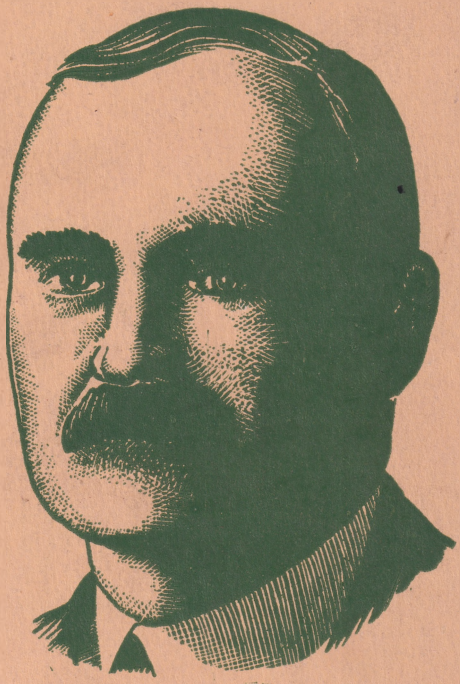
Connolly of Ireland



DEWI PRYS THOMAS.

PATRIOT
and SOCIALIST

by

Dr. Noëlle Davies

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CONNOLLY OF IRELAND

PATRIOT AND SOCIALIST

BY

DR. NOËLLE DAVIES

SWYDDFA'R BLAID, CAERNARFON

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FOREWORD

READERS of Nora Connolly O'Brien's *Portrait of a Rebel Father*, Desmond Ryan's *James Connolly*, and W. P. Ryan's *History of the Irish Labour Movement*, will not need to be told how much I owe to these. I have also used material from other books, chiefly Connolly's own *Labour in Irish History*, *Reconquest of Ireland*, and *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, and Louis Le Roux' *Vie de Patrice Pearse*.

Desmond Ryan has pointed out that many of Connolly's best writings "*lie buried in the scattered files of Labour journals in Ireland, Great Britain, and America.*" I have not had access to these, except in so far as they are quoted in the books already mentioned. Is it not time for a selection from these writings to be published by some competent editor in order that the material for a fuller knowledge and appreciation of Connolly's ideas may be accessible to the ordinary reader?

I am grateful to Capt. J. R. White, D.S.O., for valuable information and the loan of cuttings relating to the Irish Citizen Army, of which he was the founder.

Throughout I have emphasised those aspects of Connolly's life and thought which seem to me most significant; if there are some who think that emphasis misplaced, I hope it will lead them to study Connolly's writings more thoroughly for themselves, and so be able to form their own considered judgment as to what constitutes his real significance for us to-day. And when we have finished thinking about Connolly, we might do well to remember some words he wrote once when discussing the Utopian Socialists of other nations. "*The Irish,*" he observed half ironically, "*are not philosophers as a rule, they proceed too rapidly from thought to action.*" If it is a fault, it is a good fault, and one in which the people of other countries should not be ashamed to emulate them.

N.D.

29.6.45.

INTRODUCTORY

As James Connolly, the Irish Labour leader, lay wounded in prison on the eve of his execution, he comforted his sorrowing wife with words which might well serve for his epitaph—"*Hasn't it been a full life, Lillie, and isn't this a good end?*"

"A full life"—yes, no doubt about that. Navvy, pedlar, printer, insurance agent; editor, pamphleteer, historian; Labour organiser in Ireland and America, Secretary of the Irish Transport Workers' Union, Commandant of the Irish Citizen Army, signatory of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916—this self-educated son of a dustman had crowded more into his 46 years of life than most men can compass even in a longer span.

"A good end"—is that as undisputed? "*The Socialists will never understand why I am here,*" said Connolly before his execution, "*They will all forget I am an Irishman.*" Is this still true, or have the events of intervening years taught Socialists that Connolly's death, fighting for the freedom of his own small nation, was not a betrayal of the highest ideals of the international workers' movement, but rather their triumphant vindication?

Eight years after Connolly's death his biographer, Desmond Ryan, wrote of him: "*Even yet he stands alone, none too well understood by either friend or foe, leaving behind some enkindling books, much scattered writing in obscure propaganda sheets, a flourishing Labour movement, a martyr's grave.*"

Now that twenty-one more years have gone by, perhaps the time has come for a review of Connolly's life and work, his character and achievements, and a reconsideration of their significance for us to-day. Towards such a review and reconsideration this sketch, brief and incomplete as it is, is meant to be a contribution.

JAMES CONNOLLY

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS

JAMES CONNOLLY was born on June 5th, 1870, near Clones, Co. Monaghan. From his earliest childhood he was brought face to face with the hard facts of poverty and the evil results of alien government. The Great Famine of the 1840's, when millions of Irish people died or were forced to emigrate as a direct result of English Government policy, was over long before he was born; but the 1870's also witnessed much hardship and privation among the ill-organised workers, in both town and country, and many of them were driven by want to emigrate, like the workers of Wales during the Great Depression after the first World War. Among these emigrants was Connolly's father, who had hitherto been a labourer, but in 1880 got a job as corporation dustman in Edinburgh, and brought his family there with him.

Young Connolly had not long set foot on British soil when he found himself flung on to the labour market, supplementing the family's earnings as a printer's devil in the office of the local *Evening News*, where his brother also worked. His employers tried to conceal the fact that he was under the legal age by getting him to stand on a stool before a "case" whenever a factory inspector came round, so that he might appear taller than he was; but after a year the trick was found out, and Connolly lost his job. He next found work in a bakery; and then, after a period of unemployment due to a breakdown in health, he worked for two years in a mosaic tiling factory.

Leaving home at the age of eighteen, he roved through Britain as tramp, navvy and pedlar until an accident to his father recalled him to Edinburgh, where he took up his father's job as dustman. Meantime, on a short visit to Dublin, he had met his future wife, Miss Lillie Reynolds, whom he married in Perth at the age of 21.

Readers from a more sheltered environment who find passages in Connolly's writings which seem harsh, one-sided or repellent (like some of his references to the "class war,"

or the verses in which he leaves his son a "*legacy of hate for those who on the poor man's back have climbed to high estate*") should remember the bitterness of his hard, unsheltered youth and childhood. But negative bitterness was never dominant in Connolly's character; its keynotes were rather the fiery positive energy and active compassion for his fellow-workers which marked all his adult life.

This fiery yet tenacious energy revealed itself in the heroic efforts he made to overcome the handicaps of his early lack of schooling. Even as a boy he was a voracious reader. "*We were very poor and couldn't afford lights,*" he told his daughter years later, "*and I used to lie down on the floor near the fire so that it would shine on my book. When the fire was going out I couldn't read. I had no pencil to write with, either. I had to char bits of stick in the fire for a pencil, and for paper used whatever scraps I could find.*"

History was his favourite reading, and especially Irish history, which was made a vivid and living subject for him through the conversation of his uncle, an old member of the Fenian revolutionary movement. By the time he was twenty-one he was well read in the literature of Irish Nationalism, including the political writings of Mitchel and Lalor and the poems of Moore and Thomas Davis; his reading had also included Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, Carlyle and Mazzini, and he was beginning to study Marx and Engels. After his marriage his wife became his faithful helper in his studies as in every aspect of his domestic life; "*I used to ask her to go over my articles to see that my grammar and punctuation were correct,*" he said. He was not content to study for the sake of study, but from the first was concerned with passing on what he had learnt to his fellows; and this soon brought him out into the field of politics.

With his Fenian uncle, young Connolly used to attend meetings of the Social Democratic Federation, which was then carrying on vigorous propaganda in Scotland. In particular, he came under the influence of John Leslie, one of its leading speakers, who had published a pamphlet in the 1880's analysing the Irish question from a Socialist point of view. From speaking occasionally in support of Leslie at his meetings, Connolly developed into a Socialist orator himself, though first he had to master a serious impediment in his speech. Presently we find him standing as a Socialist candidate for St. Giles' Ward in Edinburgh; he was defeated,

polling 300 votes; and in order to become a candidate he had had to resign his job as corporation dustman. A small cobbler's shop which he opened did not pay; and he was on the point of seeking his fortune as a farmer in Chile, had got his passport ready and been guaranteed a grant of land and a free passage, when Leslie persuaded him to return to Ireland instead and try to organise an Irish Socialist Party there.

Early in 1896 the Connollys arrived in Dublin, and the struggle to find work began again. Connolly's daughter, Nora (whose *Portrait of a Rebel Father* should be read and re-read by all who want to grasp something of the real quality of Connolly the man), recalls one poignant episode from those Dublin days—an episode which may well have found parallels in many a Welsh worker's household within recent memory. After weary days of seeking work, her father had at last got a job, wheeling barrows of cement all day, and had come home in the evening, white from head to foot with dust and almost too exhausted to stand.

"*A hundred times I thought I'd give up and go home,*" he told his wife. "*Then I thought how happy you were this morning because I had work at last and the hungry days were over. . . . When the day was over I was too tired to be thankful. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get home, but I dragged myself along. . . . People thought me drunk, Lillie . . . when I got dizzy and reeled. . . . People thought me drunk*"—and he cried out bitterly that he was a weakling.

At that his wife exclaimed indignantly: "*You can't say that, James. You know that for the last few months you haven't had enough to eat—not even for one day. You've gone out in the morning after bread and tea to look for work, and haven't come home till it was dark, and then pretended that someone had given you a dinner so that there would be enough for me and the children. Isn't that enough to take the strength out of any man? Ask any other man of twenty-six and he'd say he'd feel the same. . . . It wasn't you; it was the work. How could you do it after months of starvation? Don't blame yourself. Don't think little of yourself.*"

And while her husband dozed in his chair she slipped quietly out and pawned the little gold watch which was her last treasure, so that he "*needn't go back to be killed again to-morrow,*" but could have good meals and get back his strength.

Years afterwards, when Connolly returned from a successful lecture tour in America, bringing presents for all the family as was his wont, he handed his wife a gold watch, saying simply, "*You see, Lillie, I didn't forget.*" The story is typical of them both.

After working for a time as a navvy, Connolly got work as proof-reader for a Dublin Sunday paper; and later, when through his efforts the Irish Republican Socialist Party had been founded, he became its first organiser at the princely salary of £1 a week, "*paid when funds permitted.*"

In many different spheres the 1890's, when Connolly returned to Ireland, stand out as a landmark in the progress of the Irish people towards national freedom and self-realisation. The movement to obtain Home Rule by Parliamentary means had seemed within sight of success under Parnell's leadership; but with the "Parnell split," and Parnell's death in 1891, it passed its zenith; and though for a time the Irish Parliamentary Party continued to dominate the political scene, and even succeeded in getting an abortive Home Rule Act placed on the Statute Book in 1914, its influence was waning. Meantime, the secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, dating from Fenian days, was slowly but steadily extending its influence, while in 1898 Arthur Griffith returned from South Africa to Ireland and launched his paper, *The United Irishman*, the following year, though it was not till some years later that he founded the Sinn Féin Party which was destined to sweep the polls in 1918. In 1893 Douglas Hyde and his colleagues had founded the Gaelic League for the preservation of the Irish language; and before the end of the century the new Anglo-Irish literary movement, with W. B. Yeats as its leading figure, had emerged, and was drawing its inspiration from ancient Irish history and legend. In 1898 an Act of Parliament set up in Ireland the same framework of local government (through county councils, etc.) as already existed in England. From the 1870's onwards a series of Land Acts had begun the process (not completed until after the attainment of self-government) of transforming the Irish agricultural system from tenant-farming, rack-renting, and absentee landlordism to peasant proprietorship. Through the efforts of Horace Plunkett, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society was established in 1894, and set to work for the promotion of co-operative banks, dairies, and other co-operative institutions managed

by the farmers themselves, in the country districts. Little or nothing had as yet been done to organise the agricultural and general labourers, numbering some quarter of a million, or the unskilled and semi-skilled urban workers; but the skilled workers of the towns had long had their friendly societies and other organisations, and gradually developed their regular trade unions. There were at least 51 of these in 1894, the year of the founding of the Irish Trades Union Congress, and by 1895 these had increased to 93, with a total membership of 17,476. In their various and widely differing spheres, all these and other movements were working to make the Irish people masters in their own house, and to deepen their knowledge of, and pride in, that house's character and history.

