the undeveloped countries by the advanced industrial nations is a further example of the nature of modern warfare. The British government’s declaration of war on the South African Republic was “in reality for the purpose of enabling an unscrupulous gang of capitalists to get into their hands the immense riches of the diamond fields.”⁹⁴ Connolly concluded that the modern state “is but a committee of rich men administering public affairs in the interest of the upper class.”⁹⁵

For the Irish worker, the South African War afforded valuable lessons: Connolly had hoped that the crisis in the Transvaal would lead to a revolutionary situation that would bring about the downfall of the British Empire and thus give Ireland the opportunity to win her independence and create a favorable situation for the development of socialism. Commenting on the war in the *Workers’ Republic*, 18 November 1899, he remarked: “Well, I think it is the beginning of the end. This great, blustering British Empire, this Empire of truculent bullies, is rushing headlong to its doom.”⁹⁶ With a war in China, a war in Africa, all that would be needed would be a war with India to give the Irish an opportunity to strike.⁹⁷ But Connolly was realistic enough in his assessment of the situation to see that the Irish working class was not yet class conscious enough to avail itself of the opportunity. The working class was divided between Home Rule and Unionism. Another lesson to be learned concerned the aggressive nature of imperialism. Although not an advocate of the use of physical force per se, Connolly realized that as “a small section of the possessing class” was “prepared to launch two nations into war, to shed oceans of blood and spend

millions of treasure, in order to maintain intact a *small portion* of their privileges,”⁹⁸ it was unlikely that the capitalist class as a whole would yield up its entire privileges peacefully.

NOTES

1. *Minutes of the ISRP, 1898–1904*, MS 16264–67, O’Brien Collection, Minutes, 22 April 1897.

2. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 87.

3. A. L. Morton and George Tate, *The British Labour Movement* (London, 1973), 142.

4. O’Brien Collection, MS 17504 (i) “The Early Propagandists of the ISRP Party.”

5. Minutes, 7 January 1897.

6. *Ibid.*, 8 October 1896.

7. MS 15669.

8. Minutes, 6 July 1903.

9. *Workers’ Republic*, February 1901.

10. This is the term Connolly used in an article in the *Workers’ Republic*, (23 June 1900) entitled “Socialism and Revolutionary Tradition.”

11. In her autobiography, Maud Gonne gives a lively account of her nationalist activities, her role in the amnesty movement for the release of Fenian prisoners, and her fight on behalf of evicted tenants. Maud Gonne MacBride, *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences* (London, 1974).

12. MS 13953, Minutes, 7 January 1897.

13. MacBride, *Servant of the Queen*, 186, 198.

14. Minutes, 7 January 1897.

15. MacBride, *Servant of the Queen*, 233, 302.

16. *Workers’ Republic*, April 1901, “Notelets.”

17. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 33–37.

18. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 81. The Young Ireland Societies were literary debating societies with strong republican sympathies.

19. Minutes, 14 March 1897.

20. See, for example, “Socialism and Nationalism,” published in the *Shan Van Vocht*, January 1897, and “Patriotism and Labour,” August 1897.

21. Minutes, 30 September 1896. The Celtic Literary Society was founded by Arthur Griffith’s friend William Rooney either on 3 February 1893, or October 1893. See Anton Großmann, *Irische Nationalbewegungen, 1884–1915* (Munich, 1979), 199.

22. See preface. note 11.

23. León Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858–1924* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976), 86.

24. Großmann, *Irische Nationalbewegungen*, 124.
25. Robert Kee, *The Green Flag*, vol. 2, *The Bold Fenian Men* (London, 1976), 127.
26. Großmann, *Irische Nationalbewegungen*, 128.
27. *Ibid.*, 127. For a full list of the names of the committees in the other counties, see *ibid.*, 298–99, nn. 52, 54.
28. Minutes, 29 April and 4 May 1897; Greaves, *James Connolly*, 88.
29. Under “Home Rulers” is understood the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party or Home Rule Party, both Parnellites and anti-Parnellites, who in 1900 became technically reunited under the chairmanship of John Redmond. See Kee, *Green Flag*, 2:129.
30. As Kee points out, this was “little better than a historical confidence trick.” It was one the party practiced shamelessly (*ibid.*, 128). The reunification process of the Home Rule Party between 1898–1900 was also the result of a fear that the United Irish League, founded by William O’Brien in January 1898 (in commemoration of the ’98 celebrations and supporting the cause of the small farmers) would supplant the divided party in public esteem (F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971], 216, 260).
31. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 98.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Connolly, “The Economic Basis of Politics,” *Workers’ Republic*, 12 August 1899.
34. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 98.
35. *Ibid.*, 99.
36. James Connolly, ed., *’98 Readings: Being a Series of Reprints of the Most Important Literature, Current in Ireland 100 Years Ago, Including the Chief Official Documents of the United Irishmen and Their Writings in Prose and Verse* (Dublin, 1897).
37. James Connolly, “Wolfe Tone and his Admirers,” *Workers’ Republic*, 5 August 1899.
38. A form of tax.
39. Connolly, “Wolfe Tone and his Admirers.”
40. MacBride, *Servant of the Queen*, 273.
41. *Ibid.*, 274.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, 275. Maud Gonne arranged bail for Connolly and all others who had been arrested during the baton charge (*ibid.*, 277).
45. For a more detailed account of the meeting, see Greaves, *James Connolly*, 91–92.
46. *Ibid.*, 99.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, 90–91. Police reports indicate that the organization of the demonstration was carried out by the IRB. In fact,

the Wolfe Tone Memorial Fund Committee was a public organization through which the IRB worked effectively.

49. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 108.
50. MS 13953, *Minutes of the ISRP, 1896–97*, first item in folder 16.
51. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 111.
52. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 42.
53. “Parnellism and Democracy,” *Workers’ Republic*, 7 October 1899.
54. “The United Irish League and its Leader,” *Workers’ Republic*, 9 September 1899.
55. Großmann, *Irische Nationalbewegungen*, 128; Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, 88.
56. *Ibid.*, 89.
57. Government reports show that by the end of 1898 the ’98 centenary clubs had the not inconsiderable membership of 31,000. It was estimated that 513 IRB circles were in existence with a total membership of over 25,000. *Ibid.*, 92.
58. Minutes, 14 August 1899.
59. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin, 1966), 30.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Kee, *Green Flag*, 2:147.
62. *Workers’ Republic*, 30 December 1899 (Diary of the Troubles).
63. MacBride, *Servant of the Queen*, 298.
64. *Ibid.* 291.
65. *Ibid.*, 294.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.* 295
68. *Ibid.*, 291; Kee, *Green Flag*, 2:145.
69. Donald McCartney, “The Sinn Fein Movement,” in *The Making of 1916: Studies in the History of the Rising*, ed. Kevin B. Nowlan (Dublin, 1969), 31.
70. Kee, *The Green Flag*, 2:147.
71. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 117.
72. McCartney, “The Sinn Fein Movement,” 33; Robert M. Henry, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein: A Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine and the Party from Its Inception up to the Period Immediately after the Easter Rising* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1970), 64.
73. Kee, 2:150.
74. *Ibid.*, 155.
75. Henry, *Evolution of Sinn Fein*, 77.
76. McCartney, “The Sinn Fein Movement,” 77.
77. *Ibid.*, 39.
78. *Ibid.*, 33, 35–36.

79. *Workers' Republic*, 23 January 1909.
80. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 87.
81. J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1970), 259.
82. William O'Brien. Letter to Thomas Johnston, 13 May 1917, MS 17238, Thos. Johnston papers.
83. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland*.
84. *Ibid.*, 263.
85. *Ibid.*, 272.
86. *Ibid.*, 268.
87. *Ibid.*, 264–265.
88. Kee, *The Green Flag*, 2: 162. My main sources of information concerning Griffith and Sinn Fein are Henry, *Evolution of Sinn Fein*; Kee, *The Green Flag*, in vol. 2 of which the author dedicates a chapter to “Arthur Griffith and Sinn Fein,” and McCartney, “The Sinn Fein Movement.”
89. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 117.
90. MacBride, *Servant of the Queen*, 297–302.
91. *Workers' Republic*, 30 December 1899.
92. Connolly, “The Roots of Modern War” in *Labour and Easter Week*, 25.
93. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
94. *Ibid.*, 27.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*, 29
97. *Ibid.*, 31.
98. Connolly, “The Roots of Modern War,” in *Labour and Easter Week*, 28. In an article in *Workers' Republic* (22 July 1899), he emphasized that the use or nonuse of physical force “will be determined by the attitude, not of the party of progress, but of the governing class opposed to that party” (*Socialism and Nationalism*, 55).

PART II

Connolly in the United States, 1903–1910

4

The Situation in the United States

Both personal and political considerations determined Connolly's decision to emigrate to the United States. The lack of comrades' solidarity and confidence in his leadership, the years of hardship and deprivation spent in building up a political party that had been virtually ruined by a split within its ranks—all this led Connolly to doubt the progress of socialism in Ireland at this point. His bitter disappointment is revealed in a letter written to William O'Brien from Glasgow shortly before his departure to the United States: "Men have been driven out of Ireland by the British Government, and by the landlords, but I am the first driven forth by the 'Socialists.'"¹ Certainly Connolly went to the United States with no great illusions. His lecture tour of the previous year under the auspices of the Socialist Labor Party had opened his eyes to the situation of U.S. labor. He was disturbed by the general atmosphere of individualism and lawlessness that even affected the trade unions. His comment on the U.S. labor movement at the end of his tour was that the country as a whole was lagging in its conception of the class struggle.² This ran contrary to the opinion of Daniel De Leon, who held that because there was no deterrent to the development of capitalism in the United States, it would be there that the strategic battle between capitalism and socialism would be fought: "America was the country upon which the emancipation of the workers of Europe depended."³ These differences in opinion were to be the preliminary to the later theoretical conflict between De Leon and Connolly.

Manifold letters written by Connolly to socialist comrades in England and Ireland, as well as the biographical works of his

daughters, reveal that he never felt at home in the United States; he regarded it rather as a place of exile, of banishment. Looking back in 1909, he confessed in a letter to William O'Brien that he regarded his emigration to the United States as "the great mistake" of his life, which he had never ceased to regret.⁴ It is impossible to estimate what progress the socialist movement would have made in Ireland had Connolly remained. Certainly the situation to which he returned in 1910 was to prove more positive than when he left in 1903. In spite of Connolly's own negative attitude to his years in the United States, his contribution to the young labor movement there, both as socialist propagandist and as an organizer of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), was significant. Moreover, the U.S. years brought a certain maturing in Connolly's political thought. Carl and Ann Barton Reeve explain that Connolly "was tempered and strengthened in the fire of the De Leon controversies."⁵ Connolly's writings on industrial unionism undoubtedly influenced the growth of the Shop Stewards' Movement in Scotland, which played a leading role in the period of large strikes during World War I. James MacManus and Tom Bell—later cofounders of the Communist Party of Great Britain—and the Scottish Socialist Labour Party supporters revered Connolly and were familiar with his writings.⁶ The British syndicalist, Tom Mann, who played a leading role in the four years of industrial unrest before the first world war, had read Connolly's "Socialism Made Easy," and his own paper, *The Industrial Syndicalist* (July 1910–May 1911), echoes much of Connolly's thoughts on industrial unionism.⁷

Connolly's political writings of this period are dominated by two main themes: his controversy with Daniel De Leon around the question of wages, marriage, and the Church, in which he attacked the sectarianism of De Leon's stand on political and trade-union issues, and Connolly's theories on industrial unionism, developed through his contact with and active participation in the IWW. A shift of emphasis can be discerned as Connolly becomes more preoccupied with the U.S. situation. The themes that formed the nucleus of his earlier writings in the *Shan Van Vocht* and *Workers' Republic*, which could be collected under

the title of *socialist republicanism*, are replaced by themes that are of immediate relevance to the U.S. working class, and in some respects are peculiar to the economic and political development of the United States. On the three main issues he followed, Connolly pursued a “broad alliance” course that brought him into conflict not only with De Leon personally, but with the policies of De Leon’s Socialist Labor Party (SLP), finally leading to his break with the party in 1908.

The controversy erupted over a letter entitled “Wages, Marriage and the Church” that Connolly sent to the *Weekly People*, 23 March 1904. The most important issue concerned the role of the trade unions. Connolly attacked Lassalle’s theory of the “iron law of wages,” which basically denied the utility of economic action on the part of the working class. According to this theory, strikes are useless: the workers do not benefit from even a temporary rise in wages, as every rise in wages is offset by a rise in prices. Connolly maintained, “The theory that a rise in prices always destroys the value of a rise in wages might sound very revolutionary, of course, but it is not true.”⁸

Basing his argument on the theory of Marx in *Value, Price and Profit*, Connolly pointed out that economic crises in capitalist society are not offset by a rise in wages. The laws regulating wages are extremely complicated, varying with circumstances, overproduction leading to unemployment and further crises. The protagonists of the Lassallean position failed to see that “exploitation takes place in the work-shop, and affects the workingman as producer, not as consumer.”⁹ Such a position, as Connolly well knew, disregarded the historic role of the trade unions in working-class struggle, in the maintenance of the rate of wages, in the reduction of the working day, and in the general tendency to raise the standard of living of the working class by wringing concessions from the employers.¹⁰

The other two issues, marriage and religion, will be dealt with in some detail in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that Connolly was concerned with the fact that the propaganda of the SLP and the *Weekly People* was becoming increasingly anti-religious in content and sentiment. He criticized the paper for

attacking the antisocialism of clergymen by questioning their theology rather than their “economic absurdities.” Connolly was convinced the paper was alienating the mass of Catholic workers from socialism with its constant attacks on Catholicism.

Of more direct relevance to the Irish situation, insofar as they directed Connolly’s political activities after his return to Ireland, are his contact with the IWW and his own evolving theories on industrial unionism. One of Connolly’s early biographers, Richard M. Fox, comments, “Probably the biggest single contribution which the American years brought was to give him a complete grasp of the theory and practice of industrial unionism in its early militant phase.”¹¹ The founding of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago, 27 June 1905, was a response, in the first place, to economic developments in the United States—the growth of monopoly capitalism. By the beginning of the century, huge trusts had been established, threatening the existence of small business. Finance capital dominated the basic industries. Economic upheaval brought with it mass unemployment and wage-cuts. As the Reeves explain:

Large armies of unemployed became a fact of daily life and breadlines and demonstrations of the unemployed were common. Bitter strikes against wage-cuts and lay-offs were the order of the day. Hundreds of workers were being killed, for lack of safety devices on the job. Workers were shot down, clubbed, and jailed frequently by the National Guard, to break up picket lines.¹²

In face of this, the American Federation of Labor,¹³ under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, pursued a policy of conciliation and collaboration with industrialists. Moreover, all unions organized under the AFL were craft unions that exacted high initiation fees from their members and excluded all but skilled and native-born workers. The great majority of workers in the United States (estimated as at least twenty million by Bill Haywood, chairperson at the IWW Founding Convention) were unorganized, completely at the mercy of big industry.¹⁴

The IWW was formed as a challenge by the working class to the power of the trusts and as a counteraction to the corruption of the AFL leadership. The organization of industrial unions was seen as the only appropriate weapon of the working class; craft unionism was outdated. From its foundation the IWW made it clear that it was out to organize the mass of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the foreign-born, and the African Americans; it based itself on class struggle, pointing to socialism as the only solution for workers; and it was not affiliated with any political party.¹⁵ It is interesting that from the outset the idea was to form a new central body into which new and existing unions could be admitted, but not to form rival unions—a policy of “boring from within” the established unions. This was the general policy of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in dealing with the IWW and conflicted with De Leon’s policy of “dual unionism,” i.e., building a separate economic organization that finally should move “under the protecting guns of a labor political party.”¹⁶

Growing opposition in the IWW to political action came to a head at the 1909 Chicago convention when the “political” clause was deleted from the preamble of the Constitution, thus severing the IWW organizationally from the socialist parties (SLP and SPA). The syndicalists wanted to remove De Leon and the SLP from a position of influence in the organization, but this move led to a split, a DeLeonite IWW being set up with headquarters in Detroit, in opposition to the Chicago IWW.¹⁷

The hostility to political action within the IWW was undoubtedly due in part to the sectarianism displayed by the DeLeonite SLP, but it was also a reaction to the policies of opportunism and class collaboration. Opposition to the political state and to all forms of authority, a tendency toward anarchy in the IWW, and a view of industrial action as the only effective means of achieving socialism were nurtured by the suppression of strikes by the state. Moreover, the vast majority of IWW members were foreign-born and migratory workers without the right to vote: “They were politically a negligible quantity.”¹⁸

NOTES

1. Sean Cronin, *Young Connolly* (Dublin, 1978), 91.
2. Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States: The Road to the 1916 Irish Rebellion* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978), 41.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Letter from Connolly to O'Brien, 24 May 1909 (*ibid.*, 182).
5. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 114.
6. *Ibid.*, 150. Connolly was a founder and the first chairperson of the Scottish SLP.
7. *Ibid.*, 151.
8. Manus O'Riordan, *Connolly in America* (Belfast, 1971), 16. See also Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 52.
9. *Ibid.*, 54.
10. For a detailed analysis of Connolly's position on this point, see the chapter "Are Strikes Useless?" in Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*; and his clash with De Leon (*ibid.* 51–63). See also O'Riordan, *Connolly*, 16, 22–25. Marx's critique of the "iron law of wages," can be found in the section of his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in vol. 24 of *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 75–99 (New York: International Publishers, 1989).
11. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 114.
12. *Ibid.*, 106.
13. The AFL was founded in Pittsburgh, 15 November 1881, by six craft unions and soon managed to oust the Knights of Labor (founded in 1869) as the major national labor federation. See William Z. Foster, *Outline History of the World Trade Union Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1956), 14.
14. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 107.
15. *Ibid.*; Paul F. Brissenden, *The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York, 1957), 63.
16. *Ibid.*, 82.
17. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 140.
18. *Ibid.*, 148.

5

Connolly as Organizer of the IWW and Its Propaganda Leagues

Connolly's biographer Richard M. Fox points out that Connolly's paramount interest on coming to the United States was in socialist theory—a result, no doubt, of the position of the Irish Socialist Republican Party.¹ Because of its size, it had had little influence on the shaping of practical politics in Ireland in a socialist direction. Thus the function of its members was largely a propagandist one—the disseminating of socialist and radical republican ideas. Connolly's experiences in the IWW were to develop his qualities as organizer along the practical lines of socialism and were to prove to be of utmost importance to him later in the labor struggles in Ireland and in the organization of the Easter Rising.

Working as organizer for the IWW District Council of New York, Connolly developed an effective strike strategy. This work brought him face to face with the leaders of the AFL, who tried to block the development of industrial unionism. Connolly devoted his time to organizing, lecturing, touring, and writing in the cause of industrial unionism. His "Notes from New York," published in the *Industrial Union Bulletin*, bear witness to the difficulties of union organizing, of convincing the workers of the weaknesses of the craft unions. The unions in the building trades in the city were all craft unions, and Connolly considered craft unionism an obstacle to the amelioration of working conditions. He also argued that the carpenters should strike at the beginning of a busy season and "not at the beginning of the slack season with its lay-offs."²

Although at this period Connolly supported the IWW policy of "dual unionism" (the setting up of the IWW as a rival

organization to the AFL), he was nevertheless anxious to prevent the IWW following sectarian lines. Connolly saw the promotion of Propaganda Leagues as essential to the spreading of industrial unionism. While the Leagues fully supported the activities of the IWW, they gave nonwage workers and the wives of union members the opportunity of actively supporting the workers in the labor struggles, as well as offering a broad platform for various clubs, associations, and ethnic organizations to assist in IWW propaganda work. At the Chicago Convention of 1908, Connolly succeeded in having the Leagues approved by Convention.³ At this point Connolly had become disenchanted with the activities of the Socialist Labor Party and its leader, Daniel De Leon. Writing to Matheson, 30 January 1908, he explained his disappointment at the growing sectarianism of the organization. “Such a party, John, is in my opinion a fraud and a disgrace to the revolutionary movement.”⁴

After resigning from the SLP, he joined the Socialist Party of America in the same year (1908). One of the reasons for Connolly’s change in attitude toward the party was the growth and cohesion of the left-wing elements. Although aware of its weaknesses, he was convinced that the SPA had the makings of a mass socialist party.⁵

NOTES

1. Richard Michael Fox, *James Connolly: The Forerunner* (Tralee, Ireland: Kerryman, 1946), 82.

2. Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States: The Road to the 1916 Irish Rebellion* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978), 117. For more detailed information on Connolly’s IWW activities see *ibid.*, 114–21.

3. *Ibid.*, 133–34.

4. *Ibid.*, 132.

5. *Ibid.*, 153.

6

Industrial Unionism and Socialist Activity

Connolly's own ideas on industrial unionism are to be found in his writings of the period. His pamphlet *Socialism Made Easy* expounds his position most clearly. Originally published in Chicago in 1909, it consisted of two parts. The first part "Workshop Talks," taken from the early satirical columns, "Home Thrusts" in the *Workers' Republic*, is in the form of question and answer, while the second part, articles on industrial unionism, is "serious throughout."¹

Industrial unionism must be examined under two aspects: the *economic aspect* covers the function of the "One Big Union" in advanced capitalist society as the direct antithesis of craft unions and as the most effective weapon of the working class against the growing menace of trusts. The *political aspect* concerns the role of the union in the formation of a socialist form of society.

Connolly explains the two principles in an article entitled "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" (February 1910). He says:

These two principles are: First that the working class as a class cannot become permeated with a belief in the unity of their class interests unless they have first been trained to a realisation of the need of industrial unity; second, that the revolutionary act—the act of taking over the means of production and establishing a social order based upon the principles of the working class (labour) cannot be achieved by a disorganised, defeated and humiliated working class, but must be the work of that class after it has attained to a commanding position on the field of economic struggle.²

Concerning the organizational form of the industrial union, Connolly explains that the general policy was to organize the workers, not according to their trades, but according to industry. The industrial unions were to become amalgamated in the “One Big Union”:

The workers in the shops and factories will organize themselves into unions, each union comprising all the workers at a given industry, that said union will democratically control the workshop life of its own industry.³

To Connolly, industrial unity was “the most cohesive and unifying force” in the labor movement.⁴ “Industrialism is more than a method of organisation,” he said, “it is a science of fighting. It says to the worker: fight only at the time you select, never when the boss wants a fight.”⁵

In contrast to the AFL which upheld the old conservative practice of “craft unionism,” and thus catered solely to the interests of the skilled workers, the IWW drew the mass of unskilled laborers to its fold.

The industrial union, according to Connolly, was, moreover, to be both the embryo of the new socialist society and the revolutionary instrument for achieving it:

It prepares within the framework of capitalist society the working forms of the Socialist Republic, and thus while increasing the resisting power of the worker against present encroachments of the capitalist class it familiarizes him with the idea that the union he is helping to build up is destined to supplant that class in the control of the industry in which he is employed.⁶

Connolly rejects the form of the political state. “The political state of capitalism,” he writes, “has no place under Socialism, therefore measures which aim to place industries in the hands of or under the control of such a political state are in no sense steps towards that ideal; they are but useful measures to restrict the greed of capitalism and to familiarize the workers with the conception of common ownership.”⁷ The function of industrial

unionism “is to build up an industrial republic inside the shell of the political State, in order that when that republic is fully organized it may crack the shell of the political State and step into its place in the scheme of the universe.”⁸

The term *syndicalism*, as will be used here, is the form that developed in the United States. It is not entirely identifiable with the French form of syndicalism that first evolved at the end of the nineteenth century, the main feature of which was the notion that the emancipation of the working class could be brought about by revolutionary industrial action alone. Political action and parliament were dismissed as “a waste of time and energy.”⁹ The main propagator of this form of syndicalism in Great Britain was Tom Mann, who set up the Industrial Syndicalist League in 1911. British syndicalists were, generally speaking, concerned with immediate social questions and not with the distant future, more interested in the methods and tactics of class struggle rather than with the actual establishment of a socialist society.¹⁰

For the syndicalist, the state is an autonomous power, and its centralized bureaucratic organizations have developed their own peculiar forms of suppression. The capitalist conditions of production and industrial organization form the basis of syndicalist theory. Both parliamentary legislative and state executive powers are of secondary importance. Hence, according to Connolly, the historically evolved forms of “states, territories or provinces” will not exist in socialist society as “sources of governmental power” but only as “seats of administrative bodies.”¹¹ In this respect, Connolly’s theory differs from that of the guild socialists, which, while recognizing the state in its present form as an instrument of suppression, at the same time sees the future state as a democratic institution of administration.¹² Guild socialism, according to Kuda, combines both syndicalist and Marxist theoretical structures: Marxist in the sense that it recognizes the dependence of the state on the economy and regards it as an organization of suppression; syndicalist in the sense that it places economic power before political power. It sees primacy of the downfall of the capitalist form of economy above the political conquest of the class state.¹³ Thus, like the syndicalists, the guild

socialists argued that the new society was to be organized primarily along industrial lines.¹⁴

In the United States certain objective conditions were conducive to the development of syndicalism. Within the IWW, opinions varied from those who completely rejected politics as an effective revolutionary weapon (anarcho-syndicalists) to Connolly, who, as a “semi-syndicalist,” still advocated the use of political action although renegating it to a secondary position. In her memorandum, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn states that between 1860 and 1914 more than fifty-three million immigrants came to the United States, a great number of whom remained disfranchised and thus outside the political process.¹⁵ The vast working-class African American population of the South was deprived of the right to vote, and a general mistrust of politics was evident. In “Socialism Made Easy,” Connolly downgrades the political struggle. “The fight for the conquest of the political state,” he says, “is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is the battle being fought out every day for the power to control industry.”¹⁶ Action at the ballot box is important, but only as an accompaniment to action in the workshop. Thus, the workers’ party is not the vanguard of the socialist movement, as its function is not to accomplish the revolution “but only to lead the attack upon the political citadel of capitalism.”¹⁷ It is no longer necessary to insist on its purification and clearness of membership.¹⁸

Connolly sums up his position thus:

One Socialist party embracing all shades and conceptions of Socialist political thought. One Socialist Industrial organization drilling the working class for the supreme mission of their class—the establishment of the Worker’s Republic.¹⁹

In “Socialism Made Easy,” Connolly expounds his theories of industrial unionism, but in his other writings of the same period, he makes contradictory statements concerning the role and composition of the socialist party—an indication of his own uncertainty about the function of syndicalism. For example, in an

article in the *Harp*, June 1908, he reiterates the vanguard role of the socialist party. It is that part of the movement “which comprehends the whole line of march, in the midst of the interests of the moment takes care of the interests of the whole, and pushes on all sections of the working class.”²⁰ In the first part of “Socialism Made Easy,” Connolly reprints an earlier article from the *Workers’ Republic* that places the importance of political action before economic:

The men who tell us that Labor Questions, for instance, have nothing to do with politics, understand neither the one nor the other. The Labor Question cannot be settled except by measures which necessitate a revision of the whole system of society, which, of course, implies political warfare to secure the power to effect such revision.²¹

How the mission of unionism “to take hold of the industrial equipment of society” is to be achieved is not clear from Connolly’s writings. Does he advocate the weapon of the general strike as the prelude to the establishment of a socialist form of society? In an article entitled “Ballots, Bullets, Or—,” written in October 1909,²² Connolly questions the effectiveness of socialists winning a majority in parliamentary elections, as the capitalist class had both the legislative and military apparatus in its hands that could be used to prevent the socialists forming a government. It is not here a question of the working class as hegemonic force winning support and consent from strata not yet detached from the old social order (e.g., Connolly did not consider the possibility of winning support from certain sections of the armed forces). This is understandable, as he was aware of the police and military brutality exercised against striking workers in the interests of the capitalist class. To his mind, the most effective weapon of the workers was the total economic boycott, in fact, the general strike.

Connolly’s activities in the United States opened up new dimensions for the development of his political thought. His dedication to industrial unionism, resulting from his own experiences, was to be of extreme importance to the trade-union

movement in Ireland after his return in 1910. The contradictions in his writings concerning the political struggle are an indication that despite his ardent advocacy of industrial unionism, Connolly never rejected political action. It was to occupy his attention more and more after his return to Ireland.

Connolly's disillusionment with the SLP as a revolutionary organization is revealed in a letter to the Scottish socialist Matheson, 30 June 1908. He considered it to have become a sterile, elitist organization, completely dominated by the personality and dogma of De Leon. He was bitter, moreover, at the personal attacks directed against him by De Leon, attempting to damn him "forever in the eyes of the revolutionary working-class as a disrupter and spy."²³ Connolly drew consequences and left the SLP and advised more tolerance concerning the attitude of socialists to working within and with other working-class organizations. Thus he justifies his joining the Socialist Party of America by explaining that in spite of compromising elements in the party there was nevertheless room for "revolutionary clear-cut elements" to work. "Now it was a long time before I felt that it was better to be one of the revolutionary minority inside the party than a mere discontented grumbler out of political life entirely."²⁴ It was the policy of "digging from within," this time applied to the political organization of the working class.

Connolly was very much concerned with the attitude of Irish socialists in the United States to their own class and cultural traditions, that an integration into U.S. society should not imply a break with ethnic ties. He was convinced that by revealing to these socialists the history and present situation of the labor movement in Ireland, the past contribution of the Irish to American independence, he would gain the sympathy and support for the cause of socialism in Ireland. Thus he helped form the Irish Socialist Federation (ISF), 29 March 1907, not with the purpose of splitting the political socialist movement into ethnic groups, but rather of educating the Irish-Americans in the principles of socialism and thereby strengthening the American socialist movement.²⁵ Thus the purpose of the Federation was mainly propagandistic—to oppose "capitalist organizations of

Irish-America,”²⁶ to give support to the Irish labor movement. The Federation, for example, became affiliated with the Socialist Party of Ireland, and arrangements for joint publishing and distributing of Connolly’s writings were made, to carry on education in Irish history.²⁷

The declaration of principles of the ISF was published in the *Harp*, February 1908. It set out “to educate the working-class Irish of this country (United States) into a knowledge of Socialist principles and to prepare them to cooperate with the workers of all other races, colors and nationalities in the emancipation of labor.”²⁸

In her autobiography, *The Rebel Girl*, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, whose father was one of the founding members of the ISF, gives a moving account of Connolly’s dedicated work for the Federation:

It was a pathetic sight to see him standing, poorly clad, at the door of Cooper Union or some other East Side Hall, selling his little paper. None of the professional Irish, who shouted their admiration for him after his death, lent him a helping hand at that time. Jim Connolly was anathema to them because he was a “socialist.”²⁹

The paper to which she refers is the *Harp*, organ of the ISF, the first issue of which appeared in January 1908. The paper contained satirical articles on U.S. “liberty” and a panorama of class struggle on the United States, as well as Connolly’s ideas on industrial unionism and political action, information on the Irish socialist movement, and comments on the Irish cultural revival.

NOTES

1. James Connolly, *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (London: Cape, 1973), 244.

2. James Connolly, *The Workers’ Republic* (Dublin, 1950), 75.

3. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 272–73.

4. See “Industrialism and the Trade Unions” in Connolly, *Workers’ Republic*, 85.

5. *Ibid.*, 84.

6. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 274–75.
7. *Ibid.*, 274.
8. *Ibid.*, 283.
9. Branko Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control, 1910–22* (Oxford, 1959), 16.
10. *Ibid.*, 17.
11. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 274.
12. See Rudolf Kuda, *Arbeiterkontrolle in Großbritannien, Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), 27.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Pribicevic, *Shop Stewards' Movement*, 2.
15. See Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States: The Road to the 1916 Rebellion* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1978), 148.
16. “Socialism Made Easy” in Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 280.
17. *Ibid.*, 289.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Manus O’Riordan, *Connolly in America* (Belfast, 1971), 73.
21. Connolly, *Selected Political Writings*, 251.
22. Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 63–68.
23. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 132.
24. *Ibid.*, 154.
25. See C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Cape, 1972), 202.
26. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 85.
27. *Ibid.*, 87.
28. *Ibid.*, 88.
29. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1973).

Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*

Although Connolly's major work, *Labour in Irish History*, was published in book form after his return to Ireland, it had appeared in instalments in the *Harp*, the last issue of the paper in June 1910 carrying the last chapter. In the book's foreword Connolly comments: "We believe that this book, attempting to depict the attitude of the dispossessed masses of the Irish people in the great crisis of modern Irish history, may justly be looked upon as part of the literature of the Gaelic revival."¹ As Robert Lynd remarks in his appreciation of Connolly, "*Labour in Irish History* is a bold and powerful attempt to write a chapter of history that had never been written before."²

This work underlines Connolly's standpoint as an Irish socialist, aware as he was of the significant role of the long tradition of republicanism in the realization of the Irish road to socialism. Here the attempt is made to show that the development of a national self-consciousness in Ireland was not only the fruit of circumstances—the result of centuries of oppression—but in itself this consciousness was an active agent, *the* factor helping to create the historical Irish nation. *Labour in Irish History* is based on the materialist conception of history, applied here specifically to the struggles of the Irish people.

Connolly makes no claim to writing an academic history of labor in Ireland. "This book," he writes, "does not aspire to be a history of labour in Ireland: it is rather a record of labour in Irish history."³ It is an attempt to place Irish history in its proper perspective, to rescue it from the monopoly of those nationalists who would have us believe that the basis of Ireland's oppression lies alone in her forced political union with Britain. From the beginning, Connolly makes his position clear: he is writing Irish

history from the point of view of the working class, because “Irish history has ever been written by the master class—in the interests of the master class.”⁴ In this work he proposes to reveal the “almost total indifference of our Irish politicians to the sufferings of the mass of the people,” and “to repair the deliberate neglect of her social question by our historians and to prepare the way in order that other and abler pens than our own may demonstrate to the reading public the manner in which economic conditions have controlled and dominated our Irish history.”⁵

The book is based on two propositions. First:

That in the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must, perforce, keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation, and that the shifting of the economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservation of the non-working class element, and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class.

Second, the Irish middle class

have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism as against every sentimental or historic attachment drawing them towards Irish patriotism; only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for Irish freedom.⁶

Connolly’s work has a didactic purpose. By studying the position of the Irish laboring classes of the past, he believes his book will give guidance to “the movement of the Irish working class to-day.”⁷ Using the “key” of historical materialism, Connolly sets out to analyze the crucial stages of Irish history by examining the prevailing method of economic production and exchange in each epoch, and the class relationships arising from this. As Connolly explains, his examination necessarily entails an explanation of the “position of Labour in the great epochs of our modern history,” and “the attitude of Irish leaders towards

the hopes, aspirations and necessities of those who live by labour."⁸

Ancient Irish society was based on communal or tribal ownership, but with the forcible breakup of the clan system in 1649, Irish society was finally dominated by an imposed "privately owned system of capitalist landlordism."⁹ Connolly is aware that some form of feudalism would have developed, even had Ireland remained independent, but being imposed by armed force such a system met with the bitter opposition of the vast majority of the Irish people. The struggle against the domination of the British ruling class in Ireland was taken up by the expanding Irish middle class, and Connolly underlines the fact that Irish patriotic movements, generally speaking, became "simply idealised expressions of middle class interest."¹⁰ The laboring classes were deceived into believing that the struggle of the Irish people lay merely on the ideological level, that it was outside the range of their "class interests." "War, religion, race, language, political reform, patriotism—apart from whatever intrinsic merits they may possess—all serve in the hands of the possessing class as counter-irritants."¹¹

In the subsequent chapters, Connolly places before his readers the facts upon which his view of Irish history is based. His starting point is the Williamite wars of 1691, as he believes that modern Irish history began with the close of those wars. "All the political life of Ireland during the next 200 years draws its colouring from and can only be understood in the light of that conflict between King James of England and the claimant to his throne, William, Prince of Orange."¹² Connolly's main point is that the Irish common people, who fought on both sides, materially gained nothing from the war. He illustrates how the Jacobite leaders betrayed the rights of the Irish people. They were only interested in retaining the land they had already stolen from the common people.

Likewise, the Protestant William of Orange had no interest in the condition of his followers—the Protestant "tillers of the soil." It was a war of private property rights, and the victorious

William “confiscated a million and a half acres, and distributed them among the aristocratic plunderers who followed him.”¹³ Irish peasants of both persuasions were on the losing side.

Whereas much literature has been written on the Penal Laws in operation against the Catholics at that time, Connolly stresses that the prevailing economic conditions brought infinitely more hardship and suffering to the peasant population than the Penal Laws could ever have inflicted. He outlines the economic circumstances in the eighteenth century that rendered tillage farming unprofitable for the large landowners. The subsequent turning over of large areas of arable land into sheep walks or grazing lands led to mass evictions of the Irish peasants. The springing up of numerous peasant secret societies, such as the “Whiteboys,” Connolly attributes to the desperate economic plight of the Irish peasantry, and he underlines the attitude of the ruling classes who did everything in their power to suppress those societies.

The agrarian struggles were not limited to the southern part of Ireland. In the north, the Protestant peasants organized to resist compulsory road repairing through the landlords’ estates. It is against this background of agrarian struggle that Connolly depicts the historical period popularly known as “Grattan’s parliament.” Again he goes to the root of the matter: the period of prosperity under Grattan was one of “capitalistic prosperity,” but not for the laboring classes. This economic prosperity Connolly attributes not to the existence of a separate Irish parliament that had wrung certain concessions from the British parliament, but rather to commercial inflation due to the “introduction of mechanical improvements into the staple industries of the country.”¹⁴ Hence it was not the loss of this parliament which destroyed Irish manufacture, but economic causes—Irish manufactures without an indigenous coal supply could not compete with their rivals in England. To illustrate his point, Connolly takes the example of Scotland, which, like Ireland, had been deprived of self-government. The reason why Scottish manufacture advanced, while that of Ireland decayed, lay in the simple

fact that "Scotland possessed a native coal supply which Ireland lacked."¹⁵

Connolly stresses that Grattan's parliament was a parliament of capitalists and that "Mr. Grattan was the ideal capitalist statesman; his spirit was the spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate."¹⁶ Thus it was that the democratic ideals of the Volunteers, including the demand for popular representation in Parliament, were frustrated by the Irish ruling class.

The chapters on the United Irishmen form the crux of the book. Here Connolly wishes to state the principles of the United Irishmen in order to show the wrong direction taken by "latter day Irish revolutionaries." He brings out a contrast to "patriots" of his own day whose activities have perpetuated the separation of the democracy of Ireland into warring religious factions. Wolfe Tone, as he points out, "built up his hopes upon a successful prosecution of a class war."¹⁷ Connolly quotes extensively from documents of the Society of the United Irishmen to underline their basic principles of democracy, as he feels duty-bound to reveal the true nature of the United Irishmen. In the past, middle-class "patriotic" historians had distorted their writings, songs, and manifestos, completely covering up the radical revolutionary nature of the movement. Connolly underlines the fact that Wolfe Tone was an internationalist, which made him all the more dangerous to the ruling class because he advocated his principles as part of the creed of the democracy of the world.

Connolly depicts the next epoch, the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as "a period of political darkness, or unbridled despotism and reaction" in Ireland as well as in the rest of Europe.¹⁸ Against the economic and political background of the period that saw an intensification of agrarian struggle in the form of the so-called Ribbon conspiracy, "a secret agricultural trades union of labourers and cottier farmers,"¹⁹ Connolly reveals the significance of the writings of the first Irish socialist, William Thompson, completely neglected by historians. According to Connolly, Thompson predated Marx in his insistence on the subjugation of labor as the cause of all social misery and in his

analysis of the true definition of capital. Connolly quotes the following passage from William Thompson's "An Inquiry into the principles of the distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness as applied to the newly proposed System of the Voluntary Equality of Wealth," published in 1824:

As long as the accumulated capital of society remains in one set of hands, and the productive power of creating wealth remains in another, the accumulated capital will . . . be made use of to counteract the natural laws of distribution, and to deprive the producers of the use of what their labour has produced.²⁰

In Connolly's estimation, Thompson's position "in the development of socialism as a science lies . . . midway between the utopianism of the early idealists and the historical materialism of Marx," for although Thompson recognized class war as a fact, "he did not recognise it as a factor, as *the* factor in the evolution of society towards freedom. This was reserved for Marx, and in our opinion is his chief and crowning glory."²¹ One could perhaps question Connolly's assessment of Thompson as being a forerunner of Marx. In one respect, Thompson and indeed other utopian socialists were *ahead* of Marx and other socialists of that later period in their ideas on the emancipation of women. Connolly does point out that Thompson was in favor of political rights for women,²² but this is only one aspect of the complex question that occupied the early Irish socialist.

In the following chapter, the cooperative experiment at Ralahine, which involved the setting up of a socialist colony, is important to Connolly as a lesson to future socialists in the importance of the cooperative movement as the framework and basis of a free Ireland. He aptly calls it "an Irish Utopia," for as an isolated experiment under the prevailing social conditions in Ireland, it was bound to fail.

In keeping with his exposé of Irish leaders of the middle class, Connolly places the "fame" of Daniel O'Connell, the so-called "Liberator," in its historical perspective. He points out that the leadership of O'Connell brought little real benefit to the mass

of the Irish people, since Catholic emancipation benefited only the Catholic "middle, professional and landed class." O'Connell's Repeal movement is depicted against a background of agrarian unrest unleashed by the social and economic oppression of the Irish peasantry. Connolly reveals the abandonment of the Clontarf monster meeting by O'Connell as a betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish common people. Moreover, O'Connell is depicted as "the most bitter and unscrupulous enemy of trade unionism Ireland has yet produced."²³ In order to reveal the reactionary nature of O'Connell's opposition, as a Westminster M.P., to the Factory Act of 1833, Connolly spends some time describing the working conditions of the English working class of the period.

Connolly depicts the Young Irelanders movement against the background of the horrors of the Famine. He states bluntly: "England made the Famine by a rigid application of the economic principles that lie at the base of capitalist society."²⁴ The lack of understanding by the Young Ireland leaders about the fate of the Irish peasantry can be seen in their "preaching the moral righteousness of rebellion, and discoursing learnedly in English to a starving people, most of whom knew only Irish."²⁵ As a body, the Young Irelanders did not advocate those things that would have brought immediate alleviation to the situation of the peasantry, such as refusal to pay rents, and the retention of crops to feed their own families. Connolly makes a clear distinction between the majority and the radical minority in the movement, notably Fintan Lalor and John Mitchel, who realized the urgency of a social and national revolution.

Again the mass of the Irish people was betrayed by their middle-class leadership. In contrast, Connolly underlines the broad social and democratic sympathies of Mitchel and Lalor and another Irish revolutionary, Devin Reilly, who declared their solidarity with the struggles of the workers in England and France. Connolly resurrects the writings of Mitchel and Lalor, which had already sunk into oblivion. In keeping with his contention that socialism in Ireland was not a foreign import, he devotes a chapter to Irish socialist pioneers. In fact, a very

important aspect of labor history was the contribution of Irish working-class exiles to the labor movement in Great Britain. Not only does he mention the names of Fergus O'Connor and James Bronterre O'Brien, leaders of the Chartist movement in England, but also a much less known "Irish apostle of the Socialist movement of the working class"—John Doherty.²⁶ He appears to have been a dominant figure in the labor movements of Ireland and England between 1830 and 1840. Connolly's conclusion is that "the effect upon the English Labour movement of the great influx of Irish workers seems to us to have been beneficial," in spite of the fact that their competition for employment had a serious effect upon wages. But they were always "the advanced, the least compromising, the most irreconcilable element in the movement."²⁷

The final chapter of this book relates the rise of the Fenian movement to the social struggles of the Irish working class. In fact, it is a substantiation of his thesis that "every attempt at political rebellion in Ireland was always preceded by a remarkable development of unrest, discontent and class consciousness amongst their [i.e., Catholic and Protestant workmen] members, demonstrating clearly that to the mind of the thoughtful Irish worker, political and social subjection was very nearly related."²⁸ Thus, with the inception of Fenianism in 1857, a determined labor agitation commenced in Ireland. In order to demonstrate how this labor agitation was related to the economic situation of the Irish working class, Connolly quotes from Marx's *Capital*. He ends his book underlining the main point that the Irish question is a social question—"the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production in Ireland."²⁹

On the whole, Connolly's book presents us with an overall picture of Irish history that is radically different from the conventional view. British imperialism in Ireland is to him not merely armed occupation, but is an expression of a highly developed form of capitalism that was supported by a large section of the Irish capitalist class. Historical materialism is the key to the

understanding of the Irish question, for "without this key to unravel the actions of "great men," Irish history is but a welter of unrelated facts, a hopeless chaos of sporadic outbreaks, treacheries, intrigues, massacres, murders, and purposeless warfare."³⁰

To a certain extent it seems strange that Connolly should have ended his account with the Fenian movement. The significance of the Irish Land League, which based its aim on agrarian struggle, is barely mentioned, and the socialist tendencies of its revolutionary leader, Michael Davitt, are not considered. Davitt is mentioned briefly.³¹ Connolly, nevertheless, assesses the achievement of the Land League accurately—the significance of the coming together of revolutionary nationalism and labor:

When the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League, and made the land struggle the basis of their warfare, they were . . . consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of labour.³²

It must be remembered that Connolly entered politics at a time when Parnellism was at its height and the labor movement was surging forward, and he had placed great hope in the unification of national and socialist elements in the Land League. Connolly is silent on Parnell, on his being hounded to death by all the reactionary forces in Ireland, and the betrayal by the liberal leader Gladstone and old guard liberals who feared the growth of a popular movement in Ireland under Parnell's leadership. This possibly shows Connolly's feelings as he witnessed the wrecking of a movement on which he had placed so much hope. It is also possible that an analysis of Parnell as political leader lay outside the scope of *Labour in Irish History*, as one of the book's main functions was to expose the true role of Irish politicians of the past as upholders of the capitalist system of exploitation. In the latter years of his political career, Parnell increasingly turned to the working class.³³

The seeds of destruction and corruption sown within the Irish National Land League are described vividly by Connolly. With

the downfall of Parnell, the conservative elements in the Land League reestablish their control, and the Irish businessmen in Great Britain came to the front and succeeded in worming their way into all the places of trust and leadership in the Irish organization. Many Irish people left the Irish National League (successor to the National Land League) in disgust and joined socialist organizations and the rising trade-union movement. Irish politicians succeeded in influencing the mass of Irish voters against socialism in an attempt to keep a union of Irish patriotism and socialist activity out of Ireland.

Connolly's analysis of Grattan's parliament and Daniel O'Connell is slightly one-sided, as he underestimates the positive aspects of these periods. In spite of its many weaknesses, Grattan's parliament maintained, to a certain extent, economic independence from Britain. As Greaves explains:

Merchant capital was finding its way into industry, and it would be wrong to deny the effect of the protectionist measures adopted by Grattan's parliament. . . . While Connolly was quite correct to trace the economic motivation of the Irish capitalists, he was on less certain ground in denying progressive significance to their political demands.³⁴

When one considers Connolly's analysis of Grattan and O'Connell, two points must be taken into account. The negative aspects of the attitude of Grattan and O'Connell toward the working people had been purposely neglected by bourgeois historians, and therefore a certain didactical purpose lies behind Connolly's analysis. The period in which Connolly wrote *Labour in Irish History* was a stage in the evolution of his political thought, and he had not at that time reached the position he was to uphold in Easter Week 1916. His syndicalist scepticism is revealed in the rather one-sided conclusion, referring also to Grattan's parliament: "The Irish toilers from hence forward will base their right for freedom not upon the winning or losing the right to talk in an Irish Parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops and farms

upon which a people's bread and liberties depend."³⁵ His attitude at this stage was, to a large extent, that only the Irish working class could be relied on in the struggle against imperialism. *Labour in Irish History* is a reflection of that position.

Both Bernard Ransom and John Hoffman argue correctly, I think, in their analyses of *Labour in Irish History*, that Connolly tends to use the materialist theory of history rather mechanistically.³⁶ Hoffman sees a tendency

to take historical materialism as a key which opens the doors of the past effortlessly, automatically and almost mechanically, rather than as a view of history which seeks to explain and interrelate the specific complexities of the past which give history its concrete character.³⁷

This, as both comment, was a feature which was widespread among socialists of the Second International. Both Ransom and Hoffman argue that Connolly's "sociological approach," connected with his too-positive interpretation of ancient Irish society, led him to interpret pre-Norman Irish society as classless and egalitarian, and the consequent conquest of Ireland from without as emphasizing the foreign nature of Irish capitalism. This is true, at least to a certain extent, although Connolly did concede that "communal ownership of land would undoubtedly have given way to the privately owned system of capitalist-landlordism, even if Ireland had remained an independent country."³⁸

Connolly maintained that the capitalist system was "the most foreign thing in Ireland."³⁹ He wished, nevertheless, to emphasise the fact that Ireland's political suppression at the hands of Britain, connected with the development of the "feudal-capitalist system in Ireland," served to underline the political nature of the Irish struggle, with the social aspect sinking out of sight. It was Connolly's intention to show that the centuries-old struggle for land and existence was part and parcel of the national struggle.

Labour in Irish History is a document of the times. It forms the cornerstone to a socialist understanding of Irish history and is

a tremendous contribution to the struggle of the Irish working class.

NOTES

1. James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin 1973), xxx–xxxii.
2. *Ibid.*, xxv.
3. *Ibid.*, 124.
4. *Ibid.*, 1.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.
6. *Ibid.*, xxxii.
7. *Ibid.*, 1.
8. *Ibid.*, 124.
9. *Ibid.* 3.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 6. While it is true that the ideological conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism—a dominant feature of Irish political life generally—can be traced back to this period, one could argue that the foundation of modern Irish history was laid in 1641, the “flight of the earls,” and the final disintegration of the clan system in Ireland.
13. *Ibid.*, 12.
14. *Ibid.*, 27.
15. *Ibid.* 28. See also Frederick Engels, “History of Ireland,” in vol. 21 of *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 145–85 (New York: International Publishers, 1985), 151–52.
16. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 39.
17. *Ibid.*, 54.
18. *Ibid.*, 67.
19. *Ibid.*, 68.
20. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
21. *Ibid.*, 74.
22. *Ibid.*, 69. For an assessment of early socialism and the woman question, see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London, 1984).
23. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 94.
24. *Ibid.*, 102.
25. *Ibid.*, 104.
26. *Ibid.*, 121.
27. *Ibid.*, 123.
28. *Ibid.*, 125.
29. *Ibid.*, 134.
30. *Ibid.*, 135.
31. *Ibid.*, 133.

32. Ibid., 131.

33. See A. Raftery, "Parnell, Independence and the Working Class," *Irish Socialist Review*, no. 1 (1974).

34. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 243.

35. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 134.

36. Bernard Ransom, *Connolly's Marxism* (London, 1980), 101–11; "James Connolly and the Theory of Historical Materialism," *Saothar* 2 (1976):53–61.

37. Ibid., 56.

38. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 3.

39. Ibid., xxx.

PART III

Radical Developments in Ireland, 1910–1913

8

The Situation in Ireland on Connolly's Return

During his period of “exile” in the United States, Connolly followed the progress of events in Ireland with intense interest. His observations led him to remark in a letter to William O’Brien, 23 May 1909, “I am very much impressed with the belief that all the conditions are favourable for a forward move in our direction.”¹ He expressed his anxiety to return to Ireland and mentioned the financial hurdles, intensified by the needs of a growing family, which seemed to make his return impossible. This was the beginning of a long series of negotiations with O’Brien, of bitter disappointment with the Dublin socialists who refused to print the *Harp* on the grounds that they felt that the *Irish Nation* met their needs.² There were undoubtedly three main aspects of the situation in Ireland that convinced Connolly he “could do good work” there:³ the progress of the socialist movement; the consolidation of left-wing forces on the nationalist side (the awakening of the democratic elements in the Sinn Fein and republican movements); and the development of “new unionism” under Jim Larkin.

During the period of 1903–1910, the socialist movement managed to survive, continuing mainly in Dublin and Belfast, although there seems to have been little connection or cooperation between the socialist organizations North and South.

The *Belfast Labour Chronicle*, organ of the Belfast Trades Council, reported on 7 October 1905 an inaugural meeting of the Belfast Socialist Society. The society had about seventy members at the outset. Mainly propagandistic in nature, it aimed “to promote the cause of socialism in Belfast by a systematic

educational *propaganda*.”⁴ In a manifesto published in the *Belfast Labour Chronicle* on 2 February 1906, the Belfast socialists stressed that they wished “to see a higher social order peacefully evolved out of the present anarchical system by constitutional means.” It was reported that Saturday evening lectures in the Avenue Hall on social, political, and economic subjects were well attended “by appreciative audiences.”

The Belfast Labour Representation Committee, founded November 1904 and modeled entirely on its British counterpart, aimed at parliamentary representation of Labour in the House of Commons. It was an agglomeration of trade, labor, and cooperative societies, as well as trade unions. A measure of Labour’s success in local elections is indicated in the 1906 Belfast local election, North Division. The Labour candidate William Walker polled 4,616 votes, slightly behind the conservative Sir Daniel Dixon, who polled 4,907. The Belfast Trades Council, dominated by the Belfast Socialist Society (BSS), was instrumental in forming the Belfast Labour Party in 1905, which, as Clarkson explains, was nominally independent of the Trades Council but “actually controlled by an interlocking directorate.”⁵ Commenting on the situation in Belfast, Clarkson remarked that “nowhere else in Ireland had Labour progressed so far as even to nominate candidates for Parliament.”⁶

From the columns of the *Belfast Labour Chronicle*, it can be deduced that Labour in Belfast was entirely British-oriented. Little information was given about activities of the labor movement in the rest of Ireland, whereas occasional articles were published concerning France and Germany to underline Labour’s “internationalism.”

In a letter to the *Belfast Labour Chronicle* (14 October 1906), Bulmer Hobson, founder of the Dungannon Club in 1905, took the Belfast Labour Party to task for its rejection of the national question and its emphasis on an “exotic internationalism.” He argued: “The democratic movement—like every other movement in Ireland—is within the nation, and must march beneath the national banner.”⁷ Divergent opinions among the members of the BSS led to the secession in 1908 of a number led by Hugh Orr

who founded the Communist Club, which met during its short existence in a room in Donegall Street.⁸ It would seem that this was identical with the SLP group to which Greaves refers. Three branches of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) were formed in Belfast in September 1907 and the remnant of the Belfast Socialist Society became the Belfast Central ILP.⁹

Besides these, another organization existed that, although nonsocialist, claimed to represent the interests of the Protestant section of the Belfast working class, namely the Independent Orange Order (IOO). It was set up in 1903 by men expelled from the Orange Order. They had vehemently criticized Orange and Unionist leaders, contending that they had been disregarding Protestant working-class interests.¹⁰ Although a sectarian organization insofar as it regarded the Orange Order to have betrayed Protestantism and to have promoted "on every possible occasion the power and influence of the Church of Rome," the IOO saw the Order as an "unholy alliance between Orangeism and toryism."¹¹ Lindsay Crawford, described by Boyle as "a Dublin gentleman and member of the Grand Lodge of Ireland,"¹² became Imperial Grand Master of Ireland in the IOO and in 1906 issued a pamphlet entitled *Orangeism, Its History and Progress: A Plea for First Principles*, in which he condemned the old order for becoming an instrument of "landlordism and class rule in the hands of conservative leaders." He juxtaposed this to the new order, thoroughly democratic in character and serving the interests of the "Orange democracy."¹³

The IOO gained considerable popularity, so that by 1907 it had seventy-one lodges throughout Ireland and even one in the United States.¹⁴ Under the leadership of Crawford, the IOO became less and less sectarian. The Magheramorne Manifesto, drawn up by Crawford in 1905, was issued to "all Irishmen whose country stands first in their affections." Apart from attacking clericalism in Irish politics and the false conception of nationality, which led to the country being governed on sectarian rather than national lines, Crawford condemned the Dublin Castle government and the policy of both English Liberals and Tories.¹⁵

Echoes of the spirit of the United Irishmen can be discerned in the conclusion, which urges the founding of a patriotic party “with a sound constructive policy that will devote itself to the task of freeing the country from the domination of impracticable creeds and organised tyrannies and to securing the urgent and legitimate redress of her many grievances.”¹⁶

Speaking at a meeting held in the Belfast YMCA, Wellington Place, on 16 December 1904, Crawford reminded the audience of the birthplace of Irish republicanism—Belfast—and showed his confidence that in the “protestant city of Belfast” the seed of this tradition would bear fruition.¹⁷ Dismissed as editor of the *Irish Protestant* in May 1906 on account of his views, he took up the editorship of the *Ulster Guardian*, official organ of the Ulster Liberal Association. His editorials were sympathetic to Larkin and the men on strike during the Belfast dock strike of 1907. Under Crawford’s leadership, collections were taken on behalf of the strikers at the IOO demonstrations on 12 July. (At the old order’s Belfast demonstration, permission to collect was refused.)¹⁸

Crawford was forced to leave the *Ulster Guardian*, having refused to agree not to publish matter advocating “directly or indirectly either Home Rule or devolution in any form.”¹⁹ Finally, he was expelled from the IOO because of his letters and speeches on Home Rule. After his expulsion, the IOO reverted to sectarianism, and Crawford, unable to find employment in Ireland, emigrated to Canada. The IOO, although retaining its separate existence, never regained the influence it had exerted during Crawford’s leadership. Moreover, the growing “threat” of Home Rule led to the strengthening of the old order and a return to sectarian politics in Belfast.

Undoubtedly, under Crawford the IOO evolved a concept of Irish nationality and nationalism very much in the tradition of the United Irishmen and Young Irelanders, combining this with a sympathy for working-class politics. In an article in the *Ulster Guardian*, 29 February 1905, Crawford maintained that he was not a socialist, “nor did he believe in the accepted theory of socialism. . . . But the socialistic theory was preferable to the

economic heresy of the linen trusts and monopolists.”²⁰ In its narrowest sense, the IOO expressed the frustration of a section of the Protestant working class and some of its middle-class allies with the politics of the Unionist-oriented ruling class.

In Dublin the socialist movement was dominated by two socialist groups—a branch of the ILP founded in 1907 and the Socialist Party of Ireland. On 4 March 1904, a joint meeting took place of the remaining members of the ISRP and the Dublin SLP (the breakaway faction), which led to the formation of the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI), the inaugural meeting of which took place on 15 March 1904.²¹ It would seem that Connolly in emigration had assumed that the original party had become moribund, judging from the letter he wrote 16 March 1904 from New York to Michael Rafferty in Dublin:

The intimation in the *Socialist* is the first opportunity I have had for months of learning that there was still the nucleus of a party in Dublin. . . . I have been very unfortunate in America but am ready to maintain my subscription in the ISRP if you will place me in communication with some official who has time to write to me and let me *know how things are*, as I have got no word about the party since I sent off my last postcard.²²

The new premises were at 14 Parliament Street, and within its first year the party had sixty members. Emphasis was placed on the Friday-evening discussion classes in which the members were to be “well grounded on the economic question.”²³ It was decided to discuss Marx’s *Wage, Labour and Capital* and *Capital*, Kautsky’s *The Working Class*, and other literature. Sunday lectures were begun in October 1906. Discipline concerning attendance at business meetings was tightened, a committee being set up to visit members reported absent ten times in a quarter.²⁴ As no one in the party was in a position to take on the responsibility of printing a party newspaper, it was decided to dispose of the printing plant. Instead, the *Socialist* (Scotland) was to be supplied with notes dealing with Irish affairs. Discussion resumed concerning the reestablishment of a party paper to

be produced monthly in manuscript form, the first number of which was read at the business meeting of 1 September 1905. The party corresponded with William Orr, member of the Belfast Socialist Society, and was kept informed of socialist activities in Belfast. The BSS in return was supplied with socialist pamphlets from the SPI.

The party had international contacts as well through the International Socialist Bureau in Brussels. In response to a circular from the Bureau, the SPI organized a meeting at Beresford Place on 21 June 1906 to commemorate the Russian revolution of 1905. A resolution was proposed by William O'Brien and seconded by J. Lyng:

That this meeting of Irish workers held to commemorate the first anniversary of Russia's Bloody Sunday sends its fraternal greetings to their fellow workers of Russia, pledges them our financial support and confidently hopes they will be successful in their gallant fight against the ruling class of that country.²⁵

A sum of nineteen shillings was collected and a procession ensued through the streets of Dublin to the party headquarters.

The Irish socialists were aware that the national question and the relationship between socialism and nationalism were not only relevant to the Socialist Party of Ireland, but also to other European socialist parties of the Second International. At a meeting on 10 October 1907, a decision was taken to "draft a letter of enquiry to be sent to the Socialist Parties of Hungary, Poland and Finland in order to elicit a knowledge of the relations which exist between the Socialist and Nationalist Parties of these countries."

What occupied the minds of the Dublin socialists was the attitude they should adopt to Sinn Fein. They condemned Sinn Fein policy for fostering extreme animosity and dividing the workers. Sinn Fein was "bigoted and insular" and fallaciously accepted "the alleged benevolent character of the Irish capitalist."²⁶ In regard to Arthur Griffith's series of articles, "The Resurrection of Hungary," and the ensuing "Hungarian policy," the socialists were on less secure ground and decided to ask the Socialist Party

of Hungary for a critique of the policy. The Hungarian Socialists replied on 13 November 1904 that the Magyars' refusal to participate in the Austrian parliament bore no analogy to the situation in Ireland. The Irish had been participating in the English parliament for over a century, whereas the Hungarians in the period in question (1850–1863) had never participated in any other than their own parliament.²⁷

On socialist policy, the members of the SPI showed considerable confusion. On the one hand, there was a tendency toward sectarianism in the question of party organization: a resolution adopted on 4 April 1905 stated that no official of a trade union could be eligible for membership of the party. Those members who were already trade-union officials were given six months' notice to resign from their official capacity. On the other hand, the party's isolation from the organized working class of the city was deplored. A discussion ensued on the question of the SPI's affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee, and it was decided to send two delegates to a preliminary meeting on 13 September 1907.²⁸ A dispute with the chairman led to the subsequent withdrawal of the SPI from the committee.²⁹

In the discussion of the party program and the question of the adoption of the ISRP program of 1896, a poignant sectarianism is revealed in the rejection of the clause about nationalizing railroads and canals. It was maintained that palliatives and reforms confused the workers and obliterated the real aims and sole reason for the existence of a revolutionary socialist party: "to educate the people in the principles and aims of socialism."³⁰ The discussion on the inclusion of reforms in the party program continued into 1908. It seemed that during Connolly's absence, sectarian elements began to dominate the ranks of the SPI. Without a party press, the propagandistic efforts of the party were severely hampered.

Connolly himself, reasonably informed of the progress of socialism in Ireland, commented on the diversity of socialist groups in "Sinn Fein, Socialism and the Nation." Of the two sides of Sinn Fein—its economic teaching and its philosophy of self-reliance—he believed that socialists could sympathize with

the latter side of the Sinn Fein doctrine. Connolly pleaded for a basis of a union “on which all those sections who own allegiance to one or other conception of Socialism may unite.”³¹ He spoke of the mutual interests of Protestant and Catholic workers:

With mutual toleration on both sides, the Protestant worker may learn that the co-operation of the Catholic who works, suffers, votes and fights alongside him is more immediately vital to his cause and victory day by day than the co-operation of workers on the other side of the Channel; and that Socialists outside of Ireland are all in favour of that national independence which he rejects for the sake of a few worthless votes.³²

Connolly’s suggestions were taken up by the SPI under William O’Brien (M.P.), and a conference was called on 13 June 1909, at which over 150 were present. A unity committee was established and amalgamation was announced on 28 August.³³ On the same day, the *Irish Nation* reported on the foundation of the new Socialist Party of Ireland (*Cumannacht na h’Eireann*):

It may be added that the independence of Ireland—political and social—so leading up to the foundation of the Socialist Commonwealth, forms the foremost plank of the Party’s ameliorative programme.³⁴

Griffith’s proposal to merge Sinn Fein with the Home Rule M.P. William O’Brien’s “All for Ireland Movement” had the effect of disillusioning many Sinn Feiners, who left the party to join the SPI. The new party recruited members in Cork, Waterford, Dundalk, Castlebar, Cahirciveen, Carrickmacross, Derry, and Belfast.³⁵

The only other radical political party was Sinn Fein, but it had little success in its attempts to contest seats. It did articulate a certain dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of Home Rule as an expression of Irish nationalism, but with its lack of clear-cut policy (e.g., confusion on the issue of the use or nonuse of physical force to gain political ends), it was unable to provide a clear alternative to the Home Rule Party. Sinn Fein was more

important as a rallying center for all dissatisfied nationalists. Kee comments, "In fact, for the greater part of the first decade of the century Griffith, though he himself left the IRB in 1906, acted far more than the IRB as a rallying point for active republican thinking, as well as for those more inclined towards his own slowly evolving ideas."³⁶

Bulmer Hobson pointed out that members of the IRB were the most active element in the Sinn Fein movement from its inception until 1910.³⁷ In fact it seems that after 1907, a date that coincides with the return of the Fenian veteran Tom Clarke from America,³⁸ members of the IRB became increasingly active in Sinn Fein, despite the fact that from a policy point of view Sinn Fein was not committed to republican separatism. Leaders of the IRB hoped to win influence in politics and recruits for the movement by participating in organizations such as Sinn Fein, the Dungannon, and Wolfe Tone Clubs.³⁹

The first decade of the twentieth century saw a considerable change in the IRB. It was a small organization—its membership was about 1,500 in 1911⁴⁰—and therefore it was possible for a few determined members to alter its policy. The change can be partially attributed to the general revival in Gaelic culture at the beginning of the century.⁴¹ Men entered the organization who were not merely interested in the promotion of a more radical mode of politics, but who were themselves engaged in the Gaelic revival movement.

