

“THEY FORGET I AM AN IRISHMAN”: JAMES CONNOLLY, SOCIALIST  
INTERNATIONALISM, AND IRISH NATIONALISM, 1896-1916

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Wilkes Honors College  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences  
with a Concentration in History

Wilkes Honors College of  
Florida Atlantic University  
Jupiter, Florida

May 2008

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate’s thesis advisor, Dr. Christopher Ely, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks first and foremost to my parents, Louise Goldberg and Richard Foss, for their material and emotional support throughout my undergraduate career, and also, perhaps in anticipation of the Honors College, for raising me to be a free thinker. Thanks to all the Broward public school teachers who helped me get this far in academia, and thanks to all the professors who have inspired me to believe I can go further. Thanks to my friends who filled these four years with lots and lots of jokes. And last but not least, thanks to my beautiful Jeanette, who has sustained me emotionally, challenged me intellectually, and always listened to my crazy ideas.

## ABSTRACT

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Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Concentration: History  
Year: 2008

Early twentieth-century Ireland was the setting of a complex political situation dominated by overlapping social, ideological, and ethnic conflicts. A group of working-class nationalists led by James Connolly attempted to fuse the class and national struggles, incorporating elements of nationalist cosmology, Marxist teleology, syndicalist trade-union practice, and the cultural militarization of Ireland’s “physical-force” tradition. This thesis critically examines their hybrid theory and revolutionary praxis. With its analysis of the failure to realize an independent, socialist Ireland, it contributes to broader discussions of the relationship between nationalism and socialism, and the ability of these theories to address cultural heterogeneity.

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For Mr. Pietrzak, who taught me how subversive a good historian can be

## Introduction

Ireland at the dawn of the twentieth century was the setting for struggles which, while fascinating in their own right, are even more deserving of study because many of them were in essence previews of some of the most important conflicts in shaping the rest of that century and laying the groundwork for this century. The conflict in Ireland between cultural liberalism, Marxist collectivism, and a culturally radical nationalism is one such conflict. The struggle for liberation from colonialism, out of which Ireland and countless other nations of the twentieth century have been born, is another. And ethnic conflict, that deadly result of the politicization of identity and the militarization of politics, has reared its head in some of the most brutal episodes of the twentieth century – the century of genocide. In early twentieth-century Ireland these conflicts were tangled up together, resulting in a political situation virtually opaque in its complexity.

Various movements tried to navigate through the murky waters of Irish politics, with various expectations of the rewards a successful journey would yield. A constitutional nationalist movement engaged Britain's parliament for Home Rule, dominion status for Ireland within the British Empire. A radical nationalist movement dismissed Britain's parliament and her empire and turned instead to an ascetic cultural politics of idealized violence. In addition to these two traditions there was another movement trying to shape Ireland's future in both related and distinct ways: a socialist labor movement. It sought to break the connection with the empire *without* alienating Britain's progressive workers, to make a case for Irish independence without being bogged down by the inescapable sectarianism of Irish nationalist politics which so

divided Protestant loyalist North from Catholic nationalist South, and to find some foundation upon which to rally the workers of this mangled, depressed, and divided island.

This is how we arrive at James Connolly, one of the most influential Irish labor leaders from the 1890s to the 1910s. This thesis is primarily concerned with his ideas and actions. While top-down histories are never fully satisfactory, especially with a topic like labor radicalization to which rank-and-file action was central, there are numerous reasons why studying Connolly can help penetrate the confusion obscuring early twentieth-century Ireland so that we can better understand its significance to contemporary history. First, Connolly straddled the gap between the socialist labor and radical nationalist (known as “separatist”) movements. A socialist trade union leader sympathetic to Irish nationalism, he attained a personal power within the institutions of the Irish labor movement that allowed him exceptional freedom to steer its policies. Second, a self-educated man, Connolly was an extremely accomplished intellectual. His attempts to construct a coherent theory rationalizing his devotion to both the working class and the Irish nation – which were flawed and will therefore be criticized relentlessly in the following pages – were nonetheless insightful and groundbreaking, anticipating developments in later theories of Third World nationalism. Third, Connolly was a prolific writer, contributing to many left-wing and nationalist journals as well as editing several of his own. For each of his actions, it seems, there was an article justifying it, rationalizing it, revealing the theory on which his praxis was based.

In 1916, Connolly was executed after he and a handful of his followers took part in a nationalist rebellion. My purpose is to ascertain how this alliance between labor and

nationalism came to be, and to judge whether it was an alliance of Machiavellian pragmatism or one based on deeper ideological affinities. This study traces the theme of nationalism in James Connolly's writings, superimposing this intellectual history onto a narrative of the Irish labor movement and the major historical events by which it was affected. The reason for this study is not simply to contribute my own judgments of Connolly onto an already rich literature, but rather, by way of critically engaging his theory, to demonstrate this case study's relevance in terms of understanding the deeper relationships between socialism and nationalism, relationships which would be so central to the history of the twentieth century.

## Chapter I

### Partisan Histories of Ireland

On Easter Monday, 24 April, 1916, a week-long insurrection against British rule in Ireland was launched. In Dublin, the only major theater of the Easter Rising, the two commandants of rebel forces were Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. Pearse was a radical nationalist and Connolly a trade-union socialist; the former was a high-ranking officer in the Irish Volunteers, a nationalist militia, and the latter was commander of the Irish Citizen Army, the military wing of a radical trade union. The two men suffered identical fates – capture and execution by the British authorities after the uprising’s suppression – but they had arrived at different historical justifications for their sacrifice. Pearse saw himself carrying on a long, indeed an “eternal” tradition of revolutionary separatism, often referred to as Republicanism; the tradition was actually crafted largely in the late nineteenth century, but its incorporation of all previous Irish rebels imbued it with an ahistorical permanence. Connolly’s approach to revolutionary action differed: he attempted to synthesize nationalist cosmology and Marxist teleology, and by combining the national struggle and the class struggle, to achieve an independent, socialist Ireland.

But before diving into ideology, we must first approach each actor’s ideological conditioning by way of a brief personal narrative. Patrick Pearse was a scholar, educator, and poet. He was born in Dublin in 1879, growing up in a middle-class family during a tumultuous period of rural depopulation, urban migration, and slum expansion. Despite regular exposure to poverty and social injustice during his youth, Pearse never developed clear views on social reform, instead blaming the misfortunes of the Irish on English

domination and abstract notions of Irish national degradation. As a teenager he attended a school run by the Irish Christian Brothers, an organization which politicized Catholicism and Gaelic culture, and he developed an interest in Irish language and Gaelic mythology. In his teens he joined the Gaelic League, an organization which promoted Irish-language and literary education, and in his early twenties he became the editor of its newspaper. In 1908, he founded St. Edna's School, where he taught his pupils the Irish language and mythologized Irish virtues. St. Edna's was an experiment in a politicized pedagogy of cultural nationalism, expressly serving as an alternative to what Pearse christened the "Murder Machine" of an English education system, one which would help construct and transmit the cosmology of a politicized Gaelic culture. Pearse, an unlikely warrior, originally practiced cultural militancy only as an academic, but through his work with the Gaelic League he became involved with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a secret revolutionary society dedicated to the overthrow of the British and the establishment of an Irish Republic. He was never married, and his repressed sexuality and aloofness from women, whom he idealized, suggests historian Sean Farrell Moran, led him to see a maternal Irish nation in need of violent, masculine protection.<sup>1</sup>

James Connolly's story is quite different. He was born in 1868 to working-class Irish parents in a slum suburb of Edinburgh, Scotland, where his father was involved with local trade unions. Connolly became a worker at the age of eleven; at fourteen he joined the Army, first seeing Ireland in the Queen's scarlet uniform. His term of service in the 1880s coincided with a period in which Irish nationalism was gaining ground: Charles Stewart Parnell's "militant" parliamentary campaign threatened to ruin any government

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<sup>1</sup> Sean Farrell Moran, "Patrick Pearse and the European Revolt Against Reason," Journal of the History of Ideas 50, no. 4 (1989), 630-636.

unwilling to sponsor Home Rule; a violent peasant campaign against rural landlords and police known as the Land War politicized the countryside; and scattered acts of terrorism against British officials by members of the Fenian Brotherhood, a militant nationalist organization turned underground after a failed uprising in 1867, kept up the flames of an Irish cultural militancy. What Connolly witnessed in Ireland gave substance to stories of a rebel Ireland he heard as a child from an old Fenian uncle. After the military, Connolly returned to Edinburgh where he married, rejoined the ranks of unskilled labor, and, with his older brother, became active in local labor unions. Connolly's experiences immersed him in two traditions – a strong sense of Irish identity and nationalism, and a commitment to class-justice and a sometimes dogmatic belief in scientific socialism – and he saw his task as a self-educated labor intellectual to weave together the sometimes frictional components of his cosmology into a consistent theory.<sup>2</sup>

Since nationalism was an important element of each ideology, we should begin with a discussion of the nation. Nationality is an abstract collective identity, transmitted more by historical narratives, cultural norms, and social and political institutions, than by lived individual experiences. Social theorists Patrick O'Mahony and Gerard Delanty explain in their groundbreaking book *Rethinking Irish History*: "National identity is reproduced in an unstable field situated between cultural discourses of common bonds and practices and political discourses of interests and rights."<sup>3</sup> This instability results from the imperfect integration of an irrational framework of traditionalism and a rational process of identifying values, interests, and rights. Nationalism, in order to resolve the

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<sup>2</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, (New York: International Publishers, 1961), 19-39.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick O'Mahony and Gerard Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity, and Ideology*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 3.

tension between these two elements, propped up the former in relation to the latter and thus “qualified the ideal of national freedom as the transcendental basis of all rights.”<sup>4</sup> An important instrument of the hegemonic impulses of nationality is the historical narrative, which, in the form of national history, gives nationality political authority by fixing it to the immemorial past, the primordial origins of culture. In his benchmark work *Imagined Communities*, anthropologist Benedict Anderson argues: “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ [...], the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past.”<sup>5</sup> Such general theory holds true in the case of Ireland, argues historian Christopher Farrington: “History and its interpretation were instrumental in constructing Irish nationalism.”<sup>6</sup> Disjointed pre-existing narratives were assimilated into a new national framework, reified into a national history. Nationalist historiography did not “emphasize a breadth of influences which set Irish experience within a wide framework,” an approach that academic honesty requires, insists historian Richard English.<sup>7</sup> Rather, it conveyed a “linear sense of national consciousness,” and depicted nationality as a force that had always existed in some incipient, immature, or muted form, and would continue to exist forever.<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, we begin our study of James Connolly, Patrick Pearse, and the movements they represented, by summarizing and analyzing each version of Irish history. Each man’s conceptualization of nationality was both informed by a certain reading of Irish history and in turn justified by that interpretation. Pearse, in various editorials,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Farrington, “Ulster Unionism and the Irish Historiography Debate,” *Irish Studies Review* 11 (2003): 252.

<sup>7</sup> Richard English, “Defining the Nation: Recent Historiography and Irish Nationalism,” *European Review of History* 2, no. 2 (1995), 200.

<sup>8</sup> English, 199.

pamphlets, and speeches, appealed to the great figures of Ireland's past, from the mythologically-remembered heroes of antiquity to immediate revolutionary predecessors of the late 1800s, posthumously recruiting them as Volunteers in the service of Ireland. Connolly also based many claims on his interpretation of history, which critiqued the dominant nationalist historical narrative by integrating cosmopolitan Marxist notions of progress. This theme is evident from his earliest publications in the 1890s, but was often peripheral to the main arguments; in his 1910 book *Labor in Irish History* he expounded upon these ideas to formulate a general theory of Irish history. Historiography thus opens a window upon ideology for both Connolly and Pearse.

Patrick Pearse approached Irish history like an orthodox nationalist historian: he constructed a cohesive narrative of an eternal Irish nation. Therefore, his history of Ireland begins in ancient times with Gaelic mythology. Pearse felt that Ireland's Gaelic heritage represented "one of the ancient indestructible things of the world [...] an idea which is older than any empire and will outlast every empire."<sup>9</sup> For Pearse, Gaelic culture represented an Ireland uncorrupted by an English-associated modernity, where honest tribal virtues were valued over bourgeois cunning. Indeed, Gaelic mythology was not treated by Pearse as allegory, but as historical fact. He wrote in his 1912 pedagogical essay "Murder Machine," for example: "It is not merely that the old Irish had a good education system; they had the best and noblest that has ever been known among men. There has never been any human institution more adequate to its purpose than that which, in pagan times, produced Cuchulainn and the Boy-Corps of Eamhain Macha."<sup>10</sup> In the myth to which Pearse was referring, the warrior Cuchulainn single-handedly fought off

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Pearse, "Theobald Wolf Tone Speech, June 22, 1913," in Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse; Political Writings and Speeches, ed. Patrick Browne (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts Ltd., 1922), 76.

