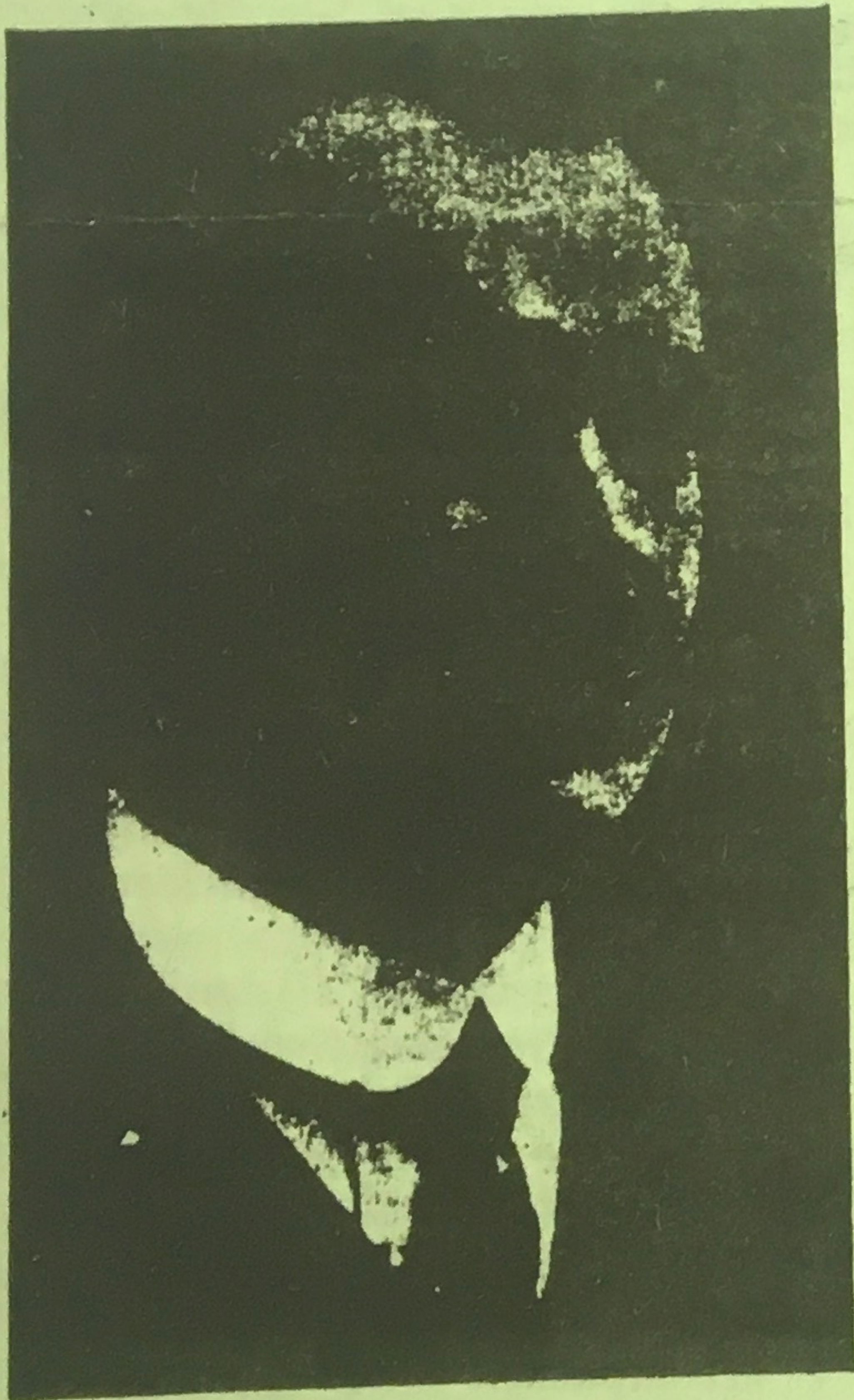


Marxist Study Guide

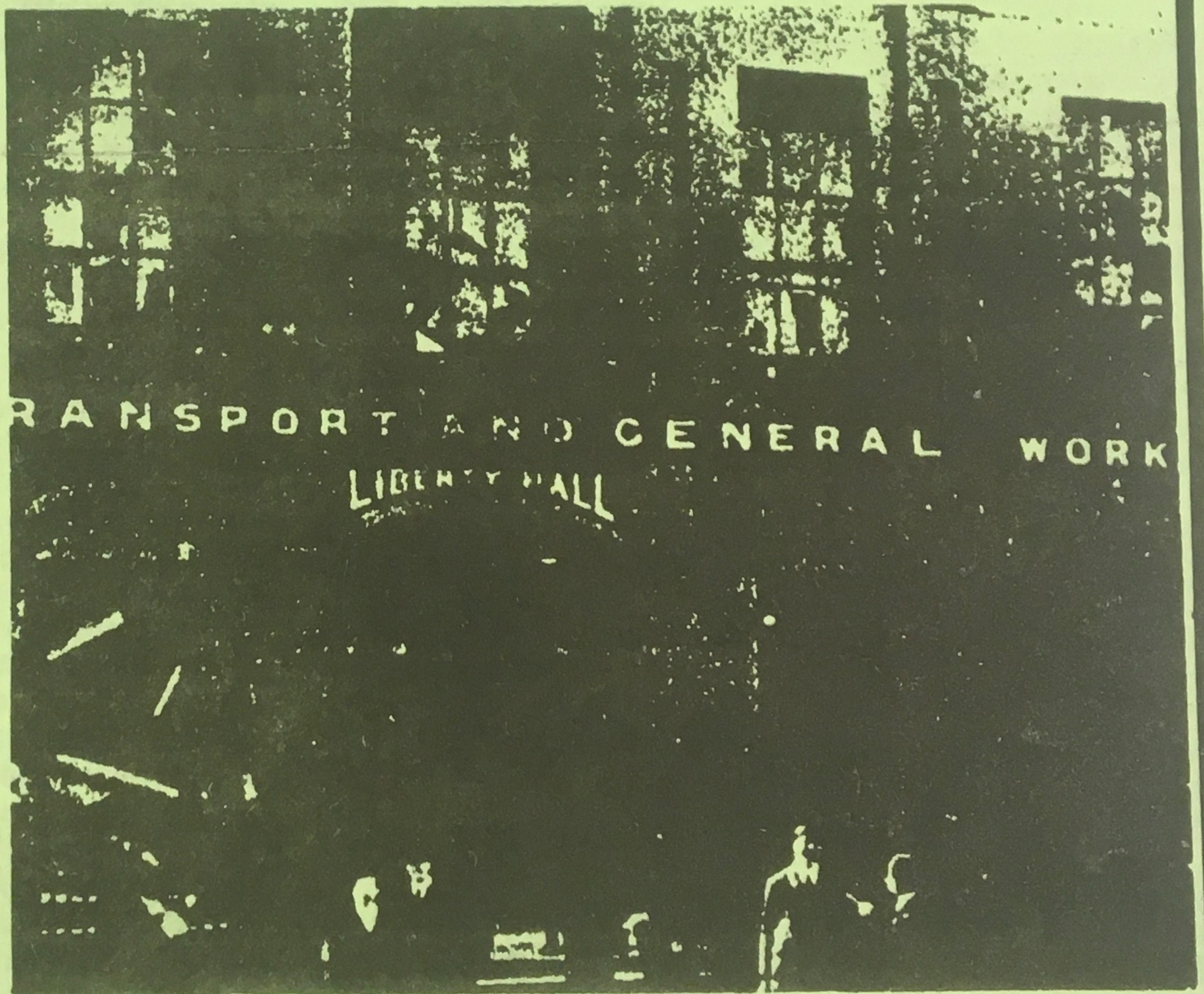
James Connolly and the Easter Rising

articles by
Lenin, Trotsky, Grant and Hadden

Introduction by Dermot Connolly



James Connolly



Liberty Hall after merciless shelling by the gunboat 'Helga'.