In Belfast a new IRB circle evolved around Bulmer Hobson and Denis McCullough. Hobson, an Ulster Quaker of Cromwellian stock, joined the IRB in 1904 and together with McCullough made a break with the older generation of republicans in Belfast, most of whom had become politically inert. His idea was to imbue the IRB with an active spirit of militant republicanism. Sean MacDiarmada joined the new movement and in 1906 Hobson founded and edited a weekly paper, the *Republic*.⁴² It advocated republicanism and the more extreme theories of Sinn Fein.

Strauss points out that the "purged IRB" represented "the unprivileged classes which were left outside the official

nationalist party organization.”⁴³ In the towns, notably Dublin, where it was strongest, it was composed mainly of journalists (Bulmer Hobson), solicitors’ clerks, junior civil servants, small businessmen (Tom Clarke, for example, owned a tobacconist’s shop), and a sprinkling of workers. In the country, it received its main support from schoolteachers, small tenants, farmers’ sons, and laborers.⁴⁴ It was only later that within the reformed organization a distinction was to emerge between right- and left-wing republicans, some gravitating more and more to the militant labor movement.

Dissatisfied with the progress of Sinn Fein, members of the IRB withdrew after the National Council meeting of January 1910 and established a monthly paper, *Irish Freedom*, which became the organ of the revitalized IRB in the face of hostility from the older leaders on the Supreme Council. A new representative committee was formed under the title, Dublin Central Wolfe Tone Clubs Committee, which was to deal with new ventures such as *Irish Freedom*. Underlying the object of the committee was the republican and Sinn Fein doctrine of self-reliance:

To propagate the principles of the United Irishmen and of the men of ‘98 who strove for complete independence of Ireland; to encourage the union of Irishmen of all creeds and of all sections for the freedom of their country; to inculcate the spirit of self-reliance by which alone true liberty can be obtained.⁴⁵

The paper was financed by a monthly subscription levied on IRB members. It was managed by Sean MacDiarmada and edited by Hobson. The first issue, in November 1910, included a positive review of Connolly’s *Labour in Irish History*. The leading article made it clear that the political policy was complete and total separation of Ireland from England in the form of a republic. This was a clear break with the Sinn Fein policy of dual monarchy advocated by Arthur Griffith.

The first decade of the twentieth century in Ireland is remarkable for the increasing commitment of women to the national

movement and to radical politics generally. Many existing clubs and societies, such as the Celtic Literary Society, the National League, and the IRB, disapproved of women being active on the political and cultural scenes and excluded them from membership.⁴⁶ Defiantly, Maud Gonne founded *Inghinidhe na hEireann* in 1900 as a women's counterpart to the Celtic Literary Society. The Society worked closely with Sinn Fein. The immediate program was the starting of free evening classes in Irish history, Gaelic, Irish dancing, singing, art, and drama for children over nine years of age. The Society entertained with dramas as a fund-raising device, Maud Gonne performing the part of Kathleen ni Houlihan in the Yeats drama of the same name.⁴⁷ Constance de Markievicz, later to play an active role in the labor movement along with Connolly and to fight on the rebel side during the Easter Rising, had joined Sinn Fein and in 1908 became a member of *Inghinidhe*.

In November 1908, the Society produced a women's journal, *Bean na hEireann* (Women of Ireland), devoted to the activities of Irish women in the nationalist movement. Its contributors included Arthur Griffith, James Connolly, and Roger Casement.⁴⁸ Helena Maloney, active with Connolly in the labor movement, joining the SPI in 1911,⁴⁹ was editor of the paper, which, she said, advocated "militancy, separatism and feminism." Helena Maloney, in her labor notes, advised, "Root out weeds as you want to root out British domination,"⁵⁰

Constance de Markievicz, although sympathetic to the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), whose president was Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, thought that the movement was not sufficiently dedicated to the national cause. She urged the young women of Ireland to rally to the struggle for national independence. In 1909, together with Bulmer Hobson, she founded the *Fianna na hEireann*, a movement to train boys to take up arms for the cause of Irish independence. The significance of the *Fianna* in the development of the liberation movement is revealed in Padraic Pearse's words: "We believe that Na Fianna Eireann have kept the military spirit alive in Ireland during the past four years and that if the Fianna had not been founded in

1909, the Volunteers of 1913 would never have arisen.”⁵¹ It was out of the ranks of the *Fianna* that the Volunteers of 1913 were recruited.

An examination of radical movements in the first decade of the twentieth century would be incomplete without brief mention of the changes which took place in the Irish trade-union movement. With the arrival of Jim Larkin in Belfast in 1907 as organizer for the National Union of Dock Labourers came the development of militant industrial unionism to Ireland—“new unionism” or “Larkinism” as it came to be called. The collaboration of Larkin and Connolly in the trade-union movement, culminating in the Dublin strike and lockout of 1913 and the rapprochement of the advanced nationalists to labor, was to open up the period of radical struggle that formed the background to the Easter Rising.

The majority of trade unions, with their British basis, catered mainly to the skilled workers. It was not until Jim Larkin’s arrival in Ireland in January 1907 that the inarticulate, unskilled workers at last found an instrument to express their grievances. The “new unionism” that Larkin advocated was to give the unskilled workers a confidence and a feeling of solidarity they had never before experienced.

Larkin had already gained considerable experience in the Liverpool docks, where he had graduated to the post of foreman dock-porter in 1903. His scrupulous honesty and temperance had won him the respect of the dockers in his charge. He was keenly aware that all the vice, poverty, disease, unemployment, and crime in the Irish cities was due to a corrupt social system in the last stages of moral and economic decay. Like many British socialists of his day, Larkin believed that the working class should be organized in a political party devoted to their interests. In his early career in England, he had regarded trade unionism as a “played-out fallacy.”⁵²

Although Larkin joined the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL) in 1901, he did not become an active member until he was to emerge as strike leader during the Liverpool Dock Strike of 1905. The strike lasted just over ten weeks and

ended in defeat, but Larkin had organized a new branch of the union, 1,200 strong. He was later to receive a permanent appointment as union organizer at £2 10s a week. It was this early experience in the docks and the organization of the NUDL which helped him master "all the techniques and tricks of demagogy, the theatrics, the repartee, the rhetoric and the poetry that were to make him one of the most successful mob-orators of his day."⁵³

In temperament Larkin was entirely different from Connolly, who was not a man to give way easily to emotion and had the mind of a theoretician. Larkin, on the other hand, was little interested in the theory of socialism; he was a man of fire and of emotion and impetuosity. His proletarian ready wit, repartee, and eloquence were a match for more educated opponents.

On his arrival in Belfast in January 1907, Larkin immediately began to organize the dockers. Within three weeks, four hundred dockers had combined in the NUDL. The Belfast workers in 1907 were indeed in a very precarious position. They had no unemployment insurance, no social security, and no financial reserves to fall back on in the case of a strike. "Their wages were so low that they could hardly live, let alone save. If they received 8s a week strike-pay they were lucky."⁵⁴ Apart from that, Belfast was a den of religious bigotry—through the instrument of the Orange Order, the employers had succeeded in sowing dissent between Protestant and Catholic workers in order to exploit them more fully. The labor troubles that were soon to involve the whole port of Belfast developed out of a minor incident. On Monday, 6 May 1907, a number of dockers, objecting to working with two nonunion men, struck work at the York dock of the Belfast Steamship Company. Larkin persuaded them to resume work, but when they reported next day they discovered that their places had been filled by blacklegs (fifty men sent over from Liverpool by the Shipping Federation). This was followed by the arrival of more blacklegs from Hull and Glasgow on 9 May. An attempt was made by the Lord Mayor to settle the dispute by arbitration. but the chairman of the Steamship Company, Thomas Gallagher, refused to have anything to do with Larkin or

the strikers. Following an incident between black-legs and the locked-out workers, Larkin was arrested, thus adding considerably to the heat of the situation. To complicate matters, carters who carried goods to and from the docks to the railways and places of business in Belfast struck in sympathy with the dockers. At the height of the strike, some 2,000 men were out (500 dockers, 1,000 carters, and 1,000 coal laborers).⁵⁵ The extreme arrogance of the Belfast employers and the extent of their exploitation of the Belfast workers were apparent in the ultimatum signed by eighteen firms, representing the coal merchants, that struck at the trade unionists' basic right of combination:

We have unanimously decided:

1. That no Person representing any union or combination will, after this date, be recognised by any of us.
2. That we will exercise our right to employ and dismiss whom we choose, and on whatever terms we choose, and that all persons while employed by us shall work together harmoniously.
3. That, in the event of a strike, whether general or confined to one or more forms, taking place, due to dissatisfaction with the terms or conditions of employment prevailing in the trade without at least three days' written notice having been given by the men to the employers, specifying the grievance complained of, we will immediately lock out all our men.

To enable the men to carefully consider these conditions, work will not be resumed until Monday, the 15th inst., at 10 o'clock a.m. and then only if there shall have been previously shown a general unanimity amongst the men to accept our terms.⁵⁶

The Belfast strike reached a climax and took on threatening proportions when the Belfast police mutinied due to dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions. Larkin added fuel to the fire by announcing that the police were working eighteen

hours a day while not receiving a penny extra. He succeeded in calling out the members of the Royal Irish Constabulary and holding a strike meeting in the yard of their own barracks. The authorities answered by dismissing one constable and suspending six others. Almost the entire force in Belfast was transferred to the outlying country districts.

The Protestant press denounced Larkin as a strike leader on the grounds that he was a Catholic and had only the backing of a militant minority. In spite of this, he managed to unite Catholic and Protestant workers. The mass of Belfast workers showed their support for him by refusing to accept his resignation as a strike leader. As Alexander Boyd, a Belfast socialist, explained, the attempt to divide the men on the question of religion "would not be successful, because men of all creeds were determined to stand together in fighting the common enemy, the employer who denied the right of the workers to a fair wage."⁵⁷ The day after a mass strike meeting, rioting broke out in the Falls Road district, the Catholic working-class area of Belfast, in which the military killed two people and injured many. In spite of the distribution of handbills, organized by Larkin to prevent the riots taking a religious turn,⁵⁸ the authorities' assertion of military power in a predominantly nationalist area helped to create the situation the antilabor politicians required to split the city on sectarian lines. The Board of Trade finally intervened and sent George Asquith to try to settle the dispute. The strike was in fact finally settled by James Sexton, general secretary of the NUDL, in Larkin's absence, to the great disadvantage of the workers. The carters did not succeed in effecting a "closed shop" in the carting trade, and the dockers returned to work on 1 November without gaining anything.

Although the Belfast strike was on the whole a failure, it showed what in fact could be achieved through a mass militant labor movement—the overcoming of religious sectarianism among the Belfast workers, the development of solidarity, and an increasing willingness to reject the political leadership of the economic oppressors. Larkin achieved all this to a limited extent.

Throughout 1908 Larkin agitated constantly on behalf of the unskilled Irish workers—the Dublin and Cork carters, coalmen, and dockers. By early June 1908, he had succeeded in organizing nearly 2,700 men in the Dublin branch of the NUDL, in spite of the increasing number of unjust dismissals by the employers in an effort to deter the men from joining that union. Larkin's determination to organize unskilled labor everywhere in Ireland alarmed Sexton to the extent that he suspended the labor leader from the union on 7 December 1908. Larkin's reply was to help found the Irish Transport Workers' Union, formally established in Dublin on 4 January 1909.⁵⁹ William O'Brien maintained that Larkin initially intended the union to be confined to transport workers only, fearing that the railway men might not be attracted to a general workers' union.⁶⁰ O'Brien's suggestion for the inclusion of the words "and General" in the union name was later taken up. As the general secretary, Larkin carried the bulk of the Irish membership of the NUDL with him. He condemned the previous policy of grafting the Irish on the English trade-union movement and pointed out that the "old system of sectional unions amongst unskilled workers is practically useless for modern conditions."⁶¹ What was required was "One Big Union" for the mass of unskilled workers. In the preface to the Transport Union's "Rule Book," Larkin defined the purpose and aims of the union on both the economic and political levels:

On the economic level he offered the Transport Workers' Union to the Irish worker as "a medium whereby you may combine with your fellows to adjust wages, regulate hours, and conditions of labour, wherever and whenever possible and desirable by negotiation, arbitration, and if the conditions demand it, by withholding our labour." The political programme embodied a legal eight hours' day, provision for all workers at 60 years' of age, Compulsory Arbitration Courts, adult suffrage, nationalisation of canals, railways and all the means of transport. The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland.

The ultimate goal was the establishment of an Industrial Commonwealth in which “all men shall work and rejoice in the deeds of their hands, and thereby become entitled to the fullness of the earth and the abundance thereof.”⁶² Larkin’s use of the sympathy strike, his slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all,” and his policy of refusing to handle “tainted goods” spread like wildfire throughout the country. What existed between capital and labor in Ireland he viewed as a state of war. In justifying his use of the sympathy strike, he pointed out with stark logic: “If the organised employers are entitled to use the sympathetic lock-out, then I say, it must be available in logic that we should also use the sympathetic strike.”⁶³ Connolly, still in the United States, welcomed the foundation of the Transport Union as following the principles of industrial unionism that he himself advocated. In a letter to O’Brien on 9 July 1909, he wrote:

Tell Comrade Larkin that I believe his union to be the most promising sign in Ireland that if things were properly handled on those lines, the whole situation . . . might be revolutionised.

In a postscript he said:

If I were in Ireland now, one of the first things I would do would be to start an *Irish Workers’ Union*, to combine all Irish unions gradually into one body. . . . I would aim at using the present bodies as far as possible. That is why I say that Larkin’s union is the most promising sign, because it is already founded on the lines others should follow.⁶⁴

Here Connolly stressed the importance of the policy of “digging from within” the existing trade-union movement and emphasized the independence of such a union from the British trade-union movement.

On the republican side, Tom Clarke deplored the fact that Irish trade unions were completely dependent on their British counterparts. On 24 April 1909, on his motion, a resolution was

passed by the North Dock Ward of Sinn Fein “approving of the movement now on foot amongst Trades Bodies to break all connection with English Trade Unions, and to effect a federation of trade bodies in Ireland that will be absolutely independent of English control.”⁶⁵

The Ireland to which Connolly returned on Tuesday, 26 July 1910, seemed from the point of view of radical politics and labor organization to be much more promising than the Ireland he left in 1903. Two days later he was in Dublin at a reception in the SPI rooms. In his speech Connolly sketched the lines on which the party should develop: “The study of Irish history and the application of its lessons to our present day problems, the creation of a literature for the Irish movement—an active municipal campaign.”⁶⁶ He immediately set to work organizing the party. In his diary, O’Brien writes of Connolly’s return to Dublin from Belfast a fortnight later and of his report of the setting up of a Belfast SPI branch with twenty-four members, including several Gaelic Leaguers and Bulmer Hobson.⁶⁷

NOTES

1. Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States: The Road to the 1916 Irish Rebellion* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978), 182.

2. *Ibid.*, 190. The *Irish Nation* was published by the Sinn Feiner W. J. Ryan (1907) successor to the *Irish Peasant* (1905–6) and the *Peasant* (1907–9). The *Irish Nation* was the main radical paper in Dublin of the period. It presented the case for socialism; it contained reports on the Socialist Party of Ireland and published material on the Young Irelanders (Lalor and Mitchel) and articles on women and the national movement by Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington. It was informative on the cooperative and labor movements generally.

3. *Ibid.*, 183.

4. John W. Boyle, *The Rise of the Irish Labour Movement, 1880–1907*. PhD. Thesis, Univ. of Dublin, Trinity College. March 1961, 368.

5. J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1970), 353.

6. *Ibid.*

7. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 248.

8. Boyle, *Rise of the Irish Labour Movement*, 369.
9. *Ibid.*
10. John W. Boyle, "The Belfast Protestant Association and the Independent Orange Order, 1901–10," *Irish Historical Studies* 23 (1962–63): 117.
11. *Ibid.*, 29.
12. *Ibid.*, 126.
13. *Ibid.*, 129.
14. *Ibid.*, 133.
15. *Ibid.*, 135.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 132.
18. *Ibid.*, 148.
19. *Ibid.*, 149.
20. *Ibid.*, 148.
21. Minutes of SPI, Book I, 4 March 1904 and 13 March 1904, O'Brien Collection, National Library of Ireland.
22. MS 15668, O'Brien Collection.
23. Minutes of SPI, 10 June 1904.
24. *Ibid.*, 4 October 1904.
25. *Ibid.*, 21 January 1906.
26. *Ibid.*, 15 October 1907 and 21 October 1907.
27. MS 15674 (2), 25.
28. SPI minutes, 19 August 1907.
29. *Ibid.*, 16 September 1907.
30. *Ibid.*, 9 December 1907 and 6 June 1908.
31. "Sinn Fein, Socialism and the Irish Nation," *Irish Nation*, 23 January 1909, in James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin: At the Sign of Three Candles, 1848), 89.
32. *Ibid.*, 90.
33. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 234.
34. *Irish Nation*, 28 August 1909.
35. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 234, 235.
36. Robert Kee, *The Green Flag*, vol. 2, *The Bold Fenian Men* (London, 1976), 162.
37. Bulmer Hobson, "The Origin of *Oglaigh na hEireann*," *An t-Oglach* (March 1931), 1.
38. Tom Clarke spent fifteen years in penal servitude for his part in a dynamiting campaign. After his release in 1898 he went to the United States, where he won the confidence and friendship of John Devoy, leading member of *Clanna-Gael*. Clarke's return to Ireland in 1907 did much to strengthen the radical wing of the IRB, since he supported the young men who were bringing new life into the movement. See Kevin B. Nowlan, "Tom Clarke, MacDermott and the IRB" in *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising, Dublin 1916*, ed. F. X. Martin (London: Methuen, 1967), 111.
39. *Ibid.*, 111–12.

40. Ibid., 110. León Ó Broin comments that there were only 1,660 members in Ireland and 367 in Great Britain in 1912 as opposed to 35,000 in 1879. The reason he gives for the decline is the “manipulation of the parliamentary leaders who overthrew Parnell” (*The Revolutionary Underground* [Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976], 140).
41. Nowlan, “Tom Clark, MacDermott and the IRB,” 111.
42. Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground*, 144.
43. Emil Strauss, *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy* (London: Methuen, 1951), 221.
44. Ibid.
45. Louis N. Le Roux, *Tom Clarke and the Irish Freedom Movement* (Dublin and Cork, 1936), 90.
46. Maud Gonne MacBride, *A Servant of the Queen* (London, 1974), 119, 94–95. Thanks to Maud Gonne’s perseverance and campaign for women in the national movement, the Celtic Literary Society finally opened its doors to women.
47. See Jacqueline van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz, in the Cause of Ireland* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 61–62. For details about *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, see also Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto, 1983).
48. Van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz*, 63.
49. MS 15704 (3), O’Brien Collection, notes by O’Brien, 5 March 1950.
50. Richard Michael Fox, *Rebel Irishwomen* (Dublin, 1966), 66.
51. Padraic H. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 113.
52. Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin, Irish Labour Leader 1867–1947* (London, 1968), 9.
53. Ibid.
54. Richard Michael Fox, *Jim Larkin, Labor Leader* (Tralee, Ireland, 1957), 37.
55. Ibid., 45. The coal laborers had been locked out by the coal merchants in answer to the threat of a general strike.
56. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 27.
57. Ibid., 26.
58. Ibid., 31.
59. *Fifty Years of Liberty Hall: The Golden Jubilee of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, 1909–1950* (Dublin, 1959), 16.
60. See MS 15704 (3), William O’Brien notes.
61. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 56.
62. Ibid., 56–57.
63. Ibid., 84.
64. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 204.
65. Le Roux, *Tom Clarke*, 84–85.
66. MS 16287, William O’Brien diary notes.
67. Ibid.

9

Belfast and Its Problems

In the summer of 1911, Connolly took up residence in Belfast as Belfast secretary and Ulster District organizer of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU).¹ He immediately set about recruiting members into the union—no easy task, since the workers were dispirited by constant victimization. After the dock strike of 1907, union activity had languished. During a cross-channel seamen's strike, Connolly managed to bring the Belfast dockers out in sympathy. At the same time, the dockers stated their own claim for an increase in wages and shorter working hours.²

Clarkson and Greaves describe the working conditions of the Belfast dockers: working hours were unlimited, and grain workers had to lift 100 tons per day for 5 shillings—an extra sixpence was given to each member of a gang that lifted 120 tons a day.³ In the *Workers Republic*, 12 June 1915, Connolly describes the situation:

Half the meal hour was worked in most cases and seldom was a full day's wage paid, no matter how hardly earned. . . . Through stoppages and pretexts of various kinds few were the men who received five shillings even for eleven and twelve hours' work.⁴

After the offer of a compromise by the employers, Connolly advised the men to accept, in order to avoid a prolonged struggle. Although Belfast remained the lowest paying port in the United Kingdom, the wage increase averaged 3 shillings a week with some lightening of labor.⁵

The area in which Connolly's skill as union organizer was best exhibited was in the Belfast linen industry, organizing the

textile workers. The linen industry was Belfast's largest-scale industry. In contrast to the large numbers of skilled and unionized labor in the shipyards, the workers in the linen industry were largely unskilled and outside the craft unions. It is not surprising that Connolly should first turn to organizing the unorganized linen workers and dockers.

Sweating in the linen trade was rife and involved both the large number of women outworkers as well as those working in the linen mills. Conditions in the industry became the subject of a government inquiry in 1911. Outwork for women was indispensable as it provided a necessary supplementary income to the meager wages of the men. But, as the inquiry discovered:

The evidence shows that out-workers furnish the employers with a supply of labour, on which, in times of pressure, he can make demands unrestricted by the Factory Acts; whilst in times of slackness he can turn them off without incurring the standing charges involved in the case of factory workers.⁶

The outworkers were thus completely at the mercy of the employers, many earning less than a penny an hour.⁷ In *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, Connolly quotes from an official report in 1909 by Dr. Baillie, medical officer of health for Belfast, to underline the situation of the outworker:

From these very low rates of pay must be deducted the time spent in visiting the warerooms for work, the necessary upkeep of the worker's sewing machine, and the price of thread used in sewing, which is almost invariably provided by the worker.⁸

The situation of the mill workers ("millies") was equally bleak. Spinning, as Connolly pointed out, was a skilled trade, requiring long years of apprenticeship, "alert brains, and nimble fingers."⁹ In spite of this, a Belfast spinner had to "toil in a super-heated atmosphere, with clothes drenched with water, and hands torn and lacerated as a consequence of the speeding up of

machinery.” She received “a wage less than some of our pious millowners would spend weekly upon a dog.”¹⁰

The average weekly earnings of a spinner were eleven shillings, threepence. If a day’s work was missed she was fined two shillings, seven pence—a sum, Connolly commented, that was out of all proportion to her daily earnings.¹¹ The *Belfast Labour Chronicle* of 17 March 1906 commented on the working conditions of the mill workers:

From the child of 13 up to the grey-haired woman of 60 years, one may see them pouring through the streets, to and from their work-rooms, at six in the morning, at one going to midday meal or at six or seven in the evening returning to their homes . . . whether we contemplate the circumstances under which the girl works in the vapour of the spinning room, with bare feet and saturated clothing, or amid the whir and crackling of the weaving shed, or guiding the seesaw of the sewing machine—all the surroundings are servile and monotonous.

In the issue of 24 March 1906, the *Belfast Labour Chronicle* takes the firm of Robinson and Clever to task for reducing the wages of the girls employed at shire handkerchiefs, work that the paper points out is carried out by skilled workers.

In 1911 the Ulster manufacturers agreed to cut output by fifteen per cent by putting the mills on short time. In order to evade this, some factory owners began to speed up production.

To keep the girls on their toes (and pit them against each other) they were forbidden to talk or sing or arrange their hair during working hours and were promised the sack if they did. Bringing sweets into the mill, or newspapers, or knitting needles also meant instant dismissal.¹²

At that time the mill workers were mostly unorganized. The Belfast Trades Council had sponsored the setting up of a linen workers’ union (Textile Operatives Society) under Mary Galway, but the union concentrated on the better-paid Protestant

working women in the making-up section.¹³ Mill girls approached Connolly, seeking advice on the question of union organization to fight against the speed-up system in the factories. Connolly did not hesitate. Deeply aware of the plight of working women generally and of the Belfast working woman in particular, he comments:

Throughout her life she remains a wage-earner; completing each day's work, she becomes the slave of the domestic needs of her family; and when at night she drops wearied upon her bed, it is with the knowledge that at the earliest morn she must find her way again into the service of the capitalist, and at the end of that coming day's service for him hasten homeward again for another round of domestic drudgery.¹⁴

Connolly set about organizing more than one thousand spinners out on strike, holding outdoor and indoor meetings to raise funds, and recruiting women into the textile section of the ITGWU, which he founded at the end of November. The wife of Thomas Johnson, an active socialist, became the first secretary. In spite of sympathy and support for the strikers, financial aid was inadequate and Connolly proposed that the spinners return to work and apply tactics of solidarity that he drew from his experiences as organizer for the IWW.

If a girl is checked for singing, let the whole room start singing at once; if you are checked for laughing, let the whole room laugh at once; and if anyone is dismissed, all put on your shawls and come out in a body. And when you are returning, don't return as you generally do, but gather in a body outside the gate, and march in singing and cheering.¹⁵

As a result, Ina Connolly-Heron comments, conditions became tolerable. In face of opposition from the Unionist press and Mary Galway, who objected on the grounds that Connolly's union was "interfering" with the Textile Operatives Society, Connolly and the Irish Textile Workers' Union set about the task

of organizing 38,000 women. The union demanded that the entire linen industry be put under the Sweated Industries Act, which would fix a minimum wage for all employees. Until the extension of the act, the union pledged itself to fight for a minimum wage of three pence per hour for all qualified spinners; proportionate increases for all lower grades in the spinning-room, and increases in the piece rates for the reeling room and all departments on piece work; abolition of fines for lost time; and the same rates for all stoppages as the daily pay per hour.¹⁶

Greaves comments that Belfast was a supreme challenge to Connolly—"a hard nut which he failed to crack."¹⁷ Why was this so? On one point Connolly was adamant: the Protestant worker—that representative of the "Orange working class"¹⁸—was an integral part of the Irish nation. In his pamphlet *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, he explained it thus:

The children of these men of the rank and file are now an integral part of the Irish nation, and their interest and well-being are now as vital to the cause of freedom and as sacred in the eyes of the Labour Movement as are the interests of the descendants of those upon whom a cruel destiny compelled their forefathers to make war.¹⁹

He emphasized that the struggle for national independence was in the *objective* interests of the whole Irish working-class democracy, Catholic and Protestant alike.

Connolly underestimated, however, the difficulties involved in convincing the Protestant workers of their objective interests. The phenomenon of Orangeism was, and is, very complex, and Connolly examined it on the ideological level only, understanding it as religious sectarianism. Optimistically he said, speaking of the probability of Home Rule, "Only the force of religious bigotry remains as an asset to Unionism."²⁰ His attitude is understandable, since his stay in Belfast was of relatively short duration. Also, because of the peculiar situation of that city—the division along sectarian lines—he was forced to live in the Catholic Falls Road area and possibly had most contact with the Catholic workers of the city. In his biography of Connolly, Richard

M. Fox points out that Connolly had most contacts among the dockers (mainly Catholic), whereas he had little contact with the Protestant skilled shipyard workers.²¹

Orangeism is more than religious sectarianism. It was and is part of the Protestant worker's way of life: it is an institution dominating home, community, and work life. Hence Orangeism cannot be explained as simply a product of Unionist ideological hegemony. In his detailed research into the origins of Ulster Unionism, Peter Gibbon has gone to great pains to show us that Orangeism is the relatively autonomous expression of Protestant working-class interests within the formation of Ulster society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Armagh, for example, the growth of Orangeism was synonymous with the independent weavers' struggle against the outcome of proletarianization.²² It is significant that the first sectarian riots took place in that county. Orangeism was thus a means of defending the status of Protestant weavers and maintaining Protestant privilege within the labor market in the eighteenth century. The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in Ulster, and later the Unionists' use of Orangeism and the Protestant worker as a tool to divide the Irish working class, were the aspects of Orangeism that concerned Connolly. He rightly pointed to the identification of the Orange Order with "the oppressive property rights of rackrenting landlords and sweating capitalists."²³ He was constantly concerned with breaking the ideological bond between Protestant workers and their employers. But this was only one facet of the problem. In Belfast, Orangeism was used as a vehicle to promote the interests of skilled artisans who were faced with threats to the exclusiveness of their crafts. In fact, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Orange Lodges existed in many areas of industry as trade associations.²⁴

Because of the working-class basis of Orangeism, it was not synonymous with Toryism, as can be discerned in the development of the Independent Orange Order, which attacked the traditional Orange Order (dominated by landlords and capitalists) and the Unionist movement as enemies of the Protestant working people.²⁵

The actual composition of the “Orange working class” of Belfast was much more heterogeneous and complicated than Connolly appears to have believed. He compared the attitude of the Orange workers to their Catholic counterparts with the contempt of skilled laborers for the unskilled.²⁶ Apart from the usual distinction between the skilled and unskilled workers, Gibbon insists that:

There was no homogeneous Protestant proletariat over which Unionist leaders established “mastery.” Instead there were two quite distinct segments of the Protestant working class, each with its own social organisation, politics and ideology.²⁷

In *Class Conflict and Sectarianism*, Henry Patterson refers to the internal stratification of the Protestant section of the Belfast working class. The skilled shipyard workers (20,000 in number by 1914) were cut off from the mill workers “by work experience and levels of pay, relative freedom from an intensely coercive discipline and social recognition.”²⁸

Gibbon backs up his argument by a sociological survey of the two dominant Protestant working-class areas in Belfast, Sandy Row, and the Shankill. He defines Sandy Row as a “mill ghetto,” since the women of Sandy Row were engaged in the local linen mills, the men either in the textile industry or casual labor. Thus a high degree of integration ensued between the local social and economic orders. There were also close personal and protective ties between employers and employees. Unlike the shipyard of Harland and Wolff, the local mills were small competitive enterprises, thus explaining why politics and trade unions were slow to impinge on the working population. Solidarity was confined mainly to the local district in terms of “fidelity” to the neighborhood against the “Catholic” enemy from without. Parochialism and localism dominated. In contrast, the men from the Shankill were skilled workers, engaged in the shipyard—a “labor aristocracy” whose place of employment was outside the area in which they lived.²⁹ What characterized the shipyard men, according to Gibbon, was a certain cosmopolitanism, an intense craft identity

that overrode localistic ties. Their livelihood was bound up with the state of British capitalism internationally; hence the more general question of union with Britain and national politics were of overriding significance to them.

Undoubtedly Gibbon's division of the Orange workers into two factions must be modified to a certain extent. Alastair Reid questions the application of the term "labor aristocracy" to the skilled shipyard workers. The textile industry, as opposed to shipbuilding, was a highly mechanized industry; fluctuation in the shipbuilding industry resulted in the laying off of skilled workers in times of depression. There was no security of employment for most skilled workers.³⁰ Connolly pointed to the number of injuries and deaths which occurred daily in the shipyards due to a lack of safety precautions:

It all means lives ruined, fair prospects blighted, homes devastated, crippled wrecks of manhood upon the streets, or widows and orphans to eat the bread of poverty and pauperism.³¹

Despite necessary modification, what Gibbon's analysis indicates is that within the Protestant section of the Northern working class a certain tradition of independent working-class politics existed, inimical to conservatism, and that Orangeism had roots in the working class. The complexity of Orangeism lies in the fact that, despite working-class roots, it has developed a relatively independent identity associated with religious sectarianism of the most backward order.

