

**HISTORICAL  
REPRINTS  
NO.1**

**JAMES CONNOLLY  
AND  
IRISH FREEDOM**

***A MARXIST ANALYSIS***

*by*

**G. SCHÜLLER**

**THE CORK WORKERS CLUB**

**20p**

October Books  
99 Mt. Pleasant  
Liverpool 3

A C.P.B.M.L.  
Bookshop

JAMES CONNOLLY  
AND  
IRISH FREEDOM

*A MARXIST ANALYSIS*

*by*

*G. SCHÜLLER*

Published by the CORK WORKERS CLUB

THIS reprint is an unabridged  
facsimile of the first edition  
published in Chicago, 1926.

This Edition ..... 1974

## Introduction.

When James Connolly, Marxian socialist and Commander-in-Chief of the Irish revolutionary army of Easter Week, 1916, was awaiting his doom at the hands of a British firing squad, his last words spoken to his daughter Nora, expressed a fear that his comrades in the socialist movement would not understand this action. And few of them did. British socialists in particular, not all of them tho, regarded Connolly's heroic act as a nationalist gesture, not having any relation whatever to the class struggle. That Connolly was a revolutionist of the new type, a man who knew all the weak spots in the imperialist structure and also knew how to mobilize all the anti-imperialist forces against the enemy, is proven by Comrade Schuller in his excellent article to which those few words are an introduction.

James Connolly was born of proletarian parents in the northern part of Ireland. He was obliged to go to work for a boss at an early age. In fact, he had to lie about his age in order to evade the law regarding child labor. Early in his life he became interested in the socialist movement and agitated in Scotland, England and Ireland, before his first visit to the United States for a speaking tour.

Tho extremely active in the American working class movement, despite the mental agony he suffered owing to the distress of his family, thru poverty, Connolly never lost interest in the Irish revolutionary movement, nationalist and proletarian. He attached considerable importance to the necessity of reaching the Irish nationalist workers in the United States with the message of socialism. He founded the Irish Socialist Federation and *The Harp*, as its official organ. Of this monthly sheet Connolly was editor, printer and newsboy.

The Federation, and its mission, was sneered at in a superior manner by the official socialists and it gradually

declined. In 1910 Connolly returned to Ireland at the invitation of some of his old comrades and he went to work in Belfast as organizer for the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which was founded by Jim Larkin. Connolly held this position until 1914, when Larkin went to the United States on a speaking tour and remained there involuntarily for over eight years.

After Larkin left Ireland Connolly took charge of the I. T. and G. W. U. The union existed chiefly on paper. It was demoralized after the defeat inflicted on it in the great lockout of 1913-14. With all Connolly's ability as an organizer, he was unable to bring the membership up to more than 5,000 when the Easter Week uprising took place.

When Connolly took charge of the union, one of his first acts was to establish a printing plant for turning out illegal literature in Liberty Hall, the union headquarters. It was on this press that most of the revolutionary literature was turned out in the early days of the war.

Connolly was everything but a pacifist. A student of military tactics, particularly of street fighting he developed the Citizen Army, a military organization composed of trade unionists which grew out of the Dublin strike. This little army was the back bone of the force that challenged the mighty power of imperial Britain in 1916. The Citizen Army guarded Liberty Hall against the British soldiers and defended the illegal printing press with their lives.

Connolly was determined that the opportunity presented by the imperialist war must not be allowed to pass without revolutionary Ireland rising in arms against the empire. With this end in view he sought an alliance with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the descendant of the Fenian Brotherhood, which gave England a nightmare after the American Civil War. The alliance was consummated and thus Connolly brought about a union between the revolutionary nationalists and the militant section of labor, tho taking care to preserve the inde-

pendence of the labor movement. He consistently pointed out that Irish labor was always betrayed in the past when it allowed itself to be made the tool of the bourgeois class who always sold out to the foreign enemy at the first opportunity.

When the world war broke out Connolly like other revolutionists expected that the social democratic leaders would raise the standard of revolt. He gave vent to his disappointment in language that burns and sears. He excoriated the social patriots and spurious pacifists with voice and pen. He said that the declaration of war by the capitalists should be the signal for civil war on the part of the European working class, that the workers should raise the banner of revolution when the "first note from the bugle of war rang out upon their ears". Instead the traitorous leaders "who pledged the life long love of comrades in the international army of labor" because the hangmen and murderers of the working class and the bullets that snuffed out the life of James Connolly were fired by guns directed by a British cabinet in which sat a member of the Second International, the Honorable Arthur Henderson.

When Connolly bid good bye to his comrades in the union headquarters as he was leaving for his last fight he said to one of them with a smile on his lip and that laughing glint in his eye: "We are going out to get slaughtered. Stay with the union. It needs you."

When the gallant little army of rebels surrendered, neither Connolly nor his comrades asked for quarter. They insisted that their followers be exempted from the death penalty. The promise was made only to be broken, in harmony with Britain's record thru Irish history. Connolly was carried on a stretcher to the place of execution, propped up against a wall and murdered. The British knew what they were doing when they murdered James Connolly but they paid thru the nose for it since then and the debt is still unpaid.

