Claiming Connolly:  

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Abstract

James Connolly’s legacy is of pivotal importance for Irish republicans. Connolly took a leading role in the 1916 Rising; his execution by British forces made him a martyr in the eyes of republicans. Connolly’s participation in the Rising, however, is not on its own sufficient to account for the prolific use republicans have made of him. The republican invocation of Connolly outstrips even that of Pádraig Pearse who himself played a leading part in the Rising and was similarly martyred.

That Connolly should be so commonly invoked and held in such high esteem by republicans is somewhat perplexing. Connolly, despite occasional republican denials, was a Marxist and Marxism was a doctrine that republicans generally repudiated. Understanding why Connolly became such a preeminent figure in republican discourse is part of understanding republicanism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Because Connolly is both an icon and an enigma he provides a means by which to examine the development of republican ideas and the conflicting interpretations of his legacy.

This thesis also explores the political intricacies and ambiguities that are present in Connolly’s own thought and activity - intricacies and ambiguities that may have allowed his ready adoption by variant republicanism.
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Glossary

**Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH):** An Irish Catholic organisation, the AOH emerged in the late 1830s as a Catholic reaction to the Protestant Orange Order. Its motto was *Fidelity to Faith and Fatherland*. The group was closely associated with the Irish Parliamentary Party. Nationalist, sectarian and conservative, the AOH supported William Martin Murphy and the employers during the Dublin Lockout.

**Irish Citizen Army (ICA):** A workers' militia formed during the 1913 Lockout to protect picketing workers from attack. The ICA —sought an Ireland ruled, and owned, by Irish men and women, sovereign and independent‖.¹ Under the command of James Connolly the ICA joined with the Irish Volunteers to take part in the 1916 Rising.

**Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP):** From 1873 the political party advocating Irish Home Rule in the Westminster Parliament. Its leader in 1916, John Redmond, denounced the instigators of the Easter Rising. The party was soundly beaten by Sinn Féin in the 1918 election. Sinn Féin went on to declare an Irish Republic; the IPP never recovered politically.

**Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB):** A conspiratorial organisation dedicated to insurrection founded by James Stephens in 1858. The IRB came to be popularly known as the ‘Fenians’. In 1867 the IRB took part in a failed rising. A subsequent attempt to rescue the movement's leaders from imprisonment also failed and three men, the ‘Manchester Martyrs’, were hanged for their part in the plot. An IRB cell was at the heart of planning the 1916 Rising.

**Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP):** Breakaway from the Official republican faction formed in 1974. The group was led by Seamus Costello until his murder in 1977. The IRSP's paper was *The Starry Plough*.

Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP): The renamed Dublin Socialist Society after Connolly became its organiser in 1896. The group never gained a large membership and folded soon after Connolly left for the United States in 1903.

Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU): Militant industrial union formed by James Larkin in 1909. James Connolly became the ITGWU’s Belfast organiser in 1911 and General Secretary when Larkin went to America in October 1914.

Irish Volunteers: Nationalist militia formed in 1913 in response to the unionist Ulster Volunteer Force. The Volunteers split in 1914 with the majority section (to become known as the National Volunteers) choosing to heed the call of Home Rule leader John Redmond to support the British war effort. The remaining Irish Volunteer organisation which opposed involvement in the war would provide the bulk of insurgent forces for the Rising.


Introduction

Apostles of Freedom are ever idolised when dead, but crucified when living... He was crucified in life, now he is idolised in death, and the men who push forward most arrogantly to burn incense at the altar of his fame are drawn from the very class who, were he alive today, would hasten to repudiate him as a dangerous malcontent.¹

James Connolly.

James Connolly's legacy is contested. Competing historical and political renderings of Connolly are poised in opposition to one another. Connolly has been embraced by revolutionaries and rebels, 'constitutional' politicians and republican insurgents, and the embrace has often been maintained as the political personalities have manoeuvred from one position to another. Michael Collins - a 'bit player' in the 1916 Rising, later the organiser of the Irish Republican Army during the Anglo-Irish War, a signatory to the Anglo-Irish treaty and First Commander in Chief of the Irish National Army - reflected that 'there was an air of earthy directness about Connolly. I would have followed him through hell.'² Collins' fellow rebel in 1916 and then his anti-treaty opponent, Eamon de Valera, the man who would become the Taoiseach (prime minister) of Ireland (three times), speaking in the Dáil Éireann (Irish parliament), could affect that 'if I were asked what statement of Irish policy was most in accord with my view as to what human beings should struggle for, I would stand side by side with James Connolly'.³ Fianna Fáil, the nationalist party established by de Valera, could invoke the memory of Connolly on occasion, but the Irish Labour Party laid claim to Connolly as one of its founders. The Labour Party's reverence for Connolly has continued, at least in the rhetoric of commemoration. Labour leader Eamon Gilmore

² Quoted in Rex Taylor, Michael Collins, Hutchinson, London, 1958, p.77. Taylor does not provide a citation for this letter from Collins to Kevin O’Brien.
professed that "Connolly's life and struggles still inspire us, to renew our work for the ideals that he espoused, and which have still yet to come to fruition in modern Ireland."

Connolly’s appropriation by the political parties of the Irish “establishment” is matched by the affirmation of the Irish socialist left. The Communist Party of Ireland lauds Connolly as “one of the greatest political thinkers to emerge in the early twentieth century”. The Irish Socialist Workers Party (SWP) declared that, “like the great James Connolly, we believe that partition [of Ireland] has bought about a carnival of reaction”. The SWP proffered Connolly’s goal of the Irish workers' republic as their own: “We want to see an Irish workers republic where all workers gain.”

The parties of the constitutional centre and of the revolutionary left invoked Connolly to support their own political projects. Connolly, however, has also become a political icon for the Irish republican movement and it is Connolly’s legacy for Irish republicanism that will be the focus of the following thesis. Republicanism’s relationship with Connolly, and what that says about both the politics of republicanism and the politics of Connolly, will be examined in the period 1966 to 2005. The time span selected covers the years just prior to the outbreak of the troubles in Northern Ireland, through the peace process of the late 1990s, ending with the Provisional IRA’s 2005 order to dump arms. It was during these years that the phoenix of Irish republicanism rose from seemingly terminal decline to become a significant player in mainstream Irish politics. It was in this period also that republicanism split, and split again; throughout this period each newly emerged faction of the republican movement, in one way or another, continued to reference Connolly as a political mentor.

James Connolly has been the subject of numerous biographies. His politics have been considered by historians and polemicists (sometimes one and the same). William Anderson observed, in his scholarly exegesis of Connolly’s politics, that in many respects Connolly’s political legacy was a vessel into which each man could pour his own dream. Certainly republicans have imbued Connolly’s legacy with their own meanings. David Lloyd, from the University of Southern California, has suggested that

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6 This declaration has appeared as part of the SWP’s published platform. See “What the Socialist Workers Party stands for”, Socialist Worker, No.329, April 20-May 7, 2011, p.2.

7 “What the Socialist Workers Party stands for”, p.2.

what might be found most interesting in Connolly – is to think from Connolly’s writings to the meaning of the ongoing republican struggle, now in a non-violent political phase, and what it signifies for the longer term future of the island.” Connolly’s position as an incisive political commentator and participant during a period of intense upheaval in Ireland’s history would seem to reinforce the validity of Professor Lloyd’s proposition. The Irish _national question_ loomed large in Connolly’s lifetime and he engaged vigorously with this pressing political problem of the day. Part of this engagement was Connolly’s attempt to find some kind of political rapport with Irish republicans, an attempt that ultimately led him to participate in the 1916 Rising. Connolly in life was a voice on the periphery of Irish republicanism; in death, however, Connolly has become an iconic figure for republicans.

One of Connolly’s expositors, Bernard Ransom, described Connolly as “a truly major Marxist theoretician”. Ransom added that Connolly was “a great man” by any standards ... and a man from whom we might learn in the depth of his intellectual challenge”. The Irish historical narrative has extolled Connolly’s virtues; it has celebrated his intellect and his noble qualities. In the process, however, Connolly’s politics have sometimes become obscured. Connolly’s legacy requires further exploration. Helga Woggon observed that Connolly’s post-1923, and in particular his post-1966 impact, still needs to be studied in depth.” William Anderson, in _James Connolly and the Irish Left_, made a valiant attempt. Anderson sought to address the question of the extent to which Connolly’s legacy provided real guidance and inspiration to the Irish Left from 1916 to 1940.” Anderson admitted that one of the major problems he faced in examining Connolly’s legacy was his status as a much honoured and greatly revered national hero.

In some respects this thesis embarks on a similar project to that undertaken by Anderson although with a different focus and method. It seeks to scrutinize the Connolly legacy in relation to Irish republicanism: how and why have republicans mobilised Connolly and how has this mobilisation and rationale changed as

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11 Ransom, _Connolly’s Marxism_, p.5.
republicanism has developed? The problem identified by Anderson – Connolly's status as a national hero – persists; Connolly's 'martyrdom' in 1916 had the effect of distorting the historical and political perceptions of him. But the form taken by these perceptions and how they were received and molded by republicans makes Connolly a 'lens' through which to examine Irish republicanism since 1966. The topic also has another element: did Connolly's political thought and its evolution lend itself to later appropriation (or misappropriation) by militant Irish republicanism? The study of Connolly as he was seen by republicanism will raise questions, not only pertaining to the recent twists and turns of the republican movement, but also as to the ambiguities of Connolly's own politics.

The republicanism that will be the focus of discussion in this thesis is of the 'physical force' variety. Armed struggle occupies a pivotal place in the strategy of this form of 'insurrectionary' republicanism, at least at some point in the history of the groups being discussed. The ultimate goal of the republicanism being studied was to sever Ireland's connection with Britain and create a unified 32-county Irish republic. What that republic might look like politically – a federation of provinces or a democratic socialist republic – depended on the inclination of the republican faction involved. In the period under scrutiny, 1966 to 2005, republicans were most concerned with the continued British presence in the six north-east counties of Ireland – Northern Ireland - that, after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, remained part of the United Kingdom. The main 'political' organisations which have historically expressed the doctrine described and which will be the focus of attention include 'Provisional' Sinn Féin, 'Official' Sinn Féin (and its later renamed incarnations), the Irish Republican Socialist Party and Republican Sinn Féin.\(^{15}\) These groups have to a large degree been given 'equal time' in the thesis. That may be considered a disservice to the 'Provisionals' who have become the most prominent of all the republican factions in Ireland and perhaps could therefore demand greater consideration. The Provisionals, however, have received a great deal of attention from scholars and commentators so the focus of analysis here was expanded to encompass the whole of the republican movement. It would be too much to claim that any attempt was being made to 'rescue' these more obscure republican groups from the condescension of posterity” but while

\(^{15}\) Although not always used by the protagonists themselves, for the sake of clarity the terms 'Provisional' and 'Official' will be used when referring to these particular republican factions.
―their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy‖, "they were casualties of history‖ and worthy of the examination they are given.\footnote{Apologies to E.P. Thompson, \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK, 1974, p.13.}

Journalist Kevin Toolis, in his \textit{journeys within the IRA’s soul} made the extraordinary claim that the violence during \textit{the Troubles} ... were acts of rebellion rather than revolution. No one had a plan to proclaim a \textit{liberated} Northern Ireland a Marxist state.\footnote{Kevin Toolis, \textit{Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA’s Soul}, Picador, London, 1995, p.5.} For the republicans that will be discussed here this is simply not the case. The aforementioned republican groups had quite definite plans - not necessarily Marxist and not necessarily practical – but revolutionary plans nevertheless. Indeed the politics expressed by these groups (and their paramilitary cohorts) could quite credibly be described as \textit{revolutionary republicanism}. Certainly at one time or another all of the republican organisations in question have depicted themselves as revolutionaries; their programmes usually called for not just the expulsion of the British from Ireland and the unification of the country, but also some form of social transformation of Irish society more generally. The use of armed force has often been the chosen means to attain that end, at least initially. All of the aforementioned organisations have, at one time or another during their history, existed alongside a paramilitary group that has espoused a facsimile of the unarmed party’s republican politics. Sometimes these paramilitary groups were openly acknowledged as the armed wing of the republican party in question, sometimes not. The pronouncements of these paramilitary groups as they invoked Connolly for political purpose will also be the subject of analysis.

To add a final element of clarity to the foci of the study, parties such as the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) of Northern Ireland and the Fianna Fáil party in the Republic of Ireland fall outside the ambit of insurrectionary republicanism. The SDLP does endorse the goal of a united Ireland and even claims to be a \textit{truly republican party}.\footnote{“The Good Friday Agreement”, see SDLP website, \url{http://www.sdlp.ie/index.php/the_issues/the_good_friday_agreement/}, accessed 21 December 2012.} Throughout its history, however, the SDLP has only engaged in \textit{constitutional} political activity. The party is not linked to any paramilitary organisation and indeed has strongly criticised the republican armed struggle and those who have supported it. Fianna Fáil also cannot be classified as insurrectionary republicans in the period under investigation. The party has never possessed an armed wing. Although Fianna Fáil emerged out of the insurrectionary republicanism of Sinn
Féin and could on occasion mobilise the electoral support of a republican constituency (including IRA members), the history of Fianna Fáil as a governing party of the Irish state has included periods of severe repression of more 'ardent' republicans. In 1939 a Fianna Fáil government introduced the Offences Against the State Act, a statute that allowed for the internment of IRA volunteers without trial. A Fianna Fáil government in 1972 succeeded in amending the Act to make it easier to secure the conviction of suspected IRA members. The amended act was quickly put to use against republicans with the arrest that year of prominent members of (Provisional) Sinn Féin.19 Individual members, sometimes quite high ranking, could aid and abet republican paramilitarism at times but the party as a whole rejected armed struggle. 20 In government (and out of it) Fianna Fáil has not supported insurrectionary republicanism. The party has paid lip-service to a broad republican goal but it has not pursued that end with any sort of political (let alone paramilitary) vigour. While still clinging to the addendum 'the Republican Party', Fianna Fáil is a decidedly 'constitutional' political organisation and should more appropriately be considered as an opponent of the 'physical force' republican movement. Fianna Fáil, therefore, will not be included among the republicans looked at in this study.

Why should Irish republicanism be examined in the way suggested? The republican movement has been a pivotal political protagonist both in the struggle for the establishment of the Irish 'nation' and in the ongoing political process since 1921. In the late 1960s the republican movement experienced a resurgence. With the outbreak of 'the troubles' in the north of Ireland after 1969 republican paramilitaries and the politics they espoused gained a prominence and notoriety that they had not enjoyed since the days of the Irish Civil War. While the armed struggle that republicans pursued might have gained most attention, the republican movement eventually demonstrated that it was quite capable of launching remarkably successful forays into the electoral arena. Irish republicanism has displayed an obsession with doctrine – with 'republican tradition' – and that has led to a number of bitter splits in the movement. While on one level, however, the factional splits might seem to illustrate republicanism's doctrinal rigidity, on another they can be taken as an indicator of the movement's political flexibility. Republican dogma, it appears, can be revised and political (and military)

20 The alleged involvement of Fianna Fáil politicians Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney in a plot to supply arms to the IRA in the early period of the troubles is perhaps the prime example.
strategy can be altered, even if it is to the chagrin of some of the more ‘traditionalist’ republicans. Republicanism, or at least sections of it, has shown an extraordinary ability to reinvent itself to suit contemporary conditions and, for the most part, it has taken Connolly along ‘for the ride’.

During the period under scrutiny Connolly was frequently invoked by republicans. In republicanism’s pantheon of martyrs and heroes it is Connolly who has gained the greatest stature. In each of the republican factions, from the ‘traditionalists’ of Republican Sinn Féin to the ‘leftists’ of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, are likely to be found *cumann* (branches) named after Connolly. Sinn Féin’s Andersonstown constituency office bears the eponym ‘Connolly House’. Bobby Sands, one of the 1981 hunger strikers who joined the ranks of the honoured republican dead, proclaimed that ‘Connolly has always been the man I look up to’.

Republicans themselves might explain the reverence they have for Connolly by citing the leading role he played in the nationalist Easter Rising of 1916. The Rising and the Proclamation of the Republic certainly represents a significant aspect of Connolly’s legacy. Connolly’s participation in the Rising, however, is not on its own sufficient to account for the prolific use republicans have made of him. The republican invocation of Connolly outstrips even that of Pádraig Pearse who himself played a leading part in the 1916 Rising and, in the eyes of republicans, was similarly ‘martyred’. While Pearse is respectfully eulogised, his political thought has not found the same sort of authority or resonance among modern republicans as has Connolly’s. The historian Kieran Allen noted that ‘republicans themselves have shifted increasingly from a worship of Pearse to a worship of Connolly’.

When Pearse’s ideas are recalled they are often specifically linked with those of Connolly. Connolly is not merely remembered by republicans as a fallen fighter; his politics, or a version of them, have been widely embraced and integrated into republican doctrine. Connolly’s legacy has been claimed by the republican movement.

That Connolly should be so commonly invoked and held in such high esteem by republicans is, in some regards, perplexing. Connolly, despite occasional republican denials, was a Marxist. Perceived as an atheistic ideology, Marxism was a problematic political concept for sometimes pious Irish republicans to accept. Marxism also declares

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its *international* revolutionary intentions, an avowal that could seem irrelevant to nationalist minded (and occasionally parochial) Irish republican militants. It is, however, this *strange embrace* of Connolly that suggests him as a pertinent analytical tool to probe the intricacies of republican ideology. Through Connolly the potential exists to examine the development of republican ideas and the recurring doctrinal themes and controversies that arise within the movement’s political discourse. Republicanism’s relationship with left politics will be of particular interest. Connolly’s emergent popularity among republicans seemed to coincide with the radical upswing of the late 1960s but it did not appear to diminish as leftist (and particularly Marxist) politics lost their attraction in the 1980s and 1990s. The analysis of republicanism through its invocation of Connolly also presents an opportunity to explore the political intricacies and ambiguities that are present in Connolly’s own thought and activity - intricacies and ambiguities that may have allowed his ready adoption by republicanism.

The literature put out by republicanism itself, by its various major factions, will provide the primary source material for the thesis. Republicanism is perhaps comparable only to the revolutionary left in its prolific publication of political material. Republican organisations have issued an abundance of newspapers and pamphlets. Individual republicans have written autobiographies, accounts of their historical experience in *the struggle*, political tracts and analyses of the republican movement. Part of the role of these publications is for the republican faction in question (or even the individual) to communicate politically with their own constituency – other republicans. The literature acts to sustain the republican *faithful*, reinforce their doctrinal commitment and improve their capacities for defending the republican position. These publications, however, reach further; they seek to connect with republican sympathisers and the broader public to publicise and advocate the republican cause. Republican literature must speak, at the same time, to both an *internal* and an *external* audience. Through these publications can be traced the shifts that have taken place in republican analyses and outlook; the republican press often signalled the changes in republicanism’s political method, tactics and strategy. These political turns needed to be explained and justified – sometimes they were contested - in the pages of the movement’s literature. Connolly and reference to his political thought is recurrent throughout republicanism’s publications and across all the movement’s factions. He is invoked time and again to defend or condemn a panoply of political positions. His analysis is used, sometimes in contradictory ways, to support the republican point of view. Connolly is interpreted and
re-interpreted, exemplified and manipulated by a range of republican scriveners. The prestigious place Connolly occupies in republican discourse makes him an ideal instrument for ‘unpacking’ the content and ‘tracking’ the direction of republican politics.

The influence of republicanism in Irish political society has already been described; this influence has been felt even within Irish academia. Republicanism has attracted the interest and sometimes the political allegiance of a number of intellectuals in Ireland. This occasionally partisan intellectual engagement has created an unusual ‘blurring’ of the divide between primary and secondary source material for this thesis. The scholars Paul Bew and Henry Patterson provide a pertinent example: Patterson and Bew have both made significant contributions to the writing of Irish history. In the collaborative text, *The State in Northern Ireland, 1921-72*, Patterson and Bew (along with Peter Gibbon) open their work with a study of James Connolly and his legacy.\(^{23}\) Patterson and Bew are established historians but they have also been associated with the ‘Official’ faction of Irish republicanism – the Workers’ Party. They have spoken at party events, they have written for party publications, and they have taken part in the internal debates of the party.\(^{24}\) Of course the idea that scholars are (or should be) politically ‘disinterested’ is entirely spurious. The association of Patterson, Bew, and others with a political expression of republicanism does not necessarily negate the historical insights that have been provided by these scholars. *The State in Northern Ireland* claimed to be a Marxist history but it was a critical commentary that came out of a milieu that had at least at one time considered itself republican.\(^{25}\) The scholars in question are at one and the same time elucidating their chosen topic in a scholarly way and contributing to a wider republican narrative.\(^{26}\) If nothing else this feature of Irish historiography serves to illustrate the continued significance of the ‘national question’ for Irish intellectuals and the penetration of republicanism into Irish intellectual life.

The writings of James Connolly also provide source material; they will be used both as a basic analytical tool and a test of particular republican interpretations of Connolly’s politics. Connolly was perhaps not quite the ‘major Marxist theoretician’

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\(^{26}\) Republicans from opposing factions might contend that the political transformation(s) of the ‘Officials’ meant that they eventually repudiated republicanism.
described by Ransom. Nevertheless he did have relevant things to say about the Irish national question, about political (and paramilitary) strategy and about republicanism. Many of the aspects of Irish society that he commented on continued to shape Irish history after his death: sectarianism, imperialism, nationalism and capitalism. These insights will be alluded to when discussing the historical situation that republicanism found itself in after 1966.

How Connolly’s theories matched the interpretation given by republicanism will demand reference to Connolly’s actual writing. Any claim to historical objectivity should, of course, be viewed with historiographical suspicion and no such claim is made here. The conception that one historical interpretation is as good as another, however, is no less problematic. The literary theorist, Terry Eagleton, remarked on the more concrete nature of certain truths:

All truths are established from specific viewpoints; but it does not make sense to say that there is a tiger in the bathroom from my point of view but not from yours. You and I may contend fiercely about whether there is a tiger in the bathroom or not ... [but] one of us has to be wrong.

In this spirit, that it is possible to be wrong about certain claims, this thesis will enter into the interpretive fray concerning Connolly. Catherine Morris wrote of recent attempts to reclaim and reinvent Connolly, that is part of the purpose of this thesis. If that endeavour is to progress, however, some versions of Connolly need to be challenged. Varied credible interpretations of Connolly might coexist but when a political group mobilizes an historical figure like Connolly to support its programmes and activity it is only fitting that these interpretations be subjected to rigorous critique – particularly if the historical basis for the assertions being made is sometimes tenuous.

Connolly’s collected works have been recently published under the auspices of the Irish Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, (the successor union to Connolly’s ITGWU). Alas as a historian working from an Australian base these collections were unavailable and use was made of older compilations. Where possible the citation of Connolly’s work will be sourced to one of these published collections or the actual primary source (most often the later Workers’ Republic newspaper). Some quotations may be obtained from biographies of Connolly. As a last resort use will be

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27 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, p.3.
made of the reliable internet source, the Connolly collection provided by the Marxist Internet Archive.\(^{30}\)

Ireland’s historical transition towards independent nationhood has been fraught, complex and divisive. For most of the republicans who will be discussed here the _national question_ remained unresolved. Offering a definition of the nation (and appearing to borrow heavily from Josef Stalin) the _Official_ republican wing ventured that

> A nation is a community of people sharing a common territory, economy and language, with a common history, traditions and culture, and whose members therefore are bound together by ties of sympathy and common interest.\(^{31}\)

In the case of Ireland, however, the aspiration for a _common territory … traditions and culture_ has presented a serious and enduring problem. Ireland has been host to two rival nationalisms: Irish nationalism, either seeking _Home Rule_ or a republic, and British nationalism in the form of unionism – the desire to maintain Ireland’s political union with Britain. After the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921) the country was partitioned. Six north eastern counties in the province of Ulster, which by then accommodated the majority of unionists, were consolidated as an entity separate from the newly established Irish Free State, which governed the remaining twenty six counties. The Northern Ireland parliament that was set up remained loyally subordinate to the British parliament at Westminster. In essence a Home Rule parliament came into existence in Northern Ireland to administer the region’s local affairs. The Irish _Free State_ operated initially with dominion status but it would eventually declare itself a republic in 1948.\(^{32}\)

Neither the Free State nor the later Republic of Ireland was acceptable to avowed republicans. In the eyes of these republicans the _twenty six counties_ retained the stigma of being a state created under British auspices – the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921. The partition of the country also meant that, for republicans, the sought after _common territory_ of the nation was divided. For these republicans the _national question_ remained _unfinished business_.

\(^{31}\) Anon, *Imperialism and the Irish Nation*, Repsol pamphlet no. 9, Dublin, (no date). Circa 1972, there is an earlier version of this pamphlet, 1969.
\(^{32}\) Northern Ireland as a governmental entity was established by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. This act also established a Home Rule parliament for the southern twenty six counties but this became null and void with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921.
The partition of Ireland was an expedient measure taken by British politicians in a situation of crisis and conflict. It was supported (begrudgingly) by local Irish unionist leaders. The calculations that led to the creation of Northern Ireland were plainly sectarian. Sectarianism had been a recognizable feature of Irish politics and society for some time prior to 1921, but in the northern regime that emerged after 1921 the rough congruence between confessional communities and national allegiance, along with the demographic "balance of forces" between those communities, gave a pronounced sectarian character to the newly created sub-state. The unionists, a zealous minority (or at least zealously led) on the island as a whole, remained resolutely loyal to Britain and conceived their identity in terms of that loyalty. In 1920-1921 unionist control and the link to the United Kingdom were maintained in Northern Ireland on the basis of a territorial partition that secured unionist political dominance in the region. The general coincidence of unionism with Protestantism reinforced a sense of "otherness" in relation to the preponderant Catholicism of the nationalists. Of course Protestantism does not describe a singular, homogenous community of faith. Yet in the Irish case it did serve to define and unite people in explicit contradistinction to the Catholicism of much of the island's population. For many of those who affirmed a staunchly British national identity, Protestantism was part of being British. The expression of this "British Protestant" identity in Northern Ireland was manifest and at times extreme.

On the Catholic side there was also a coalescing of political viewpoint(s) around a confessional identity. Members of the Catholic community frequently identified with Irish nationalism. Historically many Catholics had shown strong support for either Home Rule or complete separation from Britain. Part of the impetus for this identification with Irish nationalism was that Catholicism had for a very long time been treated with hostility, condescension and lingering prejudice by British society. In Ireland this prejudice was particularly pronounced and persistent. With the creation of the Northern Ireland sub-state this anti-Catholicism took on (or perhaps regained) institutional form. Northern Ireland's first Prime Minster, James Craig, expressed well the sectarian character of the Northern administration (and also intimated the sectarian basis of the Southern state):

33 Despite the tendency toward the association of Protestantism with unionism and Catholicism with nationalism there are enough exceptions to indicate that the trend should always be considered critically.
The hon. Member must remember that in the South they boasted of a Catholic State. They still boast of Southern Ireland being a Catholic State. All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.  

Northern Ireland was consciously engineered as a sub-state that would contain a Protestant and unionist majority. The boundary of Northern Ireland and the electoral boundaries within it were drawn to invariably deliver legislative and executive power into the hands of those who supported the union with Britain. Social policies too were formulated to ensure the dominance of unionism and the loyalty of its supporters. Sir Basil Brooke, Northern Ireland’s Minister for Agriculture and later to become Northern Ireland’s second Prime Minister, revealed the sectarian calculations needed to maintain this Protestant supremacy. Amidst an economic crisis that threatened the stability of the sectarian order Brooke recommended people not to employ Roman Catholics, who were 99 per cent disloyal.”

Far from being censured for these overtly sectarian sentiments Brooke’s comments were supported by his Prime Minister, James Craig, who declared that “there is not one of my colleagues who does not entirely agree with him, and I would not ask him to withdraw one word he said.” Discriminatory practices against the Catholic population in housing, the local government franchise and employment continued well into twentieth century. During the late 1960s this discrimination gave rise to a campaign for equal civil rights for Catholics within the context of the United Kingdom. When this campaign found itself at an impasse in the face of a government seemingly adverse to meaningful reform, as the police responded to civil rights demonstrators with brutality and sectarian violence erupted, armed republicanism resurfaced to fill the political vacuum.

The use of the terms ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ to describe two communities in Northern Ireland is widely acknowledged as problematic. Ciarán de Baróid in his

39 The concept that there are only two ‘communities’ in Northern Ireland is equally problematic. Like any society there are many ‘communities’ in Northern Ireland with various identities outside of the Catholic/Protestant ambit.
account *Ballymurphy and the Irish War* claimed that “to describe the Irish war as a conflict between Catholics and Protestants is about as honest as portraying the Vietnam war as a conflict between Christians and Buddhists.” The point is well made; the conflict that occurred in Northern Ireland had nothing to do with theological points of difference between religions. Rather it was precipitated out of very earthly factors. The communal identity assigned to a person within Northern Ireland had material implications. People from the Catholic community suffered real discrimination in jobs, in housing allocation, and in electoral representation. The Catholic community was perceived to be “disloyal” by the politically dominant unionist establishment and was treated accordingly by a partisan police force.

There are real definitional problems that arise when using the terms “Catholic” and “Protestant” to describe the communities of Northern Ireland. The alternative “political” terms that could be used to describe the protagonists – “nationalist” and “unionist” – are, however, equally precarious. Just as it is unlikely that everyone within a given community would unambiguously share a confessional identity – Catholic or Protestant - so too it is difficult to contend that everyone in a particular community would share an undifferentiated political allegiance – nationalist or unionist. For the most part, therefore, this thesis will follow the practice suggested by Tommy McKearney in his book *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament*:

> the author has decided, in most instances, to use the generic term “Catholic” instead of “Nationalist” or “Republican” unless when denoting a precise political position. As with the term “Jewish”, which is often used to denote membership of a community rather than religious belief, Catholic is often used in Northern Ireland to include people ... who are atheist or agnostic. The term “Catholic” in the context of this book denotes a section of the Northern Irish community and thus avoids attributing a political view such as “Nationalist” or “Republican” to some who do not share that outlook or position.

A similar convention will be applied to the use of the terms “Protestant” and “unionist”: “Protestant” will be used to describe a particular community; “unionist” will be used to describe a political position held by a group or individual.

Before leaving the complexities engendered in attaching labels to people it is worth highlighting the predominant class character of the communities involved. The

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deaths that resulted from the conflict in Northern Ireland were concentrated in fewer than ten postal code districts. Over a third of those who died lived in five postal districts, in North and West Belfast. These are some of the poorest parts of Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{42} Insurrectionary Irish republicanism (re)emerged overwhelmingly from among the Catholic working class, the unemployed, and small-farming communities.\textsuperscript{43} As is often the case with modern wars, it was the people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale that did the bulk of the fighting, the killing and the dying in Northern Ireland and this would apply not just to the republicans coming out of the Catholic community but to the loyalists from the Protestant side and even to the British ‘squadies’ who were sent to quell the unrest.

Adding to the complexity of terminology in the history of this period, seemingly straightforward place names such as Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland can also be considered politically contentious, particularly for the more doctrinaire of Irish republicans. Frequently the epithet ‘Free State’ is applied by republicans to the current twenty-six county ‘Republic of Ireland’. The Republic of Ireland is still not accepted by republicans as the fulfilment of the national goal. Republicans sought (and still seek) a thirty-two county, unpartitioned Irish Republic. Leaving aside, however, the views of staunch republicans, the ‘Republic of Ireland’ is the internationally recognised name of the current Irish state. It therefore makes sense to employ that descriptor, although the word ‘southern’ may occasionally be added to assist in clarity. Some republicans similarly express their chagrin at the use of the term ‘Northern Ireland’ to describe the six north-eastern Irish counties that remain attached politically to the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{44} Again, however, it is a widely recognised descriptor and so the appellative ‘Northern Ireland’ will be used. The term ‘Ulster’, which is often applied to Northern Ireland, will not be used. Ulster encompasses nine northern counties of Ireland only six of which make up ‘Northern Ireland’. These terminological conventions will be observed except in the case of direct quotes.

Finally on terminology and language, to the best of my meagre ability (as an Australian-educated historian) I have tried to do justice to the Irish language in the text


\textsuperscript{43} McKearney, \textit{The Provisional IRA}, p.98.