Midway in this decade of transition, James Connolly returned to Ireland with his twin gospels of national freedom and working-class emancipation—the two chief themes of his early studies, the two great passions of his life. From the first, "*he laid stress on the fact that the highest nationalism and essential socialism were complementary.*" To quote his own words:

> "The I.R.S.P. was founded in Dublin in 1896 by a few workingmen whom the writer 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 in order to convince the Irish people of that fact he must first learn to look inward upon Ireland for his justification, rest his arguments upon the facts of Irish history, and be champion against the subjection of Ireland and all that it implies."

Though accepting the orthodox Marxist view that the Irish question was economic at bottom, Connolly characteristically qualified it by adding 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 should they ever be foremost in the daily battle against all its manifestations, social and political.*"

Connolly's new Party had as its ultimate aim "the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based upon the public ownership by the people of Ireland 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 for the well-being of the community to be conducted on the same principles." Its immediate programme, for which it was to work by political means, included: nationalisation of canals and railways; substitution of State banks for private banks; the lending out of improved agricultural machinery to the agricultural population at the public expense for a rent covering cost and management alone; graduated income-tax on incomes over £400, to provide pensions for the aged, infirm, widows and orphans; establishment of the 48-hour week and a minimum wage; free maintenance of all children; gradual extension of the principle of public ownership and supply to all the necessaries of life; public control and management of the national schools; free education up to the highest university degree; and universal suffrage.

Connolly's view of the Irish struggle against England as the fight for a wholly different civilisation—the Gaelic clan system as against the alien English feudal system—was embodied in a series of articles, reprinted in pamphlet form in 1897 as *Erin's Hope*. He also reprinted some of the writings of Fintan Lalor, and of Wolfe Tone and other leaders of the 1798 Rising. In 1898 he started a paper known as the *Workers' Republic*, which "*appeared and disappeared in the next few years in accordance with the state of the funds.*" For a time members of the I.R.S.P. printed it themselves on a small hand-press—a proceeding which led to an accusation of blacklegging and to trouble with the Irish Typographical Association. Connolly, however, pacified the opposition, inquiring ironically if the private use of razors meant blacklegging on barbers. Eighty-five numbers of this paper had been published when it closed down in 1903 (to reappear in 1915). In it, in 1898, the opening chapters of Connolly's best-known book, *Labour in Irish History*, had already appeared.

In addition to his writing and organising, and the carrying-on of propaganda at outdoor and indoor meetings, Connolly took the lead in arranging several demonstrations which attracted more general attention. The first of these was the anti-Jubilee demonstration of 1897. Connolly's manifesto on that occasion, of which 10,000 copies were distributed,

shows how he carried out his own advice that Irish socialists should "*rest their arguments upon the facts of Irish history.*" Part of it runs as follows :

> "During this glorious reign Ireland has seen 1,225,000 of her children die of famine, starved to death while the produce of her soil and of their labour was eaten up by a vulture aristocracy—enforcing their rents by the bayonets of a hired assassin army in the pay of the 'best of the English Queens' ; the eviction of 3,668,000, a multitude greater than that of the entire population of Switzerland, and the reluctant emigration of 4,186,000 of our kindred, a greater host than the entire people of Greece. At the present moment 78 per cent. of our wage earners receive less than £1 per week, our streets are thronged by starving crowds of the unemployed, cattle graze on our tenantless farms and around the ruins of our battered homesteads, our ports are crowded with departing emigrants, and our workhouses are full of paupers. Such are the constituent elements out of which we are bade to construct a National Festival of Rejoicing !"

Connolly also organised public protests against the Boer War (when he was arrested and fined for attempting to address a proclaimed meeting) and on the occasion of Queen Victoria's visit to Dublin in 1900. In the very first number of the *Workers' Republic* Connolly had declared that "*we would have the Irish people complete masters of their own destinies, nationally and internationally, fully competent to work out their own salvation*" ; and this principle was recognised at the International Socialist Congress in 1900 when his Party's delegates were allowed to take their seats as representatives of a separate nation. In 1902 and 1903 Connolly contested the Wood Quay Ward in the Dublin municipal elections, but without success. In 1901 and 1902 he went on lecture tours in Scotland and England, and also in the United States, where he spent about four months.

Years later, Connolly claimed that by its open advocacy of an Irish republic and a "*revolutionary reconstruction of society*" his Party had "*completely revolutionised advanced politics in Ireland.*" But the Party was still small and struggling ; finance was a great difficulty ; and Connolly was often hard put to it to pay for food and other necessaries for his growing family. There was little contact between the members of the I.R.S.P. and the pioneers in other fields

of the national revival. Connolly himself used to attend meetings of the Celtic Literary Society, where he formed a friendship with Arthur Griffith which was not broken by differences in their political views; but in the main the industrial and the cultural movements at this period were working in almost complete isolation from each other, to the impoverishment of both.

The I.R.S.P. made slow headway in influencing popular opinion; and one object of Connolly's lecture tour in America was to raise enough money to save their paper from having to close down. But, according to his daughter's account, the money which he had raised for this purpose was spent on other things; and when he tendered his resignation as a protest, it was accepted. Temporarily disheartened, and with his future once more in the melting pot, he decided to return to America, where many of his kinsfolk were already living, and to bring his family out there as soon as he could get work. He sailed in September, 1903, and his family followed him soon afterwards.

Chapter II

AMERICAN INTERLUDE

For the next seven years Connolly's lot was cast in America, where he joined the Socialist Labour Party, and found employment in such varied occupations as insurance agent, linotype operator, machinist, and manager, more than once having to give up a post because he had "*become too well known as a Socialist and helper of the strikers.*" During the latter part of his stay in America his family had their home in New York. After a quarrel with its leader, De Leon, Connolly left the Socialist Labour Party in April, 1908, and, joining the Socialist Party of America, was appointed its national organiser and toured the States, lecturing and organising, from May, 1909, to June, 1910. For a time, too, in New York City, he acted as organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World.

In spite of his growing prominence in the American labour movement, Connolly did not forget that he was an Irishman; and in 1907 he founded the Irish Socialist Federation among

Irish workers in America. Its declaration of principles contains the following significant sentences :

". . . Political and social freedom are not two separate and unrelated ideas, but are the two sides of the one great principle, each being incomplete without the other. . . . The Irish Socialist Federation recognises these two phases of human development, pledges its members to fealty to the principles resultant therefrom, politically rejecting the domination of nation over nation, as of man over man."

Connolly remarked that many Socialists would object to the declaration as being definitely nationalistic instead of inter-nationalistic, because "*so many make the mistake of regarding inter-nationalism as anti-nationalism.*" But he was sure of his ground ; and in the first number of *The Harp* (1908), the I.S.F.'s new monthly paper of which he was editor, he again urged Irish workers not to break the ties that bound them to national organisations owing to a foolishly sentimental interpretation of the doctrine of universal brotherhood.

"*We propose,*" he said, "*to show all the workers of our fighting race that socialism will make them better fighters without being less Irish ; we propose to advise the Irish who are socialists now to organise their forces as Irish and get again in touch with the organised bodies of literary, educational and revolutionary Irish ; we propose to make a campaign among our countrymen and to rely for our method mainly on imparting to them a correct interpretation of the facts of Irish history past and present.*"

In pursuance of the latter aim, he completed his *Labour in Irish History*, and published it in *The Harp* in serial form.

Many of Connolly's leading articles in *The Harp* were reprinted in *Socialism Made Easy* (1909) and *The Axe to the Root*. The former pamphlet contains a passage which helps to explain Connolly's insistence that the workers in every country should recognise their nationality in all its implications, and that such a recognition would best fit them "*to co-operate with the workers of all other races, colours, and nationalities in the emancipation of Labour.*"

"An Irishman's first impressions, and his deepest ones," he wrote, "are those of his own race and country, and are the result of the influences which go to mould a man's

character, influences pre-natal as well as post-natal. Pre-natal or historical influences comprise all the hereditary elements and experiences of his branch of the human race, and in the case of the Irish Celt have burned into his character and intellectual make-up by the sad experience of a seven hundred years' struggle against tyranny. Such influences are constant and abiding, and although they may be temporarily smothered or repressed by the vicissitudes of a life-time they will survive and reassert themselves and form the chief factor in shaping the character of the individual. Post-natal influences are those of our personal, material, tangible environment, and have hitherto been those upon which the Socialist propagandist made his sole reliance in converting the Irish to his faith."

Against that common Socialist error, Connolly never ceased to preach, and his teaching still needs re-emphasis to-day, in Wales even more than in Ireland.

In 1907 Connolly had published *Songs of Freedom*, verses in the tradition of Thomas Davis and the earlier singers who sang the clans to battle—verses concerned with propaganda more than with poetic finish, in which the sentiment was more important than the style. In 1910 his *Labour in Irish History* was published in volume form in Ireland, and his *Labour, Nationality and Religion* was also published in that year. Connolly was already wishing to return to Ireland, whither *The Harp* had been transferred in January, 1910, to be printed in the *Irish Nation* office under Jim Larkin's sub-editorship. When an invitation came for him to lecture in various Irish centres, he gladly accepted it, and told his wife, who wondered how he could want to go back after all the misery they had had there, "*I love Dublin, Lillie. I'd rather be poor there than a millionaire here.*" He landed in July, 1910, and in November wrote for his wife and family to follow him; he had obtained a post at £2 a week, he said, so "*you are not coming back to the misery you left.*" This time he was back in Ireland for good.

The Connolly who returned to Ireland in 1910 was a fully matured and experienced man of forty. During his years in America he had been completing his self-education. He was "*always reading or writing when he was at home. All his little ones could play or fight around him, but he would keep on reading or writing.*" And on his long railway journeys he "*literally devoured libraries.*" He had built up a treasured

little library of his own, and had extended his mastery of languages to include German, French and Italian, as well as Esperanto and some Irish. His daughter remembered him addressing a meeting of Italian workers so fluently in their own language that at first they refused to believe that he was not an Italian. In America, too, he had gained valuable experience in public speaking and in dealing with all kinds of men.

As a young man, half-starved at twenty-six, Connolly had been "*thin, dark and Italian-looking*." At forty he was still dark, with black hair and moustache, but he had broadened out into a sturdy, wide-shouldered figure of medium height, with keen grey eyes which often had a cheery twinkle in them. He neither smoked nor drank. His outward demeanour usually seemed calm and impassive, especially by contrast with his fiery colleague, Jim Larkin; but he, too, could be "volcanic" on occasion, and was more sensitive than he appeared.

"*Connolly was an excellent speaker*," said H. W. Nevinson, who met him first in 1912, "*because his mind was clear, and he had something definite to say. . . . He was never windy, cloudy or doctrinaire. . . . Sentence after sentence came out clear and sharp, always striking immediate points in the actual daily life of the people.*" Nevinson was impressed by his "*breadth and depth of view*," and by his qualities of wit and imagination, though "*he was never tempted by imagination into sentiment, or by wit into the buffoonery that crowds enjoy.*" He was never at a loss in argument, and his retorts could be both humorous and devastating.

Desmond Ryan has suggested that in his early days Connolly tended to be more of a rigid Marxian theorist and propagandist, but that his practical experience in America caused him, while still holding to his fundamental principles, to become less of an arid doctrinaire, and brought his innate qualities of humanity and active leadership more strongly to the fore. The lessons in the strategy of living and of politics which he was henceforth to pass on to others had now been tested by himself in the hard school of experience.

His daughter has recorded some of those lessons which she learnt from him, and among the chief of them was self-reliance. Once in America when the principal of her school refused to put her in a higher class because she was "too small," she wanted her father to intervene, but he refused.

"*The earlier you learn to fight your own battles and trust to yourself, the better,*" he told her. "*If you win them you'll have confidence when the next battle comes along. If you can make your principal put you in a higher class you can say, 'I proved that I was fit for a higher class' ; but, if I write and she promotes you, you'll say, 'Daddy made her.' And the next time you have a battle to fight you'll want your daddy to do it, you won't have faith enough in yourself to do it on your own. . . . There is more joy in winning for yourself than in having someone win for you.*" When she wanted him to explain things for her, too, "*he never just gave answers, but helped her puzzle her way out, and showed his disappointment if she ever accepted a statement without a torrent of 'whys' and 'buts' and 'ifs'.*"

"A politician knows by instinct what the crowd would like to hear, and says it irrespective of whether he believes it or not," Connolly told her ; "a sincere propagandist says what he believes is right, and is prepared to justify what he says." And it was his sincerity no less than his logic which made him such a powerful speaker. For instance, when he spoke of women's rights (a favourite theme of his) it was not just empty rhetoric, but something with which he was concerned in his own everyday life. Choosing a new house, he made a particularly critical examination of the kitchen, remarking to his daughter, "You see, Nono, the family is so big that mama will have to spend most of her time in the kitchen. You and I will be at work most of the day, so the kitchen won't matter to us, but it will matter a lot to mama. So as we are picking a house for her to live in, and as she is not here, and if she were here she wouldn't think of herself, we've got to think of her." The genuineness, thoughtfulness and realism illustrated in this small incident were among the qualities which won for Connolly so much affection and loyalty from those who worked with him.