In *Class Conflict and Sectarianism*, Patterson refutes the stand of Connolly and later historians who "saw the Orange Order as the mechanism through which industrialists manipulated divisions between Protestant and Catholic workers in order to prevent the development of a strong labour movement."³² This, Patterson claims, is due to the contemporary state of Marxist thought that understood ideology as a creation of the dominant class.³³ Thus a discrepancy exists between Connolly's recognition of the historical basis of "Protestant Ascendancy"

ideology and his belief that Orangeism was the creation of the ruling classes to protect their property rights.³⁴

Patterson deals rather leniently with the dominant Protestant class. He admits that it made use of the tradition of sectarianism to further its ends, but neglects to consider the historical fact that Orangeism, which undoubtedly arose from certain traditions within the Protestant section of the working class, was also the outcome of a deliberate policy of divide and conquer. It was, for example, openly used as a weapon to suppress the United Irishmen in the eighteenth century. This argument is undialectical. Orangeism, as has been demonstrated, is on the one hand part of Protestant working-class culture. On the other hand, it is a weapon directed against the objective interests of the Protestant workers by dividing the working class, and Connolly was keenly aware of this danger.

Even had Connolly been able to fathom the full complexities of Orangeism, it is questionable whether he could have achieved more than he did in the Belfast of his times. Of the obstacles the socialist movement in Belfast had to face, Connolly wrote, "It means the propagation of twentieth century revolutionism amidst the mental atmosphere of the early seventeenth century."³⁵ He was obviously referring here to the religious "Protestant Ascendancy" frontier mentality of the Orange worker.

Parallel with this went the influence of Unionism as a political force on the Protestant section of the working class in the North. Union with Britain had brought economic benefit to the northern province, in contrast to the rest of Ireland. Hence Unionism was the direct outcome and expression of the demand of the Ulster capitalists, who depended on the link with Britain to maintain their hegemonic position. It was a relatively easy matter for the Unionists to illustrate that the link with Britain had been the basis of Belfast's prosperity as an industrial city. As was proudly claimed:

She had the largest weaving factory, the largest shipping output, the largest tobacco factory, and the largest

ropeworks in the world . . . and she was not prepared to come under the rule of a Dublin Parliament dominated by impoverished small farmers from Munster and Connaught.³⁶

The phenomenon of Ulster Unionism took concrete form with the Unionist Convention in Belfast, 17 June 1892. It was an attempt to embrace all existing sectional ideologies of conservatism and liberalism under the rhetoric of Unionism; its purpose was “the elaboration of the qualities purportedly distinguishing Ulster from the rest of Ireland.”³⁷ The convention was followed by the foundation of the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905 and by the formal integration of the Orange Order into political unionism.³⁸ It enabled the party to get a strong hold on Protestant allegiance through heavy use of Orange rhetoric. The hegemonic position of Ulster Unionism can be measured by its influence within the ranks of the labor movement in Belfast.

Connolly’s controversy with the Belfast Independent Labour Party (ILP) leader William Walker, carried on for several weeks in the columns of the Glasgow socialist paper *Forward*, reinforces Connolly’s position not only as a socialist within the Irish context, but also his left-wing stand in the Second International. To Connolly, socialism in Ireland could only develop within a *national* context if it were to have any concrete meaning for the great majority of working people:

It is only when Socialism is brought down from the clouds and is shown to have a direct bearing upon the political life of each country as a reflex of the economic history of that country, and to have a message bearing upon the political problems of the day, it is only then that Socialism has an opportunity of developing from being the cult of a few to become the faith of the many.³⁹

The struggle for national freedom was not the antithesis of the “internationalism” of the labor movement. Referring to the Stuttgart conference of Socialists (1907), Connolly reiterates the words of Bebel that the growth of socialism would lead to “a

renaissance of national culture and sympathies in countries now politically suppressed, . . . civilization of the future would be all the richer for the presence of so many distinctive forms of intellectual growth arising from different racial and national developments.”⁴⁰ Moreover, he underlined, “the internationalism of the future will be based upon the free federation of free peoples, and cannot be realised through the subjugation of the smaller by the larger political unit.”⁴¹

Connolly insisted on the independent development of socialism in Ireland. With reference to the relationship between labour in Great Britain and Ireland he maintained that it must be based upon comradeship and mutual assistance, and not upon dues-paying, should be fraternal and not organic, and should operate by exchange of literature and speakers rather than by attempts to treat as one two peoples of whom one has for 700 years nurtured an unending martyrdom rather than admit the unity or surrender its national identity.⁴²

William Walker and the ILP, on the other hand—“Labour Unionists,” as Connolly dubbed them—insisted on maintaining that the socialist movement in Ireland remain a dues-paying organ—an integral part of the British socialist movement: “Everything that the people of Ireland want can be safeguarded much better under the protection of the United Democracies than if we were isolated.” Walker’s brand of reformist socialism did not go beyond the aim of bettering the workers’ conditions of life in Belfast.⁴³ Rather than take up Connolly’s plea for socialist unity, members of the ILP voted against the proposal for the establishment of an Irish Labour Party at the Irish Trade Union Congress in 1911. Quoting Marx’s words in favor of Irish independence “that no nation is good enough or wise enough to be able to rule another nation,”⁴⁴ Connolly underlined the importance of having a separate Irish party to which the Irish trade unions could affiliate.

Despite Walker, the Independent Labour Party of Ireland (ILPI) was founded as a result of a conference held in Dublin,

Easter 1912. Four of the five Belfast branches of the ILP attended, as well as the Belfast branch of the British Socialist Party.⁴⁵ The party program was remarkable in that it contained political and syndicalist measures side by side to secure the aim of an “Industrial Commonwealth based on the common ownership of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange, with complete political and social equality between the sexes.”⁴⁶ It had a broad basis of membership, being open to “all men and women, irrespective of their past political affiliations, who desire to see the working class of their country organised upon the political field.”⁴⁷ Surprisingly there is no reference to the national struggle for independence in the program. As Greaves points out, this was probably due to the understanding of the probability of Home Rule, which would be the first step to real political independence and the “re-conquest of Ireland.” It would seem then that the ILPI program was applicable to Ireland after the advent of Home Rule. The Belfast ILPI was very sensitive to the unpopularity of Home Rule in Ulster, and after 1912 Connolly’s open-air speeches on the subject had to be discontinued.⁴⁸ With the founding of the ILPI, the SPI went out of existence—the closing meeting being held on 10 June 1912.⁴⁹

Apart from the ILPI, which was mainly a socialist propagandist party, Connolly had, as early as 1909, made proposals for the establishment of an Irish Labour Party that would have a broad base and include the trade unions. A Dublin Labour Party existed briefly from 1911 to 1912, was primarily concerned with the selection of candidates for municipal elections,⁵⁰ and did not have an all-Ireland basis.

At the Irish TUC Congress at Clonmel in 1912, Connolly’s proposals were taken up, and a resolution to establish an Irish Labour Party was passed by 49 votes to 19.⁵¹ This support for the founding of an Irish Labour Party sponsored by Congress undoubtedly had much to do with the propaganda carried out by Larkin and Connolly in the pages of the *Irish Worker*, organ of the ITGWU. Apart from this, it was generally felt that there would be little advantage in becoming part of the British Labour Party if an Irish parliament was to be established.⁵²

Practically nothing was done to set up the new party until 1913, when Larkin took up the chairmanship of the executive. The delay had been caused by Larkin's resignation at the first meeting, after members of the executive disagreed with a ruling he gave as chairman. Larkin was a strong individualist who deeply resented criticism. He was not a member of the SPI, nor of its successor the ILPI. Connolly was aware of Larkin's indispensability to the labor movement and was willing to tolerate him despite his despotism. As he explained, Larkin "must rule or he will not work and in the present state of the labour movement he has us at his mercy."⁵³ Connolly's letters to O'Brien from Belfast in 1911–12 contain criticism of Larkin's activities and recklessness. On 24 May 1911, he wrote: "The man is utterly unreliable—and dangerous because unreliable."⁵⁴ On 9 September 1912, he summed up Larkin as follows: "He does not seem to want a democratic labour movement: he seems to want a Larkinite movement only."⁵⁵ By 1913 the relationship between the two labor leaders was sorely tried. Connolly wrote on 29 July 1913, "I don't think that I can stand Larkin as a boss much longer. He is simply unbearable. . . . He will never get me to bow to him."⁵⁶

The founding of an Irish Labour Party was undoubtedly a triumph for Connolly over Walker. On the question of Home Rule, the two parties (SPI [ILPI] and ILP) were at variance. In keeping with its proimperialist policy, the Belfast ILP rejected Home Rule on the grounds of economic and social backwardness of the South. This, it was maintained, could only be remedied by remaining with Britain where the strength of progressive forces could guarantee a march forward—the betterment of living and working conditions for the working class in Belfast.

With the veto powers of the House of Lords curtailed by Act of Parliament in 1911 and with the liberals in power, it seemed that the passing of a third Home Rule Bill would only be a matter of time. Connolly's changed attitude to Home Rule is to be seen against the background of the times. In the early days of his political career, he identified the political aims of the Irish Home Rule Party with the political concept of Home Rule itself. Now,

while still condemning Redmond's party as the enemy of the Irish working class, he appreciated the important consequences for the Irish workers if they made the question of Home Rule part of their own political policy. Later, in an election address in January 1913, Connolly maintained, "As a lifelong advocate of national independence I am in favour of Home Rule, and I believe that Ireland should be ruled, governed and owned by the people of Ireland."⁵⁷ Connolly made it clear that "as Socialists we are Home Rulers, but that on the day the Home Rule Government goes into power the Socialist movement in Ireland will go into opposition."⁵⁸

The introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in April 1912 led to flood of militant opposition from Unionist Ulster, resulting in the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant by 500,000 people "to use all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Ireland."⁵⁹ Frightened by the opposition in Ulster and the Curragh incident, in which fifty-seven officers tendered their resignation and refused to quell "loyalist Ulster's opposition to lawful authorities,"⁶⁰ the British government retracted, forging a compromise with the Redmondites, whereby proposals were made to allow Ulster to opt out of the Home Rule Bill for a period of six years. Connolly was vehement in his opposition to proposals for partition. He realized that such a scheme would disrupt the labor movement:

Such a scheme as that agreed to by Redmond and Devlin, the betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured.⁶¹

Appealing to the working class of Ulster, he warned prophetically of the unbearable situation if partition should come about:

If your lot is a difficult one, even when supported by the progressive and tolerant forces of all Ireland, how difficult

and intolerable it will be when you are cut off from Ireland, and yet are regarded as alien to Great Britain, and left at the tender mercies of a class who knows no mercy, of a mob poisoned by ignorant hatred of everything national and democratic.⁶²

Patterson holds that Connolly was prepared to face the possibility of the Crown forces suppressing loyalist working-class opposition to Home Rule, his lack of qualms in this instance being due to his belief that “Unionist ideological hegemony over the Protestant working class was brittle.”⁶³ But what were the alternatives? Subsequent Irish history: partition, followed by the weakening of the Irish labor movement and all democratic forces, civil war, and the present “troubles” in Ulster, all testify to and justify Connolly’s fears of the consequences of partition.

NOTES

1. See C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 258. In his notes William O’Brien states that Connolly started with the ITGWU in Belfast on Monday, 19 June 1911 (MS 17504 [3]).

2. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 265.

3. *Ibid.*, 266.

4. J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1970), 353.

5. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 266.

6. Cited in Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 355.

7. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 355.

8. James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (Dublin and Belfast, New Books Publications, 1972), 36.

9. James Connolly, “To the Linen Slaves of Belfast,” in *Workers’ Republic*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1950), 104.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See Ina Connolly-Heron, “James Connolly, A Biography,” *Liberty* (June 1966): 15.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 272.

14. *Ibid.*, 44.

15. Connolly-Heron, “James Connolly,” 15.

16. Connolly, “To the Linen Slaves of Belfast,” 104–5.

17. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 271.
18. See “North-East Ulster,” in *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), 104.
19. Connolly, *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 8.
20. James Connolly, *Connolly’s Suppressed Articles*, vol. 3, *Connolly-Walker Controversy* (Belfast: Connolly Books, 1969), 9.
21. Richard Michael Fox, *James Connolly: The Forerunner* (Tralee, Ireland: Kerryman, 1946), 98.
22. Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism* (Manchester, 1975), 31.
23. James Connolly, “Labour and the Proposed Partition of Ireland,” in *Socialism and Nationalism*, 110–11.
24. Gibbon, *Origins of Ulster Unionism*, 94–95.
25. John W. Boyle, “The Belfast Protestant Association and the Independent Orange Order, 1901–10,” *Irish Historical Studies* 23 (1962–63).
26. Connolly, “North-East Ulster,” 104.
27. Gibbon, *Origins of Ulster Unionism*, 85.
28. Henry Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working Class and the Belfast Labour Movement in 1868–1920* (Belfast, 1980), 88, 31.
29. Unlike rioting in Sandy Row, rioting by the Shankill shipyard workers occurred at their place of work. They recruited not their next of kin, but local apprentices (Gibbon, *Origins of Ulster Unionism*, 74–75).
30. Alastair Reid, “Skilled Workers in the Shipbuilding Industry 1880–1920,” in *Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class*, ed. Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (London, 1980), 117–18.
31. Connolly, *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 37.
32. Patterson, *Class Conflict*, x.
33. *Ibid.*, 84–85.
34. See the article “Catholicism and Protestantism and Politics,” *Forward* (1913), quoted in Patterson, *Class Conflict*, 84–85; Connolly, “Labour and the Proposed Partition of Ireland,” 110–11.
35. Connolly, *Connolly-Walker Controversy*, 50.
36. Ian Budge and Cornelius O’Leary, *Belfast, Approach to Crisis: A Study of Belfast Politics, 1613–1970* (London, 1973), 107.
37. Gibbon, *Origins of Ulster Unionism*, 132.
38. Gibbon comments that the Orange Order was given 25 per cent formal representation on all party committees (*ibid.*, 140).
39. James Connolly, *Socialism and the Orange Worker* (Belfast: Connolly Books, 1968), 2.
40. Connolly, *Connolly-Walker Controversy*, 24.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
43. *Ibid.*, 28, 29.
44. *Ibid.*, 34.
45. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 278.

46. *Ibid.*, 279.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Budge and O'Leary, *Belfast*, 126.
49. Minutes of SPI.
50. MS 16271, Minutes Book of Labour Representation Committee and the Dublin Labour Party (1911–1912), O'Brien Collection.
51. Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1890–1930* (Dublin: Irish Univ. Press, 1974), 36.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*, 36.
54. MS 13908 (1), Correspondence Connolly-O'Brien, O'Brien Collection.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. Connolly, "Dock Ward Belfast, Election Address," in *Workers' Republic*, 101.
58. Connolly, "North-East Ulster," 106.
59. Grenfell Morton, *Home Rule and the Irish Question* (London, 1980), 61.
60. T. A. Jackson, *Ireland Her Own* (London, 1971), 376.
61. James Connolly, "Labour and the Proposed Partition," in *Socialism and Nationalism*, 111.
62. James Connolly, "Ireland and Ulster: An Appeal," in *Socialism and Nationalism*, 118.
63. Patterson, *Class Conflict*, 87.

10 Connolly and Religion

It would seem at this stage to be relevant to mention something about Connolly's attitude to religion, and more specifically, to Catholicism. The Belfast years, 1911–13, were those in which he was most directly confronted with religious sectarianism, both Orange and Green.

Much speculation has arisen about Connolly and religion. Was it possible for Connolly, with his radical socialist convictions, to be a Catholic? Much is made of the fact that he received the last rites of the Catholic Church before his execution. In his study of Connolly, Owen Dudley Edwards assumes him to have been "a convinced Catholic."¹ Catholicism and historical materialism were complementary in Connolly: "He brought back a true concept of man's responsibility for his history, and restored our vision of the goodness of God by refusing to ascribe to God the crimes of man."² Edwards sees Connolly in the tradition of Thomas More, standing by his ideals against the establishment of his day. Apart from the fact that the comparison is historically ill-founded, disregarding the incompatibility of the epochs, recent Connolly research has thrown light on the question of Connolly's relationship to religion and his personal beliefs.³

In a letter to the Scottish socialist John Matheson, 30 January 1908, Connolly wrote:

For myself, though I have usually posed as a Catholic, I have not gone to my duty for 15 years, and have not the slightest tincture of faith left. I only assumed the Catholic pose in order to quiz the raw freethinkers, whose ridiculous dogmatism did and does dismay me, as much as the

dogmatism of the Archbishop. In fact I respect the good Catholic more than the average free-thinker.⁴

His stand is further illuminated by his reply to the socialist Tom Bell, who asked, “Was he a Catholic?” Bell could not conceive how it was possible to reconcile the Catholicism of Rome with the materialist conception of history. Connolly replied:

In Ireland, all Protestants are Orangemen and howling jingoos. If the children go to the Protestant schools, they get taught to wave the Union Jack and worship the English King. If they go to the Catholic Church, they become rebels. Which would you sooner have?⁵

These replies not only illustrate how keenly aware Connolly was of the significant role that Catholicism could play in the Irish road to socialism, they also show Connolly’s extreme sensitivity to the religious feelings of the Catholic worker. In Ireland and the United States, where the majority of Irish were Catholic, he realized that it would be pointless to try winning the mass of Irish people to socialism by putting himself forward as an atheist. Far from regarding religion as a private matter, outside the precincts of socialism, Connolly deliberately sought dialogue and controversy with Catholic priests. While stressing the historical-materialist foundation of socialism—“neither Protestant, nor Catholic, Christian, nor Freethinker, Buddhist, Mahomatan, nor Jew; it is only *Human*”⁶—he nevertheless maintained that Christianity and socialism, or within the Irish context, Catholicism and socialism, were not diametrically opposed doctrines, the one negating the other.

Connolly was opposed to every tendency to identify socialism with the Catholic Church, but he was equally vehement in his attacks on those “raw atheists” within the labor movement who, by claiming that the Catholic Church bred anarchism and terrorism, alienated the majority of Catholic workers from the cause of socialism.⁷ In an article entitled “Roman Catholicism and Socialism,” Connolly refers to the Catholics who “have been repelled from socialism by the blatant and rude atheism of some of its irresponsible advocates.”⁸

Connolly consistently pursued the historical-materialist concept of religion, defining it as “the outcome of the efforts of mankind to interpret the workings of the forces of nature and to translate its phenomena into the terms of a language which could be understood. . . . Religions are simply expressions of the human conception of the natural world.”⁹ Our intellectual processes, he said, change with the change in our economic and social environment.

So it was that the wise men of the ancient world, the inspired men of the Holy Land, the brilliant philosophers and scholastics of medieval Europe, were all limited by their material surroundings, could only think in terms of the world with which they were acquainted, and their ideas of what was moral or immoral were fashioned for them by the social system in which they lived.¹⁰

The Catholicism of the Irish peasant, Connolly maintained, before the advent of the National School, was mingled with a belief in fairy lore and legend that testified “that he was still in a transition state of mentality between belief in the spirits of Druidism and the angels of Catholicity.”¹¹

Connolly defined the Protestant Reformation as “the capitalist idea appearing in the religious field.” The Protestant doctrine of the spiritual salvation of man being dependent solely on his individual appeal to God is a reflection of the insistence of capitalism that man’s social salvation depends solely on his own individual effort.¹²

Connolly was insistent that the role of the clergy of the Catholic Church should be as servants to the laity. He condemned any attempt of the hierarchy to dominate public opinion and to attack the labor movement and socialism.

As long as the priest speaks to us as a priest upon religious matters we will listen to him, with all the reverence and attention his sacred calling deserves, but the moment he steps upon the political platform, or worse still, uses the altar from which to tell us what to do with our political freedom, then in our sight, he will cease to be a priest and be simply a politician.¹³

Attacks of the Roman Catholic clergy on socialism were taken very seriously by Connolly. In “Labour, Nationality and Religion,” he seized the opportunity to state the case for socialism by proving the false foundations of Father Kane’s Lenten Discourses. In a short survey of Irish history, Connolly showed that official clerical views of economic and social issues had been accommodated to the basic values of bourgeois society and had become alienated from original Christian teaching. Learned Jesuit priests such as Fathers Kane and MacErlean went to great pains to point out that there was nothing in common between social and Christian democracy: “They differ from each other as much as the sect of Socialism differs from the Church of Christ.”¹⁴ Connolly took up the attack by arguing logically that socialism was consistent with Catholicism. He quoted from the early saints and pontiffs of the Catholic Church, citing their rejection of private property and their promotion of the idea of social equality.

Although a “mere labourer,” intellectually Connolly was a match for the Jesuits, versing his knowledge of ecclesiastical history as well as the history of Ireland. Among the books he consulted in writing “Labour, Nationality and Religion,” Connolly names Rev. P. J. Carrew, *Ecclesiastical History*; Von Ranke, *History of the Popes*; Murray, *Irish Revolutionary History*; and Mitchel, *History of Ireland*. Connolly is quick to draw attention to anachronisms—Kane’s “quotation” from Aristotle concerning socialism and socialist principles is shown to be absurd:

To quote Aristotle as writing about Socialism is like saying that Owen Roe O’Neil sent a telegram to the Catholic Confederation at Kilkenny in 1647, or that George Washington crossed the Delaware in a flying machine.¹⁵

During the Dublin labor dispute of 1913, Connolly furiously condemned the role of the Catholic hierarchy and their open support of the employers.¹⁶ On the other hand, he regarded the sympathy of the younger priests with labor as a positive factor in Irish society. Thus he welcomed Father Finley’s statement of the aims and principles of modern socialism, which the priest lucidly

explained in a lecture delivered before the Dublin Statistical Society. At the same time he condemned a later statement of the same priest at Maynooth that socialism had “hopelessly broken down wherever it had been tried.” Ingeniously, Connolly does not attack the priest, but assumes that the statement is proof of the low estimate in which he held the intellectual understanding of his audience. “Father Finlay,” he said, “would not risk his reputation by repeating it before an audience of scientists in the world.”¹⁷

Connolly was optimistic about the future of Catholicity (in the sense of a strictly nondenominational body of Christian values) and the Catholic Church in a socialist Ireland. He believed that the Catholic Church of the future would not oppose the forces of socialism, in view of the Church’s acceptance (out of consideration for its own welfare) of the *de facto* government and social order of a country. “When the Church realises that the cause of capitalism is a lost cause it will play along with Socialism.”¹⁸ Connolly is careful to make a distinction between the Church as institution and individual Catholics who, refusing to accept the Church’s “bull-dozing,” “stand by their rights as citizens, whilst observing their duties as Catholics.”¹⁹

When speaking of the role of the Church in socialism, Connolly had the Catholic Church in mind, not the Protestant one. This is probably because to him, Protestantism in Ireland was synonymous with both the rise of capitalism there and the British suppression of the Irish. Hence his distinction between the Orange and Catholic workers. The Catholic workers were “rebels in spirit and democratic in feeling because for hundreds of years they have no class as lowly paid or as harshly treated as themselves.”²⁰ He assumed, perhaps too optimistically, that the Irish Catholics over the centuries had learned to raise their revolt to the level of general principle, as opposed to religious sectarianism.²¹ Political and religious persecution of Catholics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was more than simply an episode in ecclesiastical history; it was an essential element in the development of national consciousness—hence the opposition to the Protestant ethic of Ireland’s English overlords.

Connolly was aware that within the general European context Irish Catholicism was unique. He was convinced that Catholicism could not be kept out of the debate on socialism in Ireland. On the contrary, both priests and Catholic laity who actively supported labor were a positive asset to the foundation of a socialist Ireland. Seen in this light, Connolly's acceptance of the last rites of the Catholic Church before his execution was not contrary to, but in keeping with, his position as a socialist. He did so at the request of Padraic Pearse, a devout Catholic who had moved very close to Connolly's socialist teachings. Reeve and Reeve contend:

It is impossible to believe that at this time, when he felt he represented the deepest hopes of Irish men and women, the majority of whom were Catholics, that he would affront the people he led, and refuse the last rites for the dying—a most sacred sacrament—whatever his personal beliefs.²²

Connolly's position on religion—his understanding of socialism within the Irish context as taking up the basic humanistic values the Church as an institution had rejected—prepared the ground for an alliance with those Irish nationalists who had become disillusioned with the superficial dogmatism of the Catholic Church.

NOTES

1. Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Mind of an Activist: James Connolly* (Dublin, 1971), 37.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, *James Connolly and the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978); Bernard Ransom, *Connolly's Marxism* (London, 1980).

4. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 242; Ransom, *Connolly's Marxism*, 100.

5. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 242.

6. James Connolly, "Labour, Nationality and Religion," in *Workers' Republic*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1950), 264.

7. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 240.

8. James Connolly, "Roman Catholicism and Socialism," in *Workers' Republic*, 56. Connolly probably had in mind such socialists as the Belgian social democrat M. Vandervelde, whom he regarded as a "middle-class doctrinaire" (*The Connolly-De Leon Controversy on Wages, Marriage and the Church* [Cork: Cork Workers Club, 1976]).

9. Connolly, "Roman Catholicism and Socialism," 58, 59.

10. *Ibid.*, 209.

11. *Ibid.*, 59. This mixture of paganism and Christianity present in the Irish peasant of the Western Seaboard fascinated John Millington Synge and is portrayed in his autobiographical work on the Aran Islands as well as in *Riders to the Sea*.

12. *Ibid.*, 262.

13. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 241.

14. "Labour, Nationality and Religion," 223. Father MacErlean's attack on Connolly was followed up by the latter's reply in the *Catholic Times*, 8 November 1912 (*James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom [London, 1973], 127–28).

15. "Labour, Nationality and Religion," 220–21.

16. In an article, "The Children, the IT and GWU and the Archbishop," Connolly vehemently attacks the clergy who prevented the sending of starving Dublin children to foster homes in England, considering the salvation of their souls to be more important than physical survival (*Workers' Republic*, 127–31).

17. James Connolly, "Father Finlay, S.J., and Socialism," in *Workers' Republic*, 43.

18. James Connolly, "Roman Catholicism and Socialism," 57.

19. *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, 137.

20. James Connolly, "North-East Ulster," in *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), 104.

21. Ransom, *Connolly's Marxism*, 23–24.

22. Reeve and Reeve, *James Connolly*, 249.

11

The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Dublin Strike and Lockout in 1913

True to its principles of New Unionism, the Transport Union became deeply involved in the labor unrest of 1911–13 that swept through Britain and Ireland. The union was determined to instill a spirit of independence, responsibility, and solidarity in the workers. The employers were disturbed by developments and waited for an opportunity to destroy the union and its chief organizer, James Larkin.

The first confrontation with employers came shortly after the founding of the union in June 1909, when the strike by quay laborers, carmen, loaders, and cattlemen in Cork spread to the Great Southern and Western Railway, where the porters were suspended for refusing to handle “tainted goods.” This was followed by a sympathy strike of railwaymen and carters.¹ The employers were not slow to answer. They formed the Cork Employers' Federation and issued an ultimatum that threatened strikers with instant dismissal, the employment of blackleg labor in such instances, and no reemployment “by any member of the Federation.”²

The strike was an obvious blunder, as the men had come out without any financial resources. The funds of the Transport Union and of the Cork Trades Council were soon exhausted, and help from the Dublin and Belfast Trades Council was insufficient. Any attempts on Larkin's part to settle the strike by arbitration were flatly rejected by the employers, who were determined to smash the union for all time. After a month without strike pay, the carters returned to work, to be followed

gradually by the other strikers. It was a defeat for the union, because “the men sought only restoration to work on the old terms without victimisation,”³ and the employers continued the lockout for weeks, while refusing to negotiate. Finally, the men were forced to accept the terms dictated by the employers. Emmet Larkin says the strike wrecked the labor movement in Cork and led to a split between the skilled and unskilled workers in the Trades Council. Also, the Transport Union branch in Cork had ceased to exist by the end of the year, and it took almost four years before it was resurrected. Clarkson, on the other hand, does not see the strike as a complete failure, for it showed the workers the necessity for the Transport Union, and, despite setbacks in Cork, the union flourished elsewhere.⁴

Moreover, the Cork strikes and lockouts of 1909 had important lessons for the future strategy of the union. They revealed the utter ruthlessness of the employers, and convinced Connolly, for example, that this could only be combated by developing “the militant spirit, the fighting character of the organisation.” At this stage in the industrial struggle in Ireland, Connolly viewed the sporadic strike, “its swiftness and unexpectedness,” and the solidarity of labor as expressed in the sympathy strike to be vitally important in combating the arbitrary will of the employers.

I believe that the development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation; that, indeed, the most theoretically perfect organisation, may, because of its very perfection and vastness, be of the greatest possible danger to the revolutionary movement if it tends, or is used, to repress and curb the fighting spirit of comradeship in the rank and file.”⁵

The year 1911 was one of industrial unrest throughout Britain and Ireland. The Seamen and Firemen’s strike in Dublin, which ended by the shipmasters conceding terms already accepted in Britain, was followed by dock strikes in Liverpool and London and by rail strikes in Ireland.⁶ The industrial unrest in Ireland

came to a climax in Wexford in August when two ironmongers closed their works, locking out 550 employees, simply because they were members of the Transport Union. P. T. Daly, local organizer of the ITGWU, raised no objection to the men joining another union provided management recognized their right to join the Transport Union. The employers stood firm, refusing to arbitrate, and used police force to baton the demonstrating workers. This again was an obvious attempt to smash the union. In January 1912, Daly was arrested and removed to Waterford, and Connolly was called to Cork to replace him. He succeeded in bringing about a settlement, adopting tactics that finally outwitted the employers: they were to recognize a new union—the Irish Foundry Workers’ Union, which would be affiliated to the ITGWU. The employers compromised and promised to reinstate the men without victimization. Two years later, in 1914, the Foundry Workers’ Union became an official branch of the ITGWU.