In Connolly's death the Irish labor movement lost its

only revolutionary theoretician. Connolly had little use for the windy blatherskite or for the cloister sociologist. He was a well-rounded revolutionary, indeed, as Comrade Schuller points out a true Leninist before that word was coined into the English language. His life, his work and his heroic death should be an inspiration to those who must carry forward the flag where it dropped, torn and bloodstained from his hands. Not only is Connolly's memory a heritage of the Irish working class but his tactics in the Irish struggle against British imperialism can be studied to advantage by the workers of all lands. He is Ireland's most precious contribution to the international proletariat.

In publishing this little book the Workers (Communist) Party, not only pays a deserving tribute to our martyred comrade, but it also wishes to bring the attention of workers of Irish birth or descent in the United States to the necessity of joining hands with workers of all races in the land in which they are exploited to the end that they may emancipate themselves from the thralldom of the system which Connolly died fighting against and to erect upon its ruins the Workers' Republic which Connolly laid down his life fighting for.

—T. J. O'Flaherty.

December 20, 1926.



## "Jim" Connolly and the Irish Rising of 1916.

### The Significance of Ireland for the Comintern.

**I**N this age so prolific in anniversaries, one event should not be forgotten—at the end of April and the beginning of May, 1926, we celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Irish Rising in 1916, and the shooting of its leader, James Connolly.

During the past few years Ireland has been relatively quiet, both as regards general and internal British policy. But it would be a serious mistake to regard as permanent the present stagnation in the political life of the workers and toiling peasantry of Ireland. Already there are signs of revival. The Irish question has not been solved by the creation of the Irish "Free State" with Dominion rights, nor has the misery of the oppressed Irish workers and small peasantry been in any way alleviated thereby. Directly under the noses of the lords of the greatest Imperialist State in Europe exists the greatest anti-imperialist force, the significance of which will continue to develop the greater the decline of British capitalism. The mutual support of the British and Irish working masses in their struggle against the common enemy is of the greatest importance, and not least for the British worker.

It is noteworthy that Ireland, in spite of its revolutionary significance and possibilities, has hitherto played but an insignificant role in the Communist International. The main reason for this lies in the decline of the revolutionary Labor movement in Ireland itself; this of late years has reached a regrettable level, the causes of which call for investigation. Ireland with its complicated conditions presents special difficulties to the Communist movement. It is therefore most important for us to study these special conditions and the experience of the

revolutionary struggle in Ireland. The 1916 rising made by troops mainly composed of workers, agricultural laborers and laboring peasants, and the work of that great Irish Marxist who led this insurrection, played a most important role in this struggle. Here we have the opportunity of studying the strong and weak sides of the young Irish Labor movement, since Connolly himself in his qualities and faults was a typical representative of the best section of the working class of his country.

The British oppressor has always been a past master in the art of keeping not only Europe but also his own country in the dark about conditions and events in Ireland, thereby isolating the Irish fighters for freedom. This isolation was not without effects upon the workers also, and thus it happened that the works of a James Connolly must today be dug out, so to speak, while the workers are almost ignorant of the fact that in Ireland a revolutionary Marxist of the first water worked and struggled. A Marxist far beyond his contemporaries in the Labor movement of the Anglo-Saxon countries, he understood despite his early end, and put into practice, the basic theories of Leninism. The title of honor must be given him, in the following pages we will show how he applied this point of view to the basic questions of the Irish working class.

### **The Role of the Working Class in the Irish Struggle for Freedom.**

A biographer of Connolly\* who examined the origin of his popularity amongst the Irish workers refers to the problem of "Connolly's secret." As a solution he finds only a few general phrases about understanding how to subject the lesser to the greater, etc. "Connolly's secret," however, is quite clear. It is THE COMBINATION OF THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE AND OF THE REVOLUTIONARY CLASS STRUGGLE OF

---

\*D. Ryan. "James Connolly." London, 1924.

THE WORKING CLASS. IT IS THE PROOF OF THE  
NECESSITY OF LEADERSHIP IN THE STRUGGLE  
FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION IN IRELAND.

Connolly ardently sympathized with the hatred of the masses against the imperialist oppression of Great Britain, and with their longing for national liberty. In the narrow sense of the word he was no nationalist; on the contrary, he was active both in theory and practice as a Marxist Internationalist. He was a stranger to any feeling against England as such. He spent the greater part of his youth in England, where he was active as an agitator in the Social Democratic Federation and frequently worked in the closest harmony with the British Labor movement against capitalists both in England and Ireland. He loved to use the declaration of the "United Irelanders" from the time of the first French Revolution.

"As to any union between the two islands, believe us when we assert that OUR UNION RESTS UPON OUR MUTUAL INDEPENDENCE. WE SHALL LOVE EACH OTHER IF WE BE LEFT TO OURSELVES."