<sup>10</sup> Pearse, "Murder Machine," pp. 24-25.

an invading army until he became exhausted, at which point the Boy-Corps took over, allowing Cuchulainn rest until they were all killed.<sup>11</sup> Historian Martin Williams points out three general themes of Irish mythology: “Fighting, which usually culminated in ultimate victory; Redemption, which may come through self sacrifice; and Heroism – the attribute of the solitary individual who must fulfill his destiny without help or sympathy from the rest of the world.”<sup>12</sup> In publicizing mythical history, Pearse was denouncing modernity and calling for a return to the lost utopian world of mythology. He wrote in 1912: “Modern speculation is often a mere groping where ancient men saw clearly. All the problems with which we strive [...] were long ago solved by our ancestors, only their solutions have been forgotten.”<sup>13</sup> Pearse and the separatists needed “some kind of decisive deliverance from modernity and from Great Britain, which represented modernity,”<sup>14</sup> and therefore their historical narrative was an indictment of modernity and, as Pearse wrote, an effort to “lead Ireland back to her sagas.”<sup>15</sup>

Establishing Ireland’s primordial national origin as a lost Gaelic utopia of liberty, community, and moral purity, robbed from the Irish over seven centuries of British imperialism, led to the conclusion that the restoration of a Gaelic utopia in the modern form of the nation required the defeat of British imperialism. Thus, the next element of Pearse’s history was the “eternal tradition,” the separatist belief that violent Anglo-Irish struggle was a permanent feature of Irish history and that nationalist militancy was the highest expression of Irish nationality – serving not only to regain the community’s

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Williams, “Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology in Ireland, 1878-1916,” The Historical Journal 26 (1983): 313.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, 315.

<sup>13</sup> Pearse, “Murder Machine,” 19.

<sup>14</sup> Sean Farrell Moran, “Patrick Pearse and the European Revolt Against Reason,” Journal of the History of Ideas 50 (1989): 625.

<sup>15</sup> Pearse, “Murder Machine,” 1912, in Collected Works, 41.

usurped sovereignty but to restore the very spirit binding the community together. The Irish, according to Pearse, “have been at age-long war with one of the most powerful empires that have ever been built upon the earth; and that empire will pass before we pass. We are older than England and we are stronger than England.”<sup>16</sup> This history posed a mission: insurrectionary separatism. Indeed, Pearse wrote in late 1915 that “Separatism, in fact, is the national position.”<sup>17</sup> This was a result of “the ancient unpurchaseable faith of Ireland, the ancient stubborn thing that forbids [...] any loyalty from Ireland to England, any union between us and them, any surrender of one jot or shred of our claim to freedom even in return for all the blessings of the British peace.”<sup>18</sup> According to this logic, it would be nothing short of an affront to Ireland’s eternal Gaelic spirit for the island’s inhabitants to evade their separatist duty by avoiding bloodshed or by seeking peace. Indeed, Pearse wrote, “There can be no peace between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between justice and oppression, between freedom and tyranny. Between them it is eternal war until the wrong is righted, until the true thing is established, until justice is accomplished, until freedom is won.”<sup>19</sup> Pearse’s cosmology demanded that the modern children of the ancient Gaels must strive, as historian Graham Walker put it, to “save Ireland from apostasy and to vindicate the *timeless doctrine* of separatist nationalism.”<sup>20</sup> The result was not only an exclusive cultural politics but a militarized cultural politics: “Until you have armed yourself and made yourself skillful in the use of your arms you have no right to a voice in any concern of the Irish Nation, no

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<sup>16</sup> Pearse, “Emmet and the Ireland of To-day,” 1914 Speech. In Political Writings and Speeches, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Pearse, “Ghosts,” p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> Pearse, “Emmet and the Ireland of To-day,” p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Pearse, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Graham Walker, “‘The Irish Dr. Goebbels’: Frank Gallagher and Irish Republican Propaganda,” Journal of Contemporary History 27 (1992): 149.

right to consider yourself a member of the Irish Nation or of any nation; no right to raise your head among any body of decent men. Arm!”<sup>21</sup>

Pearse’s history thus simplified the enormously complex centuries into seven hundred years of English outrages – into simple black and white, or, more appropriately, Irish Green and English Red. In doing so, he inevitably distorted the interests and objects of past actors. This is not uncommon of the nationalist historian who, writes Benedict Anderson, “not only claimed to speak on behalf of large numbers of anonymous dead people, but insisted, with poignant authority, that he could say what they ‘really’ meant and ‘really’ wanted, since they themselves ‘did not understand.’”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it did not stop Pearse, who in a 1914 essay wrote: “We believe that England has no business in this country at all. [...] Our forefathers believed this and fought for it: Hugh O’Donnell and Hugh O’Neill and Rory O’More and Owen Roe O’Neill: [Theobald Wolf] Tone and [Robert] Emmet and [Thomas] Davis and [John] Mitchell. What was true in their time is still true.”<sup>23</sup> In this passage, Pearse conjured distinct actors – insurrectionary seventeenth-century Gaelic chieftains, the enlightenment-inspired Irish Jacobins of the late eighteenth-century United Irishmen, and the Hegelian romantic nationalists of the nineteenth-century Young Irelanders and Fenians – claiming them as posthumously united behind an idea called Ireland and committed to its realization as a nation-state, separate and independent from an idea called England.

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<sup>21</sup> Pearse, “From a Hermitage,” *Irish Freedom*, December 1913, in Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse; Political Writings and Speeches, ed. Patrick Browne (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts Ltd., 1922), 197.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, 198.

<sup>23</sup> Pearse, “To the Boys of Ireland,” 1914, in Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse; Political Writings and Speeches, ed. Patrick Browne (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts Ltd., 1922), 112.

We will examine in greater detail Pearse's portrayal of one or two of these historical actors in order to better understand this historiography. The first is Theobald Wolf Tone, father of modern Irish Republicanism. Tone was a late eighteenth-century enlightenment republican and a leader of the United Irishmen, a revolutionary secret society. He admired the Jacobins and the example of Revolutionary France, which is where he sought refuge when the British authorities began to suppress the United Irishmen in the early 1790s. Tone returned to Ireland in 1798 to lead a general uprising with French support, but he was captured en route and later committed suicide while awaiting execution. A particularly telling way to demonstrate Pearse's attitude towards Tone is to begin with the way Pearse represented Tone's heroic last act, retold in a 1913 speech: "Three small ships enter Lough Swilly. The English follow them. Tone's vessel fights: Tone commands one of the guns. For six hours she stood alone against the whole English fleet. What a glorious six hours for Tone! A battered hulk, the vessel struck; Tone betrayed by a friend, was dragged to Dublin and condemned to a traitor's death."<sup>24</sup> Pearse's retelling of the story blended Cuchulainn and Christ – a lone, stoic hero fighting bravely against an entire army, betrayed by an Irish Judas and sentenced to death by a British Pilate, willing to die a sacrificial death in order to redeem his flock. Pearse thus created a composite hero around whom to rally his Catholic nation for war. Pearse also utilized Tone by making him the creator of the "eternal tradition," claiming that "he made articulate the dumb voices of the centuries, he gave Ireland a clear and precise and worthy concept of nationality."<sup>25</sup> Pearse's Tone had given "clear definition and plenary meaning to all that had been thought and taught before him by Irish-speaking and

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<sup>24</sup> Pearse, "Theobald Wolf Tone Speech," 1913. From Political Writings and Speeches, 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

English-speaking men; uttered half articulately by a Shane O'Neill in some defiance flung at the Englishry."<sup>26</sup> Theobald Wolf Tone was simply Patrick Pearse's idealized self-image. After the 1798 Uprising which claimed Tone's life, Irish society was destabilized enough for British Parliament to be able to incorporate Ireland's parliament through the 1801 Act of Union. Robert Emmet's violent 1803 uprising, therefore, was a necessary redemptive act. Pearse stated in a 1914 speech, "Emmet redeemed Ireland from acquiescence in the Union. His attempt was not a failure, but a triumph for that deathless thing we call Irish Nationality."<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Pearse, Irish history was a cycle of humiliation at the hands of the English and redemption by brave Irish martyrs. Tone was a Protestant who "grew to know and to love the real, the historic Irish people" – Catholics of Gaelic origin – enough to fight and die for them, and Emmet threw away his life in an abortive uprising to avenge Ireland's stolen national honor.<sup>28</sup> Both men displayed "a love and a service so excessive as to annihilate all thought of self, a recognition that one must give all, must be willing always to make the ultimate sacrifice," and therefore they were heroes in Pearse's history.<sup>29</sup>

Pearse's nationalist history diverges from James Connolly's Marx-informed history in numerous ways. The significance of Ireland's Gaelic heritage was one major point accentuating the ideological discrepancies that Connolly and Pearse brought to their representations of Irish history. Connolly looked at Ireland's Gaelic cultural heritage in terms of the perceived egalitarianism of its socio-economic system, whereas Pearse saw it in terms of heroism, fidelity, and honor – values associated with an idealized Gaelic tribal

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> Pearse, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> Pearse, "Murder Machine," 24-25.

culture. Therefore, the focus of *Labor in Irish History* is not the continuity of Irish struggles but an analysis of actual social conditions in Ireland and how they changed: the gradual replacement of the ancient Gaelic social system, first with Norman feudalism and then with English capitalism. According to Connolly, “the Gaelic culture of the Irish chieftainry was rudely broken off in the seventeenth century.”<sup>30</sup> This began with the defeat of the Confederation of Kilkenny, a Gaelic tribal alliance which rose to power in a 1641 uprising and governed Ireland for the better part of a decade; it was finalized by the ascendance of William of Orange in 1691. After the clan system’s disappearance, “the idea of common property was destined to recede into the background as an avowed principle of action, whilst the energies of the nation were engaged in a slow and painful process of assimilating the social system of the conqueror.”<sup>31</sup> The Gaelic clan system was significant to Connolly’s history because it (according to his interpretation) established the innate socialism of Gaelic tradition. Connolly’s “attempt to hitch modern socialism onto an early communism which was supposed to have flourished in ancient Ireland” is indicative of his own intellectual struggle between nationalist and socialist ideologies, and his desire to reclaim Ireland’s Gaelic tradition in service of his universal, justice-based ideology.<sup>32</sup> Achieving this would allow Connolly to demonize capitalism as being anti-Irish, as only becoming legitimate “upon the rupture with Gaelic tradition,” and accuse the Irish capitalist, “saturated with foreignism,” of “abandoning all the traditions of his race.”<sup>33</sup> With this, Connolly was doing nothing less than imagining an alternative nationality; the supposed innate socialism of Gaelic culture was to serve as the

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<sup>30</sup> James Connolly, *Labor in Irish History*, (1910), 1. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, 121.

<sup>33</sup> Connolly, 2.

historical grounding for his labor-centric conceptualization of national identity. In his interpretation, the dispossessed Irish working class and its modern socialist advocates were identified as the true heirs to Ireland's ancient Gaelic civilization: "only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland."<sup>34</sup>

As Connolly's biographer C. Desmond Greaves notes, Connolly's historiography "has been accused of romanticism because he made his starting point the fact that Anglo-Norman feudalism found and destroyed in Ireland the last surviving primitive communist society in western Europe."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, from a Marxian point of view, such criticism is well-founded. Progress in classical Marxism has nothing to do with the innate qualities of nations, because progress is universal. In *The German Ideology*, Marx briefly sketches the universal path of human development, from tribal ownership, to communal/State ownership, to feudalism or aristocratic ownership, and then up to industrial capitalism. The next step, Communism, was to be something new in the human experience, not something rediscovered. Rather than holding to the classical Marxist position, Connolly's understanding seems to have more in common with a key tenet of cultural nationalism, summarized by Martin Williams: "Progress depended on going backwards – back to the old ways."<sup>36</sup> Connolly first argued this in 1897, that

the sympathetic student of history, who believes in the possibility of a people by political intuition anticipating the lessons afterwards revealed to them in the sad school of experience, will not be indisposed to join with the ardent Irish patriot in his lavish expressions of admiration for the sagacity of his Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic organization of the Irish clan the more perfect organization of the free society of the future.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Connolly, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Greaves, 241.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, 314.