~~40p~~

45p

CONTENTS

- Conclusion to Labour in Irish History by James Connolly
- Class War in Dublin (1913) by Lenin
- A Week After the Dublin Massacre (1916) by Lenin
- The Easter Rising by Peter Hadden from Militant 152
- Connolly and the Easter Rising by Ted Grant from Militant 15
- Connolly and the Easter Rising by Peter Hadden from Militant 98
- Lessons of the events in Dublin (1916) by Leon Trotsky
- The Irish Rebellion of 1916 by Lenin

Conclusion to "Labour in Irish History"

by James Connolly

To-day the competition of the trust-owned farms of the United States and the Argentine Republic is a more deadly enemy to the Irish agriculturist than the lingering remnants of landlordism or the bureaucratic officialism of the British Empire. Capitalism is now the enemy, it reaches across the ocean; and after the Irish agriculturist has gathered his harvest and brought it to market he finds that a competitor living three thousand miles away under a friendly flag has undersold him and beggared him. The merely political heresy under which middle class *doctrinaires* have for nearly 250 years cloaked the Irish fight for freedom has thus run its course. The fight made by the Irish septs against the English pale and all it stood for, the struggle of the peasants the labourers of the 18th and 19th centuries, the great social struggle of all the ages will again rise and re-shape itself in Ireland to suit the new conditions. That war which the Land League fought, and then abandoned, before it was either lost or won, will be taken up by the Irish toilers on a broader field with sharper weapons, and a more comprehensive knowledge of all the essentials of permanent victory. As the Irish septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they rejected or accepted the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by their loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers from hence forward will base their right for freedom not upon the winning or losing the right to talk in an Irish Parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops and farms upon which a people's bread and liberties depend.

As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question. The whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production, in Ireland. Who would own and control the land? The people, or the invaders; and if the invaders, which set of them — the most recent swarm of land thieves, or the sons of the thieves of a former generation? These were the bottom questions of Irish politics, and all other questions were valued or deprecated in the proportion to which they contributed to serve the interests of some of the factions who had already taken their stand in this fight around property interests. Without this key to the meaning of events, this clue to unravel the actions of "great men," Irish history is but a welter of unrelated facts, a hopeless chaos of sporadic outbreaks, treacheries, intrigues, massacres, murders, and purposeless warfare. With this key all things become understandable and traceable to their primary origin; without this key the lost opportunities of Ireland seem such as to bring a blush to the cheek of the Irish worker; with this key Irish history is a lamp to his feet in the stormy paths of to-day. Yet plain as this is to us to-day, it is undeniable that for two hundred years at least all Irish political movements ignored this fact, and were conducted by men who did not look below the political surface. These men to arouse the passions of the people invoked the memory of social wrongs, such as evictions and famines, but for these wrongs proposed only political remedies, such as changes in taxation or transference of the seat of Government (class rule) from one country to another. Hence they accomplished nothing, because the political remedies proposed were unrelated to the social subjection at the root of the matter. The revolutionists of the past were wiser, the Irish Socialists are wiser to-day. In their movement the North and South will again clasp hands, again will it be demonstrated, as in '98, that the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social democracy.

END

The Life and Ideas of James Connolly by Dermot Connolly

JAMES CONNOLLY was a great revolutionary leader of the Irish working class. Born in Edinburgh of Irish parents on 5 June 1868, and executed by the British government in Dublin on 12 May, 1916, his life of struggle and dedication to the ideas of socialism is an inspiration to workers not only in Ireland, but the world over.

Connolly began his socialist activity in Edinburgh where he was the secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation. He came to Dublin in 1896 as a paid organiser of the Dublin Socialist Society. He transformed this loose grouping into the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP).

The ISRP was established as a revolutionary party, committed to the overthrow of capitalism and to the establishment of a workers socialist republic.

Forced to emigrate for economic reasons to the USA for a period of years, Connolly was active in socialist politics there. He was an organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World—the “Wobblies”.

It was during his activity in America that Connolly wrote *Socialism made Easy*, a brilliant introductory pamphlet for workers first coming to the basic ideas of socialism. *Socialism Made Easy* became a best seller amongst workers in America, and was published also in Australia by the newly founded Labour Party.

On his return to Ireland in 1910, Connolly became the Belfast organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. For the next two years, he played the decisive role, along with James Larkin, in the formation of the organised labour movement in Ireland.

The historic battle in Dublin in 1913, the great lock-out, laid down a tradition of revolutionary class struggle for the emerging working class in Ireland.

Connolly became the acting General Secretary of the ITGWU when Larkin was imprisoned during the lock-out. He was the Commandant of the Irish Citizens Army, the first workers militia in Europe, which arose out of the need to defend workers from attacks by scabs and the police. He also moved the motion, supported by Larkin, at the Irish Trade Union Congress in 1912, which established the Labour Party as the political arm of the trade union movement.

Connolly was a class fighter, organiser, and day to day leader of the workers par excellence. But he was also much more than that.

He was a Marxist, who bequeathed to the workers of today, not only a great tradition of struggle and of sacrifice, but a Marxist analysis of the tasks facing the working class which are as relevant today as they were in his lifetime.

For Connolly, as with all Marxists, the key to history was the class struggle. History was not made by the acts of “great men”, but the struggle to gain control “over the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production”.

The material reproduced in his pamphlet from *Labour in Irish History*, Connolly’s best work, shows clearly his understanding that the age long struggle in Ireland was essentially a social struggle for independence in Ireland which was always betrayed by the capitalist and middle class Catholic leaders who aspired to replacing British imperialism as the exploiters of the mass of the population.

From his analysis of Irish history, and his understanding of how capitalism develops into Imperialism, Connolly drew the same conclusions which Trotsky drew at the turn of the century in relation to Russia.

In backward colonial and semi colonial countries, with a weak capitalist class, the tasks of winning national independence, of establishing the conditions for industrial development, of creating a free peasantry in the countryside, and of establishing a democratic state, fall to the working class.

For Connolly, the key question was to break the hold of British imperialism, but to achieve this, the working class must be foremost in this struggle. The task was to place labour at the head of all the forces struggling for independence.

But as Trotsky explained in the theory of permanent revolution, the workers, having carried out these tasks, of the national democratic revolution, would go on uninterrupted to the tasks of socialism, not on a purely national level, but on an international level.

Connolly’s ideas, formulated independently, strikingly point in the same direction: “If you remove the English Army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic, your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and industrial institutions she has planted in this country. . . .”

Connolly argues for a republic not as in France or the USA, but for a workers republic which would be “a beacon-light to the oppressed of every land”.

These ideas were brilliantly borne out in the successful October Revolution in Russia in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.

Unfortunately in Ireland events took a different course. Connolly’s prediction, that independence in Ireland which did not overturn the social structures would lead to the Irish workers becoming “the lowest paid blacklegs in Europe” has been borne out to the letter. Workers in the so-called Republic of Ireland work the longest hours, receive the least holidays and wages, and the lowest welfare services in the EEC with the exception of Greece and Portugal.

All of Connolly’s activity, including his involvement in the premature uprising in Dublin in 1916, flows from this class analysis of society.

In 1914, the onset of world imperialist war shatters the Second International. One after another the reformist leaders of the international social democracy betrayed their class by supporting their own capitalists in the war. Only a handful of socialists internationally stood firm against the tide of chauvinism and war mongering. Liebknecht and Luxemburg, McClean, Lenin, Trotsky and to his credit Connolly.

Connolly was determined to strike a blow in Ireland against the war and all it stood for. “Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord.”

With a few thousand workers and middle class youth Connolly went into the General Post Office in Dublin in 1916 knowing there was no chance of success, but hoping that this defiant action would spark a movement of the working class in Ireland and in Europe.

In the material reproduced here, we see how Lenin regards not only the struggle in 1913, but also the attempted insurrection in 1916 as an inspiration to the workers in Russia and throughout Europe. Lenin said “it was the great misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely.”

A great revolutionary movement developed in Ireland in the period from 1917 to 1921. But Connolly had been executed in 1916, at the insistence of the Irish bosses. In this period a leader such as Connolly would have been able to group around him the best layers of the working class and the youth in a revolutionary party.

The example of the Bolshevik revolution had a tremendous effect in Ireland during this period. To their shame, the leaders of Labour adopted the “Labour must wait” ideas of Develera and the petit bourgeois nationalists of Sinn Fein were handed the leadership of the struggle in Ireland.

With the class questions pushed into the background, petty-bourgeois nationalism could have no influence over the minds of the Protestant workers in the North. The working class was divided along sectarian lines, partition was imposed on the country, and a bloody civil war followed which saw the emergence of capitalism, in its green and orange varieties, triumphant in the establishment of two poverty ridden sectarian states.

The same questions confront the labour movement in Ireland today. The signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement in November 1985 by the British and Southern Irish governments plunged Northern Ireland into a crisis on the scale of the Anti-Home-Rule movement 1912 to 1914. The Anglo-Irish agreement cannot work with the opposition of the protestants. Far from being a possible solution, it is a recipe for civil war and a re-partition in Ireland.