It was not surprising that the year 1913 saw a major confrontation in Dublin between employers and workers. Both sides had by then gained experience from the previous industrial struggles. The unrivaled inhumanity and cynicism of the Dublin capitalists were met with the stark determination of the workers to hold out at all costs. This was undoubtedly due to the unfailing and incessant work of Larkin and others in building up an organization that became the voice of the inarticulate masses. To Larkin it was extremely important that the completely demoralized Dublin working class find self-assurance to assert their rights. The union was not only to be the crusader in the industrial struggles, but also an organization of social and cultural progress for the Irish working class. Larkin campaigned against alcoholism. Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the union, acquired in 1912, became the center of the social activities of the union. Larkin’s sister Delia organized much of the social work, forming the Irish Workers’ Choir in 1912. Along with the choir and dancing classes, an Irish-language class was formed, and in June 1912 the Irish Workers’ Dramatic Society was founded. Sunday evenings were characterized by a lecture and concert, and every Christmas a

party was organized for the workers' children. In 1913 an Irish pipers' band was formed. Larkin's social program was crowned by the renting of Croydon Park in August 1913. Seeds were bought in order to interest the slum dwellers in the cultivation of vegetables and flowers, and a cow and calf were bought to familiarize the workers with Irish country life. Two soccer teams and a boxing team were also organized.⁷

Emmet Larkin comments on the hero cult surrounding Larkin. It was understandable, for those who listened to him "were heartened, for in cheering Larkin they were cheering themselves." The union was dominated by the spirit of Larkinism, by Larkin's personality. Frank Robbins, later to become one of the leaders of the Transport Union, describes Larkin's influence on him:

At this time Jim Larkin radiated for me an aura of magnetism. His arresting and flamboyant figure, his dramatic attitudes, coupled with his oratorical ability to sway his hearers, all conveyed to me the impression of a leader to whom I could give my loyalty.⁸

In an article in the *Irish Worker*, 30 August 1913, Connolly explained the deeper aspect, the social, political, and cultural significance of the ITGWU for the Irish working class:

The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union found that before its advent the working class of Dublin had been taught by all the educational agencies of the country, by all the social influences of their masters, that this world was created for the special benefit of the various sections of the master class, that kings and lords and capitalists were of value; that even flunkeys, toadies, lickspittles and poodle dogs had an honoured place in the scheme of the universe, but that there was neither honour, credit, nor consideration to the man or woman who toils to maintain them all. . . . If the value of a city is to be found in the development of self-respect and high conception of social responsibilities among a people, then the Irish Transport

and General Workers' Union found Dublin the poorest city in these countries by reason of its lack of these qualities. And by imbuing the workers with them, it has made Dublin the richest city in Europe today, rich by all that counts for greatness in the history of the nation.⁹

Larkin explained it even more simply:

We are going to *rouse the working classes* out of their slough of despond—out of the mire of poverty and misery—and lift them a plane higher. If it is good for the employer to have clean clothing and good food and books and music, and pictures, so it is good that the people should have these things also—and that is the claim we are making today.¹⁰

The publication of the *Irish Worker and People's Advocate* at the beginning of June 1911 proved to be an extremely important propaganda weapon for industrial unionism. Its aim was “to articulate working class opinion.” “What is wanted in Ireland,” Larkin said, “is an honest expression of dissatisfaction with the want of system in society.” The *Irish Worker* became extremely popular and was an immediate success. Its weekly circulation averaged 20,000 in Dublin City, which had a population of only 300,000. One of its most popular columns was the “legal column,” which gave ventilation “to any and every grievance.” This included indictments against the corruption of employers and other leading Dublin personalities. It was small wonder that within a year the *Irish Worker* received no less than seven writs for libel, none of which was really successful.¹¹

Larkin's biting satire was directed especially against the main representative of the Dublin business world, William Martin Murphy, who was described in the columns of the *Irish Worker* as an “industrial octopus,” “the Tramway tyrant,” “a capitalist sweater,” “a blood sucking vampire,” “a soulless, money grabbing tyrant.”¹² Murphy was not engaged in industry as such. His vast business empire was concerned with trade and commerce, and as such he was typical of the Dublin capitalist class. He

owned the Imperial Hotel, Clery's Department Store, and the *Irish Independent* newspaper. He had railroad shares in Ireland and West Africa and had interests in the municipal electric tramway systems in Paisley, Ramsgate, and Margate. Besides, he had the controlling interest in the Dublin United Tramway Company, where his employment system of two classes of laborers—permanent and casuals—defied trade-union organization.¹³ Murphy was not quite the “blood sucking vampire” Larkin made him out to be. He was known for his acts of personal charity among his employees. Like the nineteenth-century “benevolent” capitalist, he believed that employers should be obliged to look after their employees and condemned some of his fellow-employers for ill-treatment of their workers, since their actions were only giving aid to Larkin's cause.¹⁴ Murphy was a shrewd businessman who realized that cooperating with the trade unions—those representatives of Old Unionism—held advantages for him. Murphy was *the* representative of the Dublin financial world, a man of immense authority, and the inveterate enemy of New Unionism. He was the main force behind the formation of the Dublin Employers' Federation, Ltd., in 1911—a combination of employers to combat the activities and influence of “Larkinism” in the city.

To meet the growing threat of the ITGWU, Murphy had the Tramway Company issue a statement that it would not recognize the Transport Union. Suspected Larkinites were dismissed, and nonunion men were installed in their place. Larkin's reply was to call the men out on strike. On 26 August 1913, during the Dublin Horse Show week, seven hundred men walked off the trams. Previous to this, on 15 August, Murphy ordered the lockout of workers in the distribution section of the *Irish Independent* who were members of the Transport Union. Larkin persuaded a number of retailers to refuse to accept the *Independent* for sale. He asked the largest newspaper distributor in Ireland, Eason and Sons, to strike the *Independent* off its list. When it refused to do so, Larkin called a strike in the firm.

Matters become more complicated when the dockers on the quays refused to handle “tainted goods,” i.e., goods consigned to

Eason from England. On 29 August, the Employers' Federation took the offensive. Over four hundred employers decided on 3 September to lock out all employees who were members of the Transport Union. What had begun as a strike now took on the menacing form of a general lockout in the city. The employers tried to compel their employees to sign the following document: "I hereby undertake to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers, and, further, I agree to immediately resign my membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (if a member); and I further undertake that I will not join or in any way support this union."¹⁵ The presentation of such a document was nothing new in British labor history. In the 1830s in England, in an effort to combat the strikes organized by the Grand National Consolidated Union, employers confronted their workers with a similar document.¹⁶ Similarly in 1852, employers attempted to crush the newly founded Amalgamated Society of Engineers by locking out the workers and presenting a document that forced the men back to work.¹⁷

By 22 September, the total number of locked-out workers in Dublin had reached 25,000.¹⁸ The government did not hesitate to enlist the police to disband open-air meetings of the union. Police batoning charges on 28 and 29 August led to the deaths of two workers, James Noland and John Byrne, and the injury of over four hundred. The brutality of the police was underlined by the events on 30 August, "Bloody Sunday." A meeting to be held in Beresford Place had been proclaimed. Following the appearance of Larkin on a balcony of the Imperial Hotel, briefly addressing the crowd below, police baton-charged the crowd, including passers-by. As Liberal M.P. Handel Booth explained: "The noble street was in the hands of the most brutal constabulary ever let loose on a peaceful assembly. Up and down the road, backwards and forwards, the police rushed like men possessed."¹⁹ Both Larkin and Connolly were arrested and jailed, Larkin being released on bail on 12 September.²⁰ Connolly was released after going on hunger strike for a week. Connolly's daughter Ina relates that he was the first man in Ireland or in the British Isles to adopt this method of fighting for his rights. He

plainly admitted the source of his tactics was that of the militant suffragists.²¹

Constance de Markievicz, herself a victim of police brutality, witnessed the police batoning of women and children.²² Tom Clarke, later signatory of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on Easter Monday, 1916, wrote a letter of protest to the *Irish Worker* and the IRB newspaper *Irish Freedom*, in which he called for an independent inquiry “free of Castle control” that would be free to probe and search in every direction “into the inhuman savagery of the police.”²³ Maud Gonne MacBride, condemning the employers of Dublin for imposing their “document” on their employees, supported the workers in their refusal to sign it. “For the honour of our race, the men have refused, there would have been small hope for the Irish nation if they had consented. It would have meant that foreign domination had destroyed all manhood.”²⁴ Maud Gonne related the Dublin labor dispute to the national question. The unrivaled unscrupulousness of the employers, she maintained, was due to the fact that Ireland was not a free nation. The employers are protected, she said, “by a police force over which Ireland has no control and encouraged by a magistracy whose object seems to be to make justice a derision.”²⁵ The absence of a democratic system of government in control of the coercive and legislative systems was certainly one of the main reasons why the employers had absolute power to impose their will on the working population.

Toward the end of September, the government decided to set up a court of inquiry into the Dublin dispute by the Board of Trade, with Sir George Asquith as chairman. T. M. Healy argued the employers’ case, stating that they had been driven to act because of the attacks made on them. “They saw no way by which they could have any guarantee that the sympathetic strike which had been put down and crushed in England would be stopped in Ireland.”²⁶ Healy put the onus of the blame on Larkin and leaders of the Transport Union, arguing that Larkin acted the part of a Napoleon, and that the men “were mere puppets in the hands of three or four of their leaders.”²⁷

Larkin presented the men's case. It was a magnificent performance, denouncing the employers for the living and working conditions in Dublin. The speech took almost two hours to deliver and was full of witty repartee. Larkin ended, "We are out to break down racial and sectarian barriers. My suggestion to the employers is that if they want peace we are prepared to meet them, but if they want war, then war they will have."²⁸

The commission produced a fairly balanced report. It pointed out that "no community could exist if resort to the 'sympathetic' strike became the general policy of Trade Unions." At the same time, it concluded that the document drawn up by the employers imposed "upon the signatories conditions which are contrary to individual liberty, and which no workman or body of workmen could reasonably be expected to accept."²⁹ Larkin and Connolly showed their willingness to negotiate. The employers remained adamant and refused to accept the report as a basis for negotiation. Thus the report remained simply a piece of paper, and no effort was made by the British (Liberal) government to act on the findings of the commission.

The attitude of the employers and the increasing misery and deprivation of the locked-out workers and their families called forth a storm of protest in the press. Above all, leading members of the Dublin intelligentsia voiced their protest and sympathized with the workers. The famous "Open Letter to the Masters of Dublin" by the poet and painter George William Russell (pen name AE)," published in the *Irish Times*, 7 October 1913, reveals Russell's abhorrence of the inhuman autocracy of the employers: "Your insolence and ignorance of the rights conceded to workers universally in the modern world were incredible, and as great as your inhumanity."³⁰ The letter ended with a prophetic ring:

There was autocracy in political life and it was superseded by democracy. So surely will democratic power wrest from you the control of industry. The fate of you, the aristocracy of industry, will be as the fate of the aristocracy of

land if you do not show that you have some humanity still among you.³¹

The *Irish Citizen*, organ of the Irish Women's Franchise League, edited by Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, was very much concerned with the question of women and labor. Although, as Skeffington points out, the paper was a purely suffragist organ, "taking no sides in the struggle between organised labour and organised capitalism now going on in Dublin," a conflict that suddenly threw out of employment six hundred girls at Jacob's factory must deeply concern all those "who are interested in women's conditions of work."³² Skeffington points to the labor leaders, especially Larkin and Connolly, who helped the suffragist cause.

Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Mary Plunkett, officers of the Dublin Industrial Peace Committee and later signatories of the Easter Monday proclamation, opened the columns of their journal *Irish Review* to Connolly's defense of the workers.³³

Eamonn Ceannt, likewise a signatory, showed his sympathy with labor by criticizing publicly Griffith's attacks on Larkinism. As far back as the Wexford dispute of 1911, Ceannt publicly disassociated himself, as a Sinn Feiner, from Griffith's attitude to labor. Griffith had not condescended to analyze "any of the principles for which Larkin professes to stand."³⁴ Moreover, he ignored the fact that both Larkin and Connolly were also working for the cause of Irish nationalism. Ceannt reminds Griffith that "it is the business of Sinn Fein to use the grievances of the various classes in this country as a whip to lash the English tyrant out of Ireland." He caustically remarks: "By the way, have you no condemnation of the Employers' Federation, or is there one law for them and another for the servants?"³⁵

Padraic Pearse made use of the columns of the new paper *Irish Freedom*, oriented toward the Irish Republican Brotherhood, to voice his opinion on the situation of 1913. "My instinct," he said, "is with the landless men against the lords of lands and with the breadless men against the master of millions. I may be wrong, but I do hold it a most terrible sin that there should be landless men in this island of vast yet fertile valleys,

and that there should be breadless men in this city where great fortunes are made and enjoyed." Giving an insight into the living conditions of one-third of Dublin's population, he concludes:

These are among the grievances against which men in Dublin are beginning to protest. Can you wonder that protest is at last made? Can you wonder that the protest is crude and bloody? I do not know whether the methods of Mr. James Larkin are wise methods or unwise methods (unwise, I think, in some respects), but this I know, that here is a most hideous wrong to be righted, and that the man who attempts honestly to right it is a good man and a brave man.³⁶

On 28 October Larkin was tried and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on charges of sedition. Protest and messages of solidarity came from all over Britain and Ireland. Meetings were held throughout Britain in support of the Dublin workers and for the release of Larkin. One such meeting took place in the Albert Hall, London, on 1 November, at which the speakers included Connolly and George Russell. The *Irish Citizen* reported enthusiastically about the meeting, referring to the work of the "militant suffragists" who helped to organize and steward it:

No sentiment of any of the speakers was so loudly cheered as Mr. James Connolly's declaration that he stood for opposition to the domination of nation over nation, of class over class, or of sex over sex.³⁷

In a remarkable speech in which he defended the workers as "the true heroes of Ireland to-day" and insisted that "democratic control of industry will replace the autocracy which exists to-day," George Russell summed up the nature of the Dublin conflict: "This labour uprising in Ireland is the despairing effort of humanity to raise itself out of a dismal swamp of disease and poverty."³⁸

During the month of October, it was suggested by Mrs. Dora Montifiore, a prominent social worker in London, that some of

the children of the locked-out workers be sent to foster homes in England. This act of charity was condemned by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Archbishop Walsh, who, in an open letter, asked the mothers of the children if they had abandoned their faith and Christian Catholic duty. As a result, numbers of Catholics, led by their priests, picketed the boats that were to take the children to England and in many cases forcefully prevented the children from leaving. Many protested against this infringement of civil liberties, among them William Butler Yeats, who wrote in an article entitled “Dublin Fanaticism”:

I want to know who has ordered the abrogation of the most elementary rights of the citizens, and why the authorities who are bound to protect every man in doing that which he has a legal right to do—even though they have to call upon all the forces of the Crown—have permitted the Ancient Order of Hibernians to besiege Dublin, taking possession of railway stations like a foreign army.³⁹

Yeats’s open protest elicited a letter from George Russell to the poet that healed a breach in their friendship. It was up to the intellectuals to “make a fight for social and intellectual freedom.”⁴⁰

James Connolly was skeptical of Mrs. Montifiori’s scheme. He anticipated the opposition that would be roused. Although deeply grateful to those who had offered their homes, he pointed out, “We have nevertheless felt that the scheme was bound to be taken advantage of to our detriment by all the hostile elements who surround us, but usually fear to reveal their hostility.”⁴¹ He made it plain, however, that “the master class of Dublin calmly and cold-bloodedly calculate upon using the sufferings of the children to weaken the resistance of the parents.” If the employers reject the Archbishop’s offer of mediation, then, Connolly said, it is clear where the Archbishop’s duty lies, namely in organizing public support for the workers “to defeat their soulless employers.”⁴²

One of the major factors that kept the locked-out workers solidly behind Larkin and the union over months was the amount

of financial support received. Distress funds in Britain and Ireland were set up by intellectual well-wishers. Above all, the financial aid from the Irish and British labor movements was phenomenal. Large sums were contributed by British trade unionists. The Miners' Federation sent £1,000 a week for a period, and the British Trades Union Congress raised over £90,000. The cooperative movement in Britain made substantial contributions—two foodships were sent to Dublin; the S.S. Hare arrived on 27 September and the S.S. Fraternity on 4 October.⁴³ An eye-witness account of the journey of the Hare to Dublin indicates the atmosphere of solidarity among the British rank-and-file workers for the victims of the lockout: "Over in Dublin men were fighting a workers' battle, and women and children were beset by hunger."⁴⁴ The reaction of the recipients is also significantly recorded: "Ah, now," said one man, proudly (he had not eaten for twenty-four hours), "it's themselves might be wanting our help some day."⁴⁵

In Liberty Hall, soup kitchens were organized to feed the hungry women and children. Constance de Markievicz and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington of the Women's Franchise League offered their services in this respect.

One of the outcomes of the recurring police brutality was the decision to form a workers' defense force—the Irish Citizen Army. In various speeches, even as far back as the Belfast strike of 1907, Larkin had hinted at the founding of a "citizen army."⁴⁶

At one of the mass meetings held outside Liberty Hall, Larkin underlined the need for a disciplined workers' army. Sean O'Casey records in *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* the speech in which Larkin declared:

Labour in its own defence must begin to train itself to act with disciplined courage and with organised and concentrated force. . . . If Carson had permission to train his braves of the North to fight against the aspirations of the Irish people, then it was legitimate and fair for Labour to organise in the same militant way to preserve their rights and to ensure that if they were attacked they would be able to give a very satisfactory account of themselves.⁴⁷

At the meeting in the Albert Hall on 1 November, George Bernard Shaw made the point, “If you put a police man on the footing of a mad dog, it can only end in one way, and that is that all respectable men will have to arm themselves. I suggest you should arm yourselves with something which should put a decisive stop to the proceedings of the police.”⁴⁸ On 11 November, Connolly spoke to a suffragist meeting that many of the locked-out women attended. He hinted at military force, endorsing the actions of militant suffragists.

The Industrial Peace Committee that had failed in its efforts to bring about a settlement of the dispute was renamed the Civic League. On 12 November, members of the League met in the Reverend R. M. Gwynn’s room at 40 Trinity College and discussed the formation of a Citizen Army. Captain White, an ex-Sandhurst regular army officer who had fought in the South African war, but who had, in the intervening years, abandoned British imperialism for Home Rule, put forward the proposal and was later to take charge of army drilling.

On 13 November, at a victory meeting to celebrate Larkin’s release from jail, Connolly announced the formation of a Citizen Army: “Listen to me, I am going to talk sedition. The next time we are out for a march, I want to be accompanied by four battalions of trained men. I want them to come with their corporals, sergeants and people to form fours. Why should we not drill and train our men as they are doing in Ulster?” The actual formation of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) was announced the same evening at a meeting of the Civic League in the Ancient Concert Rooms.⁴⁹

Captain White enthusiastically drilled the men in Croydon Park despite great difficulties: men were ill-clothed and undernourished, and the numbers fluctuated depending on the numbers attending simultaneous strike meetings and strike duties.⁵⁰ By December, the numbers of those enlisted in the ICA were between 500 and 600. The relatively small number was due to age and size restrictions on members—only fully grown men were to be admitted.⁵¹ Another reason was undoubtedly the formation of the Irish Volunteers, arising from a meeting organized

by the IRB on 11 November. The Irish Volunteers were undoubtedly the larger organization, the Irish Citizen Army understanding itself as a *workers'* army, the protective arm of the labor movement. From the outset, Connolly was aware of the wider implications of the Citizen Army. In a letter to William O'Brien, he wrote: "There is a magnificent chance for the Transport Union all over Ireland as the one labour organisation aggressively active on the true nationalist side."⁵²

The death knell for the labor struggle in Dublin was sounded on 1 February 1914, when the Builders Labourers' Union, 3,000 strong, agreed to a humiliating surrender:

The Union agreed that none of its members should remain or become in the future, a member of the Irish Transport Workers' Union. Its members will not take part in or support any form of sympathetic strike; they will handle all material, and carry out all instructions, given them in the course of their employment. Further they will work amicably with all employees, whether they be unionists or non-unionists.⁵³

By 11 February 1914, the lockout was virtually over, and the Dublin Relief Fund, sponsored by the British Trades Union Congress, announced its official closure. What had happened? Larkin had doubtless made serious blunders at the decisive point in the struggle. Both he and Connolly realized that the success of the struggle lay in the support they received from the British labor movement. Both appealed to British trade unionists to help keep the port of Dublin closed by taking steps to prevent the further importation of nonunion labor into Dublin, and thereby isolating the Dublin employers. British labor leaders were dilatory, because it sounded like the call for a general strike in Britain in support of the Dublin workers. Larkin spontaneously issued a manifesto over the heads of the trade-union officials, making a definite appeal to the rank and file to support the labor struggle. He followed this by a series of vicious attacks on leading personalities of the British labor movement.⁵⁴ This, in turn, had been provoked to a certain extent by his experiences with some British

trade-union officials who refused to give union support to “sympathetic strikes.” At a special Trades Union Congress in London on 9 December, the majority of delegates voted against the Dublin workers’ demand for sympathy-strike action and the call for a monthly levy organized by the trade unions.⁵⁵ It was obvious that the 20,000 workers and their families could not be supported by the slender resources of the Irish trade-union movement. As Connolly explained:

The Dublin fighters received their defeat, met their Waterloo, at the London Conference of 9th December. At that Conference the representatives of organised labour declared that they would not counsel the use of any kind of economic force or industrial action in support of the Dublin workers, and immediately this was known, the fight was virtually lost.⁵⁶

In an article on 9 February 1914, after the outcome of the lockout had become obvious, Connolly bitterly denounced British trade-union officialism: “We asked for the isolation of Dublin, and for answer the leaders of the British Labour movement proceeded calmly to isolate the working class of Dublin.”⁵⁷

Both Connolly and Larkin underlined the importance of sympathy-strike action—the nonhandling of “tainted goods” as an effective means of meeting the demands of the employers on the industrial field. It was a method similar to the boycott applied to landlords during the days of the land war in Ireland. Connolly explained the essence of the sympathy strike as follows:

It pointed out that we in Dublin had realised that the capitalist cannot be successfully fought upon the industrial field unless we recognise that all classes of workers should recognise their common interests, that such recognition implied that an employer engaged in a struggle with his workpeople should be made taboo or tainted, that no other workers would co-operate in helping to keep his business growing, that no goods coming from his works should be handled by organised workers. That he should, in effect, be put outside the pale of civilisation, and

communication with him should be regarded as being as deadly a crime as correspondence with an enemy in war time.⁵⁸

The sympathy strike was a method to be employed in particular situations to combat the power of employers. It was not a general strategy aiming at the overthrow of the existing social order.

Connolly was quick to point out that the trade-union amalgamations and federations being established at that period did not necessarily imply a great increase in trade-union solidarity and revolutionary spirit among union members. In fact, the growth of huge amalgamations such as the National Transport Workers' Federation tended to lead to increased bureaucracy and alienation of officials from the rank and file. Centralization and the lack of regional or district organization led, according to Connolly, to "the worst type of sectionalism: each local Union or branch finds in the greater organisation of which it is part a shield and excuse for refusing to respond to the call of brothers and sisters in distress, for the handling of tainted goods, for the working of scab boats."⁵⁹

Connolly regarded the sporadic or lightning strike as more effective than the carefully planned strike that had to be sanctioned by trade-union officials.

The big strike, the vast massed battalions of Labour against the massed battalions of capital on a field every inch of which has been explored and mapped out beforehand, is seldom successful, for very obvious reasons. The sudden strike, and the sudden threat to strike suddenly, has won more for Labour than all the great Labour conflicts in history.⁶⁰

Thus bureaucracy and sectionalism were dampening the spontaneous spirit of solidarity among the rank and file. If industrial unionism was to become a revolutionary force, Connolly pointed out, "we must recognise that the only solution of that problem is the choice of officers, local or national, from the standpoint of their responsiveness to the call for solidarity."⁶¹ The amalgamation or federation of unions must then "be carried

out by men and women with the proper revolutionary spirit.”⁶²

These thoughts of Connolly undoubtedly inspired the development of the Shop Stewards’ Movement in Britain. The breach between the working men and women and their trade-union leaders and the almost total assimilation of trade-union policies with those of the government during the years of the first world war created a situation that was ripe for militant working-class revolt on the shop floor level. The shop-steward leaders filled the vacuum that had arisen between the rank and file and the officials.

Summing up the outcome of the lockout, Connolly maintained that the battle was “a drawn battle,” for although the workers had been unable to “force the employers to a formal recognition of the Union, and to give preference to organised labour,” the employers themselves gained nothing. They failed to impose the “document” on the whole working population of the city and in the end “were unable to carry on their business without men and women who remained loyal to their unions.”⁶³

What the British labor leaders failed or refused to understand was that the Dublin lockout was more than a trade-union fight: it was “a great class struggle.”⁶⁴ British labor retreated in face of the prospect of a wave of sympathy strikes throughout Britain and the consequences of revolutionary action. The *Irish Times*, however, did not fail to see the implication of the Dublin conflict; “Smashing Larkin” was very different from “smashing Larkinism”:

There is no security whatever that the men who are now going about their work brooding over the bitterness of defeat will not endeavor to reorganize their broken forces, and, given another leader and another opportunity, strike further and a more desperate blow at the economic life of Dublin.⁶⁵

With the founding of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers at the height of the struggle in Dublin, and with the sympathy of a section of the intelligentsia, including the radical sections of Sinn Fein, for the workers’ fight, the road to Easter Week had begun to be paved.

NOTES

1. J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1970), 224.
2. *Ibid.*, 225; Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader, 1876–1947* (London, 1968), 59.
3. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 225.
4. *Ibid.*, 227.
5. James Connolly, “Old Wine in New Bottles,” in *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, edited by Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (London: Cape, 1973), 314–15.
6. For a detailed description of the strikes, see Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 235–40.
7. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 148.
8. *Ibid.*, 145; Frank Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough: Recollections of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin, 1977), 15.
9. James Connolly, “The Dublin Lock-out: On the Eve,” in *The Workers’ Republic: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1950), 112.
10. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 74.
11. *Ibid.*, 70–74.
12. *Ibid.*, 107.
13. *Ibid.*, 106; “An Enquiry into the Labour Disputes held in Dublin Castle on 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th October, 1913,” National Library of Ireland, 19.
14. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 107, n. 5; Curriculum Development Unit, Dublin, *Divided City: Portrait of Dublin 1913* (Dublin, 1978), 68.
15. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 244.
16. A. L. Morton and George Tate, *The British Labour Movement* (London, 1973), 70.
17. *Ibid.*, 105.
18. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 109–10.
19. Donald Nevin, ed., *1913: Jim Larkin and the Dublin Lock-Out* (Dublin, 1964), 34.
20. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 115.
21. Ina Connolly-Heron, “James Connolly, a Biography,” *Liberty* (July 1966): 46.
22. *Ibid.*, 34–35.
23. *Ibid.*, 37.
24. *Ibid.*, 84.
25. *Ibid.*
26. “An Enquiry into the Labour Disputes,” 3.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 121.
29. *Ibid.*, 121–22.
30. Nevin, *1913*, 57.

31. Ibid.
32. "Suffragists and the Strike," *Irish Citizen*, 6 September 1913.
33. Nevin, 1913 86, 87.
34. Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, 274.
35. Ibid., 275.
36. Padraic H. Pearse, "From a Heritage" (October 1913), in *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 177–79.
37. *Irish Citizen*, 8 November 1913.
38. Nevin, 1913: *The Dublin Lock-Out*, 86; 87.
39. Ibid., 72.
40. Ibid.
41. Connolly, "The Children, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Archbishop," in *Workers' Republic*, 128.
42. Ibid., 129, 130.
43. Nevin, 1913, 46.
44. Percy Redfern, "The Story of the Foodships," *The Wheatsheaf*, November 1913, in Ruth Frow, Edmund Frow, and Michael Katanka, *Strikes: A Documentary History* (London: C. Knight, 1971), 152.
45. Ibid.
46. John W. Boyle, "Connolly, the Citizen Army and the Rising," in *The Making of 1916*, ed. Kevin B. Nowlan (Dublin, 1969), 54.
47. Sean O'Casey, "The Story of the Irish Citizen Army," in *Feathers from the Green Crow* (London, 1963), 185.
48. Jacqueline van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz in the Cause of Ireland* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 115.
49. Ibid., 116–17.
50. Boyle, "Connolly, the Citizen Army and the Rising," 55.
51. See van Voris, *Constance Markievicz*, 120; also Frank Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough: Recollections of the Irish Citizen Army* (Dublin, 1977), 16.
52. Van Voris, *Constance Markievicz*, 120.
53. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 141.
54. Ibid., 131–32.
55. Ibid., 139.
56. Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 146, note 1.
57. James Connolly, "The Isolation of Dublin," in *Workers' Republic*, 144.
58. James Connolly, "A Lesson from Dublin," in *Workers' Republic*, 147.
59. Connolly, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 317.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. "The Problem of Trade Union Organisation," in *Workers' Republic*, 324.
63. Ina Connolly-Heron, *Liberty* (July 1966): 50.
64. James Connolly, "Glorious Dublin," in *Workers' Republic*, 123.
65. Larkin, *James Larkin*, 142.

The “Woman Question” in Ireland

Referring to Connolly during the Dublin strike and lockout of 1913, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, editor of the suffragist newspaper the *Irish Citizen*, stated: “Mr. James Connolly . . . is the soundest and most thorough-going feminist among all the Irish labour men. . . . He has done more, by speech and writing, than any other man to bring about that strong feeling of sympathy for the suffragist cause which now exists among the Irish Labour Party.”¹ Not only did Connolly give wholehearted support to the cause of women’s political rights, he even, as we have seen, adopted the tactics of the suffragists by going on a hunger strike while in jail. In his use of language, he was always careful to avoid employing the term “man” or “men” to denote the whole of the human race; he referred on most occasions to “men and women,” thus underlining his view that women were men’s equals and partners. Examples of Connolly’s usage are: “The man or woman who has caught the spirit of the Labour Movement brings that spirit of analysis and definition into his or her public acts and expects at all times to answer the call to define his or her position”;² and, “The men and women in the shop must be the controlling and directing force of the labour movement”;³ and again, “Who dare censure these brave men and women? Assuredly not men and women of our generation”;⁴ and, “Today the memory of the Young Irelanders is held close to the heart of every intelligent Irish man or woman.”⁵

Connolly took a very firm stand on the question of equal rights for women. In fact, he saw it as one of the prerequisites of a future socialist society in Ireland: “Of what use to such sufferers can be the re-establishment of any form of Irish state if it does not embody the emancipation of womanhood.”⁶ The

Independent Labour Party of Ireland, founded in Dublin in 1912 at the instigation of Connolly, made “complete political and social equality between the sexes one of the first planks in its platform.”⁷ Connolly’s demand for social and political rights for women stemmed from his belief in the close connection between the suppression and exploitation of women and the establishment in Ireland of “a social and political order based upon the private ownership of property.”⁸ “The system of private capitalist property in Ireland, as in other countries, has given birth to law of primogeniture under which the eldest son usurps the ownership of all property to the exclusion of the females of the family.”⁹ This, as Connolly explained, was not the case in the older Gaelic system of society. Some of Connolly’s remarks come very close to Engels’s position in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. There is also a striking similarity to William Thompson’s remarks on exploitation of women in his “Appeal of One-Half the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery,” first published in 1825. It is not clear if Connolly read the text, but he certainly was aware of its existence and mentioned it in *Labour in Irish History*. “Thompson,” he said, “advocated as a necessary preliminary to socialism the conquest of political representation as the basis of the adult suffrage of both sexes.”¹⁰

Connolly was, above all, concerned about the situation of women from the laboring classes, for, as he pointed out, “The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave.”¹¹ He recognized her double burden: not only is she a wage-earner, completing each day’s work, but also “she becomes the slave of the domestic needs of her family.” He held this up against those “who prate glibly about the ‘sacredness of the home’ and the ‘sanctity of the family circle.’”¹²

In the *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, he painted a dismal picture indeed of the plight of the Belfast mill girls. Their work was anything but emancipatory. The situation in Dublin and among the sweated home-workers was no better. Women in rural areas were forced to emigrate and seek work abroad. “It is humiliating,”

wrote Connolly, "to have to record that the overwhelming majority of those girls were sent out upon a conscienceless world, absolutely destitute of training and preparation and relying solely upon their physical strength and intelligence to carry them through."¹³ Connolly believed that the women alone would achieve their own emancipation: "None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter."¹⁴ He encouraged women to take on political responsibility where possible. His own daughter Nora recounts how she made her first public speech at her father's instigation.¹⁵

In his controversy with the U.S. socialist Daniel De Leon, Connolly declared himself in favor of monogamous marriage and condemned the "divorce evil of today" arising "out of that capitalist system, whose morals and philosophy are based upon the idea of individualism and the cash nexus as the sole bond in society."¹⁶ This indicated a singularly undialectical approach to the question. However, the situation should be borne in mind. His polemic against De Leon colored his opinions somewhat and possibly accounts for his unfortunate rejection of August Bebel's book *Woman and Socialism* without having read it in detail. Connolly was very sensitive, moreover, to negative statements made by Catholic priests on the question of socialism, marriage, and the family.

In a later "Defence," Connolly quoted extracts from Bebel's book, extracts that he felt underlined his controversial point: "It has been said that his work (i.e., Bebel's) is based upon that of Morgan but the most delicate mind could read Morgan without a blush and the same cannot be said of Bebel."¹⁷ He holds fast to his opinion that Bebel's book is "an attempt to seduce the proletariat from the firm ground of political and economic science on to the questionable ground of physiology and sex."¹⁸ Sexual relations, according to Connolly, are beyond the bounds of socialism: "I personally reject every attempt, no matter by whom made, to identify Socialism with any theory of marriage or sexual relations."¹⁹ It is unfortunate that he should have relegated gender relationships to the private sphere. He was doubtless right in asserting that the abolition of the capitalist system would solve

the economic side of the woman question only, but to him “the question of marriage, of divorce, of paternity, of the equality of woman with man are physical and sexual questions.”²⁰ He did not see that gender relationships are basically *social* relationships, which, in turn, are tied up with traditional patriarchal concepts of the family and women’s role in the family. Thus he failed to understand divorce as a fundamental democratic right. He saw the emancipation of women basically as economic emancipation.