<sup>37</sup> Connolly, *Erin's Hope: The Ends and the Means*, 1897 edition. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

By the time he wrote *Labor in Irish History*, Connolly had updated his theory to keep from contradicting Marx. He clarified that the development of private property out of communal ownership “was inevitable in any case” and did not only occur because of Britain’s colonization.<sup>38</sup> Connolly’s qualification here is not entirely convincing; indeed, why argue for a primordial Irish socialism in the first place if it will simply be disregarded in favor of Marx? The tendentiousness of Connolly’s theory here reveals a problem fusing the two traditions out of which his thought came: the romantic nationalism of the Fenians and the cosmopolitan working-class internationalism of the Marxists.

Even if Connolly believed that he had settled any theoretical inconsistencies, in terms of the practical struggle for Irish independence, the implications of internationalism are ambiguous. As historian Horace Davis shows, even Marx and Engels themselves were at odds on the subject. Marx believed that an accelerated process of imperial expansion, consolidating atomized or backward markets into the larger and more efficient economies of Europe’s industrial powers, was more progressive than a system of large numbers of small nation-states, an idea upon which he “heaped scorn and ridicule” at the First International in 1866.<sup>39</sup> Marx came to support Irish independence eventually – not out of sympathy for small nations against larger nations, but because he saw the British bourgeoisie exploiting the Irish connection to alleviate their own class troubles and to stall social revolution.<sup>40</sup> Marx certainly had no sympathy for national mythologies and transcendental missions; his internationalism was based on his teleology, his own transcendental mission, that of socialism. Engels, on the other hand, believed that “Not

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<sup>38</sup> Connolly, *Labor in Irish History*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Horace Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Davis, 66.

only is the existence of nations a prerequisite for internationalism – it is a prerequisite for socialism, too.”<sup>41</sup> It was Engels’ line of thinking that Connolly accepted: he wrote in 1909 that “a Socialist movement must [...] draw its inspiration from the historical and actual conditions of the country in which it functions and not merely lose themselves in an abstract ‘internationalism’ (which has no relation to the real internationalism of the Socialist movement).”<sup>42</sup> Internationalism, he believed, was only possible within a framework of free, independent nations, linked not by relationships of subjugation or dependency, but by the universality of socialism.

Patrick Pearse was not the only one to force Irish historical figures through his own ideological filter. In *Labor in Irish History*, James Connolly conveyed his own representation of Theobald Wolf Tone and the United Irishmen, standing in stark contrast to Pearse’s. Tone’s United Irishmen, claimed Connolly, did not entangle their revolutionary message with a sense of innate cultural superiority: the group “understood that the Irish fight for liberty was but a part of the worldwide upward march of the human race, and hence it allied itself with the revolutionists of Great Britain as well as with those of France, and it said little about ancient glories, and much about modern misery.”<sup>43</sup> Connolly portrayed Tone as a populist, one who “built up his hopes upon a successful prosecution of a Class War, although those who pretend to imitate him to-day raise up their hands in holy horror at the mere mention of the phrase.”<sup>44</sup> In Connolly’s interpretation, Tone died in the service of a universal ideology, not in a sacrificial act of national redemption. The nation was undeniably important, but only as a step towards

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<sup>41</sup> Davis, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Connolly, “Sinn Fein, Socialism, and the Nation,” In *Irish Nation*, January 23, 1909. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>43</sup> Connolly, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Connolly, 21.

universal human liberation. There was nothing inherent to the Irish nation setting it against other nations, even the English nation; rather, it was the dominant ideologies of nation-states which set them against one another. Connolly felt that Tone's story confirmed that "War, religion, race, language, political reform, patriotism [...] all serve in the hands of the possessing class as counter-irritants, whose function it is to avert the catastrophe of social revolution by engendering heat in such parts of the body politic as are the farthest removed from the seat of economic enquiry."<sup>45</sup> Separatism, therefore, could not simply be a duty of nationality. It needed to be justified: by a corresponding social program which would relieve the Irish in *this* world rather than redeem them in some transcendental one, and by an understanding of the Irish struggle as a part of a universal one.

James Connolly believed that progress, ultimately, required Irish independence, but that not all movements aimed at Irish independence were necessarily progressive. In *Labor in Irish History*, Connolly relayed an episode from mid nineteenth-century Irish politics meant to vindicate this idea. The two main characters of the episode are Fergus O'Connor, an Irish politician who had been a member of the Repeal Association in the 1840s, and Daniel O'Connell, the leader of that organization. O'Connell, remembered as the heroic Great Emancipator due to his constitutional efforts in the 1830s to grant equal rights to Catholics, turned his efforts in the 1840s to repeal the Act of Union. Fergus O'Connor, after years spent working fervently for independence, began to doubt that separation from England was what the poor and discontent of Ireland really needed most. After serving some time as a Repealer in the House of Commons, writes Connolly,

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<sup>45</sup> Connolly, 4.

[O'Connor] arrived at the conclusion that the basis of the oppression of Ireland was economic, that labour in England was oppressed by the same class and by the operation of the same causes as had impoverished and ruined Ireland, and that the solution of the problem in both countries required the union of the democracies in one common battle against the oppressors.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, O'Connor came to champion not an Irish organization but one based in England: the Chartists. Daniel O'Connell's hostility to the progressive leanings of the working class alienated Fergus O'Connor, and, writes Connolly, "gave him to the Chartists as one of their most fearless and trusted leaders."<sup>47</sup>

Through the narrative put forth in *Labor in Irish History*, all the internal tensions and inconsistencies of Connolly's thought are betrayed. On the one hand, the book is a tireless indictment of the British Empire and the crime of Ireland's subjugation. On the other, it is equally critical of nationalists who abandon the quest for social justice. On the one hand, it tries to ground Irish socialism in an immemorial Gaelic past, and argues that Irish cultural nationalism lends itself to socialism. On the other, it celebrates figures like Tone and O'Connor who, according to the narrative, were either nationalists by way of a universal liberationist philosophy, or abandoned the national struggle in favor of a more progressive cause. Connolly's commentary on Irish history reveals this tension between nationalism as an instrument of anti-colonial struggle and nationalism as the vindication of some ultimate abstract ideal. The remainder of this thesis will deal with James Connolly's theory in the context of active struggle, both for Irish independence and for the advent of a socialist society. The internal tensions of his hybrid theory – a labor-centric nationalism which has come to be called Socialist Republicanism – would become more pronounced as events revealed theory's limitations.

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<sup>46</sup> Connolly, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Connolly, 36.

## Chapter II

### Belfast: The Test of Internationalism

Historian Richard English, discussing the hegemony of cultural nationalism in early twentieth-century Irish politics, notes: “Those who proposed alternative definitions of the authentic national community found themselves profoundly marginalized.”<sup>48</sup> This observation certainly applies to James Connolly’s identity project. Despite agricultural depression and urban migration, Ireland as a whole was still a rural, peasant country, more open to agrarian populism than Marxism. Urban Ireland would be the proving ground for Connolly’s updated definition of nationality; the cities would need to accept Socialist Republicanism in order for it to be a potent force towards the liberation of both the subjugated Irish nation and its doubly exploited working class. As a popular socialist propagandist and labor leader, James Connolly enjoyed a considerable amount of support in some working-class communities. Dublin, the epicenter of Gaelic revivalism since the late nineteenth century, was extremely receptive to a fusion of nationalism and socialism. But Belfast, also home to a vigorous labor movement, was unlike ethnically homogenous Dublin: it had a divisive legacy of sectarian violence. While Dublin socialists could openly associate their movement with left-wing nationalism, Belfast socialists, in the interest of working-class solidarity, evaded the question of nationality as best they could, when the question could be evaded. It remained to be seen whether Socialist Republicanism could inspire a truly pan-Irish progressive labor movement, or whether his synthesis of socialism with elements of “Irish Ireland” cultural nationalist doctrine was too much for Irish Protestants to accept.

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<sup>48</sup> English, 196.

Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, any truly revolutionary workers' movement in Ireland would have needed to be based on a Dublin-Belfast axis. In some ways, the fate of Belfast was of even greater importance to the labor movement than that of Dublin, because Belfast was a bona fide industrialized city and more in touch with British industrial towns such as Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool. Outside of Belfast, Irish trade unionism in the latter nineteenth century was overwhelmingly conservative in character. Irish workers subscribed to the doctrine of "Old unionism," says historian J. Dunsmore Clarkson: they "accepted their share of the responsibility for the welfare of trade and industry. [...] They did not claim the right to enjoyment of the produce of their own labor; they felt no resentment that a few should prosper at the expense of the many."<sup>49</sup> Unionization was largely confined to skilled workers, eager to maintain their traditional high wages and cordial relations with management. Unions were organized by craft, not by industry or class: the concept of unionization on a mass scale, designed to allow the entire working class to bring its collective economic pressure to bear on the entire bourgeoisie, was slow to catch on in Ireland. Amalgamation of local or craft-based unions into nationwide unions based on combining all the workers of a given industry began in England before it trickled over to Ireland. Belfast led Ireland in cross-channel union membership, amounting to half of its 19,000 trade unionists.<sup>50</sup> In Dublin, on the other hand, over 4,800 Dublin workers still "clung to their local unions."<sup>51</sup> Belfast was more closely integrated with the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the main vessel through which the large British amalgamateds cooperated. "Belfast alone sent delegates [to the

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<sup>49</sup> J. Dunsmore Clarkson, Labor and Nationalism in Ireland, (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1925), 164.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Mitchell, Labor in Irish Politics, 1890-1930, (Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974), 18.

<sup>51</sup> Clarkson, 184.

TUC] with any sort of regularity.”<sup>52</sup> According to labor historian Arthur Mitchell, “As late as 1899 this city contained half of the trade unionists in the country.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, states J. Dunsmore Clarkson, “In Belfast alone did Socialism in those early years of the twentieth century make any appreciable headway.”<sup>54</sup>

While many Irish workers were connected to the TUC through membership in cross-channel amalgamated unions, Ireland was consistently underrepresented in terms of actual delegates. Congresses were held in Ireland only twice, in Dublin (1880) and in Belfast (1893). Clarkson describes how the 1880 Dublin congress revealed the disparate states of industrial development in Ireland and Britain, with a hint of hyperbole: “Judging by the tone of the speeches, the delegates from Great Britain were rather surprised that the Irish delegates did not bring their pigs and their shillelaghs to the sessions of Congress.”<sup>55</sup> To remedy Ireland’s status as an afterthought at the British TUC, Ireland formed its own Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) in 1894. Its founding was not meant to be provocative in any way. “Irish labor issued no Declaration of National Independence; the new Congress was conceived as a much-needed supplement, not as a rival to the British Congress.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Irish labor shared little common ground on which to make political demands. At the ITUC there was a tacit agreement to leave politics alone and focus on material betterment only; “the congress was considered to be little more than a platform on which workers of the north and south could meet once a year.”<sup>57</sup> Motions concerning the advancement of public, non-sectarian education, and

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<sup>52</sup> Clarkson, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Clarkson, 213.

<sup>55</sup> Clarkson, 177.

<sup>56</sup> Clarkson, 187.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, 49.

concerning official labor endorsement of either the Irish Parliamentary Party or the (British-based) Independent Labor Party, inspired the kind of heated debate and parochial entrenchment which was always threatening to disintegrate the labor coalition – which was determined, in the words of a Cork Congress (1895) delegate, “not to promote the interests of any party, sect, or clique, but to strengthen and extend the cause of labor – by trade unionists, for trade unionists.”<sup>58</sup>

The ITUC was certainly not a manifestation of radical nationalism; the relocation of the meeting-place of Ireland’s trade unions was based more on pragmatism than on principles – and principles of conservatism if any at all. Nevertheless, for many workers, especially in Dublin, relocation held a greater significance. Clarkson notes “a growing Sinn Fein sentiment among a section of the Dublin workers,” meaning these workers began to associate with the cultural nationalist, anti-English, pro-independence, “Irish-Ireland” ideology of Arthur Griffith and his newspaper *Sinn Fein* (Irish for “we ourselves”).<sup>59</sup> It was this section of militant working class nationalists with whom James Connolly’s ideas came to resonate. However, Connolly’s focus at this time was not trade union activism but political activism, and in 1896, he founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) in Dublin, largely for the educative purpose of familiarizing the Dublin working class with radical socialism. Nationalism was also a central element of the party’s platform, however, and the party’s ideology is a true reflection of Connolly’s pure thought, unaltered by the trials of leadership during times of crisis. He wrote in an 1897 editorial, “We are resolved upon national independence as the indispensable groundwork of industrial emancipation, but we are equally resolved to have done with the

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<sup>58</sup> Opening Speech of Hugh M’Manus, Report of Second Irish Trades Congress. Quoted in Clarkson, 205-205.