\textsuperscript{44} It is pointed out by some commentators that the northern most point of the Ireland is actually in the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland.
Irish republican publications frequently attempted to use the Irish language with greater or lesser degrees of fluency. Dates of publication and page numbers are often rendered in Irish. For the most part I will try to replicate this convention in the relevant citation with an English language translation immediately following in brackets. Where obvious errors in the Irish language have been made in the republican publication it has been corrected to minimize any confusion. Where an Irish term is in common usage (at least among republicans) this is also given in Irish with an English language translation given at its first appearance, as with the term Árd Fheis (national convention). In the case of individuals’ names, the form that is in most common usage will generally be applied, as with Seán MacStiofáin instead of John Stephenson and Ruairí Ó Bradaigh instead of Rory Brady. Although Irish republicans may occasionally use James Connolly’s Irish appellation - Séamas Ó Conghaile – as that is not in common usage (and was not commonly used by him) the English language version will be adhered to. As with place names these terminological conventions will be observed except in the case of direct quotes.

The situation in Northern Ireland which became the pre-occupation of the republican movement in the later twentieth century has already been briefly described. Chapter one will go further with establishing context, looking at Connolly’s life and the development of his politics. It will also review some of Connolly’s key expositors, those who established particular representations of the man, who made, if you like, the ‘vessels’ into which republicans would ‘pour their dreams’. Those biographers who created less congenial ‘Connollys’ for republicanism’s purposes will also be considered. Chapter two will reveal just how ‘hegemonic’ Connolly is in republican discourse. This chapter will trace the history of republicanism’s splits and fractures. It will investigate how Connolly’s Marxism was assimilated, or denied, by republican groupings; it will scrutinize the competing interpretations of Connolly that emerged out of republican schism. Chapter three will look at the historical narrative that republicanism offers and Connolly’s place in it. Republicanism’s engagement with historical debate, particularly as it unfolded as part of the ‘revisionist’ controversy in Irish historiography will also be examined. Chapter four will assay how Connolly has been used in relation to

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46 Pádraig Pearse might be the obvious departure from this naming convention. Pearse’s name is often given in English. I have opted for an Irish spelling as it appears in that form regularly in republican publications and, as Pearse was a great Irish language enthusiast, it would seem appropriate.
republicanism’s use of ‘physical force’. It will examine the changed political application of Connolly as some republican factions moved away from armed struggle towards ‘constitutional’ politics. Chapter five will explore the republican conciliation of Connolly’s Marxism with Catholicism. It will trace the decline in importance of this conciliation and the resort by some republicans to a Connolly-inspired Marxist political critique; the less radical republican alternative to this critique, that still continued to revere Connolly, will also be considered. In each of these chapters the republican discourse will be related back to the actuality of Connolly’s writings and his political activity.
Chapter 1

James Connolly and his Expositors

Where oh where is our James Connolly?
Where oh where is that gallant man?
He's gone to organise the union
That working men they might yet be free

‗James Connolly‘, song by Patrick Galvin.

Following his death in front of a British firing squad James Connolly was quickly embraced as a nationalist martyr by those struggling for an independent Ireland. With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 Connolly became celebrated as one of the consecrated ‗founding fathers‘ of a ‗free‘ Irish nation. Connolly’s legacy, however, has not been unproblematic for either those attempting to consolidate the Irish state or for those who have sought to ‗remodel‘ it. Connolly’s memory needed to be treated with care by Ireland’s new political leaders lest the oppositional voices that were directed against them and against the form the new state had taken were inadvertently legitimised. If Connolly was celebrated as a rebel who sought to overthrow the established order in Ireland through armed struggle, then why could that memory not be invoked by ‗unreconciled republicans‘ in order to sanction the replacement of a current Irish ruling order and a state that was perceived as deficient, both politically and territorially? Republicans, however, could also find Connolly’s legacy discommodious. Those republicans who were religiously devout or politically parochial found Connolly’s Marxism difficult to accommodate within the strictures of their faith and doctrine. For Ireland’s rulers and for rebellious republicans alike Connolly’s legacy was to be approached with caution; it frequently needed to be reconsidered and reconciled with reference to particular political necessities. Those who wrote about Connolly grappled with his enigma; a review of their expositions will illuminate the issues that were at play in the republican figuration of Connolly.

The accounts that Connolly’s biographers have produced reflect the contested nature of his legacy. As with any historical narrative the interpretation offered is conditioned by the writer’s own ideological standpoint. In the case of Connolly, Ireland’s political divides added to the complexity. Supporters of the Irish Free State
and those opposed to it, Catholics and Communists, revisionists and Trotskyites (of whatever tendency) - each shade of opinion formed its own conception (or critique) of Connolly. He was constructed and reconstructed, celebrated, revered and revised. Various _Connollys_ were _transmitted_ to future would-be devotees through the texts of his expositors. Connolly’s followers could pick and choose which portrayal was most amenable to their purpose. Republicans could find a lot to embrace in the work of Connolly’s biographers but there were also aspects and varieties of the _Connolly story_ that were, from a republican point of view, far less endearing.

It would be a mammoth task to review all of the literature concerning Connolly; by the mid-1980s at least three hundred and forty books, articles, pamphlets and other writings had appeared.\(^1\) The texts that will be considered here are those that have provided key and/or lasting interpretations of Connolly with a special emphasis on accounts that republicans would have found influential or troubling. An initial guide as to which works might fulfil this criteria is provided by Richard English in his expansive history of the IRA. He lists the Irish historical and political texts that were read by republican prisoners during the 1980s. Along with Connolly’s own *Labour in Irish History* there was Desmond Greaves’ *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, *Connolly’s Marxism* by Bernard Ransom, David Howell’s *A Lost Left*, and the Irish Workers Group publication *Connolly: A Marxist Analysis*.\(^2\) To expand this list some of the early texts that attempted to establish particular representations of Connolly and his political outlook will also be scrutinised; so too will critical texts that consolidated or revised historical/political perceptions of Connolly. What will be left out of this list until later (Chapter Three) are the historical texts related to Connolly that republicans themselves have produced. The intent of this chapter is to draw out specific depictions of Connolly that appeared in the works of expositors who were not part of the later republican movement.\(^3\) What is being sought is the elements provided by these biographers that would became significant (or controversial) in the later reconstruction(s) of Connolly.

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3. It is acknowledged that some of Connolly’s biographers such as Constance Markievicz and Desmond Ryan would likely have identified as republicans but they predate the re-emergent republican movement of the late 1960s which is the main focus here.
Before examining Connolly’s expositors it is worth looking at some general aspects of Connolly’s life and political thought. A biographical sketch of Connolly is, of course, necessary for a work such as this but the summary that will be given here will also reveal the version of Connolly that will generally be set against the interpretive alternatives that appear later in the text. It is readily admitted that this account will be informed by some sympathy for Connolly combined with an appropriately critical hindsight.

James Connolly was born in Edinburgh in 1868 in the city’s squalid ‘little Ireland’ quarter. As the third son of an immigrant Irish labourer, poverty forced Connolly at an early age into a series of low paid unskilled jobs. At fourteen he was compelled to lie about his age and, like thousands of other Irishmen, to accept the ‘Queens’ shilling’; Connolly joined the British army. His deployment with the army saw him posted to Ireland, Connolly’s first experience of the country. The difficult circumstances of Connolly’s youth did not deter him from becoming a zealous autodidact. Connolly’s daughter recalled her father telling her of having to read by the light of fireplace embers and of using charred sticks as his pencils. Later Connolly availed himself of the educational opportunities offered by socialist societies which organised classes, lectures and libraries for workers. So as to access a broader range of Marxist theory and to communicate with workers who may not have spoken English Connolly taught himself several languages. During his time in America, Connolly surprised his daughter by addressing a meeting of expatriate Italian workers in Italian. James Connolly, in a Gramscian sense, was an organic intellectual of the working class.

Connolly deserted the British army in 1889 and returned to Scotland, quickly becoming involved in the burgeoning socialist movement there. In 1894 he ran as a socialist candidate in the Edinburgh town council elections. He was defeated but provided a reasonable contest in the face of hostility from not only his immediate political opponent but also from the Irish National League who urged a vote against

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Connolly in the interests of “faith and country”. Anti-socialist sentiment within Irish national politics would be something that Connolly would encounter and confront throughout his political life.

Connolly became recognised as an accomplished political orator and propagandist in the Scottish socialist milieu but as an unskilled labourer – and one who was prominent in the socialist movement - Connolly's employment prospects were always precarious. The Connolly family was continually plagued by poverty. In 1896 Connolly relocated to Dublin to take up a supposedly paid position as the organiser for the tiny Dublin Socialist Society. Connolly wasted little time in transforming the group into the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) declaring that “the two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland - the Socialist and the National - were not antagonistic but complimentary, and that the Irish Socialist was in reality the best Irish patriot”. Connolly’s ‘patriotic’ credentials as an Irishman were not always accepted; his ‘foreign’ birth occasionally counted against him. Connolly spoke with the accent of his working class Edinburgh origins, an intonation that did not go unnoticed by his more parochial listeners. In one instance a Dublin outdoor meeting presided over by Connolly was reportedly broken up by hurled cabbage stalks and cries of ‘you’re not an Irishman’.

The event serves to illustrate the difficult political terrain that Connolly found in Ireland. When he spoke as a ‘patriot’ Connolly could be assailed as not being ‘authentically’ Irish and when he declaimed as a socialist he could be attacked as a malcontent peddling an alien, atheistic and malign ideology.

The linking of national liberation with social emancipation might not have been well received by the Dublin crowd but even within the Marxist Second International to which Connolly and his group were allied it was a controversial stance. In Britain many socialists saw the Irish struggle for national liberation as a distraction, a problem that would be taken care of when the advanced industrialised nation(s) achieved socialist revolution. For the most part they supported the parliamentary campaign for Irish Home Rule which would grant Ireland only a subordinate legislature, still under the authority

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10 Levenson, James Connolly: A Biography, p.38.
11 Connolly’s pay from the ISRP was not always forthcoming. See Connolly O’Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father, p.61.
of the British crown and with strictly curtailed powers. Connolly’s advocacy of complete Irish national independence raised objections from some British socialists who evinced their own alleged internationalism firmly from within the confines of an imperial centre.

Connolly’s position on the conjoined nature of the nationalist and socialist political struggles led him to seek a leading role for socialists and the working class in the nationalist campaign. He condemned the “Irish middle class ... who had stepped to the front as Irish patriot leaders”. He targeted the nationalists of the Irish Parliamentary Party who limited their aspirations to Home Rule.

[T]hey set the seal of their approval upon a system founded upon the robbery of their countrymen ... they bound up the destinies of their country with the fate of an Empire in the humiliation of whose piratical rulers lies the Irish people’s only chance of national and social redemption.

As compensation for this gross betrayal the middle class politicians offer – Home Rule.

Connolly also directed his ire at those British socialists who gave “unqualified praise” to the “Home Rule party”.

[W]e called attention in the columns of the *Workers’ Republic* to the extraordinary utterances of certain English Socialists concerning the Home Rule party and its attitude towards Labour and Socialism. We pointed out that this Home Rule party was essentially a capitalist party, inspired solely by a consideration for capitalist interests ... We also expressed the opinion that the action of English Socialists in giving such commendatory notices to the enemies of the Irish Socialists was nothing short of treason to the International Labour movement.

For Connolly it was the working class who must champion the cause of Ireland’s liberation if anything meaningful was to be achieved: “No amount of protestations should convince intelligent workers that the class which grinds them down to industrial

18 Connolly, “Erin’s Hope”, p.177.
slavery can, at the same moment, be leading them forward to national liberty ... This can only be done by our working class”.

Connolly called for the complete political and economic separation of Ireland from Britain. The demand was expressed in the programme of the ISRP:

the national and economic freedom of the Irish people must be sought in the ... establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic, and the consequent conversion of the means of production, distribution and exchange into the common property of society, to be held and controlled by a democratic state in the interests of the entire community.

British authority over Ireland, even in the mediated form of Home Rule, was repudiated and so too were the exploitative relations of capitalism. The republic that Connolly envisaged would be a ‘workers’ republic’ free of domination from Britain and free also from the strictures of capitalism – a system that Connolly conceived of as having been introduced to Ireland by English invasion. In one of Connolly’s most quoted passages he declared that,

If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs.

A thorough-going Irish liberation for Connolly therefore meant not only the overthrow of British rule but also the creation of a socialist society.

Connolly had made a clear theoretical break from those British socialists who supported only Irish Home Rule and who on the ‘Irish question‘ conceded to the bourgeois politics of the Irish Parliamentary Party. The emphasis on class and class struggle as a means to separate Ireland from Britain and at the same time transcend capitalism set Connolly apart from many of his ‘English’ comrades. Connolly’s conception of class struggle in the early part of his political development did not, however, mean that he necessarily envisaged a violent revolution as a necessary

consequence of the transition to a workers’ republic. Like many of his Second
International socialist contemporaries Connolly saw in the increasing enfranchisement
of the working class the possibility of ushering in the socialist order without recourse to
‗physical force‘ – a means that was often preferred by Irish republicans and would later
come to be advocated by the Bolshevik leader Lenin.24 Connolly did not entirely
preclude the use of force; he accepted that it might be needed to enforce the mandate of
the working class and to bring about the social change that had been voted for. In either
circumstance – peacefully by means of the ballot box or forcibly by means of arms – for
Connolly the agents of liberation would be the Irish working class: ―[h]e Irish Working
Class must emancipate itself, and in emancipating itself it must, perforce, free its
country.‖25 Later, under extreme pressure, Connolly‘s attitude to physical force and the
central active role of the working class would undergo a metamorphosis.

Connolly‘s ideas regarding the ‗Irish question‘ separated him from some British
socialists. His ideas also differentiated him from many ‗advanced‘ Irish nationalists:
republicans who often advocated insurrection as a political means but, if they thought
in class terms at all, preferred cross-class alliances that would encompass the whole
Irish ‗nation‘ regardless of class origins. The political differences that Connolly had
with Irish republicans did not deter him from directing his considerable rhetorical skill
towards attempting to win them to socialism. While in no way uncritical of republican
politics Connolly saw those who sought an Irish republic as essentially ‗progressive‘.
Capitalism, Connolly argued, was a phenomenon that had been inflicted on Ireland by
foreign intervention. The English conquest of Ireland had displaced a ‗native‘
communal form of property and replaced it with ‗individualist institutions‘ that would
eventually provide the basis for the emergence of capitalism. For Connolly therefore an
‗authentic‘ Irish nationalism was one that would seek to reinstall a version of the
communal economic system of ‗Ancient Erin‘ in the modernised form of a socialist
republic – a ‗reconquest of Ireland‘.26

Connolly envisaged that an independent capitalist Ireland would have difficulty
competing in the international capitalist economy. Ireland, Connolly maintained, could

‗physical force‘ will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.
26 David Lynch, Radical Politics in Modern Ireland: The Irish Socialist Republican Party, 1896-1904, Irish
not attain prosperity by establishing a manufacturing system in a world-market already glutted with every conceivable kind of commodity.”

Connolly warned that even if by some miracle, we were able to cover the green fields of Erin with huge, ugly factories, with chimneys belching forth volumes of poisonous smoke and coating the island with a sooty desolation – even then we would quickly find that under the conditions born of the capitalist system our one hope of keeping our feet as a manufacturing nation would depend upon our ability to work longer and harder for a lower wage than the other nations of Europe, in order that our middle class may have the opportunity of selling their goods at a lower price than their competitors. This is equivalent to saying that our chance of making Ireland a manufacturing country depends upon us becoming the lowest blacklegs in Europe.

A capitalist Irish republic would seem to hold few attractions for the working class. Connolly conceived that the workers’ republic was the most desirable and, in class terms, the only really viable outcome of the struggle for national liberation; republicans Connolly thought could be convinced of this and so seemed to be a ‘natural’ audience for his proselytising. The political overtures that Connolly made towards republicans, and indeed his final pact with them in 1916, would be at the heart of the quandary that would face his expositors when they came to grapple with his involvement in the Easter Rising.

Between 1903 and 1910 Connolly spent time in the United States of America and it was here that he became a convinced and active syndicalist. The idea behind industrial unionism (as syndicalism was usually termed in the Anglophone world) was that militant industrial action in the workplace, under the auspices of the ‘One Big Union’ (OBU), would sound the death knell of capitalism. In 1905 the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was established in Chicago to give form to these ideas. The IWW was an organisation dedicated to ‘the definite ideal of taking over and holding the economic machinery of society.’ Connolly expounded the IWW’s revolutionary method:

The means proposed to that end ... was the enrolment of the working class in Unions built upon the lines of the great industries ... all industrial Unions should be linked as members of one great Union, and that one membership card should cover the whole working-class...

organisation. Thus was to be built up a working-class administration which should be capable of the revolutionary act of taking over society ... . 31

In 1907 Connolly became “one of the earliest organisers” for the IWW. 32 Connolly had from the outset spoken the language of class warfare and he considered industrial unionism as “more than a method of organization – it is a science of fighting”. 33 Lightning strikes and solidarity action were the means by which revolutionary workers would seize the initiative in the class struggle. As Connolly explained, “[i]n the light of this principle of industrial unionism every fresh shop or factory organized under its banner is a fort wrenched from the control of the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the revolution to be held by them for the workers.” 34 A combative, activated working class would gradually gain control of industry, strike by strike and workplace by workplace and thus bring about a revolutionary transformation of society. The class militancy proffered by industrial unionism sat well with Connolly’s political temperament. Connolly’s “conversion” to the syndicalist “science of fighting” did nothing to displace his continued desire for the workers’ republic.

Connolly’s time in America was marked by theoretical disputes with his former political mentor, Daniel De Leon. He became disillusioned with the sectarian practice of De Leon’s Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and eventually Connolly broke with the group. He also broke politically with a doctrinaire conception of the party, the purpose of which was to hone its “scientific socialism” and await the day when the consciousness of the masses would reach the party’s theoretical highpoint. 35 Connolly reacted to the bitterness of the doctrinal arguments with DeLeon by refusing to engage further “in the campaigns of slander which form the stock in trade of the American Socialists”. 36 He expressed an aversion to “[c]ompromisers and schemers” who would “erec[t] parties to serve their personal ends and satiate their lust for being worshipped”, “intellectual

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mannikins” who would “perch themselves upon the shoulders of the workers”.

Connolly announced “I have little use for the Socialist intellectual”.

The rejection by Connolly of De Leon’s party model did not lead to the outright dismissal of the need for a political party – a position held by some of Connolly’s fellow “Wobblies”. Connolly instead held that “the day that the IWW launches its own political party” it would furnish the solution to the “problem” of socialist unity in America. This party would be kept “honest”, Connolly thought, by “resting upon the economic movement of the working class” – the IWW. Connolly’s reassessed notion of the party was that it should be an adjunct to the industrial union. The party would propagate for socialism and might campaign at election time but revolution would come through the direct action of the working class operating through the “one big union”.

In 1910 Connolly returned to Ireland to find that industrial unionism had found an audience among key union militants. James Larkin had recently formed the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU) which styled itself as Ireland’s “One Big Union”. Within a year Connolly became the Belfast organiser of the Union. The IGTWU aimed to organise Ireland’s large unskilled workforce and grew quickly from four thousand members in 1910 to twenty two thousand by 1912. The militant tactics of the ITGWU, sympathetic strike action and the “black’ of goods “tainted” by non-union labour, had won improvements for many of Ireland’s most exploited workers. In so doing, however, the ITGWU had raised the hackles of some of Ireland’s most powerful capitalists. William Martin Murphy, newspaper baron and Dublin United Tramways Company (DUTC) owner, one of Ireland’s richest men, was prominent among these. In August 1913 Murphy demanded that workers in the dispatch office of his Irish Independent newspaper drop their ITGWU membership. Forty workers were immediately sacked for refusing to do so. The dispute spread quickly to the tram drivers of the DUTC. By September the Employers Federation had joined...

39 The ‘Wobblies’ was a term used to refer to the IWW.
40 Connolly, “A Political Party of the Workers”, p.96.
Murphy in his battle with the ITGWU. Employers across Dublin initiated a general lockout of workers to try and smash the transport union and its militant allies. On threat of dismissal employers demanded that their workers repudiate ITGWU membership if they held it and pledge not to join it or any affiliated union in the future. With James Larkin in and out of jail Connolly was called from Belfast to assist in leading the union.45

The Lockout of 1913 was a bitterly fought industrial struggle that eventually involved twenty five thousand workers.46 The trams of the DUTC that were still operating during the Lockout were attacked with stones by striking workers.47 In one such incident the tram driver drew a revolver to force the passage of his tram through an angry crowd; William Martin Murphy had ensured that ‘loyal’ DUTC employees had been issued with licenses for firearms.48 A planned ITGWU demonstration for Sunday 31st August had been banned by Dublin Castle.49 Connolly, addressing a meeting outside the ITGWU headquarters, Liberty Hall, defiantly suggested that people might take a stroll down O’Connell Street to see if a meeting was being held there or not.50 As the meeting broke up police responded to the jeers of workers with a baton charge.51 Connolly was arrested the next day for incitement to cause a breach of the peace.52 He refused to accept bail to be of good behaviour and was sentenced to three months in prison.53

On the day of the banned ITGWU rally Larkin, who had been in hiding for fear of arrest, appeared on the balcony of the Imperial Hotel in Dublin’s main thoroughfare, O’Connell Street; the Imperial Hotel was owned by William Martin Murphy. As bystanders and sympathisers began to cheer Larkin’s bravado police responded vigorously.54 A witness to the event, Handel Booth, a visiting Liberal Member of Parliament, described the Dublin police as ‘the most brutal constabulary ever let loose

49 Dublin Castle was the centre of imperial administration and a symbol of British authority in Ireland.
50 Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, p.308. Connolly made a play on the fact that the ban on the ITGWU demonstration specified ‘Sackville Street’ while Irish nationalists were in the habit of referring to it as ‘O’Connell Street’.
on a peaceful assembly ... kicking the victims when prostrate was a settled part of the police programme".\textsuperscript{55} The event became known as "Bloody Sunday" (one of four in Irish history).\textsuperscript{56} Police violence over the weekend of 30 and 31 August took the lives of John Byrne, James Nolan and James Carey, who died as a result of police beatings. Another man, John McDonagh, suffering from paralysis and bedridden, was beaten so badly during a police raid on his home that he died later in hospital.\textsuperscript{57} The 1913 Lockout was a life and death struggle.

William Martin Murphy, attempting to bolster the confidence of the Dublin employer class, intimated what was at the base of his lockout tactic: "[w]hen an actual strike takes place ... the workman has fired his last cartridge. The employer will generally manage to get his three meals a day, but the workman has no resources in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred."\textsuperscript{58} Connolly responded to the threat of starvation with an affirmation of the workers’ courageous determination:

I heard of one case where a labourer was asked to sign the agreement forswearing the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and he told his employer, a small capitalist builder, that he refused to sign. The employer, knowing the man’s circumstances, reminded him that he had a wife and six children who would be starving within a week. The reply of this humble labourer rose to the heights of sublimity. "It is true, sir,” he said, “they will starve; but I would rather see them go out one by one in their coffins than that I should disgrace them by signing that.” And with head erect he walked out to share hunger and privation with his loved ones. Hunger and privation – and honour.\textsuperscript{59}

Connolly was, of course, trying to maintain the spirit of the strikers and enlist the sympathy of other social forces. The call did not go unheard. Thousands of British railway workers stopped work in solidarity with their Irish comrades and British trade unions provided material support for Dublin’s locked-out workers. Food ships sponsored by the British Trade Union Congress steamed into Dublin port to feed the strikers and their families. The ITGWU’s appeal for sympathetic strike action, however, was antithetical to the more cautious British trade union leadership; it discouraged the

\textsuperscript{55} Quoted in Newsinger, \textit{Jim Larkin and the Great Dublin Lockout of 1913}, p.40.
\textsuperscript{57} Newsinger, \textit{Jim Larkin and the Great Dublin Lockout of 1913}, p.40.
\textsuperscript{58} Yeates, \textit{Lockout: Dublin 1913}, p.81.
union rank and file from more militant industrial action. By January 1914 support from the British TUC was fading and Dublin workers were being forced by deprivation to begin to return to work. In the aftermath of the Lockout Connolly expressed a certain bitterness; he felt that the Dublin fight was sacrificed in the interests of sectional officialism. Irish workers had been forced to eat the dust of defeat and betrayal. The Lockout was later described by Connolly as a drawn battle but the ITGWU had been badly mauled during the dispute and it would take some years to rebuild the union’s capacity for industrial action. Connolly’s revolutionary determination, however, remained intact.

The violence that had accompanied the Lockout occurred within the context of an increasing militarization of Irish politics. In 1912 unionists (referring here to those who wanted to maintain the union with Britain – not ITGWU members), had acted to form an armed militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, to resist Home Rule. The unionists pledged their determination to use all means which may be found necessary to defeat the ... conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. Irish nationalists responded in kind with the formation of the Irish Volunteers to defend the progress towards Home Rule. During the Lockout, as the ITGWU fought police and strike breakers and its leaders faced arrest, Connolly made his own call to arms: I am going to talk sedition. The next time we are out for a march I want to be accompanied by four battalions of trained men with their corporals and sergeants. Why should we not drill and train men as they are doing in Ulster? The Irish Citizen Army (ICA) was formed with the purpose of protecting the working class, and of preserving its right of public meeting and free association. While it was a workers’ militia established to

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67 Quoted in Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, pp.326-327.
defend strikers, the ICA’s constitution pledged its members to work for an Irish Republic, and for the emancipation of labour.” The ICA was not an organisation entirely of Connolly’s making but the enthusiasm he found for it demonstrated that a combined desire for national and class liberation persisted in Connolly’s politics. Connolly’s political aspirations would now also have the added backing of armed force.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Connolly was one of the few European socialists who stood firmly against the conflict. Connolly openly countenanced the resistance of the working class to imperialist war.

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

Regrettably for the revolutionary Connolly in 1914 no bridges were destroyed and no barricades were erected, on the European continent or in Ireland. Indeed the socialist parties of the Second International, in France, Germany, and Britain, generally supported the war efforts of their respective nations. Through 1914 and 1915 Connolly continued to exhort the working class to resist the British war effort: “alone in Ireland the working class has no ties that bind it to the service of the Empire.” Connolly’s efforts were largely unsuccessful. Thousands of Irishmen volunteered to fight in the British army. By comparison Connolly’s Irish Citizen Army at most numbered two hundred recruits.

As the war continued Connolly’s overtures were increasingly directed away from the working class towards insurrectionary Irish republicans. He praised the section

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69 Connolly, “For the Irish Citizen Army”.
74 Allen, The Politics of James Connolly, p.139.
of Irish Volunteers that had rejected John Redmond’s call to defend the Empire and had split from the larger volunteer movement. Connolly pronounced that

\[\text{[T]he Irish Volunteers of our time have that great quality the want of which betrayed their predecessors. That quality is: complete faith in their own country, complete confidence in her destiny to be a nation, and complete reliance upon the power of Ireland to survive all the shocks an adverse fate may bring upon her.}\]

Invoking previous nationalist uprisings, Connolly urged the Volunteers not to miss the chance to launch an insurrection while Britain was preoccupied with the war abroad. Connolly reckoned that \(\text{[t]o us ... a great opportunity has come.}\)

Connolly failed to arouse the bulk of the working class to rebel against British rule but his revolutionary urgency was in unison with (or perhaps a little ahead of) an internal faction of the Irish Volunteers. Unbeknownst to Connolly, within the leadership of the Volunteers a cell of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) \textit{had} been planning an insurrection to take advantage of Britain’s wartime preoccupation. In early 1916 Connolly was co-opted into this circle of republican conspirators. The plan for the Rising was, largely through subterfuge, to mobilise the sixteen thousand members of the Irish Volunteers in pre-emptive action against a supposed British crackdown. To support the Rising a German freighter would land twenty thousand rifles on the Irish coast. Armed with the German weapons, insurgent Volunteers in the countryside were expected to capture trains and seize rural towns.

The conspirator’s strategic ambitions were extremely optimistic and the Rising overall was poorly organised. The German arms ship was intercepted by the British navy and was scuttled by its captain at the entrance to Cork Harbour. Eoin McNeill, the Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers, was only partially informed of plans for the Rising and was wary of any precipitate action. When he discovered that the threat of

\[\text{[T]he 'Redmonite' Volunteers came to be known as the 'National Volunteers'.}\]
\[\text{The Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB), later to become the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was established in Dublin in 1858. It was a secret oath-bound insurrectionary organisation seeking an Irish republic. The organisation also came to be referred to as the 'Fenians'. See Leon Ó Broin, \textit{Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924}, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1976, p.2.}\]
\[\text{Newsinger, \textit{Rebel City}, p.141.}\]
\[\text{Allen, \textit{The Politics of James Connolly}, p.151.}\]
British military suppression was an artifice of the conspirators and the hoped for weapons were beyond reach he countermanded all orders for mobilisation. Despite these seemingly devastating setbacks the leaders of the Rising were determined to go ahead.

On Easter Monday, 24th April 1916, about a thousand insurgents launched the Rising. Connolly was named Commandant General of the rebel forces in the city, the combined Volunteers and ICA now assumed the name of the Army of the Republic. Colloquial usage soon rendered it as the Irish Republican Army. Outside the Dublin General Post Office the Rising's leaders proclaimed an Irish Republic. James Connolly was one of the seven signatories to the Proclamation. The ‘Republic’, such as it was, survived for a week as the rebels doggedly held central Dublin against British forces, but the thwarted mobilisation, the tactics chosen and the lack of arms made defeat inevitable.

The death sentence was imposed by British military court martial, conducted in secret, on ninety of the Rising's participants. Many of the condemned would have their sentences commuted but fifteen of the rebels were to face execution. Connolly was the last to be shot. By the time of his impending execution the political impetus for the killings was waning but the Irish Independent newspaper of William Martin Murphy, Connolly's capitalist adversary during the Lockout, vehemently opposed any leniency. Connolly had been badly injured during the uprising and his wound had turned gangrenous. On 12 May 1916 he was tied to a chair and shot by firing squad in Kilmainham Prison.

Connolly's leadership role in the 1916 Rising and the circumstances of his death have coloured the historical and political interpretations of him ever since. In 1916, as the rebel prisoners were led away by British troops, one insurgent, James Malone, observed that “most of the people had real hatred in their hearts for the Irish volunteers. We were often insulted on the journey.” Yet Malone attested that “three weeks later, when we were on our way to England, the very same people were praising and blessing us, waving the Tricolour and shouting. Seventeen of our comrades had been executed in

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81 The numbers who turned out for the Rising is disputed. Newsinger in Rebel City, p.142, offered the figure seven hundred Volunteers and one hundred and twenty ICA members. English in Irish Nationalism, p.261, suggested around twelve hundred participants. I have chosen an intermediate estimate.
83 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, p.376.
84 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, p.420.
the meantime."\(^{87}\) Certainly within a year after the executions the consecration of the _martyrs_ of 1916 was well underway. While the Rising’s _glorious dead_ were eulogised, many of the survivors, mostly released from prison by 1917, went on to become the leadership of the newly ascendant Irish nationalist movement, now vigorously seeking separation rather than merely Home Rule. The new nationalist leaders, however, were not imbued with Connolly’s Marxist principles; they had no desire to see the nascent Irish state become a _workers_’ republic_ and were often strongly influenced by a socially conservative Catholicism. Under these circumstances some of the early interpretations of Connolly were eager to deny or obscure his Marxist politics.

One of the first of these dissimulations was offered by the Catholic Truth Society which produced a pamphlet on the _Social Teachings of James Connolly_. Written by a Jesuit clergyman, the Reverend Lambert McKenna, the text argued that while Connolly was moved by a genuine _deep love for the common folk of Ireland_, his socialism was to be handled with the greatest of care and probably best left alone.\(^{88}\) An examination of Connolly’s writings seemed, for McKenna, to impose irresistibly the conclusion that Connolly’s deepest and strongest passions was his love of Ireland; that his socialism though sincere and enthusiastic, was primarily adopted by him because it seemed to promise the fulfilment of his dream of a free and prosperous Irish people."\(^{89}\) McKenna sought to subordinate Connolly’s socialist ideal to a more amorphous social and national aspiration for Irish freedom and prosperity - a freedom and prosperity that was compatible with capitalism and the precepts of the Catholic Church. A fear was expressed by McKenna that _[t]here are many in Ireland today who profess themselves to be marxian (sic) socialists, and to be on that account carrying on the life-work of Connolly_.\(^{90}\) At the time of McKenna’s writing, circa 1920, the workers’ movement in Ireland did appear to be in the ascendant. Across Ireland many work places had been seized by their workers to be run as collectives. Taking inspiration from the recent Russian Revolution Irish workers adopted the word _soviets_ for these socialised enterprises.\(^{91}\) The newly occupied _Knocklong Soviet Creamery_ summed up the temper

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\(^{89}\) McKenna, _The Social Teachings of James Connolly_, p.43.