Self-control was another of Connolly's outstanding characteristics. "*Words won't cure things,*" he said when things went wrong, and, instead of complaining, set himself to discover the best practical line of action to take in the circumstances. Once at Mass in Belfast the priest directed his whole sermon against him and his labour activities, and the congregation started turning round to look at him. His daughter was furious, and wanted to get up and protest, but he sat calmly through it all, with his gaze fixed sternly

on the preacher; and when they were outside he told her, smiling, "*There is one very important lesson you've learned in church this morning. To keep control of yourself in face of attack. If you have self-control your opponent can never force you to an act which you may regret later. Remember that, Nono; you'll find it very useful during life.*" Connolly would have been more than human if his self-control had not sometimes given way to impatience or a mood akin to despair; but, in the main, the man who returned to Ireland in 1910 was a man who had mastered himself and was equipped to take up the fight for the mastery of those evils which had long been darkening the life of his native land.

Chapter III

BACK IN IRELAND

"

Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me," Connolly wrote in *The New Evangel* (1901), "*and the man who is bubbling over with love and enthusiasm for 'Ireland', and can yet pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and the suffering, the shame and degradation wrought upon the people of Ireland—aye, wrought by Irishmen upon Irish men and women, without burning to end it, is, in my opinion, a fraud and a liar in his heart, no matter how he loves that combination of chemical elements he is pleased to call 'Ireland.'* "

His remaining years after his return home were spent in the struggle for the emancipation of the most downtrodden and unprivileged among the Irish people and in the fight for the national freedom which he regarded as an essential prerequisite for such emancipation. During those years "he lived at high pressure almost every moment, organising, lecturing, writing, debating, editing, and sparing neither himself nor others in his desire to line up the forces of Irish labour."

In 1911, the year after his return to Ireland, Connolly went to live in Belfast, and was appointed Secretary and Ulster District Organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. The emergence of this Union in 1908, under the leadership of that fiery personality and powerful orator, Jim Larkin, had been the chief landmark in Irish

labour organisation during the period of Connolly's absence. In Ireland then, as in Wales to-day, there were "workers' representatives, so-called, whose ideal seemed to be soft jobs and quiet lives for themselves and their relations"; but there was a new spirit in the new Union, which sought to organise the unskilled workers, and whose membership was not limited to any one craft or group of crafts, as in the older Unions.

Connolly was, rightly or wrongly, a believer in industrial unionism, and built "great hopes upon the One Big Union to assure social and political peace in Ireland," and so he threw himself all the more wholeheartedly into the work of the new I.T.G.W.U., which seemed to him to be a step in that direction. He hoped eventually to see all Irish wage-workers organised as sub-divisions of one great whole, in a single national body elected by the vote of all the unions, and directing the power of all these unions in any needed direction.

He believed that an organisation of this kind would have such economic power that it could settle questions which the politicians had long failed to settle; for instance, it could settle the question of Irish manufacture by refusing to handle goods whose sale or use in Ireland would deprive Irish men and women of a chance of earning their living in their own country. (Perhaps Wales could have done with a bit of such tactics during the inter-war depression, when half-a-million Welsh workers had to emigrate in search of employment!). Connolly advocated such an all-embracing organisation not only as a practical expression of the solidarity of labour, but also because he hoped it would be powerful enough to achieve reforms by peaceful means without bloodshed, though he did not rule out the possibility of a resort to physical force if other methods failed.

For the next few years, Connolly and Larkin were the outstanding personalities in the Irish working-class movement; and it seemed strange that two such strong and strongly-contrasted personalities could work together without clashing. But—even apart from their common loyalty to the movement—this was made easier by the fact that while Larkin was dominating the scene in Dublin, Connolly had his headquarters in Belfast, and when Connolly in turn moved to Dublin, Larkin was away for most of the time, first in prison, then on a speaking tour in England, and after-

wards, in October, 1914, going out to America, where he remained for some years.

Connolly commended the transport workers for concentrating upon the more immediate tasks of the economic struggle rather than upon the theory of value and the materialist conception of history; and, under the joint leadership of himself and Larkin, "*less theorising and more fighting*" became the watchword. The workers adopted a policy of "guerilla warfare" by means of "direct action," lightning strikes, refusal to handle "tainted goods," and the sympathetic strike (defined by Connolly as "the affirmation of the Christian principle that we are all members of one another").

Naturally, Connolly was accused of being a dangerous agitator who was stirring up discontent among the workers, but he justified his policy in an eloquent passage in the *Irish Worker* (Christmas, 1912)—a passage which, incidentally, shows how much farther his aims went than a mere improvement in the material conditions of the working class.

> "With a people degraded, and so degraded as to be unconscious of their degradation, no upward march of Ireland is possible," he wrote; "with a people restless under injustice, and resolved, if need be, to peril life itself in order to end such degradation, tho' thrones and empires fall as a result—with such a people all things are possible; to such a people all things must bend and flow. . . . A small nation such as Ireland can only become great by reason of the greatness of soul of its individual citizens. It is therefore a matter of sincere congratulation to every lover of the race that the workers of Ireland are to-day profoundly discontented, and, so far from being apathetic in their slavery, rebellious to the point of rashness. . . . Every time the labourer, be it man or woman, secures a triumph in the battle for juster conditions the mind of the labourer receives that impulse towards higher things that comes from the knowledge of power. Here and there to some degraded individuals, the victories of Labour mean only increased opportunities for drink and degeneracy, but on the whole, it remains true that the fruits of the victories of the organised working class are as capable of being stated in terms of spiritual uplifting as in the material terms of cash."

Connolly's "agitation" was thus neither aimless nor irresponsible, and he was always ready to present a reasoned

case, and to adopt conciliatory methods when these showed any prospect of obtaining good results.

His first big fight in Belfast was to improve conditions at the docks. Here the Union was weak, and a system of "speeding up" had been adopted. Bonuses (*one-tenth* of a day's pay for an extra *one-fifth* of a day's work crowded into the ten hours) had been introduced in order to extract the last ounce of energy from the workers, and the pace was kept up by the threat of dismissal, and by slave-driving methods. Hence, though 100 tons had been taken as the daily average for a gang unloading grain, daily totals of 160 and even 200 tons became by no means uncommon. One man in each gang had to carry this weight on his back from hatch to rail, while others worked half-naked in the dust-filled hold. Accidents were frequent, and few men could stand the strain of working at this pace for more than three days in succession. Such were the conditions which Connolly found on his arrival. He at once began to organise the dockers ; and presently, when it was found that the Ulster S.S. Co. was paying Belfast seamen lower wages than it paid in the Bristol Channel, he and the Secretary of the Seamen's Union called them out on strike in support of the seamen's claims and of their own. The result was a 3s. increase in the weekly wage, the abolition of "speeding up", and the fixing of the daily average for gangs unloading grain at 100 tons ; and subsequent strikes brought about a further improvement in conditions.

In the same year (1911) Connolly's resourcefulness and humorous commonsense were called into play by another Belfast dispute—the mill girls' strike. Conditions in the Belfast linen mills had been bad for years. A woman who had worked there for 45 years described them as follows : "I was just turned eight when I began. When you were eight you were old enough to work. Worked in steam, making your rags all wet, and sometimes up to your ankles in water. The older you got the more work you got. If you got married you kept on working. Your man didn't get enough for a family. You worked till your baby came, and went back as soon as you could ; and then, God forgive you ! you counted the years till your child could be a half-timer and started the same hell of a life over again."

As part of a policy of "speeding up," the employers had introduced new rules, imposing fines for talking or laughing,

while bringing newspapers or sweets into the mill meant instant dismissal. Over 1,000 women and girls quitted work in protest, and appealed to Connolly to organise them in the absence of other trade union support. The strike was endorsed at an enthusiastic mass meeting of 3,000 women ; but funds soon ran low, and it was apparent that it could not be carried on much longer. Connolly then called the strikers together and told them that the oppressive conditions in the mills could be broken down by the simple expedient of returning to work and then systematically defying every unreasonable rule. "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 any one 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 !" These unorthodox tactics transformed an apparent defeat into a victory, and brought about a change in the whole atmosphere of the mills.

Connolly's adaptability and capacity to distinguish the substance from the shadow were further illustrated by his handling of an industrial dispute in the Wexford foundries early in 1912. The strike, which arose on the question of recognition of the I.T.G.W.U., had been a long and stormy one, and Connolly was eventually called in to settle it. The employers obdurately refused to recognise the Transport Union, but Connolly persuaded them to recognise an Irish Foundry Workers' Union and to reinstate all the strikers within a month ; "the delighted employers raised no objection to the new union's affiliation with Larkin's detested organisation" !

In 1912, too, Connolly attended the Irish Trade Union Congress for the first time, and made an appeal for independent Labour representation on public boards, which was strongly supported by Larkin and others. In consequence, the Congress decided to form "*an Irish Labour Party, independent of all other parties in the country, in order that the organised workers might be able to enter the proposed Irish Parliament as an organised Labour Party on the political field.*" In the following year, Connolly contested Dock Ward in the Belfast municipal elections, polling 900 votes. Among his other activities were the revival of the agitation for the feeding of school children, which was largely responsible for having

the Act extended to Ireland, and a speech, in face of strong opposition, at a women's suffrage demonstration in the Phoenix Park in Dublin.

It was characteristic of Connolly that in the midst of all these varied calls upon his energies he still found time for research. He realised a truth which all politicians would do well to realise—that hard facts would provide a much stronger groundwork for his case than any amount of theories; and in health reports and housing surveys he found hard and shocking facts enough. He found that in Dublin, under the rule of the "empire on which the sun never sets," 20,000 families were living in one room apiece, and the 1911 death-rate of 27.6 per 1,000 was higher than in any other European city—higher even than Moscow's 26.3 per 1,000—, and that this death-rate fell most heavily on the poorer classes. Untiringly he challenged public opinion with brutal facts like these; he printed tables, too, of sweating wages, named the employers who paid them, and defied them to take action against him for libel. He hoped some day to have leisure enough to extend his researches in the field of Irish history, but this he never had.

The year 1913 was marked by the biggest industrial dispute which Ireland had so far witnessed. The Dublin employers were becoming alarmed at the growing power of the I.T.G.W.U., especially after a strike of quay porters under Larkin's leadership in January, 1913, in which the men won a large measure of their claims. One of the leading employers, William Martin Murphy, a dominant figure in the Dublin United Tramways Co. and in other business concerns, determined to eliminate the influence of the Union among his workers once for all. Several tramwaymen were dismissed for Union activities; a few of their comrades struck work in sympathy on the eve of the famous Dublin Horse Show in August, and the trouble spread swiftly. There were clashes with the police, and Larkin, speaking at a great meeting in Beresford Place, declared that the workers did not mean to take brutality patiently, but that, as the Carsonites in Ulster were being allowed by the authorities to arm, they too would arm themselves in their own defence. He and four of his associates were arrested, but released on bail; and a mass meeting announced for the following Sunday in O'Connell Street was proclaimed by the Government. Meantime, public feeling had been further roused by a series of

baton attacks by the police on the strikers and their associates ; and on the day of the proclaimed meeting a large crowd had assembled in O'Connell Street, when Larkin appeared in disguise at a hotel window and began to address the people. He was arrested at once ; and a police baton charge of exceptional violence followed, when men, women and children were struck down indiscriminately.

A few days later the employers delivered their great counter-stroke against the Union. Four hundred and four of them issued a united declaration that henceforth they would not employ any worker who did not sign an undertaking that he or she would neither belong to nor help the I.G.T.W.U. The workers stoutly refused to sign any such declaration, and it was later stigmatised by a Government Commission as imposing "*conditions which are contrary to individual liberty, and which no workman or body of workmen could reasonably be expected to accept.*" Before long 37 unions, and many thousands of union members, were involved.