<sup>59</sup> Clarkson, 204.

leadership of a class whose social charter is derived from oppression.”<sup>60</sup> The party stood for an independent Ireland: democratic politically as well as industrially. But the overall conservatism of the Irish trade union leadership, its aversion to “abstract questions of political economy,” and its evasion of political controversies for the purpose of coalition maintenance, essentially closed the possibility of union organizing to Connolly and the ISRP radicals.<sup>61</sup> The high point of trade union radicalism in Ireland, when Connolly’s socialism would be well-received, was yet to come.

In these early days, Connolly’s fledgling party had more success with regards to the national side of its platform, for turn-of-the-century Dublin was more a center for Irish-Ireland separatism than socialism. Indeed, in 1897, its nationalist agitation yielded “one of the most spectacular campaigns of its existence,” a demonstration against Queen Victoria’s Jubilee tour of Dublin in which a large black coffin marked “British Empire” was carried through the city in a funeral procession shadowing the Queen’s own parade route.<sup>62</sup> As the 1890s progressed, Connolly and the ISRP continued to educate for socialism but agitate for nationalism. “Leading the fight against the Boer War, the ISRP entered its great days.”<sup>63</sup> Agitation against the Boer War, however, oftentimes landed Connolly on the same pulpit as arch-conservative nationalists such as Arthur Griffith, who served with Connolly on the Irish Transvaal Committee, a pro-Boer body. Griffith was hostile to socialism because of its perceived disintegrative effect on the nation, leading Irish workers to feel more partial to their class – even to the working class of

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<sup>60</sup> Connolly, “Patriotism and Labor,” in *Shan Van Vocht*, August 1897. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>61</sup> Opening address of the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, Cork, 1895. Quoted in Clarkson, 196-197.

<sup>62</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, (New York: International Publishers, 1961), 88.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

England – than capitalists in Ireland. He felt that Irish capital and Irish labor must cease hostilities to the benefit of the nation, writing in his paper *The United Irishman*, precursor to *Sinn Fein*, “[Ireland’s] employers must be satisfied with smaller profits; and her mechanics and general workers must also make a sacrifice in money for the moral and social gain of living amongst their kindred in their own land.”<sup>64</sup> Connolly, however, had already expressed his skepticism towards “the cry for a ‘Union of Classes,’” in 1898, writing that such an appeal

is in reality an insidious move on the part of our Irish master class to have the powers of government transferred from the hands of the English capitalist government into the hands of an Irish capitalist government, and to pave the way for this change by inducing the Irish worker to abandon all hopes of bettering his own position, and to assume such an attitude of meek resignation to his lot as a wage-slave as might convince the English government that he would make no revolutionary use of his political power, but would leave things much as they are.<sup>65</sup>

The Boer War compelled Connolly to join forces with his social adversaries when presented with an opportunity for national insurrection. Connolly’s biographer C. Desmond Greaves writes, “As British arms suffered repeated defeats, Connolly hoped the struggle against the war might end in a revolutionary crisis, in which it would be possible to free Ireland.”<sup>66</sup> Connolly wrote at the end of 1899, “wherever a blow is struck for freedom – national or social, political or economic – you will find the Socialist Republicans, ready and willing to fight.”<sup>67</sup> According to Greaves, “It is clear that Connolly looked forward to the possibility of a revolutionary situation in which Ireland might win freedom and set foot on the road to socialism,” he saw such a situation with

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<sup>64</sup> Arthur Griffith, Editorial in *The United Irishman*, 5 July, 1902. Quoted in Clarkson, 262.

<sup>65</sup> Connolly, “The Re-Conquest of Ireland,” in *Workers’ Republic*, 2 September 1898. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>66</sup> Greaves, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Connolly, “Dublin and the War,” in *Workers’ Republic*, 30 December, 1899. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

the British army bogged down at the bottom of the African continent.<sup>68</sup> Despite Connolly's own 1897 warning that "no revolutionists can safely invite the co-operation of men or classes, whose ideals are not theirs, and whom, therefore, they may be compelled to fight at some future critical stage of the journey to freedom," only two years later he seems to have been prepared to accept a Union of Classes for the purpose of national liberation and the dismemberment of the British Empire.<sup>69</sup> The ISRP attracted anti-Imperialists of all shades of economic thinking, but continued to lack the strong trade-union membership needed for the full realization of its doctrine. The party "was limited by the environment in which it grew," argues Greaves.<sup>70</sup> Dublin was clearly the right city for nationalism but the wrong city for socialism, and Belfast vice versa. Connolly's coupling of nationalism and socialism was lost on an Irish labor movement not sufficiently united to endorse either ideology. In any event, the party's following was small; according to Greaves, contemporary critics joked that "the ISRP had more syllables than members."<sup>71</sup> In 1903, Connolly left Ireland for the United States, where he worked with the Industrial Workers of the World and gained experience in real trade-union organizing work. While Connolly was away from Ireland, the ISRP languished and died, and with it died a major mouthpiece of working-class nationalism. But by Connolly's 1910 return, radical labor was reborn, with a new leader, Jim Larkin, and a new center, Belfast.

Belfast was Ireland's most important industrial city in the early twentieth century, home to the most socialistic working class in Ireland. Part of socialism's appeal to the

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<sup>68</sup> Greaves, 115.

<sup>69</sup> Connolly, Erin's Hope: The Ends and the Means, 1897. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>70</sup> Greaves, 167.

<sup>71</sup> Greaves, 80.

workers of Belfast, surely, was its transnational potential – it did not alienate based on creed, but only on class. Urban migration transformed Belfast from a small Protestant shipping town to a major multicultural city.<sup>72</sup> Sectarian riots had been a part of Belfast life since the 1830s, and they only intensified as the century progressed. Skilled Protestant workers resented Catholics for economic as well as religious reasons, and a particular gang of skilled shipyard workers “became the shock-troops and the ideological vanguard of Protestant/Unionist supremacy in the city.”<sup>73</sup> Skilled labor and white-collar trades were overwhelmingly dominated by Protestants. However, in most unskilled trades as well there was a Protestant majority, or Protestant and Catholic workers were at parity. In short, most Catholics were unskilled workers, but most unskilled workers were Protestants. It was a situation in which Protestant unskilled workers shared a nearly identical industrial experience with Catholics – they were exploited by the same employers and excluded (to a lesser extent, of course) by the same skilled “artisan elite.”<sup>74</sup> In this situation, there was much potential for socialist ideology to take hold – to transcend religious boundaries and unite the working class against its mutual enemies.

It was this Belfast that Jim Larkin entered in 1907, an organizer for the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Laborers (NUDL). Larkin was born in either 1874 or 1876 (the date is still disputed, as is his place of birth),<sup>75</sup> and was raised in Liverpool by Irish parents. He joined the ranks of the great unwashed at an early age, working a number of unskilled jobs and eventually becoming a dock worker. Although he had been

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<sup>72</sup> Ronald Munck, “Class and Religion in Belfast – A Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985), 242.

<sup>73</sup> Munck, 243. The term “Unionist” in this context refers not to trade unionists but to loyalists, those who upheld the Act of Union and opposed Home Rule.

<sup>74</sup> Munck, 243.

<sup>75</sup> John Newsinger, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly, and the Dublin Labor Movement*, (London, The Merlin Press, LTD: 2004), 6.

an outspoken socialist and an ILP member since the early 1890s, he did not cut his teeth on trade union activism until 1905, when an NUDL strike was resoundingly defeated by the Shipping Federation, a cross-channel organization of shipping firms notorious among trade unionists for waiting out strikers using scab labor. The defeat left Larkin “transformed by the hard school of experience into an aggressive, determined trade union organizer.”<sup>76</sup> He brought his organizational and rhetorical talents to Belfast in May 1907, sent to lead a group of NUDL dockers striking for pay increases and union recognition. When the employers imported scabs from Liverpool, the entire dock went out on strike. In early July they were joined by the carters, and then, for a time, the miners; on the 19<sup>th</sup>, a section of the Belfast police mutinied rather than protect scab workers. Remarkably, the Catholic and Protestant laborers “were joined on the picket lines by hundreds of shipyard workers, skilled Protestants.”<sup>77</sup> This solidarity of labor was demonstrated on July 12, the day of an annual Orange parade reenacting the Battle of the Boyne, by the lack of all too customary sectarian violence; all one Belfast newspaper had to report was “A Quiet Day.”<sup>78</sup> In spite of violence by the authorities, condemnations by the Catholic clergy, and Unionist attempts to depict the strike leadership as Fenians, the strike continued.<sup>79</sup> It was ended in September by the intervention of James Sexton, an NUDL executive, who went over the heads of local organizers to negotiate with the Shipping Federation. The dockers went back to work, and the fleeting trans-sectarian unity of the Belfast working class subsided back into mutual mistrust and tension.

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<sup>76</sup> Newsinger, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Newsinger, 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Northern Whig*, 13 July, 1907. Quoted in Clarkson, 217.

<sup>79</sup> Newsinger, 8-9.

The 1907 Belfast dock strike had several far-reaching consequences concerning the relationship between class and nationality for the Irish working class. First, the Belfast workers proved by deed that the sectarianism which had been so damaging to national unity could be mitigated and transcended by appealing to the universalities of class instead of the particularities of religious and cultural heritage. Historian Ronald Munck concludes that this phenomenon was only possible because “Larkin’s industrial leadership was not related to political objectives. [...] Sectarian and sectional consciousness could allow for a limited economic unity and no more.”<sup>80</sup> But Munck perhaps gives too much credit to the strength of bigotry. The strike demonstrated the commonalities of Belfast’s antagonistic communities and their mutual separateness from the English in two ways: first, their strike had been sold out by an English leader, James Sexton, who prevented an official NUDL strike in support of the Belfast members; and second, it was British army units who dispersed the strikers after the local police mutinied. The failure of Larkin and the other strike organizers to build a lasting working-class unity based on such shared experiences cannot be attributed simply to eternalized inter-communal antagonisms. Certainly the unity of the Belfast working class was deliberately discouraged at every turn by Unionist and Nationalist leaders alike. Attempting to demonstrate the city’s non-sectarianism, union organizers invited Joseph Devlin, a Nationalist MP, and Tom Sloan, a Unionist MP, to address a mass rally; Sloan turned down the invitation at the last moment, leaving only Devlin to deliver a provocative, nationalistic speech denouncing the military presence as an army of occupation.<sup>81</sup> From Dublin, Arthur Griffith penned editorials whipping up nationalist

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<sup>80</sup> Munck, 246.

<sup>81</sup> John Gray, City In Revolt, (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1985), 152.

sentiment against cross-channel labor solidarity: stories in his newspaper dealing with the labor movement were typically printed under the heading “English trade-unionism in Ireland.”<sup>82</sup> His position was that men like Larkin came over from England to weaken Ireland’s economy and get Irish workers into trouble. Indeed, the workers received no support from sectional leaders for their fraternization (the forging of a new class-based identity would have put these leaders out of business). Belfast 1907 represented the perfect moment to capture the energy and unity of the working class and channel it into a radical political movement, but consistent discouragement from conservatives on both sides of the religious divide, and labor’s failure to articulate an alternative to religion as a basis of political solidarity, contributed to the failure to realize such an opportunity.

Such failures contributed to the importance of what could be considered the most resounding consequence of the strike: the new Irish-based union it bred. After the inglorious finale at Belfast, there was a mutual disenchantment between Larkin and the NUDL executive. When in the following year, Larkin again let loose his characteristic militancy leading a carters’ strike in Dublin, the NUDL disowned his activities, so he founded the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), with its headquarters in Dublin. It was disillusionment with the NUDL officials who had sold out his strike that inspired Larkin to found a new union, and it was the mandate of circumstance that his new union was founded in Dublin, or in Ireland at all: the ITGWU was not born of Larkin’s nationalist sympathies but of pragmatic necessity – he was abandoned by his English union so he organized a new one in Ireland. Historians E. Rumpf and A.C.