Connolly took a deep interest in the history of the Irish struggle for liberation, those 700 years of tragic history of wars, unsuccessful risings, treason, terror and famine. He raised the question as to the causes of the failure of the former movements, especially those during the past hundred and fifty years. As answer he found that the national struggle had not been linked up with the social struggle. He declares in his most important work, "Labor in Irish History"\*:

" . . . As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question, the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors

\*"Labor in Irish History." This classical Marxist treatment of the Irish question is quite unknown on the Continent. It is really most important that this book should be published both in the Russian and in the German languages.

resolves itself in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production in Ireland. Who would own and control the land? The people or the invaders; and if the invaders, which set of them—the most recent swarm of land thieves, or the sons of the thieves of a former generation? These were the bottom questions of Irish politics, and all other questions were valued or deprecated in the proportion to which they contributed to serve the interests of some of the factions who had already taken their stand in this fight around property interests."

The result of this was that very many struggles for freedom failed because they did not carry with them the working masses, for

"the producing classes could not be expected to rally to the revolution unless given to understand that it meant their freedom from social as well as from political bondage."

This, however, does not give quite a clear interpretation of the failure of the national struggle. A further reason was to be found in the leadership of this struggle. The rich bourgeoisie, bound by a thousand ties to the ruling class in England and terrified of the class struggle, betrayed the struggle for national liberty; the middle and petty bourgeoisie wavered helplessly and sought a peaceful compromise in the most constitutional manner possible, always in fear that their agitation might cause the working masses to raise the social question.

"The spokesmen of the middle class, in the press and on the platform, have consistently sought the emasculation of the Irish National Movement, the distortion of Irish history, and, above all, the denial of all relation between the social rights of the Irish toilers and the political rights of the Irish nation. It was hoped and intended by this means to create what is termed 'a real National movement,' i. e., a movement in which each class would recognize the rights of the

other classes and laying aside their contentions would unite in a national struggle against the common enemy—England. Needless to say, the only class deceived by such phrases was the working class.

"When questions of 'class' interests are eliminated from public controversy a victory is thereby gained for the possessing, conservative class, whose only hope of security lies in such elimination. During the last hundred years every generation in Ireland has witnessed an attempted rebellion against English rule. Every such conspiracy or rebellion has drawn the majority of its adherents from the lower orders in town and country, yet under the inspiration of a few middle class doctrinaires the social question has been rigorously excluded from the field of action to be covered by the rebellion if successful; in hopes that by such exclusion it would be possible to conciliate the upper classes and enlist them in the struggle for freedom. The result has in nearly every case been the same. The workers, though furnishing the greatest proportion of recruits to the ranks of the revolutionists, and consequently of victims to the prison and the scaffold, could not be imbued en masse with the revolutionary fire necessary to seriously imperil a domination rooted for 700 years in the heart of their country. They were all anxious enough for freedom, but realizing the enormous odds against them, and being explicitly told by their leaders that they **MUST NOT EXPECT ANY CHANGE IN THEIR CONDITION OF SOCIAL SUBJECTION, EVEN IF SUCCESSFUL**, they as a body shrank from the contest, and left only the purest minded and most chivalrous of their class to face the odds and glut the vengeance of the tyrant."

Hence, declared Connolly, the liberation struggle in Ireland was only possible under the leadership of the working class, which should now take over the lead in this struggle.

"The result of the long drawn out struggle of Ire-



land has been, so far, that the old chieftainry has disappeared, or through its degenerate descendants has made terms with iniquity, and become part and parcel of the supporters of the established order; the middle class, growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of the economic rivalry of England almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the political despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and 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 freedom in Ireland."

The National movement was at a low ebb when Connolly began his activities in Ireland in the '90's. The development of British capitalism had not been without its effects on Ireland, and crumbs from the table of imperialist England had fallen to the upper and middle classes in Ireland. The land reforms had had a temporary pacifying effect on the peasantry, hence the National movement had adopted a rather tame form. Its program was simply Home Rule, limited autonomy within the framework of Great Britain, and the road thereto was by constitutional methods.

Connolly started a bitter struggle against the Home Rulers. His program was clear and definite: complete separation from Great Britain, an independent Irish Republic. The road thereto was by means of mass organization and of mass struggle, using every possible legal method and in the final issue revolutionary instruction.

In 1898 Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party and its organ, "The Workers' Republic." The I. S. R. P. declares its program to be the development of an Irish Socialist Republic based on public ownership by

the Irish people of the land and the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Connolly himself writes about the effect of the new Party upon the political life on Ireland:

"It is no exaggeration to say that this organization and its policy 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 political 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 close together and eyes fearfully glancing round. 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."

Just as Connolly founded the first Socialist Labor Party in Ireland, so too he worked with the greatest enthusiasm in organizing the trade unions. Together with Jim Larkin he roused with his fiery agitation and apt leadership the working masses in Ireland, and worked for the foundation of trade union organizations. When Jim Larkin founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union he received the full support of Connolly, who together with Larkin became the most important organizer in the movement. And what is still more, it can be justly said that Connolly was the theoretician of the movement. He applied in a brilliant manner the good that he had learned in America from the Industrialists. Still, although he fought for the correct revolutionary aspect of industrialism in contrast to the out-of-date reformist ideas of craft unionism, he struggled against every tendency towards separation from the "po-

litical movement." On the contrary, the Transport Workers' movement formed the basis for the creation of the Irish Labor Party, and was at the same time the most active factor in the national revolutionary movement for liberation.