The Protestant working class will never accept a capitalist united Ireland. On the other hand, the Catholic population have never, and will never, accept the sectarian state in the north. There is no

solution to this question within the confines of capitalism.

The Anglo-Irish agreement is an attempt by capitalism in Britain and the South of Ireland to stabilise the North. But they will achieve the exact opposite.

Inevitably, unless the agreement is withdrawn, the stage is set for a bloody confrontation which will engulf the whole of Ireland.

A civil war in Ireland will lead not to a united Ireland but a repartition of the country. Connolly could predict that partition would lead to "a carnival of reaction" in 1914. This was certainly the case when partition was enforced in 1922. A repartition now would have the same if not even more serious consequences for the working class. The trade unions would be split on sectarian lines. Catholics make up 50 per cent of the population of Belfast. They would be driven out, with Protestants being driven out of the Border areas where they are now a minority.

A Lebanon would be created in Ireland. Pogroms, massacres, refugee camps on the border, and military right wing governments most likely in two new but even more sectarian states. The struggle for socialism would receive a decisive set-back. It is for these reasons that Marxists in Ireland also oppose the campaign of individual terror of the Provisionals.

Only a united working class, struggling to end capitalism, can prevent such a scenario. But of common struggle, on the common issues that face workers, unity can be forged.

Class questions and class solutions must be put to the forefront. The right wing leaders of the Labour Parties in Britain and Southern Ireland have deserted a class standpoint in preference to following tamely after Thatcher in Britain and Fitzgerald in the South.

Left leaders like Tony Benn in Britain could do well to study the writings of James Connolly. To simply argue for a united Ireland is to adopt a non-class position in the real, concrete conditions which exist.

There is only one demand, which if taken up and campaigned for by the labour movement throughout these islands, can pose a solution—for a socialist United Ireland, linked to a socialist Britain, in a socialist Federation of Britain and Ireland.

The material reproduced here will be of tremendous assistance to those attempting to understand the very complicated questions in Ireland. I hope that this material will inspire them to go on and to study the works of James Connolly, which they will find relevant not just on the national question but on all the issues which face the workers' movement today.

I will conclude with one last quote from Connolly himself:

"Revolution is never practical—until the work of the revolution strikes. Then it alone is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromisers become the most futile and visionary of human imaginings.

"For that hour let us work, think and hope;...for that supreme time of human history let us watch like sentinals, with weapons ever ready, remembering always that there can be no dignity in labour until labour knows no master." (*Socialism made easy.*)

The powerful labour movement in Britain and Ireland today, with a leadership of the calibre of workers like James Connolly, and armed with his Marxist ideas, would push aside the failed capitalist system in both islands and open up throughout the whole of Europe the perspective for the socialist transformation of the continent and the planet as a whole.

March 1986

Further reading on Ireland

Labour in Irish History (Connolly) £1.35

The Life and Times of James Connolly (Greaves) £3.95

Ireland Her Own (Jackson) £3.95

The Connolly-Walker Controversy (Connolly) £0.80

The Connolly-De Leon Controversy (Connolly) £1.50

Labour, Nationality and Religion (Connolly) £0.50

The reconquest of Ireland (Connolly) £0.50

Ireland upon the Dissecting Table (Connolly) £2.00

Story of the Irish Citizen Army (O'Casey) £2.50

James Connolly-Selected Writings £4.60

Divide and Rule (MILITANT) £1.40

Prices as of Feb. 1987

PLEASE ADD 25 per cent postage for orders under £5, 10 per cent for orders £5-£10. Over £10 post free.

Please make cheques payable to: "World Socialist Books". We stock all the classic writings of Marxism and Militant publications. Send for free booklist to: World Socialist Books, 3-13 Hepscott Road, London E9 5HB.

Books can also be ordered from MIM publications 75 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1. Please note prices in the South vary with the exchange rate.

Militant

THE MARXIST PAPER FOR WORKERS UNITY & SOCIALISM

No to Anglo-Irish deal

EDITORIAL BOARD STATEMENT



Militant Irish Monthly Subscribe now!

6 issues (Ireland & Britain) £3.00

12 issues (Ireland & Britain) £5.00

Make cheques, etc payable to: Militant Irish Monthly and return to: 75 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1 or: 4 Waring Street, Belfast.

CLASS WAR IN DUBLIN

By Lenin

In Dublin, the capital of Ireland—a city of a not highly industrial type, with a population of half a million—the class struggle, which permeates the whole life of capitalist society everywhere, has become accentuated to the point of class war. The police have positively gone wild; drunken policemen assault peaceful workers, break into houses, torment the aged, women and children. Hundreds of workers (over 400) have been injured and *two killed*—such are the casualties of this war. All prominent workers' leaders have been arrested. People are thrown into prison for making the most peaceful speeches. The city is like an armed camp.

What has happened? How could such a war have flared up in a peaceable, cultured, civilised free state?

Ireland is something of a British Poland, only rather more like Galicia than the Poland represented by Warsaw, Lodz and Dombrowski. National oppression and Catholic reaction have turned the proletarians of this unhappy country into paupers, the peasants into toilworn, ignorant and dull slaves of the priesthood, and the bourgeoisie into a phalanx, masked by nationalist phrases, of capitalists, of despots over the workers; finally, the administration has been turned into a gang accustomed to every kind of violence.

At the present moment the Irish nationalists (i.e., the Irish bourgeoisie) are the victors. They are buying up the lands of the English landlords; they are getting national *self-government* (the famous Home Rule for which such a long and stubborn struggle has been going on between Ireland and England); they will freely govern "their own" country jointly with "their own" Irish priests.

Well, this Irish nationalist bourgeoisie is celebrating its "national" victory, its maturity in "affairs of state" by declaring a war to the death on the Irish labour movement.

An English Lord-Lieutenant lives in Dublin, but in fact he has less power than the Dublin capitalist leader, a certain Murphy, publisher of the *Independent* ("Independent"—my eye!), principal shareholder and director of the Dublin tramways, and a shareholder in many capitalist enterprises in Dublin. Murphy has declared, on behalf of all the Irish capitalists, of course, that he is ready to spend three-quarters of a million pounds (nearly seven million rubles) to destroy the Irish trade unions.

And these unions have begun to develop magnificently. The Irish proletariat, awakening to class-consciousness, is pressing the Irish bourgeois scoundrels engaged in celebrating their "national" victory. It has found a talented leader in the person of Comrade *Larkin*, Secretary of the Irish Transport Workers' Union. Larkin is a remarkable speaker, a man of seething Irish energy, who has performed miracles among the unskilled workers—that mass of the British proletariat which in Britain is so often cut off from the advanced workers by the cursed petty-bourgeois, liberal, aristocratic spirit of the British skilled worker.

A new spirit has been aroused in the Irish workers' unions. The unskilled workers have brought unparalleled animation into the trade unions. Even the women have begun to organise—a thing hitherto unknown in Catholic Ireland. So far as organisation of the workers is concerned Dublin looks like becoming one of the foremost towns in the whole of Great Britain. The country that used to be typified by the fat, well-fed Catholic priest and the poor, starving, ragged worker who wore his rags even on Sunday because he could not afford Sunday clothes, that country, though it bears a double and triple national yoke, has begun to turn into a country with an organised army of the proletariat.

Well, Murphy proclaimed a crusade of the bourgeoisie against Larkin and "Larkinism". To begin with, 200 tramwaymen were dismissed in order to provoke a strike during the exhibition and *embitter* the whole struggle. The Transport Workers' Union declared a strike and demanded the reinstatement of the discharged men. Murphy engineered lock-outs. The workers retaliated by downing tools. War raged all along the line. Passions flared up.

Larkin—incidentally, he is the grandson of the famous Larkin executed in 1867 for participating in the Irish liberation movement—delivered fiery speeches at meetings. In these speeches he pointed out that the party of the English bourgeois enemies of Irish Home Rule was openly calling for resistance to the government, was threatening revolution, was organising armed resistance to Home Rule and with absolute impunity was flooding the country with revolutionary appeals.

But what the reactionaries, the *English* chauvinists Carson, Londonderry and Bonar Law (the English Purshkeviches, the nationalists who are persecuting Ireland), may

do the proletarian socialist may not. Larkin was arrested. A meeting called by the workers was banned.

Ireland, however, is not Russia. The attempt to suppress the right of assembly evoked a storm of indignation. Larkin *had to be* tried. At the trial Larkin became the accuser and, in effect, put Murphy in the dock. By cross-questioning witnesses Larkin proved that Murphy had had long conversations with the Lord-Lieutenant on the eve of his, Larkin's, arrest. Larkin declared the police to be in Murphy's pay, and no one dared gainsay him.