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<sup>82</sup> Clarkson, 221.

Hepburn agree that Larkin was, indeed, “forced by circumstances.”<sup>83</sup> The unintended consequence of this was that Larkin actually won some praise from Irish nationalism. Even though most nationalists identified more closely with the idealized peasant or artisan than with the proletarian, evidently some were not hostile to working-class militancy so long as it was *Irish* working-class militancy. Griffith wrote in response to the ITGWU’s founding, “We wish well and will give all our assistance to any genuine Irish organization of transport workers.”<sup>84</sup> In *Irish Freedom*, organ of the budding republican wing of the Sinn Fein movement, the correspondent “Criminal” expressed satisfaction that the Irish workers, in breaking free of a British Federation and forming their own Irish union, were finally grasping “the essential truth of the Sinn Fein position – that only Ireland can save Ireland in the end.”<sup>85</sup> Entirely by accidents of circumstance, the seeds of rapprochement between radical nationalists and socialists were planted with the founding of the ITGWU.

But an alliance with left-republicanism was not the union’s goal, for several reasons. First, Connolly believed that only workers’ control over industry through union activity could achieve socialism, and that a mere putsch would lead to state ownership instead of workers’ ownership. Connolly laid out his thoughts in the 1908 pamphlet

*Socialism Made Easy*:

I have said that the capitalist class became a revolutionary class when it realized that it held control of the economic heart of the nation. I may add when the working class is in the same position, it will also as a class become revolutionary, it will also give effective political expression to its economic strength. [...] [T]he fight for the conquest of the political state is

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<sup>83</sup> E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1977), 11.

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Griffith, “The Dublin Strike,” in *Sinn Fein*, 5 December, 1908. Quoted in Clarkson, 269.

<sup>85</sup> “Criminal,” “Who Says Irish Freedom,” in *Irish Freedom*, March, 1913. Quoted in Clarkson, 284. Contributors to *Irish Freedom* and other radical publications frequently used pseudonyms.

not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is the battle being fought out every day for the power to control industry.<sup>86</sup>

The first step to liberation was workers' control of industry; the overthrow of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a working-class social order would then be a *fait accompli*. Thus, the primary objective of the ITGWU and its leaders was to radicalize Irish trade unionism. And within the first few years of the union's existence, it looked as though they might actually achieve this goal. This, after all, was the period of the Great Labor Unrest which swept across the British Isles until the Great War. Unskilled workers went out on strike in unprecedented numbers; they struck for previously tolerated grievances, they struck for each other in demonstrations of sympathy, and usually, they struck without the sanction of their trade union officials. The emphasis on direct action of rank-and-file workers – on intuitive spontaneity as opposed to calculating rationality – is what gave the Great Labor Unrest its radical character, writes George Dangerfield in his classic *The Strange Death of Liberal England*:

The instinct of the British worker was very active in 1910. [...] The only visible symbol of unity was the Trade Unions: to the Trade Unions he turned. And the Trade Unions became the not too willing repository for instincts, for feelings, for a kind of vital unreason. [...] And so the deepest impulse in the great strike movement of 1910-1914 was an unconscious one, an enormous energy pressing up from the depths of the soul...<sup>87</sup>

And it was not out of conscious association with syndicalist doctrine that these workers were striking so violently, Dangerfield maintains; syndicalism, rather, entered British labor's lexicon in order to rationalize such celebrative, rebellious irrationality. In Ireland, Larkin and Connolly hoped to channel this new dynamism into genuine, revolutionary

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<sup>86</sup> James Connolly, *Socialism Made Easy*, 1908. In Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom, eds. *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 280.

<sup>87</sup> George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 233-235.

industrial organization. For this reason, the ITGWU sought to challenge not only the employers, but also the executives of the major trade unions who seemed to approach the former with such servile humility. Connolly wrote, “the spirit, the character, the militant spirit, the fighting character of the organization, was [...] of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organization.”<sup>88</sup> The ITGWU’s fighting spirit made it a beacon for increasingly radicalized workers. In 1911 alone, the union grew from five- to eighteen-thousand members; and while the officials of other unions were disowning strikes, the ITGWU was “play[ing] a major part in organizing the wave of unrest that swept across Ireland.”<sup>89</sup>

The second reason for Irish labor to distance itself from even socially progressive sections of nationalism was the importance of integration Ulster into the national labor movement. Connolly, whose nationalist views were already well-publicized, was put in charge of ITGWU operations in Belfast, a city so sensitive to the national question that he had to articulate an internationalist position which could attract support across sectarian divisions. Connolly used his definition of internationalism, “that of a free federation of free peoples,” to argue that Ireland could best contribute to the international working class movement when the whole island was recognized as a unified, independent nation-state.<sup>90</sup> But the issue of self-determination raises the question: shouldn’t Protestant Ulster also have been allowed to take its seat in a free federation of free peoples? Historian George Dangerfield makes the case coarsely but fairly: “The Orange population of Ulster was thrifty and industrious but not lovable. And it had no love for England. It was quite alone; it owed no allegiance to anyone but itself and the grim God it had

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<sup>88</sup> James Connolly, “Old Wine in New Bottles,” 1914. In Edwards, 314.

<sup>89</sup> Newsinger, 14.

<sup>90</sup> Connolly, *Forward*, 27 May, 1911. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

fashioned in its own likeness.”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Orange Ulster was neither English nor Irish; it had a legitimate claim to a separate nationality, and Connolly’s mistake lay in his failure to recognize this claim by offering the Orange Belfast workers an expressly *multi-*national labor movement instead of a national one to which they were simply supposed to belong.

Even though James Connolly discouraged official links between his movement and Irish nationalism, his theory incorporated elements of the separatist cosmology which disavowed the cultural distinctness of Ulster Protestants. In the summer of 1911, Belfast Labour MP William Walker criticized James Connolly’s calls for the formation of an Irish Socialist Party, problematizing Connolly’s understanding of nationality:

Surely, if because of national characteristics, Ireland has a right to an Irish Socialist Party, by the same parity of reasoning Scotland also should have its Scottish Socialist Party; and, to pursue the matter, a Highland and a Lowland Party, a Welsh Party, a Berwick-on-Tweed Party; and as York was once the seat of power, a Northern English Party and a Southern English Party? In fact, if Comrade Connolly understood the ramifications of ‘Nationality’ he would be chary about tilting a lance on the question.<sup>92</sup>

The irony is that Walker’s jesting hyperbole is more consistent with internationalism than Connolly’s position. Socialism, after all, was envisaged to be a free association of free peoples in which, wrote Connolly in 1909, “states, territories or provinces will exist only as geographical expressions” because governance would be organized along industrial lines.<sup>93</sup> As Lenin wrote in 1915, “The overthrow of the bourgeoisie will tremendously accelerate the collapse of every kind of national partition without decreasing, but on the contrary increasing millions of times, the ‘differentiation’ of humanity, if we are to understand by this the wealth and variety of spiritual life, trends of ideas, tendencies,

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<sup>91</sup> Dangerfield, 77.

<sup>92</sup> William Walker, *Forward*, 8 July, 1911. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>93</sup> Connolly, *Socialism Made Easy*, 1909 pamphlet. In Edwards, 274.

shadings.”<sup>94</sup> Nationality would no longer be assigned the important political function of legitimizing the state because the state would no longer exist: it would wither away in a process of simultaneously devolving power to local self-governance and evolving power to transnational workers’ associations. Collective identity – such as nationality – would no longer be shackled to institutional power, and thus could develop freely and without coercion, but this would not prevent democratic administration across such communities. With such a theory, Connolly could have articulated the right to separate nationality for the Irish, the Orangemen, and even the Scotsmen, Welsh, and English. All of these peoples, recognizing that they *could* be separate nations, could have shared a multi-national Socialist Republic in which cultural traditions could be expressed freely, without interference from state power. Connolly could have accelerated the breakup of the British Empire, starting with Great Britain itself.

Connolly, however, believed he had done enough. In fact, he so believed his transfiguration of Irish nationality to be acceptable to majority and minority alike, he boasted that his theory of nationality harbored “not a trace of chauvinism.”<sup>95</sup> Connolly’s folly was not indeed chauvinism, but rather, as Gerard Delanty and Patrick O’Mahony put it, “the denial of difference in the assertion of an imposed homogeneity.”<sup>96</sup> Unable to accept the truth of Irish cultural heterogeneity, he still defined Irish nationality in such a way that considered Ulster Protestants to be agents of the British, their cultural autonomy a cancer of British rule in Ireland. Summarizing the Orange position, he wrote: “their fathers were planted in this country to assist in keeping the natives down in subjection

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<sup>94</sup> V. I. Lenin, 1915. In Davis, 206.

<sup>95</sup> Connolly, “Socialism and Irish Nationalism,” in *L’Irlande Libre*, 1897. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>96</sup> Delanty and O’Mahony, 86.

that this country might be held for England.”<sup>97</sup> The reactionary Orange leader Sir Edward Carson, meanwhile, *was* expressing Ulster’s right to self-determination – only he claimed that Ulster was determined in favor of Union with Britain. Connolly should have encouraged the Protestant workers of Ulster express their self-determination by breaking the Union in addition to resisting Gaelic-Catholic cultural hegemony. Why didn’t he? Recall his thesis in *Labor in Irish History*: the Gael is innately socialist and therefore the formation of a socialist state is also the highest expression of his nationality. For the Orange workers to be included in Connolly’s Socialist Republic, they had to abandon their claim to cultural and national distinctness from the rest of Ireland. And rather than assume an alien identity, the Protestant workers of Ulster flocked to the reactionary Orange leadership, which affirmed their nationality, rather than the Socialist Republicans, who denied it. For Connolly, establishing an Irish nation was more than an instrumental step towards defeating imperialism – another part of it was establishing the hegemonic ambitions of Gaelic cultural nationalism. Connolly proved unwilling or unable to repudiate a 300 year old grievance and accept a multinational Ireland.

Meanwhile, Connolly’s ability to include Orange Ireland in his envisaged Socialist Republic was seriously undermined from without as well. In 1912, Home Rule was passed by the House of Commons and vetoed by the House of Lords – it could be vetoed for two consecutive years, but the third year it would pass. In late 1912 the Orange leadership drafted the Ulster Covenant, a document declaring the intention to resist if a Home Rule parliament was set up in Dublin. Out of its 471,414 signatories was

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<sup>97</sup> Connolly, “Our Duty In This Crisis,” *Irish Worker*, 8 August 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

formed the 100,000-strong Ulster Defense Force in January 1913.<sup>98</sup> The prospect of a North-South civil war nourished sectarian strife, as the working conditions which had made a non-sectarian working-class movement feasible in 1907 were being deliberately and artificially dismantled. Belfast capitalists and their corporatist allies in the Orange movement were dividing the workers, driving Catholics from their jobs, followed by any Protestants who resisted. Sectarian violence, Unionist saber-rattling, and economic manipulation overlapped to divide the working class, co-opt the Protestant workers into a scheme of sectarian corporatism, and extinguish radical socialism's threat to conservative Orange power. Because Connolly was unable to theorize an acceptable place for Protestants in his Socialist Republic, creating a link which would have been able to withstand elite efforts to break apart proletarian solidarity, militant Irish labor lost Belfast.

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<sup>98</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, 1916: The Easter Rising, (London: Orion Books Ltd, 2005), 27.