Connolly’s statements on marriage and divorce were certainly a step behind the ideas of democratization of gender relationships advocated by William Thompson and the early socialists, but a decline of feminist impulse had occurred within socialism. Women’s issues were pushed to the periphery, to be tackled once the primary battle of capitalist exploitation had been won.²¹ Although his views on certain feminist issues may have been narrow, judging from today’s standards, far from rejecting feminism, as was the case with contemporary socialist leaders in Britain, Connolly insisted that the economic and political emancipation of women must be an integral part of any socialist program.

NOTES

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3. James Connolly, *The Workers’ Republic* (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1950), 156.

4. James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin, 1973), 69.

5. James Connolly, “Labour, Religion and Ireland,” in *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings* (London: Cape, 1973), 69.

6. James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (Dublin and Belfast: New Books Publications, 1972), 45.

7. *Irish Citizen*, 8 June 1912.

8. Connolly, *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 45.

9. *Ibid.*, 43.

10. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 69.

11. Connolly, *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 41.

12. *Ibid.*, 44.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. 45.
15. Richard Michael Fox, *Rebel Irishwomen* (Dublin, 1967), 53.
16. Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 237.
17. James Connolly, Emile Vandervelde, and Daniel De Leon, *The Connolly-De Leon Controversy on Wages, Marriage and the Church*, Historical Reprints (Cork: Cork Workers Club, 1976), 30.
18. Ibid., 8, 9.
19. Ibid., 31.
20. Connolly, Vandervelde, and De Leon, *Connolly-De Leon Controversy*, 8–9.
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PART IV

Escalation of Radical Activity Leading to the Easter Rising, 1913–1916

13

Preparing for Revolution

Speaking of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), which had a membership of about two thousand in 1911, Bulmer Hobson comments that the new organ *Irish Freedom* provided the organization with a rallying point and a unity of outlook and conviction that had previously been lacking. There were still too few in the movement, however, to influence Irish politics in a particular direction. They “had to be content to wait until some new situation should arise of which they could take advantage to emerge as a definite force which would have to be reckoned with.”¹ Between 1910 and 1912, despite the foundation of the Wolfe Tone and Freedom Clubs and the *Fianna na hEireann* under the auspices of the IRB, advanced nationalism was losing ground in the face of the growing popularity of Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party and the demand for Home Rule.

A new situation was precipitated by the arming and drilling of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which had arisen out of the unification of all existing anti-Home Rule volunteer groups in the North in January 1913. In September 1913, at the height of the lockout in Dublin, a decision was taken by an assembly of five hundred delegates at the Ulster Unionist Council in Belfast to set up a provisional government in Ulster if Home Rule became law. Not only did the arming, drilling, and securing of German arms for the UVF meet with silent acquiescence on the part of the Liberal government, but the British Conservative Party openly supported the Ulster Unionists through the foundation of the “British League for the support of Ulster and the Union.”²

Political developments in Ulster—the Orange-conservative alliance—led young nationalists to doubt the ability of Redmond

and cohorts to deal with the Ulster Unionists and to win Home Rule by constitutional means. Parliamentary democracy was fast being eroded. Recourse to a more radical method of asserting the rights of the Irish people was publicly urged by Padraic Pearse, the headmaster of St. Enda's, and Eoin MacNeill, professor of early and medieval Irish history at University College Dublin—both outside the IRB.³

Apart from developments in Ulster, the growing inevitability of war between Great Britain and Germany inclined many dissatisfied nationalists toward the advisability of an Irish national military force. Michael Joseph Rahilly, a prominent Gaelic Leaguer (always referred to as “The O’Rahilly,”), advocated in *Irish Freedom* (August 1912) the foundation of an Irish Volunteer Force. In the eventuality of war with Germany, Britain would be forced to reduce its standing army in Ireland by over three-quarters. Then it would have to rely on the good will of the Irish military force and accept the demands of self-government.⁴ The National Council of Sinn Fein resolved on 20 January 1913 that “it was the duty of all Irishmen to possess a knowledge of arms.”⁵ A hall was then hired for shooting practice by members of Sinn Fein. The IRB consequently began drilling, with instructors recruited from the older members of *Fianna na hEireann*, the boys’ military-training organization.⁶

The foundation of a national volunteer force was inspired by the appearance of an article by MacNeill, “The North Began,” in *An Claidheamh Soluis* (1 November 1913), agitating for the establishment of citizen forces that, like the Volunteers of 1782, could become “the instrument of establishing self-government and Irish prosperity.” He pointed to the agitation in Ulster as being “the most decisive move towards Irish autonomy that has been made since O’Connell invented constitutional agitation.”⁷ Nationalist and republican welcoming of a recourse to arms in Ulster and comparing of the Carsonites to the Ulster rebels of ’98 were naive and completely unhistorical. England was seen as the main enemy of the Irish people; the Orangeman, because he was ready to fire on the Unionist flag “the moment it threatens his prosperity,” was seen as their “natural ally.”⁸ Padraic

Pearse's November 1913 article shows a tendency to regard the use of physical force per se as an appropriate method of getting rid of the English, without considering the ideological implications:

Personally, I think the Orangeman with a rifle a much less ridiculous figure than the Nationalist without a rifle; and the Orangeman who can fire a gun will certainly count for more in the end than the Nationalist who can do nothing cleverer than make a pun.⁹

Connolly rejected this misrepresentation of the Carsonite position as a form of Irish patriotism, pointing out that the true aim of the Carsonites was to be reestablished in their historic position "as an English colony in Ireland, superior to and unhampered by the political institutions of the Irish natives."¹⁰

Apart from the arming of Ulster, there were rumors of drilling by the Midland Volunteer Force in Athlone. To what extent such a force actually existed as described in the columns of the *Westmeath Independent* is doubtful.¹¹ Such reports did, however, help to underline the urgency of founding a volunteer force in the South.

The IRB under Hobson took the initiative in this direction by urging MacNeill to start a national volunteer movement. It was hoped that by having MacNeill as figurehead of the movement the IRB would have effective control behind the scenes and lead it in a revolutionary direction. F. X. Martin maintains that MacNeill, although realizing that he would not be in a position to control the Volunteers, nevertheless hoped to guide it. He underestimated, however, the effectiveness of the IRB as conspirators.¹²

A "steering committee" was set up to inaugurate a meeting to found the Irish Volunteers. The social composition of the committee was lower middle class, mainly intellectual, ranging from an accountant and clerk of the Dublin Corporation (Ceannt and Fitzgibbon), to journalists (Moran, editor and proprietor of the *Leader*; W. J. Ryan, member of the editorial staff and leader-writer of the *Irish Independent*; Piaras Beaslai, on the staff of the *Freeman's Journal*; Hobson, freelance journalist; Sean

MacDermott (MacDiarmada), on the staff of *Irish Freedom*, to schoolteacher (Pearse), and university professor (MacNeill).¹³

The financial difficulties facing the movement were in evidence even before the inaugural meeting of 25 November. Martin calls it “a poor man’s organisation,” the first subscription list showing the sum of £8 7s 6d contributed by sixteen subscribers. In contrast, the Ulster Volunteers’ target of £1,000,000 had been well passed by the end of 1913/14.¹⁴

The committee represented three shades in the nationalist movement: supporters of the Parliamentary Party (such as MacNeill and Moran), members of the IRB (Hobson, MacDermott, Ceannt, Deakin, and Beaslai), and active members of Sinn Fein who were not members of the IRB although sympathizing with it, (such as The O’Rahilly and Fitzgibbon), and Gaelic revivalists (Ryan and Campbell).¹⁵ On the whole, the Gaelic League and the Irish cultural revival were the all-pervasive force that inspired the movement from its inception. Care was taken to have a broadly based provisional committee. Hobson maintained that no attempt was made to confine membership of the committee to people in sympathy with the IRB or Sinn Fein.¹⁶ However, the committee of thirty had from the outset twelve IRB members, and that shifted to fifteen when MacDonagh, Pearse, and Plunkett joined the Brotherhood.¹⁷

A public meeting was held in the Rotunda Rink on 25 November to enroll volunteers. At this mass meeting, at which nearly four thousand men signed the enrollment form, a manifesto was read outlining the purpose of the movement “to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland.”¹⁸ It was to be a defensive organization that would “not contemplate either aggression or domination.”¹⁹ From the beginning, the public image of the Volunteers was based on MacNeill’s idea that they should act as a guarantee that the British government would have to respect Ireland’s claim to self-government without partition. Military action would only be necessary if the government took steps to disarm the Volunteers or imposed conscription in Ireland. This would necessarily entail

short-term decisions, action understood simply as confrontation. Below the surface flowed the radical current of the IRB that understood the Volunteers to be *the* weapon to be forged for a revolutionary struggle, to be employed at the most opportune moment. The outbreak of war in 1914 and subsequent political developments in Ireland were to bring the idea of the Volunteers as a revolutionary army increasingly to the fore.

From the inception of the movement, a certain amount of animosity and rivalry existed between the Volunteers and the purely working-class organization of the Citizen Army. To begin with, the committee had refrained from inviting representatives of the labor movement to the meeting at the Rotunda Rink. It is doubtful if this was a wise move. There was a strong element in the Volunteers that believed that it would be prudent to include representatives of the established nationalist bodies as well as supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party on the committee. But to neglect deliberately representatives of the labor movement was bound to provoke ill-feeling and give indirect support to the accusations of radical Larkinites such as Sean O'Casey that the Volunteers were simply a middle-class nationalist movement that the workers should refrain from joining.

In an article in the *Irish Worker*, 21 February 1914, O'Casey declared:

Personally I hold the workers are beside themselves with foolishness to support any movement that does not stand to make the workers supreme, for these are the people, and without them there can be no life nor power.²⁰

The meeting in the Rotunda Rink was intermittently interrupted by hecklers from the Transport Union, who had arrived in a group of several hundred with hurley sticks. The anger of the Larkinites had been provoked by the appearance of Larry Kettle, co-secretary of the Volunteers, on the platform. Kettle had been accused of ousting Transport Union men from the city power works at the Pigeon House Fort, and his father had roused the anger of the Larkinites by hiring scab labor at harvest time when his farm laborers went on a sympathy strike with the city

workers.²¹ The hostile demonstration in the Rotunda Rink was, however, directed against Kettle and not the organization of the Irish Volunteers as such.

In his *Story of the Irish Citizen Army*, O'Casey maintains that the disturbance was not organized by the Citizen Army and that the Army and its officials had nothing to do with the occurrence.²² Relations between the rank and file of the Volunteers and the Citizen Army were cordial. There was, however, no intention of amalgamating the Citizen Army with the Volunteers, due to the antilabor stance of the Volunteer Provisional Committee, especially MacNeill and Hobson. MacNeill rejected a challenge by the Citizen Army to a public debate in which the Volunteers were "to justify their appeal for the sympathy and support of the Irish working class,"²³ to declare if they stood for the principles of an Irish Republic, "to give in their constitution a declaration in favour of the Rights of Man as well as the Rights of Ireland, as the United Irishmen did; and to refuse a welcome to those who attempted to prevent the workers from asserting their elemental right to join the Union of their choice."²⁴ O'Casey accused Bulmer Hobson of using his influence to prevent an understanding between "the forces of Labour and the militant power of young-hearted Nationalism."²⁵

The "young-hearted Nationalism" to which O'Casey refers was voiced in the columns of the new IRB organ *Irish Freedom*, edited by Hobson. Articles were contributed arguing for a union of forces between nationalists and socialists. An Irish Republic would entail a social as well as a national regeneration of the Irish Nation:

The conception of the nation as a spiritual entity will not be destroyed if Nationalists decide that changes must be made in the social structure before happiness and goodwill reign in Ireland, and see that the making of these changes involves a shifting of economic wealth from the possession of the few to the possession of the many.²⁶

Although also voicing the opinion of those nationalists who were skeptical of militant trade unionism, the tone of the paper

generally was favorable to the labor movement. Referring to the number of skilled workers who had joined the Volunteers, an article entitled "The Labour Movement and the Volunteers" pointed out that the working-class rank and file could "make the organisation what they will." Turning to the middle-class element in the movement, the writer wryly noted that "whether the Irish middle-class has enough brains, tenacity, and courage to work with the Irish working-class to gain the political freedom needful for both is for the future to decide."²⁷

By the middle of 1914, the Volunteers showed signs of becoming quite a formidable organization; by May, 75,000 had enrolled. From July to September the numbers rose from 160,000 to 180,000.²⁸ After the publicity of the Howth gun-running incident on 26 July 1914, money began to pour in for arms from all over Ireland.²⁹ American subscriptions came in at the rate of £1,000 a month. The financial difficulties of the Volunteers had been overcome.

Redmond, disliking the rapid growth of an organization completely outside the control of the Parliamentary Party, presented MacNeill with an ultimatum in June 1914. The Provisional Committee of the Volunteers would have to accept twenty-five Redmonite nominees, or Redmond would set up a rival organization. Rather than risk such a split, MacNeill, Casement, and Hobson consented, much to the dismay of the radical republicans. Hobson's prestige within the IRB suffered a blow as a result. He broke with Clarke and MacDermott, gave up the editorship of *Irish Freedom*, and resigned from the Supreme Council of the IRB.³⁰

The compromise with Redmond had the effect of temporarily dulling the improved relationship between the Volunteers and Citizen Army that had come about as a result of the common pilgrimage to the grave of Wolfe Tone at Bodenstown on 26 June 1914. Tom Clarke, chairman of the Wolfe Tone Committee, welcomed the participation of the Citizen Army. O'Casey recalls:

It was gratifying to see that the committee in charge made every possible effort to give equal honour to all. The

Fianna formed an inner ring around the grave, and the outer ring was formed by alternative members of the Volunteers and units of the Irish Citizen Army.³¹

During the months following the Dublin Lockout, the Citizen Army, in spite of the untiring work of Captain White, practically went out of existence. Much original enthusiasm had been sapped by the outcome of the lockout; the labor leaders had not sufficient time to devote their entire energies to the Citizen Army; many workers had drifted into the more attractive Volunteer movement. By March 1914 it had become obvious that radical steps would have to be taken if the Citizen Army was to be saved from total extinction. O'Casey approached Captain White, suggesting that definite steps be taken to "form the Citizen Army into a systematic unit of labour."³² This meant to draw up a constitution, to elect a council to supervise systematic drilling, "to open a fund for equipment purposes, to arrange for public meetings, to form companies of the army wherever Labour was strongest, and generally to take steps to improve and strengthen the condition and widen the scope of the Irish Citizen Army."³³

A public meeting was held in the Concert Room of Liberty Hall on 22 March 1914, at which Jim Larkin presided. The constitution was approved, and an army council was elected with Sean O'Casey as its first secretary.³⁴ Larkin informed those present that steps would be taken to provide a standard uniform, and tents would be procured for night camping during the summer months in Croydon Park.³⁵ The constitution stressed the "absolute unity of Irish Nationhood." This was aimed at Asquith's proposal for partition (9 March 1914), according to which any Irish county could vote itself out of Home Rule for six years.³⁶ The constitution included general principles of democracy and the words of Lalor that "the ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested of right in the people of Ireland."

Apart from the additional clause that stipulated that every enrolled member must, if possible, be a member of a trade union recognized by the Irish Trades Union Congress, there is no

reference to the objective of a workers' republic, nor to the working-class nature of the army. It is possible that the aim was to attract radical-minded nationalists, otherwise oriented toward the Volunteers, to the Citizen Army.

With British entry into the war against Germany on 4 August 1914, a qualitatively new situation arose in Ireland. The Third Home Rule Bill, which had been given the Royal Assent, was suspended for the duration of the war. Hence the constitutional road to Irish independence was blocked. At the same time, a recruiting campaign aimed at mass enlistment of Irishmen into the British army began. It was opposed by the Dublin Trades Council, which declared against Irish involvement in the war in September 1914. The Independent Labour Party of Ireland (ILPI) organized antiwar lectures in the autumn of 1914.³⁷ In October 1914 the Irish Neutrality League was founded, the committee consisting of labor men and republicans; Connolly was president; Sean T. O'Kelly of Sinn Fein was secretary; and Thomas Farren, president of the Dublin Trades Council, was treasurer.³⁸ Republican opposition to the war was the result of the long tradition against British imperialism and propaganda in the republican movement. But why the strong antiwar feeling in the main labor and socialist organizations in Ireland?³⁹ This was unique, for as Arthur Mitchell points out, the Irish labor movement was the only movement in a belligerent country not to support the war effort. One of the main reasons is probably the clear stand of Connolly on the war question and on the issues of socialism and nationalism, and undoubtedly the linking of socialism with the demand for national self-determination.

Desmond Greaves explains the theoretical problem that faced Connolly thus:

Was the correct course now to identify the Irish and British movement and endeavour to concert the overthrow of capitalism in both countries simultaneously? Or was the Irish movement for national independence *in its own right* a factor making for the overthrow of European capitalism?⁴⁰

Connolly had no illusions concerning the attitude of British labor leaders to the Irish labor movement. Considering the position of the Labor M.P. George Barnes, who supported Asquith's partition proposal on the grounds that he and his colleagues took their cue from the representatives of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Connolly commented:

This, I take it, is a confirmation of my position that the Irish workers must work out their own salvation, and that in the process of working it out they need not be astonished if the working-class leaders in Great Britain utterly fail to understand them.⁴¹

On the nature of Irish socialism, Connolly wrote:

This question of presenting Socialism that it will appeal to the peculiar hereditary instincts and character of the people amongst whom you are operating is one of the first importance to the Socialist and Labour movement. A position, theoretically sound, may fail if expressed in terms unsuited to the apprehension of those to whom you are appealing. . . . I have painstakingly stuck to the endeavour to translate Socialist doctrines into terms understood by the Irish, in or out of Ireland.⁴²

In almost biblical language, Connolly makes his point clear: a war between the nations in the interests of capitalism is "a thing accursed." In contrast, the war of a subject nation for independence as well as "the war of a subject class to free itself from the debasing conditions of economic and political slavery" are "holy and righteous."⁴³

From September 1914 on, Connolly's increasing use of revolutionary language becomes noticeable. On 20 September Redmond delivered a speech at Woodenbridge, County Wicklow, in which he summoned all Irishmen to fight on the side of Great Britain in the war. MacNeill, Hobson, Pearse, MacDermott, and the other original members of the Volunteer Committee repudiated Redmond and his nominees. Redmond retaliated by setting up his own organization, the Irish National

Volunteers. F. X. Martin estimated that of the 180,000 Volunteers registered, only 11,000 sided with MacNeill.⁴⁴ The split had a devastating effect on the size of the movement. In Ulster the 4,000 Volunteers under McCullough shrunk to 200, in Derry from 2,000 to less than forty.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the Volunteers who remained with MacNeill were a solid, determined group and Connolly, welcoming the move to remove the Redmondites from the committee, was convinced that only a new, aggressive policy on the part of the movement could prevent the Provisional Committee and their followers from being “wiped out of existence.”⁴⁶

The Volunteers must recognise that their fight is a struggle to the death. . . . The Volunteers must realise that against the shamelessly vile methods of the politician there is but one effective weapon—the daring appeal of the Revolutionist.⁴⁷

The Volunteers, he maintained, should pledge themselves to fight for Ireland and to enforce “the repeal of all clauses on the Home Rule Act denying to Ireland powers of self-government now enjoyed by South Africa, Australia or Canada.”⁴⁸ By October, Connolly was offering the Provisional Committee of the Volunteers all the support necessary in the forthcoming struggle. As he ominously presaged:

For some of us the finish may be on the scaffold, for some in the prison cell, for others more fortunate upon the battlefields of an Ireland in arms for a real republican liberty.⁴⁹

Connolly’s concept was gradually becoming clearer. According to Greaves, “His mental picture was that of a democratic revolution to put an end to the imperialist war, in Irish conditions taking a national form.”⁵⁰

NOTES

1. Bulmer Hobson, “The Origin of Ogláigh na hEireann,” *An-t-óglách* (March 1931): 2.

2. F. X. Martin, "MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers," in *The Scholar Revolutionary Eoin MacNeill, 1867–1945, and the Making of a New Ireland*, ed. F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (Shannon: Irish Univ. Press, 1973), 105.
3. *Ibid.*, 107.
4. *Ibid.*, 114.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 116.
7. *Ibid.*, 131.
8. Padraic H. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 189.
9. *Ibid.*, 185.
10. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism* (Dublin, 1948), 131–32.
11. For details, see Martin, "MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers," 126–28.
12. *Ibid.*, 135–36.
13. *Ibid.*, 138–40.
14. *Ibid.*, 140.
15. *Ibid.*, 146.
16. Hobson, "The Origin of Oglagh na hEireann," 4.
17. Martin, "MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers," 151.
18. Hobson, "Origin of Oglagh na hEireann," 5.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Sean O'Casey, *Feathers from the Green Crow* (London, 1963), 107.
21. Martin, "MacNeill and the Irish Volunteers," 164.
22. O'Casey, *Feathers from the Green Crow*, 202.
23. *Ibid.*, 204.
24. *Ibid.*, 203.
25. *Ibid.*, 209.
26. J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1970), 286.
27. *Irish Freedom*, March 1914.
28. Hobson, "The Origin of Oglagh na hEireann"; Martin "MacNeill and the Volunteers," 178.
29. Erskine Childers landed 900 German rifles and 26,000 rounds of ammunition at Howth from his yacht. An incident occurred at Bachelor's Walk as Volunteers returned home. Soldiers sent to intercept the Volunteers got out of hand and shot several people. See Bulmer Hobson, "Origin of Oglagh na hEireann," *An-t-óglách* (June 1931): 10.
30. León Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858–1924* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976), 154.
31. O'Casey, *Feathers from the Green Crow*, 211.
32. *Ibid.*, 191.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, 193–94.
35. *Ibid.*, 192.
36. John W. Boyle, "Connolly, the Citizen Army and the Rising," in *The Making of 1916*, ed. Kevin B. Nowlan (Dublin, 1969), 57.

37. Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1898–1930* (London, 1974), 62.
38. *Ibid.*, 63.
39. The Belfast branch of the ILPI was split on the issue of anti-British war propaganda. There were objections to Connolly's antiwar lectures and speeches. In the course of the war years, the party fell apart (*ibid.* 62).
40. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 353.
41. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 122.
42. *Ibid.*
43. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week, 1916* (Dublin, 1966), 46.
44. F. X. Martin, "McCullough, Hobson and Republican Ulster," in *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916*, ed. F. X. Martin (London: Methuen, 1967), 104.
45. *Ibid.* The National Volunteers had no political basis. Within a year they had become a negligible force.
46. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 164.
47. *Ibid.*, 163.
48. *Ibid.*, 165.
49. *Ibid.*, 161.
50. Greaves, *James Connolly*, 359.

14 A Socialist and War

Connolly's thought in many ways reflects the most important issues that occupied the international working class during the period of the Second International. One of these major issues was the question of the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. It was by no means a clear issue within the International, nor was the question of the role of national liberation movements in the struggle for socialism.

Although the London Congress of the International passed a resolution in July 1896 asserting the right of all nations to self-determination, declaring sympathy for the working people of the oppressed nations, and calling upon them to work together with the class-conscious workers of the world to organize for the overthrow of international capitalism and the establishment of international socialist democracy,¹ the Stuttgart Congress of 1907 indicated that the colonial question had not been clarified. Within the ranks of the European socialist parties were those (MacDonald, England; van Kol, Holland; David and Bernstein, Germany) who were in favor of developing a "positive socialist colonial policy"—accepting colonialism as a *fait accompli*, recognizing the "civilizing" influence of colonialism, and putting forward proposals for improved treatment of native peoples and the development of national resources. Although the debate ended with a vote in favor of a resolution that rejected the "civilizing" mission of capitalist society—"capitalist colonial policy, by its very essence, necessarily leads to the enslavement, forced labor and the destruction of the native peoples under the colonial regime,"²—this could not hide the sharp division of opinion.

Sharp differences on the question of self-determination existed even among the left-wing socialists. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, argued that by supporting the fight for national independence in the oppressed countries, the socialists were merely helping to strengthen the power of the native national bourgeoisie, who would possibly make use of its “right” to exploit other people. This argument was rejected by Lenin, as it did not consider a national uprising from the fundamental standpoint of its “*real* social content,” but only examined the possibility that the bourgeoisie, although suppressed at present, could make use of its “*right* to oppress.”³ National liberation movements were, to Luxemburg, anachronistic, petty bourgeois, and reactionary. She did not see the revolutionary potential of the national liberation movements in the struggle against czarism and later against imperialism.⁴ In his notes on the Easter Rising, Lenin maintained that the experience of the imperialist war that began in 1914 proved the opposite; namely, that in the epoch of imperialism, the civil war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the industrially advanced countries must be combined with democratic revolutionary movements, in which the national liberation movements of the underdeveloped, oppressed nations play a considerable role.⁵

In his article on Luxemburg’s “Junius Pamphlet,” Lenin criticizes her opinion that national wars are no longer possible since the world is divided up into a small heap of imperialist powers, and thus every war that begins as a national war is bound to turn imperialist. Lenin argues that a national war can become imperialist or revolutionary, depending on circumstances. “National wars waged by colonies and semi-colonies in the imperialist era are not only probable, but *inevitable*.”⁶ Such national wars and uprisings must not necessarily be unsuccessful. Lenin considered that, in the epoch of imperialism, a socialist revolution will be a struggle of all oppressed colonies and nations against international capitalism,⁷ for it is, he maintained, one of the elementary characteristics of imperialism that it accelerates capitalist development in the underdeveloped countries and thus “extends and intensifies the struggle against national oppression.”⁸ Lenin

advocated the fusion of nations, which he considered could only come about through a transitional period guaranteeing freedom for the oppressed nations of the world.⁹

James Connolly, through the specific experience of Ireland, understood that in the epoch of imperialism national liberation movements could contribute to the overthrow of capitalism. Moreover, he maintained that as long as the British people supported British government policy toward Ireland, they were guilty of maintaining oppression:

We are sick of the canting talk of those who tell us that we must not blame the British people for the crimes of their rulers against Ireland. We do blame them. In so far as they support the system of society which makes it profitable for one nation to connive at the subjection of another nation they are responsible for every crime committed to maintain that subjection.¹⁰

Putting it even more bluntly, Connolly suggested that insurrection in Ireland and throughout the British dominions might be required “to teach the English working class they cannot hope to prosper permanently by arresting the industrial development of others.”¹¹

At the Stuttgart Congress of 1907, the left-wing socialists succeeded in adding an amendment to Bebel’s resolution asserting that the source of wars lay mainly in capitalist economic rivalries; if war threatened to break out then it should be the duty of the working class in the countries affected and their parliamentary representatives to make every effort to prevent the war by all means at their disposal, depending on “the intensity of the class-struggle and the political situation in general.” The amendment continued:

Should war none the less break out, it is their duty to intervene in order to bring it promptly to an end, and with all their strength to make use of the economic and political crisis created by the war to stir up the deepest strata of the people and precipitate the fall of capitalist domination.¹²

Following the outbreak of war in the Balkans in November 1912, an emergency socialist congress was called at Basel. Its purpose was to present a united socialist front against war and to prevent the Balkan war from being turned into a European war. The manifesto that was issued reiterated the principal theses of the Stuttgart Congress. By August 1914, the main European powers were engaged in the war; the socialist parties in the belligerent countries had been powerless to prevent its outbreak. Only a minority of socialists spoke out and opposed the war. In Germany on 4 August 1914, the German social democrats in the Reichstag voted solidly in favor of the war credits, thus supporting government policy. In Great Britain, the Labour Party, the trade unions, the Fabians, and the right wing of the British Socialist Party under Hyndmann supported British government policy in the war. As Connolly commented:

With the honourable exception of the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Labour Party, the organised and unorganised Labour advocates of Peace in Great Britain swallowed the bait and are now beating the war drum.¹³

With the main body of socialists in the belligerent countries supporting the war effort, the ideological and political collapse of the International was inevitable. Connolly's stand on the war question was clear:

I believe that the socialist proletariat of Europe in *all* the belligerent countries ought to have refused to march against their brothers across the frontiers, and that such refusal would have prevented the war and all its horrors even though it might have led to civil war.¹⁴

“If these men must die,” he argues, “would it not be better to die in their own country fighting for the freedom of their class” for “even an unsuccessful attempt at social revolution by force of arms, following the paralysis of the economic life of militarism, would be less disastrous to the socialist cause than the act of socialists allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers in the cause.”¹⁵ Connolly was persistent in his attack on

“jingoism” or British chauvinism, which called for loyalty to Britain and the British Empire. He knew that the appeal to a false sense of national pride was deliberately provoked by the ruling classes in the interest of finance capital. It was obvious to him what such a war would mean to the Irish working class: more unemployment and less wages. Hence a European war for the aggrandizement of the capitalist class could provide the working class of Europe with an opportunity to overthrow the fetters of the capitalist system.

Should the working class of Europe, rather than slaughter each other for the benefit of kings and financiers, proceed tomorrow to erect barricades all over Europe, to break up bridges and destroy the transport service that war might be abolished, we should be perfectly justified in following such a glorious example and contributing our aid to the final dethronement of the vulture classes that rule and rob the world.¹⁶

Connolly’s practical proposal was that the labor movement in Ireland should take immediate action in preventing profiteering by stopping the export of foodstuffs from Ireland. He was aware of the consequences: “This may mean more than a transport strike, it may mean armed battling in the streets to keep in this country the food for our people.”¹⁷ Thus the anti-imperialist activities of Irish socialists could be the starting point of the movement which would end in the emancipation of the European working class:

Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled in the funeral pyre of the last war lord.¹⁸

In 1915 Connolly sought to find an answer to the question of how was it possible that European socialism failed to avert war. It was due, he maintained, primarily to the “divorce between the industrial and political movements of labour.” Socialist political organization was not strong enough in any country to direct

revolutionary industrial organization. As Connolly explained, “No socialist party in Europe could say that rather than go to war it would call out the entire transport service of the country and thus prevent mobilization. No socialist party could say so, because no socialist party could have the slightest reasonable prospect of having such a call obeyed.”¹⁹

In none of the belligerent countries were the revolutionary socialists in a position to assert themselves in the face of opportunist influence. Within the Second International the revolutionary socialists formed a persistent, but nevertheless small minority and, at the outbreak of war, the opportunists in the European socialist parties, who represented the interests of a section of the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy,²⁰ were at the helm of affairs, and their pact with the national bourgeoisie had the effect of influencing and completely disorientating the masses, “dumbfounded, panic-stricken, disunited, crushed by the state of martial law.”²¹ From 5–8 September 1915, an international conference of socialists took place at Zimmerwald, at which the left-wing socialists, including the Bolsheviks, issued a manifesto against war and those socialists who supported it and for peace against annexations. Lenin’s proposal, however, to turn the imperialist war into civil war was turned down.²² At the beginning of April 1916, Lenin underlined his point that the development of revolutionary mass struggle must inevitably lead in the conditions of European war to the “transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war for socialism.”²³

On 30 August 1914, shortly after the outbreak of war, Connolly was agitating for action at a meeting in Dublin:

Revolutions do not start with rifles; start first and get your rifles after. Our curse is our belief in our weakness. We are not weak, we are strong. Make up your mind to strike before your opportunity goes.²⁴

In January 1916, Connolly explained his strategy thus:

We believe that in times of peace we should work along the lines of peace to strengthen the nation, and we believe

that whatever strengthens and elevates the working class strengthens the nation. But we also believe that in times of war we should act as in war.²⁵

Coming to the crux of the matter, Connolly pointed out that “the far-flung battle line” of England is weakest at the point nearest its heart, that Ireland is in that position of tactical advantage, that a defeat of England in India, Egypt, the Balkans, or Flanders would not be so dangerous to the British Empire as any conflict of armed forces in Ireland.²⁶

Writing some months after the Easter Rising, Lenin was to arrive at the same conclusion: “A blow delivered against the power of the English imperialist bourgeoisie by a rebellion in Ireland is a hundred times more significant politically than a blow of equal force delivered in Asia or Africa.”²⁷

In the face of British jingo propaganda, Connolly and other Irish socialists carried out an antirecruiting campaign. To do so it was necessary to combat the strong anti-German feeling that was saturating the Irish people. In the pages of the *Irish Worker*, Connolly stressed again and again that the Irish labor movement had no war with Germany, but welcomed the German “as a brother struggling towards the light.”²⁸ Connolly put the blame fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the British Empire. In so doing he underestimated considerably the role of German imperialism. While understanding the roots of the war to be economic—“This war is not a war upon German militarism, but upon the industrial activity of the German nation”²⁹—he overlooked the aggressive nature of German imperialism in its suppression of the smaller nations in the colonial race for “a place in the sun.” Following the lead of German socialists such as August Bebel, who argued that Germany was waging a war of defense against Russian barbarism, Connolly underlined the “civilizing” influence of the German nation: “German thought is abreast of the rest of the world. . . . [I]t is now universally admitted that the Germans are the best educated people in Europe.”³⁰ “To help Britain,” he maintained, “is to help Russia to the dominance of Europe, to help the barbarian to crush the scientist.”³¹

He contrasted the “peaceful industrial development of the German nation” to the “armed piracy of Britain.”³²

Undoubtedly, much of what Connolly wrote during this period was directly propagandistic, aimed at combating British jingoism and anti-German fever—hence his insistence that Britain was the main enemy of the Irish people—but his arguments concerning the imperialist nature of the war lack the perspicacity and directness which are evident in Lenin’s articles of the same period. Lenin pointed out in 1914 that “neither of the two belligerent groups of nations is second to the other in cruelty and atrocities in warfare.”³³ and that the German bourgeoisie was hoodwinking the working class into believing that the war was “in defence of the fatherland, freedom, civilisation, for the liberation of the peoples oppressed by tsarism and for the destruction of reactionary tsarism.”³⁴ Lenin was in no doubt that the same bourgeoisie that had always been “a most faithful ally of tsarism and an enemy of the revolutionary movement of Russia’s workers and peasants” would make “every effort to support the tsarist monarchy against a revolution in Russia “independent of the outcome of the war.”³⁵

Connolly, together with Irish socialists and republicans, carried out a successful anticonscription campaign. He was convinced that some form of conscription in Ireland would eventually be introduced, but that it would be resisted by insurrectionary warfare, which would mean “barricades in the streets, guerrilla warfare in the country.”³⁶

We of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, we of the Citizen Army, have our answer ready. We will resist the Militia Ballot Act, or any form of conscription, and we begin now to prepare our resistance. Upon the Volunteers we urge similar resolves, similar preparations.³⁷

Connolly vented his wrath against the use of “economic conscription,” or military conscription under economic pressure, which he bluntly described as “the policy of forcing men into the army by depriving them of the means of earning a livelihood.”³⁸

Connolly was aware that those Dublin employers who had locked out their workers in 1913 were employing the same weapon of starvation to force men into the British army. He condemned those Englishmen and Scotsmen who were fleeing from conscription in England and appearing in Ireland to replace Irishmen in jobs. “The duty of English workers,” he said, “is to stay at home and fight conscription, not to run away from the fight.”³⁹

NOTES

1. Vladimir I. Lenin, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” in vol. 22 of *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 321.