Larkin was released on bail (political liberty cannot be abolished at one stroke). Larkin declared that he would appear at a meeting no matter what happened. And indeed, he came to one disguised, and began to speak to the crowd. The police recognised him, seized him and beat him up. For two days the dictatorship of the police truncheon raged, crowds were clubbed, women and children were brutally treated. The police broke into workers' homes. A worker named *Nolan*, a member of the Transport Workers' Union, was beaten to death. Another died of injuries.

On Thursday, September 4 (August 22, O.S.), Nolan's funeral took place. The proletariat of Dublin followed in a procession 50,000 strong behind the body of their comrade. The police brutes lay low, not daring to annoy the crowd, and exemplary order prevailed. "This is a more magnificent demonstration than when they buried Parnell" (the celebrated Irish nationalist leader), said an old Irishman to a German correspondent.

The Dublin events mark a turning point in the history of the labour movement and of socialism in Ireland. Murphy has threatened to destroy the Irish trade unions. He has succeeded only in destroying the last remnants of the influence of the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie over the Irish proletariat. He has helped to steel the independent revolutionary working-class movement in Ireland, which is free of nationalist prejudices.

This was seen immediately at the Trades Union Congress which opened on September 1 (August 19, O.S.), in Manchester. The Dublin events inflamed the delegates—despite the resistance of the opportunist trade union leaders with their petty-bourgeois spirit and their admiration for the bosses. The Dublin workers' delegation was given an ovation. Delegate Partridge, Chairman of the Dublin branch of the Engineers' Union, spoke about the abominable outrages committed by the police in Dublin. A young working girl

had just gone to bed when the police raided her house. The girl hid in the closet, but was dragged out by the hair. The police were drunk. These "men" (if one may call them such) beat up ten-year-old lads and even five-year-old children!

Partridge was twice arrested for making speeches which the judge himself admitted were peaceful. "I am sure," said Partridge, "that I would now be arrested if I were to recite the Lord's Prayer in public."

The Manchester Congress sent a delegation to Dublin. The bourgeoisie there again took up the weapon of nationalism (just like the bourgeois nationalists in Poland, or in the Ukraine, or among the Jews!) declaring that "Englishmen have no business on Irish soil!" But, *fortunately*, the nationalists have already lost their influence over the workers.*

Speeches delivered at the Manchester Congress were of a kind that had not been heard for a long time. A resolution was moved to transfer the whole Congress to Dublin, and to organise a general strike throughout Britain. Smillie, the Chairman of the Miners' Union, stated that the Dublin methods would compel all British workers to resort to revolution and that they would be able to learn the use of arms.

The masses of the British workers are slowly but surely taking a new path—they are abandoning the defence of the petty privileges of the labour aristocracy for their own great heroic struggle for a new system of society. And once on this path the British proletariat, with their energy and organisation, will bring socialism about more quickly and securely than anywhere else.

Severnaya Pravda No. 23,
August 29, 1913;
Nash Put No. 5, August 30, 1913

Collected Works, Vol. 19,
pp. 332-36

* The Irish nationalists are already expressing the fear that Larkin will organise an independent Irish workers' party, which will have to be reckoned with in the first Irish national parliament.

A WEEK AFTER THE DUBLIN MASSACRE

By Lenin

On Sunday, September 7 (August 25, O.S.), exactly a week after the police massacre, the Dublin workers organised a huge meeting to protest against the conduct of the Irish capitalists and the Irish police.

The meeting took place in the same street (O'Connell Street) and at the same spot where the meeting banned by the police was to have taken place the previous Sunday. It is a historic spot, a spot where it is most convenient to organise meetings and where they are most frequently held in Dublin.

The police kept out of sight. The streets were filled with workers. There were crowds of people, but complete order prevailed. "Last Sunday," exclaimed an Irish speaker, "the police truncheon reigned here without reason; today reason reigns without the police truncheon."

Britain *has* a constitution—and the authorities did not dare to bring their drunken policemen into action for the second time. Three platforms were put up and six speakers, including representatives of the English proletariat, condemned the crime perpetrated against the people, called upon the workers to display international solidarity, to wage a common struggle.

A resolution was unanimously adopted demanding freedom of assembly and association, and calling for an immediate investigation—under the direction of independent persons and with a guarantee of publicity for all the proceedings—of the conduct of the police the previous Sunday.

In London a magnificent meeting was held in Trafalgar Square. Groups of socialists and workers came with their

banners. There were many posters with cartoons and slogans on topical events. The crowd particularly applauded a poster depicting a policeman waving a red flag with the inscription "Silence!"

Outstanding speeches were made by Ben Tillett, who showed that the "Liberal" government of Britain is no better than a reactionary one, and Partridge, Dublin Secretary of the Engineers' Union, who described in detail the shameless acts of police violence in Dublin.

It is instructive to note that the principal slogan at the London and Dublin meetings was the demand for freedom of association. This is quite understandable. Britain *has* the foundations of political liberty, *has* a constitutional regime, generally speaking. The freedom of association demanded by the workers is one of the reforms absolutely necessary and quite achievable under the present constitutional regime (just as achievable as, say, the partial reform of workers' insurance in Russia).

Freedom of association is equally indispensable to the workers of Britain and of Russia. And the British workers quite rightly advance this slogan of a political reform essential to them, perfectly well aware of the path to be followed for its achievement and of its complete feasibility under the British Constitution (just as the Russian workers would be right in advancing the partial demand for amendments to the Insurance Act).

In Russia, however, precisely those general foundations of political liberty are absent *without which* the demand for freedom of association is simply ridiculous and is merely a current liberal phrase designed to deceive the people by suggesting that the path of reform is possible in our country. In Russia the fight for freedom of association—freedom most urgently needed by both the workers and the entire people—cannot be conducted *without* contrasting the impotent and false reformism of the liberals with the consistent democracy of the workers, who have no reformist illusions.

Severnaya Pravda No. 27,
September 3, 1913;
Nash Put No. 8, September 3, 1913

Collected Works, Vol. 19,
pp. 348-49

The Easter Rising

By Peter Haddon

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

(James Connolly in the *Irish Worker*)

Easter week 1916 stands as a landmark in the history of Ireland. The action of a few thousand men in taking to arms against the overwhelming military might of Britain, although at the time isolated and easily crushed, has had a stunning effect on subsequent developments.

Apart from Dublin, only a few areas, such as Galway, where 1000 men were led by Liam Mellows responded to the call to arms. Those who did fight faced inevitable and bloody defeat. From the British side, no quarter was given. Those areas occupied by the Insurgents were saturated by shell and rifle fire. In an orgy of bloodshed following the final surrender, 90 of the leaders were sentenced to be shot by secret courts martial. During the weeks following the rising 14 of these sentences were carried out, the last man executed being James Connolly, shot while strapped to a chair, unable to stand due to bullet wound in the ankle.

Those who signed the 1916 Declaration of Independence saw the rising as a continuation of the tradition of armed struggle

laid down by every past generation since the 1898 rebellion. To men like Pearse, MacDonagh and the old Fenian leader, Tom Clarke, it would be better to go down in blood than to allow a generation to go without one attempt to win freedom through armed revolt. Pearse, at his court martial, summed up his attitude: "... we seem to have lost, we have not lost. To refuse to fight would have been to lose, *to fight is to win!*"

But in 1916 the struggle for national independence had assumed an altogether different character from the days of '98 or from the mainly peasant revolts of the 19th century. A new force had appeared on the scene in Ireland, the Irish working class.

As Connolly constantly explained, only this class could carry on the traditions of the past, only they remained as the "incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom." Every other class was tied through countless bonds of corruption to the purse strings of English and foreign capital. 1916 reinforced this conclusion. Those who fought were drawn mainly from the ranks of the working class and the most heroic sections of the petty bourgeoisie.

It showed that only the working class, with other middle strata of society in support could, on the one hand fight for national freedom, and on the other fight for the economic freedom and working class internationalism which was the programme of Connolly and the Citizens Army.

However, both within Ireland, and in the international working class organisations, the rising attracted little support. To most social democratic leaders in Europe it was a non-event. Almost alone in the workers' movement Lenin stood out in defence of the rising. Those people who dismissed it as a mere putsch were castigated by Lenin. Today there are a number of so-called Marxists, with a policy which has nothing in common with any of the great teachers of Marxism, who justify their support for the provos' campaign by pointing to Lenin's position on 1916.