\(^{90}\) McKenna, _The Social Teachings of James Connolly_, p.46.

of the times with the slogan hung over the door "we make butter not profits".  

McKenna’s concern regarding the growing radicalism of Irish workers was not entirely illusory. Connolly’s Marxism was anathema to the Catholic Church but his standing as a nationalist martyr meant that McKenna could ill-afford to completely and comprehensively repudiate the entirety of Connolly’s politics. Another authority could, however, be summoned by McKenna: –God knows more than any about the things that make for the welfare of the world which he has made; and when, through his Church he has laid down certain principles for the ordering of the world it is for Catholics madness to ignore them.” 

McKenna’s version of Connolly had him as a good Irish patriot. His socialism was unfortunate but only the expression of a caring soul. The Catholic Church preferred to characterize Connolly’s Marxism as, at best, a well intentioned error of judgement.

Constance Markiewicz was another of Connolly’s earliest biographers. In Markiewicz’s James Connolly’s Policy and Catholic Doctrine Catholicism would again trump Connolly’s Marxism. Markiewicz had been a member of the Irish Citizen Army and had taken part in the Rising. She had been moved by the religious devotion that she had seen among the volunteers. In Kilmainham Jail she converted to Catholicism in an act of spiritual communion with her fellow rebels. Historian Henry Patterson has remarked that, as a close friend of Connolly’s and a ‘early martyr’ participant in the Rising (her death sentence was commuted), Markiewicz, in the post-Civil War period, ‘was the Sinn Fein leader most able to put a red gloss on republicanism.” That might have been the aim but any ‘red gloss’ was overlaid with the liturgical hues of Catholicism and with Irish nationalist green. Although Markiewicz sympathised with ‘Larkinism’ and had joined the ICA, James Connolly’s Policy and Catholic Doctrine generally followed a line similar to that of McKenna’s work. Markiewicz’s intent was to save Connolly from the condemnation of ‘Catholic Ireland’ by aligning his thought with that of the Irish clergy and the Pope:

The majority of the people of Ireland are very Catholic and many of them shudder at the word ‘Socialist’, and some of them would seem to

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92 Kostick, Revolution in Ireland, p.115.
93 McKenna, The Social Teachings of James Connolly, p.84.
94 Newsinger, Rebel City, pp.148-149.
vision a dim form with hoofs and a tail leading each Socialist firmly down a broad path to a terrible and fiery end; therefore having found that James Connolly gloried in the name of Socialist, we will see what one of the most Gaelic among the spokesmen among our priests, as well as Pope Leo XIII., have to say for the social system advocated and the policy adopted by James Connolly.  

Markiewicz proceeded to harmonize the objectives of Connolly's socialist programme with Catholic social doctrine. Commenting on Connolly's plans for schools in a 'reconquered' Ireland, Markiewicz remarked that 'such are the schools that James Connolly visioned. Schools where the worship of the golden calf would be banished, and where the ideals and principles of Christ would be the guiding rule'. Every one of Connolly's programmatic 'items' were, according to Markiewicz, 'an attempt to attain to the more Christian and human status of the workers that Pope Leo appeals for, and to abolish those inhuman conditions that Pope Leo condemns'.

Regardless of Connolly's apparent programmatic accord with Pope Leo, the taint of a perceived godless and foreign Marxism still had to be expunged from his legacy. Markiewicz contended that 'some people would try and label him a disciple of Marx, but in reality he was no man's disciple; he studied and appreciated Marx, just as he studied and appreciated the thoughts and lives of all men who had worked for the betterment of the world'. Markiewicz acknowledged that 'Socialism was what he stood for, but it is the Socialism of James Connolly and of nobody else'. Marxism was effectively excised from Connolly's politics to be replaced with an individualised humanist 'socialism' that was made congruent with Catholic social teaching.

The nation is not forgotten in Markiewicz's reconstruction of Connolly's politics. In keeping with the religious overtones, Markiewicz stated that 'the writings he left will always be the Gospels of our Nationality'. Markiewicz lent her not inconsiderable standing and popularity as a confidante of Connolly's and a participant  

97 Constance De Markiewicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, no publisher or date given, p.6.  
99 Markiewicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, p.33.  
100 Markiewicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, p.39.  
102 Markiewicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, p.7.  
103 Markiewicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, p.46.
in the Rising to the consolidation of the image of Connolly as a Catholic, a 'non-Marxist' socialist, and an Irish patriot.

Connolly's legacy was recounted by another former Irish Citizen Army member (although not one who took part in the Rising). In 1919 Sean O'Casey produced *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*. O'Casey, somewhat paradoxically in light of his later critique of Connolly, became a socialist through the circuitous route of Irish nationalist politics. In 1903 O'Casey involved himself in the 'Irish Ireland' movement and joined the Gaelic League. He 'Gaelicized' his name becoming Sean Ó Cathasaigh and, via the Gaelic Athletic Association, he was eventually recruited into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. O'Casey's intent at this time was to drive the British out of Ireland and restore Irish language and culture. His politics began to change when O'Casey, like many Dublin workers, joined the ITGWU. Even in 1913, however, O'Casey was still arguing for the republican cause and warning against socialism. The experience of the Dublin Lockout changed O'Casey's priorities. The IRB's unwillingness to clearly embrace the class struggle of the ITGWU caused O'Casey to withdraw from the 'Brotherhood'. In 1914 O'Casey would become the secretary of the Irish Citizen Army.

In *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* O'Casey located a rupture in Connolly's politics. He believed that after the outbreak of the First World War Connolly shifted from the narrow byway of Irish Socialism on to the broad and crowded highway of Irish Nationalism". O'Casey refused to accept that Connolly was in any way a 'socialist martyr', and critiqued Connolly's conversion to nationalism.

The vision of the suffering world's humanity was shadowed by the nearer oppression of his own people, and in a few brief months pressed into a hidden corner of his soul the accumulated thoughts of a lifetime and opened his broad heart to ideas that altered the entire trend of his being. The high creed of Irish Nationalism became his daily rosary, while the higher creed of international humanity that had

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104 'Irish Ireland' is a name sometimes given to the forms of cultural nationalism that took shape in the 1890s and early twentieth century. See D.J. Hickey and J.E. Doherty, *A New Dictionary of Irish History From 1800*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 2005, p.227.
105 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*, April 1985, 20;(2), pp.221-222.
so long bubbled from his eloquent lips was silent forever, and Irish Labour lost a leader.\textsuperscript{110}

For O’Casey, Connolly was a _socialist apostate_; Connolly’s socialism had given way to Irish nationalism in the last period of his life. Thus was explained his concord with the nationalist rebels of the IRB and his participation in the Rising. O’Casey was expressing a view that had been arrived at by others in the socialist movement. Thomas Johnston, the editor of the Glasgow socialist newspaper, _Forward_, which had carried many of Connolly’s articles, expressed his astonishment at hearing of Connolly’s involvement in the Rising; none of Connolly’s writings for _Forward_, he said, had _ever_ given a hint that he [Connolly] was developing into a military insurrectionist Sinn Féiner\textsuperscript{111}. By 1919 the executed leaders of the Rising were in the process of nationalist canonisation so O’Casey’s assessment received little attention.\textsuperscript{112} Ignored in 1919, however, O’Casey’s contention that Connolly had abandoned socialism for the cause of the nation would resurface in later interpretations.

Desmond Ryan was another veteran of the 1916 Rising. He had been a member of the Irish Volunteers. In his 1924 biography of Connolly Ryan lamented the contested nature of Connolly’s legacy. Connolly’s “real greatness” had been dimmed by followers who repeat his phrases and neglect the lessons he taught.”\textsuperscript{113} According to Ryan, for Irish party politicians ... Connolly is less awkward to them as an honoured corpse than as an evangelist of unpopular and little-understood theories.\textsuperscript{114} “From the very first”, Ryan acknowledged, Connolly’s biographers were faced with the difficulty whether to write as propagandists or to attempt an intimate study few living men could write”.\textsuperscript{115} Ryan clearly though himself qualified to undertake the task; in his biography he attempted to represent Connolly as both a socialist and a nationalist. Ryan insisted that, “from the outset, ... he [Connolly] was definitely Marxist, Separatist, and Workers’ Republican, applying these clear cut social and political creeds to varying crises”.\textsuperscript{116} Connolly, Ryan argued, “must be classified as a Workers’ Republican and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ó Cathasaigh, _The Story of the Irish Citizen Army_, p.52.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Quoted in Newsinger, _Rebel City_, p.151.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Newsinger, _Rebel City_, p.130.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Desmond Ryan, _James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings_, Talbot Press, Dublin, 1924, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ryan, _James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings_, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ryan, _James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings_, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ryan, _James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings_, p.2.
\end{itemize}
Communist … He would certainly have been at one with Lenin in destruction and construction alike.”

Ryan’s narrative was far more accepting of Connolly’s Marxism than either McKenna or Markiewicz’s works. He does not obfuscate the Marxist content of Connolly’s thought nor does he claim it was entirely superseded by Connolly’s nationalism. At one with Lenin and linked with other Bolshevik leaders, Connolly’s Marxism was endorsed but Ryan also bestowed upon Connolly a mysterious Fenian uncle who kept vivid in his memory the glamour and agony of the nationalist struggle. Connolly, according to Ryan, transformed his earlier Nationalism, as interpreted by his Fenian uncle, into Revolutionary Socialism. Ryan was assiduous in emphasizing Connolly’s nationalist devotion. A former ISRP comrade was found to reinforce Connolly’s nationalist credentials: In his youth he [Connolly] was a nationalist of the extreme type. While in America Connolly was imagined by Ryan as wistfully turning his thoughts to Ireland. For Ryan here was an Irishman, drunk deep in the Socialist philosophy, with a curious Nationalist kink in him. Connolly’s Marxism could, in Ryan’s account, nestle quite comfortably alongside his nationalism without contradiction.

Connolly emerges in Ryan’s narrative as an all-encompassing figure. He was the propagandist, Labour Leader, revolutionary, martyr, rebel and prophet before his time. That Connolly may have changed his mind at some point during his active political life was apparently unfitting for a prophet and martyr; Connolly’s philosophy was unchanging but developing until life gave out. Ryan’s biography served the purpose of canonisation without necessarily achieving the intimate study of Connolly that might have been hoped for. Ryan had supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty and he was quite willing in his biography to fight his political corner. Recalling recent developments in Ireland – the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Irish Free State, the tragic Civil

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117 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.2.
118 Ryan brackets Connolly with the thought of Bukharin and Preobrazhensky’s, The ABC of Communism, (p.9) and Trotsky’s concept of ‘self-determination’, (p.10).
120 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.15.
121 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.12.
122 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.31.
123 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.2.
124 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.31.
125 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.2.
War, and partisan claims upon Connolly’s name and corpse” – Ryan put forward his own case: 126

One inclines upon the whole to define his probable attitude as that of the official Irish Labour Party. Surely his voice, pen and personal influence would have aided that Party in its opposition to the Civil War, its disinterested attempts to avert that folly, its efforts to find a basis of reconciliation between Free Stater and Republican, and its acceptance, in all the circumstances, of the machinery of the Irish Free State as a step, and as an appreciable step towards the co-operative commonwealth of his heart’s desire. 127

Connolly had been posthumously enlisted to a contemporary cause, the political legitimacy of the Irish Free State. It would not be the last partisan claim upon Connolly’s legacy.

In 1935 Nora Connolly O’Brien, Connolly’s daughter, contributed to the growing Connolly bibliography with Portrait of a Rebel Father. Nora Connolly’s reminiscences command a certain authority as a first-hand account of Connolly’s later life. The book’s preface, written by the noted essayist and fervent nationalist Robert Lynd, tended to reprise Ryan’s earlier estimation; Connolly was described as a working class leader and a Nationalist in almost equal proportions. He was at once as patriotic as Garibaldi and as revolutionary as Lenin. 128 Lynd also continued to conciliate Connolly’s politics with religion; James Connolly was that unusual thing, a Catholic as well as a patriotic Marxist. 129

While the narrative provided by Nora Connolly was marked by the sentimentalism and adoration that might be expected from a beloved and devoted daughter, it is not quite as given to hyperbole as was Lynd’s preface. Nora Connolly celebrated her father as a socialist and as a militant union leader. Her account also showed him as a nationalist, albeit a socialist republican one. Applauding her father’s response to the outbreak of the First World War, Nora Connolly exclaimed you’ve appealed to all the best elements, and you’ve raised the cry – Ireland for the Irish people. 130 Nora Connolly shared her father’s political attitude and aspiration: we’ll

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126 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, p.3.
127 Ryan, James Connolly: His Life Work and Writings, pp.3-4.
129 Lynd, “Preface”, p.11.
130 Connolly O’Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father, p.191.
have revolutionary Labour and Nationalists working together for the real freedom of Ireland.”

The account given by Nora Connolly was certainly credible but it was, of course, unavoidably filtered through the prism of her own political proclivities. Connolly’s commitment to the Irish national struggle was marked in his daughter’s reminiscences by an enthusiastic emphasis on the paramilitary means which Connolly came to employ in 1916. Nora Connolly was deeply involved with the republican movement in Belfast. In Portrait of a Rebel Father Nora attests to setting up a branch of Cumann na mBan, the women’s republican organisation. Nora Connolly revealed that she had met the staunch republican, Liam Mellows, even before her father did. She visited Ernest Blythe, a Sinn Féin and Irish Republican Brotherhood member, in prison. Later in her life Nora Connolly expressed her support for the post-1968 republican armed struggle in the North. The nationalist enthusiasms of the daughter were apt to obscure some of the political nuances of the father. Nora Connolly had been only ten when her father had left the ISRP and travelled to America; Nora Connolly’s account necessarily therefore gave pre-eminence to the later phase of Connolly’s political career in which the Irish Citizen Army played an active part. James Connolly’s involvement in the Rising was seen by Nora as a brave and appropriate gesture in the fight for an Irish republic. Without necessarily disturbing some of the previous images of Connolly – as a Catholic and as a patriot – Nora Connolly’s portrait of her father consolidated an image of him as a socialist-republican with an inclination towards the use of armed force.

James Connolly – The Forerunner, by Richard Michael Fox, is of interest mainly because of its rather overwrought depiction of Connolly. Fox extols Connolly’s virtues: courage, endurance, knowledge – all these qualities, he possessed in abundance”. The homage paid to Connolly occasionally bordered on the absurd.

The ship bearing Connolly to America approached the statue of Liberty looking out impassively across the ocean. Yet if ever that stony face could light up with enthusiasm it should have been when

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133 Connolly O’Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father, p.204.
134 Connolly O’Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father, p.222.
James Connolly – self-dedicated to the service of human liberty – passed by on his way to another venue of battle.\(^{138}\)

Fox repeated a nationalist mythology that had grown up around Connolly’s origins. His birth place was given as a “little gloomy cabin” in County Monaghan, Ireland.\(^{139}\) James Connolly's earliest memories, according to Fox, were of toiling for long hours in the fields.\(^{140}\) The Connolly family were said to have suffered the rural poverty of Ireland before being driven out of the country by famine in 1880, eventually ending up in the urban slums of Edinburgh.\(^{141}\) Fox’s construction of Connolly as part of the rural Irish poor served to establish Connolly as a “true” country son of Ireland. Furthermore Connolly had personally suffered, it was claimed, the Irish national ordeal of famine. Connolly’s stint in the British army was replaced with a period of adventurist vagabondage” as an itinerant labourer in Northern England, a far more appropriate past for an Irish nationalist hero.\(^{142}\)

In reference to Connolly as a socialist Fox’s account was similarly embroidered. Fox had Connolly go to Paris in 1900 to attend the International Socialist Congress as a delegate for the Irish Socialist Republican Party. At this Congress Connolly met the leaders of International Socialism – Karl Kautsky, August Bebel, Jules Guesde, Jean Jaurès and others”.\(^{143}\) Connolly’s credentials as a socialist of international standing were thus advanced; unfortunately Connolly never actually attended this conference.\(^{144}\)

Leaving aside these inaccuracies, Fox continued the characterisation of Connolly as “being a Socialist and an Irish Republican”.\(^{145}\) Connolly was described as both “keen Irish nationalist and an internationalist”.\(^{146}\) Like biographers before him, Fox harmonized Connolly’s Marxism with Catholicism; Connolly combined “an acceptance of the Marxian view of economics and of history – as a record of social struggles – with the Catholic outlook which emphasised the value of the human soul.”\(^{147}\) Fox was not adverse to Connolly’s Marxism. Lenin was cited by Fox to “justify” Connolly’s

\(^{138}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.57.
\(^{139}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.16. Connolly’s date of birth was also given as 1870. It was later established, by Greaves to be 1868.
\(^{140}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.16.
\(^{141}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, pp.16-17.
\(^{142}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, pp.22-23.
\(^{143}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.51.
\(^{144}\) See Lynch, Radical Politics in Modern Ireland, p.92.
\(^{145}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.46.
\(^{146}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.63.
\(^{147}\) Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.131.
participation in the 1916 Rising and defend him from the charge of “forgetting Socialism”. Connolly’s ideas are again portrayed by Fox as being consistent from his early activity through to 1916. For Fox “Connolly is one of those men carved out of a solid piece; he gets a little more rubbed or polished as the years go on. That is all”.

Connolly’s thought assumed the appearance of a received sacred text rather than the product of an active political mind that responded to experiences and changing social context. Fox leaves us with the image of Connolly as a suitably martyred Irish patriot retaining his Catholic devotion. Connolly’s Marxism was admitted but he is set in ideological stone, a Marxist saint rather than a “social being” engaged in an “intellectual life-process”. Fox’s representation of Connolly reconfirmed him as a nationalist and a socialist from beginning to end without deviations. It was not a new image of Connolly and it would be re-cast in more sophisticated versions later on.

Desmond Greaves’ 1961 biography, The Life and Times of James Connolly, can be considered the pivotal text in historical writing on Connolly. Greaves is credited by some as being the “intellectual progenitor” of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement of the 1960s and his biography provided an interpretation of Connolly’s politics that was hugely influential for many leading civil rights activists, socialists and Irish republicans.

Greaves provided a well researched and scholarly account of Connolly’s “life and times” that corrected some of the factual errors of previous biographers. In his work Greaves addressed a key question regarding Connolly: “How did it come about that an international socialist gave up his life and his prospect of seeing socialism in his lifetime for the sake of a national revolution?” For Greaves this was not merely an academic question; it had “obvious implications for future practice.”

His answer was clear: Connolly was a “socialist republican” who “regarded national independence as a primary goal”.

Greaves replaced the view of Connolly’s doctrine as static and perennially consistent with an understanding that there were instead three distinct phases in Connolly’s thought: the first social democratic, the second broadly syndicalist, and the

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148 Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, pp.245-246.
149 Fox, James Connolly: The Forerunner, p.172.
150 Karl Marx, Preface and Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1976, p.3.
third foreshadowing some of the most modern conceptions of scientific socialism”.

The modern conception of scientific socialism was, for Greaves, one that accorded with his own political disposition. Greaves was a long-standing member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In keeping with this political orthodoxy Greaves grafted a revolutionary stages theory on to Connolly’s politics; it was a theory that had owed much to the influence of Stalinism. Stalin’s stages theory ran simply:

- the first stage is the revolution of an all-national united front ... when the revolution was striking chiefly at foreign imperialism, and the national bourgeoisie supported the revolutionary movement;
- the second stage is the bourgeois-democratic revolution ... the third stage is the Soviet revolution, which has not yet come, but will come.

Greaves applied this template to Connolly’s revolutionary project. Connolly took part in the Easter Rising, seeing it as a stage in the unfolding revolutionary process. For some time Connolly seems to have been undecided on whether Sinn Fein (or IWW) tactics would bring both political and economic independence so to speak at one blow, or whether the winning of political independence was an intermediate objective to be tackled on its own. Ultimately he decided on the second, most people agree correctly. Hence the road to Easter week.

The point was made even more clearly in Greaves’ epilogue:

Connolly held that the national revolution was a prerequisite of the socialist revolution. But he did not arrive easily at a clear conception of their mutual relationship. At first he was inclined to identify them. Later he distinguished them as the political and economic aspects of one process. Finally he reached the conclusion that they were two stages of one democratic reorganisation of society, each involving economic changes which it was the function of political change to promote.

If Connolly had been initially misguided, some time prior to 1916 he had readjusted his vision in line with Greaves’ modern conception of scientific socialism.

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159 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, p.425.
For Greaves –[t]he issue of national independence (political and economic) is the crux of Irish politics” and, as Greaves would have it, –Connolly’s mature and considered opinion [was that] the national revolution takes precedence” over the social revolution.\(^{160}\) Greaves insistence that Connolly’s revolutionary practice eventually conformed with a stages theory not only confirmed Connolly as a socialist in good standing (with the CPGB) but served as a rebuttal to the accusation that Connolly had abandoned socialism in 1916. The argument Greaves mounted was essentially that Connolly’s politics had in fact developed appropriately; Connolly came to the realisation that only the _national revolution_ was achievable at the time of the Rising. Greaves postulated that “after January 1916” Connolly “was adumbrating the conception of the National Front, or alliance of the forces making for liberation.”\(^ {161}\) According to this conception, the revolutionary victory of the working class in alliance with a _national bourgeoisie_ would lead to the establishment of a revolutionary government, resisting imperialism without, and suppressing its agents within the country. ... During this period those capitalists who accepted the National State were to be left in possession of their capital.”\(^ {162}\) Connolly’s collaboration with a _national bourgeoisie_ in the Easter Rising, far from being an abandonment of Marxist principle, as Sean O’Casey suggested, was, in the opinion of Greaves, the correct application of revolutionary praxis.\(^ {163}\) Connolly’s position corresponded, Greaves claimed, “in Connolly’s day as in our own”, with “the world-historical mainstream of socialist thought”.\(^ {164}\) Thus was Connolly anointed as a _scientific_ socialist pursuing the goal of national liberation in appropriate class collaboration with insurrectionary republicans. The national revolution was the necessary first instalment in the revolutionary process. The social revolution would come later.\(^ {165}\) It was a formulation that would be repeated by sections of the republican movement.

Greaves was well aware that Connolly’s legacy was contested. He noted that the “history of Connolly’s ideas in Ireland after his death provides many examples of attempts to disconnect the two aspects of his teaching, to make him a _pure_ nationalist,

\(^{160}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, p.428.  
\(^{161}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, p.428.  
\(^{162}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, p.428.  
\(^{163}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, p.344.  
\(^{164}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, p.343.  
\(^{165}\) Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, pp.342-344.
or a ‘pure’ socialist.”

Referring to the ‘ill-fated Republican Congress’ of the 1930s, Greaves remarked that in the factional fight between those who wanted ‘The Republic’ and those who wanted ‘The Workers’ Republic’, ‘both sides claimed Connolly’. Appearing to make a more contemporary observation Greaves then described an ‘economist labour movement claiming his [Connolly’s] socialism, and a paramilitary republican movement claiming his nationalism.”

Neither has got Connolly”, Greaves contended. If they understood him”, Greaves averred, they would be striving for some approach to unity, in whatever form present conditions prescribe. And each would have to modify its practice for the sake of unity.” Greaves’ suggested strategy became very attractive to Irish republicans in the 1970s and 80s as they attempted to make inroads into Irish trade unions; unity seemed less attractive to people in the Irish labour movement.

If Greaves attempted to consolidate Connolly’s historical position as a ‘Marxist-Leninist’, then Owen Dudley Edwards, in The Mind of an Activist – James Connolly, tried to wrest him back into a less radical, social democratic fold. Delivered initially as a lecture under the auspices of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Edwards’ account is something of a panegyric. In key regards Edwards returns to the former construction(s) of Connolly as a Marxist, Catholic and a nationalist combined. Edward’s Connolly was a devoutly spiritual materialist, a Marxist Catholic, and a national internationalist.”

Connolly, Edwards accepted, ‘sought to found a Socialist Ireland, a workers republic” but in the process of trying to integrate the strands of Connolly’s thought Edwards tended to obscure Connolly’s commitment to militant class struggle. Edwards contended that Connolly ‘was perpetually concerned to create rather than to destroy, to build bridges between men’s minds rather than to create cleavages.”

Connolly’s politics, once again, were made to accord with Catholicism. Edwards made a somewhat naughty point, that Connolly was a Catholic rather than a Protestant

166 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, pp.426-427.
in his approach to Marx: that is to say, he did not insist on rigid adherence to Holy Writ, in this case Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ writings, but rather believed in Holy Writ assisted by tradition.” Connolly, Edwards claimed, was “one of the best and most enlightened apologists the Catholic Church has seen since the Industrial Revolution;” he vouched that Connolly saw that there was much of value in Marx’s ideas on man [but] this did not oblige him to assent to Marx’s ideas on God”. Seeming to concur with Markievicz’s earlier inference, Edwards averred that Connolly saw God’s place in history as a force which would lead men to hurl themselves against the forces of mammon”. Markievicz had seen Connolly as being concerned with banishing the worship of the golden calf; Edwards contended that Connolly was acting alongside God in leading men to oppose the greedy materialism of mammon. Like biographers before him, Edwards attempted to construct a Connolly that would be acceptable to a Catholic Ireland.

Edward’s contribution is noteworthy as one of the first significant (re)considerations of Connolly’s thought after the eruption of the Northern Ireland troubles in the late 1960s. The lecture upon which the text is based was delivered in 1968 when the civil rights agitation in Northern Ireland was just getting underway. When the text of the lecture was published in 1971 Edward’s added an epilogue reflecting on Connolly’s particular influence on the protagonists in the civil rights struggle.

What I did not anticipate was the rebirth of Connolly in a global outburst of participation politics, whose advocates in Ireland, especially in Northern Ireland, proclaimed it with stress on Connolly’s teachings and reaffirmed his powerful relevance to the establishment against which they struggled. Connolly between 1968 and 1971 moved from the lecture-room to the streets ...

But whereas Edwards was willing to commend the courageous young people no longer content to leave Connolly in the shrine of inactive piety”, he was not willing to endorse all of those who would seek to invoke Connolly’s legacy. Edwards warned that it would be a foolish man who assumed a blessing from Connolly for all forms of new

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177 Edwards, *The Mind of an Activist*, p.34.
The "new form of vitality" that Edward’s referred to was the burgeoning armed struggle of the republican paramilitary groups. The "problem of the Easter Week Rising", the title of one of the chapters in Edward's text, was now thrust very much to the fore. How could Connolly’s resort to armed uprising be justified and even celebrated while the armed struggle of republicans in the North was condemned? Edward's response was confounding:

That he finally took to the gun is undeniable; but he did so himself, not by means of pawns destined for cannon-fodder. He had scant use for politicians seeking to exploit gun-toting in his own day, and he confronted them in the shape of the Tories and Unionists who sponsored the Ulster Volunteers.\(^{183}\)

That Connolly was "Commandant General" of the insurgents in Dublin, issuing potentially fatal directives to his subordinates, seemed to have been overlooked by Edwards. *The Mind of an Activist* ends with a final caution regarding Connolly’s legacy:

We should admire the courage that led him into the Easter Rising; we may wish to applaud its ideals; that does not involve our offering it an otiose and possibly ill-advised posthumous endorsement.\(^{184}\)

Edwards presented another "all-inclusive" Connolly: the "spiritual materialist", the "Marxist Catholic", the "national internationalist". Connolly's broad-minded ideals could be embraced by all good people. Even his resort to arms could be considered courageous, although it was not to be replicated.

The advent of the troubles in the North introduced a new imperative for some biographers of Connolly. If Connolly was not to be entirely abandoned to armed republicanism then certain clarifications needed to be made as to the course of Connolly's political career. Edwards’ construction of Connolly required him to walk an interpretive "tightrope", always in danger of conceding too much to the Rising's exemplar. It was a "tightrope" that many of Connolly's future biographers would be increasingly forced to traverse.

*Connolly's Marxism* by Bernard Ransom was a more incisive yet still sympathetic left analysis of what is described by Ransom as Connolly's "Hibernicised" version of Marxist doctrine.\(^{185}\) Ransom again went to considerable length to assert

Connolly’s theoretical continuity. He argued that there existed a socialist consistency throughout Connolly’s career.

All of this thinking was an evident component of his ‘Hibernicising’ drive for an Irish road to socialism from his earliest days in Dublin and he did not change that thinking in any substantive respect subsequently.\(^{186}\)

Ransom had previously collaborated with Edwards in editing a collection of Connolly’s writings and in *Connolly’s Marxism* he concurred with Edwards’ observations regarding Connolly’s Catholicism.\(^{187}\) With perhaps more intellectual finesse than Edwards, Ransom delivered another mediated Connolly: a man ‘for all political seasons’. Connolly’s revolutionary nationalism involved, according to Ransom, ‘the accommodation of Marxist science to the national and religious traditions of Ireland.’\(^{188}\) Ransom asserted that Connolly perceived the ‘practice of ancient Gaeldom ...the Christian consciousness of Catholicity, together with the secular tradition of political and economic struggle ... each as an element in the historical struggle of labour in Ireland against its own subjection.’\(^{189}\)

Ransom specifically refuted Greaves’ idea that Connolly saw the Irish revolution in terms of a stages theory.\(^{190}\) Instead Ransom offered the alternative that ‘[t]he best comparison to be made is ... with the Bolshevik notion developed by Parvus and Trotsky of the ‘Permanent Revolution’.’\(^{191}\) The perspective on Connolly’s theoretical alignment had altered: no longer coincident with a stages theory, Connolly’s politics were now in line with the theory of permanent revolution. The understanding of his participation in the Rising, however, remained unchanged; it was still accepted as the correct choice for a socialist revolutionary to make. Connolly’s involvement in the Rising was not, in Ransom’s view, a capitulation to nationalism but a seizing of the revolutionary moment.\(^{192}\)

As Connolly contemplated the awesome imponderable of where the liberal state breakdown might lead under the strains of modern total war, the loss or suspension of rights won by labour under the liberal constitution and the practical constraints on party and union activity, he turned to the Citizen Army as the one remaining vehicle capable of

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\(^{186}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.117.

\(^{187}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.3.

\(^{188}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.4.

\(^{189}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.4.

\(^{190}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.4.

\(^{191}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.118.

\(^{192}\) Ransom, *Connolly’s Marxism*, p.117.
genuine class-conscious action. Commander of Europe’s first ‘red army’ gradually became his prime role.  

Ransom explained the apparent shift in Connolly’s political method – the move from a belief in class mobilisation as a vehicle for social change to a reliance on the abilities of a (small) ‘red army’ – as a response to the outbreak of war, the ‘backwardness’ of the Irish situation and the armed manoeuvrings of unionist partitionists.  

Connolly’s ‘choice of revolutionary policy’, his ‘insurrectionary commitment in the 1914-1916 period’, was seen by Ransom as having ‘a principled base in many of his earlier stands on important issues.’ Ransom asserted that Connolly’s ‘commitment’ to insurrection was indicative of ‘a standpoint beyond parliamentary politics and constitutional form: a standpoint based on the marxist (sic) principle of the state as a function of the class factor and not – as the reformists believed – a reality independent of it.’ In Ransom’s analysis Connolly joined with the Rising on the basis of sound Marxist principle.

Ransom went further in justifying Connolly’s involvement in the Rising; not only was it based on firm political principle but what was being fought for was actually a socialist republic. Ransom was unequivocal: ‘[t]he radical text of the Proclamation of the Republic reveals without mystery the ideal for which Connolly died. It was the socialist one’. The interpretation that Ransom offered of the Proclamation as a socialist document would reoccur later in relation to Connolly’s legacy. That Connolly’s legacy also offered some form of ‘Hibernicised’ Marxism for Irish revolutionaries was also a proposition that would be repeated by some republicans.