2. George D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 3, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (London, 1970), part 1, 70.

3. Lenin, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” 332.

4. For a summary of Rosa Luxemburg’s theses on the national question between 1893 and 1917, see Michel Löwy, “Le problème d’histoire,” in Georges Haupt, Michel Löwy, and Claude Weill, *Les Marxistes et la question nationale, 1848–1914* (Paris, 1974), 376.

5. Lenin, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up,” 353–58.

6. Lenin, “The Junius Pamphlet,” in vol. 22 of *Collected Works*, 311.

7. Lenin, “Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919,” in vol. 30 of *Collected Works*, 159.

8. Lenin, “The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution,” in vol. 23 of *Collected Works*, 78.

9. Lenin, “A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism,” in vol. 23 of *Collected Works*, 67; Lenin, “The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” in vol. 21 of *Collected Works*, 413–14.

10. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1966), 163.

11. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), 172.

12. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 3, *The Second International*, part 1, 67–68.

13. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 152.

14. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 55.

15. *Ibid.*, 41.

16. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 133.

17. *Ibid.*, 133–34.

18. *Ibid.*, 134.

19. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 59.

20. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," in vol 23 of *Collected Works*, 110.
21. Lenin, "Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International." In vol. 21 of *Collected Works*, 443.
22. Imanuel Geiss, *Geschichte griffbereit*, vol. 4 (Hamburg, 1988), 579.
23. Lenin, "Proposals Submitted by the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. to the Second Socialist Conference," in vol. 22 of *Collected Works*, 176.
24. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 49.
25. *Ibid.*, 138–39.
26. *Ibid.*, 139.
27. Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," 257.
28. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 172.
29. *Ibid.*, 138.
30. *Ibid.*, 135, 139.
31. *Ibid.*, 135.
32. *Ibid.*, 140–41.
33. Lenin, "The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War," in vol. 21 of *Collected Works*, 18.
34. Lenin, *Lenin on Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 91.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism*, 168–69.
37. *Ibid.*, 169.
38. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 120.
39. *Ibid.*, 158–59.

The Easter Rising: A Critical Assessment

There are clear reasons for Connolly's change in strategy concerning the aim of establishing a socialist republic in Ireland. Commenting bitterly on the suppression of the *Irish Worker*, on 4 December 1914, he said, "We will now rejoice, Home Rule is on the Statute Book, martial law is now in force, and free expression of opinion is forbidden."¹ The introduction of the Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act, which restricted civil liberties and the ever-growing threat of the Conscription Act being enforced in Ireland led Connolly to believe that these were indeed "exceptional times": "We believe in constitutional action in normal times, we believe in revolutionary action in exceptional times. These are exceptional times."²

In December 1914, besides the *Irish Worker*, the nationalist papers, *Sinn Fein*, *Irish Freedom*, and *Ireland*, were suppressed. On 24 March 1916, the *Gael* was suppressed, and the premises of the printers in Liffey Street, Dublin, were raided by the police, who "seized all the type forms, dismantled the machinery, and carried all the vital parts off to Dublin Castle along with all books and papers connected or believed to be connected with the journal."³ When the police threatened to invade Liberty Hall to search the premises, a mobilization order went out to the Dublin workers to protect the *Workers' Republic* and Liberty Hall.⁴ The readiness and enthusiasm with which the summons was carried out are described vividly in the *Workers' Republic* of 1 April 1916.⁵ The alertness with which the Dublin workers acted when it was a question of defense of Liberty Hall—the citadel of the militant labor movement—is a sign of the efforts made under Connolly's leadership to turn the Citizen Army into a disciplined military force.

Following Larkin's departure to the United States in October 1914, Connolly became acting general secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), editor of the *Irish Worker*, and chairman of the Citizen Army. This, however, had not followed automatically. In his memoirs, *Forth the Banners Go*, William O'Brien recalls how Larkin had suggested that P. T. Daly become acting general secretary in his absence, with Connolly in charge of the paper and the insurance section of the ITGWU. Considering Daly to be incompetent, O'Brien wrote to Connolly advising him against taking up the job delegated to him by Larkin. In response Connolly wrote a letter to Larkin from Belfast (9 October 1914) frankly expressing his disappointment at Larkin's decision and stating:

To bring me to Dublin now and put me in a position subordinate to Daly would be equal to announcing to the public that you had come to the conclusion that I was not fit to be trusted. I do not think that I deserve this. . . . As I have no confidence personally in Daly's ability to manage the Union I should not like to be in a position where I should share the responsibility of the failures without the power to avert them.⁶

Connolly was set on maintaining a friendly relationship between the Citizen Army and the Volunteers, since he regarded the Volunteers, after the Redmondite split, to be an essential alliance partner in the forthcoming struggle against Britain. Commenting on the present Volunteer leadership and that of 1782, he points to a qualitative difference:

We cannot see that the present leaders of the Irish Volunteers can at all be compared to the crowd of aristocratic, clerical and capitalist reactionaries who steered the Volunteers of '82 to their destruction. . . . [T]he one certain mark to distinguish the Irish Volunteers of today from their forerunners is the fact that in their allegiance they set Ireland first.⁷

It was not impossible for a member of the Citizen Army to have close connections with the Volunteers. Constance Markievicz, for example, through her membership in *Cumann na mBan*, which described itself as “an independent body of Irish women, pledged to work for the establishment of an Irish Republic by organizing and training the women of Ireland to take their places by the side of those who are working and fighting for a free Ireland,” was engaged in initiating a Defence of Ireland fund for arming and equipping the Volunteers.⁸

Although the immediate practical work of *Cumann na mBan* consisted in fund-raising, first aid and demonstrations on setting up field kitchens and feeding an army, the general aim was the gaining or rather regaining of citizenship for women which had prevailed under the old Gaelic system of civilisation, in which “women were free to devote to the service of their country their every talent and capacity.”⁹

Sean O’Casey, a staunch Larkinite who regarded any attempt at alliance with the Volunteers as a compromise with the forces of nationalism, tried to oust Constance Markievicz from the Citizen Army by claiming that the “Volunteers Association was, in its methods and aims, inimical to the first interests of Labour, and it could not be expected that Madame could retain the confidence of the Council.”¹⁰ Defeated, O’Casey resigned from the position of secretary of the Army and left. His bitterness is reflected in his antinationalist stand in his early play “The Plough and the Stars” and in his autobiography—in his assessment of Connolly, the advanced nationalists, and the Easter Rising.

Much significant material has been published so far on the Easter Rising, especially following its fiftieth anniversary in 1966.¹¹ Yet, despite this, the more one reads on the subject, the greater becomes the impression of confusion and contradiction among individual authors concerning an interpretation of the essential aspects of the Rising. The Rising itself is described

variably as a “dignified protest,” “a demonstration in arms,” “a foredoomed enterprise,” “a dramatic spectacle” played for the benefit and applause of future generations of Irishmen. Tom Garvin, for example, explains that “the event had the air of an enactment on stage about it, and of course its real effects were symbolic and psychological rather than military.” It was an enactment “on stage” of “Pearse’s mythical conflict between Gael and Gall, of gallant fight against overwhelming odds.”¹² Larsen and Snoddy on the other hand regard it as a “working-men’s revolution.” They declare it to look like “a perfect picture of a socialist revolution in the way Lenin and Marx envisaged it in their writings.”¹³ F. X. Martin wonders whether it is a “revolution or evolution.”¹⁴ Augustin Birrell, chief secretary of Ireland at the time of the Rising, writing in 1936, condemns it as “a supreme act of criminal folly on the part of those who were responsible for it, for it never had a chance, and was really nothing more than a Dublin row.”¹⁵ Summing it up, Sean Cronin remarks, “The rebellion in Dublin was no more than a protest in arms by men—and women—who believed in the doctrine of physical force.”¹⁶

Quite apart from praise or condemnation of the military plans for a rising, apart from the controversy concerning the military competence or incompetence of the leaders, most writers seem to agree that the rebellion was a foredoomed enterprise, organized by a small minority of rebels, without the popular support of the masses. It was recognized as a failure by the leaders, and is therefore significant as a “victory of spirit over materialism,”¹⁷ or, as Cronin comments, “Unlike previous struggles, in 1916 ideology created the event. The people did not rebel.”¹⁸

What is striking in the great majority of interpretations of 1916, is that the Rising is analyzed on its own merits as an isolated event, without taking account of the wider context of the imperialist world war and of the significance of the Irish struggle as part of the general struggle of the smaller nations for self-determination. Most historians approach the problem entirely undialectically. It is misleading to reduce the Rising to the question of the triumph of mind over matter. It is true that ideology or

“cultural nationalism” did much to create the atmosphere of 1916, but certain events and activities also helped to aggravate matters. If it were merely a question of staging a spectacle to rouse the Irish from national slumber, if the leaders regarded themselves as “the prophetic shock-minority,”¹⁹ prepared to sacrifice themselves to save the national soul of future generations, why did they take steps to make the planned insurrection as effective as possible?

In her comprehensive article on the background to the Rising, Maureen Wall points to the series of lectures given at Volunteer headquarters on Kildare Street, by Connolly, MacDonagh, and others “on practical aspects of warfare, including communications, mapping, and street fighting.”²⁰ Plans were drawn up for the participation of the provinces, including Ulster in the event of a national rising. Dorothy Macardle speaks of the plans of the insurgents as being detailed and precise.²¹ F. X. Martin contradicts this, stating that the plans for the provinces were vague: “the rebels in Dublin, if necessary, would fight their way out of the city, withdraw across the midlands and with the men in the west, joined by Volunteers who were to have marched from Ulster to Connacht, would “hold the line of the Shannon” in a final grand rally of the Gaels of Ireland against the oncoming British troops.”²² J. J. Connell points to the discrepancy of standard between the Dublin Volunteers and those in the rest of Ireland. The Dublin Volunteers were ahead of the country generally in cohesion and knowledge.²³ Significant were the efforts to procure military aid from Germany, in which Roger Casement played a leading role.

An element of self-sacrifice was doubtless present, at least in the mind of Padraic Pearse. Our attention is constantly drawn to Pearse’s writings of the period—political and literary—in which elements of Christian religious doctrine—blood-sacrifice of the redeemer—are mixed with elements of Gaelic heroic mythology: “One man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world. I will take no pike. I will go into the battle with bare hands.”²⁴ Similarly in his play *An Ri* (The King) it is the self-imposed sacrifice of a child that purchases freedom for his people.²⁵ The

recreation of a heroic spirit and inculcation of heroism embedded in the *Cuchulainn* epic with its motto “better is short life with honour than long life with dishonour,” were the basic tenets of Pearse’s bilingual school, the St. Enda School.

The exaggerated form of rhetoric—preoccupation with the idea of self-sacrifice and bloodshed—was in keeping with much political writing in radical papers of the period, where the tone had to contend with the growing hysteria of British army recruitment propaganda in face of the German threat.²⁶

Those writers who harp on the insurrection as a hopeless gesture and the idea of self-sacrifice as being the most significant factor in the Easter Rising are quick to point out that it was purely a rising of *defense*, that is, the plan for Dublin, generally speaking, was the fortifying of certain key buildings and holding them against all attack. The leaders are reproached for not including in the plans the taking of Dublin Castle and Trinity College, symbols of British authority. It is argued repeatedly, although without any historical evidence, that the leaders, including Connolly, believed that government forces would not attack capitalist property, and that the Rising would end with close-range fighting between British and republican forces with a bayonet charge.²⁷ There is no doubt that warfare was contemplated at key points in concentrated bodies, rather than guerrilla warfare of small forces. It is difficult, however, to find adequate reasons why street fighting was a priority, and guerrilla warfare in the Dublin hills would only take place when surrender was on the agenda.

In 1895, Engels, an outstanding military critic, had pointed out the weaknesses of street fighting and barricades in revolutionary strategy.²⁸ With the development of firearms, the use of dynamite, and the use of rail to transport troops, the conditions for insurgents since 1848 had worsened. This did not mean that street fighting would no longer play a role, but Engels was skeptical of its efficiency. He was, of course, thinking in terms of Paris 1848/49 and 1870, where revolutionary opposition came from the barricades themselves. Connolly was thinking in terms of the Moscow rising of 1905, where effective street fighting

was carried on by small contingents or groups of insurgents who managed to escape during the fighting through the labyrinth of courts and back streets of the houses. In his 29 May 1915 article on the Moscow Insurrection of 1905, Connolly is obviously drawing conclusions and parallels that could apply to insurrectionary warfare in Ireland and in Dublin specifically: the number of insurgents was small compared to government troops and they were badly armed.

Connolly maintained the use of field guns and artillery by government troops in street fighting “was against all the teaching of military science”; further, a regular bombardment of the city would only have been possible had that section of the population loyal to the government been outside the insurgent lines. But that would have meant an abandonment of business and property, and, as Connolly concludes, “the moral effect of such a desertion of Moscow would have been of immense military value in strengthening the hands of the insurgents and bringing recruits to their ranks.” Connolly concludes that “even under modern conditions, the professional soldier is badly handicapped in fighting inside a city against really determined civilian revolutionists.”²⁹

Although one can assume that Connolly was not familiar with Lenin’s 1905–1907 writings on the Russian Revolution, it is interesting to examine Lenin’s conclusions on the lessons of the Moscow rising. First, Lenin maintained that there had been insufficient agitation of the masses for an armed uprising; second, the revolutionaries had overlooked the significance of winning over government troops, already wavering in their loyalty.³⁰ With sufficient reflection, these two lessons could have played a significant role in the outcome of the Easter Rising, considering the fact that the vast majority of British troops stationed in Dublin who put down the Rising were Irish.³¹ The new military technique involving the division of insurgents into small mobile groups of tens, threes, and twos became an all-important tactic of the revolutionaries. This method of fighting, however, had not been sufficiently developed in the Moscow Rising. From the lessons of Moscow in 1905, and Paris in 1830, Connolly saw the advantage of carrying out a determined, courageous offensive,

consisting of the fortifying of strong buildings or the “active defence” of strong points and rendering the insurgent forces as elusive as possible.

Quite apart from the question of success or failure of the Rising, it would seem that self-sacrifice—death—in the cause of the establishment of an Irish republic was a calculated risk and a possibility that was taken very seriously by the military council of the IRB in planning the insurrection. The Rising was conceived first and foremost as a *demonstration* of the right of nations to self-determination. It was believed that such an insurrection, quite apart from its outcome, would guarantee Ireland belligerent status and thus ensure that its case for independence would be considered at the peace conference following the war.

The Irish Race Convention, New York, on 4 March 1916, at which 2,300 delegates participated, set up the Friends of Irish Freedom Organisation, the aim of which was to appeal to the Powers after the war on behalf of Irish Independence. In his speech, John Devoy declared that Ireland must establish its position as a belligerent nation by declaring its independence and holding military posts.³² It was thus of vital importance that Ireland’s right to a seat at the peace conference would be assured.

There is little indication that the leaders who planned rebellion regarded it as doomed to failure from the outset. As has already been explained, the plans were for an all-Ireland rising. The idea in the provinces was that the Volunteers, armed with German rifles (it was hoped that 20,000 could be landed off the Irish coast), would prevent the troops and Irish constabulary from advancing on Dublin while the insurgents seized and fortified certain strategic points. The IRB Military Council was to occupy the General Post Office and establish the headquarters of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic there.³³

Diarmuid Lynch, a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB and a staff captain during the Rising, suggests that Pearse and the other leaders had hopes of a military victory when laying their original plans.³⁴ This can certainly be underlined by the optimistic note in Pearse’s correspondence with Joseph

McGarrity, leading member of *Clan na nGael* in the United States and president of the American Volunteers Aid Association. Writing after the Volunteer split, October 1914, Pearse was convinced that the resulting small separatist force of disciplined, determined men was of intimately more value to the cause of independence than “the unwieldy, loosely-held-together mixum-gatherum force we had before the split.”³⁵ In his manifesto on the eve of surrender, Pearse remarked:

I am satisfied that we should have accomplished more, that we should have accomplished the task of enthroning, as well as proclaiming, the Irish Republic as a Sovereign State, had our arrangements for a simultaneous rising of the whole country, with a combined plan as sound as the Dublin plan, has been proved to be, been allowed to go through on Easter Sunday.³⁶

Pearse is referring to the fateful countermanding order issued to the Volunteers by Eoin MacNeill that smashed the plan for a concerted rising. Only then, it seems, did the leaders accept the serious possibility of defeat. Connolly’s comment on the steps of Liberty Hall on Easter Monday morning, “We are going out to be slaughtered,” indicated his realistic assessment of the situation. But the die was cast. It was believed that to postpone fighting after such preparation and pledges would be much worse than defeat. It was obvious that in such an event the leaders would be arrested and imprisoned, and the revolutionary movement would receive such a blow from which it would take many years to recover.

The fact that the authorities were reluctant to carry out wholesale arrests throughout 1915 up to the Rising, despite open provocation by Volunteer and Irish Citizen Army drilling, was not due to liberalism on the part of the government. Lord Wimborne, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, explains that general government inaction “was due to the difficulty of doing anything effective without provoking a collision, when in the first place, we had not the troops to enforce it, and secondly, because we

were anxious to avoid a collision in view of the major consideration of the war.”³⁷

Thus the insurgent leaders were correct in their calculations concerning the “weakness” of government authority in Ireland during war conditions. Subsequent statements by Wimborne and Chamberlain disclose that government plans for arresting all leaders on Sunday, 23 April, the day before the Rising, were postponed as a result of hesitation on the part of the Under Secretary and the military.³⁸

In February 1916, Eoin MacNeill wrote, “The only possible basis for successful revolutionary action is deep and widespread discontent. We have only to look around us in the streets to realize that no such condition exists in Ireland.”³⁹ Also Maureen Wall is convinced that it “was against what would seem to be a definite non-revolutionary background that the architects of the Rising set out to formulate their plans.”⁴⁰

On the surface, at least, this would seem to be true. To begin with, despite the air of sedition—sham battles, military parades, and antirecruiting meetings—the government authorities were surprisingly reticent. Scarcely more than a dozen men in the militant nationalist movement were convicted.⁴¹ Moreover, rural Ireland, the traditional seat of unrest, had changed. With the land purchase acts, it was possible for tenants to become proprietors of their land. The tenants benefited from the introduction of the Old Age Pension and, in addition, the World War brought a boom to Irish agriculture.⁴² Martin points out that about 200,000 Irishmen served actively with the British forces during the 1914–1918 war, the vast majority of them Volunteers: “According to official statistics there were 150,183 Irishmen on active service for the crown in April 1916.”⁴³ Moreover, “where was the slavery, and therefore the tyranny, of which Pearse spoke? At that time, every Irishman was entitled to a vote, could join the civil service and the British forces, and enjoy all the other privileges of loyal subjects of the king.”⁴⁴

The situation in Ireland was much more complex than a superficial reading suggests. The concessions granted through parliament to the Irish people were understood as privileges and

not the rights of a distinct people. Redmond and his party may have held the balance of power in Parliament, but in Ireland they had no real power at all. Dublin Castle, with its Irish Executive consisting of its Lord Lieutenant (Wimbourne) and Chief Secretary (Sir Matthew Nathan), had complete administrative control of the country; the Lord Lieutenant was responsible for the civil government, with the naval and military forces of the Crown in Ireland under his command.⁴⁵

The balance of patronage in the legislative system can be discerned from the fact that in the Privy Council there were only 7 Catholics as opposed to 50 Protestants. In the High Courts only 3 out of 18 judges were Catholic. There were only 7 Catholic county court judges, and 20 to 30 of the 124 district inspectors were Catholic.⁴⁶ Moreover, Dublin Castle had at its disposal the Dublin Metropolitan Police and the Royal Irish Constabulary with an effective net of espionage spread throughout the country: "There were over nine thousand officers and men of this semi-military force in the country armed and trained to shoot and possessing the most intimate knowledge of the daily lives of their fellow country men in the districts where they were stationed."⁴⁷

Despite the lapse of the Peace Preservation Act in 1906 that gave government control over the importation and sale of arms and ammunition and over the carrying of arms or possession of ammunition, the Irish government had still other powers for dealing with explosives—through the Explosive Substances Act of 1883. The Criminal Law and Procedure Act of 1883 authorized the Lord Lieutenant by proclamation to prohibit or suppress dangerous associations. Older acts, such as the Whiteboy Acts, were still in force.⁴⁸ With the passing of the Defence of the Realm Act, 8 August 1914, nearly five hundred prosecutions took place in Ireland between November 1914 and April 1916.⁴⁹

From the evidence given before the Royal Commission after the Easter Rising, it was established that during 1915 the country had become so seditious that juries in various parts of the country "could not be trusted to give decisions in accordance with the evidence."⁵⁰ This can be partly explained by a new phenomenon

in rural life. During the war, new passport regulations were introduced into Ireland prohibiting young men of military age from emigrating. Most of the traditional emigration was from the poorest areas and consisted of landless young men, “the kind of people” according to Tom Garvin, “who had traditionally been the raw material of secret societies.”⁵¹ Added to this was the eclipse of Redmond and his party. Suspension of the Home Rule Bill undermined confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party and, after the success of the Ulster gun-running at Larne and the Curragh mutiny, constitutionalism as a solution to Irish politics had proved to be a failure.

An indication of the general mood of national sensitivity can be seen in a public meeting held at the end of March 1916 to protest against deportation orders.⁵² So impressive were the propaganda meetings, the marches and parades of the Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army—the preparation of the public mind for insurrection—that Chief Secretary Birrell confessed before the commission that before the rebellion the impression he got “walking about the streets was that Sinn Feinism was in a certain sense in possession.”⁵³ The “hoarded passions of the labour disputes and Bachelor’s Walk”⁵⁴ were other elements that heightened the atmosphere.

Writing in November 1913, Pearse indicated the ideological activity of the ensuing years that aimed at preparing the public mind for the objective of the “Irish Revolution”: “There will be in Ireland of the next few years a multitudinous activity of Freedom Clubs, Young Republican Parties, Labour Organisations, Socialist Groups, and what not.”⁵⁵ Martin comments that there was a substantial minority of people and junior clergy who supported the radical separatist movements through the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Sinn Fein, and the Republican Clubs.⁵⁶

In their analysis of the class structure of the Easter Rising, Larsen and Snoddy come to the conclusion that “the people involved in 1916 represent the full and broad occupational structure of the Irish urban society and also, to some extent, the rural areas.”⁵⁷ It was undertaken by workers together with “small

farmers, many middle and a few upper middle-class people.”⁵⁸

Local police described the Volunteers as being composed principally of “shop assistants, artisans and, in the country districts, of small farmers’ sons.”⁵⁹ It would be an exaggeration to assess the situation in the period 1915–1916 as consistently revolutionary. A revolutionary situation was growing, but was not fully developed. The decline in popularity of the Parliamentary Party, together with the war situation that not only brought a further suppression of civil rights in Ireland, but also led to the situation whereby the government was no longer quite master of the situation, opened up a completely new horizon and possibilities for revolutionary activity.

It is interesting to consider how Lenin, as representative of the left wing in the Second International, assessed the Easter Rising within an international context. He attacked those who condemned it as a “putsch.” For, as he explained:

The term “putsch,” in the scientific sense of the world, may be employed only when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs, and has aroused no sympathy among the masses. The centuries-old Irish national movement, having passed through various stages and combinations of class interests, manifested itself, in particular, in a mass Irish National Congress in America (*Vorwärts*, March 20, 1916), which called for Irish independence; it also manifested itself in street fighting conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie *and a section of the workers* after a long period of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc. Whoever calls *such* a rebellion a “putsch” is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of picturing a social revolution as a living phenomenon.⁶⁰

Despite its failure, which Lenin attributes to prematurity—the fact that it took place at a time “before the European revolt of the proletariat had *had time* to mature”⁶¹—the Easter Rising was significant as a training ground for the future national revolutionary

movement in Ireland. Perhaps the real tragedy of Easter 1916 lies in the fact that Connolly and Pearse, those leaders who would have been in a position to direct the precipitant revolutionary situation that emerged in 1918–20, had been eliminated. The disorientation of labor and the republican movements after 1916—labor’s abdication from the national struggle—was to have severe consequences for the subsequent development of the national revolutionary movement in Ireland.

Arthur Mitchell points out that Connolly’s successors to the leadership of the labor movement had not participated in the Rising.⁶² They had failed to understand his socialist republicanism. Constance de Markievicz, who had stood by Connolly and was a member of the Citizen Army Council, did not have a position of leadership in the labor movement. Few on the republican side appreciated Pearse’s position that had led him, in the years leading to the Rising, to a closer understanding of Connolly’s socialist teachings. Thus the alliance between socialism and the “real forces of nationalism” that Connolly and Pearse had striven so hard to maintain was broken.

A consideration of the writings of both Pearse and Connolly from this period throws considerable light both on Pearse’s republicanism as well as Connolly’s concept of socialist republicanism. It shows also how an alliance between “the forces of real nationalism” and socialism was possible.⁶³

NOTES

1. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), 182.

2. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1966), 117.

3. *Ibid.*, 168.

4. *Ibid.*, 169.

5. *Ibid.*, 171.

6. William O’Brien, *Forth the Banners Go* (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1969), 242–43; also MS 13908 (i), Letters Connolly to O’Brien, O’Brien Collection, National Library of Ireland.

7. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 133–34.
8. Jacqueline van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz in the Cause of Ireland* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 132.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 140.
11. In his article “1916: Myth, Fact, and Mystery,” *Studia Hibernica* 7 (1967), F. X. Martin gives an important comprehensive survey of articles and books dealing with the most varied aspects of the Easter Rising published up until 1967/68. These include literary works on the Rising, historical works that examine the role of the IRB, the Volunteers, the Citizen Army, as well as individual leaders, the role of the provinces and religious and moral aspects of the Rising. Significant works published since then will be mentioned in the notes.
12. Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1981), 112–13.
13. Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Oliver Snoddy, “1916: A Workingmen’s Revolution,” *Social Studies* 2 (1973): 383.
14. F. X. Martin, “1916: Revolution or Evolution,” in *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916*, ed. F. X. Martin (London: Methuen, 1967).
15. Martin, “1916, Myth, Fact, and Mystery,” 7.
16. Sean Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology* (Dublin, 1980), 116–17.
17. Martin, “1916, Myth, Fact, and Mystery,” 116.
18. Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 117.
19. Martin, “1916, Myth, Fact, and Mystery,” 109.
20. Maureen Wall, “Background to the Rising,” in *The Making of 1916: Studies in the History of the Rising*, ed. Kevin B. Nowlan (Dublin, 1969), 172.
21. Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (London, 1937), 160.
22. Martin, “1916: Myth, Fact, and Mystery,” 92.
23. J. J. Connell “History of the Irish Volunteers,” MS 13168, National Library of Ireland.
24. Padraic H. Pearse, “The Singer,” in *Plays, Stories, Poems* (Dublin, 1966), 44.
25. *Ibid.*, 67.
26. Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (London, 1977), 179.
27. Maureen Wall, “The Plans and the Countermand: The Country and Dublin,” in Nowlan, *Making of 1916*, 227.
28. Frederick Engels, Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* [1895], in vol. 27 of *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1990), 517–19.
29. James Connolly, “Moscow Insurrection of 1905,” in *Revolutionary Warfare* (Dublin and Belfast, 1968), 5–6.
30. Vladimir I. Lenin, “Lessons of the Moscow Uprising,” in vol 11 of *Collected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965) 173–77.
31. Martin, “1916: Myth, Fact and Mystery,” 64.

32. Macardle, *Irish Republic*, 152–53.
33. *Ibid.*, 160–61.
34. See Gerald A. Hayes-McCoy, “A Military History of the 1916 Rising,” in Nowlan, *Making of 1916*, 263.
35. Sean Cronin, *McGarrity Papers* (Tralee, Ireland, 1972), 57.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook: Easter 1916* (Dublin, 1917), 164.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Maureen Wall, “Background to the Rising,” 160.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Sean MacDiarmada was arrested for delivering an antirecruiting speech in Tuam on 16 May 1916 (*ibid.*, 173).
42. *Ibid.*, 161; P. Lynch, “The Social Revolution That Never Was,” in *The Irish Struggle 1916–1926*, ed. Desmond Williams (London, 1968) 141.
43. Martin, “1916, Myth, Fact and Mystery,” 64.
44. Martin, “1916, Revolution or Evolution,” 248.
45. *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook*, 195–96.
46. F. X. Martin, “The Origins of the Irish Rising of 1916” in *The Irish Struggle, 1916–1926*, ed. Desmond Williams (London, 1968), 8.
47. Macardle, *Irish Republic*, 148. See also *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook*, 196.
48. *Ibid.*, 196–97.
49. *Ibid.*, 197; Macardle, *Irish Republic*, 148.
50. *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook*, 199.
51. Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, 110.
52. See Robert Kee, *The Green Flag*, vol. 2, *The Bold Fenian Men* (London, 1976), 258.
53. *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook*, 158.
54. *Ibid.* Birrell is referring here to the Dublin lockout of 1913 and the gun-running incident in which two civilians were killed.
55. Padraic H. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 94.
56. Martin, “1916: Myth, Fact, Mystery,” 113.
57. Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Oliver Snoddy, “1916: A Workingmen’s Revolution?” *Social Studies* 2 (1973): 386.
58. *Ibid.*, 383.
59. Kee, *Bold Fenian Men*, 257.
60. Lenin, “The Irish Rebellion of 1916,” sect. 10 of “The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up,” in vol. 22 of *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 355.
61. *Ibid.*, 358.
62. Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1898–1930* (London, 1974)
- 72.
63. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 124.