It is complete nonsense to attempt to compare the two struggles. Any Marxist would defend the Easter rebellion. But Lenin pointed to the negative side of the rising as well as the positive: "The misfortune of the Irish is that they have risen prematurely, when the European revolt of the proletariat has not yet matured."

Not only in a European context, the Rising was premature in the context of Ireland itself. In 1916 there was no upsurge of unrest among the mass of the Irish people. In particular among the working class there was no mood of revolt. The attitude of the slum dwellers of Dublin was one of open hostility to the rebellion.

Even after the surrender, while the defeated volunteers were being marched through South Dublin, they were greeted with jeers and pelted with rotten fruit and vegetables by the inhabitants of the slums in that area.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in preparing for the seizure of power in Russia in 1917, paid meticulous attention to the problem of insurrection. To Lenin, insurrection was an art, and could only be successfully attempted under certain conditions. Among these were a willingness to make sacrifices on the part of the working class, an inability on the part of the rulers to find a solution to the crisis in society, support for the working class from the petty bourgeoisie, and the existence of a revolutionary party.

These conditions were absent in Ireland in 1916. The time was not ripe for a mass revolt. From the insurgents, even from Connolly and the Citizen Army, there was no broad appeal to the Irish workers. No call was made for a general strike which could have served to paralyse the country, hinder the movement of troops and bring the working class to their feet.

Nevertheless, Lenin spoke out in defence of the rising. He did this because of the conditions which existed in Europe at that time. In 1912 the leaders of the Social Democratic parties in Europe had proclaimed their solidarity in opposition to all imperialist wars. In 1914 when the European carnage was begun these same leaders dropped all pretence of internationalism and joined in the chorus of support for the war.

In 1914 they had the resources to provoke a titanic struggle against the war, but they capitulated without a struggle. In Ireland, without the resources to permit any possibility of success, a group of people were

prepared to struggle against oppression and against the war. To Lenin, as to all Marxists, they stand as giants when compared to their critics.

More than any of the other leaders of 1916 Connolly was motivated by a burning hatred of the capitulators abroad who had betrayed their initial opposition to the war, and of those so-called leaders of the national movement, the Redmondites, who were leaning over backwards to ensure support for the British war effort in Ireland.

A GREAT TRADITION

To Connolly, a rising in Ireland would act as a clarion call to the workers on all sides at that time immersed in the muck and the blood of the trenches.

To achieve this Connolly was prepared to rise alone in February 1916. Distrustful of the volunteers, he threatened to take to the streets with only the tiny Citizens Army to back him. Even at Easter he had no illusions in the IRB and the Volunteers.

A week before the rising he had told his men "The odds against us are a thousand to one. But if we should win, hold on to your rifles because the volunteers may have a different goal. Remember, we are not only for political liberty but for economic liberty as well." He fought hoping that his sacrifice would arouse the international working class. His mistake was in not understanding, as did Lenin, that a mood of opposition to the war would inevitably grow and preparing for those more favourable conditions.

The Irish working class paid dear for the mistake, for through the death of Connolly they were deprived of a clear leadership during the struggles of the post war period. But Connolly and the participants in the Easter Rebellion have left behind them a tremendous tradition of struggle. Today the Labour Movement, North and South, needs to recapture that tradition in order that the voice of the working class may ring out invincible in the struggle for a Socialist United Ireland

CONNOLLY AND THE 1916 EASTER RISING

On 17th April 1916 the Irish Citizen Army, together with the Irish Volunteers, rose up in arms against the might of the British Empire to strike a blow for Irish freedom and for the setting up of an Irish Republic. Their blow for freedom was to reverberate round the world, and preceded the first Russian Revolution by almost a year.

The background to the rebellion was the centuries of national oppression suffered by the Irish people in the interests of British landlordism and capitalism. In this they had the support of the Irish landlords and capitalists, of the Catholic hierarchy, who were linked by ties of interest to the Imperialists, and joined with them in fear of the Irish workers and peasants.

It is impossible to understand the Easter Rising without understanding the ideas of its leader, James Connolly, who considered himself a Marxist and based himself on the ideas of Internationalism and the class struggle. Like Maclean in Britain, Lenin and Trotsky, Liebknecht and Luxemburg and other Internationalists, Connolly regarded with horror the betrayal by the leaders of the Labour Movement in all countries in supporting the Imperialist War. Dealing with the betrayal of the Second

International Connolly declared in his paper *The Workers Republic* "If these men must die, would it not be better to die in their own country fighting for freedom for their class, and for the abolition of war, than to go forth to strange countries and die slaughtering and slaughtered by their brothers that tyrants and profiteers might live?" Protesting against the support by the British T.U.C. of the war Connolly wrote "Time was when the unanimous voice of that Congress declared that the working class had no enemy except the capitalist class—that of its own country at the head of the list!"

CONNOLLY'S CLASS POSITION

Connolly stood for national freedom as a step towards the Irish Socialist Republic. But while the Stalinists and reformists today—50 years after 1916 still mumble in politically incoherent terms about the need for the "national revolution" "against Imperialism," Connolly was particularly clear about the *class question* that was at the basis of the Irish question. Without being in direct contact with Lenin and Trotsky he had a similar position. "The cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland, and

the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour" he wrote. "They cannot be dissevered. Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil." . . .

Connolly had no illusions in the capitalists of any country, least of all Ireland. On International capitalism he wrote "If, then, we see a small section of the possessing class prepared to launch into war, to shed oceans of blood and spend millions of treasure, in order to maintain intact a *small portion* of their privileges, how can we expect the entire propertied class to abstain from using the same weapons, and to submit peacefully when called upon to yield up forever all their privileges?"

And on the Irish capitalists, "Therefore the stronger I am in my affection for national tradition, literature, language, and sympathies, the more firmly rooted I am in my opposition to that capitalist class which in its soulless lust for power and gold would bray the nations as in a mortar." And again "We are out for Ireland for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord; not the sweating, profit grinding capitalist; not the sleek

"NOT THE RACK-RENTING LANDLORDS; NOT THE PROFIT GRINDING CAPITALIST... BUT THE IRISH WORKING CLASS"

and oily lawyer; not the prostitute pressman—the hired liars of the enemy. Not these are the Irish upon whom the future depends. Not these, but the Irish working class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared."

Writing on the need for an Irish insurrection to expel British Imperialism he wrote in relation to the World War "Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last War lord."

As an answer to the demand for conscription which had been imposed in Britain and which was supported by the Irish capitalists for Ireland too, where the employers were exerting pressure to force Irish workers to volunteer Connolly wrote "We want and must have economic conscription in Ireland for Ireland. Not the conscription of men by hunger to compel them to fight for the power that denies them the right to govern their own country, but the conscription by an Irish nation of all the resources of the nation—its land, its railways, its canals, its workshops, its docks, its mines, its mountains, its rivers and streams, its factories and machinery, its horses, its cattle, and its men and women, all co-operating together under one common direction that Ireland may live and bear upon her fruitful bosom the greatest number of the freest people she has ever known."