The general strike of the Dublin workers in 1913 marked the brilliant climax of the trade union mass movement which was thus created.

### **The Union with the Peasantry.**

Just as Connolly was convinced of the necessity of the leadership of the working class, so too he realized that its fate was inseparably involved with that of the peasantry, with whom union must be established if national and social liberation were to be attained. He stood for the Leninist interpretation of this alliance both in theory and in practice. Since the Irish question, at least until the beginning of this century, fundamentally revolved around the question, "Who possesses the land and governs?" he took as starting point the understanding of the Irish struggle for freedom.

During the 700 years of British rule the Irish peasantry, which had hitherto owned and tilled the land on the basis of a kind of clan kinship, had been robbed of their land with the most fearful cruelty. The land was given to the British conquerors and their supporters and servants. The peasants were driven away and physically destroyed by war, hunger and terror, or remained as tenant farmers. In this way, the peasants came to live as tenants on that same ground which in reality belonged to them, and at the same time were obliged to pay the landlords scandalously high rents. The result was misery amongst the peasants, which was hard to distinguish from chronic famine. Ireland produced and exported large quantities of corn, but the peasants mainly existed on potatoes.

Every bad potato harvest made a big change for the worse in the condition of the peasantry. In 1845-1849,



there was a terrible famine, which brought in its wake the deaths of several hundred thousands from hunger and fever. And during this time Ireland continued to export corn for large sums of money. Even today, after the agrarian reform, such periods of famine are still possible, as was proved by the famine in Ireland in the winter of 1924-25, which was particularly rampant among the peasants in the West.

The result of this condition of the peasantry were voiced in many peasant risings and revolts, in which the peasantry supplied the mass of the troops until the time of the development of the industrial proletariat. In the famine years, in 1848, and in the '70's under the leadership of the "Land League" these peasant risings were particularly widespread.

The year 1848 was also marked as a year of disgraceful weakness and treachery on the part of the petty bourgeoisie and the betrayal of a powerful and specially hopeful revolutionary mass movement. Connolly writes bitterly and with contempt of the leaders of the "Young Ireland" movement, who from fear of the social land demands of the peasantry lost a favorable possibility for revolution and separation from England. Our Irish Girondists sacrificed the Irish peasantry on the altar of private property. With scorn he writes ("Labor in Irish History") about these "revolutionaries" who wanted to carry out the rising in a "respectable" manner:

"English army on one side, provided with guns, bands and banners; Irish army on the other side, also provided with guns, bands and banners, 'serried ranks with glittering steel,' no mere proletarian insurrection, and no interference with the rights of property . . . But the crowning absurdity of all was the leadership of William Smith O'Brien. He wandered through the country telling the starving peasantry to get ready, but refusing to allow them to feed themselves at the expense of the landlords who had so long plundered, starved, and evicted them; he would not allow his fol-

lowers to seize upon the carts of grain passing along the roads where the people were dying for want of food; at Mullinahone he refused to allow his followers to fell trees to build a barricade across the road until they had asked permission of the landlords who owned the trees."

As a counterpart to this Connolly writes full of appreciation of the Fenians who in their struggle for national freedom and social liberty of the workers joined with the Land League, i. e., the peasants in the struggle for the land:

"When the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League, and made the land struggle the basis for their warfare, they were not only placing themselves in touch once more with those inexhaustable quarries of material interests from which all the great Irish statesmen from Laurence O'Toole to Wolfe Tone drew the stones upon which they build their edifice of a militant patriotic Irish organization, but they were also, consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of Labor."

This union of the workers and peasants Connolly declared to be the basis and inspiration of the modern Labor movement, and in full recognition he points out that the principles of the Land League were not only recognized as Communist, but that the organ of the Land League in America, "The Irish World," bore the sub-title of "American Industrial Liberator."

The agrarian reform was introduced. The causes therefore were the pressure brought to bear by the Land League movement and the circumstance that the investment of capital in industrial undertakings, because of the competition of American corn, had become more profitable than agriculture in Ireland. For this reason, the British Parliament, at the close of the last century and the beginning of the present, decided upon a series

of laws enabling the peasants to purchase their land from the landlords. The peasants were able to secure the land on credit advanced by the State at 49 years' purchase at the rate of four per cent (later three and a quarter per cent). The landlords received in addition to the market price of their land an additional sum from the State varying between three and eight per cent. The result of these reforms, or rather this buying out of the landlords, was the transformation of Ireland gradually from a country of tenants to that of a country of small peasants who owned their own farms. In 1914 there were 348,855 peasants who owned their own land and 217,282 tenant farmers. This latter figure has been reduced still more since that time, and today only about one-third of the land is held on lease.

In spite of these reforms the overwhelming majority of peasants even today do not employ hired labor. That is to say, the overpowering mass of the Irish country folk is composed of laboring peasants (petty peasants and tenant farmers). This peasantry is oppressed by the heavy weight of debt. It is obliged to pay twice as much for its own land as it is worth, as a result of all this interest, extras and land speculation.