### Chapter III

#### From Class War to Great War

James Connolly remained in Ulster as the sectarian crisis there escalated. But to the forces of polarization in Belfast – Unionists and Nationalists, a well-funded sectarian militia, and orchestrated economic manipulation – Connolly “had no means of resistance but propaganda,” writes C. Desmond Greaves.<sup>99</sup> In light of such difficulties, ITGWU leader James Larkin renewed his focus on Dublin, the city where the union was founded and where its journal, *Irish Worker*, was printed and circulated. In some ways it was a retreat. Dublin was not a major industrial center like Belfast, and manufacturing accounted for only 20% of its workforce in 1911: “Administration and commerce, rather than industry, were what drove the city’s economy.”<sup>100</sup> The city was home to a relatively large professional middle class, a relatively small “proletarianized” working class, and an enormous mass of underemployed casual workers and unemployed slum-dwellers. The city’s tenements were infamously squalid, crowded, and dangerous: in a city of around 300,000, at least 39,000 people lived at least four to a room in these slum tenements, some as many as twelve in a room.<sup>101</sup> Dubliners may not have been the prime candidates for a revolutionary working class, but they were poor, and they were angry. The ITGWU substituted the divided Belfast working class with the invigorated, militant, seething,

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<sup>99</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, (New York: International Publishers, 1961), 293.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Rouse, “What was Dublin like in 1911?” *The National Archives of Ireland*, <<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/main.html>>

<sup>101</sup> John Newsinger, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly, and the Dublin Labour Movement*, (London: The Merlin Press Ltd, 2004), 5.

slum-dwelling workers of Dublin. “Before the year was out,” writes John Newsinger in an inventory of Dublin union activism,

agricultural laborers, blacksmiths, bill posters, biscuit workers, bottle makers, box makers, brass finishers, bricklayers, building laborers, cabinet makers, canal loaders, carpenters, carters, coach makers, confectioners, dockers, electricians, engineers, gas workers, glaziers, hairdressers, iron founders, linen workers, market gardeners, match workers, millers, newsboys, painters, pavoirs, plasterers, plumbers, poplin workers, seamen and firemen, sewage workers, soap makers, stevedores, stone cutters, tobacco workers, tramway workers, van drivers, wood machinists – even schoolchildren – were to be involved in industrial action.<sup>102</sup>

The largest, lengthiest, and most epic of the 1913 Dublin strikes was the Great Lockout, an attritional confrontation between workers and employers effecting a six-month period of open class warfare between labor and capital, “a great class struggle, and recognized as such by all sides,” wrote Connolly.<sup>103</sup>

The chief engineer of the Lockout was William Martin Murphy, a leading capitalist in Dublin. He had made his fortune building Ireland’s railways and electrifying the Dublin tramways in the 1880s and ‘90s; he also owned the *Irish Independent* newspaper, began as a costly effort to mediate public opinion but transformed by the early 1900s into a profitable commercial venture.<sup>104</sup> Paternalistically tolerant towards conservative “old unionism,” Murphy was hostile to the general labor unions which tried to organize entire industries, such as Larkin’s ITGWU which so epitomized this radical “new unionism.” Thus, in fall 1913, he resolved to crush the ITGWU in Dublin, lining up his class allies behind him through the Employer’s Federation, his answer to the industrial unions. The first salvo was the dismissal of about 250 known union activists

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<sup>102</sup> Newsinger, 15.

<sup>103</sup> James Connolly, “Glorious Dublin!” in *Forward*, 4 October 1913. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>104</sup> Andy Bielenberg, “Entrepreneurship, Power, and Public Opinion in Ireland: The Career of William Martin Murphy,” in *Irish Economic and Social History* 27 (2000), 29-35.

on 19 August. “The intention was clear,” writes historian John Newsinger, “there was to be a general clear out of union men.”<sup>105</sup> The union’s response came on August 26: hundreds of tram workers left their cars on the street and hundreds of other workers with Murphy’s various operations walked out as well. The ITGWU was officially out on strike. In early September, more employers began to lock out their workers, and by the close of that month some 400 employers had joined the Lockout which put some 25,000 out of work.<sup>106</sup> As the union and the Employer’s Federation escalated the dispute, a bold partition was materializing in Dublin between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Historian Emmet Larkin remarks, “Now all the employers were on the side of their class whether they wanted to be or not.”<sup>107</sup>

Leading up to the strike, Murphy had made it clear that the union’s demands would not be heard, and during the first week the Dublin authorities made sure that the union’s resolve would not be seen. Police violence climaxed in the first few days of the Lockout, as the authorities sought to check the assertiveness of the workers. Assemblies were forbidden, and the streets were cleared by police batons. Evidently, clearing the streets was not enough, with police invading the Corporation Buildings tenement on the night of the 30 August and again on the following night, indiscriminately beating the unlucky occupants with truncheons.<sup>108</sup> When union pickets tried to block the trams, police drove the pickets from the streets. When the workers held firm, baton charges were used to effect their dispersal. Newsinger argues that the police violence was part of a deliberate campaign pursued by the state in collusion with the employers to teach the

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<sup>105</sup> Newsinger, *Rebel City*, 47.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>107</sup> Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 143.

<sup>108</sup> Newsinger, 48-49.

strikers “a well-deserved lesson.”<sup>109</sup> Emmet Larkin notes that violence was reciprocal, especially after the baton-charge dispersal of the O’Connell Street rally and Larkin’s re-arrest: “The temper of the strikers had changed, [...] for they seemed to be more interested in coming to grips with the police than in checking the operation of the trams.”<sup>110</sup> Even if outright conspiracy was not the case, certainly the draconian measures of the police on the street matched those of the employers in the docks, mills, and warehouses of the cities.

The only recourse available to employers as a cushion against the economic ramifications of an uncooperative proletariat was the importation of scab labor, which began at the end of October. Scabs were recruited from the unemployed of crowded English cities like Manchester, Liverpool, and London, usually furnished by employers’ organizations such as the Shipping Federation.<sup>111</sup> In this case, however, some scabs were provided by other transport unions, and sometimes workers were sent by union executives to replace unofficial strikers in the same union; Connolly wrote disgustedly of “Union men to be brought from England to take the place of members of the same Union who refused to desert their brothers of the Transport Union.”<sup>112</sup> Mass picketing on the quays failed to stop the flow of scabs, working under police protection and usually themselves armed as well. The union formed a militia to protect the pickets against armed police and strike-breakers, but this Irish Citizen Army (ICA), armed with hurling sticks for want of rifles, was unable to stem the tide of scabs shipping into the city. The strike became a waiting game. With scabs absorbing the impact of the strikers’ absence,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>110</sup> Emmet Larkin, 126.

<sup>111</sup> Newsinger, 79-81.

<sup>112</sup> Connolly, “The Isolation of Dublin,” in Forward, 7 February 1914. In Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom, eds. James Connolly: Selected Political Writings, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 305.

the capitalists of Dublin could pursue business as usual and workers of Dublin would eventually be forced to capitulate. Connolly recognized the union's unsustainable position. Reflecting in February 1914, he wrote,

We argued that a strike is an attempt to stop the capitalist from carrying on his business, that the success or failure of a strike depends entirely upon the success or non-success of the capitalist to do without the strikers. If the capitalist is able to carry on his business without the strikers, then the strike is lost, even if the strikers receive more in strike pay than they formerly did in wages.<sup>113</sup>

The Dublin workers needed the international solidarity of labor. Without a concerted effort by the working class as a whole, in Britain, Europe, even America or Australia – without sympathetic action or at least boycotts of Dublin goods, anything to deny the Dublin bourgeoisie an income – defeat was inevitable. Relief funds, raised by the British Trade Union Congress, did pour into the city, but the general strike of British transport workers which Connolly felt was needed to stop the flow of scabs failed to occur. Connolly saw in this failure the sting of betrayal. He blamed the British workers for stopping short of the all-important sympathetic general strike, and the trade union officials who decided against supportive direct action in December. Class war was transformed from theory into reality in Dublin, and the working class was beaten. February 1914 dawned with ITGWU members trickling back to work, the final betrayal coming when the Dublin Relief Fund was suspended on 11 February.<sup>114</sup> The machinations of the capitalists, the blatant partiality of the authorities, and the trifling charity of the British workers in lieu of direct action combined to pass a death sentence on the strikers.

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<sup>113</sup> Connolly, "The Isolation of Dublin," in *Forward*, 7 February 1914. In Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom, eds. *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 304.

<sup>114</sup> Emmet Larkin, 156.

Because it occurred under the shadow of the mounting crisis concerning Home Rule and Ulster militarization, the Great Lockout brought the complex relationship between Irish labor and Irish nationalism to the surface. The Lockout, explains John Newsinger, “was more than just another industrial dispute that could be ended in compromise. It was a struggle to determine who were to be the masters in Home Rule Ireland: the employers or the labor movement.”<sup>115</sup> The behavior of the nationalists during the strike showed that they were unconcerned with the situation of the workers and much more worried about Home Rule and Ulster. So in November 1913, in the midst of the titanic struggle of labor’s existence, when Professor Eoin MacNeill, medievalist at University College Dublin and prominent moderate nationalist, called for the establishment of a Home Rule militia as an answer to militarization in Ulster, most nationalists did not understand the insult to the working class. Playwright and union activist Sean O’Casey did, writing in his 1919 account, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*:

The creation of the National Volunteers was one of the most effective blows which the Irish Citizen Army received. Thousands that had originally attached themselves to the Citizen Army passed over into the more attractive and better organized camp of the Volunteers. Many, no doubt, preferred Caithlin Ni Houlihan in a respectable dress than a Caithlin in the garb of a working woman.<sup>116</sup>

Mainstream Irish nationalists – supporters of the Home Rule platform – saw labor pursuing selfish ends in a destructive sideshow at a time when existential challenges faced the incubating Irish nation. For the Irish socialists, Home Rule was only desirable insofar as devolution brought democracy another step closer to the Irish people.

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<sup>115</sup> John Newsinger, “‘In the Hunger-Cry of the Nation’s Poor is Heard the Voice of Ireland’: Sean O’Casey and Politics 1908-1916,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985) 226.

<sup>116</sup> Sean O’Casey, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*, (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., Ltd., 1919), 9-10. “Caithlin Ni Houlihan” is a traditional feminine personification of Ireland.

Connolly wrote in August 1913, “we announce that as Socialists we are Home Rulers, but that on the day the Home Rule Government goes into power, the Socialist movement in Ireland will go into Opposition.”<sup>117</sup> Home Rule, not of primary importance to labor, was something for which the Volunteers were willing to fight a civil war.

The radical separatist wing of the national movement – comprised of Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and the “advanced nationalists” of the physical-force school – mostly shared in the belief that the Great Lockout was superfluous and the nation suffered for it. Historian Graham Walker explains: “The ‘nation’ was always an abstraction in the Republican mind. It certainly did not translate into operative concepts of social radicalism; class conflicts were regarded as a distraction from national goals.”<sup>118</sup> Many separatists saw a strategic need to shore up the forces of the nation in the face of the expected civil war against Orange militants. Rejecting Connolly’s maxim, “whatever strengthens and elevates the working class strengthens the nation,” the editor of the IRB journal *Irish Freedom* wrote of the need “to avert the war of class against class at a time when every class must stand together to save the nation.”<sup>119</sup> Some separatists, termed “spiritualists” by J. Dunsmore Clarkson, felt that because the nation was something holy, the separatist cause was pure while the labor cause was smudged with the dirt of crass materialism. The *Irish Freedom* correspondent “Rapparee” conveyed such views in a 1913 editorial: “not the allegiance of employees, who would transfer that allegiance to a higher bidder, but the love of sons who would sacrifice all for her sake, is what is

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<sup>117</sup> Connolly, “Belfast and Dublin To-Day,” *Forward*, 23 August 1913. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>118</sup> Graham Walker, “‘The Irish Dr Goebbels’: Frank Gallagher and Irish Republican Propaganda,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992), 156.

<sup>119</sup> Connolly, “What is our Programme?” *Workers’ Republic*, 22 January 1916. In Edwards, 348. “Capital and Labor,” *Irish Freedom*, November 1913. In Clarkson, 286.

required from those who would fight for Ireland's liberation."<sup>120</sup> Sean O'Casey, before he was a labor activist, held views like these. In an early 1913 polemic against *Irish Worker* correspondent "Euchan," O'Casey argued that "The delivery of Ireland is not in the Labor Manifesto, good and salutary as it may be, but in the strength, beauty, nobility and imagination of the Gaelic ideal."<sup>121</sup>

Some radical nationalist, however, were beginning to see the possibilities of a strategic alliance between labor and separatism. The *Irish Freedom* correspondent "Criminal" noted what an asset the workers would be in the nation's ranks: "The workers form so large a class as to almost be the nation, as they have only to fold their arms to make quite abundantly clear."<sup>122</sup> James Connolly too saw (albeit a few years later) what the working class could do for the nation simply by folding its arms, observing that "the power of the enemy to hurl his forces upon the forces of Ireland would lie at the mercy of the men who controlled the transport system in Ireland."<sup>123</sup> But beyond mere strategic and pragmatic considerations, there was an ideological reason for separatists to be excited by the Great Lockout. They seized upon the epic and pure quality of the rising, divorced from its substance: a righteous struggle of oppressed against oppressor; a battle of honest weakness against dishonorable strength, requiring a transcendental, moral strength. An *Irish Freedom* editorial in the midst of the Lockout declared,

There is a profound significance in this fight, and though we dislike internecine strife in face of our common foe, the Separatists of Ireland must realize that a spiritual revolt has been begun in Dublin. [...] The

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<sup>120</sup> "Rapparee," "Democracy and Nationality," in *Irish Freedom*, February 1913. In Clarkson, 283.