David Howell’s study of Connolly ranks as one of the best in analytical terms. A Lost Left provides a sharp critique of Connolly’s perceived theoretical limitations. Connolly’s sense of Irish national identity was seen by Howell as problematic; it did not clearly acknowledge the growing divisions in Ireland between nationalists and those wanting to preserve the union with Britain. Connolly’s Labour in Irish History demonstrated, for Howell, how far Connolly came to accept a conception of Irish nationality as ‘Gaelic and Catholic.’ Labour in Irish History, according to Howell,

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193 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, p. 81.
194 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, pp. 80 and 91.
195 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, p. 91.
196 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, p. 91. Italics in original.
197 Ransom, Connolly’s Marxism, p. 118.
198 Howell, A Lost Left, p. 13.
199 Howell, A Lost Left, p. 39.
200 Howell, A Lost Left, p. 88.
also largely ignored or glossed over the opposition to Home Rule of working-class unionists in the North and the obstacle this represented to any Irish route to socialism.\(^{201}\)

Howell was sympathetic to the social and doctrinal milieu that Connolly found himself in. Connolly’s Marxism, Howell claimed, evolved out of the "innocent optimism of much Second International Socialism".\(^{202}\) The ordeal of the 1913 Lockout caused Connolly to reconsider the efficacy of his syndicalist politics.\(^{203}\) With the onset of World War One Howell pictured Connolly as facing "the near-disintegration of effective socialist politics" and Connolly reacted by placing "a heightened emphasis on Nationalist themes".\(^{204}\) In these circumstances Connolly felt that action was essential. The alliance that Connolly made with insurrectionary nationalists did not, in Howell’s opinion, mean that Connolly had simply abandoned socialism for an uncomplicated Nationalism.\(^{205}\) Instead Howell averred that Connolly’s action in 1916 was a choice made in what seemed to a long-standing Socialist, an increasingly bleak situation.\(^{206}\) The outcome of 1916 for socialists, Howell contended, was depressing.\(^{207}\) This "verdict", Howell thought, needed to be placed against the naive claims that Connolly in theory and practice offered a viable synthesis of nationalist and socialist politics. No such synthesis ever existed to be deflected from a triumph by contingent circumstances.\(^{208}\) Howell firmly situated Connolly’s legacy in historical context: "1916 and 1917 [the Russian Revolution] were vital but they have all too easily become prisms through which we are presented with distorted images of the past."\(^{209}\) Howell concluded that any recovery of Connolly’s politics would require an act of historical imagination.\(^{210}\) The republican prisoners who (might have) read Howell’s text appeared quite capable of this act of historical imagination and some would come to synthesize a politics quite reminiscent of Connolly’s socialist republicanism.

Austen Morgan’s James Connolly – A Political Biography was most certainly not in the tradition of hagiography that had characterised a number of the previous monographs. James Connolly – A Political Biography was a text written within the

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\(^{201}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.88.  
\(^{202}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.38.  
\(^{203}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.120.  
\(^{204}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.141.  
\(^{205}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.142.  
\(^{206}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.153.  
\(^{207}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.153.  
\(^{208}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.153.  
\(^{209}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.153.  
\(^{210}\) Howell, A Lost Left, p.154.
context of the ongoing situation in the North; Morgan admitted that as a teenager in Northern Ireland in the 1960s I must have noticed that James Connolly reputation was being revived by liberal writers in the Republic”. Morgan continued: “In, what may be called, Anglo-Irish socialist culture from 1968, it was impossible to avoid Connolly as the historical hero who represented militant anti-partitionism.” For Morgan, however, Connolly was no hero; he launched a very sharp attack on Connolly and his legacy with little of the countervailing affinity shown by treatments such as Howell’s.

Morgan in his biography of Connolly sought to pose the question “why should a man who lived as a socialist, die as an Irish nationalist?” This question had not previously, in Morgan’s view, “been posed in earnest.” Morgan’s text put forward the premise that a transition had taken place in the last twenty months of Connolly’s life; his politics moved from a commitment to socialism to a nationalist allegiance. Connolly had in the circumstances of “historical crisis” led a nationalist “revolution” for an Irish state “long championed by European radicals but challenged by Ulster Protestants”. Morgan remarked on Connolly’s legacy: his involvement in the Irish national revolution had given “working class politics a strong nationalist identity.” No praise was forthcoming from Morgan for the nationalist endowment that Connolly had left behind.

The main target of Morgan’s censure was Connolly’s theoretical grasp of Marxism and its application to his political practice. Morgan rejected the contention that Connolly remained “true” to his socialist calling. He accepted that “[n]o doubt Connolly, on the basis of his life before 1914, would have welcomed the October revolution if he had survived”; but in regard to Connolly’s participation in the Rising Morgan was certain: “[o]n the evidence of the last twenty months of Connolly’s life, it is very difficult to associate Easter 1916 with international proletarian revolution”. Morgan assailed Connolly’s doctrinal basics. “Connolly imported a British conception of socialist strategy”, Morgan asserted, “which he failed to apply to an agrarian and

212 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.vii.
213 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.ix.
214 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.ix.
215 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, pp.ix-x.
216 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.x.
217 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.x.
218 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.10. Italics in the original.
219 Morgan, James Connolly: A Political Biography, p.10. Italics in the original.
nationalist Ireland, where Catholic politics avoided the minority problem of the Ulster Protestants.” Morgan derided the “attempts to characterize Connolly as having theorized working-class leadership of the Irish revolution [as] historically preposterous, conceptually unstable and ultimately dependent on a mythical Connolly.”

Connolly’s major work, *Labour in Irish History* came in for severe criticism from Morgan: “This unique history drew on the Marxist tradition, in that it looked forward to a future of socialism in Ireland. Here the affinity ceased.” Morgan was clear: “The historiography of *Labour* was nationalist.” For Morgan, “Catholic nationalism finally conquered Connolly’s proletarian commonsense.” Morgan insisted that “In August 1914 Connolly became a revolutionary nationalist.” In Morgan’s final analysis – Connolly went to his death an unapologetic Fenian. There were many opportunities to articulate a socialist project, but there is no substantial evidence that he sought to do so.”

*James Connolly – A Political Biography* ends with the conclusion that, if Connolly had survived, it would have been as a senior officer of the IRA ... and a potential leader of Sinn Féin”. Morgan repudiated the previous renderings of Connolly - that Connolly was a consistent _socialist republican_, either _carved out of a solid piece_ from the beginning or coming to that realisation by 1916 - reverting instead to an updated and quite venomous version of Sean O’Casey’s hypothesis that Connolly finally succumbed entirely to nationalist ideology. Morgan’s *James Connolly* was a part of the _revisionist_ trend in Irish historiography; it represented a _revised_ version of Connolly, one that was, in some ways, a reaction to the ongoing conflict in the North and Connolly’s prominence in republican discourse. Morgan’s attack on Connolly would not go unanswered by republicans.

Kieran Allen’s *The Politics of James Connolly* was a self-avowed Marxist interpretation. Allen stated that the _book is written from within the general framework of the theory and perspectives of the Socialist Workers Movement_.

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228 Irish historical revisionism will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
*James Connolly* took a critical approach to its subject but while Allen certainly found deficiencies in Connolly’s theoretics he contended that

the Irish left needs to recover the politics of James Connolly. His description of partition as a *carneval of reaction* to be fought vigorously; his dismissal of *gas and water* socialists ... who put minor electoral gains above an opposition to Loyalism; his notion of a working-class leadership of the national struggle – all are of continued and direct relevance. They stand today as the basis for a revolutionary socialist position in Ireland.\(^{230}\)

Allen had specific political groupings in mind when he urged the *Irish left* to *recover* the politics of Connolly; he rebuked both the Irish Labour Party and the Workers’ Party for their excessively hostile attitude to *republican forces*. — The prejudices and backward politics of the republicans”, Allen maintained, “were no reason to equate them with the militarism of the British Empire.”\(^{231}\)

The respect shown for Connolly did not deter Allen from locating significant flaws in Connolly’s understanding and application of Marxism. Allen argued that Connolly must be viewed as a revolutionary socialist who was trapped inside the decaying traditions of the Second International.\(^{232}\) Key among Allen’s criticisms was Connolly’s continued entreaties to the *advanced nationalists* of Irish republicanism. While subjecting the Home Rule politicians of the Irish Parliamentary Party to often withering denunciations, Connolly repeatedly cajoled Irish republicans to recognise in his workers’ republic the expression of a *true* nationalism, one which rejected the *alien* (English) imposition of private property.\(^{233}\) Connolly saw republicanism as a movement that could be comprehensively won over to socialism.\(^{234}\) This courting of republicans, in Allen’s view, was symptomatic of Connolly’s misunderstanding of republicanism’s class content. As Allen put it, “Connolly never tried to locate the class roots of the republican ideology among the lower-middle class.”\(^{235}\) Connolly failed to see that the pro-capitalist republicanism articulated by groups like Sinn Féin could represent the aspirations of a burgeoning Irish bourgeoisie.\(^{236}\) According to Allen, “[t]he result was a fudge on his attitude to Sinn Féin which pointed to its *good* and *bad*’


points without defining the socialist attitude to it." At most Connolly offered tactical advice to the republicans on how to proceed politically. Nowhere in Connolly's writings was there a fundamental critique of republicanism. Finally in 1916, Allen tells us, "caught in the decaying traditions of the Second International" and the pessimism and despair that these politics invoked, Connolly subordinated his revolutionary socialism to a republican intent.

Allen finds Connolly's grasp of Marxism to be imperfect. The analysis that flowed from Connolly's political understanding was confused; nevertheless Allen argued that Connolly did not, in 1916, shift to a purely nationalist position. Connolly, Allen insisted, while encumbered by the political inheritance of the Second International, maintained a commitment to revolutionary socialism throughout this period up to his death. Allen concluded his analysis by stating that Connolly's failure to build a resolute revolutionary party meant that no one coherent Connolly tradition had endured. Instead Connolly's political legacy was splintered and fragmented as different groups claimed to follow in his wake. Some of Connolly's republican followers would critique very sharply Allen's take on the politics of James Connolly.

Also out of the Marxist school of thought came Connolly: A Marxist Analysis, published by the Irish Workers Group (IWG). Like Allen, the authors of A Marxist Analysis clearly expressed the purpose of their text: "to examine the roots, influences and developed ideas of Connolly's thought from an unashamedly Marxist standpoint ... that of the classical tradition upheld and developed by Trotsky". The book's three authors, Andy Johnston, James Larragy, and Edward McWilliams, situated their Marxist analysis in relation to Connolly's past expositors. Morgan's thesis that Connolly's involvement in the 1916 Rising flowed from a subjective abandonment of socialism for nationalism upon the outbreak of war was firmly rejected. So too was Greaves' attempt to bracket Connolly with Lenin on the basis of their attitude to the

239 Allen, The Politics of James Connolly, p.149.
war and indeed to the insurrection itself."\textsuperscript{244} In reference to the Rising the authors of \textit{A Marxist Analysis} \textbf{contended that Connolly's political \textit{innovation} within the socialist movement} – the fusion of socialist and nationalist aspirations – \textit{led him} to become a leader of the \textit{nationalist} rebellion of 1916.\textsuperscript{245} This, they considered, was the central paradox \textit{in} the written corpus and practical legacy he has left us.\textsuperscript{246}

\textbf{Johnston, Larragy, and McWilliams} recognised Connolly's hegemony over the Irish left. They contended that \textit{every serious attempt} since 1916 to develop a socialist programme\textsuperscript{247} which could also address the national question \textit{has looked} to Connolly's legacy.\textsuperscript{248} This legacy, however, was not judged by the IWG to be an entirely beneficial one for Irish socialism; Connolly's 'socialist republicanism', \textit{because it is ambiguous on key questions of class and nation"}, remained an obstacle to developing independent working class politics.\textsuperscript{248} Connolly's Marxism was, once again, found wanting. The \textit{real foundations of Connolly's attitude to the Irish national question"} were, according to the IWG's analysis, a \textit{regressive break from the Marxist theory of the nation in a radical populist (and petit-bourgeois) direction.}\textsuperscript{249} Connolly's \textit{own understanding of the Irish revolution represented a non-Marxist adaptation to Irish revolutionary nationalist traditions.}\textsuperscript{250}

Connolly's legacy, with its \textit{programmatic confusion} of the national and socialist tasks was, for the IWG, \textbf{a significant problem.}\textsuperscript{251} 'Republican socialism' was an \textit{ideological rallying point} for socialist elements within [the] Republican Movement, and those sections within the socialist and labour movements who stand by the struggle of the nationalist minority in the north against their oppression.\textsuperscript{252} This \textit{Republican socialism}, however, derived its legitimacy from the real ambiguities of Connolly's ideas and especially the confusion of programmes embodied in his final struggle.\textsuperscript{253} Using a similar metaphor to one that had been used by Allen, the authors of \textit{A Marxist Analysis} asserted that Connolly \textit{was wrong to lower the red flag to the green, to subordinate the working class programme to that of the revolutionary democratic

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\textsuperscript{244} Johnston et al, \textit{Connolly: A Marxist Analysis}, p.10.
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bourgeoisie." Unlike Allen’s hope that perhaps at least some of the politics of James Connolly could be "recovered", Johnston, Larray, and McWilliams concluded instead that there was little worth salvaging: "The tragedy of Connolly” was that “in the most testing moment” he “confused rather than clarified". The IWG’s negative assessment did not stop republicans from using Connolly as a launching pad for continued attempts to develop their own "socialist-republicanism".

Connolly’s expositors went some way to establish the context in which republicans would understand Connolly. Certain depictions of Connolly reoccurred in the accounts: Connolly the patriot, the Catholic, the Marxist, the socialist republican, or an amalgam of these elements. This political hybridity did not mean, for many of his biographers, that Connolly was inconsistent. Indeed Connolly’s political insights led him most appropriately to lead the Rising in 1916. Much of this material was suitable for republican historical consumption. Of course some of Connolly’s biographers would challenge the visions of Connolly that were presented. These accounts were more unsettling for Connolly’s would-be republican legatees. Connolly’s scholarly and literary expositors did not, however, represent the only means by which his legacy could be conveyed. The republican movement was quite capable of generating its own images of Connolly and of "remembering" past political attempts to make "real" Connolly’s ideals. In the next chapter we will contextualise Connolly’s political legacy as it stood in the late 1960s. The "hegemonic" position that Connolly occupied in the literature of republicanism will be highlighted and we will examine the contest that occurred within the republican movement itself over which "Connolly" would be triumphant.

Chapter 2

Connolly and the Republicans

God rest gallant Pearse and his comrades who died
Tom Clark, MacDonagh, MacDiarmada, McBride,
And here's to James Connolly who gave one hurrah,
And faced the machine guns for Erin Go Bragh.

‗A Row in the Town‘, Irish folksong commemorating the 1916 Rising.

Connolly took his place in republican memory alongside the martyrs of 1916: Pádraig Pearse, Thomas Clarke, Éamonn Ceannt, Seán MacDiarmada and others. More than any of these leaders of the Rising, however, it was Connolly‘s legacy that struck a chord with later republicans. He contributed a corpus of political writings that revealed Ireland’s colonial subordination under the conditions of capitalism. These writings have provided republicans with a captivating radical rhetoric that has been used to significantly elaborate the republican doctrine. Connolly has also acted as the medium through which republican icons that preceded him have come to be understood – in particularly Wolfe Tone and James Fintan Lalor. The hegemony of Connolly in republican discourse tended only to increase from the late 1960s onwards. The republican embrace of Connolly, however, has not always been unproblematic or uncontested - even within the ranks of the movement. Contending republican factions have sought to mobilise Connolly for their own ends. This contest of interpretations was played out in the crucible of two of republicanism‘s major splits and in the radicalising atmosphere of the 1960s. Connolly seemed to offer to republicans a way of revitalising the doctrine, of making it relevant to a new generation of adherents. The focus of this chapter will be on Connolly‘s political ascendance among republicans and how different factions constructed contending ‗Connollys‘. Set alongside these interpretations of Connolly will be an alternative historical version that is not informed by a republican discourse.

Connolly in an address to the Irish people articulated one of his core principles: the struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects: it is national and it is social. Its national ideal can never be realized until Ireland stands forth before the world, a nation free and independent. It is social and economic; because no matter what the form of government may be, as
long as one class own as their private property the land and instruments of labor, from which all mankind derive their subsistence, that class will always have it in their power to plunder and enslave the remainder of their fellow creatures.¹

During the 1920s and 1930s, in the wake of military defeat in the Civil War and the consolidation of the southern Free State, there was a growing perception that republicanism had little to offer beyond a commitment to an ethereal republic that was utterly unrealisable. Among republicans the _national aspect_ had been pre-eminent but with the realisation that they risked becoming politically redundant some in the republican movement began to turn towards the _social aspect_ suggested by Connolly. The arduous circumstances of small farmers and landless labourers, the low wages of workers, unemployment and sub-standard housing, along with the simmering resentments of the subordinated Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, all represented opportunities for republicans to reinvigorate their doctrine and broaden their appeal.

Republican _traditionalists_ both before and after 1916 had tended to favour the physical force of committed and armed volunteers over broader class-based political mobilisation as the means to gain _the Republic_. Ernie O’Malley, an IRA volunteer in the War of Independence, expressed the aversion felt by many republican leaders to any demands that would rival the national cause and its armed struggle:

> Our company strength was mainly working men: but I was too intense on the new spirit of volunteering to feel their other allegiance. The Volunteer spirit in essentials was hostile to Labour, afraid that any attention to its needs or direction would weaken the one-sided thrust of force.²

After the trauma of the Civil War the _pure_ physical force method began to be challenged by those who would seek to add a more _political_ dimension to republicanism’s appeal. The _politicisers_³ within the republican movement felt themselves hemmed in by the ideological legacy of a dogmatism that preferred an

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³ ‘Politicisers’ is a term that has been attached to those republicans who sought a greater role for the ‘social question’ within republican politics. ‘Traditionalists’ is used to designate those that opposed this strategy. This terminology was suggested by Anthony Coughlan, “The IRA in the 1960s: Rethinking the Republic? A critical review article by Anthony Coughlan on Matt Treacy’s book _The IRA in the 1960s: Rethinking the Republic?_”, Indymedia Ireland, [www.indymedia.ie/article/99779](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/99779) accessed 16 September 2011, p.1.
unencumbered focus on the national issue and that harboured a deep distrust of "politics" – particularly politics in its parliamentary form. Politics that raised the issue of class, for the most part, was considered anathema. This anti-political, "traditional" form of republicanism put its faith in the "virtues" of a military campaign harking back to the heroics of 1916 and the War of Independence.4

The Republican Congress, formed in 1934, represented an effort to break from the stultifying rigidities of "traditional" republicanism. George Gilmore, who was deeply involved in the project, described the Republican Congress as an effort to set "the republican-minded people of Ireland ... on what can be called a Tone-Connolly approach to their emancipation."5 The Republican Congress would be inspirational for a number of later "left republicans", not least of all thanks to its, albeit momentary, overcoming of the northern sectarian divide: supporters of the Republican Congress from Belfast's Protestant Shankill Road attended the 1934 Wolfe Tone commemoration carrying a banner bearing the slogan "Break the Connection with Capitalism. Connolly's Message our Ideal. On to the Workers' Republic".6 Connolly's "teachings", for the supporters of the Congress, represented "the deepest instinct of the oppressed Irish nation."7 An inaugural declaration was issued.

We believe that a republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots Capitalism on its way. "We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working class".8

The words quoted by the founders of the Congress were those of Connolly. The Republican Congress was short-lived but proved influential beyond its brief existence and it would not be the last effort to inject "politics" into the republican movement. Connolly was emerging as a politically significant figure for republicans.

During the 1960s republicanism again sought to politicize itself by a turn towards the social question.9 Between 1956 and 1962 the Irish Republican Army had

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7 Gilmore, The Irish Republican Congress, p.31.
engaged in an armed ‘Border Campaign’ against partition and the British military presence in Northern Ireland. The campaign failed to gain popular support and neither the stability of the northern sub-state nor the hegemony of the unionist political establishment were seriously threatened. When the campaign was finally called off the IRA found itself in a parlous situation. While old republicans may have retained the respect of their local community for their sacrifices and commitment, active support for the Irish Republican Army seemed to have dwindled.\footnote{Richard English, \textit{Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA}, Macmillan, London, 2003, p.75.} In 1967 Cathal Goulding, Chief of Staff of the IRA, speaking at the republican movement’s annual Wolfe Tone commemoration, articulated the sentiments of those who wanted to turn away from a purely military strategy towards the \textit{social aspect} of the struggle. Goulding cited Connolly to support the change: ‘This is not any longer a movement for dream-filled romantics, who have been fed on Barry’s \textit{Guerrilla Days} and have never taken the trouble to read McArdle’s \textit{Irish Republic} or Connolly’s \textit{Workers Republic}. This movement has room only for revolutionaries and radicals’.\footnote{“Bodenstown ’67”, \textit{The United Irishman, An tÉireannach Aontaithe}, Vol. XXI, Uimhir 7, Iúil (July) 1967, pp. deich–aon déag (pp.10-11).} The spectre of Connolly had appeared at Bodenstown before; henceforth Connolly would be a regular \textit{guest} at the Wolfe Tone commemoration.

Cathal Goulding had become IRA Chief of Staff in 1962. The general demoralisation of the movement that had set in after the lack of military success in the Border Campaign meant that few people had wanted to take up the task.\footnote{Patterson, \textit{The Politics of Illusion}, 1989 edition, p.84.} For Goulding the campaign’s failure demonstrated that the republican movement would be unable to achieve its aims through armed force alone. Goulding credited the writings of James Connolly as having been hugely influential in his political development.\footnote{“The Mind of a Revolutionary – Cathal Goulding talks to Henry Kelly”, \textit{The Irish Times}, March 8, 1975, p.5.} As a young recruit to the movement Goulding had seen the radicalisation that had led to the formation of the Republican Congress and by the late 1960s an awareness of a \textit{left republican} historical legacy was becoming more widespread. Desmond Greaves’ biography of James Connolly, published in 1961, which emphasized Connolly’s commitment to Marxism, was a key text in this process.\footnote{Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, \textit{The Lost Revolution, The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party}, Penguin Books, Dublin, 2009, pp.28-29.} The fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising and the centenary of Connolly’s birth further stimulated interest in his...
George Gilmore, the veteran of the Republican Congress, produced a pamphlet entitled *Labour and the Republican Movement* which stated explicitly that “if there is to be any future for the Irish people as a free people, it must depend upon a return by organised Labour to the politics of James Connolly.” Gilmore intended that republicans would be part of the return to Connolly’s politics.

Sinn Féin President, Tomas MacGiolla, cautiously aligned himself with Goulding’s vision for the republican movement. In his presidential address to the 1965 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis MacGiolla outlined a republican alternative to western capitalist materialism and ‘foreign’ communism. While careful to emphasize that Sinn Féin did not oppose free enterprise per se, MacGiolla invoked the authority of James Connolly to advocate the co-operative control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. His address evaded any specific mention of socialism. By 1967 MacGiolla was far less reticent as he observed “Socialism is in at the moment in Ireland. There is a mad scramble to the left since Pope John made it respectable.” So seemingly respectable had socialism become that the Árd Fheis of that year passed a motion that amended the party constitution. The aim of Sinn Féin was henceforth declared to be “the complete overthrow of English rule in Ireland and the establishment of a democratic Socialist Republic based on the Proclamation of Easter Week 1916.” Connolly’s politics, at least through the ‘narrow byway’ of the 1916 Proclamation, had been inserted into Sinn Féin’s programme. Sinn Féin’s new attraction to socialism did not mean that the ‘national question’ had been entirely put aside. As MacGiolla expounded to the Árd Fheis delegates: “The British connection is the strength of the ascendency establishment in both the North and the South. If we are to break the grip of capitalist economics, we must first break the grip of British Imperialism. This is the lesson of Connolly and this is the lesson of Tone.” Connolly’s ‘teaching’, it seemed,
could add the popular ‘socialist’ ingredient to Sinn Féin’s political mix without overshadowing the commitment to the national goal – or so it was thought.

The republican movement in the 1960s faced a serious dilemma: how would it survive and how would it revitalise itself? The Republican Congress might have provided an historical precedent but that some leading republicans looked to the ‘left’ for answers to the movement’s lethargy should also be understood in the wider political context of the period. At this time national liberation movements appeared to be in the ascendant. A wider liberationary discourse was gaining popularity across the globe as the colonized sought independence from their imperial overlords. Britain’s imperialist pretensions in the middle-east had been ignominiously rebuffed at Suez in 1956. In the British colony of Kenya brutal repression had failed to halt the drive to independence. Guerrilla movements in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America were challenging the hegemony of Europe and the United States. The nations of the so-called ‘Communist bloc’, the USSR and its Eastern European satellites, along with Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba seemed to offer for some an alternative system to that of the western capitalist imperial powers. Eamonn McCann, the Northern Ireland civil rights activist, commented on this period:

The ideological climate was different, not just in Ireland but everywhere that we knew of ... Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre were world figures, famous far beyond the frontiers of literature and philosophy for their anti-war activities and involvement in socialist struggles. Students and other young people read, or at least thought it important to be able to claim to have read, Marcuse, Regis Debray, Franz Fanon, even a little light Trotsky.

Referencing more popular influences Gerry Adams had a similar recollection:

People did not live their lives in isolation from the changes going on in the world outside. They identified to a greater or lesser extent with the music, the politics, the whole undefined movement of ideas and changes of style. Bob Dylan, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, long hair and beads, the ‘alternative society’ ... This was the promise of the ’60s, that the world was changing anyway and the tide of change was with the young generation.

The republican movement was not so insular as to remain unaffected by the prevailing social and political mood and Connolly's radical politics made a good ‘fit’ for young Irish people seeking profound social change.

With the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church also underwent a period of liberalization. MacGiolla’s remarks at the 1967 Árd Fheis, that there was "a mad scramble to the left" since Pope John had made "socialism respectable", were made in an atmosphere of loosening religious strictures.\(^{24}\) At election time Catholic Cardinals would still warn of the great danger that socialism presented but the days of widespread, clamorous anti-communism, of the type seen in the 1930s and 1950s, was over.\(^{25}\) Within the political ferment of the late 1960s, with left ideas attaining a legitimacy and prominence that they had not enjoyed for decades, some republicans realised an opportunity to ‘re-discover’ Connolly. Thus armed they would seek to use ideas claiming authority from Connolly as a means to ‘ politicise’ their movement. At a commemoration of the Rising in 1969 Goulding noted that “for Republicans the adhesion to the ideal of a Workers’ Republic may be said to be a new departure.”\(^{26}\) At the same time, however, he signalled that “today there is a place in our organisation for every man who believes in the goal of Connolly, the goal of the Workers’ Republic.”\(^{27}\) Connolly appeared to be the ‘man of the moment’.

Goulding was far more amenable than some of his republican contemporaries to seeking outside the narrow confines of the movement for theoretical help in reorienting republicanism. Two key figures who assisted Goulding in the process of politicisation were Anthony Coughlan and Roy Johnston. Both men had lived in England and had been involved in the activities of the Connolly Association there.\(^{28}\) The Connolly Association had grown out of the remnants of the Republican Congress in Britain during the 1940s. One of the mainstays of the Connolly Association was Connolly's biographer, Desmond Greaves, who edited the Association’s newspaper, the *Irish Democrat*.\(^{29}\) Coughlan and Johnston were strongly influenced by Greaves’ thinking on the ‘national issue’ and by his strategies for ending partition. Goulding, who met with


\(^{27}\) "Easter 1969", p.deich (10).


\(^{29}\) Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, p.36.
Greaves on the historian’s visits to Dublin, was similarly swayed. On his return to Ireland, Johnston, on the invitation of Goulding, joined the IRA and became its Education Officer. Anthony Coughlan supported the process of politicisation that Goulding and others were pursuing but he declined to formally join the republican movement. These new adherents and sympathisers would assist in the process of transmitting ‘Connollyesque’ ideas to the republican movement. Their efforts, however, would not go unopposed.

Inside the republican movement there were those who rejected the political trajectory that was being proposed and who resented the input of people they regarded as ‘outsiders’, people like Johnston. The Connolly Association that Coughlan and Johnston had been associated with was often characterised as a communist front organisation; but while Desmond Greaves was a long-time member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and Roy Johnston had been a member while he lived in England (and he would later join the Communist Party of Ireland after his departure from Sinn Féin), the Connolly Association was not merely a facade for the CPGB. The Connolly Association steered a relatively independent political course. Guided by Greaves, the Connolly Association’s raison d’être was, through the achievement of equal civil rights in Northern Ireland, to end the partition of Ireland. According to Coughlan the Connolly Association did not claim to be a socialist organisation. This made little difference to those republicans who would have no truck with ‘communism’ and the belief that the republican movement had been infiltrated and diverted by ‘communists’ would prove later to be one of the grievances that would precipitate a republican schism.

The republican movement’s shift to the left in the late 1960s should not be overstated. The political reorientation did not mean that those driving the process had clearly adopted Marxist principles (although later both those who were for and against the shift would occasionally claim that they had). Coughlan remarked that “Going political” in the 1960s did not require Republicans to become socialists or Marxists, even if particular individuals might lean in

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32 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, pp.36-37.
33 Coughlan, “The IRA in the 1960s: Rethinking the Republic?” pp.4-5.
those directions. Nor did it require the Republican movement as a whole to advocate socialism or Marxism.\(^{34}\)

One of the eventual opponents of the movement’s political direction, Ruairi Ó’Brádaigh, initially viewed it as part of a cycle in Irish republicanism that had occurred before. O’Brádaigh observed that in the early 30s the movement was accused of flirting with the Communist Movement. But the Movement got over that.\(^{35}\) The later move to the left was, for O’Brádaigh, a policy that could be corrected”, if required.\(^{36}\) Even the aim of establishing a democratic socialist republic that had been inserted into the Sinn Féin constitution was tempered by reference to the Proclamation of 1916; a document whose stated vision, while bearing the imprint of Connolly’s thought, falls some way short of a fully-fledged socialist manifesto.\(^{37}\) Nevertheless the political left-turn in republicanism did mean that James Connolly could, and would, be cited to justify the new direction and ward off accusations of ideological contamination from aien communism. As Tomas MacGiolla was at pains to assert:

True Republicanism and true Socialism are identical as both are based on the Brotherhood of man. It is our policy to end the domination of Nation by Nation and of man by man. Socialism has nothing to do with either Atheism or totalitarianism as is evident from even a superficial reading of Connolly. Neither is it a philosophy which must be imported. It is part of the Republican tradition since the founding of the United Irishmen, was deeply rooted among the Fenians, and was the driving force behind the 1916 Rebellion.\(^{38}\)

The battle over socialist republicanism was only just beginning and interpretations of James Connolly would be chief among the weapons used in this ideological contest.

Tomas MacGiolla in defending the movement’s political turn was not tilting at windmills. A number of influential republicans viewed the shift towards social/political agitation with suspicion. Seán MacStiófáin was one such figure. The English-born MacStiófáin had become a committed revolutionary republican at age twenty-one.\(^{39}\) MacStiófáin too had absorbed Connolly as part of his formative ideological process. He described his early political education:

\(^{34}\) Coughlan, “The IRA in the 1960s: Rethinking the Republic?”, p. 2.


\(^{36}\) O’Brádaigh in White, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, p.121.


\(^{38}\) Tomas MacGiolla, President of Sinn Fein, to Árd Fheis, The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe, Vol. XXIII, Uimhir 1, Eanáir (January ) 1969, p.se (p.6).

somewhere or other I managed to dig up some pamphlets on James Connolly. They were heavy going for me at the time, with no one to guide or tutor me, but I read and reread them until bit by bit I could make out both the national and the social shapes of the Irish revolutionary philosophy.\textsuperscript{40}

MacStiofáin claimed Connolly as a political influence and honoured him as a revered republican predecessor. While marching for the first time in the Wolf Tone commemoration – “on that historical pilgrimage” to Wolfe Tone’s grave – MacStiofáin recounted that he believed himself to be marching on the same road as Tom Clarke, Pearse and Connolly must have done (sic) when they led their volunteers to Bodenstown in the years before 1916.”\textsuperscript{41} Even for republican traditionalists like MacStiofáin Connolly maintained his prestige.

MacStiofáin raised objections to what he perceived as the penetration of Marxist ideas into the republican movement. He was a devout Catholic. Speaking of his time in prison with other republicans in the 1950s MacStiofáin recalled that “throughout our years of imprisonment we were ... sustained by our belief in God and in the practice of our religion, which I have always found to be a great consolation any time I have been in a tight spot.”\textsuperscript{42} MacStiofáin’s piety made him hostile to the perceived atheism of Marxist doctrine. In 1966 MacStiofáin took deep exception to a letter written by Roy Johnston to the republican newspaper \textit{The United Irishmen} which criticised the reciting of the rosary at republican commemorations, labelling it a sectarian practice. “The real target of this Marxist criticism was not sectarianism,” MacStiofáin claimed, “but religion as such.”\textsuperscript{43} In Cork and South Kerry, where MacStiofáin had local authority in the republican movement, he stopped circulation of the paper. He also tried to influence other regions to do the same - much to the chagrin of the central republican leadership.\textsuperscript{44} MacStiofáin was among those republicans who viewed the Connolly Association as a Communist Party front group. As part of the IRA’s national leadership MacStiofáin opposed the movement’s “new line” on socio-political involvement. He railed against the new proposals to divert the IRA into the never-never land of theoretical Marxism.