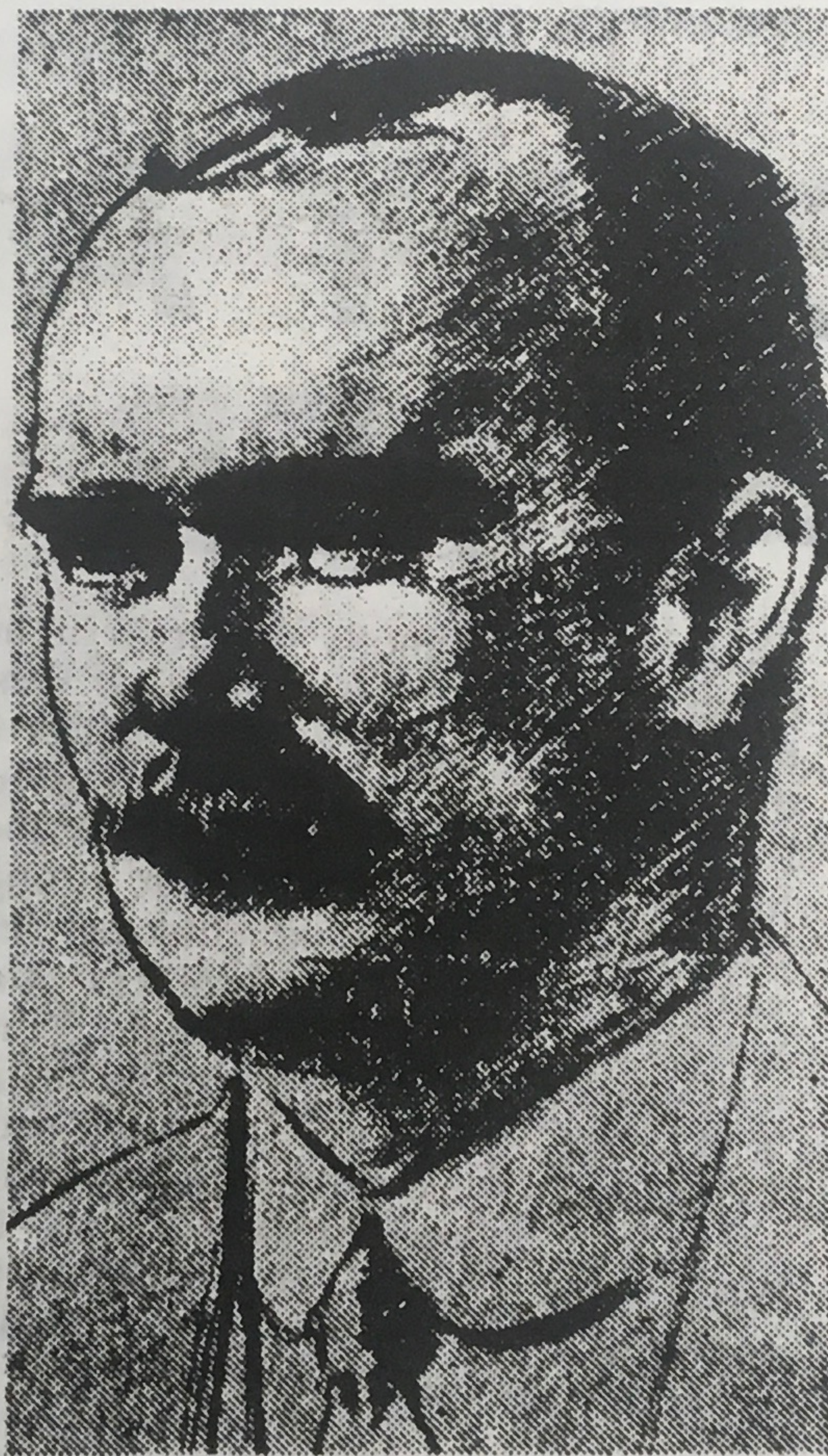
BY TED GRANT

He looked at the employers who were opposing conscription too from a critical class point of view "If here and there we find an occasional employer who fought us in 1913 (The Great Dublin lock-out in which the employers tried to break union organisation, but were defeated in this object by the solidarity of the Irish workers and their British comrades too) agreeing with our national policy in 1915 it is not because he has become converted, or is ashamed of the unjust use of his powers, but simply that he does not see in economic conscription the profit he fancied he saw in denying to his followers the right to organise in their own way in 1913."

Answering objections to the firm working class point of view which he expounded he declared "Do we find fault with the employer for following his own interests? We do not. But neither are we under any illusion as to his motives. In the same manner we take our stand with our own class, nakedly upon our class interests, but believing that these interests are the highest interests of the race."

It is in this light that the uprising of 1916 must be viewed. As a consequence of the struggles of the past Connolly who was the General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union had organised the Citizen Army for the purpose of defence against capitalist and police attack and for preparing for struggle against British Imperialism. The Citizen Army was almost purely working class in composition; dockers, transport workers, building workers, printers and other sections of the Dublin workers being its rank and file.

It was with this force and in alliance with the more middle class Irish volunteers that Connolly prepared for the uprising. He had no illusions about its immediate success. According to William O'Brien, on the day of the insurrection Connolly said to him "We are going out to be slaughtered." He said "Is there no chance of success?" and Connolly replied "None whatsoever." . . .



James Connolly; Irish and International Labour martyr; executed by the British 1916

Connolly understood that the tradition and the example created would be immortal and would lay the basis for future freedom and a future Irish Socialist Republic. In that lay his greatness. What a difference from the craven traitors of the German Socialist and

Communist and Trade Union leaders who despite having three million armed workers supporting them, and with the sympathy and support of the overwhelming majority of the German working class (ready to fight and to die, capitulated to Hitler without firing a shot.

Having said this it is necessary to see not only the greatness of Connolly, sprung from the Irish workers, one of the greatest sons of the English speaking working class, and the effect of the uprising in preparing for the expulsion, at least in the Southern part of Ireland of the direct domination of British Imperialism, but also the faults of both.

There was no attempt to call a general strike and thus paralyse the British Army. There was no real organisation or preparation of the armed struggle. No propaganda was conducted among the British troops to gain their sympathy and support. The leaders of the middle class Irish Volunteers were split. One of the leaders Eoin MacNeill countermanding orders for "mobilisation" and for "manoeuvres" and in the confusion only part of the Volunteers, joined with the Irish Citizen Army in the insurrection. Thus at the last minute the insurrection was betrayed by the vacillation of the middle class leaders, as they have betrayed many times in Irish history and in the history of other countries.

INDISSOLUBLE UNITY OF IRISH AND BRITISH WORKERS

The British occupying troops suppressed the insurrection and then savagely executed its leaders, including the leader of the insurrection James Connolly, who was already badly wounded.

Connolly was murdered, but in the last analysis, British Imperialism really suffered defeat.

Nowadays all sections of Irish society in the 26 countries hypocritically give support to the "brave and undying heroism of Connolly." The Irish capitalists pretend to honour him. Connolly would have spit contemptuously in their faces. He fought them, ever since he attained manhood, in the interests of the Irish workers and of International Socialism. But his most withering contempt would have been reserved for those in the Labour Movement, including the leaders of the Irish Labour Party and of the so-called Communist Parties, and of the various sects claiming to speak in the name of Irish Labour, who fifty years after Easter 1916, have not understood that unity of the Irish workers North and South can only be obtained by conducting the struggle on a class basis for an Irish Socialist Republic, in indissoluble unity with the British workers in their struggle for a British democratic Socialist Republic.

Union leaders
with the

CONNOLLY AND THE

This year's Easter celebrations will once again bring to life in Ireland the memories of the Easter Rebellion of 56 years ago. For those people who in Ireland, north and south, today continue the struggle begun by the Easter insurgents, the real lessons of 1916, not those drawn from the potted 'official' histories of the southern state, are of fundamental importance.

In numerical terms, the rebellion was small. The initial march into O'Connell St was only just over 1,000 strong. In general, the country outside Dublin remained quiet during the week of fighting. The capture of Ashebourne by Tom Ashe's men, the Wexford rising and the taking of Enniscorthy, the mobilisation of 1,000 volunteers led by Liam Mellows in Galway, these were the only significant exceptions to the overall calm.

With such small forces, the rising faced inevitable defeat. Every one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence understood this. Connolly's words to William O'Brien, spoken on the morning of the insurrection, show how aware he was of his fate: "We are going out to be slaughtered." Asked by O'Brien, "Is there no chance of success?" Connolly replied, "None whatever."

NEW CHAPTER OF HISTORY

Yet 1916 is something far more than a brief and bitter confrontation between a handful of 'patriots' and the armed might of England. Pearse and Connolly for their part in the rising, stand directly in line with the traditions of revolt laid by the United Irishmen and subsequently built upon by every generation. The volunteers of Easter week and the tiny Citizen Army in 1916 wrote a new chapter in Irish history, turning the page from where the vanquished of previous generations, Robert Emmet, the Young Irelanders, the Fenians and others had left off.

Only a few may have marched on Easter Monday. Yet the actions of these few was enough to kindle the flame of revolt among the mass of the Irish people. In this respect, the heroism and gallantry of those who fought, gallantry which was even praised by the British Officers sent to put the rising down, singles them out as the outstanding figures of their generation.

In particular, the young insurgents of 1916 stood head and shoulders above the rotten leaderships of the Social Democratic parties throughout the world; the people who, in the interest of their particular national capitalists, applauded the sending of their supporters to become cannon-fodder in the trenches of Europe.

These people, the so-called socialist leaders of the world, who at the Basle Congress of 1912 had promised opposition to any imperialist war, but who, in the event, sprang to the 'Defence of the fatherland', pale in comparison with Connolly and his comrades, who were prepared to take up arms against "the war of nation against nation in the interest of royal freebooters and cosmopolitan thieves."