16

Pearse and Connolly: Unity toward an Irish Republic

A principal reason for concentrating on Padraic Pearse among other notable leaders of the Rising is that on the nationalist side he came closest to the socialist teachings of Connolly. Moreover, of the signatories of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, apart from Connolly, Pearse was the most prolific political writer. He is the most controversial and enigmatic figure of the Rising. The sentimentalized view of Pearse “as a relentless idealist haunted by the necessity for blood sacrifice to save the Irish nation” became a central theme in Irish nationalist mythology, persisting into the 1970s.¹ This image has been reinforced by negative literary treatment of the man as a political leader in O’Casey’s play *The Plough and the Stars* and his autobiography. Yeats’s poem “Easter 1916” reads:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.

In her 1977 biography, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure*, Ruth Dudley Edwards recoils from the Pearse myth and attempts to take him down from the pedestal of national hero-worship that he had occupied for over sixty years. Political considerations, however, are mainly disregarded. She concentrates on a psychological study of Pearse, attributing to him a morbid, death-seeking, egocentric, and eccentric personality that dominated all his activities, both political and cultural.²

In his study on Irish nationalism, Sean Cronin declares Pearse to be a separatist, “not an ideological republican like Tone.”³ To Cronin, Irish republicanism as advocated by Tone was essentially secular—the divorce of religion from politics. Although this is true for the fathers of Irish republicanism, to claim it to be true for republicanism in its subsequent historical development in Ireland is to deny its ability to absorb new qualities in a changed historical situation. Thus the whole field of national self-consciousness that expressed itself through the medium of the Gaelic revival is, according to Cronin, outside the domain of republicanism. The “Irishness” is taken out of republicanism, which instead becomes a general creed independent of country.

The anticlericalism that, according to Cronin, typified the continental republicanism of France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal cannot be applied in like manner to Irish republicanism. Irish republicans did not reject religion, but rather certain aspects of religious institutions that had a negative influence on the material well-being of the Irish peasant—such as church tithes.

Historically speaking, the United Irishmen had not developed a national consciousness in the sense of a distinct Irish nationalism—this was to begin with the Young Ireland movement and to receive a tremendous upsurge at the turn of the twentieth century. With the Gaelic revival, new aspects or horizons were opened up for the development of Irish republicanism. Pearse’s Catholicism is very closely connected with the Gaelic revival and Irish Ireland. The fact that symbols of Christian teaching can be applied to political propaganda is scarcely surprising in the national revolutionary movements of countries where religion plays a dominant role in cultural activity.

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between republicanism and separatism, as Cronin attempts to do. Separatism is an aspect of republicanism that in the course of history has evolved a separate existence. As a political movement, separatism, as distinct from republicanism, could be equated with an extreme form of nationalism, in which the use of physical force for achieving the goal plays the most important role. It is the democratic

tradition within republicanism, rather than secularism, that distinguishes it from separatism. If one defines republicanism as separatism with the aim of establishing a republic on basic democratic principles, then it seems valid to describe Pearse as a republican.

One could say of Pearse's writings (this applies particularly to those of 1913 and after) that there is a mingling of Gaelic tradition with a radical form of republicanism as a political ideal.

The image of Pearse as poet and dreamer given to wild flights of fantasy has been largely dispelled by the publication of his complete letters and educational writings.⁴ The practical, down-to-earth tone of many of the letters reveals an able organizer and, as F. S. L. Lyons points out in his foreword, "The pragmatic correspondence can be weighed against the flamboyance, sometimes even the barely suppressed hysteria of Pearse's published writings from 1914 onwards."⁵ This is further substantiated by Pearse's educational writings, which up to the present have received little attention from academic historians. They reveal a mind very much alive to new developments in the field of European education. Pearse's educational ideas, which took on practical form with the foundation of St. Enda's College, are an outstanding contribution to Irish cultural and political history.

In literary assessments of the background of the Easter Rising, Pearse has been termed a "political nationalist" as opposed to "cultural nationalists" such as Yeats, Douglas Hyde, etc.⁶ "Cultural nationalism" could perhaps be applied to Yeats, who held aloof from the political movement, but on the whole such a division between culture and politics is misleading, because it rejects the interaction of both elements, neutralizing culture as something beyond the realm of political activity. Pearse is an example of the combination of the cultural and political aspects of the national movement in the one person. The cultural aspect of the national liberation movement has a significant political function, since the stress on a lost cultural heritage and the revival of national self-consciousness are important ideological weapons in the struggle for national liberation; they are essential forms of resistance to British cultural hegemony, and

thus anti-imperialist in their nature. This is certainly how the mature Pearse assessed his own role in the cultural revival movement.

Many of Pearse's literary presentations of the Gaelic past, it is true, have from the point of view of content little in common with Irish folk culture. With their emphasis on the deeds of kings, they reflect Gaelic high (bardic) culture. But it is not the content of such literature that determines its position within the national culture of Ireland, but rather its aim as a weapon of cultural resistance against the forces of British colonial domination. This, too, is how Pearse understood the foundation of his school, St. Enda's (*Sgoil Eanna*) at Ranelagh, Dublin, in 1908. It was not simply a matter of reforming the Irish educational system, but rather a complete radical transformation was necessary that would make the school an active agent in the regeneration of national self-consciousness. It was thus the function of St. Enda's to inspire its pupils with their own revived cultural heritage. St. Enda's was a direct antithesis of the existing British education system in Ireland, especially on the level of secondary education. In a pamphlet aptly entitled "The Murder Machine," published in 1916, Pearse condemned the education system that "aimed at the substitution for men and women of mere things".⁷ It had succeeded in eliminating the national factor, in making "willing" and "manageable" slaves, who were not even conscious of their slavery.⁸

The political significance of St. Enda's as an instrument in the process of national liberation can only be fully understood if Pearse's political activities and writings are likewise considered, for he inspired the school no less through his own role in the republican movement. The period during which he was headmaster of St. Enda's was also one of increasing involvement in radical political activities. In 1913, he was involved in the founding of the Volunteers and became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In December 1914, he was appointed Director of Organisation of the Irish Volunteers.⁹ In 1915, he was appointed a member of the Military Council and of the Supreme Council of the IRB.¹⁰

It is generally assumed that Pearse advocated the use of physical force as the sole means for the achievement of the Irish nation. The following lines are often quoted to underline his position.

We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them.¹¹

That Pearse's position concerning the use of physical force was more differentiated than this is scarcely considered. He did not advocate the *unqualified* use of arms. In December 1913, he admitted that he knew of no other way than "the way of the sword," but as he explained further,

When I say the sword I do not mean necessarily the actual use of the sword: I mean readiness and ability to use the sword. Which translated into terms of modern life, means readiness and ability to shoot.¹²

In 1916, in another article, "The Spiritual Nation," he wrote that if a nation could obtain its freedom without bloodshed, it was its duty so to obtain it. However, under the circumstances, he did not believe in the possibility of obtaining freedom for Ireland without the shedding of blood.¹³ This was written in 1916, after the British government had decided to postpone Home Rule for the duration of the war. Following the shelving of Home Rule and Redmond's commitment of the National Volunteers to the support of Britain during the war, both Pearse and Connolly were forced to rethink effective methods for the achievement of national independence.

Writing to McGarrity in 1915, Pearse expressed anger about the money that "the rich men are making on the war while the very poor are on the verge of starvation."¹⁴ At the same time, he saw the war as a means of providing an opportunity for

workers to emancipate themselves and for the suppressed nations in Europe, above all Ireland and Poland, to achieve national self-determination: “This war with all its misery may be the means of uplifting the poor workers to their proper place” for “the workers themselves will realise much better the purpose for which many of their lives have been sacrificed.”¹⁵ Pearse did not have the clear socialist stand of Connolly concerning the nature of war. To Connolly “all war is an atrocity . . . all warfare is inhuman. All warfare is barbaric,”¹⁶ since it is waged by the capitalist class in the battle for new markets and as such brings untold suffering to millions. Thus the signal of European war should have been “the signal for rebellion,” should have been the signal leading to civil war and social revolution.¹⁷

Pearse, although appreciating the fact that war was making the rich richer and the poor poorer, did not see it as a result of the battle between the Great Powers to maintain and increase their capability of exploiting the world’s resources. To Pearse, war becomes an abstract phenomenon, which in itself is a “terrible thing,” but not an “evil thing.” “The tyrannies that wars break, the lying formulae that wars overthrow, the hypocrisies that wars strip naked, are evil.”¹⁸ He points to the possibilities that the situation of the European war could create:

What if the war kindles in the slow breasts of English toilers a wrath like the wrath of the French in 1789? . . . What if the war sets Poland and Ireland free? If the war does these things, will not the war have been worth while?¹⁹

It is within this context that Pearse’s controversial and highly emotional statement was made: “The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields.”²⁰ He understood the war as a terrible necessity that offered the suppressed millions an opportunity for emancipation.

Pearse’s dedication to the republican ideal is reflected in his writings on Tone, Mitchel, Lalor, and Davis. He was thoroughly acquainted with Tone’s autobiography, Mitchel’s *Jail Journal*, and the essays of Davis and Lalor. Ryan noted that “he carried Tone’s *Autobiography* around with the unflinching care some

ministers would appear to carry their Bibles and knew it as literally.”²¹ It is hardly surprising that the literary curriculum of St. Enda’s included the writings of Tone, Mitchel, and Lalor, as well as the Gaelic literature of the past, for the pupils must be made aware of the recent history of Ireland—the tradition of revolutionary republicanism. This was an essential purpose of the new educational system in Ireland advocated and practiced by Pearse.

Pearse described Mitchel’s *Jail Journal* as “the last gospel of the New Testament of Irish Nationality as Wolfe Tone’s Autobiography is the first.”²² Of all Irish republicans Wolfe Tone stands highest in Pearse’s esteem. He placed Tone above Mitchel, both as a man and as a leader of men. “Tone’s was a broader humanity with as intense a nationality; Tone’s was a sunnier nature with as stubborn a soul.”²³ To Pearse, Tone’s basic democratic stand was an essential aspect of his republicanism: “Tone the greatest of modern Irish separatists, is the first and the greatest of modern Irish democrats.”²⁴ Pearse declares “The Secret Manifesto to the Friends of Freedom in Ireland” to be “the first manifesto of modern Irish democracy. It bases the Irish claim to freedom on the bedrock foundation of human rights.”²⁵

Basic humanism is to Pearse also an essential aspect of Thomas Davis:

There was a deep humanism in Davis. The sorrow of the people affected Davis like a personal sorrow . . . he was a democrat in the truest sense, that he loved the people, and his love of the people was an essential part of the man and of his Nationalism.²⁶

Pearse’s radical position within the republican movement was established in his political writings. In the articles that he contributed to *Irish Freedom* from June 1913 to January 1914, collected under the title *From a Hermitage*, he openly shows his sympathy for the locked-out workers of Dublin. Although denying that he was anything as “new-fangled as a socialist or a syndicalist,” he wryly admitted that he was “old-fashioned enough to be both a Catholic and a Nationalist.” Pearse rebels

against a social system that upholds “disgusting incongruities”²⁷ —“a country, capable of feeding twenty million people, which has only a population of four million of which thousands are starving.”²⁸

Pearse gives a vivid description of the squalor of the Dublin slums:

The tenement houses of Dublin are so rotten that they periodically collapse upon their inhabitants, and if the inhabitants collect in the street to discuss matters the police baton them to death.²⁹

Pearse regarded the contemporary liberation movement as “a movement of the people, not of the “leaders.”³⁰ His reading of Irish history led him to the same conclusion as Connolly:

The leaders in Ireland have nearly always left the people at the critical moment; have sometimes sold them. . . . The instinct of the people has always been unerring . . . and plainly the instinct of the Fenian artisan was a finer thing than the soundest theory of the Gaelic League professor.³¹

Like Connolly, he regarded the “repositories of the Irish tradition to be “the great, splendid, faithful, common people.”³²

In his final article, “The Sovereign People,” Pearse lays down his concept of an Irish Republic, drawing to a large extent on the writings of James Fintan Lalor. It is a republic founded on radical democratic principles:

Let no man be mistaken as to who will be lord in Ireland when Ireland is free. The people will be lord and master. . . . The right to the control of the material resources of a nation does not reside in any individual or in any class of individuals; it resides in the whole people and can be lawfully exercised only by those to whom it is delegated by the whole people, and in the manner in which the whole people ordains.³³

In regard to the issues of nationalization and private property in the future Irish republic, Pearse clearly states that he would not disallow the right to private property, but insists “that all property is held subject to the national sanction.”³⁴ It would lie with the future government (fully representative of the people, elected by universal suffrage) to decide what should become the public property of the nation: the soil, the means of transport with its railways and waterways, all the sources of wealth, etc. Writing in 1913, Pearse elaborates somewhat; the free Irish republic would

drain the bogs, would harness the rivers, would plant the wastes, would nationalise the railways and waterways, would improve agriculture, would protect fisheries, would foster industries, would promote commerce, would diminish extravagant expenditure (as on needless judges and policemen), would beautify cities, would educate the workers (and also the non-workers, who stand in dire need of it).³⁵

In his writings *From a Heritage*, Pearse insists that there are only two ways of righting wrongs: reform or revolution. Reform is possible, he insists, “when those who inflict the wrong can be got to see things from the point of view of those who suffer the wrong.”³⁶ From his Swiftian-like satirical description of the respectable citizens of Dublin and the employers, we can presume that Pearse regarded revolution as the only solution.

Pearse did not have Connolly’s clear understanding of the system of capitalist exploitation. He professed to be at peace with all his “fellow-slaves, whether capitalist or worker,”³⁷ being concerned with the nation as a whole and not with any one class within the nation. He believed basically that the roots of all Irish evil lay in foreign domination.³⁸ His sympathy with the Dublin slum dwellers stemmed more from emotional ties with the underdog, rather than from a rational understanding of the situation. With his insistence, however, on the social content of the liberation struggle, Pearse undoubtedly stands in the republican

tradition of Tone, “the intellectual ancestor of the whole movement of Irish nationalism, of Davis, Lalor and Mitchel.”³⁹

Davis and Lalor he regarded as representing two vital aspects of the movement, the “spiritual, cultural element, as later embodied in the Gaelic League,” and the democratic, social element, embodied in “the more virile labour movements” of the period. Mitchel is representative of the “physical force” element.⁴⁰

In his short biography of Pearse, Ryan comments that Connolly recognized Pearse’s democratic instinct and “confessed to his friends that he had always been attracted towards Pearse, in whom he felt some quality above the average of Nationalist politicians.”⁴¹ In their reminiscences, those in the labor movement who knew both Connolly and Pearse note their unity. Thus Cathal O’Shannon remarks:

Pearse and Connolly, so dissimilar in character, life and mentality, so similar in hopes and aims and fate, were thrown much together in political affairs, and with both of them mutual respect ripened into friendship and a comradeship and an identity of ideals more than brotherly. This identity one felt tangibly when one talked with either above (sic) their common work and the things that were stirring the best hearts and minds of the younger Ireland to their depths.⁴²

Pearse’s “democratic instinct” is revealed in his poem “The Rebel”:

I am come of the seed of the people, the people that
sorrow,
That have no treasure but hope
No riches laid up but a memory
Of an Ancient glory.

He warns:

And I say to my people’s masters: Beware,
of the thing that is coming,
beware of the risen people.⁴³

This warning is symbolic of a rising, the outcome of which was not quite what Pearse had envisaged.

NOTES

1. Desmond Ryan, *The Man Called Pearse* (Dublin, 1919), 1.
2. Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (London: Gollancz, 1977), 156, 161.
3. Sean Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology* (Dublin, 1980), 102.
4. Seámas O'Buachalla, ed., *The Letters of P. H. Pearse* (Gerrards Cross, 1980); Seámas O'Buachalla, ed., *A Significant Irish Educationalist: The Educational Writings of P. H. Pearse* (Dublin and Cork, 1980).
5. O'Buachalla, *Letters of P. H. Pearse*, ix.
6. Robert Driscoll, *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), 12.
7. Padraic H. Pearse, "The Murder Machine," in *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 7.
8. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
9. Sean Cronin, *The McGarrity Papers* (Tralee, Ireland, 1972), 58.
10. O'Buachalla, *Letters of P. H. Pearse*, xxiii.
11. Pearse, *Political Writings*, 98–99.
12. *Ibid.*, 196.
13. *Ibid.*, 323.
14. Cronin, *McGarrity Papers*, 60.
15. *Ibid.*
16. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1966), 50–51.
17. *Ibid.*, 55.
18. Pearse, *Political Writings*, 217.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 216.
21. Ryan, *The Man Called Pearse* (Dublin, 1919), 5.
22. Pearse, *Political Writings*, 293.
23. *Ibid.*, 170.
24. *Ibid.*, 283.
25. *Ibid.*, 274.
26. *Ibid.*, 326.
27. *Ibid.*, 181.
28. *Ibid.*, 179–180.
29. *Ibid.*, 178.
30. *Ibid.*, 209.
31. *Ibid.*, 209–210, 211.

32. Ibid., 345.
33. Ibid., 345, 339.
34. Ibid., 340.
35. Ibid., 180.
36. Ibid., 172–173.
37. Ibid., 177.
38. Ibid., 180.
39. Ibid., 370.
40. Ibid., 370–371.
41. Ryan, *Man Called Pearse*, 126.
42. Cathal O’Shannon “Fellowship with Pearse,” *Liberty* 10 (June 1955): 6.
43. Padraic H. Pearse, *Plays, Stories, Poems* (Dublin, 1966), 337, 339.

Connolly's Mature Concept of an Irish Socialist Republic

It would be absurd to attempt to read a well-thought-out political concept into Connolly's writings of 1914–16. It is only possible to try to reconstruct his ideas on the content of an Irish socialist republic on the basis of his writings of that period as a whole.

By insisting that the emancipation of the Irish working class was connected directly with the emancipation of Ireland as a sovereign nation, Connolly underlined the fact that the revolution in Ireland was conditioned by circumstances relevant to Ireland alone. The possibility of the working class coming to power through the medium of democratic institutions seemed remote indeed, as long as the national question remained unsolved, for although Ireland was not a feudal absolutist state, like Russia before 1905, it was not a highly industrialized democratic state either. The existence of parliamentary elections and the introduction of the Local Government Act of 1898 did not obliterate the fact that Ireland was ruled by coercion.

Since civil society was underdeveloped, it could scarcely be a question of a prolonged "war of position," in which the Irish working class, together with other democratic forces, worked to take over the leadership of the entire nation. Connolly possibly underestimated the extent to which the Irish working class had been conditioned by Redmond and the Irish nationalists. The absence of a mass working-class movement in Ireland forced Connolly to think in terms of an organization of activists who could mobilize the spontaneous discontent of the masses at the decisive moment. It was thus also a question of a "war of

maneuver”—a frontal attack on the British imperialist forces. I have taken from Gramsci the terms “war of position” and “war of maneuver,” as I believe they best explain Connolly’s dilemma. The conditions in Ireland at the time rendered any form of revolutionary strategy other than a “war of maneuver”—sudden confrontation—impossible. Had Connolly waited for the more-or-less inevitable introduction of conscription into Ireland, public consent for the national cause would undoubtedly have increased considerably. It is doubtful, however, that this would have influenced the progress of socialism in Ireland.

Connolly believed that Britain’s dominance of the sea was preventing other nations from developing their commercial capacity—“an indispensable condition for socialist triumph.”¹ Hence it was necessary to strike a blow at Britain in order to hasten the socialist revolution. “Every socialist anxiously awaits and prays for the full development of the capitalist system which can alone make socialism possible.”² In spite of Ireland’s undeveloped state economically, Connolly did seem to see the possibility of the development of socialism there, independent of its development elsewhere in the world. With Britain involved in the First World War, Connolly saw the possibility of the Irish working class setting an example to the socialists in the other European countries.

Greaves maintains that Connolly’s socialist strategy included “a popular insurrection led by the Irish working class, with the trade union movement (though not the working class party) as the backbone of popular organisation.”³ The function of the political party of the working class was to conquer political power, but the effectiveness of the political vote depended “primarily upon the economic power of the workers organised behind it.”⁴ Maintaining a syndicalist position, he believed that “the process of organising that economic power would also build the industrial fabric of the socialist republic, build the new society within the old.”⁵

The Irish Transport and General Worker’s Union (ITGWU) was to play a key role in the coming revolution, for as Connolly

explained, “We have succeeded in creating an organisation that will willingly do more for Ireland than any trade union in the world has attempted to do for its national government.”⁶

Connolly envisaged the Irish trade-union movement, at the head of which stood the ITGWU and Citizen Army, as a “military wing,” controlling Irish docks, shipping, and railways, organizing the struggle through a general political strike: “We realised that the power of the enemy to hurl his forces upon the forces of Ireland would lie at the mercy of the men who controlled the transport system of Ireland.”⁷ The political strike was thus a necessary prerequisite to an armed uprising. Connolly blames certain “fervent advanced patriots”—possibly he had Griffith in mind—and their attacks on the Irish trade unions for disrupting such plans:

Had we been able to carry out all our plans, as such an Irish organisation of Labour alone could carry them out, we could at a word have created all the conditions necessary to the striking of a successful blow whenever the military arm of Ireland wished to move.⁸

Connolly understood the Irish revolution as one of “stages.” Both John Hoffman and Desmond Greaves have pointed out that Connolly’s reference to the Irish government during the “first days of freedom” echoes the analysis advanced by Lenin in “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.” “It is a *process* in which the establishment of a national democracy serves as the springboard for further advance.”⁹

Connolly refers to the establishment of an Irish republic that will impose economic conscription:

All the material of distribution, the railways and canals, and all their equipment will at once become the national property of the Irish state. . . . All factories and workshops owned by the people who do not yield allegiance to the Irish Government immediately upon its proclamation should at once be confiscated, and their productive powers applied to the service of the community loyal to Ireland, and to the army in its service.¹⁰

A people's state may need to be defended by the people in arms, as Connolly explains: "Conscription of the men to defend their new-won property and national rights may follow should it be necessary."¹¹

That Connolly regarded the Irish Republic established in Easter Week and laid down in the Proclamation as the first stage is borne out by his warning to the Citizen Army: "In the event of victory, hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political liberty."¹²

Connolly was convinced that a successful revolution could only come about through an alliance of all anti-imperialist forces under the leadership of the working class. He had arrived at this conclusion gradually. In an article published in the *Harp* in 1910, Connolly showed the development of his thoughts:

Whilst we are as firm as ever in our belief that the only hope for Ireland, as for the rest of the world, lies in a revolutionary reconstruction of society, and that the working class is the only one historically fitted for that great achievement, we are prepared to co-operate with all who will help forward the industrial and political organisation of labour, even should the aim they set for such organisation be far less ambitious than our own. We invite the co-operation of all who will work with us toward that end.¹³

This conclusion was reinforced by Connolly's experiences during the strike and lockout in Dublin, when certain sections of the intelligentsia supported the locked-out workers:¹⁴

Out of that experience is growing that feeling of identity of interests between the forces of real nationalism and labour which we have long worked and hoped for in Ireland. Labour recognises daily more clearly that its real well-being is linked and bound up with the hope of growth of Irish resources within Ireland, and nationalists realise that the real progress of a nation towards freedom must be measured by the progress of its most subject class.¹⁵

Connolly also welcomed the cooperative agricultural movement of which George Russell (AE), editor of the *Irish Homestead*, was assistant secretary. Here he saw the possibility of cooperation in the economic field between urban and rural workers, leading to a possible development of an understanding in the political field. It is interesting that in the *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, Connolly replaces the term “Workers’ Republic” with “Co-operative Commonwealth,” which he defines as

a system of society in which the workshops, factories, docks, railways, shipyards etc. shall be owned by the nation, but administered by the Industrial Unions of the respective industries.¹⁶

The small farmers and rural laborers, as well as the advanced nationalist section of the intelligentsia, were potential alliance partners:

We have in Ireland, particularly outside of the industrial districts of the North, a greater proportion of professional, literary and artistic people than is to be found in any European country except Italy. . . . [I]t may be predicted that its existence will serve the cause of Labour in Ireland.¹⁷

Connolly underlined the significance of the cultural aspect of the revolutionary movement that helped to make it not “a dogma of a few” but “the faith of the multitude.”¹⁸ Apart from writing labor songs, Connolly wrote two plays, *The Agitator’s Wife* (unfortunately lost) and *Under which Flag?*,¹⁹ performed on 26 March 1916 in Liberty Hall by the Workers’ Dramatic Society. The obvious symbolism could not have been lost on the audience. The decision of Frank, the farmer’s youngest son, to go out and fight with the Fenians—“They’re gone to fight for Ireland. Gone to give their heart’s blood if need be that poor Mother Erin might be a nation among the nations of the Earth”—underlines the republican character of the play, placing it among similar works of the Gaelic Revival such as Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and Pearse’s *The Singer*.

Conclusion

James Connolly was unable to overcome the objective difficulties confronting the labor and national liberation movements of his time. He was forced in the end to agree to a rising which was politically much less advanced than that which he had himself conceived, one in which the working class could only play a minor role. A strong socialist party was absent, the Irish trade-union movement was loosely organized, and many in the ITGWU failed to understand Connolly's alliance with the advanced nationalists.

Desmond Greaves maintains that Connolly

typified all that was best within the revolutionary wing of the International. He displayed its splendid reckless militancy. He shared its frequent theoretical confusion. . . . [He] was one of the most important figures of what may be called the middle stage of the world labor movement. He was one of the first working-class intellectuals. He was one of the most tireless and dedicated socialist workers who ever lived.²⁰

The socialist strategy for the national liberation movement in Ireland worked out by Connolly offers an outstanding and invaluable perspective for a socialist understanding of the national question. The revolution is not simply an expropriation of the ruling class, a qualitative change in class relationships; it must be the creation of a people, the realization of the Irish nation, both the negation and the fulfillment of the past, the "reconquest of Ireland." As Connolly maintained, "Ireland as distinct from her people, is nothing to me."²¹

NOTES

1. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1966), 57.

2. James Connolly, *Socialism and Nationalism: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), 143.

3. C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 380–81.
4. James Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 58.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 138.
7. *Ibid.*, 137–38.
8. *Ibid.*
9. John Hoffman, “The Dialectic Between Democracy and Socialism in the Irish National Question,” in *Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class*, ed. Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (London, 1980), 141.
10. Connolly, “Economic Conscription,” in *Labour and Easter Week*, 127. Pearse was obviously informed about Connolly’s concept of an Irish republic in the first days of freedom. See Padraic H. Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1962), 340. “The Sovereign People” was published two months after Connolly’s article “Economic Conscription.”
11. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 127.
12. Greaves, *Life and Times of James Connolly*, 403. Greaves points out that Connolly is probably referring to MacNeill and others, not to Pearse and Clarke, with whom he was in collusion.
13. James Connolly, *Workers’ Republic: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly*, ed. Desmond Ryan (Dublin: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1950), 70.
14. Connolly points to the sympathetic interest shown by “the intellectuals in the fortunes of the workers,” (James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, (Dublin and Belfast: New Books Publications, 1972), 63.
15. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 127.
16. Connolly, *Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 62.
17. *Ibid.*, 63.
18. Connolly, *Labour and Easter Week*, 105.
19. James Connolly, *Under Which Flag?*, MS 13935, O’Brien Collection, National Library of Ireland.
20. Greaves, *Life and Times of James Connolly*, 430–31.
21. James Connolly, *The James Connolly Song Book* (Cork: Cork Workers’ Club, 1972), 24.

Epilogue

The Easter Rising

The original plan for a rising in Ireland was conceived on a wide scale. Against the background of war in Europe and backed by funds from *Clan-na-Gael* in the United States, the Irish Republican Brotherhood considered a nationwide rising with a German-backed invasion force consisting of Irish prisoners of war in Germany and Irish-American soldiers.¹ Sir Roger Casement, who had been working for the British Foreign Service, returned to Ireland after retirement in 1913 and devoted himself to the cause of Irish independence. He became involved in securing military help from Germany, traveling there from New York in October 1914. By early 1916 the IRB's supreme council, consisting of Padraic Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, Eamonn Ceannt, Tom Clarke, and Sean MacDiarmada, decided that a rising with the assistance of the Irish Volunteers should be carried out. Between 19 and 22 January, Connolly took part in secret discussions with the IRB military council. After being briefed on the plans for a rising, Connolly was made a member of the council. The Irish Citizen Army was to be part of the insurrectionary forces. Thomas MacDonagh, poet and teacher at St. Enda's school, also joined the military council, bringing its final number to seven.

A message was sent to John Devoy of *Clan-na-Gael* in New York, informing him about a rising on Easter Sunday, 23 April, and requesting *Clan* to send a shipload of arms to Ireland to arrive between 20 and 23 April. Devoy, accordingly, contacted the German embassy, which passed on his message to Berlin. Key elements in the plan were to go wrong, however. A German ship, the *Aud*, with arms for Ireland, sailed from Bremerhaven on 9 April, but on its arrival in Tralee Bay found no one to meet it. The date for the planned landing had been changed, but

having no wireless equipment, the captain of the *Aud* was unable to receive any messages. On leaving the bay, the ship was intercepted by British cruisers. The captain and his crew blew it up, escaping in lifeboats. Roger Casement, believing the German arms to be insufficient, followed the *Aud* in a submarine, with the intention of persuading the leaders to call off the rising. If he failed to do so he was prepared to participate himself. On landing at Banna Strand, Tralee Bay, he was arrested. The final blow came when Eoin MacNeill, chief of staff of the Volunteers, learned that a rising was imminent. On being informed late on the night of Easter Saturday, 22 April, that the *Aud* had been sunk and Casement arrested, he sent out orders countermanding the rising and forbidding the Volunteers to participate in any insurrectionary activity. The result was utter confusion in the Volunteer ranks. The military council, despite the difficulties, decided to go ahead with the rising, postponing it to Easter Monday.

At a meeting of the military council of the IRB early on Monday morning, Padraic Pearse was appointed president of the provisional government of the Irish Republic and commandant-general of the army and James Connolly was appointed vice-president and commandant-general of the Dublin division. On the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin, Padraic Pearse read out a proclamation signed by the seven members of the military council declaring the establishment of the Irish Republic. This document is remarkable for its radical democratic content:

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible . . . The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts.

Although scattered uprisings occurred in the provinces, most of the activity was centered in Dublin. The plan was to

concentrate fighting at certain strategic points in the city, such as the Four Courts buildings, Jacob's biscuit factory, and St. Stephen's Green.² The participants were largely from the working class: tradesmen together with clerks, shop assistants, and laborers. Most of the women who participated in the fighting, with the exception of Constance Markievicz, worked as nurses, cooks, and couriers. The British authorities had been taken unawares at first, but within forty-eight hours, troops were landed. The strategy was to throw a cordon around the Irish positions and close in on the GPO. St. Stephen's Green was raked with machine-gun fire, and on Wednesday morning the gunboat *Helga* bombarded Liberty Hall from the Liffey.

On the same day Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, socialist and pacifist, who had been trying to organize a citizens' force to prevent the looting of shops, was arrested and taken to Portobello Barracks, where, on the orders of a British army officer, he was shot dead. By Friday the GPO had been isolated from other rebel positions. That night the blazing GPO had to be evacuated. James Connolly, who had received a leg wound, was taken out on a stretcher. On Saturday, in order to prevent further loss of life, the leaders decided to surrender. Following the Rising, 3,430 men and 79 women were arrested. Many of these had not even been involved in the fighting.

Ninety of the insurgents, including all the leaders, were sentenced to death by secret court-martial. James Connolly was taken by ambulance from hospital to Kilmainham Jail, carried by stretcher into the jail yard, and shot seated in a chair. Constance Markievicz, whose death sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life on account of her sex, was held in Mountjoy Jail before being transported to England. Eamon de Valera, who had been born in the United States, managed to avoid execution following the U.S. consul's intervention on "a plea of citizenship."³ Roger Casement was tried in England at the Old Bailey on the charge of high treason. Despite protest from many quarters and a petition from the U.S. Senate asking the British government to exercise clemency, Casement was hanged in Pentonville prison

on 3 August. Sixteen persons, including Casement and all of the signers of the proclamation, were executed; seventy-five death sentences were commuted to imprisonment.

Massive protest in Ireland and in the British press finally put an end to the executions. It was not until 1917, however, that the British government amnestied the remaining prisoners held since the Rising.

NOTES

1. For most of the information in this account, I am indebted to Liz Curtis, *The Cause of Ireland: From the United Irishmen to Partition* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1995).

2. P. Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London, 1972), 228.

3. Owen Dudley Edwards, "American Aspects of the Rising," in *1916: The Easter Rising*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Fergus Pyle (London, 1968), 162.

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