\textsuperscript{40} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{41} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.50.
\textsuperscript{42} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.62.
\textsuperscript{43} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.96.
\textsuperscript{44} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.96.
and parliamentary politics.” MacStiofáin specifically targeted Johnston as the main instigator of the strategy.

I knew where some of the new influence was coming from. A Marxist whom I knew to be Moscow-oriented, and who had been in the GPGB and the Connolly Association, had returned to Ireland and was now a member of the Republican movement. I had no objection to him on personal grounds, but I pointed out that there was a clause in regulations forbidding membership to communists.

The attempt to have Johnston removed failed when Goulding threatened to resign if Johnston was forced out.

MacStiofáin described the cognitive process he underwent to become an “anti-communist” there were, for MacStiofáin, several reasons, and they were all simple ones. Stalin’s betrayal of the Republicans in the Spanish civil war had made fascism stronger in Europe. MacStiofáin saw the European communist parties as

a ridiculous example for national revolutionaries, being completely dominated by another country, taking part in capitalist parliaments, and dodging the issue with half-hearted reformist programmes ... you would no more achieve a free and just social order under a Soviet state than you would under a capitalist one.

MacStiofáin uncritically associated Marxism with the ideology of the Soviet Union and Eastern European regimes. He confessed that he found Marx ponderous and trying to read Marx in prison “would still leave me weary.” Revealing a ‘traditional’ republican tendency to favour ‘physical force’ over political activity, MacStiofáin expressed his admiration for Castro’s “extremely efficient guerrilla campaign with a highly competent leadership”. He added, however, that “[i]t was hard to tell from reports at that time whether Castro and his movement were Marxist or not, and to be honest I didn’t care.”

Given MacStiofáin’s piety and his staunch anti-communism, his acceptance of Connolly as part of the respected canon of republican doctrine could only have been conditioned by a similar interpretation to that offered by Constance Markiewicz – that Connolly’s politics should be understood as an attempt to attain to the more Christian

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51 MacStiofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p.82.
52 MacStiofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p.82.
and human status of the workers”. It was not Marxism; it was “the Socialism of James Connolly and of nobody else”. This was at odds with those in the republican movement who accepted that Connolly drew “his ideology from Marx and Engels.”

Discussing republicanism’s “problems of ideology”, Derry Kelleher, a leading Sinn Féin member who had also been greatly influenced by Desmond Greaves, repined that “despite the efforts which have been made to up-date the republican movement in its philosophy over the past four or five years it is still possible to find those within it who vehemently assert that Connolly was not a Marxist.” MacStiofain would certainly have fallen into that category. The scene was being set for a clash of ideologies, each of which embraced a different interpretation of Connolly’s politics.

Despite his hostility to the “political turn” MacStiofain did not entirely repudiate the part that social issues could play in the republican struggle:

It went without saying that agitation on social and economic issues was part of the struggle for justice. But I believed that we should not allow ourselves to get so committed to it that we would lose sight of the main objective, to free Ireland from British rule. It was British domination which had led to many of the abuses and injustices that called for social agitation.

On the face of it MacStiofain’s position seemed to replicate that of MacGiolla; the Sinn Féin president, as we have seen, held that “[t]he British connection is the strength of the ascendency establishment in both the North and the South”. There were, however, key differences in the perspective of MacStiofain as opposed to the republican “politicians’. MacStiofain’s deep animosity towards “communism‘ and his traditional republican attachment to the primacy of armed struggle meant that, while he could claim that “certainly as revolutionaries we were automatically anti-capitalist”, he added a crucial caveat.

But we refused to have anything to do with any communist organisation in Ireland, on the basis of their ineffectiveness, their

53 Constance De Markievicz, James Connolly’s Policy and Catholic Doctrine, no publisher or date given, p.39.
54 Markievicz, James Connolly’s Policy and Catholic Doctrine, p.7.
56 English, Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA, pp.87-88.
57 Kelleher, “Problems of Ideology”, p. se (p.6).
58 MacStiofain, Memoirs of a Revolutionary, p.92.
59 “1967 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, Change in the North, Sinn Fein President on Republican Tradition”, The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe, Nollaig (December), 1967, p. tri (p.3).
60 MacStiofain, Memoirs of a Revolutionary, p.135.
reactionary foot-dragging on the national issue and their opposition to armed struggle. We opposed the extreme socialism of the revisionists because we believed that its aim was a Marxist dictatorship, which would be no more acceptable to us than British imperialism or Free State capitalism. ... We maintained that every country must travel its own road to the kind of socialism that suits it best. Ours should be the democratic socialism that was preached and practised by the men of 1916.\footnote{MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.135. The term ‘revisionists’ is aimed at those who would later comprise the ‘Official’ republican faction.}

MacStiofáin appeared to be paraphrasing Connolly. Connolly had remarked that –[t]he interests of labor all the world over are identical, it is true, but it is also true that each country had better work out its own salvation on the lines most congenial to its own people.\footnote{James Connolly, “Erin’s Hope: The End and the Means”, in \textit{James Connolly: Selected Political Writings}, Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (eds.), Grove Press, New York, 1973, pp.187-188.} MacStiofáin’s _socialism_ bore little resemblance, however, to that elaborated by Connolly. Connolly’s socialism was reduced by MacStiofáin to that which was _preached and practised by the men of 1916_ – a group who by no means all identified as socialists. Connolly’s doctrine was _rendered safe_ by limiting it to the inferences of the Proclamation and leaving out any mention of an activated, militant working class or any firm commitment to the expropriation of the means of production by that class. MacStiofáin’s understanding of Connolly was informed by his profound aversion to Marxism (as he conceived it) but his views also represented the discontent that was focussed on the _new line_ of the _politicians_. The events of 1969 would gel this discontent and lead to a definitive split in the republican movement.

In Northern Ireland the incapacity of the unionist regime to adequately address the demands of the civil rights movement was leading to increasingly violent confrontations between police and civil rights supporters and the Catholic and Protestant communities. The violence reached a watershed in August 1969. A march by the Protestant Apprentice Boys in Derry, ostensibly to commemorate the defence of that city against the forces of King James II in 1689 but seen by many Catholics as an exercise in sectarian coat-trailing, degenerated into clashes between Protestant marchers and the mainly Catholic residents of Derry’s Bogside district. The _Battle of the Bogside_, as the rioting in Derry came to be known, prompted the Civil Rights Association to make an appeal for people to take the pressure off the Bogside by diverting police resources to other foci in Northern Ireland. In response rioting broke
out in towns across the North.\textsuperscript{63} In Belfast the violence that was precipitated was on a larger scale than in Derry. While in Derry the rioting had quickly become a battle between the residents of the Bogside and the police, in Belfast the patchwork of Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods in close proximity to each other led to a more serious element of sectarian conflict. Many families were burned out of their homes with the Catholic community suffering the overwhelming majority of the attacks.\textsuperscript{64} Republicans would remember the assaults on the Catholic community in Belfast as being a _pogrom_.\textsuperscript{65} Tommy McKearney, a one-time volunteer in the Provisional IRA, described it as resembling “more the type of racist-inspired behaviour witnessed in the southern states of the US before the civil rights era of the 1960s.”\textsuperscript{66} Whether conceived of as a pogrom or as sectarian/racist thuggery, the incidents of August 1969 made a deep impression on the republican movement.

A number of republicans now began to call on the leadership of the movement to take action to defend the beleaguered northern Catholic community and to provide guns and ammunition to those who would use them. The leadership of the movement was not oblivious to these calls or to the desperate situation that they saw developing. Moves were made to transfer active IRA members north and to acquire weapons. Older republicans who had been disgruntled with republicanism’s political direction and had drifted out of the movement were now returning. In Belfast a number of veteran republicans – Jimmy Drumm, Seamus Twomey, Billy McKee and Joe Cahill – re-emerged and began to accuse the leadership of failing to defend nationalist communities. The sectarian attacks of 1969 charged the internal political controversy and the return of the older men to the IRA only added weight to the dissenting faction.\textsuperscript{67} MacStiofáin conveyed the sense of mounting animosity among the _traditionalists_: “A feeling of grim determination could now be sensed among the IRA volunteers. The leadership should have sensed it and gone cautiously, knowing that it is very foolish to oppose intense patriotic emotions with far-fetched political theories.”\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{67} Hanley and Millar, \textit{The Lost Revolution}, pp.130-136.
\textsuperscript{68} MacStiofáin, \textit{Memoirs of a Revolutionary}, p.127.
The IRA held an extraordinary convention in late December 1969. A motion from the leadership calling for the formation of a National Liberation Front (NLF) that would be driven by republicans but extend to include Labour Party supporters, trade unionists and communists was passed. An even more controversial motion calling for an end to the republican shibboleth of parliamentary abstentionism was also passed. Later that night Seán MacStiofáin and Ruairí Ó Bradaigh, both of whom were opposed to ending abstentionism and were hostile to the concept of the NLF, held another meeting at which they set up a new Army Council of the IRA. The Provisional IRA was born.  

Sinn Féin’s Árd Fheis was held on 11th and 12th January the following year. It was the largest gathering of Sinn Féin delegates since the 1920s. The NLF concept was again endorsed by a majority of delegates. The resolution to remove all embargoes on political participation in parliament from the Sinn Féin constitution was, however, bitterly contested and eventually failed to receive the required two thirds majority. Not satisfied with this outcome some of those in support of ending abstention sought to force the issue and called on the Árd Fheis for a vote of confidence in the ‘official’ leadership of the IRA – the section that had already struck abstention out. The hegemony of the IRA in relation to Sinn Féin meant that acceptance of this motion would result in Sinn Féin’s de facto endorsement of an end to abstention. MacStiofáin responded by declaring his allegiance to the newly formed Provisional Army Council; he then left the convention with a number of other Provisional supporters. The group immediately went to a pre-arranged meeting place and announced the establishment of a ‘caretaker’ executive of Sinn Féin. The Provisional IRA now had its own political wing.

The schism that opened up at the IRA and Sinn Féin conferences was not immediately replicated ‘on the ground’ throughout the republican movement. Certainly the leaders of the factions, now dubbed the ‘Provisionals’ and the ‘Officials’, were jockeying for position (and arms). Rhetorical forays were being launched and violence between the factions would escalate quickly but in 1970 many republicans were maintaining their loyalty to the Official leadership and/or adopting a ‘wait and see’ attitude. Many areas across the country were unwilling to affect a split; Wexford Sinn

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70 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.146.
72 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.146.
Féin proposed a meeting of both sides to heal the rift. In an interview given to *An Phoblacht* in 1989 a spokesperson for the Provisional IRA commented: “Firstly it is important to realise that the experience of the split in the IRA was quite different in urban and rural areas and that in many rural areas the split was a non-event until it became apparent that the ‘Sticks’ … had abandoned armed struggle.”

In the immediate aftermath of the split the editor of *The United Irishmen*, which remained under the control of the Official leadership, offered a quite conciliatory “personal view” of the Árd Fheis walk-out. He urged those who supported the Official position to understand the principled motivations of the newly departed:

> Indeed, it is dishonest and vain to invoke the etiquette of democracy against the walk-out. If the people who departed genuinely felt that a basic principle of Republicanism had been violated then it was as much a matter of common sense as duty on their part to act as they did. Republicanism down the centuries has repeatedly defied accepted democratic conventions when a principle was at stake.

In its Easter statement the Official IRA Army Council also made conciliatory overtures calling

> on all Republicans to do their utmost to achieve unity in our ranks. … If we cannot have immediate unity of all Republicans, let us at least strive for maximum co-operation between them in the struggle for the emancipation of our people and the re-conquest of the wealth and resources of our country.

At this stage some comradeliness between the factions (at least from the Official side) still seemed to persist. In the ‘cut-and-thrust’ of factional discord interpretations of Connolly were perhaps side-lined. The reference made to the ‘reconquest’ of wealth and resources, however, showed that Connolly continued to influence republican thinking even in a period when the movement was at odds with itself.

Gerry Adams, who eventually would cleave to the Provisional side and become a leading member in that faction, was representative of the wary approach adopted by some towards the split. Adams came from a republican family and, once again,

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74 “‘We will break Britain’s will’ – IRA”, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, Sraith Nua Iml. 11, Uimhir 32, Lúnasa (August) 17, 1989, p.8. The ‘Sticks’ was a colloquial term for the Official republican faction.
Connolly was a part of the political tradition that he had inherited. His maternal grandmother, so he would later reveal, was on personal terms with both James Connolly and James Larkin. Adams attested that at this time ... [mid to late 1960s] a major influence in moulding the political character of my generation of republicans was the popularisation of the writings of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, in particular James Connolly. In 1970 Adams was not necessarily opposed to the concept of the National Liberation Front or adverse to socialism. He did not share the visceral anti-communism of some of the older republicans who instigated the break from the Official movement. Adams distanced himself from those parts of the first major Provisional statement which denounced the Officials for their extreme socialism. For a number of months after the split he and other IRA members in Belfast’s Ballymurphy area maintained a degree of independence from both the Officials and Provisionals. Nevertheless, as the rivalry between the groups intensified, James Connolly’s perceived legacy would be used in the factional fight between the two sections.

The newly formed Provisionals did not abandon Connolly’s thought to the seemingly more left-wing Officials. In part this was due to the presence of a section of younger republicans in the Provisional ranks who, like Adams, were sympathetic to the idea of socialism. For many working-class republicans in the North, often materially deprived as members of a subordinated community but roused to seek for more by the civil rights agitations, Connolly’s vision of an Ireland re-conquered for its common people was an attractive one. Connolly’s general political stature and the reverence in which he was held by republicans as a martyr of the 1916 Rising also meant that it would have been virtually impossible to completely renounce him. Connolly was too great an iconic persona for the Provisionals to entirely relinquish him to their Official rivals – even if they had been inclined to do so.

Connolly might have been revered but his Marxism was an extremely difficult ideological element for many in the Provisional leadership to accept. Dáithí Ó Conaill, perhaps the most virulent anti-communist among the Provisional leaders, stretched credulity in his attempt to reconcile the Marxist Connolly with Provisional republicanism:

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Those who propagate an alien social philosophy are doing a disservice to the Irish nation. They forget that within Ireland, North and South, are the brains and talent to fashion a society suitable for our own people. Let us never forget that James Connolly admired Tone because he imitated nobody; let us be true disciples of Connolly by striving for the originality of thought which he himself attained in his day. Connolly found his inspiration in the Republican philosophy.

Ó Conaill’s polemic ran directly counter to the interpretation of Connolly that Derry Kelleher had articulated less than a year before. Whereas Kelleher had willingly acknowledged the ideological debt Connolly had to Marx, Ó Conaill sought to deny any Marxist influence. The _originality of thought_ that Ó Conaill urged on young republicans was a means to detach Connolly from any connection with Marxism.

The assertion that Connolly found _inspiration_ in republican philosophy does not bear close scrutiny. Connolly’s support of Ireland’s national struggle for separation - not just for Home Rule but for a workers’ republic - was an ideological innovation within the British socialist milieu of the times. Connolly had arrived at this position from the standpoint of the oppressed and exploited Irish working class. Marx had approached the issue differently but he too came to the conclusion that the complete separation of Ireland from Britain was necessary as a “precondition to the emancipation of the English working class”. Clearly in his advocacy of national independence for Ireland Connolly stood in the tradition of Marx and Engels. Connolly described Karl Marx in 1899 as “the ablest exponent of socialism the world has seen, and the founder of that school of thought which embraces all the militant socialist parties of the world”. Eleven years later, in his classic treatise, _Labour in Irish History_, Connolly had retained his admiration: “Karl Marx, [was] the greatest of modern thinkers and first of scientific Socialists”.

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83 Kelleher, “Problems of Ideology” _The United Irishman_, Meitheamh (June) 1969, p.se (p.6).
Connolly certainly venerated particular radical republicans of the past. He thought “with pride and joy of Wolfe Tone and his struggle for Ireland”; but he “refracted” Wolfe Tone’s eighteenth century republicanism through a socialist lens. Tone’s revolutionary ideology had been surpassed and elaborated on by modern socialism. As Connolly put it “Wolfe Tone was abreast of the revolutionary thought of his day, as are the Socialist Republicans of our day.” The principles of Wolfe Tone would be “honoured”, in Connolly’s view, only by the realisation of “the Socialist Republic”. Connolly’s theoretical inspiration was Marx and socialism far more than it was Tone and republicanism. Denying the Marxist basis of Connolly’s thought was a political artifice of the anti-communist Provisionals.

Ó Conaill and some of his fellow Provisionals might wish to jettison any “alien social philosophy” from their republican doctrine, yet they knew they could not do without any social theory at all. In an early statement from the Sinn Féin Caretaker Executive they detailed the reasons for their walk-out. They asserted that “[t]here is no doubt that an extreme form of Socialism was being pushed on the Movement”, by the Official leadership. The Caretaker Executive affirmed its belief “in a Democratic Socialist Republic for All Ireland”, but, “it seems certain that the ultimate objective of the leadership which remained … is nothing but a totalitarian dictatorship of the left.”

In place of the Official’s “extreme socialism” the Provisionals counter-posed their own “home-grown” doctrine: “Ours is a Socialism based on the native Irish tradition of Comhar na gComharan which is founded in the right of worker ownership and on our Irish and Christian values.”

Comhar na gComharan would become a part of the Provisional’s plan for a “new Ireland” – Éire Nua. The policy represented the Provisional’s earliest attempt to articulate a social and political vision for the Ireland they were fighting for. In addition

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90 Connolly, “The Men We Honour”.
91 Connolly, “The Men We Honour”.
92 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, p.3.
93 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, p.3.
94 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, p.6.
95 Éire Nua translates to ‘new Ireland’.
to proposals for a just social and economic system the plan advocated a federalist political structure that would replace the Partition Statelets in Ireland. Designed as a gesture towards north-eastern unionists, Éire Nua proposed regional assemblages in each of Ireland's four provinces under the control of a single all-Ireland federal parliament. The social aspect of the new Ireland that the Provisionals envisaged called for

the nationalisation of the monetary system, commercial banks and insurance companies, key-industries, mines, building land and fishing rights; the division of large ranches; an upper limit on the amount of land to be owned by any one individual; the setting up of worker-owner co-operatives on a wide scale in industry, agriculture, fishing and distribution, but still leaving ample room for private initiative under state supervision. The extension and development of Credit Unions is also included.

The Comhar na gComharan philosophy which it was claimed informed social and economic thinking in the Republican Movement approximated to the idea of Neighbours’ Co-operation. It was described as cooperative or distributist in character. distributism had close links with Catholic social thought and urged a return to small-scale family farming and small units in trade and industry to combat the evil of big capitalism. Champions of distributism also sought to avoid Socialism, save property and preserve the family. According to party president, Ruairí Ó Bradaigh, however, for us in Sinn Féin it [Comhar na gComharan] is our Socialism. That may have been but it was not the socialism of James Connolly.

The Provisional’s economic programme proposed that private enterprise would still have a role to play ... but not in key industries ... State incentives would, of

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97 Ó Brádaigh, Our People, Our Future, What Éire Nua Means, p.3.
99 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, pp.5-6.
course, favour co-operative projects as the most socially desirable.”105 The ‘Comhar na gComharsan manifesto’ declared,

We do not advocate state ownership; there lies dictatorship. Every man must be an owner to be free. National Strength needs central government. Personal freedom needs decentralised control. A healthy nation needs both ownership by the people of all industries and a central government to co-ordinate their activities is (sic) the solution. To accomplish this the Irish people must have in their hearts the enthusiasm of Pearse, the devotion of Connolly, the anger of Mitchel, the heroism of Emmet and the faith of Tone.106

Connolly's devotion was preferred to his actual class politics. Connolly's Marxism was submerged with patronising reverence amidst a panoply of sanctifying republican martyrs whose ideas were not necessarily compatible with Connolly's. The incantation of the devotion of Connolly, the anger of Mitchel, the heroism of Emmet and the faith of Tone resembled a pious litany rather than a coherent political programme; Connolly's inclusion in this parade of republican martyrs did not require Provisional supporters to focus too closely on the specifics of Connolly's theoretics.

Sinn Féin's promotional material for Éire Nua asserted that the basic Republican position, in this as in so many other matters, derives from the claim in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916 – the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland107. The words from the Proclamation likely owed much to Connolly's influence; but while he was invoked in its promotion the content of Éire Nua owed nothing to Connolly's Marxist politics. The programme of the Irish Socialist Republican Party – of which Connolly was the chief formulator – advocated the abolition of private banks and money-lending institutions and establishments of state banks, under popularly elected boards of directors, issuing loans at cost.108 Superficially this measure might seem to resemble Éire Nua's proposed nationalisation of the monetary system and commercial banks.109 The lineage of Connolly's ISRP programme, however, could be traced to the influence of the Marxist Second

106 O’Brádaigh, Our People, Our Future, What Éire Nua Means, pp.9-10. The ‘Comhar na gComharsen manifesto’ was first published in the Irish Press, December 3, 1970.
109 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, pp.5-6.
International and the accepted view that socialist parties should have both _minimum_ and _maximum_ demands. As a means of palliating the evils of our present social system the ISRP’s programme presented ten minimum demands of which the abolition of private banks and money-lending institutions was one. Yet the ultimate aim of the ISRP was the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic in which all the means of production, distribution and exchange would be the _common property of society_. Even the party’s minimum demands called for the _[g]radual extension of the principle of public ownership and supply to all the necessaries of life_.

In Connolly’s socialist republic there was not going to be _ample room for private initiative_, nor were there the equivocations around _free ownership_ that appeared in the Éire Nua policy. Connolly’s ISRP programme was a Marxist instrument. It bore the hallmark of Connolly’s background in the British Social Democratic Federation and stood in the general historical tradition of the _Communist Manifesto_. Éire Nua was a political pastiche: it advocated an ill-defined public ownership alongside a commitment to private property; it rehashed ideas from the Douglas Credit Movement which were popular during the Great Depression and appealed to those who wanted to reform the economic system without upsetting the class structure. Even the Provisional’s proposals for nationalisation of key industries, mining, fishing rights and building land fell well within the boundaries set by Catholic social policy which allowed government ownership of particular enterprises where it could be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

The proposals for a _mixed_ public-private economy and the _Christian values_ contained in Éire Nua were not political principles that had been gleaned from Connolly. The advocates of Éire Nua urged republicans to have the _devotion of Connolly_ in their hearts without having the politics of Connolly in their programme.

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111 Connolly, “Irish Socialist Republican Party”.
112 Connolly, “Irish Socialist Republican Party”.
113 Connolly, “Irish Socialist Republican Party”.
114 Lynch, _Radical Politics in Modern Ireland_, pp.40-41. The _Communist Manifesto_ included a list of ten minimum demands that Marx and Engels suggested Communists should make a part of their general propaganda.
Éire Nua sought to reject ‘Western’ liberal capitalism and the consumer society on one hand and the state capitalism of the ‘Eastern’ block on the other.”\textsuperscript{117} Essentially, however, the policy was an attempt to articulate an ‘anti-capitalist’ aspiration for Provisional Republicanism without resort to the politics of Marxism. It was a perspective informed by a devout anti-communism. After the outbreak of war in 1914 Connolly had hung a banner outside Liberty Hall inscribed with the slogan ‘We serve neither King nor Kaiser but Ireland’. This was now contorted by Ruairi O’Brádaigh, who declared that ‘We do not serve Queen, Kremlin or Free State, but will strive for a 32 County Republic based on the Proclamation of Easter Week and Christian Principles.’\textsuperscript{118} The dilution of Connolly’s revolutionary socialist politics went hand in hand with the Provisionals regular denials of Connolly’s Marxist foundations. This was the ‘socialism’ of the Provisionals and of nobody else.

After the split the Provisionals quickly established a republican newspaper for the south of the country, \textit{An Phoblacht}.\textsuperscript{119} The Provisional faction thus had an organ for propagating and developing its doctrine. Elaborating further on \textit{Comhar na gComharan}, a correspondent for \textit{An Phoblacht} argued that,

\begin{quote}
To Tone, Russell and Nielson, Emmet, Lalor, Mitchel, Connolly and Pearse, to their comrades and their predecessors, Irish Freedom meant not only an independent government, but the undoing of the conquest as well – in other words, the recovery of the land, wealth and political power, by the whole people and the revival of Irish culture.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

Again the obfuscating device of including Connolly among a republican pantheon of martyrs was employed and, lest the recovery of land, wealth and political power be misconstrued as ‘extreme socialism’, the writer felt compelled to moderate the imperative.

\begin{quote}
It is significant that all these men, though influenced by the revolutionary movements of their times, visualised for a free Ireland a form of society based in its fundamentals on the old Gaelic system –
\end{quote}

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an economy of owner workers grouped into co-operatives for particular functions of agriculture and industry.\textsuperscript{121}

James Connolly in his key work, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, certainly posited that prior to the ‘English’ invasion – the basis of society in Ireland … rested upon communal or tribal ownership of land.’\textsuperscript{122} It is, however, something of a paradox, in light of the Provisional’s own antagonism towards alien social philosophy’, that one of the chief purposes of Connolly’s assertion of an antecedent Gaelic collectivism was to counter the apostate patriotism of the Irish capitalist class” who continued to hurl the epithet of ‘foreign ideas’ against the militant Irish democracy.”\textsuperscript{123} Connolly was operating in an often parochial Irish society that harboured an entrenched social conservatism. The socialism he espoused was challenged by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the respectable voice of Home Rule nationalist politicians. On the popular level Connolly frequently had to endure a hostile audience. In 1911 at an open air gathering in Cobh (then called Queenstown) the meeting was broken up by an angry mob which accused Connolly of anti-religious sentiments. Connolly and his supporters were run out of town (although as testament to Connolly and his comrades’ determination they did return the next day).\textsuperscript{124} Within Irish society there was a particular prejudice against socialism, atheism, or anything that may have been considered as an outside corrupting influence. Connolly was eager to defuse these criticisms and therefore he set forth a socialism that could claim an Irish ancestral legitimacy. In works like \textit{Labour in Irish History} the Gaelic allegory was overplayed but Connolly was not advocating a return to a romanticised ‘Gaelic’ past. He maintained that while the conquest of Ireland hastened the demise of the clan system, the break-up of communal land ownership would have given way to the privately owned system of capitalist-landlordism, even if Ireland had remained an independent country.”\textsuperscript{125} He made it clear that longings for a return to the ancient system of land tenure” were now organically impossible.”\textsuperscript{126} Connolly invoked a Gaelic tradition - admittedly probably an imagined one - in order to promote his Marxist vision of an Irish workers’ republic but the socialism that Connolly proposed

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\textsuperscript{121} Fear Domhnainn, “Comhar na gComharan. The Worker Ownership Idea Based on Irish Traditions and Needs”, \textit{An Phoblacht}, ljúil (July) 1970, p.4.  \\
\textsuperscript{122} Connolly, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, p.2.  \\
\textsuperscript{123} Connolly, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, p.xxxi.  \\
\textsuperscript{125} Connolly, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, p.3.  \\
\textsuperscript{126} Connolly, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, p.3.
\end{flushleft}
was not merely a harking back to a communal antiquity. Connolly placed the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class’ at the centre of his politics and advocated the seizure of the means of production by that class. Five years after the publication of Labour in Irish History (and just a year or so before the Rising) Connolly still declared that the most sacred duty of the working class of Ireland is to seize every available opportunity to free itself from the ravenous maw of the capitalist system and to lay the foundations for the Co-operative Commonwealth – the Working Class Republic.”

By couching the vision of a ‘free Ireland’ in terms of a Gaelic ‘co-operative’ tradition An Phoblacht’s correspondent sought to obscure Connolly’s commitment to Marxism; it also mitigated Connolly’s revolutionary aim of creating a thoroughly new society in the form of the workers’ republic. For the republican readership of An Phoblacht Connolly was, again, trimmed of his political ‘excesses’.

By 1971 the schism between the Officials and the Provisionals had hardened. Doctrinal disagreement had escalated to a shooting war between rival republicans. The United Irishman published a statement from the Official IRA - no longer calling for unity - which invoked Connolly. It contained a stinging attack on the Provisionals:

The Republican Movement will resist the sell-out of the Irish working class in whole or in part. To sectarians of the right and left alike we repeat that there are not two nations in Ireland but one working class. To those patriots who won’t touch Socialism until Ireland is free we repeat Connolly’s warning that a change in uniform brings no improvement in the lot of the common people. Neither sunburst or bomb burst will deflect us from a national liberation struggle that will break the English connection not only in word but in deed. The first step is not to repeat history but to understand it.

Rhetorically at least the Officials seemed to articulate a closer political match with Connolly’s Marxist principles. A Marxist sounding phraseology was readily adopted by the Officials. Like a number of Connolly’s biographers the Officials had no qualms in making a link between Connolly and his Bolshevik contemporary, Lenin. According to a review in The United Irishman, Lenin knew what Connolly was about and praised

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127 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxxii.
129 “Press Try to Suppress IRA Statement”, The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe, Vol. XXV, Uimhir 10, Deireadh Fómhair (October), 1971, p. cuig (p.5). The ‘sunburst’ referred to is a symbol generally associated with the Provisionals.
him”. At this time the Provisionals would have been reticent to make an unambiguous connection between Connolly and a Marxist figure like Lenin. The Provisionals were lambasted by the Officials for their _traditionalist_, anti-socialist politics. MacGiolla saw in the Provisionals _the image of the sectarian fighter in a religious war._ In contrast MacGiolla’s own faction stood _for a socialist republic which would fulfil the aims of Connolly_. Derry Kelleher made the attack personal: _Connolly too, had to contend with blinkered nationalists like Ruairi O Bradaigh_.

The Officials embraced Connolly with confidence but their own rendering of him was at times theoretically and historically dubious. The political and social temper of the late 1960s had stimulated the _politicians’ shift to the left but it had brought with it some additional _ideological baggage_ of the times.

In the early 1970s Eoin Ó Murcha, a member of the Official’s (IRA) Army Council, authored a pamphlet entitled _Culture and Revolution in Ireland_. While quoting copiously from Connolly’s writings, Ó Murcha’s assertions appear to owe a far greater doctrinal debt to the thoughts of Chairman Mao than to Connolly. With ruthless candour Ó Murcha makes the political intention of the pamphlet clear: _There is no neutrality here, and the revolutionary vanguard of the people has the right to demand of artists and intellectuals that they make a firm commitment to the progress of humanity, to the enrichment of humanity which we declared to be the purpose of art._

Connolly is quickly enlisted to add ideological legitimacy to Ó Murcha’s argument for _culture and revolution_:

> What Connolly is saying ... is that ordinary men and women are the real makers of history, and that humanity owes nothing to kings or _great_ men; ... those who work are the rightful inheritors of all the wealth of the earth. This, indeed, is the basic philosophy of socialism, the attitude of mind we must propagate. This is the task we set our artists and intellectuals; if they are not willing to meet this task they

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132 Mac Giolla, _Where We Stand_, p.11.

133 Derry Kelleher, _An Alien Ideology? Republicanism, Christianity, Marxism_, Repsol pamphlet no.12, Republican Education Department, Dublin, circa 1973, pp.1-2.