"Thus the Irish people found themselves robbed in very deed for a second time. First, the Britishers took their land away from them by force, and then by means of Acts of Parliament forced them to pay more than double the price for this same land."\*

In addition to this, there was a further nuisance, the "Gombeen men," traders and bank capitalists, who in the small rural places acted as veritable leeches on the rural population and were hand in glove with the former landlords.

"Indeed the buying out of the landlords in many cases served only to gorge still further the ever-rapacious maw of those parasites upon rural life."†

\*Kernhelzev ("Revolutionary Ireland"), Moscow, 1923.

†J. Connolly, "The Reconquest of Ireland," Dublin, 1914.

Connolly cherished no illusions about the land "reform." He showed up the fact that the mass of the peasantry was still steeped in misery and that the necessity for joint struggle with the workers still existed, was even still greater than hitherto. The opponent and exploiter had only changed his shape. Formerly that shape was that of a feudal capitalist landlord and now the peasantry was faced with trade and bank capital and the collector of the British government.

Connolly wrote on the effects of the reforms on the land question:

"But that question so dreaded rises again; it will not lie down, and cannot be suppressed. The partial success of the Land League has effected a change in Ireland, the portent of which but few realize. Stated briefly, it means that the recent Land Acts, acting contemporaneously with the development of trans-Atlantic traffic, are converting Ireland into a country governed according to the conception of feudalism into a country shaping itself after capitalist laws of trade. That war which the Land League fought, and then abandoned, before it was either lost or won, will be taken up by the Irish toilers on a broader field with sharper weapons, and a more comprehensive knowledge of all the essentials of permanent victory. As the Irish septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they rejected or accepted the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by their loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers from henceforward will base their fight 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."

The correctness of this analysis was proved by the role which the peasants played in the civil war, 1919-1921,

during which agrarian unrest and arbitrary expropriation by the peasants took place.

According to Connolly, Co-operation was one of the most important forms of joint work between peasants and workers. Larkin couched his and Connolly's program thus: To organize the workers into unions according to industry, to join them together into one political unit and at the same time to unite the agricultural workers with the urban workers through Co-operation.

As we will see from the quotation given below, Connolly went still further. To his mind Co-operatives did not only constitute contact between workers and peasants but also provided the possibility of a joint Labor Party (as we would say today a Farmer-Labor Party).

His genius penetrated still further. He understood that the Co-operatives provided the only way of transforming agriculture under conditions of private ownership to Socialism and after the overthrow of capitalism the Co-operatives would act as a means by which the conflict between town and country would be overcome, and both would be joined together in a unified Socialist economy. And Connolly emphasizes:

"If to that combination of agriculturalists and urban laborers we have just hinted at, as a possibility of co-operation upon the economic field, we add the further possible development of an understanding upon the political field between these two groups of co-operators we begin to realize the great and fundamental change now slowly maturing in our midst . . . Then when to the easily organized laborers of the towns is added the staying power of the peasantry, and when representatives appear in the Halls of Legislature voicing their combined demands, the Party of Labor which will thus manifest itself will speak with a prophetic voice when it proclaims its ideal of a regenerated Ireland re-conquered for its common people.



"For the only true prophets are they who carve out the future which they announce."<sup>6</sup>

### **Connolly, the Revolutionary and Marxist.**

Connolly was proud to declare himself a Marxist. He makes frequent reference to Marx in his book, "Labor and Irish History," which in itself represents an attempt to apply Marxist method to Irish history. He speaks of Marx as "the greatest of modern thinkers and the first scientific Socialist."

Connolly was enabled to follow a real Marxist tactic by the fact of his profound understanding of Marxism. He pursued a real Marxist policy, between the open reformists on the one hand and the pure military revolutionaries (no rarity in Ireland), the rigid trade unionists and the sectarian pseudo-Marxist Socialists on the other.

Constitutional Fabianism earned his contempt. He was fully aware of the advantage of utilizing all legal possibilities and of the necessity of spending years in organizing, agitating for the daily struggle on behalf of partial demands. But he would countenance no infringement of the recognition that the final issue of all great political and social questions could only be decided by force, and that Ireland's liberation from the British imperialist yoke and the social emancipation of its workers was only possible through revolutionary channels. He, the organizer of industrial trade unions, fought political sectarianism at the same time. He invited his comrades of the Scottish Social Democratic Federation to drop their sectarian scruples (amongst which was the oath of allegiance to king and constitution) and to enter Parliament as a political party.

Connolly was a revolutionary to the core. McManus once wrote (1919) that Connolly was the only Socialist he had met who judged the social position or political crisis from the standpoint of its revolutionary possibili-

---

<sup>6</sup>"Reconquest of Ireland."

ties. As was worthy of a revolutionary, he occupied himself seriously with the political, tactical, and military questions of a rising in Ireland. He understood very well the Leninist conception that a rising is an "art" which has got to be "studied."