It was in order to offset the rising tide of support for the war, in particular the threat of conscription in Ireland, that motivated Connolly to make this stand. Before the rising, impatient with the leaders of the volunteers, he was even prepared to go it alone with the small force of the Citizen Army, not because there was any possibility of success, but only because such bold action, he believed, could "set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last capitalist bond and debenture is shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

The battles now being waged in the streets of Northern Ireland, the reawakening of the nationalist consciousness of the people of the south, all this is a continuation of the struggle of 1916. After the the Easter Rising, General Maxwell ordered that graves big enough for 100 bodies should be dug for those he intended to execute. General Maxwell has his modern counterpart in General Ford, the man who sent the paratroopers into the Bogside on Bloody Sunday.

The million people who came out on strike in revulsion against the latter atrocity, stand directly in line with those who demonstrated for the release of the prisoners after 1916. The fight for, in Connolly's words, 'The reconquest of Ireland', for an end to military tyranny; for an end to the tyranny of the exploitation of the Irish working class at the hands of foreign capitalists and financiers and their Irish counterparts, has not ended.

MARXIST

For this reason, the real lessons of 1916 must be taken to heart. In particular, the lessons of Connolly,

in whose tradition every leader of the Catholic population in the North claims to stand. The motives which drive the residents of the Catholic areas towards IRA, given the methods of the army, are understandable. But a cursory comparison of the leaders of both sections of the IRA, as well as the Green Tories who claim to head the national movement, is enough to show the depths of the chasm which separates them from both the ideas and the methods of Connolly.

Connolly was not an individual terrorist. He did not organise the planting of bombs, the assassination of soldiers, politicians or whatever. Had he wanted to do so, he had every opportunity in the period between the 1913 lockout and rising when he had to back him an armed and trained force, the Citizen army.

As a Marxist, Connolly put his faith in the ability of his class to change society, not a handful of individuals to do it for them. Those people who justify individual terrorism by looking to the traditions set by 1916, have not understood the first thing about that rising.

PROTESTANT WORKERS

Although it is true that only a few thousand participated in the rising, it is also true that none of its leaders saw any possibility of victory. The rising had a different purpose. It was an appeal to the people of Ireland and the working class of the world to rise against the bloody slaughter being perpetrated in Europe. Every bullet fired in 1916 was intended as an inspiration to others. Not so with the bullets and bombs of today. The individual terrorist does not turn outwards to the masses. Instead he reduces the struggle to a 'duel in the dark' between his own secretive organisation and the British Army.

A guerrilla campaign in NI is particularly self-destructive, in that it worsens sectarianism and thereby weakens the position of the Catholics themselves. The Provisional IRA together with the other Catholic leaders, have not the beginnings of an idea of how to appeal to the Protestant workers. All that they can think of to overcome sectarianism in their Dail Uladh, is that the Protestants "could be adequately satisfied if they formed a large part, possibly a majority, in a truly Ulster regional parliament." For the Catholics in

1916 UPRISING

such a set-up, "they would take comfort in their newly-found strength." (*Republican News, Sept 11*)

What an abyss lies between this and the position of Connolly! In his "Socialism and the Orange Worker", Connolly attacks the northern socialist for not having seriously taken up the question of organising among the Protestants. This would not have been carried out by stressing the comparative strength of their religion in any new set-up, but by pointing to their position as workers and their day-to-day struggle against exploitation, misery and want.

ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

Connolly's appeal to Protestants was never merely an exposure of the Orange leaders, but was this coupled with a withering attack on all shades of bigotry in the ranks of the Catholics.

This Easter, the AOH, in the name of Connolly amongst others, will celebrate the rising. Quietly forgotten is Connolly's own description of this organisation. Once described as "more Catholic than the Pope", the AOH was referred to by Connolly as "the foulest brood that ever came into Ireland." He went on, "were it not for the Board of Erin (AOH), the Orange society would long have ceased to exist. To brother Devlin (Grand Master AOH) and not brother Carson, is mainly due the progress of the of the covenanting movement."

What would Connolly have said about the miserable squeakings of 'An Phoblacht' on the question of the TUs, when they call for the breaking of all links with foreign

unions and for the conducting of branch business in Gaelic, is unimaginable. Suffice to say that in his "Yellow unions in Ireland", he describes how such unions, when established, have been "the first to betray the cause of Labour."

ERIN'S HOPE

The Citizen Army was built and prepared for 1916, not on the basis of a hand-in-glove relationship with the Green Tories with whom they would share the barricades, but on the basis of a struggle against such people. Connolly would literally turn in his grave to think that people who claim to be his followers today, engage in parleys and behind-the-scene deals with the Tories of Fianna Fail.

Never would he have accepted money from a capitalist government on the provision that he would disengage from struggle against that government. Nor would he have rubbed shoulders on Civil Rights platforms with Green Tories and bigots, without at the same time openly and mercilessly criticising them.

The words written by Connolly in "Erins Hope", are like a beacon lighting up the mistakes of both sections of the IRA in this respect. "No revolution can safely invite the co-operation of men or classes whose ideals are not theirs and whom, therefore, they may be compelled to fight at some future critical stage of the journey to freedom." These are exactly the same sentiments as he echoed on the very eve of the rising, when he instructed his men, in the event of victory, to hold onto their guns "because the volunteers may have a different goal."

INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE

1916 holds many important lessons for today. But the most fundamental of all arises from the fact that in the main, the participants in the rising were drawn from the ranks of the working class. This is the proof of the correctness of Connolly's famous phrase, "Only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland." Every other class is bound hand and foot to the purse-strings of English capital. For this reason only the working class can solve the national problem in Ireland. There can only be a free united Ireland if that freedom, that unity, is founded on the basis of a fight against the stranglehold of Rent, Interest and Profit; the tyranny of landlordism and capitalism and for a socialist united Ireland.

The failing of the Easter rising was that it was premature. The Irish rose too early, before the same seeds of revolt were sown among the workers of Europe. At the same time, no preparations were made to organise a general strike and to appeal to the soldiers in the British Army, many of whom were Irish in any case.

Nevertheless, those who fought in 1916 set an example for the working-class movement internationally to follow. Even in the present situation in NI, were the Labour leaders to breathe in even one breath of the spirit of 1916 and couple this with a correct application of the ideas of Connolly and of Marxism, a way forward could be provided.

By PETER HADDEN
(Belfast YS)

Sir Roger Casement, formerly a prominent official in the British colonial service, but by conviction a revolutionary Irish nationalist who acted as intermediary between Germany and the rising in Ireland has been sentenced to death. "I prefer to be standing in the dock to being in the prosecutor's place," he cried before the sentence was passed on him, with its statement, in accordance with the time-honored pious formula, that Casement was to be "hanged by the neck until dead," after which God was invited to have mercy on his soul.

Will the sentence be carried out? This question must be giving Asquith and Lloyd George some anxious hours. To execute Casement would mean making more difficult the situation of the opportunist, purely parliamentary Irish Nationalist Party led by Redmond, which is ready to sign in the blood of the Dublin rebels a new compromise with the government of the United Kingdom. Reprieving Casement, however, after so many executions have already taken place, would mean openly "showing indulgence to a highly placed traitor." British social-imperialists of the Hyndman type are strumming their demagogic tunes on this string, with real hooligan blood-lust. But however Casement's personal fate may be settled, the sentence passed on him marks the close of this dramatic episode of the rising in Ireland.

So far as the purely military operations of the rebels were concerned, the government, as we know, proved to be rather easily the master of the situation. A nationwide movement, such as the nationalist dreamers had conceived of, completely failed to occur. The Irish countryside did not rise. The Irish bourgeoisie, together with the upper, more influential stratum of the Irish intelligentsia, held aloof. Those who fought and died were urban workers, along with some revolutionary enthusiasts from the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.

The historical basis for a national revolution has disappeared even in backward Ireland. Insofar as the Irish movements in the last century were popular in character, they always drew their strength from the social antagonism between the rightless and starving pauper-farmers and their all-powerful British landlords. But whereas for the landlords Ireland was merely an object of exploitation by agrarian plundering, for British imperialism it was a necessary guarantee of domination of the seas. In a pamphlet written on the eve of the war, Casement, speculating on arousing Germany's interest,³⁶ showed that an independent Ireland would mean "freedom of the seas" and a mortal blow to Britain's naval supremacy. This is true, inasmuch as an "independent" Ireland could exist only as an advance post of some imperialist state hostile to Britain, and as its naval base against British command of the seaways.