134 Hanley and Millar, _The Lost Revolution_, p.149.

must be consigned to the waste-bins of history and others found who
will perform this great revolutionary task.\footnote{Ó Murcha, \textit{Culture and Revolution in Ireland}, 1971, p.21.}

Ó Murcha’s argument was, in short, that British invasion and colonization had sought
the destruction of an Irish culture that was intrinsically at variance with the materialist
values of British imperialism.\footnote{Ó Murcha, \textit{Culture and Revolution in Ireland}, 1971, p.17.} The task of “national liberation”, according to Ó
Murcha, would therefore “necessitate the championing of native Irish culture”\footnote{Ó Murcha, \textit{Culture and Revolution in Ireland}, 1971, p.24.}. This
re-created national and “socialist” culture “of the common people” would be ranged
against British imperial hegemony and would be instrumental in its downfall.\footnote{Ó
Murcha, \textit{Culture and Revolution in Ireland}, 1971, pp.24-25.} Ó
Murcha again invoked Connolly: “[t]his view of history shows us (as Connolly showed
in \textit{Labour in Irish History}) that the emancipation of the working class can only be
achieved by that class and by those who accept socialist ideology: a socialist culture
needs to be developed to proclaim this message.”\footnote{Ó Murcha, \textit{Culture and Revolution in Ireland}, 1971, p.25.} With Connolly’s implied political
blessing the anamnesis of a Gaelic past and the support for the Irish speaking regions of
the Gaeltacht would be the starting point for the proposed Irish “cultural revolution”.\footnote{Hanley and Millar, \textit{The Last Revolution}, p.207.}

The Maoist overtones in Ó Murcha’s work did not sit comfortably with all those
in the Official republican camp. At party education seminars the pamphlet’s
dissemination was met with a degree of resistance. Cathal Goulding, however, was a
strong supporter of Ó Murcha and there were other members of the Officials who saw
the preservation and proliferation of the Irish language as an integral part of the
revolutionary process in Ireland.\footnote{Hanley and Millar, \textit{The Last Revolution}, p.207.} Connolly’s combination of the national and the
social aspects of Ireland’s struggle for freedom had already led some of his previous
expositors to link Connolly’s thought with Maoism but O’Murcha’s attempt to mobilize
Connolly’s writings to support a Maoist type “cultural revolution” in Ireland were
extreme and decidedly anachronistic.\footnote{See Bernard Ransom, \textit{Connolly’s Marxism}, Pluto Press, London, 1980, p.6.} In \textit{Labour in Irish History} Connolly had tried to
situate the struggle for social liberation within an “authentic” Irish historical and cultural
milieu. Connolly believed that \textit{Labour in Irish History} should have been considered as
part of the literature of the “Gaelic revival” then going on.\footnote{Connolly, \textit{Labour in Irish History}, pp.xxx-xxxi.} The polemical attempt by
Connolly to link the future Irish socialist republic to a Gaelic past was, however, entirely unconnected, historically or doctrinally, with the political imperatives of Mao’s ‘cultural revolution’. Connolly’s initial attitude towards cultural restoration as a means towards the revolutionary ends was illustrated by his response to the movement to promote the Irish language. Greaves in his biography contends that Connolly’s first judgement of the Gaelic movement was a cautious and even sceptical one. Connolly maintained that

“You cannot teach starving men Gaelic; and the treasury of our national literature will and must remain lost forever to the poor wage-slaves who are contented by our system of society to toil from early morning to late at night for a mere starvation wage. Therefore, I say to our friends of the Gaelic movement - your proper place is in the ranks of the Socialist Republican Party, fighting for the abolition of this accursed social system which grinds us down in such a manner ... .”

Connolly was elaborating his thesis that the ‘true’ Irish patriot was one who saw Ireland’s liberation in terms of social revolution as well as national emancipation. Connolly’s tone towards the Irish language enthusiasts moderated as time passed; in 1908 he professed that

“... it is not necessary that Irish Socialists should hostilize those who are working for the Gaelic language ... it is well to remember that nations which submit to conquest or races which abandon their language in favour of that of an oppressor do so ... from a slavish and cringing spirit. From a spirit which cannot exist side by side with the revolutionary idea.”

The defence of culture and language was now seen by Connolly as a part of a suitably rebellious policy of defiant self-reliance and confident trust in a people’s own power of self-emancipation by a people.” In Labour in Irish History Connolly adduced that Ireland at the same time as she lost her ancient social system, also lost her language as the vehicle of thought of those who acted as her leaders.” As a result of this twofold

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145 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, p.110.
147 James Connolly, “The Language Movement”, in James Connolly: Selected Writings, P. Berresford Ellis (ed.), p.288. First published in The Harp, April 1908. Note this is an article distinct from the one published under the same title in The Workers’ Republic, 1898.
149 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxvii.
loss”, Connolly claimed, “the nation suffered socially, nationally and intellectually from a prolonged arrested development.”

Greaves contended that Connolly’s “mature opinion” was that defence of a people’s mother tongue was an integral part of the defence of its soil. Connolly’s later writings go some way to support the assertion but Greaves probably (and O’Murchu certainly) overstated the case. Connolly saw in the language movement the possible sign of a willingness to resist colonial subjugation. A more conciliatory posture towards it fitted with Connolly’s general approach of attempting to entice the support of republicans. In 1915, however, Connolly could still ask the Gaelic Leaguer to realise “that capitalism did more in one century to destroy the tongue of the Gael than the sword of the Saxon did in six”.

The reconquest of Ireland – the taking possession of the entire country, all its power of wealth-production and all its natural resources, and organising these on a co-operative basis for the good of all” – would be accomplished by the One Big Union, “the most effective form of combination for industrial warfare to-day”. The Gaelic Leaguer would be a welcome accessory, but would not necessarily be integral to the material struggle of the revolutionary industrial union. The language that Connolly was most interested in was the language of working-class revolution.

Connolly’s more glaring omission when it came to the Gaelic movement was in regard to certain shared nationalist assumptions. He tended to accept that Irish nationality was somehow intrinsically Gaelic. In his eagerness to find common political ground with the Gaelic Leaguer Connolly at times seemed to neglect the sentiments of northern Protestant workers. Of course he could not countenance ‘Orange’ bigotry but he was also unlikely to illicit much revolutionary enthusiasm from Protestant workers for Irish cultural studies (or perhaps even from the sweated working class of Dublin).

While some members of the Officials flirted with Maoism the Provisionals were busy consolidating their own doctrine and defending themselves from the barbs aimed at them by their opponents. Connolly was again part of this doctrinal dispute between republicans. The Provisionals warned their supporters that

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150 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxvii.
151 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, p.110.
153 Connolly, The Reconquest of Ireland, pp.8 and 70.
155 Connolly’s response to the Protestant working class will be examined further in Chapter 4.
What has emerged since the split is a subtly fostered campaign designed to deceive our members into believing that Connolly – on his record – would have spurned the alleged chauvinism of the Provisionals who are derided as “pure green” Republicans, a phrase meaning inflexible doctrinaires lacking economic and social content in their political programme. The Provisionals countered with their own version of Connolly; they argued that, unlike the Irish Communist Party opportunists and many other sincere Marxists, Connolly was determined on a political separatism first; a socialist renewal would then follow after national liberation had been achieved. Connolly appeared, according to the Provisionals, to have adopted a stages theory of revolution – ironically an analysis that resembled that of CPGB member Desmond Greaves. Yet An Phoblacht’s correspondent was assiduous in noting the distinctions between Connolly’s political positions and those of Marxists: Unlike many modern Marxists ... Connolly proclaimed that socialists should be content to ignore religion”, and unlike many Marxists James Connolly was indomitable (sic) in his belief that partition would be the greatest national tragedy. The Provisionals were continuing with the effort to distance Connolly from the politics of Marxism. An Phoblacht confidently asserted that Connolly’s charter was now championed by the Irish Republican Army. The Provisionals would soon, however, be joined by a republican paramilitary competitor just as keen to assume Connolly’s legacy but with no hesitation in accepting a more unabashed class-based politics purportedly emanating from Connolly’s doctrine.

The 1970s witnessed another significant split in the republican movement. In February 1972, in what was described as a retaliatory attack for the murders by the British Parachute Regiment on Bloody Sunday, the Official IRA bombed Aldershot army barracks killing five female kitchen workers and a gardener. Cathal Goulding would say of the bombing that it went very wrong. I felt crushed after it, that only working class women had been killed by the explosion and that was really all that

happened. It was a catastrophe.\textsuperscript{162} Despite Goulding’s remorse, however, the Officials continued their maladroit violence. In May the group kidnapped and killed William Best, a nineteen year old soldier in the Royal Irish Rangers. Best was from the largely Catholic Creggan area of Derry and was home on leave. The killing outraged local opinion with hundreds of women marching to the Official’s Derry headquarters to condemn the murder.\textsuperscript{163} The accumulation of disasters associated with the armed campaign contributed to the Officials’ decision to call a unilateral ceasefire in May 1972.\textsuperscript{164} The Official faction had been increasingly moving away from a paramilitary strategy towards a policy of attempting to build cross-community support among Catholic and Protestant workers.\textsuperscript{165} As Tomás Mac Giolla argued, “[i]f sectarianism, bigotry and hatred are rooted out the working class will unite in brotherhood to throw out the imperialists North and South and claim the wealth of the whole island.”\textsuperscript{166} Some in the ranks of the Officials were dissatisfied with the winding down of the armed struggle and still wished to “strike back” at the British army and loyalist paramilitaries. They would leave the Official faction and would take with them a distinctive version of Connolly.

Disenchantment with the Official leadership’s policy direction coalesced in December 1974; a section of the group, led by Seamus Costello, formerly an Official IRA Director of Operations, broke away to form the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP).\textsuperscript{167} The party proclaimed its objective: to “End Imperialist Rule in Ireland and Establish a 32 County Democratic Socialist Republic, with the Working Class in control of the Means of Production, Distribution and Exchange.”\textsuperscript{168} The IRSP set out to appropriate Connolly’s politics with gusto. The party’s name was a conscious rearrangement of Connolly’s own Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP).\textsuperscript{169} The

\textsuperscript{162} “The Mind of a Revolutionary”, p.5.
\textsuperscript{164} Bew and Gillespie, Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles, 1968-1993, p.52. The Official’s ceasefire declaration did leave open the option of ‘retaliatory’ and ‘defensive’ actions.
\textsuperscript{165} Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.283.
\textsuperscript{167} Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.149.
\textsuperscript{169} English, Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA, p.177.
newspaper launched by the party adopted the title *The Starry Plough*, after the flag of Connolly’s Irish Citizen Army, flown during the 1916 Rising.\textsuperscript{170} The paper carried a regular column entitled “Connolly’s Corner”, the aim of which was to give readers an opportunity to read some snippets from various writings by Connolly, to follow interpretations of what he meant and to give them an opportunity of seeing Connolly as he really was”.\textsuperscript{171}

The language of class was very much to the fore in the rhetoric of the IRSP. At its first meeting in Dublin Seamus Costello, chairman of the new party’s National Executive, declared that “the development of class politics in Ireland – which would bring an end to the sectarian murder campaign in the North - could only be achieved by the ending of the British interference in Ireland.”\textsuperscript{172} This was key among the concepts apparently gleaned from Connolly, that “[t]he struggle for National Liberation and the struggle for the emancipation of the working class is part of the same struggle.”\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, for the IRSP, it was necessary that the struggle for National Liberation be led by the working class. If it were not, then British Imperialism would be replaced by a government of native gombeen men and speculators.” Connolly’s warning that “Nationalism without Socialism – without a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of ... common property ... is only national recreancy” appeared to have been heeded by the IRSP.\textsuperscript{174} In its apparent radicalism the rhetoric of the IRSP tended to go further than that of the Provisionals; its propaganda was deeply infused with anti-colonial and anti-capitalist sentiment that combined with the party’s political demand for a ‘liberated’ Irish socialist republic.

\textsuperscript{170} *The Starry Plough* had been the Official republican movement’s newspaper in Derry prior to 1975. After the killing of William Best *The Derry Journal* refused to continue to print the paper. See Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, *INLA: Deadly Divisions*, p.17. Following the split Costello’s supporters were a majority in Derry and most followed him into the IRSP, apparently taking the paper’s *nom de guerre* with them. See Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, p.284.


\textsuperscript{173} “IRSP Public Meeting”, *The Starry Plough*, Aibreán (April) 1975, p.2.

\textsuperscript{174} “IRSP Public Meeting”, *The Starry Plough*, Aibreán (April) 1975, p.2. A ‘gombeen man’ is usually used to describe a ‘native’ Irish small businessman, in Marxist terms the Irish petit bourgeoisie. The term carries with it derogatory connotations of dishonesty and exploitative profiteering at the expense of the poor.

[T]he philosophy that the national question and the class question are one question, not to be divided nor either merely used” was a political mantra for the IRSP. Connolly’s postulate that the struggle for Irish freedom had two aspects, national and social, was consciously (and conscientiously) endorsed by the IRSP. For the Republican Socialists,

The struggle of small farmers, the homeless, the worker, cultural groups, women and national independence are all the one struggle. None of these struggles can give way to each other. ... Connolly was condemned by many Irish and European socialists for participating in a ‘mere nationalist insurrection’. But Connolly saw only one struggle.\(^\text{177}\)

The IRSP coupled this ‘one struggle’ philosophy with an anti-imperialist broad front strategy that recalled the Official’s national liberation front. There was, claimed the IRSP, “the necessity for a broad front of all anti-imperialist and radical forces.”\(^\text{178}\) Such unity”, it was argued, would be a serious threat to British imperialism in this country and would serve to clarify and serve as a magnet for the mass of the Irish working class who may be disheartened and confused but who are basically anti-imperialist. In face of such opposition British imperialism would eventually crumble.\(^\text{179}\)

Of course neither the IRSP’s nor the Officials’ concept of the anti-imperialist or national liberation front were particularly original. By the mid-1970s groups calling themselves ‘national liberation fronts’ and identifying as ‘socialist’ had won victories against the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam. These successful international examples of anti-imperialist struggle seemed to provide a handy blueprint for ‘left’ republicans who identified the Irish as being a colonised people and who sought the establishment of an Irish ‘socialist republic’. James Connolly appeared to have become for the Republican Socialists in the IRSP their own Frantz Fanon.\(^\text{180}\)

Seeking the sanction of history, the IRSP interpreted the 1916 Rising as precursor of the broad anti-imperialist front:


The 1916 rising was a major development in the struggle for national liberation and socialism in that it was the first broad front of anti-imperialist forces and because it rekindled the will of the Irish people to struggle for national liberation and socialism, a struggle that has continued for the past 60 years.\textsuperscript{181}

Seamus Costello drove the point home in his 1976 Easter commemoration speech with the added invocation of Connolly:

the 1916 rising had been a turning point in Irish history because it represented the unity in action of two important political traditions, the tradition of militant nationalism represented by the IRB and the tradition of militant labour represented by Connolly.\textsuperscript{182}

Costello re-iterated the IRSP commitment to uniting all anti-imperialist forces against the common enemy.”\textsuperscript{183} With Algeria and Vietnam as contemporary examples, with the 1916 Rising as the apparent historical forerunner, and with Connolly’s supposed imprimatur, the anti-imperialist front was politically enshrined in the IRSP’s programme. The anti-imperialist front carried with it an implication of armed force and this physical force' tendency was quite compatible with traditional republican militarism.\textsuperscript{184} The IRSP’s split from the Officials had not been a separation caused by any particular aversion to extreme socialism of the kind that so repelled leading Provisionals. Costello’s supporters who followed him out of the Official faction instead objected to what they claimed were the reformist and counter-revolutionary attitudes” of the Official leadership and their waning commitment to armed struggle.\textsuperscript{185} The IRSP considered itself the only political party in Ireland that has managed to entwine the National Question with the Class Question and that can successfully do something about it.”\textsuperscript{186} Connolly’s words and image would be constantly invoked by the IRSP to support their anti-imperialist national liberation struggle with the working class, at least theoretically, at the forefront of the fight.

\textsuperscript{181}”The Fight for National Liberation and Socialism Goes On”, pp.4-5.
\textsuperscript{183}”1916 – Unity in Action”, p.6.
\textsuperscript{184}It was on the issue of the use of violence that the rather ill-conceived broad front strategy foundered. While the Provisionals were willing to sign on to a broad front with the IRSP, the Communist Party was not and Costello believed that without the Communists the alliance would not constitute the broad front he envisaged. See Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, INLA: Deadly Divisions, Torc publishers, Dublin, 1994, pp.111-112.
Despite their apparent enthusiasm for the use of physical force the IRSP stated in 1975 that it was "a political organisation without a military wing." Early the next year, however, The Starry Plough announced the formation of a new republican paramilitary group:

The National Liberation Army was recently formed with the aim of ending British Imperialist rule in Ireland and creating a 32 county Democratic Socialist Republic. As revolutionaries, we recognise the paramount necessity for the existence of an armed Anti-Imperialist organisation, which will play an effective role in the current struggle.

The aims of the new "army" tended to replicate those of the IRSP but the party attempted to maintain a distance from the activities of the "National Liberation Army", at least initially. Tit-for-tat violence involving members of the IRSP and the Official faction had been going on virtually since the IRSP had first formed. The "National Liberation Army" may have been separate from the IRSP but clearly someone was shooting back on the party's behalf. On 1st March 1975 Official IRA leader, Sean Garland, was shot six times at his home in Dublin; he survived. In April of that year Billy McMillen, a leading member of the Belfast Officials, was shot and killed. The aim of the "National Liberation Army" was stated to be the "ending of British Imperialist rule"; in the first instance its chief targets seemed to be erstwhile republican "comrades".

The IRSP's denials of military involvement appear even more improbable as by the early summer of 1975, about six months after the IRSP had come into existence, some forty of its members were already in jail in the North for various paramilitary offences, including possession of weapons and explosives, murder, attempted murder, and robbery. Still the effort to maintain the appearance of non-involvement in armed activity was continued. For its part the INLA announced that "[t]he Comhairle Ceanntair of the Irish Republican Socialist Party ... has asked us to state that it is a legitimate political organisation, which is not engaged in any aspect of armed activity, generally accepted nom de guerre.

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188 "New Army Announced", The Starry Plough, An Camchéachta, Eanáir (January) 1976, Vol.1, No.10, Starry Plough Publications, Dublin, pp.4-5. Various pseudonyms were used for the IRSP's armed wing, particularly in its early stages. The National Liberation Army was one. The INLA became the group's generally accepted nom de guerre.
190 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, pp.296-297.
191 Holland and McDonald, INLA: Deadly Divisions, p.73.
military or otherwise.”

As much as it might have been denied the commonality of the IRSP and the INLA became apparent when the armed struggle began to claim the lives of party members. The *Starry Plough’s* eulogy for eighteen year old IRSP member Colm McNutt revealed that, “Colm was also claimed as a volunteer by the Irish National Liberation Army.” Later that year the *Starry Plough* reported Tommy Trainor’s fatal shooting; he was acknowledged as an IRSP member and INLA County Armagh battalion officer. Finally, in a document by one of the IRSP’s more cognizant members, Thomas Power (_Ta Power_), it was admitted that Seamus Costello, “from 1974 to his death on the 5th of October 1977 ... held the position of Chief of staff and director of operations in INLA.” As shadowy as the goings on of ‘secret armies’ can be, it seemed that on the same day that the IRSP was formed, a separate Árd Fheis was held to found the Irish National Liberation Army. Ta Power was certain that Costello was the founder of the IRSP and the INLA”. The IRSP was following in the republican tradition of fielding a paramilitary army to further its anti-imperialist ends and Connolly was invoked in support of that strategy: “Connolly forged the weapons of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish socialist republican philosophy. Today the Irish working class have the weapons of the Irish Republican Socialist Party and the Irish National Liberation Army.”

Seamus Costello was murdered on 5th October 1977 while sitting in his car in inner-city Dublin. He met his death as a result of the hostilities between the ISRP/INLA and the Official faction. In death Costello himself was celebrated with reference to James Connolly. Gerry Lawless, speaking for the _Troops Out Movement_ at a

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196 Alan Woods, _Ireland: Republicanism and Revolution (The revolutionary dialectic of Republicanism)_ , Wellread publishers, London, 2005, p.94. This is a highly sympathetic treatment of the IRSP and includes a preface by Gerry Ruddy, Ard-Comhairle member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party.
197 “The Ta Power Document”.
memorial for Costello, said of him that "[n]o individual Irish revolutionary, since Connolly, had so successfully combined the qualities of politician, trade unionist and military leadership".²⁰⁰ Nora Connolly eulogised Costello in the introduction to a commemorative pamphlet:

He seemed to be the leader who would bring about an organisation such as my father wished to bring about. Of all the politicians and political people with whom I have had conversations, and who called themselves followers of Connolly, he was the only one who truly understood what James Connolly meant when he spoke of his vision of freedom of the Irish people. In him, I had hoped at last after all these years, a true leader had come, who could and would build an organisation such as James Connolly tried to do.²⁰¹

The IRSP/INLA’s martyred leader had been ‘blessed’ with the legacy of James Connolly by no less a person than his beloved daughter. Costello could now forever be posthumously ‘twinned’ with Connolly in republican socialist dogma.

Not just for republican socialists but for all republicans, to have the doctrinal authority of Connolly bestowed upon the contemporary politics of the group was extraordinarily important. The hegemony of James Connolly in republican doctrine and rhetoric is manifest. He was continually invoked by all factions to sanction splits and to accredit political programmes. His image appeared on the front covers of republican newspapers and in appeals for recruits to the various factions. In all of this the historical interpretation was crucial; the memory of Connolly needed to be constructed and established in a way appropriate for the republican perspective in question. Because the historical representation of Connolly was so important republicans would need to sharpen their critical skills to extract from Connolly’s legacy what was required. As we will see in the next chapter they would prove themselves quite prepared to engage vigorously with writers of history and the academic historical profession to defend their version of Connolly and the Irish past.

Chapter 3

History, Martyrs and Doctrine

If you really love me teach the children in your class the history of their own land and teach them that the cause of Caitlín Ní Ullacháin never dies.

Seán Heuston, from a letter to his sister just prior to his execution for involvement in the 1916 Rising.

Commencing in the 1930s Irish historiography began a process of transformation. Some historians undertook a ‘revision’ of Irish history to rid it of the perceived ‘myths’ that had previously underpinned a nationalist telling of the past. This process of historical revision gained added impetus from events that took place, particularly in the North, during the late 1960s and 1970s. Increasingly the once accepted nationalist historical narrative was regarded as divisive, destructive and as giving succour to republican paramilitaries. The ‘nationalist mythology’ that told of ‘eight hundred years of national oppression’ and the ‘brave resistance’ to it came under intense scrutiny. The historiographical debate was vigorous and at times vicious. Desmond Fennell, one of the intellectual protagonists in the argument, mocked what he saw as the revisionist’s pretensions: ‘Do they really imagine that the IRA in the North sit cowering in their burrows and trenches fearful of some new blast of revisionist history from UCD?’ Republicans may not have feared the ‘blasts’ of the revisionist historians but neither did they ignore them. Indeed the republican movement entered the historical battle of interpretation with gusto. The struggle over how Ireland’s past would be represented was considered by republicans to be vitally important and the argument was waged between the various strands of republicanism as well as against historians outside the movement. One of the key figures of contention in the historiographical conflict was James Connolly.

A national historical narrative that tells the story of the nation, that encapsulates the nation’s essence, that laments its travails, that celebrates its triumphs, is extraordinarily important for nationalist movements; Irish republicanism is no exception. For republicans history was (and is) an integral part of their political doctrine. An appropriate nationalist history provided a sense of identity and a connection with past Irish resistance to foreign domination. An editorial from An Phoblacht encapsulated the obsessions of the republican national historical narrative: The Republican Movement traditionally has sought to protect and strengthen Irish nationality (or the sense of Irish identity), as Irish resistance has done since 1169: … The Irish instinct over 800 years has been to resist assimilation”. Ruairí Ó Bradaigh expressed similar sentiments,

this is an anti-colonial struggle and our analysis could be explained in three or four sentences – it took the English 400 years to subdue the whole island of Ireland. They came to rule us and rob us. They expropriated the land, they suppressed our civilisation. James Connolly refers to all this in his writings and speeches.

It was this eight hundred years of national oppression school of historical thought that the revisionist historians sought to assail and that traditional republicans wanted to defend. Even the Official faction, which would later demonstrate a greater willingness to consider a revised version of Irish history, was inclined to locate itself within a nationalist historical framework: Sinn Féin The Workers’ Party has its roots deep in Irish history. We are part of a long tradition of struggle by an oppressed people against its imperialist exploiters.” History, for revisionists and republicans alike, was a site of ideological conflict.

In seeing history as a political battleground modern republicans had been preceded by Connolly himself. Connolly held that, in order to convince the Irish people that the Irish Socialist was in reality the best Irish patriot”, the Irish socialist must first of all learn to look inward upon Ireland for his justification, rest his arguments upon the facts of Irish history, and be the champion against the subjection of Ireland and all that

7 “In Memory of Tone”, [speech at Bodenstown by Sean ÓCionnaith, Director of International Affairs, SF/NP], The United Irishman, An Eireannach Aontaithe, Vol 32, No. 7/8, lúil/Lúnasa (July/August) 1979, p.5. Incidentally this was another example of a commemoration of Wolfe Tone in which Connolly was referenced.
it implies.”. Labour in Irish History was written by Connolly to counter –Irish middle class teachers and writers” who had been –imbued with the conception of feudalistic or capitalistic social order”, an –order of things … entirely alien” to Irish society. Connolly expressed his belief that –the whole concept of orthodox Irish history for the last 200 years was a betrayal and abandonment of the best traditions of the Irish race.” With the constitutional proponents of Home Rule squarely in his sights, Connolly attacked the –spokesmen of the middle class” who, in the Press and on the platform, have consistently sought the emasculation of the Irish National movement, the distortion of Irish history, and, above all, the denial of all relation between the social rights of the Irish nation. It was hoped and intended by this means to create what is termed _areal National movement_ – i.e. a movement in which each class would recognise the rights of the other classes and laying aside their contentions would unite in a national struggle against the common enemy – England. Needless to say, the only class deceived by such phrases was the working class.

Connolly understood that –Irish history has ever been written by the master class – in the interests of the master class.” This ruling class _distortion_ of Irish history was seen by Connolly as a means to obfuscate the social aspect of the national struggle and to dupe the working class into accepting _middle class_ leadership of the movement. Labour in Irish History came from an uncompromising working class perspective. In one of his most acclaimed phrases Connolly declared that only the Irish working class remained –as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.” Connolly dedicated Labour in Irish History –[t]o that unconquered Irish working class” from –one of their number”. Connolly identified a false version of Irish history as one of the bulwarks of the continued political power of –the Capitalist-minded Home Ruler”, but a fabricated history was also a boon to –the Orange fanatic”. Connolly excoriated the unionist opponents of Home Rule for their own historical deceptions. The past

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10 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxxi.
11 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxvii.
12 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.3.
13 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.3.
15 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxxii.
16 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.xxxii.
exploitation of Protestant tenants by ―English and Episcopalian‖ landlords was described by Connolly.\(^{18}\) For the purposes of opposing Home Rule, however, Connolly charged that the Protestant elite were willing to resort to deception:

> the landlord and capitalist class now seek an alliance with these Protestants they persecuted for so long in order to prevent a union of the democracy of all religious faiths against their lords and masters. To accomplish this they seek insidiously to pervert history, and to inflame the spirit of religious fanaticism.\(^{19}\)

―The best cure‖ Connolly knew ―for that evil‖ of a falsified history was → a correct understanding of the events they so distort in their speeches and sermons.\(^{20}\) Connolly's historical writings sought to accentuate the class dimension of the national struggle and downplay the religious sectarian divide. In his articles for socialist newspapers and in pamphlets such as *Labour in Irish History* and *The Reconquest of Ireland* Connolly articulated a historical narrative that was crafted to support the cause of national liberation but also to go further and fasten that struggle, with workers in the forefront, to an anti-capitalist imperative. The republicans of the later twentieth century would replicate Connolly's commitment to utilizing an historical narrative for political ends. Connolly's historical writing would provide an important basis for republicanism's national self-identity and it would be used to bolster support for the campaign against British rule.

*Labour in Irish History* was Connolly's major theoretical work. It was an accomplished piece of socialist propaganda, a polemic directed very much towards winning the sympathies of the _advanced nationalists_ of his day.\(^{21}\) As a contribution to _historical_ writing, however, Connolly's work is not without its shortcomings. Bernard Ransom and Owen Dudley Edwards, commenting on *Labour in Irish History*, observed that Connolly's _desire to use nationalist feelings to win a favourable audience for socialist doctrines led him into some of the pitfalls of nationalist history._\(^{22}\) Connolly's _rosy view of pre-Norman Ireland_ with its apparent communal form of property was, according to Ransom and Edwards, one such pitfall. The _failure_ of Connolly to assess the burgeoning of the Belfast working class in the nineteenth century was considered to

\(^{18}\) Connolly, “July the 12th”, p.149.  
\(^{19}\) Connolly, “July the 12th”, p.149.  
\(^{20}\) Connolly, “July the 12th”, p.149.  
be a "tragic omission". Edwards and Ransom claimed that Connolly appealed, essentially, to an international working class of Catholic origin, although he did so in a highly anti-sectarian way. Connolly's lack of awareness of the Protestant working class perspective had been remarked upon by other of his expositors; Connolly's republican legatees were likely to be less concerned with the omission.

Kieran Allen had praised *Labour in Irish History* in his analysis of Connolly's politics but he also added a trenchant critique. Allen confronted Connolly's conception of social republicanms' as being a "true" form of Irish nationalism. Conceding the difficult social context in which Connolly was trying to operate – the working class in Ireland at the time was still tiny and weak" – Allen contends that in seeking other "springs of revolt" Connolly imagined a far greater radical potential within Irish nationalism than actually existed." Connolly's conviction that republicanism contained an inherent ideological inclination towards anti-capitalism was, according to Allen, "clearly wrong": "There was nothing "artificial" about an Irish nationalist movement that accepted capitalist relationships." This led to serious ambiguity regarding republicanism in Connolly's writings. Connolly's opaque theoretical legacy allowed republicanism the ability to develop its politics within a nationalist paradigm while still invoking the Connolly "tradition".

Connolly's theoretical legacy has been further historically "problematised" by his practical legacy; throughout his life Connolly propagated for socialism and took part in and led working class struggles both great and small. Connolly, however, finally met his fate as a result of his involvement in an abortive nationalist uprising – an insurrection with little real input from the organised working class. The 1916 Rising itself has presented particular difficulties of interpretation for historians. The eminent Irish historian, F.X Martin, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising, commented that —

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23 Edwards and Ransom, p.35.
24 Edwards and Ransom, p.35.
the very outset the pitch was being queered for the historians”. 32 Connolly’s part in the Rising was part of this _quaerēt pitch_. Very soon after his execution an argument commenced concerning Connolly’s political trajectory. Sean O’Casey perhaps fired the opening salvo when he accused Connolly of moving “from the narrow byway of Irish Socialism on to the broad and crowded highway of Irish Nationalism”. 33 Whether Connolly maintained his socialist convictions or whether he finally capitulated to _bourgeois nationalism_ (or if he established some appropriate political compromise between the two in the context of that _stage_ of the Irish revolution) was part of the historical controversy that was played out, not only in academic journals, but in the publications of the republican movement.

Among republicans of the later twentieth century _Labour in Irish History_ found a particular resonance. On the occasion of a republished edition and prior to the split in the republican movement, _R.J._ (likely Roy Johnston) remarked on the _topicality_ of the ideas expressed in _Labour in Irish History_. 34 _R.J._ adduced that “[i]t is only in the last five years that the ideas of uniting the country and establishing democratic control over the economic life of the country have become linked. Connolly’s works have played a key role in this process and will continue to do so.” 35 _Labour in Irish History_ was for those in the republican movement — essential reading for anybody who wants to understand our history — the socialist key to the pages of our history.”

After the split in the republican movement the Provisional faction continued to revere the text. _An Phoblacht_ said of _Labour in Irish History_ it was “a book which every Republican should read and re-read”. 37 _Labour in Irish History_ was specifically mobilised to support the Provisional faction’s self-avowed socialist _Comhar na gComharsan_ program. 38 Connolly’s text was used to reassure republicans that socialism

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33 P.Ó. Cathasaigh, (Sean O’Casey) _The Story of the Irish Citizen Army_, Dublin, 1919, p.52.
was "no alien creed". An Phoblacht's readership was reminded by Connolly, in Labour in Irish History, that we were never behind in the struggle for the emancipation of man, and indeed, an Irishman, Thompson, anticipated much of what Karl Marx and Lenin were to say later. The Provisional's purpose in raising Thompson was somewhat different from what Connolly had intended. Connolly had sought to advocate Marxism among Irish workers; the Provisionals sought to substitute their own form of socialism for the Marxist variety. In an article that invoked Thomas Aquinas alongside Connolly, the Provisionals offered a slogan that revealed the mediated nature of their socialist doctrine: if we keep as a guide the slogan 'love one another' or 'every man is my neighbour' [it] will generate the strength to go forward in the path already marked out for us by such men as Wolfe Tone, Hope, Lalor, Connolly. As interpreted by An Phoblacht, Connolly's historical writings could be quite malleable.