<sup>121</sup> Sean O'Casey, "'Euchan' and Ireland: A Challenge to Verbal Combat," in *Irish Worker*, 22 February 1913. In David Krause, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941*, Volume I, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 16-18.

<sup>122</sup> "Criminal," "Who Says Irish Freedom," *Irish Freedom*, March 1913. In Clarkson, 284.

<sup>123</sup> Connolly, "What is our Programme?" *Workers' Republic*, 22 January 1916. In Edwards, 347.

conception of the nation as a spiritual entity will not be destroyed if Nationalists decide that changes must be made in the social structure.<sup>124</sup>

Concrete concerns, issues such as social structure, were secondary for the separatists. Intellectually, separatism was based on a simplified cosmology of clear moral dichotomies in which the Irish were categorically right and the English were categorically wrong. In this world, to negotiate and reason with one's enemy was cowardly and impure; the separatist, writes intellectual historian Sean Farrell Moran, was "committed to an absolute to be won at any cost."<sup>125</sup> Pearse believed that this type of total conflict was being played out in Dublin: "the Socialists who want Universal Peace propose to reach it by Universal War; and so far they are sensible."<sup>126</sup> While the capitalists represented decadence and individualism, the workers represented a humble asceticism and a moral fortitude that harmonized with the anti-modernism and messianic indulgences of the separatists. Decadence, wrote Pearse, was weakness, because "Those who have are always inclined to hold; always afraid to risk."<sup>127</sup>

In the meanwhile, a new conflict flared over government proposals to partition Ireland between a Home Rule south and a Unionist north. By 1914, the inter-communal violence in Ulster and was approaching a crescendo. It was the third consecutive year the Third Home Rule Act would be read; when it passed, the Lords could not use their veto as they had in 1912 and 1913. Unionists threatened to use force to resist – and the nationalist Volunteers threatened to use force to ensure – the act's implementation. Ireland appeared to be on the brink of civil war, and the Liberal government lacked a

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<sup>124</sup> "Capital and Labor," *Irish Freedom*, November 1913. In Clarkson, 286.

<sup>125</sup> Sean Farrell Moran, "Patrick Pearse and the European Revolt Against Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 4 (1989), 630.

<sup>126</sup> Pearse, "From a Hermitage," *Irish Freedom*, October 1913. In Pearse, 184-185.

<sup>127</sup> Patrick Pearse, "From a Hermitage," *Irish Freedom*, January 1914. In *Political Writings and Speeches*, 207.

consistent response. In early March, hoping to work out a compromise between North and South, Prime Minister Asquith first introduced the idea of a partition of Ireland along religious lines. Later that same month, the government, now attempting to apply pressure on the UVF, ordered the British garrison at the Curragh to move into Ulster. Over fifty officers resigned rather than “coerce” Ulster, and the government withdrew the order. This incident, which came to be called the Curragh Mutiny, exposed the government’s lack of resolve, encouraging Unionist leader Edward Carson to force a more favorable partition scheme through the commons. Carson’s amendment would give majority-Protestant counties the option to remain in the United Kingdom for six years while the rest of the country came under a Dublin parliament.<sup>128</sup>

For Irish labor, the emotion surrounding the aftermath of the Great Lockout was eclipsed by this new danger. James Connolly immediately denounced partition because it would “keep up the fires of religious bigotry in order to divide the workers, and make united progress impossible.”<sup>129</sup> The following week, he wrote, “we would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out.”<sup>130</sup> This position differs starkly from Patrick Pearse, who welcomed the opportunity for a fight between north and south. He wrote in October 1913, “Better wipe out Ireland in one year’s civil war than let England slowly bleed her to death.”<sup>131</sup> Like a medieval doctor, Pearse’s remedy of choice seems to have been blood-letting: “bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has

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<sup>128</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *1916: The Easter Rising*, (London: Orion Books Ltd, 2005), 57.

<sup>129</sup> Connolly, “Ireland and Ulster: An Appeal to the Working Class,” *Irish Worker*, 4 April 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>130</sup> Connolly, “The Exclusion of Ulster,” *Forward*, 11 April 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>131</sup> Pearse, “From a Hermitage,” in *Irish Freedom*, October 1913. In Pearse, 188.

lost its manhood.”<sup>132</sup> But the *militarism* Pearse conflated with the industrial *militancy* of the labor movement was in fact a profound threat to the ITGWU’s objectives. Indeed, the militarization of society in 1913-1914 helped to sap the union of its characteristic dynamism, setting it on the defensive. A war over Home Rule wouldn’t serve labor’s ends, so Connolly opposed one. Partition represented different dangers for Connolly and Pearse, and thus they opposed it for different reasons. However, they did both oppose it, putting their respective movements on the same side of the issue.

Right on the heels of the partition crisis and the civil war scare, another crisis erupted: the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. Irish labor had suffered two major blows, one after the other. The stress was so great that Jim Larkin, chairman of the ITGWU and seemingly indefatigable leader of militant Irish labor, left in September for America, ostensibly to raise funds but also undoubtedly to recover personally from labor’s setbacks. Connolly, soon after the war’s outbreak, was displaying more definite and public signals that the normal labor agenda would be altered to accommodate an increasing nationalism. In a speech in early September, Connolly urged a group of workers, “If ever you shoulder a rifle, let it be for Ireland.”<sup>133</sup> Not for the working class, but for Ireland. Armed rebellion for Ireland was also the position of the separatists, who, according to historian Tim Pat Coogan, had “a sense of moral obligation to fight.”<sup>134</sup> The separatists “felt a sense of shame at being the first generation of Irishmen for 120 years not to have risen with arms in their hands. It was pointed out that they had missed the opportunity of a Rising during the Boer War, and that the chance provided by the Great

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<sup>132</sup> Pearse, “The Coming Revolution,” November 1913. In Pearse, 98-99.

<sup>133</sup> “Connolly’s Speech on War’s Outbreak,” *Irish Worker*, 5 September 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>134</sup> Coogan, 62.

War should not be passed up.”<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, the alliance between militant separatism and socialist labor was still not manifest in 1914, when Connolly’s flirtations with insurrection still remained closely linked to a sense of labor internationalism. Indeed, soon after the war’s outbreak he prophesized (mistakenly) that an Irish insurgency “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 shriveled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Coogan, 62.

<sup>136</sup> Connolly, “Our Duty in This Crisis,” *Irish Worker*, 8 August 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

## Chapter IV

### The Contested Road to Easter Week

In rapid succession, the partition crisis and the Great War forced the Socialist Republicans and the radical nationalists into the same position on two essential issues; the two movements stood in the same corner of an Irish political arena being rapidly and radically polarized by war. In late 1914, Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond promised Britain Ireland's support in the war effort, and maneuvered to take control of the Irish National Volunteers. The organization fractured: the National Volunteers, a majority, followed Redmond to the Continent while the Irish Volunteers, a small minority led by Eoin MacNeill but officered largely by IRB infiltrators, refused to go to war for England. The preeminent nationalist militia in Ireland was now an almost undiluted body of committed separatists. Rapprochement between Connolly's Citizen Army and the Volunteers began in earnest with this split, and as time passed by, wrote Sean O'Casey, "it was apparent that the Citizen Army was really becoming the militant Left Wing of the Irish Volunteers."<sup>137</sup> O'Casey himself resigned from the ICA in protest; he felt that Connolly was selling out a genuine socialist agenda in favor of cooperation with the nationalists. Many other trade unionists expressed concern with Connolly's gravitation towards the nationalists. According to J. W. Boyle, "Some had objected to the installation of the printing press for the *Workers' Republic* and to the Citizen Army's use of Liberty Hall."<sup>138</sup> Jim Larkin, apprehensive about Connolly's intentions, wired him

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<sup>137</sup> O'Casey, 54.

<sup>138</sup> J.W. Boyle, "Connolly, the Citizen Army and the Rising," in, The Marking of 1916; Studies in the History of the Rising, edited by Kevin B. Nowlan. Stationary Office: Dublin, 1969.

from America in early 1916, telling him the ICA was “not to move.”<sup>139</sup> Since Larkin’s departure, however, Connolly was the general secretary of the ITGWU, the commandant of the ICA, and the editor of *Irish Worker* – he ran the union, its media, and its military – and the centralization of such powers in Connolly put him in a unique position to wield a disproportionate influence over labor policy. On Easter Monday, April 24, 1916, the combined Army of the Irish Republic, made up of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army and led by Pearse and Connolly, marched from Liberty Hall (the ITGWU’s headquarters) to Dublin’s General Post Office (GPO) on O’Connell Street. There, Pearse read aloud the Proclamation of the Irish Republic as rebel troops occupied the Post Office, formally beginning the uprising. As Sean O’Casey recalls, “this display was a sign to the governing classes to at least consider the dumb wish of an aspiring people... It was followed by fire and bloodshed.”<sup>140</sup>

The extent to which James Connolly’s ideology transformed along the road to Easter Week remains a tendentious issue at the heart of a prolonged debate among Irish socialists and historians of Irish socialism. Most early accounts were essentially canonizations, written by Irish leftists hoping their movement would bask in the glory of Connolly’s martyrdom. The first critical effort to interrogate Connolly’s theory and exorcize out its contradictions came from Sean O’Casey. His 1919 history of the ICA argued that, by the end of the year 1914, an “almost revolutionary change [...] was manifesting itself in Connolly’s nature. [...] Connolly had stepped down from the narrow byway of Irish Socialism on to the broad and crowded highway of Irish Nationalism.”<sup>141</sup> In a famous indictment, O’Casey then declared that, years before James Connolly was

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<sup>139</sup> Mitchel, 69.

<sup>140</sup> O’Casey, 56.

<sup>141</sup> O’Casey, 52.

ever martyred by a British firing squad, “Irish Labour lost a Leader.”<sup>142</sup> In his 1961 book *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, Connolly’s biographer and exuberant defender C. Desmond Greaves rejected O’Casey’s criticisms, championing instead what historian John Newsinger dubs a Connolly “continuity thesis.”<sup>143</sup> Greaves traced Connolly’s republicanism back to the 1890s – citing the ISRP, the anti-Boer War agitation, the cooperation with Sinn Fein and other non-socialist groups for Irish independence – to argue that Connolly had already successfully bridged the gap between nationalist and socialist theory, that the principles of Marxism and Fenianism were not contradictory. Greaves’ interpretation holds that “the national revolution was a prerequisite of the socialist revolution,” and that Connolly only participated in a nationalist putsch because an independent bourgeois-state needed to be established before socialism could be.<sup>144</sup>

According to John Newsinger’s critique, the problem with Greaves’ position is that in posthumously forging Connolly into an “Irish Lenin [...] Greaves bent and twisted Connolly out of shape to make his ideas fit his Stalinist stages theory.”<sup>145</sup> Newsinger holds up O’Casey’s 1919 verdict: “Connolly did not argue that the Easter Rising was a blow in the struggle for socialism, but rather that it was an attempt to save the soul of the nation.”<sup>146</sup> According to Newsinger, Connolly went from being a committed socialist to a committed nationalist, despite his misleading tendency to continually drape his rhetoric with appeals to socialist revolution: “The notions of socialism and national liberation continued to co-exist in his mind, but whereas his socialist pronouncements remained propagandist exercises, his republican commitment was to be realized in practice on the

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<sup>142</sup> O’Casey, 52.

<sup>143</sup> Newsinger, *Rebel City*, 131.

<sup>144</sup> Greaves, 425.

<sup>145</sup> Newsinger, *Rebel City*, 131.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

streets of Dublin.”<sup>147</sup> This last fact is indisputable, of course – proven by the bullet holes still lodged in the GPO’s columns. Whatever Connolly’s intentions, he *did* participate in an expressly nationalist rebellion, the manifesto of which makes no reference to social justice except for a vague declaration of “the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland.” There is much more in the Proclamation about self-sacrifice and the eternal tradition of separatism than there is about rectifying the social condition of the masses. In *Labor in Irish History*, Connolly argued that every previous Irish rebellion has failed because “the social question has been rigorously excluded from the field of action to be covered by the rebellion if successful.”<sup>148</sup> But in 1916, Connolly gave his life in such an uprising.