Connolly was soon in the thick of the fray. The day before the O'Connell Street meeting he was charged with inciting to riot at a protest meeting in Dublin the previous night. In reply to the charge he made "*the best Republican speech since Robert Emmet left the dock.*" He boldly told the court that

> "if they deprived the people of peaceable means of settling their difficulties they would drive them to revolutionary methods. . . . When it came to a choice between what was legal and what was right, they would choose what was right. He said the Crown had no right in Ireland, and never would have any right in Ireland, and that he refused to recognise the Crown ; and that he refused to recognise the King's proclamation when it was used against the Irish people."

The court gave him three months. Feeling that he was needed outside, however, he went on hunger strike, was released after a few days, and so, when Larkin in turn was sent to jail, was able to take over the direction of affairs in Dublin as organiser, orator, and editor of the *Irish Worker*.

Some members of the employers' organisation wished to settle the dispute by conciliation and conference with the workers, but they were over-ruled by the majority, who felt sure of being able to starve the men out, and so refused to compromise. As the weeks went on, there was great privation

and suffering among the workers and their families, but, in spite of this and of numerous arrests for picketing, they refused to give in. In September delegates from Ireland gave a first-hand account of the dispute to the British Trade Union Congress, which promised support, and undertook to send foodships to Dublin while the struggle lasted. These, and the communal kitchen organised by Countess Markievicz at Liberty Hall (the I.T.G.W.U. headquarters), helped the Dublin workers to prolong the struggle.

Meantime, the conscience of a number of intellectuals and professional men had been disturbed by what one of them, the poet and co-operative philosopher "Æ", described in a memorable indictment as the employers' "*devilish policy of starvation.*" Under the leadership of Professor Tom Kettle, they formed an Industrial Peace Committee, which tried to bring about a settlement. When all efforts by themselves and other mediators had failed, owing to the obdurate attitude of the employers, the feelings of the Committee began to incline more and more strongly to the workers' side.

At one of their meetings in the Mansion House towards the end of December, Capt. J. R. White, D.S.O. (who had resigned his commission in the British Army four or five years earlier because of his pacifist views) "*outlined his ideas for the formation of a citizen army, as a means by which to bring discipline into the distracted ranks of labour. He gave an assurance that the plan would exclude any idea of military activities.*" The Chairman had to rule Capt. White's motion out of order, as the Lord Mayor had granted the use of the Mansion House only on condition that the Committee remained neutral; but the meeting thereupon adjourned to the Rev. R. M. Gwynn's rooms in Trinity College, where the plan was further discussed, and Capt. White and others handed over the first contributions to the funds of the proposed new organisation. Such was the origin of the Citizen Army, formed from members of the I.T.G.W.U., of which Connolly subsequently became Commandant, and which Capt. White organised and drilled on the Union's sports ground at Croydon Park. Observers agreed that the existence of this disciplined body helped to bring about a considerable improvement in the behaviour of the police, and a decrease in baton charges.

As the months dragged on, it became apparent that the employers would not yield and that the workers could not win. Connolly spoke powerfully on their behalf at a great Albert Hall meeting in London in November, under the presidency of George Lansbury; and he and Larkin (who had been sentenced to seven months' imprisonment in October, but released almost immediately in consequence of two Government bye-election defeats) appealed to the British workers at a special meeting of the T.U.C. to give them effective support by a "blockade" of Dublin; but this appeal proved fruitless. After some eight months of conflict, the struggle ended indecisively. Connolly summed up the results of it as follows in the *Irish Worker* (28.11.14):

> "The battle was a drawn battle. The employers, despite their Napoleonic plan of campaign, and their more than Napoleonic ruthlessness and unscrupulous use of foul means, were unable to carry on their business without men and women who remained loyal to their unions. The workers were unable to force the employers to a formal recognition of the Union, and to give preference to organised Labour."

Indecisive as it was in its immediate outcome, the "Labour war" of 1913 had far-reaching results. It revealed the heroic quality in ordinary working men and women ("*the real heroes and conquerors are to be found in the slums and in the prisons*," Connolly wrote of them at Christmas, 1913), and it brought about an awakening of the social conscience in many quarters in Ireland where ignorance or indifference had formerly prevailed. In the judgment of "Æ", moreover, there would have been no Easter Week Rising in 1916 had it not been for the unjust and unmerciful attitude of the employers and the authorities in 1913, leaving Labour with a grievance which "*supplied the passional element in the revolt.*"

Their experience of the attitude of organised British Labour, which was ready to assist with food and mediation offers, but refused all appeals for more effective support by means of a general strike or a "blockade" of Dublin, helped to teach the Irish workers that, whatever freedom they wanted, they had better win it for themselves, instead of relying overmuch on the "international brotherhood" of their comrades in imperial England. The creation of the Irish Citizen Army during the "Labour war" forged a weapon which Connolly

was to use later in another and a grimmer war. At first its members had drilled with no other arms than broom handles ; but in July, 1914, the successful gun-running exploit at Howth gave them the equipment for more militant action.

Chapter IV

THE LAST PHASE

James Connolly was under no illusions concerning the magnitude of the disaster to humanity involved in the outbreak of the first World War. "Civilisation is being destroyed before our eyes," he wrote in *Forward* (15.8.14). He was prepared to justify as righteous "*the war of a subject nation for independence, for its right to live its life in its own way*," or "*the war of a subject class to free itself from the debasing conditions of economic and political slavery*" ; but he declared that "*the war of nation against nation in the interest of royal freebooters and cosmopolitan brigands is a thing accursed*" ; and he was bitterly disappointed that international labour had failed so utterly to avert the War.

Connolly saw the War in terms of the slaughter and suffering it brought upon the common people in every land, and had little sympathy with the half-mystical conception of Patrick Pearse (later his co-signatory to the Proclamation of the Irish Republic), who wrote that "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing," and that the War, however base the policy of the Governments, had an element of nobility—"the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country." In writing these words Pearse, who had no first-hand experience of modern warfare, was most probably thinking of war in terms of voluntary sacrifice for a noble cause (like the sacrifice which he was soon to make himself) or of the epic conflicts in ancient Irish legend, when two hosts of heroes met in battle, both animated by the same high code of chivalry. Doubtless there has never been a war in history which has not produced some such heroic episodes ; but in modern war the heroism is increasingly overborne by the mechanised mass slaughter of conscript armies and helpless civilians, and by the propaganda of lies and hate which is even more dehumanizing than the physical

horrors of the battlefield. And so a generation shaken and disillusioned by the experience of two World Wars within a single lifetime is likely to find Connolly's estimate of the character and consequences of war more in tune with its mood than that of Pearse.

That estimate was given in a powerful article in the *Irish Republic* (20.11.15), in which Connolly described the price paid by Ireland for her part in the British Empire and its wars.

> "All those mountains of Irish dead, all those corpses mangled beyond recognition, all those arms, legs, eyes, ears, fingers, toes, hands, all those shivering, putrefying bodies, once warm, living and tender parts of Irish men and youths—all those horrors buried in Flanders or the Gallipoli Peninsula are all items Ireland pays for being part of the British Empire . . . all these widows . . . fatherless orphans, all these shattered, maimed and diseased wrecks of humanity, who for years will crowd our poor-houses and asylums, or crawl along our roads, affronting our health by their wounds and our comfort by their appeals to pity, all, all are parts of the price Ireland pays for being an integral part of the British Empire. And for what do we pay this price? Answer, ye practical ones! Answer, ye men of prudence, of moderation, of business capacity!
>
> "Ireland is rotten with slums, a legacy of Empire. The debt of this war will prevent us getting money to replace them. Every big gun fired in the Dardanelles fired away at every shot the cost of building a home for a working-class family. Ireland has the most inefficient educational system and the poorest schools in Europe. The Empire compels us to pay pounds for blowing out the brains of others, for every farthing it allows us to train our own.
>
> "An Empire, on which the sun never sets, cannot guarantee its men and women as much comfort as is enjoyed by the everyday citizen of the smallest, the least military State in Europe. Nations that know not the powers and possessions of Empire have happier, better educated, better equipped men and women than Ireland has ever known, or can ever know as an integral part of the British Empire."

The man who wrote that terrible first paragraph was no war-monger. Nor was Connolly a dilettante or a drawing-room theorist who would rush to arms without counting

the cost of his action in human lives. He lived too close to the people not to know what armed revolt would mean in terms of suffering for the rank and file. Why, then, did he so vehemently urge on the preparations for a national insurrection, and lead his men out in armed rebellion against the immensely superior English Government forces on Easter Monday, 1916?

Many have found that question puzzling; and some have thought that in leading a nationalist rising Connolly was betraying his international socialist principles. But in reality the rising was the logical "next step" for a man of Connolly's outlook. Capt. J. R. White has written of the Citizen Army (*Irish Times*, 21.9.43): "*Its outlook, and that of its leaders, was first internationally socialist, and only secondarily became nationally socialist, or socialistically national, when the whole anti-war organisation of international socialism collapsed at the first blast of the trumpet.*" If these words mean in reference to Connolly that his nationalism was an integral part of his internationalism, that he regarded Ireland's struggle for freedom as "*but a part of the world-wide upward march of the human race*" and always desired that he and his country should play a worthy part in that international upward march, then they are undoubtedly true. But if they are interpreted to mean that before 1914 Connolly was the kind of socialist who (in his own words) "made the mistake of regarding internationalism as anti-nationalism," but that on the outbreak of war he suddenly changed his mind and became a nationalist, then that interpretation is contradicted by Connolly's whole career and his own writings.

Connolly was a nationalist before he was a socialist; and when he became a socialist he did not renounce his nationalism; to him the two were complementary, not contradictory. Again and again as a socialist organiser, both in Ireland and in America, he struck the nationalist note. And his nationalism was a matter not merely of intellectual theory, but of the heart and of the will, which must perforce find expression in action. If he had remained in America he would probably have risen to a prominent position in the international Labour movement, and a position in which there would have been no risk of his life and his activities being cut short before a firing squad. But he loved his own country and his own people, and under the compulsion of that love he chose the harder path. "I love Dublin, Lillie.

I'd rather be poor there than a millionaire here"—that was the real Connolly.

> "The Irish working class," he wrote in the *Irish Worker* (31.10.14), "sees no abandonment of the principles of the Labour movement in this fight against this war and all that it implies; sees no weakening of international solidarity in their fierce resolve to do no fighting except it be in their own country, to secure the right to hold that country for its own sons and daughters. Rather do they joy in giving this proof that the principles of the Labour movement represent the highest form of patriotism, and that true patriotism will embody the broadest principles of Labour and Socialism."

Not only did Connolly "take his stand upon the fundamental truth that Ireland is a subject nation, and that, therefore, Ireland has no national enemy in Europe save one, and that nation the one that holds her in subjection"; he also believed that in striking a blow for her freedom Ireland might set in motion forces that would bring about thedownfall of the whole capitalist-imperialist system which is the chief cause of modern wars. Because of Ireland's strategic position at the heart of the British Empire, action by her might be decisive. Within a week of the outbreak of war, Connolly had set forth a practical immediate programme for the readers of the *Irish Worker*. If the workers in Europe rose against the war, the Irish workers should help them. In any case, Ireland should withhold support from the war, and a National Committee should be formed at once to prevent foodstuffs from leaving Ireland until adequate provision had been made for the feeding of the Irish working-people. The struggle to hold the food might lead to more than a transport strike; it might mean armed revolt and street fighting; but they must not shrink from the consequences. For, "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 are shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war-lord." Connolly's proposals had no immediate practical result, but they show the direction in which his mind was working.

"*Revolution is my business*," Connolly said once; and his ultimate aim was always a fundamental change in the whole structure of capitalist imperialist society. He had long hoped

that this change might be brought about by peaceful means, but now he wrote, "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" (*Workers' Republic*, January, 1916). At the end of the War, he said, England would have "more than two soldiers for every adult male in Ireland," and then the opportunity for a successful armed rebellion would be gone.