In 1978 Sean Cronin, former IRA training officer and one of the chief strategists of the late 1950s border campaign, authored a study of James Connolly's early political career. Cronin's Young Connolly focuses mainly on the period of Connolly's activity in Edinburgh and Ireland, ending with his departure to America in 1903. Nevertheless, Labour in Irish History, although only published as a book on Connolly's return to Ireland in 1910, was remarked on. With reverence (and some artistic license) Cronin recounts Connolly's authorial diligence: While other members of the ISRP played draughts in the party club rooms, Connolly sat in the corner writing the early chapters of his classic Labour in Irish History. According to Cronin, Labour in Irish History was a revelation. Using Marx's economic interpretation of history as a tool, though not a Bible, Connolly came up with a case study of British colonialism. The roots of the conquest were economic. Cronin was more willing than some

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41 Breatnach, “Exploitation”, p.11.
43 Sean Cronin, Young Connolly, Repsol Ltd, Dublin, first published 1978, this edition 1983, pp.97-98. Cronin points out that part of Labour in Irish History was written during Connolly's ISRP days, see p.107, fn.38.
44 Cronin, Young Connolly, p.97.
45 Cronin, Young Connolly, p.98.
Provisionals to admit that ‘Connolly was a Marxist.’ Nevertheless Fenianism was located by Cronin as being one of Connolly's formative influences. ‘[W]e may be sure’, says Cronin, of this Fenian influence, ‘for Connolly’s traditional view of Irish history did not come from books.’ Cronin appeared to give credence to the existence of the ‘Fenian uncle’ that Desmond Ryan ‘gave’ to Connolly in his reconstruction of the family history. Young Connolly concluded with Cronin’s assertion that Connolly’s ‘Socialism had a Fenian face’; a reassuring contention for republicans and a very prescient inference for a work that does not examine Connolly’s involvement in the 1916 Rising.

In 1984 Jack Madden produced an article for An Phoblacht/Republican News entitled ‘The hypocrisy of historical revisionism’. Madden confronted the imputation that Connolly had, at some point, abandoned his socialism. Recalling the period of the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising (1966), Madden remarked ‘[f]ifty years after the event, it was easy and safe to forgive James Connolly his socialism and even to spread the rumour that he had retracted this socialism on his death bed.’ The idea that Connolly gave up his socialism was rejected by Madden but what rankled more was the moral separation of 1916 from the Provisional’s own ongoing armed struggle. Madden directed his indignation at the southern Irish regime for its ‘hypocrisy’ regarding the 1916 Rising. In commemorating the Rising in 1966, Madden wrote, it had been ‘safe ... to select the incidents of heroic sacrifice and submerge the reality of war. It was even safe for ... the establishment to give the seal of approval to a war which an earlier establishment had denounced as a ‘terrorist and subversive conspiracy’.’ In the context of the Troubles Madden reproached ‘that same [southern] establishment [that] used the myth they had created to pretend that what happened in the Tan War differed intrinsically from the armed struggle in the North.’ The ‘establishment’ (and that would include academics as well as political leaders) in the Republic of Ireland, so Madden contended, was eager to ‘cordon off’ 1916 from the Northern conflict; the ‘martyrs of 1916’ could not be compared to the ‘terrorists’ of the Provisional IRA. For

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46 Cronin, Young Connolly, p.100.
47 Cronin, Young Connolly, p. 18.
48 Desmond Ryan, James Connolly - His Life Work and Writings, Dublin, 1924, p.13.
49 Cronin, Young Connolly, p.102.
51 Madden, “The hypocrisy of historical revisionism”, p.8.
52 Madden, “The hypocrisy of historical revisionism”, p.8.
the Provisionals it was desirable that Connolly remain identified as a socialist (although not necessarily as a Marxist) in the historical narrative; the Provisional faction saw itself as a socialist group. It was absolutely vital, however, that the revisionist reinterpretation of the 1916 Rising (and the _Tan War_ ") – which appeared to the Provisionals to call into question their recourse to political violence – was firmly met and countered.

Professors Boyce and O’Day, commenting on the revisionist controversy, observed that “[a] clear definition of _revisionism_ remains absent from the discussion.”54 For the scholars in the debate this might be so but for the Provisional republican faction the issue appeared far more clear-cut. _An Phoblacht/Republican News_ unequivocally identified revisionism as “the pro-imperialist re-writing of Irish history”.55 With such a firm conception of revisionism it was to be expected that Austen Morgan’s _James Connolly: A Political Biography_, would receive a sharp critical reception in the pages of _AP/RN_. Morgan’s book was described as “a full-scale scholarly assault on Connolly’s position in the socialist pantheon of Ireland from an unashamedly _two-nationist_, _revisionist_ viewpoint.”56 _AP/RN_’s reviewer, Seamas O Maicin, could find “nothing new” in Morgan’s work: “[t]he central point of the book – Connolly deserted socialism for nationalism prior to 1916 – has been kicking around the Irish left since Connolly’s death.”57 O Maicin contended that the question Morgan’s work posed was ill-conceived. _AP/RN_ explained:

> It is clear that Connolly’s socialism swam in a sea of nationalist separatist culture and he did not believe there was any contradiction between them. The specific insight which he contributed to Marxism ... was that the most consistent opponents of national oppression should be socialists and that, in an imperialist dominated country such as Ireland, the struggle for social revolution and national liberation are inextricably linked.58

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57 O Maicin “The Divine Gospel of Revisionism”, p.13. The ‘two nationism’ referred to by _AP/RN_ is the contention that two nations legitimately exist in Ireland: one republican Irish, the other unionist British/Irish.
Connolly’s nationalism, as the Provisionals understood it, had always been a component part of his socialist outlook. There was no break in continuity from the _socialist republicanis _m_ of Connolly’s early days in Dublin to his final rebellious act in 1916. As the Provisionals regularly asserted, “the nationalist and socialist dimensions are two sides of the one coin” and in this they claimed to be in accord with Connolly.\(^59\)

Morgan’s questioning went further than just challenging Connolly’s socialist commitment, the accepted nationalist axiom of an Irish nation that “naturally” encompassed all thirty two counties was itself questioned. Connolly had vehemently opposed any proposed scheme for the partition of Ireland, seeing it as a politically retrograde step sacrificing “to the bigoted enemy the unity of the nation”;\(^60\) with Connolly’s stated position, again the Provisionals agreed entirely. In Morgan’s work the Provisionals recognised the assertion that Ireland contained “two nations”: a “nationalist/Catholic” one committed to a unified Irish nation that encompassed the whole island; and a “unionist/Protestant” one that remained “loyal” to the union with Britain.\(^61\) Not surprisingly, the “two nations” thesis that Morgan presented was refuted sharply by AP/RN.

Connolly’s original sin, we are told, is that he premised “an already existing nation”. But the “nationalist problematic” here is Morgan’s not Connolly’s. Not unreasonably Connolly argued for a 32-County Irish national democracy. Partition only emerged as an option as a result of the threat of arms by unionists, backed by the British Conservatives. This then, as now, represented a formidable obstacle to Irish independence but the point for Connolly was to mobilise the Irish democracy against it. Morgan and the “two-nationists” see the nationalist majority in dominated Ireland as the problem. The result of this is the acceptance of a reactionary sectarian state in the North and a bourgeois/church dominated one in the South.\(^62\)

The “two-nationist” rejection of republicanism’s irredentism made Morgan’s biography politically unacceptable for those subscribing to the republican doctrine. What was being defended here, however, was more than just Connolly’s socialist credentials or a

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\(^{59}\) “No nation that enslaves another can itself be free – Adams”, _An Phoblacht/Republican News_, Srath Nua Iml. 5, Uimhir 29, Iúil (July) 28, 1983, p.7. The ‘two sides of the same coin’ metaphor was common in republican discourse.


\(^{61}\) Morgan was not the first to come up with the ‘two nations’ idea. It is implicit within the notion of partition. The British Irish Communist Organisation espoused a version of the idea. Perhaps most notably Conor Cruise O’Brien in his _States of Ireland_, Hutchinson and Co, London, 1972, elaborated the concept.

republican reading of history. Morgan’s critique attacked the very heart of nationalist belief that “the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland”.

Beyond the criticisms made of Connolly, Morgan’s basic premise was a complete anathema to the Provisional faction. Other revisionist writings would be received with similar hostility. It was not, however, just revisionist historians that could pose challenges to the Provisional’s preferred historical narrative. Historical controversy could erupt even within the movement.

For the most part revisionist historians were beyond the republican ‘pale’ and so their writing could be castigated with little reserve by AP/RN’s correspondents; but in 1988 an historical work emerged that needed to be treated far more diplomatically. Republican prisoners incarcerated in Her Majesty's Prison Maze, Northern Ireland, had produced a work entitled *Questions of History* which sought to apply Marxist terms ... to show how previous generations of republicans were unable to achieve independence.

Imprisoned republicans were an honoured cohort within the movement and AP/RN’s reviewer, Tom O’Dwyer, dutifully lauded the prisoner’s endeavour: “What *Questions of History* shows is that, despite gross brutality and petty humiliation, Ireland’s prisoners of war are using their captivity to concentrate on vital historical and political questions of the Irish revolution.” O’Dwyer admitted, however, that “the book has also provoked a healthy controversy within the Republican Movement.” Healthy or not, O’Dwyer’s review appeared as a means to, on the one hand, dampen down any argument, and on the other, to authoritatively pronounce on the issues raised. The conditions under which the prisoners wrote was very quickly given as a factor in their apparent historical ‘misinterpretation’.

By restricting and manipulating the information which prisoners receive, their jailers hope to confuse them. Long Kesh prisoners have been unable to see *AP/RN* for the last three years but during that period sectarian publications of Stalinist and Trotskyist mini-groups

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63 This phraseology is taken from Article 2 of the Constitution of Ireland (1937) before it was amended in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. Morgan actually censures Connolly for being “a prophet of ‘the reintegration of the national territory envisaged in the 1937 constitution”, see Morgan, *James Connolly: A Political Biography*, p.202.

64 Prison Maze was also colloquially known as ‘Long Kesh’ (from the early internment camp that had been on the site), the ‘H-Blocks’ and the ‘Maze’.


have circulated fairly freely. The curious theories of these political sects figure all too often in the pages of Questions of History.\(^{68}\)

The educational environment allegedly created by the prison authorities seemed to be a doctrinally dangerous one from the Provisional’s point of view. O’Dwyer cautioned the AP/RN readership that,

Marxism is a useful tool for understanding reality but it has been appallingly misused in the past by those who’ve tried to make reality fit their own prejudices. Irish Marxists have been among the worst in this regard. They’ve shown an extraordinary confusion about their own gospel. The Republican Movement has been particularly misunderstood by these so-called Marxists.\(^{69}\)

Of most concern for O’Dwyer was that “in common with many Irish Marxists, the authors of Questions of History”\(^{70}\) had apparently confused two separate classes, the bourgeoisie (which owns and controls production) and the petty bourgeoisie.\(^{71}\) The Long Kesh’ prisoners asserted that James Connolly was suspicious of the bourgeois forces he was aligned with\(^{72}\) during the 1916 Rising. O’Dwyer responded,

National liberation movements usually contain a number of business people (in Marxist terms petty bourgeoisie) who fight side by side with workers and small farmers or peasants. In other situations (and especially in imperialist countries) people of a petty bourgeois background can be extremely right-wing but they’ve also numbered among the most uncompromising revolutionaries in world history. There’s a world of difference between the bourgeoisie (which owns and controls production) and the petty bourgeoisie.\(^{73}\)

The prisoners, O’Dwyer contended, despite their best intentions, had it wrong:

Although the authors believe they’re writing within the tradition of James Connolly, this analysis is a direct contradiction of Connolly’s ideas. He believed that the IRB, as revolutionaries, were fighting against, not for, the bourgeoisie. Connolly was indeed suspicious that the petty bourgeois ideas of people like Arthur Griffith and DeValera would draw them away from the struggle but he saw that the direction of the revolution was towards, not away from socialism.\(^{74}\)

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\(^{72}\) O’Dwyer, “Work of resistance”, p.13. This is O’Dwyer quoting directly from Questions of History. The actual original Long Kesh text could not be located.


It seemed to be that O’Dwyer was being drawn into arguing on the Marxist terrain that the prisoners had chosen. Perhaps this was exactly what they had hoped for.

On a superficial level O’Dwyer’s observation regarding the participation of the petit bourgeoisie in the national liberation struggle was, in a sense, formally correct. O’Dwyer and the prison authors of *Questions of History* would have almost certainly been aware of Lenin’s thoughts on the 1916 Rising; Lenin recognised that the Rising had been “conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie and a section of the workers”. Nevertheless he supported the attempted insurrection as a part of the social revolutionary struggle. He argued that,

> The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital ... ”

Lenin had far more to say on the subject: his vision of insurrection posited the leadership of the “class-conscious vanguard” who would “unite and direct” the rebellious petty bourgeoisie to “capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts” and lead to “the victory of socialism”. None of this had occurred in 1916; Lenin’s description of what a social revolution should look like did not fit the actualities of the Rising. There was no leadership by a class-conscious vanguard, only Connolly as an individual. There were, however, prejudices, reactionary fantasies, weaknesses and errors and these seemed to persist even in 1988.

O’Dwyer’s theoretical clarifications were not aimed at improving the prisoner’s understandings of Lenin or Marxist doctrine. *Questions of History* had been written by radicalising prisoners as a political corrective directed at the republican movement; its purpose was to show how previous generations of republicans were unable to achieve

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75 The Provisionals periodically mentioned Lenin’s defence of the 1916 Rising. For example see the editorial in An Phoblacht, Iml. 9, Uimhir 41, Deireadh Fómhair (October) 21, 1978, p.2.
independence.”\textsuperscript{80} The prisoner’s seemed to share Connolly’s apparent suspicions regarding an alliance with the bourgeoisie (or petty bourgeoisie). These concerns were being expressed at a time when Gerry Adams was urging “all shades of Irish nationalist opinion to”\textsuperscript{81} assist in helping “secure Irish national self-determination.”. A new strategy was emerging that called for a mass movement. The prisoners were not alone in their fears that the proposed “broad front orientation would mean that republicans would be submerged in establishment politics.”\textsuperscript{82} Marxism had not uncommonly been viewed with scepticism and distrust within the Provisional faction. The real source of controversy with \textit{Questions of History}, however, seemed to have less to do with a “mistaken” Marxist interpretation and more to with the evolving political policy of the Provisional leadership – a policy that the prisoners, with reference to history, sought to critique and that O’Dwyer sought to defend.

That \textit{Questions of History} came out of the Provisional’s imprisoned cadre was indicative of a radical trend that was evident among republican prisoners. Tommy McKearney, a former republican prisoner, attested that, “unlike those pushing for acceptance of a purely parliamentary strategy, this group of prisoners were firmly to the left of the movement and Marxist for the most part.”\textsuperscript{83} Bobby Sands, another Long Kesh prisoner, wrote in his diary that “Connolly has always been the man I look up to.”\textsuperscript{84} More importantly Sands expressed his political opinion: “Only radical socialist thought – that promoted by Connolly, Tone, Lalor, Mellows and others, the perennially pure republicanism that holds the answers – must be put into practice and must be taught preached and spread in and out of the Movement.”\textsuperscript{85} The radicalism of this cohort of republican prisoners represented a challenge to the Provisional leadership on the outside. The leadership saw a pragmatic need for a degree of increasing accommodation with bourgeois class forces and political institutions. The “act of historical imagination”

\textsuperscript{82} “Political Policy. Towards a Mass Movement: Sinn Fein Ard Fheis 1989”, \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 11, Uimhir 5, Feabhra (February) 2 , 1989, p.6. The words are from Johnny White arguing against the new policy at Sinn Féin’s Ard Fheis.
\textsuperscript{84} “The Diary of Bobby Sands”, eight page supplement to \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 3, Uimhir 22, Meitheamh (June) 13, 1981, p.iv.
\textsuperscript{85} “The further writings of Bobby Sands - The socialist republic”, \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 3, Uimhir 49, Nollaig (December) 17, 1981, pp.10-11.
that the prisoners had undertaken to ‘recover’ Connolly’s revolutionary politics was, for the leadership, a threatening one.\footnote{David Howell, \textit{A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism}, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, p.154.}

The Provisional faction had, since its creation, had an ambiguous relationship with the politics of class. In 1974, defending republicanism’s left-wing character, \textit{An Phoblacht} asserted that ‘\textit{t}he base of the Republican Movement always has been working class and today that basis is more solidly working class than ever before.’\footnote{“Left or Right”, \textit{An Phoblacht}, Iml. 5, Uim.2, Eanáir (January) 11, 1974, p.2.} Nevertheless at a party Árd Fheis in the late 1970s a Sinn Féin councillor from County Donegal could insist that the ‘class war has nothing to do with Republicanism’.\footnote{Deasún Breathnach, “What’s this about the class war?”, \textit{An Phoblacht}, Iml. 9, Uimhir 6, Feabhra (February) 8, 1978, p.7.} In reply a young man rushed up to the microphone and reminded the audience, just as heatedly, that James Connolly believed in fighting the class war and that James Connolly had died for Ireland.\footnote{Breathnach, “What’s this about the class war?”, p.7.} Gerry Adams, as vice-president of Sinn Féin, declared that ‘\textit{a}s Republicans we stand with the Have-nots against the Haves. We stand with the under-privileged, the young, the unemployed, the workers – the people of no property.’\footnote{“Revolutionary politics needed to back up military gains”, [Bodenstown oration 1979, Gerry Adams, Vice-President of Sinn Fein], \textit{An Phoblacht}/\textit{Republican News}, Sraith Iml. 1, Uimhir 22, Meitheamh (June) 23, 1979, p.6.} Adams represented one of the leading figures in the Provisionals who were quite comfortable with talking in class terms. Yet four years later Adams, now president of the party, sounded a note of caution in case the prospect of broadening the party’s social base should be jeopardised:

I believe we should also be mindful of Connolly’s clear understanding of the need for republicans, socialists and progressive nationalists to find unity on democratic republican demands. We must be mindful of the dangers of ultra-leftism and remember at all times that while our struggle has a major social and economic content the securing of Irish independence is a prerequisite for the advance to a socialist republican society. Therefore because we are the guardians and the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland, republicans have a duty to beware of any tendencies which would narrow our demands and our base. This is true not only of forces outside our movement but also of tendencies within our party. We must strive therefore to ensure that each and every one of us has the opportunity to play whatever role our commitment, political perception, or circumstances permit.\footnote{Gerry Adams, presidential address to the Árd Fheis, \textit{An Phoblacht}/\textit{Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 5, Uimhir 45, Samhain (November) 17, 1983, p.9.}
Adams was keen to emphasize that there was a place in the Provisional republican movement for non-socialist republicans. The corollary was that, while the Provisionals might claim to aspire towards socialism and express a commitment to the have-nots, class identity was something that needed to be carefully managed within the Provisional faction lest it undermine the struggle for an Irish republic. James Connolly had stated that the struggle between the Haves and the Have Nots was the controlling factor in politics, and that this fight could only be ended by the working class seizing hold of political power; the Provisionals were not so unequivocal. What is revealed by both Adams’ admonition to the Árd Fheis and O’Dwyer’s response to the Long Kesh prisoners is that the issue of class struggle should not and could not be allowed to divide the nationalist community. The interests of the Provisional’s working class and small farmers support base needed to be acknowledged and co-ordinated, at least rhetorically. The perception on the part of the Provisional leadership, however, was that these class interests - and there was likely to be a certain disconnectedness between the aspirations of the Provisional’s urban working class constituency and their rural supporters - had to be reconciled with any prospective support that might emanate from other shades of Irish nationalist opinion, not to mention the Provisionals relatively conservative US-based sympathisers. No display of ultra-leftist tendencies, inside or outside the prison walls, could be allowed to upset the national cross-class alliance that the Provisionals sought.

O’Dwyer’s review did not go unchallenged. From Long Kesh a republican prisoner replied to the criticisms: What the authors of Questions of History attempted to do was to objectively analyse Irish history from a materialist perspective and show that on numerous occasions drastic errors were made as people followed would be republicans. The correspondent from Long Kesh refuted Tom’s [O’Dwyer’s] conclusions that the curious theories of the political sects (Stalinist and Trotskyist mini-groups) figure all too often in the pages of Questions of History.” Instead the correspondent insisted the books used for references and information” by the authors of Questions of History were of a diverse nature” and included Connolly’s Reconquest

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93 James Connolly, “Taken Root”, James Connolly’s Lost Writings, in Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh (ed.), p.60. Originally published in The Workers’ Republic, March 1902. Adams very likely took the phraseology used in his Árd Fheis speech from this article by Connolly.
The controversy surrounding Questions of History abated but it pointed to the crucial significance of an ‘appropriate’ historical narrative for the republican movement. Even a much respected section of republicans, those imprisoned for the cause, could be taken to task for too great a deviation from nationalist historical orthodoxy.

A year later AP/RN returned to the fray against a more familiar adversary. In reviewing the historical text Modern Ireland 1600-1972 - authored by the ‘archrevisionist’ R.F. Foster - AP/RN again made clear its hostility to revisionist history:

The new-look history says that British rule was not a bad thing; that the British were more sinned against than sinning; and that we Irish were primarily at fault in our relations with them. Irish history is being reinterpreted, redesigned to serve the politics of the present. It is history as propaganda.

Once again a revisionist historian asserted that Connolly’s socialism had succumbed to nationalism and once again AP/RN disclaimed the assertion; AP/RN used Foster’s own words to demonstrate their understanding of Connolly:

Connolly’s main contribution was to argue that a nation-state must be established in Ireland as a necessary pre-condition for social and economic progress, not merely as a rather vague end in itself.

The Provisional’s had already ascribed this view to Connolly: ‘he recognised that the social struggle would be abortive unless the national struggle was won first.’ This fitted with the Provisional’s own political prioritisation of the national struggle. The nationalist and socialist elements might be two sides of the same coin but for the Provisionals that coin should always come up on the national side first.

Foster’s was a general history of Ireland not specifically devoted to Connolly. This did little to lessen the opprobrium heaped on Foster’s analysis by AP/RN. The review of Foster’s text concluded with another expression of the Provisional faction’s

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97 Curtin, “‘Varieties of Irishness’: Historical Revisionism, Irish Style”, p.200.
99 “An Exercise in Revisionism”. The single inverted commas are in the original text and enclose Foster’s words as quoted by AP/RN.
_anti-revisionism_: Revisionism has been described as the _historiography of the Irish counter-revolution_. With this work it has reached its highest point."\(^101\)

In 1990 *AP/RN* reviewed Kieran Allen’s *The Politics of James Connolly*. As has already been mentioned Allen’s book came unambiguously from a revolutionary Marxist tendency.\(^102\) Although Allen’s stated intention was to subject Connolly’s ideas to considerable criticism”, the critique would be levelled from a Marxist, and therefore a revolutionary socialist, position.”\(^103\) *The Politics of James Connolly* cannot be regarded as part of the revisionist trend (as amorphous as that trend might be). While Allen described Connolly’s political strategy as “ultimately flawed” and warned against seeing Connolly as “the font of all wisdom on the Irish Question”,\(^104\) he also stated that “in a very real sense ... the Irish left needs to recover the politics of James Connolly.”\(^105\) Allen claimed as his “starting point a shared position with Connolly: the continued relevance of anti-imperialism for the left.”\(^106\)

Revisionist tract or not, and whatever Allen’s sympathies with Connolly might have been, *AP/RN* certainly did not recognise, in Allen, a comrade in anti-imperialist struggle. Tom O’Dwyer again took up the critical cudgel against a Marxist interpretation of Connolly, this time without the need for any sort of republican comradely deference. The review was scathing:

>This book is an intense disappointment. Much of Connolly’s work still needs to be brought to light, and all of it needs a clear, revolutionary defence today when revisionist ideas are so common. Unfortunately Kieran Allen has submerged some important points in factional diatribe.\(^107\)

O’Dwyer contended that “an accurate account of Connolly’s career challenges every stock idea on the right and nearly everyone on the political left.”\(^108\) Of the previous Connolly studies O’Dwyer judged that “some have been fair. C. Desmond Greaves’ remains the best of these. Others, such as Austen Morgan’s recent book, are little more

\(^{101}\) “An Exercise in Revisionism”, pp.8-9.
\(^{103}\) Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*, p.x.
than insulting diatribes. Kieran Allen’s *The Politics of James Connolly*, falls between these two stools.”

The flaw in Allen’s work, for O’Dwyer, lay chiefly in the allegedly doctrinaire politics of the revolutionary left.

According to this work, [Allen’s] the central reason for all of Connolly’s ‘failings’ seems to be that he did not concentrate on building a small, tightly knit band of ‘advanced’ revolutionary socialists, willing to denounce anyone who deviated even an iota from their gospel. Kieran Allen, of course, leads a small group which perfectly fulfils these criteria.

O’Dwyer had already demonstrated a distrust of the ‘curious theories of these political sects’.” He mobilised Connolly again, this time to condemn the Socialist Workers Movement (SWM) of which Allen was a leading member. O’Dwyer asserted that Connolly became heartily sick of the sterile world of small sect politics. He encountered a particularly virulent form of this during his US stay and he learned from the experience, unlike some of his critics – a jibe clearly directed at Allen and the Socialist Workers Movement. The SWM may have been a ‘small sect’ but *AP/RN* were still impelled to offer a fierce rebuttal of the politics that informed Allen’s analysis of Connolly’s politics. Marxist historical writing on Connolly could, it seemed, be as threatening for the Provisionals as was that of the revisionists.

The revisionist historians maintained their ability to rile the Provisionals. On the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising *AP/RN* returned, yet again, to the theme of Connolly’s alleged political metamorphosis from socialist to nationalist:

To revisionist historians James Connolly’s participation in the 1916 uprising is the ultimate proof of his abandonment of socialism. By joining the rebellion he violated all the principles of Marxism on which his political outlook was based. In 1916 there was no revolutionary situation; there was no attempt to involve the broad mass of workers; there was no declaration in favour of socialism. In place of these there was only a conspiracy of day-dreamers and a lot of woolly idealism. To become embroiled in such an adventure Connolly must surely have ditched his Marxism in preference for the romanticism of his nationalist confederates. So goes the myth.

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James Connolly – the practical visionary” differed from other rejoinders that AP/RN had offered to revisionist history. The article, which is extensive, covering a two page spread, was remarkable for its defence of Connolly's socialism in seemingly Marxist terms. Revisionist historians were accused by the Provisionals of an inability to fathom Connolly's distinctive approach.”" That Connolly's Marxism was categorically erased by his association with the romantic nationalism of Pearse was vigorously refuted. The 1916 Rising was reconciled with (the Provisional’s understanding of) Marxist theoretics:

Armed preparations cannot simply be subordinated to the ebbs and flows of popular consciousness. It is obvious therefore that Marxism does not exclude the possibility – rare though it may be - of a situation where an armed uprising can be a prelude to an awakening of the mass of the people.""

AP/RN claimed that “within the Marxist tradition, there is substantial support for the stand Connolly took.” AP/RN went on to invoke Engels, “Marx’s close collaborator”, to support Connolly’s actions in 1916. The parade of Marxist luminaries was not complete:

It is clear that Connolly did not see the Easter Rebellion as a specifically socialist undertaking. But he remained convinced that the logic of events would help transform the ensuing upsurge in a socialist direction. His was a thoroughly socialist perspective, similar (though not identical) to the strategy then being followed by Lenin in Russia.""

For AP/RN, “[t]he claim that Connolly abandoned his objective of a socialist Ireland in order to take part in a nationalist rising is a contortion hard to credit even from the pens of revisionists.” That AP/RN would defend Connolly with reference to Marxism was almost as hard to credit.

The altercation that AP/RN engaged in with revisionist historians was in defence of republicanism’s cherished historical tenets but it also had a more immediate purpose. According to AP/RN, “[r]evisionist historians blame Connolly for the subsequent marginalisation of the labour movement in Irish politics. They claim that in the national

struggle ... social and economic issues were bound to be squeezed out.” AP/RN contested this view of history doggedly. The principal contention of the Provisional’s version is that Labour leaders who came after 1916 – did not follow in the socialist-republican tradition pioneered by Connolly.” Furthermore the contemporary leaders of the Irish Labour Party suffered from the same deficiency:

If Labour’s attitude to the 1918 elections symbolised anything it was the distance which separated Connolly’s successors [in the Labour Party] from the strategy he had bequeathed them. Whereas Connolly believed that a republic was ‘the only purely political change worth crossing the street for’ and would only ally with militant separatists, his successors were the exact opposite; they ran scared of the very word republic and wheeled and dealed with the right-wing nationalists, the Free-State. They are still at it to this day.

If revisionist historians were not to be trusted nor were the ‘timid and opportunist’ leaders of the Irish Labour Party.

AP/RN’s criticism of the Irish Labour Party’s historical record was prompted by contemporary considerations. The Provisionals tended to resent the lack of support accorded them from the established Labour Party in the south - a support to which they believed they were entitled as representatives of an Irish working class struggle in the north, albeit one infused with a nationalist/republican ethic. More than just pleading for support, however, the Provisionals sought ideally to overtake the southern Labour Party and assume its constituency to become a ‘republican labour party’. In the Provisionals view, ‘it is only a radical republicanism which can today answer the needs of the working class.’ After the electoral successes that accompanied the hunger strike campaigns of the early 1980s the Provisionals began to seriously entertain aspirations to become major political ‘players’ in the Republic. Attacking the history of the Labour Party, particularly as it too laid claim to Connolly’s legacy, was standard modus operandi.

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120 “James Connolly – the practical visionary”, p.15.
121 “James Connolly – the practical visionary”, p.15.
122 “James Connolly – the practical visionary”, p.15.
By 1992 Jack Madden felt that perhaps the revisionist ‘tide was turning’. Madden elaborated on what the Provisionals still saw as the ideological and institutional underpinnings of revisionist historiography.

The rise of what we term ‘revisionism’ coincided with the resurgence of nationalist resistance in the Six Counties, although the process of revising an often far too simplistic history had begun several years earlier. What happened in the late 60s and early 70s was that the necessary task of revising accepted notions of our past through new and honest research was perverted to fit the anti-national and anti-republican bias of sections of the academic, commercial and political establishments.

Revisionism was seen as aimed very much at the republican movement: an historical assault on republicanism to undermine its basic beliefs that were rooted in an understanding of the Irish past. The Provisionals, while expressing their apparent approval for a revising of history based on ‘honest research’, left little doubt as to what cause they thought that history should serve:

If the pre-revisionist histories erred, at least it can be said that they erred on the side of an unapologetic and a spirited nationalism. The ‘revisionists’, on the other hand, err on the side of an anti-national, anglophile interpretation of our past. And they dare to claim academic and moral superiority!

‘Revised‘ or not, the preferred historical account was one that would bolster the national ‘spirit‘ and with it the Provisional’s campaign of ‘national resistance‘ to British imperialism. Madden summed up the hostility republicans felt towards revisionist historians; revisionism had ‘left nationally-minded people with a sour taste in their mouths and a deep suspicion of historians in general.’

The Provisional republican faction was not alone in its concern for establishing a ‘correct‘ historical interpretation of Irish history. The Irish Republican Socialist Party observed that ‘many people have failed to understand the lessons of 1916, undoubtedly due to the false historical analysis made by historians and the media.’ The party was perturbed by ‘the talk of rewriting our history books to discourage mass sympathy and

support that exists for the national liberation struggle”.\(^{130}\) The revisionist trend in history was, for the IRSP, an intellectual "counter-attack" directed at republicanism:

We are living at a time when political upheavals have forced the agents of imperialism to launch a counter-cultural attack on their opponents. That attack has taken the form of rewriting Irish History, with the prime purpose of denigrating the revolutionary role which the republican tradition has played in it. Now more than ever, therefore, republican socialists must look to history, perfect their grasp of the past and with those lessons in mind, move towards future struggles. History can and does make us steadfast in the knowledge that – as Connolly put it – "the national and social question are one".\(^{131}\)

Just as the Provisionals had attacked left wing groups who might challenge their historical narrative so too the IRSP had in its sights the "misunderstandings" of Connolly held by the Irish left. For the IRSP "the Irish Left is as befuddled on the National Question to-day as they were in Connolly's time. Despite the lip-service paid to Connolly's memory, his unambivalent stand on the national question is still not acknowledged."\(^{132}\) The IRSP's antipathy towards revisionist history and their censure of the Irish left came together in the special ire they reserved for the politics expressed by their former "comrades" in the Official republican faction.