During the war his journal, "The Workers' Republic," gave the place of honor to studies about risings, street fights in Moscow in 1905, Paris in 1830 and in 1848, the rising in the Tyrol in 1905, and guerilla warfare in India, revolutionary struggles in Mexico, and similar happenings. At a meeting of the officers of the revolutionary Irish Volunteer Army, Connolly was asked during his lecture on street fights how it happened that he understood so much about revolutionary and military questions. He smilingly replied "You forget that revolution is my business." (Ryan, "J. Connolly.")

It is very worthy of note that Connolly grasped the conception of the Soviet idea. Daniel De Leon influenced him very much in this, he had worked jointly with him in America. Just as he, so too did Connolly declare that the future government and the future division of the country would be based not on territory but on production and its component parts and branches.

### **Against the Imperialist War.**

It is a platitude to state that Connolly as a revolutionary fighter against imperialism was also an ardent fighter against the last imperialist war. The breakdown of the Socialist International oppressed him greatly. To this was added the complete treachery of the Irish bourgeois and petty bourgeois Nationalists. The former, the Home Rulers, under Redmond's leadership, went over completely to the camp of the British Imperialists; the latter, weak and vacillating, expected to get all assistance from the Germans. From the very beginning Connolly was quite clear that only by a rising of the workers could the war be put a stop to, and also that such a great revolutionary rising would take place. On August

15, 1914, he wrote to this effect in the Glasgow "Forward." He expressed to the Scottish comrades the wish to take active part in such a co-ordinated international struggle of the workers.

It is not clear why Connolly's Party which had affiliated to the Second International had had so little contact with the Left Wing of this International. It is quite possible that the isolation of Ireland through England during the war was responsible for this.

There was no doubt in Connolly's mind that the war as far as Ireland was concerned would not end without a decisive revolutionary struggle and rising. He understood only too well that this war intensified the crisis to a great extent, and must one way or another lead to a decision in Ireland. Further, he declared, that there never was a more favorable moment than the present for Ireland to fight for its freedom. "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity." In this sense Connolly preached open revolutionary defeatism.

"But we also believe that in times of war we should act as in war . . . We shall continue in season and out of season, to teach 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 conflict of armed forces in Ireland, that the time for Ireland's Battle is Now—the place for Ireland's Battle is Here."

This declaration shows the Leninist spirit which permeated Connolly's policy.

Connolly looked forward to the pending revolutionary struggle in Ireland not merely as an Irish affair, but he hoped that it might form the beginning of the international revolution.

"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 deben-



ture are shrivelled up on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

This brings us to the Easter of 1916, the first upheaval in Ireland.

### **The Easter Rising.**

Irish bourgeois nationalists and British Socialists sought and seek still in vain for an explanation of Connolly's leadership of the Easter rising. Much as these latter sympathized with Connolly as a labor leader and Socialist they could not understand how he could take part in such an act and thus we see the strangest endeavors to explain, or rather to excuse Connolly's attitude during the Red Easter of 1916. It is no small wonder that the Irish rising was either rejected by the British Labor movement, or in the most favorable instance was received with a lack of general understanding.

Some attributed Connolly's attitude to the influence of his comrade, Pearce, the Republican, who is said to have believed in a mystic manner that every generation of Ireland must offer up a blood sacrifice. The others explained the rising as a result of Connolly's depression and despair caused by the war and the position of Ireland. His decision was also attributed to the fact of his bitter sorrow at the breakdown of the Socialist International and his mental rejection of the mutual slaughter of the workers of all countries, which impelled him to deal a blow, no matter how few people he could win to his side.

Others explained the rising as a demonstration of the wish to show that Ireland was not loyal and did not relinquish her demands.

Others again simply declared the rising was a "Putsch."

Of course, all these explanations are so much nonsense: meant to excuse Connolly, they accuse their originators by showing that they are at loggerheads with the principles of revolutionary struggle, or that they

totally misunderstand them. Besides, they are absolutely contrary to the actual facts.

The events proved the correctness of Connolly's Leninist analysis. The war brought economic want to the country. It increased to an extreme degree oppression and deprivation of political rights. Arrests, confiscation, suppression of papers, were the order of the day. Slowly there ripened amongst the masses a condition of revolutionary discontent. The growing strength of the revolutionaries compelled the British government to prepare, nervously and anxiously, a large-scale destructive offensive and a regime of general reaction.

These conditions brought about a rapprochement between the revolutionary groups. These were: the Irish Transport Workers' Union and the Irish Socialists, who rallied to Connolly's newspaper, the "Workers' Republic," the Irish Citizen Army, which represented the military organization of both these workers' organizations and was founded during the general strike in 1913, the Sinn Feiners and the Irish Republican Volunteers. Both the latter groups represented the radical lead of the petty bourgeois nationalists, but at the same time had a strong following amongst the workers and peasants.