For all his hatred of bloodshed, Connolly was at one with Pearse in his belief that "*there are things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them.*" In his tribute to the dead Fenian leader, O'Donovan Rossa, Connolly wrote in 1915:

> "*Slavery is a thing of the soul before it embodies itself in the material things of this world. I assert that before a nation can be reduced to slavery its soul must have been cowed, intimidated or corrupted by the oppressor. Only when so cowed, intimidated or corrupted does the soul of a nation cease to urge forward its body to resist the imposition of the shackles of slavery; only when the soul so surrenders does any part of the body consent to make truce with the foe of its National existence. . . . For generations this conflict between the sanctity of the soul and the interests of the body has been waged in Ireland. The soul of Ireland preached revolution, declared that no blood-letting could be as disastrous as a cowardly acceptance of the rule of the conqueror; nay, that the rule of the conqueror would necessarily entail more blood-letting than revolt against that rule.*"

Since August, 1914, the assault upon the soul of the Irish people had been intensified. "For twelve months, twelve dreary agonising months, we have seen war in Ireland, war upon the soul of Ireland, war upon the traditions, the religious spirit, the centuried hopes of martyred men and women who had made Ireland famed and respected wherever there are gathered men and women capable of long fortitude in disaster and sublimity of soul in the midst of defeat. . . . Every high and noble instinct, implanted in her by centuries of suffering, was appealed to that her children might deny the past of their country, and surrender their hope of moulding her future. Ireland was asked, nay, was ordered, to deny

all that her martyrs had affirmed, to affirm all that her martyrs had denied. . . . The fighting in Belgium and in Poland was for the material possession of towns and cities, the fight in Ireland has been one for the soul of the race—that Irish race which with the centuries of defeat behind it, still battled for the sanctity of its dwelling-place." And not only was the integrity of Ireland's soul in danger, the bodies of her sons were in daily jeopardy while no one took the lead to prevent thousands of young Irishmen, enticed by high-sounding recruiting slogans or driven by economic necessity, from being marched away to die on foreign battlefields.

In Connolly's view, after the outbreak of the first World War, the choice for the Irish people was not between war and peace, but between fighting for a worthy cause and fighting for a worthless one. He drew a parallel between the existing situation and that on the eve of the Great Famine of the 1840's. The multitudes who died so tamely then were given no chance of dying for something worth while. Similarly, if the Irish people were given no such chance and challenge now, hundreds of thousands of them would die instead as soldiers in England's armies or perhaps in a famine which might result if England persisted in drawing without restriction on Ireland's food supplies to meet her war needs and to feed her armies and navies.

It was with thoughts like these in his mind that Connolly exclaimed to his daughter when the War broke out:

> "This generation has let one opportunity pass by. There was no attempt" [at insurrection] "in Ireland during the Boer war. Fate has been kind in giving us this second opportunity. If we don't take advantage of it we will be eternally disgraced. It's not likely there'll be another."

And again, in 1916, when it seemed that the plans for the Rising had fallen through, he cried in agony, with tears in his eyes:

> "If we don't fight now, all we have left to hope and pray for is that an earthquake will come and swallow Ireland up—and our shame."

They are words that might have been uttered by Patrick Pearse himself, so close are they to his spirit. And indeed, as the friendship between Pearse and Connolly grew and deepened during the two years before the Rising, the funda-

mental affinities of thought and feeling that united them became ever more clearly manifest, so that we find statements by Pearse on social issues that might almost have been written by Connolly, and declarations of nationalist principles by Connolly that might almost have been written by Pearse.

The mention of Pearse recalls the fact that, though Connolly at first was one of a very small minority in grasping the significance of the War as an opportunity for throwing off the yoke of English rule, he and his immediate followers were not the only ones who viewed it in that light. The secret oath-bound revolutionary organisation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood had the same end in view. According to Bulmer Hobson (one of its members) the I.R.B. had not more than 2,000 members in Ireland and the principal English cities in 1911 ; but they were all picked men, and some held prominent positions in other national organisations, such as the Gaelic League. In August, 1914, the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. in full session decided to take advantage of the War to organise and carry out an armed insurrection against England.

During the years immediately preceding the War, while the Bill conferring on Ireland a limited measure of Home Rule was making its slow progress through the English Parliament, Sir Edward Carson and his followers were organising and arming the Ulster Volunteers with the avowed object of resisting the Bill by force if it became law—and the English Government let them arm unhindered. On November 25th, 1913, the Irish nationalists, at a public meeting in Dublin, launched a counter-organisation, the National Volunteers, for the purpose of assuring and maintaining the common rights and liberties of all the people of Ireland, and uniting Irishmen of all religions, parties and classes for this end.

From the first the new organisation was permeated by the influence of the I.R.B., but it was thought well to have a "neutral figurehead," and so the position of nominal leadership was given to the Irish scholar and historian, Eoin Mac Neill, though the most active leaders were actually men like Pearse and other members of the I.R.B. (Pearse was himself no lover of secret societies, and considered that they should have no place in the life of a normal peaceful country ; but in the existing circumstances in Ireland he believed that there was no practical alternative to their use as a means of liberation). At first the Parliamentary Party, under John

Redmond, had held aloof; but, seeing the growing success of the Volunteers, Redmond wished to bring them under his own control, and, as a step in this direction, made approaches which resulted in the admission of 25 of his Party's nominees to the Executive Committee of the Volunteers in the early summer of 1914.

On the outbreak of the War, widespread disappointment was caused in Ireland by the suspension of the Home Rule Act "for the duration"; but instead of making it a condition of his Party's support for the War that the Act should be put into force immediately, Redmond unconditionally pledged Ireland's full co-operation in England's war effort, and put the National Volunteers at the disposal of the English Government. A split in the Volunteer organisation resulted; and in the last week of September its I.R.B. members and others who were unwilling to follow Redmond's policy seceded and formed a new organisation, the Irish Volunteers. Its membership was only 12,000, whereas that of the National Volunteers had been 120,000. At a national Convention on November 25th, 1914, its objects were declared to be to assure the defence of Ireland, to prevent the partition of the country, to oppose conscription, and to establish an Irish Government in the place of the English Government in Ireland.

Already in August, 1914, the I.R.B. had formed a secret "Military Committee" within the Volunteer organisation to prepare for the use of the Volunteers in an armed revolt. At the end of 1915 this Military Committee consisted of six members: Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Thomas Clarke, Eamonn Ceannt, Joseph Plunkett and Seán MacDiarmada. Several of them held key positions in the Irish Volunteers, Pearse, for instance, being Organiser-General and Thomas MacDonagh his assistant; and, as it was they who took the most active part in the work of the organisation, the rank and file looked upon them as the real leaders rather than Eoin MacNeill, who was the Chief of Staff. Unlike the I.R.B. group, who were determined to launch a rebellion before the War was over, MacNeill and the other "moderates" on the Executive held that the Volunteers should not strike the first blow, but should resort to guerilla warfare if attacked by the Government forces, and that the chief aim should be to conserve the strength of the organisation so as to be able to use it as a bargaining

counter to win concessions for Ireland when peace returned. Bulmer Hobson, the Secretary-General of the organisation, was (though an I.R.B. member himself) a strong partisan of the "moderate" view. On the other hand, the I.R.B. view was emphatically shared by James Connolly; and from August, 1914, onwards his association with the I.R.B. group within the Irish Volunteers, and especially with Pearse, became continually closer. From the first there had been a certain amount of friction and mistrust between the Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army; but Connolly would not let this stand in the way of the co-operation between them which he saw to be essential to the success of an Irish national rising.

Redmond's assent to the shelving of the Home Rule Act, and his pledge of Irish support in the War, seemed to Connolly to be a betrayal of the centuries-long national effort. At a meeting in Dublin he declared that it had caused him, "*though naturally unemotional and cold-blooded, to weep tears of inward anguish.*" Indignantly he declared, "*We shall show the world that, though Redmond may sell Ireland, he cannot deliver the goods!*"; and he set to work to prove his declaration true. His own attitude was made abundantly clear, not only in the streamer hanging outside Liberty Hall with the words, "WE SERVE NEITHER KING NOR KAISER, BUT IRELAND," but also in the columns of the *Irish Worker*, and, when it was suppressed in December, 1915, in the *Workers' Republic* which took its place.

When Mr. Asquith came over to deliver a recruiting address in the Dublin Mansion House on September 25th, 1914, Connolly and his I.R.B. associates planned to seize the building beforehand, and hold it by force, but the plan was called off at the eleventh hour. In 1915 the proposal to apply conscription to Ireland aroused strong opposition throughout the country, and Connolly took a leading part in the campaign against it. The threat of conscription made him all the more determined that Irishmen should have the opportunity of striking a blow for their own country's freedom rather than go as conscripts to fight in their conqueror's wars.

Connolly and his colleagues were not without hopes that a well-organised revolution might succeed, or at least that the rebels might be able to hold out long enough to loosen England's hold on Ireland irretrievably. But if not?—

Connolly's resolve, like Pearse's, held firm even in the face of that terrible "if not." He had long ago faced the possibility that his championship of Ireland's cause might bring about his death. When on hunger strike in 1913, he had written to his wife, "Many more than I (perhaps thousands) will have to go to prison, and perhaps, the scaffold, before our freedom will be won. Nothing worth while can be won without suffering." And now in 1915, on the occasion of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral, he wrote :

> "The Irish Citizen Army in its constitution pledges its members to fight for a Republican Freedom for Ireland. Its members are, therefore, of the number who believe that at the call of duty they may have to lay down their lives for Ireland, and have so trained themselves that at the worst the laying down of their lives shall constitute the starting point of another glorious tradition—a tradition that will keep alive the soul of the nation."

Once decided on rebellion, Connolly chafed against delay. "The spirit of calculation, which is the very essence of a good merchant, is the destruction of a good revolutionist. . . . There is always for the revolutionist the knowledge that a sudden move of the enemy may set all your schemes at naught and force action along lines never dreamed of by your wisest heads. In such a contingency, the swiftest thought must be followed by the swiftest action—the spirit of adventure then becomes the greatest revolutionary asset." Counselled repeatedly to wait, he retorted that the British Government would not wait till the rebels had their plans completed; it was not by waiting that it had held Ireland down for 700 years, but by striking at the opportune moment. In the *Workers' Republic* he published descriptions of revolutions in other countries, and of street fighting and guerilla warfare, for "those who desire to acquire a knowledge of how brave men and women have in other times and in other places overcome difficulties and achieved something for a cause held to be sacred."

As the months went by, Connolly became increasingly impatient. So open was his advocacy of rebellion that the I.R.B. grew alarmed lest it might put the English military authorities on their guard and lead to a premature disclosure of the rebels' plans and the arrest of their leaders before anything effective could be done. In November, 1915,

the I.R.B. Military Committee actually kidnapped Connolly, who had been threatening openly in his paper that the Citizen Army would march out alone whatever the rest did, and detained him for a week. During this time Pearse and MacDonagh interviewed him personally, and Pearse gave his word that the I.R.B. would not attempt a rebellion without the co-operation of the Citizen Army. On receiving this assurance Connolly, though unwillingly, consented to wait, and was released. At Christmas, 1915, the I.R.B. Military Committee secretly fixed the date of the Rising for Easter Sunday, 1916, while Pearse, as Organiser-General of the Volunteers, publicly announced that the Volunteers would hold "three days' manoeuvres" on that date. Connolly was still insisting that "the time for Ireland's Battle is NOW —the place for Ireland's Battle is HERE" (*Workers' Republic*, January, 1916); and early in February MacNeill (who knew nothing of the detailed plans for an Easter Week Rising) had an interview with him in Pearse's presence, and tried to persuade him to adopt a more restrained policy, but without result.

During the weeks immediately before the Rising Connolly spent nearly all his time, day and night, at Liberty Hall, which was virtually converted into an armed fortress and ammunition dump, with Citizen Army men constantly on guard for fear of a raid by the English military. A month before the Rising, the Workers' Dramatic Company presented at Liberty Hall a three-act Fenian play, *Under Which Flag?* by James Connolly; it reiterated the message which Connolly had so often preached, for the contrasted flags of the title are those of Ireland and the Empire, and at the end of the play the hero chooses the Irish flag.