It was Gladstone who first set the military and imperial interests of Britain quite clearly higher than the interests of the Anglo-Irish landlords, and inaugurated a broad scheme of agrarian legislation whereby

state, to the farmers of Ireland — with, of course, generous compensation to the landlords. Anyhow, after the land reforms of 1881-1903 the farmers were transformed into conservative petty proprietors, whose attention the green flag of national independence could no longer distract from their small holdings. The surplus of Ireland's educated population flowed away in their masses to the cities of Britain, as lawyers, journalists, shop assistants, and so on, and in this they were, in the main, lost to the "national cause." The independent Irish bourgeoisie of trade and industry, to the extent that such a class was formed in the last few decades, at once took up a fighting stance toward the young Irish proletariat, and thereby removed itself from the national-revolutionary camp into that of imperial possibilism and Irish "conciliation."

The young working class of Ireland, formed as it was in an atmosphere saturated with heroic memories of national rebellion, and coming into conflict with the egoistically narrow and imperially arrogant trade unionism of Britain, has naturally wavered between nationalism and syndicalism, and is always ready to link these two conceptions together in its revolutionary consciousness. It has attracted to itself some young intellectuals and certain nationalist enthusiasts, who, in their turn have brought about the ascendancy of the green flag over the red in the labor movement. Thus, the "national revolution," in Ireland too, has amounted in practice to a workers' revolt and Casement's markedly isolated position in the movement merely gives sharper emphasis to this fact.

In a wretched, shameful article Plekhanov wrote recently of the "harmfulness" of the Irish rising to the cause of freedom and rejoiced that the Irish people had "to their honor," understood this and had not supported the revolutionary madmen. Only given complete patriotic softening of the brain can one imagine that the Irish peasants declined to take part in the revolution out of regard for the international situation and thereby saved the "honor" of Ireland. Actually, they were guided merely by the blind egoism typical of farmers and their utter indifference to everything that happens beyond the bounds of their bits of land. For this reason and this alone they made possible the swift victory of the London government over the heroic defenders of the Dublin barricades.

The experiment of an Irish national rebellion, in which Casement represented, with undoubted personal courage, the outworn hopes and methods of the past, is over and done with. But the historical role of the Irish proletariat is only beginning. Already it has brought its class anger against militarism and imperialism into this rising, under an out-of-date flag. This anger will not now subside. On the contrary, it will find echoes all over Britain. Scottish soldiers smashed down the barricades of Dublin. But in Scotland itself the miners have rallied round the red flag raised by MacLean and his comrades.

The hangman's work done by Lloyd George will be sternly avenged by those very workers whom the Hendersons are now trying to chain to the bloody war chariot of imperialism. □

The Irish Rebellion of 1916

by V.I. Lenin

The views of the opponents of self-determination lead to the conclusion that the vitality of small nations oppressed by imperialism has already been sapped, that they cannot play any role against imperialism, that support of their purely national aspirations will lead to nothing, etc. The imperialist war of 1914-16 has provided *facts* which refute such conclusions.

The war proved to be an epoch of crisis for the West-European nations, and for imperialism as a whole. Every crisis discards the conventionalities, tears away the outer wrappings, sweeps away the obsolete and reveals the underlying springs and forces. What has it revealed from the standpoint of the movement of oppressed nations? In the colonies there have been a number of attempts at rebellion, which the oppressor nations, naturally did all they could to hide by means of a military censorship. Nevertheless, it is known that in Singapore the British brutally suppressed a mutiny among their Indian troops; that there were attempts at rebellion in French Annam, (see *Nashe Slovo*) and in the German Cameroons (see the Junius pamphlet); that in Europe, on the one hand, there was a rebellion in Ireland, which the "freedom-loving" English, who did not dare to extend conscription to Ireland, suppressed by executions, and, on the other, the Austrian Government passed the death sentence on the deputies of the Czech Diet "for treason", and shot whole Czech regiments for the same "crime".⁴⁰

This list is, of course, far from complete. Nevertheless, it proves that, owing to the crisis of imperialism, the flames of national revolt have flared up *both* in the colonies and in Europe, and that national sympathies and antipathies have manifested themselves in spite of the Draconian threats and measures of repression. All this before the crisis of imperialism hit its peak; the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie was yet to be undermined (this may be brought about by a war of "attrition" but has not yet happened) and the proletarian movements in the imperialist countries were still very feeble. What will happen when the war has caused complete exhaustion, or when, in one state at least, the power of the bourgeoisie has been shaken under the blows of proletarian struggle, as that of tsarism in 1905?

On May 9, 1916, there appeared in *Berner Tagwacht*, the organ of the Zimmerwald group, including some of the Leftists, an article on the Irish rebellion entitled "Their Song Is Over" and signed with the initials K. R.⁴¹ It described the Irish rebellion as being nothing more nor less than a "putsch", for, as the author argued, "the Irish question was an agrarian one," the peasants had been pacified by reforms, and the

nationalist movement remained only a "purely urban, petty-bourgeois movement," which, notwithstanding the sensation it caused, had not much social backing".

It is not surprising that this monstrously doctrinaire and pedantic assessment coincided with that of a Russian national-liberal Cadet, Mr. A. Kulisher (*Rech* No. 102, April 15, 1916), who also labelled the rebellion "the Dublin putsch".

It is to be hoped that, in accordance with the adage, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good", many comrades, who were not aware of the morass they were sinking into by repudiating "self-determination" and by treating the national movements of small nations with disdain, will have their eyes opened by the "accidental" coincidence of opinion held by a Social-Democrat and a representative of the imperialist bourgeoisie!!

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

To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc. — to imagine all this is to *repudiate social revolution*. So one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could villify the Irish rebellion by calling it a "putsch".

Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which *all* the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these

there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But *objectively*, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot* be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it — without such participation, mass struggle is *impossible*, without it no revolution is possible — and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for different reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately “purge” itself of petty-bourgeois slag.

Social-Democracy, we read in the Polish theses (I, 4), “must utilise the struggle of the young colonial bourgeoisie against European imperialism *in order to sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe*”. (Authors’ italics.)⁴²

Is it not clear that it is least of all permissible to contrast Europe to the colonies in *this* respect? The struggle of the oppressed nations in Europe, a struggle capable of going all the way to insurrection and street fighting, capable of breaking down the iron discipline of the army and martial law, will “sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe” to an infinitely greater degree than a much more developed rebellion in a remote colony. A blow delivered against the power of the English imperialist bourgeoisie by a rebellion in Ireland is a hundred times more significant politically than a blow of equal force delivered in Asia or in Africa. . . . The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene.

The general staffs in the current war are doing their utmost to utilise any national and revolutionary movement in the enemy camp: the Germans utilise the Irish rebellion, the French — the Czech movement, etc. They are acting quite correctly from their own point of view. A serious war would not be treated seriously if advantage were not taken of the

enemy's slightest weakness and if every opportunity that presented itself were not seized upon, the more so since it is impossible to know beforehand at what moment, where, and with what force some powder magazine will “explode”. We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis. If we were, on the one hand, to repeat in a thousand keys the declaration that we are “opposed” to all national oppression and, on the other, to describe the heroic revolt of the most mobile and enlightened section of certain classes in an oppressed nation against its oppressors as a “putsch”, we should be sinking to the same level of stupidity as the Kautskyites.

It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had *had time* to mature. Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats. On the other hand, the very fact that revolts do break out at different times, in different places, and are of different kinds, guarantees wide scope and depth to the general movement; but it is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful, revolutionary movements that the masses gain experiences, acquire knowledge, gather strength, and get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught, just as certain strikes, demonstrations, local and national, mutinies in the army, outbreaks among the peasantry, etc., prepared the way for the general onslaught in 1905.

Some questions for discussion

- 1) Haven't the workers in Ireland always been divided by religion?
- 2) If Ireland was an important colony, why did the Liberal Government of the day propose 'home rule' for Ireland in 1913?
- 3) Why did Carson, supported by sections of the British ruling class, organise the 'Carragh Mutiny' against home rule, in 1914?
- 4) Why didn't many workers support the Easter Rising in 1916?
- 5) Why did Connolly organise the rising with inadequate support for victory?
- 6) Didn't the 1916 proclamation show that Connolly accepted that the national liberation struggle came before the struggle for socialism?
- 7) Didn't the landslide victory for Sinn Fein in the 1918 elections show that the first struggle was for independence?

Handwritten scribbles and numbers in the bottom right corner, including the number '52' and some illegible characters.

Title: Marxist Study Guide: James Connolly and the
Easter Rising

Organisation: Militant

Date: 1987

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.
Visit www.leftarchive.ie

The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.