Connolly understood that in the coming revolutionary struggle joint work was necessary between these groups. How he interpreted this is shown in the characteristic manner in one of his declarations:

"The time is now ripe. ("Irish Worker," August 15, 1914), nay the imperious necessities of the hour call loudly for, demand the formation of a committee of all the elements outside, as well as inside the Volunteers, to consider means to take and hold Ireland, and the food of Ireland, for the people of Ireland. We of the Transport Union, we of the Citizen Army, are ready for any such co-operation. We can bring it the aid of drilled and trained men; we can bring to it the heartiest efforts of men and women who in thousands have shown that they know how to face prison and

death; and we can bring to it the services of thinkers and organizers who know that different occasions require different policies—that you cannot legalize revolutionary actions and that audacity alone can command success in a crisis like this."

This collaboration became a reality and under Connolly's influence the Volunteers moved more and more to the Left. The desire for revolutionary action grew amongst their ranks.

After a period of stormy events April, 1916 came. A highly charged atmosphere prevailed; mobilization of both sides began. The British government prepared for the disarmament by force of the "Volunteers" and of the "Citizen Army" and the destruction of the entire movement. Connolly and his friends were of the opinion that now the time had come for the revolutionaries to act and to proceed from the defensive to the offensive. The leaders of the Volunteers actually gave the order for general maneuvers on a large scale at Easter, i. e., in other words, the signal for a rising. At the last moment the petty bourgeois leaders of the Volunteers rescinded the order, mainly because the German help which they had expected had failed to arrive. This typical and despicable act of petty bourgeois cowardice was too late. It was not able to restrain the rising, but simply undermined the onslaught. The people from "Liberty Hall" who constituted the life and soul of the rising had already drawn up the proclamation of the Provisional government of an Independent Irish Republic. The workers and the revolutionary section of the Volunteers were not prepared to give in without a struggle and refused to carry out the order to disband. The rising was unavoidable.

In accordance with the plan previously drawn up, Connolly undertook the leadership without any hesitation.

He undoubtedly hoped that they would succeed in carrying with them the majority of the Volunteer Army; and that in any case the rising, even if it should fail,

would constitute the preliminary to a general large scale revolutionary struggle. Hence, he also calmly and with decision weighed the possibilities of its failure. His first hope was shattered, not because the masses of the Volunteers were not ready, but because the disorganization which the cowardly petty bourgeois leadership caused at the last decisive moment was too great. Subsequent events confirmed his second expectation to the full.

On the morning of April 24, the most important points of the city of Dublin were in the hands of the revolutionaries. Proclamations of the Provisional government were posted up and the radio stations proclaimed on all sides the foundation of an Independent Irish Republic. The people participated in scenes of the most intense enthusiasm.

Then the struggle began. About one thousand Volunteers and workers' troops maintained their position for more than a week against a powerful British army. Only by ruthless use of artillery, which completely destroyed the whole center of the city, and by numerical supremacy did the British succeed, with great losses, in forcing the revolutionaries to surrender after a week's fighting.

Then an orgy of White Terror ensued. Mass shooting of leaders, mass arrests, executions of non-combatants, devastation. In short, imperialistic British civilization showed itself in its full development. Connolly did not escape his doom. The British government, a government in which sat Arthur Henderson, the present Secretary of the Labor Party, signed the order for his execution, which took place on May the 12th. He had been severely wounded in the struggle and was so weak that he was unable to stand and was shot seated in a chair. He met his end calmly and philosophically. Up to the last minute he remained what he had always been, a proletarian revolutionist.

The slogans of the rising were, "Down with the War! Down with British Imperialism! All hail a free Irish Republic!" One may wonder, perhaps, that more definite Socialist slogans did not play a bigger role in this strug-

gle, but we must not forget to take into consideration that this rising was not the final struggle of the Irish workers, but merely the preliminary thereto. In this way, this first revolutionary outburst of the masses obtained expression at a moment when pressure was felt most strongly from British imperialism and the war. But still the entire rising had a definite Socialist color. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic declared, although in vague terms, the right of the Irish people to the means of production of wealth. It is apparent from the fact that the rising primarily appealed to the workers, that the masses of the fighters were workers and agricultural laborers, and a considerable section of the leaders Socialists and trade unionists.

The warm words with which Lenin wrote of this Easter rising will best show our appreciation. In his article, "The Results of the Discussion on Self-Determination" of 1916\* he attacks the "monstrous judgment" of those who termed this "heroic rising" a Putsch.

\*Published in "Against the Stream."

"Those who can term such a rising a Putsch are either the worst kind of reactionaries or hopelessly doctrinaires, incapable of imagining the social revolution as a living phenomenon."

And again:

"To assume the possibility that a social revolution without risings of small nations in the colonies and Europe, without revolutionary outbursts of the petty bourgeoisie, with all their prejudices, without movements of the unconscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against the oppression of landowners and the church and monarchists and national oppression, is equivalent to denying the social revolution."

The Irish rising was, as Lenin shows, a manifestation of the serious crisis of imperialism, a crisis which in 1917-18, led to the collapse of a number of imperialist states and to the Proletarian Revolution.

"The crisis of imperialism was at that time still far removed from the stage of its highest development:



the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie had not yet been overcome (the war to a finish can bring that about, at present it has not gone so far); proletarian movements are still very weak in imperialist states."