It was Connolly's custom to lecture on military tactics to members of the Citizen Army on certain evenings, and after one of the last of these lectures he told the men, "We will shortly be fighting for our freedom. If there is any man here who for any reason, mystic or otherwise, does not wish to go the whole road with us, now is the time for him to step out and hand in his gun. It will be more honourable for him to step out now, and he will be more worthy of respect if he does so now than if he stayed in and allowed us to rely on him, only to fail us at the moment when most needed. Step out now those of you who wish to do so, and there will be no hard feelings and no hard words." Not a

man stepped out; and Connolly exclaimed, in a voice aglow with pride and affection, "Boys, I never doubted you. Boys, I'm proud of you."

Meantime, Eoin MacNeill was becoming more and more uneasy at the increasing authority assumed by the I.R.B. members on the Volunteer Executive, and more and more suspicious that the Volunteer manoeuvres ordered for Easter Sunday were intended merely as a cover for an armed rising. At last, late at night on the Thursday before Easter, he and two other members of the Executive who shared his views called upon Pearse, who informed them, in reply to a point-blank question, that the Rising was definitely decided upon, and received the answer that, short of warning the English Government, MacNeill would do everything possible to prevent it. The scholarly MacNeill was now faced with a choice which would have been a terrible one for even the most seasoned campaigner. He believed that the Rising could not succeed, and that an unsuccessful rebellion would be disastrous. Should he then, as Chief of Staff, allow the proposed "manoeuvres" to take place, and send out thousands of young Irishmen to what he believed would be a wasted death? Should he flout the majority decision of his Executive, and countermand the Rising? Or should he wash his hands of the whole business, and resign? In the event he hesitated, consulted this man and that, declared his intention of resigning, changed his mind, and finally issued an order countermanding the manoeuvres and revoking all previous orders for Easter Sunday given to the Volunteers. To make doubly sure that it would reach all Volunteer units throughout the country, he had this order published in the *Sunday Independent*.

From the point of view of the leaders of the Rising, MacNeill's last-minute counter-order was a calamity, for it produced confusion in the Volunteer ranks, and destroyed all possibility of success by destroying the possibility of a simultaneous Rising in all parts of Ireland. Naturally, there were bitter feelings; but the justest and most generous verdict on the whole episode was that of Pearse, who said, "Both Eoin MacNeill and we have acted in the best interests of Ireland." And, in spite of all the confusion, cross-purposes and cross-currents of policy, personal animosities, failures and mistakes that preceded, accompanied and followed it, the Rising did in the end justify Connolly's hope that it would "*constitute the starting-point of another glorious tradition*"

and Pearse's belief that "*if we do manfully the thing that seems right to us we must in the long run rise to some achievement.*" For, though it seemed such a hopeless failure at the time, within a few years the Rising had borne its harvest in a new awakening of the national spirit and the attainment of a measure of freedom such as Ireland had not known for centuries.

At the end of the week before Easter news reached Dublin that Sir Roger Casement, who had been expected to bring aid from Germany, had been captured on landing in Kerry, and that the shipload of guns, which was all the help the Germans would send, had also been intercepted by the English. This was another blow to the plans for the Rising; nevertheless, meeting at Liberty Hall on Easter Sunday, April 23rd, the leaders, including Connolly, decided that, as it was now impossible for mobilisation to take place on that day, it should be carried out on Easter Monday instead, and orders were immediately sent out to that effect.

At 9 o'clock on Easter Monday morning, Connolly and the six leaders of the I.R.B. Military Committee (Clarke, Pearse, MacDonagh, Plunkett, MacDiarmada, and Ceannt) approved and signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, commencing with the words:

> "Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to the flag and strikes for her freedom . . ."

Pearse was appointed General of the Republican Forces and President of the Provisional Government, Connolly Vice-President, and Commandant-General of the Dublin Division. About 11 a.m. they and their comrades left Liberty Hall for the General Post Office in O'Connell Street, which was to be seized and held as the seat of the Provisional Government.

Connolly knew well what was in store for him. "*We are marching out to be slaughtered,*" he told his friend William O'Brien. "*Personally I have no fears or regrets,*" he added; and in the Post Office he clasped Pearse's hand and cried exultantly, "*Thanks be to God, Pearse, that we have lived to see this day!*"

Outside Dublin the Volunteers, confused by orders and counter-orders, remained inactive, except for a few sporadic risings. In Dublin itself less than a thousand of the Irish

Volunteers mustered for the insurrection. The roll of the Citizen Army in April, 1916, numbered 250; of these 118 followed Connolly into the Rising. This small force of Volunteers and Citizen Army men seized the General Post Office and other principal buildings in Dublin, and held out in arms there for a week, during which English reinforcements poured into the city. Liberty Hall was shelled to pieces by a gunboat on the River Liffey, and a great part of O'Connell Street was reduced to ashes by a ruthless artillery bombardment. On the Friday Pearse and his comrades had to evacuate the burning Post Office, and on the Saturday evening Pearse signed a general order to surrender in order to save further slaughter of defenceless civilians and of his followers, though some of the Republican garrisons (including the one commanded by Eamonn de Valera) did not actually surrender until a few days later.

Desmond Ryan, who fought beside him, has described Connolly's valiant bearing, "*vigilant and taciturn*," during the siege of the Post Office, where he was in command. Slightly wounded in the arm, he received a much more serious wound when, during a sortie into a flaming street, a sniper's bullet struck him on the ankle. Gangrene speedily set in; and, when his comrades marched out to surrender, he was too weak to walk and had to be carried on a stretcher. He was taken as a prisoner to Dublin Castle. The surgeon who tended his wounds there declared that "he was the bravest man I have known."

Then began the terrible series of executions which filled Ireland with horror and slow-burning rage. Twelve of the other leaders of the Rising had been shot; and still Connolly's wife and children, some of whom had been allowed to see him for a few minutes, clung to the hope that the authorities would surely never shoot a wounded man, and that by the time Connolly's wound was healed, public feeling would be so strong that they would not dare to shoot him. Last-minute efforts were made to save him; for instance, Capt. White, his colleague in the early days of the Irish Citizen Army, sought to arouse a public protest in Wales, and had an article actually set up in the I.L.P. paper, the *Merthyr Pioneer*, explaining Connolly's international socialist aims, when the chief authority of the I.L.P. in London wired the paper forbidding publication, and it accordingly appeared with the set-up article blacked out. And so, in Capt White's

words, "Connolly was shot by a British firing squad and socialism was murdered in Ireland with the connivance and negative assistance of British Left-Wing socialists."

At midnight on May 11th, the military authorities sent an ambulance to fetch Mrs. Connolly, with her daughter Nora, to see her husband. It was to say goodbye. "*I fell asleep to-night for the first time,*" he told them, "*I was awakened at eleven and told I was to be shot at dawn.*" He was calm and tried to cheer them. "*There is nothing to cry about,*" he said. Before they left he managed to slip into his daughter's hand a copy of his last statement, made to his Court Martial. It ran as follows :

"To the Field General Court Martial, held at Dublin Castle, on May 9th, 1916.

(Evidence mainly went to establish the fact that the accused, James Connolly, was in command at the General Post Office, and was also Commandant-General of the Dublin Division. Two of the witnesses, however, strove to bring in alleged instances of wantonly risking the lives of prisoners. The Court held that these charges were *irrelevant* and could not be placed against the prisoner).

"I do not wish to make any defence except against charges of wanton cruelty to prisoners. These trifling allegations that have been made, if they record facts that really happened, deal only with the almost unavoidable incidents of a hurried uprising against long established authority, and nowhere show evidence of set purpose to wantonly injure unarmed persons.

"We went out to break the connection between this country and the British Empire, and to establish an Irish Republic. We believed that the call we then issued to the people of Ireland was a nobler call, in a holier cause, than any call issued to them during this war, having any connection with this war. We succeeded in proving that Irishmen are ready to die endeavouring to win for Ireland those national rights which the British Government has been asking them to die to win for Belgium. As long as that remains the case, the cause of Irish freedom is safe.

"Believing that the British Government has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland, the presence, in any one genera-

tion of Irishmen, of even a respectable minority, ready to die to affirm that truth, makes that Government for ever a usurpation and a crime against human progress.

"I personally thank God that I have lived to see the day when thousands of Irish men and boys, and hundreds of Irish women and girls, were ready to affirm that truth, and to attest it with their lives if need be.

JAMES CONNOLLY,
Commandant-General,
Dublin Division,
Army of the Irish Republic."

At dawn on May 12th James Connolly was carried out to his execution ; he was still too weak to stand. The priest who was present gave Connolly's family this description of the final scene : "*They carried him from his bed in a stretcher to an ambulance and drove him to Kilmainham Jail. They carried the stretcher from the ambulance to the jail yard. They put him in a chair. He was very brave and cool. . . . I asked him :* 'Will you pray for the men who are about to shoot you ? ' *and he answered,* '*I will say a prayer for all brave men who do their duty*'. . . . *And then they shot him.* . . ."

Chapter V

CONNOLLY'S TEACHINGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE TO-DAY

Though James Connolly's body has long since perished in the quicklime of his felon's grave, it would surely be mistaken to regard him merely as a dead heroic figure of the past, and overlook the continuing potency of his work and his ideas in the life of to-day.

The man whose actions played so decisive a part in the making of modern Ireland, and whose writings influenced Lenin, cannot lightly be dismissed as a spent force, in his own country or elsewhere. And surely in Wales where, even among the workers and their so-called leaders, there has been so much apathy and complacency, and so little resolute action, in face of social scandals like mass unemployment and migration, and the toll of life taken by the

twin scourges of T.B. and silicosis—surely here there is need for more men of the stamp of James Connolly, who will not only face facts, but face them in the light of an ideal and a purpose for which they are quite literally prepared to give their lives.

To admire Connolly whole-heartedly and find in him a source of lasting inspiration does not imply believing that he was infallible or unqualified acceptance of everything he taught; and we know from his daughter's testimony that he himself would have been the last to approve of such an attitude. Some socialists will probably always be prone to regard his nationalism as a lamentable aberration.* On the other hand, those approaching the subject from the standpoint of the present writer will find it hard to accept without reservations such statements as "only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland." They will unreservedly endorse Connolly's "I regard each nation as the possessor of a definite contribution to the common stock of civilisation," but when Connolly goes on to add, "I regard the capitalist class of each nation as being the logical and natural enemy of the national culture which constitutes that definite contribution," they will be unable to follow him unless the term "capitalist class" is given a much narrower definition than usual. They will remember, for instance, that William Thompson (hailed by Connolly as "*the earliest Irish apostle of the social revolution*" and forerunner of Marx) and James Fintan Lalor (whom Connolly praises as a "*peerless thinker*" and "*the clearest exponent of the doctrine of social and political revolution in Ireland*") both belonged to the possessing class; nor will they forget the contributions made to the Irish national revival in Connolly's own day by men and women who were members of the "ascendancy class" by birth and breeding, such as Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory, and W. B. Yeats in the realm of culture, and Sir Horace Plunkett in the building up of the agricultural co-operative movement.

On this whole question of the relation between class and nation, Arthur Griffith perhaps came nearer the heart of the matter than Connolly (and Connolly himself would un-

*(10/9/45). For many—perhaps most—British Socialists are really imperialists at heart (*cf.* Mr. Ernest Bevin's recent reference to Hong Kong as "our territory"), and imperialists have no use for genuine nationalism.

doubtedly have agreed with many of his statements) when he wrote in *Sinn Féin* (November, 1913):

> "Sinn Féin is a national, not a sectional movement, and because it is national, it must not and cannot tolerate injustice and oppression within the nation. It will not, at least through my voice, associate itself with any war of classes or attempted war of classes. There may be many classes, but there can be only one nation. If there be men who believe that Ireland is a name and nothing more, and that the interest of the Irish working man lies not in sustaining the nation, but in destroying it, that the path to redemption for mankind is through universalism, cosmopolitanism, or any other 'ism' than Nationalism, I am not of their company. . . . If a legislature is set up in this country . . . I shall seek to have its powers increased until they amount to national independence, and with the increase of its powers *increase not only the wealth of the country, which is not prosperity, but the just distribution of that wealth, which is prosperity.*"

The last sentence indeed echoes Connolly's warning against gauging the prosperity of a country "merely by the *volume* of wealth produced, entirely ignoring the manner in which the wealth is distributed among the workers who produce it" (*Labour in Irish History*, p. 40).

Again, the rigid application of the Marxian "economic interpretation of history" may sometimes have led Connolly into one-sided or unjust judgments in his drastic "debunking" of certain national leaders and movements in *Labour in Irish History*. Dr. George O'Brien, for instance, in his *Economic History of Ireland in the 18th Century* advances reasoned and detailed evidence to show that Connolly underrated the beneficial effects on Irish economic life of the brief period of legislative independence under Grattan's Parliament.