At the heart of the Greaves-Newsinger polemic are mutual accusations of selectiveness, omission, and outright misunderstanding, as well as the reliability of a particular quotation – cited by Greaves but rejected by Newsinger – in which Connolly was alleged to have told an assembly of Citizen Army men about two weeks before the Rising, “In the event of victory, hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political liberty.”<sup>149</sup> Since it is impossible to know whether or not this is really how James Connolly felt, we must limit our inquiry to the discernable facts accepted by historical consensus, as well as Connolly’s prolific self-referential writings. Some of Connolly’s statements support Newsinger’s argument, that Connolly subordinated his socialism to his nationalism. In a January 1916 article he flaunted the fact that his actions were parallel to the rest of the labor movements in Europe which fell in beneath their

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<sup>147</sup> Newsinger, *Rebel City*, 124.

<sup>148</sup> Connolly, *Labor in Irish History*, 1910. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>149</sup> Greaves, 403.

respective national banners instead of together effecting the collapse of the imperial war machine. He boasted, “We have succeeded in creating an organization [of labor] that will willingly do more for Ireland than any trade union in the world has attempted to do for its national government.”<sup>150</sup> But other writings of Connolly’s suggest that Greaves’ interpretation was correct: that Connolly understood the Rising to be a necessary step towards socialist revolution; that he could *consistently* be simultaneously a nationalist and a socialist because national independence was required for socialism; that socialism was unachievable while Irish democracy stared down the barrels of British rifles. In a February 1916 editorial, the title of which asked, “What is a Free Nation?” Connolly wrote: “A free nation must have full power to alter, amend, or abolish or modify the laws under which the property of its citizens is held in obedience to the demand of its own citizens for any such alteration, amendment, abolition, or modification. Every free nation has that power; Ireland does not have it.”<sup>151</sup> Connolly’s nationalism, while appearing to overshadow and replace his socialism, was based on the belief that Irish independence was necessary if socialism was to be achieved democratically.

Newsinger seems to be searching for some inconsistency, something which made Connolly’s nationalism incompatible with his socialism, in order to pinpoint the shortcomings of his theory. This search leads him back to a reformulation of O’Casey’s original critique: that James Connolly abandoned socialism in favor of nationalism. The main problem with this interpretation is that it treats “nationalism” as a monolithic idea and therefore fails to take into account a qualitative shift evident in the nationalism espoused by James Connolly. Horace B. Davis, in his study of Marxist theories of

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<sup>150</sup> Connolly, “What is our Programme?” *Workers’ Republic*, 22 January 1916. In Edwards, 347.

<sup>151</sup> Connolly, “What is a Free Nation?” *Workers’ Republic*, 12 February 1916. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

nationalism, notes the diversity of nationalisms: “There was no conflict between the anti-nationalism of the IWW and the Irish nationalism of Connolly and Larkin, for the former was directed against the imperialist nationalism of the United States and Great Britain, and not against the rising nationalist sentiment in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.”<sup>152</sup> Nationalism *per se* does not contradict socialism; rather, the character of a nationalist movement is dependent upon its context. Indeed, to argue for the incompatibility of nationalism and socialism is to discount various twentieth-century colonial liberation movements in Africa and Asia. The view was articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1961: “If it triumphs, the national revolution will be socialist; [...] we shall achieve revolutionary socialism everywhere and all together or we shall be beaten one by one by our former tyrants.”<sup>153</sup> Connolly took this very position in 1897: in an independent Ireland without socialism, “the green-coated Irish soldiers will guard the fraudulent gains of the capitalist and landlord from ‘the thin hands of the poor’ just as remorselessly and effectively as the scarlet-coated emissaries of England to today.”<sup>154</sup> C. Desmond Greaves was correct when he wrote that Connolly “anticipated what is now known as neo-colonialism.”<sup>155</sup>

The question remains as to whether Connolly’s participation in the Easter rising was a strategic step towards establishing socialism or a sincere acceptance of the logic put forth in Pearse’s Proclamation. The prevalent assumption of the historical literature on the subject – that the explanation has to be one or the other, that both motivations

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<sup>152</sup> Davis, 124.

<sup>153</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 1961 Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), xlvii.

<sup>154</sup> Connolly, “Socialism and Nationalism,” *Shan Van Vocht*, January 1897. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>155</sup> C. Desmond Greaves, “Connolly and Easter Week: A Rejoinder to John Newsinger,” *Science and Society* 48, (1984), 220.

could not have been equally decisive – suggests a monolithic understanding of nationalism. It is not the case, as Newsinger argues, that Connolly’s socialism was fully subordinated to his nationalism; nor is it the case, as Greaves argues, that Connolly’s nationalism was based on Ireland’s colonial context and only intended as a step in an envisaged progression from colony to independent state to socialism. This instrumental sense of nationalism *is* evident throughout Connolly’s writing; but there is also another sense of nationalism evident throughout his writing which came to dominate especially after 1914: Gaelic cultural nationalism.

As Gerard Delanty and Patrick O’Mahony argue, instead of imagining an alternative to the cultural politics of nationalism, Connolly came to believe that “oppositional positions in society could still belong to the overall cultural consensus and did not require to engage in constructing their own counter-culture.”<sup>156</sup> Connolly had at one point been engaged in constructing a socialist counter-culture. He wrote in 1897: “our nationalism is not merely a morbid idealizing of the past, but is also capable of formulating a distinct and definite answer to the problems of the present and a political and economic creed capable of adjustment to the wants of the future.”<sup>157</sup> The political culture he was promoting was not primordial but as fluid as the present. In a 1909 essay comparing labor and Sinn Fein, Connolly argued: “Ireland must rely upon itself, respect her own traditions, know her own history, preserve her own language and literature without prejudice to, or denial of, the worth in the language or literature of other people, stand erect in her own worth and claim to be appraised for her own intrinsic value.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Delanty and O’Mahony, 91.

<sup>157</sup> Connolly, “Socialism and Nationalism,” *Shan Van Vocht*, January 1897. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>158</sup> Connolly, “Sinn Fein, Socialism, and Labor,” *Irish Nation*, 23 January, 1909.

Nationality was real, according to his logic, and it certainly should not be *disavowed*, either coercively or voluntarily, in the course of seeking peace. But the nation-state for Connolly was by no means of *primary* importance because “factors for Freedom take no heed to political frontiers, nor to the demarcations of political states,” but only the universal relations of the workplace.<sup>159</sup> Connolly went from understanding nationality as sort of an indispensable triviality to celebrating it as the only viable framework for freedom, happiness, and meaning. For example, in August 1914, Connolly identified “Irish discontent” as “symptoms of an aspiration after distinct nationality,” rather than making any appeals to social justice.<sup>160</sup> In 1915, he legitimized the “eternal tradition” notion of the separatist cosmology, writing: “The fight in Ireland has been one for the soul of a race – that Irish race which with seven centuries of defeat behind it still battled for the sanctity of its dwelling place.”<sup>161</sup> And in 1916, he argued that “the frontiers of Ireland, the ineffaceable marks of the separate existence of Ireland, are as old as Europe itself, the handiwork of the Almighty,” affording the nation-state that mystical status granted by the setting of its foundations in an obscure, immemorial past.<sup>162</sup>

This same theme of cultural nationalism in his thought which led him to believe that the Gaelic race was innately socialist, that Orange cultural identity was a misguided Irish identity, and that Irishness was measured, as Richard English puts it, “against certain indices of supposed authenticity – Catholicism, Gaelicism, separatism, Anglophobia,” now dominated his politics to the extent that it made him willing, even

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<sup>159</sup> James Connolly, “Sinn Fein and Socialism,” *The Harp*, April 1908. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>160</sup> Connolly, “The National Danger,” *Irish Worker*, 15 August 1914. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>161</sup> “Ireland’s Travail and Ireland’s Resurrection,” *Workers’ Republic*, 7 August 1915. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>162</sup> Connolly, “What is a Free Nation?” *Workers’ Republic*, 12 February 1916. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

eager, to die for Ireland.<sup>163</sup> He warned the Irish in February 1916 that the solution to their problems might lie in a “supreme act of self-sacrifice – to die if need be that our race might live in freedom.”<sup>164</sup> And indeed, Connolly knew he would die as a result of the Easter Rising. The IRB’s Supreme Military Council, of which Connolly was a member, had the chance to postpone the Rising once it became clear that German aid would not come and that victory was impossible, but Connolly cast the deciding vote in favor of proceeding regardless.<sup>165</sup> Before the march from Liberty Hall on Easter Monday, he confided in his union colleague and eventual successor William O’Brien, “We are going out to be slaughtered.”<sup>166</sup> By participating in the Easter Rising, Connolly opted for martyrdom. Sean Farrell Moran argues that “Ireland’s Easter Rising of 1916 was not the result of some rational political process,” but rather “aestheticism that expressed itself within political action.”<sup>167</sup> Pearse and the separatists expected defeat and execution, of course. It was an expectation consistent with Pearse’s historiography, that every generation must make a blood sacrifice to restore the honor of their shamefully enslaved nation. After all, the cultural nationalist’s battle was not just military, but spiritual and moral as well, and as Moran points out, “If the conflict between Britain and Ireland was transcendent, failure could become success.”<sup>168</sup> Leading up to the Easter Rising, this cultural politics of symbolic self-sacrifice made its way into Connolly’s thinking as well. This is what changed on the road to Easter 1916.

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<sup>163</sup> English, 200.

<sup>164</sup> Connolly, “What is a Free Nation?” Workers’ Republic, 12 February 1916. From James Connolly Internet Archive, Marxists.org.

<sup>165</sup> Coogan, 96.

<sup>166</sup> Greaves, 410.

<sup>167</sup> Moran, 625-631.

<sup>168</sup> Sean Farrell Moran, Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 99.

## Conclusion

I undertook this study not simply to add my own interpretation of James Connolly to the existing wealth of literature, much of it polemical, regarding the soundness of his theory. Breaking into longstanding historiographical debate over Connolly's reputation – whether to represent him in a favorable light or a critical light – was not my primary concern here. Instead, what I hope to have offered through a discussion of Connolly is a case study exploring how theories of universal human liberation can degenerate into divisive, anti-humanistic, transcendental missions. For most of his career James Connolly was a cosmopolitan Marxist who conceptualized the nation in a de-mystified way and whose nationalism was a reaction to Ireland's colonial context. But Europe's reversion to the primordial politics of mystified tribalism, leading its nations to total war in 1914, pulled Connolly firmly into the trap – into an inflexible and morally inflated understanding of the nature of human solidarity that can lead relatively effortlessly to bloodshed. His inability to transcend the sectarian divide in Ulster in 1911-1912 was the first sign of a shift from a context-dependent anti-colonial nationalism into an absolute, inflexible, spiritual, non-rational, racist, exclusive, primordial, anti-modern Gaelic cultural nationalism.

Ireland's situation of ethnic conflict is a case deserving of study. Until several years ago, this conflict has continued to take lives in northeast Ulster, and there is no guarantee that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement will provide the groundwork for a permanent peace. The fact that identity-based struggles continue to take lives around the world – in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia, and, as these words are being written, in

Iraq – testifies to the dangerous irrationality of an identity politics still prevalent despite the efforts of progressive minds to effect its eradication. The link between ethnic conflict and imperialism needs to be studied in depth. In Ireland as in the aforementioned cases, the transfer of populations, the culturally insensitive creation and alteration of political borders, and the imported concept of nationality, which politicized culture by making it the foundation for political legitimacy, all combined to set ethnic conflict in motion. James Connolly attempted, with his theory, to turn the labor movement into an effective counterweight to these dangerous developments. This was a study of how his theory failed. The juggling of socialism and nationalism in his theory could only be resolved if his nationalism were not absolute and exclusive, if he did not assert that divinely forged communities should live within divinely drawn borders, if he accepted the fluidity of communities subject to the forces of life and the forces of history. By 1916, Gaelic cultural nationalism was so prevalent in his thought that resolving the nationalist-internationalist dilemma was nearly impossible. Instead of forming the foundation of a culturally independent liberation project, Connolly's socialist politics were integrated into the dominant cultural nationalist discourse, too unyieldingly homogenizing to facilitate reconciliation, peace, and justice in a country as diverse and complex as Ireland.

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