"The misfortune of the Irish lay in the fact that their rising was untimely, since the rising of the European proletariat was NOT YET ripe. Capitalism is not so harmoniously constructed that separate sources of risings can suddenly unite without failure of overthrow. On the contrary, the difference in time, the difference and dissimilarity in the place of the risings act as a guarantee for the greatness and depth of the joint movement; it is only by untimely, partially and consequently unsuccessful attempts at revolutionary risings that the masses will again experience, learn, assemble their forces, recognize their true leaders, the Socialist proletarians, and thereby prepare the joint attack; just as isolated strikes, town and national demonstrations, mutinies in the army, peasant risings, etc., prepared the general attack in 1905."

#### **Civil War and the "Free State."**

Lenin's prophetic word was fulfilled. The Easter rising marked the beginning of a new epoch. The rising and the persecutions accomplished in a few weeks what the propaganda of years had failed to do: the ideas of the extreme revolutionary groups and their methods were supported by the masses.\* The revolutionaries realized that the only way to liberate Ireland was through a revolutionary struggle, and they won over practically the whole mass of the Irish people to this program.

Then came the years of the widespread partisan war, 1919-1921, which stand without parallel in the history of revolutionary struggles, in which the Irish Republic, created at Easter, 1916, was actually thrust on British imperialism. In the end the British government had to climb down in order not to lose everything. In 1921 Ireland was made a Free State with Dominion rights like

Australia and South Africa, having previously separated from the North (Ulster). But even this partial success was only possible as the result of the armed revolutionary struggle which had been inaugurated by the Easter rising.

The disunited, petty bourgeois nature of the leadership of the struggle was shown by the Republican consent to this compromise. Only the radical wing, consisting mainly of working elements, agricultural laborers, and the poorer petty bourgeoisie, refused to accept the compromise; these were led by De Valera. Then a fresh civil war ensued and the world witnessed the sad example of the Irish Nationalists and Republicans, in the garb of the Free State, but really as the agents of British imperialism and of the Irish capitalists, slaughtering by hundreds Irish Republicans and fighters for freedom.

\*Kernheitzer. "Revolutionary Ireland."

Today the Free State has become a respectable Dominion of the British Empire, Mr. Cosgrave, the President, on the occasion of the last attack on Mussolini's nose, sent a moving and servile telegram of sympathy.

But naturally the Irish question has not been solved thereby, nor have its workers been helped; the role of liberator falls to the workers of Ireland.

The Irish Labor movement after the Easter rising committed a number of serious errors. Up to that time it had taken the lead politically in the struggle against British imperialism, and in the struggle against conscription in 1917-1918 by means of the strike weapon. But now it resigned this leadership into the hands of the petty bourgeoisie. At the time of the 1918 elections it decided not to put forward any Labor Party or trade union candidates because of the Sinn Feiners. This was a suicidal manner of establishing the united front against British imperialism. But it served as only one example in a long political history of how the active elements of the working class were completely enmeshed in the petty bourgeois Republican movement, and how the workers and toiling peasantry again were taken in too by the

petty bourgeoisie. The Labor movement has not taken to heart Connolly's Leninist slogan, that in spite of the united front with the revolutionary nationalists the workers must retain their independence and their leading role.

De Valera's tardy (or premature [?]) rising against the compromise and the Free State, in which many workers and agricultural laborers took part, was also a mistake. It had as a result the further destruction of the active forces of the workers and the revolutionary strata of the petty bourgeoisie.

Today the position of the revolutionary movement in Ireland is most unsatisfactory. The trade union movement is split and weakened. There is neither a Socialist Labor Party nor a Communist Party. The Labor Party is weak and expends its energy in petty reformist work. In reality, it is simply the parliamentary representative of the trade unions and has no proper organization. Amongst the remaining Republicans who have been quite scattered, there are many good revolutionary forces. The peasants are unorganized.

Thus we see that the first task of the Irish working class is to consolidate its forces and create a virile leadership and organization. It is an absolute necessity to found a class conscious revolutionary Labor Party, and in this connection we must welcome the existing tendencies towards forming an Irish Workers' Party. The trade unions must be strengthened and made into a real powerful trade union movement. The Labor Party must raise the standard of Connolly; it ought never to lose sight of the fact that the workers alone should have the struggle for the final liberation from British imperialism and capitalism. It must not forget that for this end it must act jointly with the peasantry, and this is all the more possible in Ireland since the majority consists of hard working small farmers.

Thus, in union with the British working class, the other oppressed people in the British Empire and the workers of other countries, the Irish workers will raise aloft in Ireland the red flag of the Irish Workers' Republic.

G. Schüller.



## HISTORICAL REPRINT SERIES

I

IT is our intention to republish during the ensuing months a series of pamphlets and booklets which, in our opinion, are of historical value to the study of the development of the Socialist Movement in Ireland.

ALL publications will be unabridged, and we would like to stress that in publishing them we do not necessarily agree with all the sentiments expressed.

WE welcome suggestions from readers on works to be included in the SERIES, and should anyone possess a pamphlet which they deem worth republishing, we will be glad to hear from them.

THE CORK WORKERS CLUB  
9, St. Nicholas Church Place,  
Cove St, Cork.