Like an orthodox Marxist, too, Connolly explains the fact that earlier generations of English settlers in Ireland often sided later on with the Irish against the English as simply due to motives of economic self-interest: "each generation of English adventurers settling upon the soil as owners resented the coming of the next generation, and . . . their so-called Irish patriotism was simply inspired by the fear that they should be dispossessed in their turn as they had dispossessed

others," while "since English confiscations of Irish land ceased no Irish landlord body has become patriotic or rebellious." No doubt there is an element of truth in this; but might not an equally possible explanation be that, when the earlier settlers came, Irish society was still a living, organic, functioning entity, capable of assimilating the newcomers and binding them to itself with such ties of affection that they were ready to fight for the Irish way of life as something that they felt to be "ours" instead of each fighting merely for the lands and privileges that he felt to be "mine"? But in later generations, when the Irish way of life and culture and society had been broken, and survived only in struggling remnants in the "Hidden Ireland" of a downtrodden peasantry, the Irish national being no longer had the power to win such general loyalty from originally alien elements. Wales has witnessed a very similar development. And can the Glyndŵr Rising, for instance, be interpreted in purely economic terms as due to the feud between a powerful chieftain and his territorial rival? Must not a higher issue and higher motives have been involved, for it to take so powerful a hold on the nation's memory and imagination?

Connolly often gives the Irish working class credit for acting from motives other than those of selfish economic interest (e.g., *Labour in Irish History*, pp. 7, 12 and 126); one feels that he might give members of other classes more credit for sometimes doing the same. No doubt it is hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the fact that a man's income is above a certain figure does not necessarily render him inaccessible to all the nobler impulses that have inspired humanity (e.g., Robert Owen).

Connolly would probably reply that his statements were only generalisations on the tendencies of economic classes to behave in certain ways, and that individual exceptions do not disprove a rule. And, as Desmond Ryan has said, "Written in haste, under different circumstances in a crowded life, by a man who had to struggle hard to win his daily bread, *Labour in Irish History* is a work of genius when the last leisured professor and acute critic has explained its obvious one-sidedness, its errors, omissions, and defects."

However extreme the language which he may have used on occasion about the class war, one feels that fundamentally Connolly's attitude was not so very far removed from that of Jacques Maritain, who has written, "If the proletariat

demands to be treated as an adult, by this very fact it is not to be succoured, *ameliorated*, or saved by another social class. On the contrary, the principal rôle in the next phase of evolution belongs to it and to its own historical upward movement. It is not, however, by withdrawing from the rest of the community in order to exercise a class dictatorship, as Marxism would have it, that the workers and peasants will be in a position to play this inspiring and renewing rôle. It is by organizing and educating themselves, by becoming aware of their responsibilities in the community, and by uniting in their task all the elements, to whatever class they may belong, who have determined to work with them for human liberty."

Certainly, whatever his theory of the class war, Connolly did not apply it too rigidly in practice. In the first Irish number of *The Harp* (1910), for instance, hailing all unselfish men and women who worked for social righteousness, he did not demand that they should be one as to means, but expressed his readiness to co-operate with all who helped in the industrial and political organisation of labour, even though their aim was less ambitious than his own. And the motto he chose for the paper was : "*In things essential, Unity ; in things non-essential, Liberty ; in all things, Charity*," while in his *Reconquest of Ireland* he expressed the hope that "the present population, descendants alike of the plebeian conquerors, and the conquered plebeians, may enjoy in common fraternity and goodwill that economic security and liberty for which their ancestors fought, or thought they fought."

Perhaps, too, Connolly might have modified his views on the efficacy of the class war as a means of realising his hopes for the workers if he had lived to see the results of the experiment in Russia, where the application of that theory, instead of achieving real emancipation and supremacy for the working class, has (in Drucker's words) made it "increasingly obvious that Marxist socialism can only lead to an even greater inequality, to the complete loss of freedom and to the emergence of a hereditary caste of officials as ruling class."

Similarly, it may be doubted whether the proposal by Connolly (who had little first-hand experience of rural life) that agriculture should 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" would in fact ensure the harmonising of individual initiative and community interest as effectively as the combination of peasant proprietorship and voluntary co-operative organisation which may be seen in actual practice in, e.g., the Scandinavian countries.

It may be doubted, too, whether the One Big Union which he advocated would be in every case the most effective form of workers' organisation. So long as the Trade Union is conceived of simply as "an anti-organisation, an anti-body against social toxins," it may be argued that this centralisation will increase its capacity to resist the centralised power of capitalism. Even then this advantage may be bought dear at the risk of increased bureaucracy and neglect of the special needs of particular groups of workers who have little influence on the central organisation. (Welsh miners, for instance, are likely to find this to be the case in consequence of the swallowing-up of the South Wales Miners' Federation by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.) And when the workers' organisation is conceived of, not merely as a weapon of negative defence, but as a means of ensuring to the workers a share in the real constructive control of industry, then the case for organisation in small units becomes irresistible, as a means of placing freedom and responsibility within the reach of the individual worker.

There are passages in Connolly's writings which show that he *was* fully alive to the need for organising in small units in order to avoid bureaucracy and give every worker a genuine share in industrial control. For instance, in praising the famous Ralahine experiment (1831–33) in the common holding and co-operative working of land by a group of peasants, he wrote :

> "Had all the land and buildings belonged to the people, had all other estates in Ireland been conducted on the same principles, and the industries of the country also so organised, had each of them appointed delegates to confer on the business of the country at some common centre as Dublin, the framework and basis of a free Ireland would have been realised."

Again in *Socialism Made Easy* (1909) he outlines his proposals for the control of each industry by the workers in it, and the control of national affairs by representatives from all these industries, and goes on to say :

"In other words, socialism must proceed from the bottom upward, whereas capitalist political society is organised from above downward; socialism will be administered by a committee of experts elected from the industries and professions of the land; capitalist society is governed by representatives elected from districts and is based upon territorial division. . . . This conception of socialism destroys at one blow all the fears of a bureaucratic State, ruling and ordering the lives of every individual from above, and thus gives assurance that the social order of the future will be an extension of the freedom of the individual, and not a suppression of it. In short, it blends the fullest democratic control with the most absolute expert supervision, something unthinkable of any society built upon the political state." In the *Workers' Republic* (10.6.1899) he wrote:

"Socialism implies *co-operative control* by the workers of the machinery of production; in the absence of such *control* we have nought but State *capitalism*, as the Post Office at present. Socialism is the ownership by the State of all the land and materials for labour *combined with the co-operative control by the workers* of such lands and materials."

Connolly's conception of socialism "proceeding from the bottom upward" is paralleled by Lenin's conviction that the Soviet constitution must be based (as the Webbs express it) "not on the anonymous mass voting of huge electoral constituencies, but on a large number of relatively small meetings of neighbours and associates in work, at which there could be an intimate discussion of the issues in which the people were interested, and about which they had views of their own." Unfortunately, in actual practice in Russia, the possibilities of real democracy contained in this conception have been largely nullified by the imposition of the centralised bureaucratic rule of the Communist Party, so that in all really vital matters control proceeds, not "from the bottom upward," but "from above downward," as much as, if not more so than, in any typical capitalist state.

Nevertheless, the value of the small unit of organisation as a means of ensuring democratic freedom and responsibility remains; and it is interesting to find that principle, which Connolly recognised even if he did not work it out in detail,

acknowledged to-day by leading writers of the most diverse schools of thought. Thus on the one hand we find the Socialist G. D. H. Cole affirming that

> "the small unit is valuable in itself, as a liberating influence upon the human spirit; and the vaster the scale of production and distribution that is enforced on man by the advance of applied science, the more important it becomes to miss no opportunity of breaking up administration into manageable units, in which the individual can hope to exert a significant influence."

And on the other hand we find writers as far removed from the standpoint of Marxist Socialism as Peter Drucker and Roy Glenday (Economic Adviser to the Federation of British Industries) insisting that our most urgent task is to "prevent centralised bureaucratic despotism *by building a genuine local self-government in the industrial sphere*," that "man is happiest when living in small communities, preferably when, like the peasant, he has some form of direct attachment to his native soil," and that "the world will revert to the ideal of moderate-sized, approximately self-contained units and groups."

It is with the working-out of this principle that the Welsh Nationalist Party is concerned in Wales, and in that task it seeks guidance, not only from abstract theory, but from the historic social tradition of Wales itself and from the more recent experience of self-governing small nations concerned with human welfare instead of imperial power, like those of Scandinavia. On the day when this principle wins general acceptance, people will no longer think of Connolly's socialism and his nationalism as contradictory, but will realise that both were integral parts of one harmonious whole.

When all is said and done, surely the most remarkable thing about James Connolly, and the thing best worth remembering, is not that he joined with other Socialists in repeating some of the less valid Marxist slogans, but that he so pre-eminently embodied the noblest qualities of Marx himself—the passionate sympathy with the oppressed, the respect for facts, the searing emphasis on the realities of the life of the poor—, and that he combined with these the realisation that the worker is not merely a cog in the State machine or a piece of mass material for revolutions, but a human individual with spiritual roots in the past, and a history and

a country of his own which must not be ignored in planning his present and his future.

How many Socialists in Wales to-day would have vision enough to think or write of their own country as Connolly wrote of his : "Ireland at the same time as she lost her ancient social system, also lost her language as the vehicle of thought of those who acted as her leaders. As a result of this two-fold loss the nation suffered socially, nationally and intellectually from a prolonged arrested development. . . . The Gaelic language, scorned by the possessing classes, sought and found its last fortress in the hearts and homes of the 'lower orders,' to re-issue from thence in our own time to what the writer believes to be a greater and more enduring place in civilisation than of old" ?

How many would say of the Welsh working class what Connolly said of the Irish : "The Irish working class, as a class, can only hope to rise with Ireland"—or accept in practice the full implications of his statement that "the interests of Labour all over the world are identical, it is true, but it is also true that each country had better work out its own salvation on the lines most congenial to its own people" ?

On the other hand, it would be a poor Nationalist who (whether accepting the whole of Connolly's Socialist doctrine or not) did not wholeheartedly assent to his definition of the nation as the family writ large :

> "*We accept the family as the true type of human society. We say that in that family the resources of the entire household are at the service of each, as in the family the strong does not prey upon or oppress the weak, as in the family the least gifted mentally, and the weakest physically, share equally the common store of all with the most gifted and physically strongest, as in the family the true economy consists in utilising and conserving the heritage of all for the good of all, so in like manner the nation should act and be administered. Every man, woman and child of the nation must be considered as an heir of all the property of the nation, and the entire resources of the nation should stand behind each individual, guaranteeing them from want, and multiplying their individual powers, with all the powers of the organised nation.*" (*Workers' Republic*, 29.1.15).

Neither in the family nor in the nation are our obligations bounded by the present: "each generation should pay to its successors the debt it owes to its forerunners." Every true Nationalist would endorse Connolly's demand for "a level *below* which no man shall be driven, a common basis of equality of opportunity for all," and echo his declaration that "in the long run the Freedom of a nation is measured by the Freedom of its lowest class: every upward step of that class to the possibility of possessing higher things raises the standard of the nation in the scale of civilisation; every time that class is beaten back into the mire the whole moral tone of the nation suffers."

Connolly has recently been criticised by Mr. Seán Ô'Faoláin for popularising the "grand delusion" that "the antique social order enshrined for those whom he called 'our Gaelic forefathers' certain nobly desirable democratic rights and institutions, and that the modern debased commercialised Irish stood between the people and these admirable traditions." This criticism is apparently based upon Connolly's references to "the Irish clan system" ("under which the Gael reached the highest point of culture and civilisation in Europe") "founded upon common property and a democratic social organisation, as a rival to the politico-social order of capitalist feudalism founded upon the political despotism of the proprietors and the political and social slavery of the producers." The criticism would also include such passages from his writings as the following: "The Irish chief, although recognised in the courts of France, Spain, and Rome, as the peer of the reigning princes of Europe, in reality held his position upon the sufferance of his people, and as an administrator of the tribal affairs of his people, while the land or territory of the clan was entirely removed from his private jurisdiction," and "we see in socialism . . . the modern application of the social principle which underlay the Brehon Laws of our ancestors." Against this democratic conception of the Gaelic clan system, Mr. Ô'Faoláin cites the Gaelic preface to the great collection of Gaelic Laws known as the "Senchus Mor," which refers to such general anarchy that "even the churl's son dared to consider himself the equal of the son of a king."

Now whether Connolly or Mr. Seán Ô'Faoláin (with another generation of research at his disposal) possessed the more accurate knowledge of the ancient Irish clan system (under

which Ireland certainly did attain to one of the highest points of culture and civilisation in contemporary Europe) I do not pretend to know, and it is a matter for Gaelic historians and scholars to decide. It is quite possible that they would find Connolly to have been right in his main contentions; and it does not seem impossible that certain social inequalities between "churl's son" and "king's son" might have co-existed with a relatively democratic economic system such as Connolly describes, whether or not this is to be explained by "Æ" 's theory that it is the Irish nature to love "the aristocracy of character and intelligence," while at the same time basing its *economic* life on *democratic* principles.

That Connolly was right in discerning in the ancient Irish clan system a democratic spirit not to be found in the Anglo-Norman feudal system, is borne out (even at a period when the former system was already decaying under the impact of the latter) by the testimony of Froissart, who records how shocked the English were when "foure of the princypall kynges," who had submitted to the English King at Dublin, were unwilling to learn English manners, and "wolde cause their mynstrelles, their servauntes and varlettes, to sytte with them and to eate in their own dysshe and to drinke of their cuppes; and they showed me" (i.e., the squire who told the story to Froissart) "that the usage of their countre was good, for they sayd, in all thynges, except their beddes, they were and lyved as common." Historical evidence suggests that a similar spirit, and similar institutions, were characteristic of the old Welsh social system.

Mr. Ó'Faoláin's dismissal of Connolly's views as "romanticism" (on the ground that the antique Gaels would have fought to the death against the idea of a Republic and that the Republicans would have been "appalled by the reality of those days and conditions") hardly seems justified in the light of Connolly's own statement that "we see in socialism ... *the modern application* of the social principle which underlay the Brehon Laws of our ancestors." Connolly never claimed that the ancient Irish social system was perfect in every particular, nor did he dream that it could or should be revived precisely as it existed in bye-gone centuries.

Criticism of this kind also seems to under-rate the truth in Goethe's saying that the best that history has to give us is the enthusiasm it arouses. Whether or not Connolly had formed a completely accurate picture of the ancient

Irish social system, whether or not he overlooked its less democratic features, he did discern in it a genuinely noble element; and that "guiding gleam of poetry in his toilsome and often harassed career" inspired him in turn to heroic efforts for the making of a nobler Ireland. To the charge that this inspiration was based on a delusion, one is tempted to reply as Abraham Lincoln did when told that General Grant drank too much—by saying that he wished Grant would give his other generals some of the same brand of spirits! But the moral which Connolly himself would probably draw from the whole controversy, for the people of small nations like Ireland and Wales who are either completely ignorant of their past or feel for it a vague pride based on very scanty knowledge, is that they should never rest until they have learned more of their own country's history, and so won a fuller and deeper knowledge, founded on facts, as a surer basis for the inspiration which the past can give.

A characteristic of Connolly's which is worth recalling to-day was his abhorrence of anything savouring of totalitarianism. Born leader as he was, he disliked much talk of leadership, and it was to the rank and file that his praise and admiration were most readily given. "Squabbles in the Socialist and Labour ranks he regarded as a sign of individuality which should allay all fears of a bureaucratic régime or servile State in a Socialistic community built on industrial unions" (cp. *Labour, Nationality and Religion*, p. 58). What a refreshing contrast to the craze for uniformity which has infected so many modern Socialists! It is interesting to imagine the pungent comments which he might have made on modern "dictators of the proletariat," and so-called democratic elections (like those in the Baltic States under Soviet Russian domination), at which only one Party may be voted for.

In this connection, a passage written by Connolly in 1914 is of not a little topical interest to-day, and may be even more so ten years hence. Although he believed that the German rulers were "as bad as the English," he declared, "If we had to choose between strengthening the German bully or the Russian autocrat, the wise choice would be on the side of the German. For the German people are a highly civilised people, responsive to every progressive influence, and rapidly forging weapons for their own emancipation, whereas the Russian Empire stretches away into the depths of Asia and

relies upon an army, largely recruited from amongst many thousands of barbarians, who have not yet felt the first softening influence of civilisation. German influences have helped to shape for good the hopes of the world, but the thoughts and hopes of the best in Russia were, but the other day, drowned in blood by Russia's worst. To help Britain is to help Russia to the dominance of Europe, to help the barbarian to crush the scientist. That is the reflection of the wise revolutionist of to-day." One is reminded of G. D. H. Cole's dictum that "a country which has in it large elements of barbarism does not cease at once to be barbarous merely by becoming Socialist," and wonders if time will prove Connolly right here, also.

It is almost inevitable that a comparison should be made between Connolly and the great French Socialist, Jean Jaurès, though it would require fuller knowledge than the present writer possesses to work it out in adequate detail. In spite of the wide differences in their upbringing and circumstances, there were striking points of similarity between them. Both were leading international socialists and both were great nationalists; both were peace-lovers who yet believed in the right of a nation to fight in defence of its freedom; both, though by different means, opposed the first World War with all their power and both paid for that opposition with their lives. Both earned the tribute which Connolly once paid to Robert Emmet, "*He believed in the brotherhood of the oppressed and in the community of free nations, and died for his ideal.*"

Connolly's definition of internationalism as "*the free federation of free nations*" is echoed in Jaurès':

> "It is only by the free federation of autonomous nations which have given up the exercise of military force and have submitted themselves to the rules of law that human unity can be realised. But it will not be by the suppression of national life but by its ennoblement."

Both men were opposed to State Socialism; Jaurès in 1893 put forward proposals for the control of industry very similar to Connolly's, claiming that they would give the workers "complete rights of property in their individual work and full liberty, initiative and sovereignty." Mr. J. Hampden Jackson's comment that, while Jaurès' proposals are somewhat vague in detail, their emphasis on individual

initiative and rights is highly significant, is equally applicable to Connolly's. Both Jaurès and Connolly realised the importance of making knowledge available to the masses, "to teach them not what to think but how to think," and the part which the Press and other agencies of adult education could play in achieving this end. As with Jaurès, so with Connolly, "his emphasis was always on ethics rather than on economics."

Both in theory and in practice Jaurès stressed the vital contribution which co-operative societies could make towards achieving real popular control; even under the capitalist system they could prepare the way for a new social order, developing the workers' faculties by the exercise, education and confidence obtained through managing their own affairs in co-operation. Similarly, Connolly paid a cordial tribute to the pioneer work of "Æ" for the agricultural co-operative movement in Ireland, and to the way in which he "brought to the long-neglected toilers of Dublin a new conception, viz., that the co-operative societies which had been so long and so successfully propagating themselves throughout the agricultural areas of the country might yet be linked up with the fortunes of the industrial workers in such a manner that, serving the other's temporary needs, they could between them lay the groundwork of a new social order."

In the *Reconquest of Ireland* Connolly works out in some detail the lines on which through co-operation "the immense staying power of the peasantry" and "the easily organised labourers of the towns" could be brought together, and the picture is rich in suggestions for Wales to-day.

> "Stocking the products of the agricultural co-operative societies in time of industrial peace, the workers would enjoy their credit in time of war; then the trades union in time of peace could invest its funds in the co-operative societies; in time of lock-outs or strikes it would fight with food guaranteed to its members by such societies which for the food required would be able to pledge their credit to the organised co-operative farming community.
>
> "Trade union funds instead of being deposited in banks to be let out by those institutions to capitalist exploiters could be placed to the credit of soundly conducted co-operative enterprises, developing the farmers and aiding the resources of the toilers in town and country. In so doing the urban workers would know that in helping to

make life in the rural districts less unbearable they were also helping to stem the flow of labour into the towns and thus increasing the security of their own position.

"The idea is capable of almost infinite expansion, and not least amongst its attractions is the hope that the minds of Irish men and women once set thus definitely in the direction of common work, common ownership, and democratically conducted industry, their thought would not cease from travelling that path until they had once more grasped the concept of an Ireland of whose powers, potentialities and gifts each should be an equal heir, in whose joys and cultures all should be sharers."

Within a few days of the Easter Week Rising "Æ" wrote to a friend, "*The stirring element in this was Labour. Connolly was the strong man and intellect in the Rising.*" The same conclusion—"that without Connolly there would have been no 'Easter Week' "—has been implicitly or explicitly expressed by later writers like Mr. R. M. Fox in his *History of the Irish Citizen Army*. Whether the historians of the future will endorse this view of Connolly's pivotal significance, or whether they will agree with Le Roux in assigning greater importance to Pearse and to the I.R.B., it is too soon to say; but it seems beyond all question that in any case Connolly had a major share of responsibility for the Rising and its consequences; and therefore he must be regarded as one of the chief architects of the new Ireland of to-day.

What would he think of his handiwork if he could see it now? No doubt it would still be very far from the ideal Ireland of his dreams; he would still find poverty and other social evils to challenge his crusading spirit; and the spectacle of partition would be abhorrent to the Ulsterman who wrote: "against it Labour in Ulster should fight even to the death if necessary, as our fathers fought before us." Still, he might take comfort from his own saying: "*in the political and social world generally the thing that matters most is not so much the* EXTENT *of our march, but rather the* DIRECTION *in which we are marching.*" And on the credit side of the account he would find many positive achievements to gladden him, and many reforms for which he fought regarded now as commonplaces—widows' and orphans' pensions, children's allowances, a more equal distribution of wealth and of land ownership, great improvements in housing, public health,

and educational opportunities. And, remembering how bitterly he felt the cost in young lives of Empire and of war, perhaps we shall not go far wrong in thinking that, of all the achievements bought by his life and death, he would be proudest of "*Ireland's concrete attainment of a measure of freedom from the British war machine, which, to say the least of it, compares favourably with the futile sobs of abstract English pacifism.*" These are the words of Connolly's old comrade, Captain J. R. White, who points out (in *Peace News*, 27.10.44) that "twenty-six Irish counties have achieved positive neutrality as a result of their successful fight against British imperialism," while "all thirty-two have achieved freedom from conscription" both in this war and the last, and the result has been a victory for concrete pacifism in the "existence of one focus in Western Europe wholly free from conscription and two-thirds of it free from war." In this unexpected way Connolly's militant use of the Irish Citizen Army has resulted in achieving in some measure the pacifist ideals of its founder.

Our experience in the present war has taught us the inestimable value of the existence of some islands of sanity and human goodwill—in neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland, for instance—amidst the engulfing sea of slaughter and destruction, while the example of Denmark has shown how hard it is for military might to make any effective conquest of a country in which the common people have solidly achieved a considerable measure of real freedom and responsibility and co-operation.

Surely the best hope for humanity's future lies in the multiplication of such islands among the people of the small nations, and groups of like-minded people in the larger ones, working out on a small scale and in units of manageable size the only principles on which a free and peaceful world order can eventually be founded.

But if this work is going to be done, it cannot be done by theorists and Utopian planners ; it will have to be done by the people themselves. Connolly stressed this responsibility of the people when he pointed out (*Workers' Republic*, 4.9.15) that without their direct action through their own organisations at home their Parliamentary representatives at Westminster could have achieved nothing for them : "the Irish people, fighting in Ireland upon the battle-ground of their farms, leagues and trade unions have compelled an

unwilling legislature to pass measure after measure enacting as law that which the power of the people had already won as rights." Only as a result of such concerted, self-relying action will subject peoples experience "*the difference with which the world at large treats those who simply claim its pity, and those who are strong and self-reliant enough to enforce its respect.*"

In a war-shattered world, and in face of the growing trend towards totalitarianism in all the imperial countries, the task of building a better order will be a hard one; it will require men and women with something of Connolly's own quality to achieve it. But Connolly would never have been the man he was if it were not for his ideals—the inspiration he drew from his own country's history, his sense of human brotherhood, his unbreakable love for the living, imperfect Irish people of his own day and generation. Until the people in every country sow the seeds of peace and freedom by giving their allegiance, realistically and not in words alone, to ideals as wide, as deep, as great as Connolly's, they cannot hope to reap such great achievements.


IRELAND
WALES