In 1977 Sinn Féin, The Workers' Party (as the "Officials" renamed themselves in that year) published *The Irish Industrial Revolution*; the text promised that, "with the advantage of hindsight and using the tools of modern historical analysis", it would vindicate "Connolly's theory and bring his exposures up to date."\(^{133}\) The first section of *The Irish Industrial Revolution* was an economic history of Ireland from the seventeenth century onwards in which James Connolly featured prominently.\(^{134}\) The authors declared:

Today the only true inheritors of Connolly's tradition are Sinn Fein, The Workers' Party, who is (sic) exposing the contemporary myths of the Irish bourgeoisie and acting on foot of these exposures are earning their right to claim clear title to Connolly's legacy.\(^{135}\)

\(^{130}\) "The Fight for National Liberation and Socialism Goes On", pp.4-5.


\(^{132}\) "Connolly's Life and Death is His Testament", p.8.


\(^{134}\) Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 337.

It was a confident (and perhaps conceited) claim on the part of Sinn Féin, The Workers’ Party (SFWP).

The IRSP was, of course, not going to allow SFWP to entirely usurp their own claim to Connolly’s legacy without challenge. The Republican Socialists vigorously denounced the publication. *The Irish Industrial Revolution* was reproached for the resemblance its analysis bore to the work of “whizkid historians” from established universities - historians that the IRSP considered revisionist.\(^{136}\) The IRSP sneered that “such historians are strange authorities indeed for Sinn Féin – the Workers’ Party.”\(^{137}\) It was not, however, just a question of intellectual pretension or of competing interpretations; the IRSP maintained that “these academics have a far more insidious role to play ... they have in fact launched the most sophisticated cultural attack to date on the Irish anti-imperialist movement.” The IRSP pronounced that “it is tragic that they [revisionist historians] should have found rabid disciples among people who claim to speak from that [the republican] tradition.”\(^{138}\) As a split from the Official republican faction it was to be expected that the IRSP would generally hold the politics of SFWP in particular contempt. The IRSP perspective was that Sinn Féin, the Workers’ Party had “degenerated” into a reformist faction. For the IRSP it was clear that “SFWP is a force opposed to revolution in Ireland. ... To-day SFWP act as a Trojan horse among the working class carrying reactionary policies into working class organisations and poisoning them against the anti-imperialist struggle.”\(^{139}\) Sinn Féin, The Workers’ Party’s implied acceptance of revisionist history, as the IRSP saw it, was symptomatic of the “Sticks’ political debasement.

The political “evolution” of what was formerly the Official republican faction meant that their view on the revisionist historiographical controversy and Connolly’s legacy tended to diverge from the rest of the republican movement. By the late 1980s, at least ostensibly, the Workers’ Party (the name adopted after 1982) had repudiated the sort of republican nationalism that the Provisionals seemed to represent. For the Workers’ Party, “at the heart of militant Catholic nationalism” was “Anglophobia, ...


land hunger, and - above all – the hatred of Protestants”.\(^{140}\) The tactics of the Provisional IRA were denounced:\(^{141}\) “The terrorists ... must be isolated, and not allowed to masquerade as _patriots‘, _freedom fighters‘ or under any such grandiose titles. Their deadly mixture of the Armalite and the ballot box must be rejected.”\(^{142}\) The Workers‘ Party was eager to slough off the taint of sectarianism that it saw as implicit in the nationalism of _traditional_ republicanism and it wished to escape the opprobrium that many people attached to the armed campaign. The transformation of the Workers‘ Party - towards a democratic socialist politics, with, until 1989, an expressed sympathy for certain eastern European regimes and an apparent repudiation of armed struggle\(^{143}\) – inclined the group to look more favourably on the criticisms offered by the revisionist historians. Indeed Party President Proinsias De Rossa described the Workers‘ Party as having been always –intelligently revisionist”.\(^{144}\) Indeed members of the Workers‘ Party and some intellectual fellow travellers would come to construct emphatic critiques of Connolly.

The Workers‘ Party attracted to itself a number of scholars involved in the writing of Irish history - Paul Bew, Henry Patterson, and Ellen Hazelkorn being the most prominent. In the late 1970s Bew and Patterson along with Peter Gibbon authored *The State in Northern Ireland, 1921-72*, purportedly _a Marxist history of Northern Ireland._\(^{145}\) Their account begins with what has been described as a sophisticated theoretical attack on Connolly and his political legacy.\(^{146}\)


\(^{141}\) The denunciations did not always pass without self-criticism. See Paddy Woodworth, “On the outside, looking in” *Making Sense, Ireland’s political and cultural review*, No. 20, January/February 1991, published by Repsol Ltd, Dublin, p.11. Woodworth commented, “It is one thing to say ’we did this, we were wrong, we won’t do it anymore and we don’t think the Provos should either.’ People can understand that and respect it. It is another thing altogether to come on like a bunch of choirboys and choirgirls when the dogs in the street know the WP’s history.” Woodworth was referring to the Workers’ Party’s own paramilitary past.


\(^{143}\) In the late 1980s ‘Group B’, the internal Workers’ Party code name for the armed wing, was in the North still being implicated in racketeering and armed robberies to raise funds. Punishment attacks and tit for tat violence against, particularly the INLA, was also still ongoing. See Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution, The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party*, Penguin Books, Dublin, 2009, pp. 536-545.

\(^{144}\) Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution, The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party*, p.585, quoting the 1992 Árd Fheis address of WP President Proinsias De Rossa. It is acknowledged that De Rossa soon after led a split away from the Workers’ Party to form Democratic Left.


political analysis were located a number of deficiencies, "political error[s]" and "failures". Connolly, according to The State in Northern Ireland, viewed English rule as a mere "symbol" of "foreign" (i.e capitalist) property relations which colonialism had imposed in Ireland. The Irish nationalist bourgeoisie was equally implicated in these relations. Bew, Gibbon and Patterson contended that this reasoning led Connolly to argue that the national struggle could only be "properly" fought as a socialist revolution. The critique then proceeded to pillory Connolly’s perceived legacy and those who claimed to follow it. Bew, Gibbon and Patterson admitted that the notion that the Irish working class alone had an objective interest in national independence was not a serious limitation on Connolly’s politics until after the Easter Rising. Henceforth, however, the problem was that, short of socialism, Connolly’s supporters could never consistently acknowledge that the national revolution had ever been fully achieved. In practice, this was not simply unhelpful but positively misleading; Socialism was identified with national liberation and the struggle for socialism was reduced to the completion of the national revolution.

For Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, the democratic, that is to say the national, stage of the Irish revolution seems probably to have been as complete as it ever could be by 1921. The authors thought that Connolly would have been unlikely to have recognised this and it is his 1896-1916 position that lives on today, and which has had the effect of absorbing the question of socialist revolution to that of national irredentism. Essentially Bew, Gibbon and Patterson were conceding the historical and political interpretation of Connolly to the republicans. The expropriation of Connolly’s revolutionary socialism by the irredentists of republicanism was not seriously challenged; Connolly’s legacy, as it was rendered by Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, was instead abandoned in its entirety.

Connolly’s conceptual deficiencies did not, for Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, end with his position on the national question. Connolly was also reproved for failing to recognise the material underpinnings of Protestant working-class unionism.

147 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.4.
149 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.17.
150 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.18.
151 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.18.
152 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.18.
154 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.19.
155 Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, The State in Northern Ireland, p.19.
Connolly, according to the authors of *The State in Northern Ireland*, saw the attachment of the Protestant working class to the union with Britain as supported only by a system of illusions and misrepresentations, the source of which was the ruling class; their purpose in fostering these illusions was to prevent the exploited masses arriving at an awareness of their ‘real’ situation.\(^{156}\) Henry Patterson elaborated this criticism in *Teoiric: Theoretical and Discussion Journal of Sinn Fein the Workers’ Party*. Connolly, Patterson asserted, tended to treat the Unionist movement simply as a manifestation of religious bigotry instigated by the Belfast bourgeoisie to keep Protestant and Catholic workers divided.\(^{157}\) In doing so, Patterson argued, Connolly ‘hopelessly underestimated’ the strength of unionism.\(^{158}\) This strength, according to Paterson, arose from the fact that it wasn’t simply lies and illusion, but gave a specific form of expression to a real structural division in the geographical entity called ‘Ireland’. Ulster was dominated by a mode of production – capitalist machine industry – that was distinct from the dominant mode of production in the rest of Ireland – commercial capitalist agriculture.\(^{159}\)

Patterson admitted that the rather mechanical model of base and superstructure that he suggests ‘of itself does not explain everything about Loyalism, however the tradition of analysis initiated by Connolly which did not take it into account can only be seriously defective.’\(^{160}\) In both *The State in Northern Ireland* and Patterson’s later article for *Teoiric* it was made clear that, for the intellectuals of the Workers’ Party, Connolly had left behind him an ‘unfortunate legacy for later generations of Irish Marxists.’\(^{161}\)

In 1988 it was another of the Workers’ Party’s intellectuals, Ellen Hazelkorn, who reviewed Austen Morgan’s biography of Connolly in the organisation’s *Making Sense* magazine. In contrast to *An Phoblacht*’s censure, Hazelkorn praised Morgan’s *James Connolly: A Political Biography*, declaring that Morgan’s book is essential and should be on the reading list of anyone seeking to genuinely pursue political progress in Ireland.\(^{162}\) In a similar vein to the criticisms made by Bew, Gibbon and Patterson,

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\(^{156}\) Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland*, p.9.


\(^{158}\) Patterson, “Loyalism”, pp.22-23.

\(^{159}\) Patterson, “Loyalism”, pp.22-23.

\(^{160}\) Patterson, “Loyalism”, pp.22-23.

\(^{161}\) Patterson, “Loyalism”, pp.22-23.

Hazelkorn offered her own sharp critique of Connolly's nationalist position and his attitude towards the Protestant working class. Hazelkorn contended that "nationalism has never been grasped as essential to socialism by the entire Irish working class.\textsuperscript{163} Connolly, according to Hazelkorn, denied and then belittled Protestant working class desires for unity with Britain, he misrepresented unionism as the product of British or bourgeois manipulation, "false consciousness" or flaws with Protestant theology.\textsuperscript{164} Hazelkorn insisted, so Hazelkorn averred, that anyone who denied the nationalist solution in the objective interests of Irish working class democracy was an "imperialist", contributing only to working class polarisation.\textsuperscript{165}

Hazelkorn's contention that nationalism was not "grasped as essential to socialism by the entire Irish working class\textsuperscript{166}" was indicative of a perception within the Workers' Party that a socialism wedded to a nationalist republican imperative could not win support among the Protestant working class. Connolly's ideological imperfection when it came to the Protestant working class in the north-east had been noticed by some of his biographers and the criticisms had some validity. Connolly's acceptance of an Irish nationalism that was, for the most part, "Gaelic and Catholic" was indeed problematic.\textsuperscript{167} The Workers' Party's concern, however, to avoid the sectarian pitfalls of advocating a socialism overly imbued with nationalist assumptions resulted frequently in its own analytical myopia when it came to recognising the reactionary and bigoted elements that existed within unionism. Workers' Party theoreticians critiqued Connolly's stance on the "national question"; more reserve was shown when it came to the other nationalist "problem" on the island – British nationalism. Connolly – while on occasion expressing too much confidence in the "rebellious spirit" of Catholic workers\textsuperscript{168} – did recognise the inherent ideological impediments that loyalty to Britain placed on the development of a revolutionary consciousness among sections of the Protestant working class. \textit{The State in Northern Ireland} conceded that in 1886 "Ulster Presbyterians" took into the unionist anti-Home Rule alliance an "intensely pro-

\textsuperscript{163} Hazelkorn, "Working in two worlds", p.27.
\textsuperscript{164} Hazelkorn, "Working in two worlds", p.27.
\textsuperscript{165} Hazelkorn, "Working in two worlds", p.27.
\textsuperscript{166} Hazelkorn, "Working in two worlds", p.27.
\textsuperscript{167} Howell, \textit{A Lost Left}, p.88.
imperialist” stance. It is difficult to see how the imperialist political position of working class unionism was to be reconciled with Connolly’s expressed revolutionary socialism. Connolly had always been hostile to ‘accomplices’ of Britain’s ‘pirate’ Empire. In the imperialist patriotic fervour of 1916 Connolly attacked those who “do sport the loyal colours, and do sing Rule Britannia, and do shout for the war, and are blatant jingo to a man”. Previously, however, he had also attacked “the man who is bubbling over with love and enthusiasm for ‘Ireland’, and can yet pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and the suffering, the shame and the degradation wrought upon the people of Ireland, aye, wrought by Irishmen upon Irishmen and women”. While perhaps too enamoured with a ‘Gaelic’ nationalism that was, in his view, imbued with rebellious possibilities Connolly could see the reactionary side of Irish patriotism; he could hardly be expected to ‘tuckle’ to imperialist sentiment (or bigotry) among the Protestant working class. In the idea of Connolly’s workers’ republic (trimmed of its nationalist excesses), however, Connolly conceived of the means to break the ideological hold of imperialism and attract militant Protestant workers to socialism – as had occurred briefly and on a small scale in 1934. This was not a conception that the Workers’ Party intellectuals were willing to seriously entertain.

Hazelkorn, Bew and Patterson were among those in the Workers’ Party who took its Marxist aspirations seriously. Yet it was also this group of intellectuals who attacked Connolly’s political legacy most fervidly. At the base of their criticisms was a profound disquiet over the divided state of the Irish working class and the supposition that Connolly’s advocacy of separation from Britain had acted to exacerbate the political and sectarian schism within that class. While Connolly was the focus of these criticisms from the intellectuals of the Workers’ Party, the critique was also aimed in

174 As was evidenced at the Bodenstown commemoration mentioned in Chapter 2.
175 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.463.
the direction of Connolly’s contemporary supporters, chiefly the Provisionals and the IRSP. That both these rival republican groups continued to laud Connolly’s radical separatism served only to reinforce the vehemence of criticism coming from Connolly’s Workers’ Party detractors.

The attitude of the Workers’ Party to Connolly and his legacy was not, however, uniform across the Party’s ranks. The different opinions were neatly juxtaposed in the 1991 March/April edition of *Making Sense*. Paul Bew contributed an article which argued that the era opened up by the Easter Rising of 1916 has come to a close.\(^{176}\) Bew contended that, the spirit of 1916 will not return; not because anyone betrayed it, in so far as it [the Easter Rising] could be it was made the guide to government policy for forty years and it failed.\(^{177}\) Bew’s article repudiated any radical nationalist vision of reunification; it rejected the violence of 1916 but it also explicitly abandoned any revolutionary social vision that might have been contained in the aspirations of 1916. Ireland, Bew claimed, was moving back to the world of Redmond\(^{178}\) and a more relaxed, less charged version of Irish political destiny.\(^{179}\) Bew, in dispensing with the insurrectionary nationalism represented by the Easter Rising, also jettisoned any commitment to Connolly’s revolutionary socialism in favour of a pragmatically evolving social and economic policy that Redmond would easily recognise.\(^{180}\)

Immediately adjacent to Bew’s contribution was one from respected senior party member, Tomás MacGiolla. MacGiolla had no intention of abjuring 1916 or the Connolly legacy. No member of the Workers’ Party, announced MacGiolla, should have any hang-ups about commemorating men like Connolly and Pearse and the historic events which took place in Dublin in Easter Week 1916.\(^{181}\) MacGiolla vigorously defended the very solid foundations set down for us in the past by men like Tone and Connolly.\(^{182}\) Pointedly MacGiolla also insisted that

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\(^{177}\) Bew, “The End of an Era”, *Making Sense*, p.27.

\(^{178}\) Bew, “The End of an Era”, *Making Sense*, p.27. John Redmond was the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party between 1900-1918. He was committed to pursuing Home Rule through purely constitutional means.

\(^{179}\) Bew, “The End of an Era”, *Making Sense*, p.27.

\(^{180}\) Bew, “The End of an Era”, *Making Sense*, p.27.


It is quite ridiculous and childish to attempt to ignore 1916, to forget about it, to pretend it never happened or worse still to pretend it had no significance. (If people have hang-ups about 1916 because the provos claim to be the successors of Connolly and Pearse then that’s even more ludicrous and childish – there is no more connection between them than there is between the Red Army Faction and the Red Army).\textsuperscript{183}

MacGiolla’s rendition of the 1916 story lacks the appearance of scholarly rigour in comparison to Bew’s account; he was not, like Paul Bew, a trained historian. But while not an academic historian MacGiolla still recognised the fundamental importance of \_1916\_ for a socially radical Irish republicanism. MacGiolla understood that

History for the vast majority of people is what they are taught in school. What they are taught in school is what the State and church wants them to think. I was taught that Easter Week 1916 was a Poet’s Rebellion of idealists, a blood sacrifice inspired by the crucifixion of Christ, futile but brave and heroic. All I was told of Connolly was that he was shot in his chair and someone wrote a beautiful poem about it. Everything I subsequently read about it proved to me what a huge sham and lie this was, an insult to everyone who participated and in particular to the Dublin working class.\textsuperscript{184}

In defending the legacy of Connolly and 1916 MacGiolla was also attempting to maintain the political credentials of his own party. Connolly, according to MacGiolla, in 1916 had been fighting “for socialism, for independence” and by its connection with the Connolly legacy the Workers’ Party still fought on for those ideals. MacGiolla understood very well the ‘hegemonic’ battlefield that history represented.

MacGiolla articulated a version of history in keeping with his own ‘left republicanism’. By contrast there was nothing particularly ‘left’ or ‘republican’ that was evident in Bew’s contribution. The taint of political violence attached to 1916, and the Workers’ Party’s own paramilitary history, was neatly addressed by MacGiolla: “[w]e do not necessarily agree with everything these men said, or everything they did, anymore than we agree to-day with everything we ourselves said or did in the past.”\textsuperscript{185} MacGiolla placed “those things that were said and done” in context: “all of them were part of our historical and political development.”\textsuperscript{186} MacGiolla’s ‘contextualisation’ was meant to be applied as much to the activities of the Official IRA as it was to the insurgents of 1916. But whatever the context MacGiolla still clung to the validating

heroics of those he clearly considered to be the forerunners of his party: "Tone and Connolly and Pearse helped to shape our destiny".\textsuperscript{187} There was no abandonment of the revolutionary inspiration that 1916 offered. For MacGiolla 1916 was "a revolution of ideas which made us all think in completely different terms from the pre-1916 perspective on politics, economics and society."\textsuperscript{188} Contrary to Bew's assertion that "the Irish people have moved on"\textsuperscript{189} from 1916, MacGiolla held that Ireland's contemporary political parties have been formed with the objectives of either supporting and promoting these ideas [of 1916] or of bitterly opposing them.\textsuperscript{190} For MacGiolla the struggle that 1916 represented was an ongoing one in Irish politics and the contest of historical interpretation was not one that was conducted entirely with forces outside the party; an ideological struggle over Irish history was part of an internal political debate inside the Workers' Party itself. Against what were perhaps the 'intelligent revisionists' in the Party, MacGiolla and those around him maintained a commitment to a republican and socialist vision based around their reading and understanding of Connolly and 1916.

In 1986 (Provisional) Sinn Féin had suffered its own split in the ranks, although this time one far less significant than that which had occurred in 1970. Again the immediate issue at stake was abstention; the Sinn Féin leadership proposed the taking of seats in the Dáil Éireann. When the motion to end the political embargo on the Southern parliament was passed Ruairí Ó Bradaigh lead his abstentionist supporters out of the Sinn Féin convention - and out of the party itself - to establish Republican Sinn Féin (RSF).\textsuperscript{191} This new 'traditionalist' republican splinter was perhaps even more committed to the articulation of an unreconstructed nationalist version of Irish history than were the Provisionals. At Republican Sinn Féin's own 1989 Árd Fheis, in support of a motion "asserting the right of the Irish people to full freedom and nationhood and denying any English claim to rule any part of Ireland", it was stated that

\begin{quote}
The true national history and the true national spirit move along together and if the youth lose track of that, unfortunately the nation will suffer. James Connolly said that England does not, never did and never can belong in Ireland and while there are young people who believe this our country will be saved.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{9999}
\bibitem{189} Bew, "The End of an Era", Making Sense, p.27.
\bibitem{191} Brian Feeney, Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 2003, p.333.
\end{thebibliography}
James Connolly obviously maintained his revered status in the historical and political discourse of Republican Sinn Féin; so too any articulation of revisionist history continued to be despised. *Saoirse*, the RSF’s political organ, expressed the party’s disapproval of revisionism’s ascendancy: “The vicious lobotomising of Irish history by revisionists who preach peace in conjunction with a scarcely concealed hatred of Republicans and nationalists, whose sin is to desire independence of Britain, is becoming quite a fashion.” It was not a fashion that the RSF had any intention of adopting.

The RSF had their own counter to the perceived historiographical ‘heresies’ of the revisionist historians. Martin Calligan, a founding RSF member who had walked out with Ó Bradaigh in 1986, authored a pamphlet entitled *James Connolly’s Prophecy*. The pamphlet offered a conspicuously partisan republican interpretation of the 1916-1923 period. Advertised in the party’s press, it was an historical narrative consciously constructed to buttress the RSF’s political agenda. The text affirmed the party’s faithfulness to Connolly and ‘true’ republican doctrine.

Sinn Fein Poblachtach [RSF] is the only organisation in Ireland that upholds the teachings of Connolly and the Proclamation of 1916, the Declaration of Independence and Social and Economic Programme of the real Dáil Éireann, 1919. There is no other organisation – any organisation who recognises foreign institutions in Ireland and would swallow British Oaths, thereby admitting Britain’s right to rule over any part of the country and to make laws to oppress Irishmen and women, proscribing organisations, cannot claim the historic name Sinn Fein.

Calligan’s ‘history’ began with a quotation from Connolly’s last statement to his court-martial.

Believing that the British Government has no right in Ireland, never had a right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland, the presence in any one generation of Irishmen of even a respectable minority, ready to die to affirm that truth, makes the Government forever a usurpation and a crime against human progress. Take me away and let my blood bedew the Sacred Soil of Ireland. I die in certainty that one day my blood will fructify.

The transcription is faithful to Connolly up until the last sentences: Connolly did not speak at his court-martial of his blood ‘bedewing’ the ‘sacred soil of Ireland’, he did not say that one day it would ‘fructify’. Calligan had appended these last lines to Connolly’s statement from the (purported) court-martial address of Thomas MacDonagh.\(^{197}\) The added sentiment does, however, bolster the perception of Connolly as a spiritually inspired nationalist martyr, a perception preferred by the traditionalists of RSF.

The ‘history’ presented by Calligan failed in regard to the requirement for evidentiary rigour but its ‘truth’ was attested to, for its republican readership, by receiving the imprimatur of ‘the men and women who played a noble part in making Irish History’\(^{198}\). Calligan cited the sources of his historical knowledge while also managing a swipe at the ‘authorised’ history curriculum of the southern Republic: ‘I learned Irish history from the people who played a noble part in making it, not the distortion of history taught in the schools of the 26 Counties’\(^{199}\). In the face of this alleged ‘authentic’ version of Irish history imparted by republicanism’s heroes, the revisionists could not hope to compete. Any rival revisionist version of history - however judicious the revisionist scholar might have been in the use of their sources - could only be considered, by Calligan and the RSF, to be a ‘deception and make believe.’\(^{200}\) History, for the RSF, was again an important ideological frontline in the republican political struggle.

Connolly, in the eyes of the RSF, was unquestionably a martyr for the Irish nation, a virtual nationalist saint. The RSF still retained a ‘social aspect’ as part of its doctrine. Without disturbing his saintly image Connolly could defend the poor from the grasping hands of the rich: ‘James Connolly and his gallant comrades gave their lives to overthrow the system under which we live today, a system that robs the poor so that the rich might grow.’\(^{201}\) The RSF’s anti-capitalism, however, was affixed to a particular nationalist perspective; capitalism was ‘that British system’.\(^{202}\) In Labour in Irish History Connolly had identified British imperialism as being the importer of a capitalist

\(^{197}\) See Last Words: Letters and Statements of the Leaders Executed After the Rising at Easter 1916, Piaras F. MacLochlainn, (ed.) published by the Stationery Office, Dublin, 1990. Thomas MacDonagh’s “Address to the Court Martial, 2 May 1916” ends with “Take me away, and let my blood bedew the sacred soil of Ireland. I die in the certainty that once more the seed will fructify.” It is acknowledged that the authenticity of the MacDonagh Court Martial document is not completely verifiable, pp.54-60.

\(^{198}\) Calligan, James Connolly’s Prophecy, p.3.

\(^{199}\) Calligan, James Connolly’s Prophecy, p.13.

\(^{200}\) Calligan, James Connolly’s Prophecy, p.13.

\(^{201}\) Calligan, James Connolly’s Prophecy, p.2.

system into Ireland. In the early twentieth century with the British Empire still the 
preeminent capitalist world power and in the context of Connolly's attempt to win 
advanced nationalists' to socialism, the equation of Britain with capitalism made sense 
both historically and politically. The far cruder articulation of such a formulation in the late 
twentieth century (and beyond), lacking Connolly's fundamental socialist ethic, meant that the 
RSF's seemingly anti-capitalist position easily tipped over into parochial anti-British xenophobia. The RSF still endorsed the Éire Nua doctrine that they had 
brught with them from the early days of the Provisionals. They called for a true 32-
County Federal Democratic Socialist Republic, but again it was a socialism that needed to be clearly defined as social caring or distributist socialism. RSF's 
socialism was not to be mistaken for Marxism. The social vision of RSF's leadership 
was assiduously prescribed. The new way of life proposed by RSF lay in small 
enterprises, worker/producer-owned cooperatives and regional development. Connolly's revolutionary Marxist conception of a workers' republic was entirely 
obliterated. The RSF's exegesis of Connolly epitomises the warning given by Desmond 
Greaves: To canonise is to kill. The Connolly that appears in RSF's historical 
narrative is not recognisable as a Marxist revolutionary. Instead Connolly appears as 
another of republicanism's glorious patriot dead. Connolly's republican consecration and the RSF's inherent suspicion of Marxist socialism allowed no space 
for any critical engagement with Connolly's actual political thought. At the end of 
James Connolly's Prophecy Calligan reproduced the words of a song eulogising 
Connolly: going to his death like a true son of Ireland ... James Connolly fell into a

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203 See for example, “Wolfe Tone Commemoration 1989 - Éire Nua: Best Basis for Peace and Justice” (oration by Dáithí Ó Conaill), Saoirse, Irish Freedom, Uimhir 27, lúil (July) 1989, pp.4-5. Sinn Féin dropped the federalist Éire Nua policy in 1982. The change in policy added to the tensions that would later fuel the split with the RSF. The RSF adopted the Éire Nua policy in their political platform. See “Sinn Féin Árd Fheis ’82. Going Forward” An Phoblacht/Republican News, Sraith Nua Iml. 4, Uimhir 44, Samhain (November) 4, 1982, p.10.


205 Fear Domhann, “SAOL NUA, a Response”, Saoirse, Irish Freedom, Uimhir 72, Aibreán (April), 1993, p.6. This article is preceded by a disclaimer that the opinions expressed are those of an RSF member rather than official doctrine but the comments are not later refuted by the RSF leadership.

206 “The Irish people must be allowed to speak as one unit”, [Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’s presidential speech to 89th Árd Fheis], Saoirse, Irish Freedom, Uimhir 80, Nollaig (December) 1993, p.8. Saol Nua roughly translates to ‘new way of life’.

207 Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly, p. 431.

208 For an example of the exaltation of patriot dead, Connolly among them, see “A Message of Freedom and Hope to the people of Newry and South Armagh from Republican Sinn Féin”, Saoirse, Irish Freedom – The Organ of Irish Republicanism, Uimhir 90, Deireadh Fómhair (October), 1994, p.7.
ready-made grave.” Connolly’s Marxism and any meaningful radical political thought he might have offered was similarly interred by Republican Sinn Féin.

The ‘historical’ discourse of Republican Sinn Féin is the most traditionalist, rigid and unsophisticated of all the republican factions. The importance they placed on the ‘correct’ interpretation of history, however, was shared with all of the competing strands of republicanism. The Provisionals and the IRSP used Connolly to provide historical legitimacy for their political and paramilitary projects. The Official republican faction, attempting to become a ‘modern democratic socialist party’ and trying to distance itself from its paramilitary past, had sought to critique and reject the legacy of James Connolly. The repudiation of Connolly, however, was not an exercise that carried the whole of the party with it. The Workers’ Party too would try to hold on to a vision of Connolly.

The interpretation of national history was important to the republican movement as a whole. For some republicans, however, time and ‘history’ could move on. Connolly had been ‘revised’ by ‘the historians of the counter-revolution’; now his historical and political purpose would be ‘reassigned’ by a section of republicanism itself.

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209 Taken from the second last stanza of “James Connolly”, reproduced in Martin Calligan, *James Connolly’s Prophecy*, no place or publisher provided, 1989, p.15.
210 John Lowry, “A stereotyped picture”, *Making Sense, Ireland’s political and cultural review*, No. 21, March/April 1991, published by Repsol Ltd, Dublin, p.25. Lowry described the transformation the Officials had undergone “from a narrow nationalist organisation to a modern democratic socialist party representing the interests of the working class in the Dáil Éireann.”
Chapter 4

Armed Struggle, Peace Process and Parliamentarism

Everyone finds his niche in the end. Groups of intellectualist liquidators from among former Marxists and former liberals with a bomb are being welded together by the course of events.

V.I. Lenin, "On the Eve of the Elections to the Fourth Duma".¹

Writing for the nationalist journal *The Shan Van Vocht* James Connolly contended that

Now traditions may, and frequently do, provide materials for a glorious martyrdom, but can never be strong enough to ride the storm of a successful revolution.

If the national movement of our day is not merely to re-enact the old sad tragedies of our past history, it must show itself capable of rising to the exigencies of the moment."²

It was one of Connolly’s first pieces produced for an Irish audience and he was addressing himself to "all earnest nationalists".³ Before 1916 precious few "earnest nationalists"⁴ would have been much inclined towards Connolly’s exhortations. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first century almost all republicans professed to follow in Connolly’s political footsteps in some form or another. Yet some of those who claimed to stand by the ideas of James Connolly⁵ remained doctrinally committed to a republican tradition that appeared to be, in key regards, at odds with Connolly’s politics. Other republicans came to realise that too fervent a devotion to tradition could place unwanted political strictures on the movement. The re-evaluation(s) that took place caused fractures to appear in the republican movement but the competing viewpoints each continued to invoke Connolly. The "martyr of 1916" could be summoned to

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¹ Russian Marxists sometimes referred to those undertaking terrorist activities as “liberals with a bomb” because of the implied repudiation of the method of class struggle.
³ Connolly held that there should be a “frank acceptance on the part of all earnest nationalists of the Republic as their goal.” See “Socialism and Nationalism”, p.121.
⁴ “CIRA’s potential worries British and Dublin administration”, *Saoirse, Irish Freedom – The Voice of the Republican Movement*, Uimh. 126, Deireadh Fómhair (October), 1997, p.3.
legitimize the armed struggle or, as the peace process' gained momentum, Connolly could be mobilised to maintain the credibility of republicanism's radical credentials; a radicalism seemingly compromised by the passage into purely "constitutional" politics. The apparent pliability of Connolly's imprimatur revealed that, in a certain way, republicanism was able to rise to the political exigencies of the moment", although not in the manner that Connolly intended. Republicans were politically sophisticated enough to mold Connolly to fit the immediate political agenda but Connolly's place in the changing republican discourse also points to the enigmatic legacy that Connolly himself left behind: his imperfect class analysis of republicanism as a political phenomenon and his fatal involvement with the Rising of 1916.

The republican movement is marked by its zealous commemoration of the past. We have seen that a "correct" understanding of Irish history has been an intrinsic part of the republican political perspective and that the Rising occupies a pivotal place in the republican historical narrative. The re-emergence of republican paramilitary activity in the late 1960s was considered by many republicans to be a legitimate continuation of an armed struggle that was launched in 1916. Republicans could affirm that "when war erupted again, at the end of the 60s ... a new generation of Irish freedom fighters took up arms to oppose British rule in the six-counties". The Provisional IRA was conceived of as the rebellious successor to the insurgents of 1916:

Sixty-three years ago this Easter weekend, vehicles were commandeered, the barricades went up and gun battles broke out in Dublin as the Irish Citizen Army and Irish Volunteers proclaimed in arms the Republic, and merged into the Irish Republican Army. Today in the North the Irish Republican Army still proclaims in arms our independence …

The assertion of this apparent historical "continuity" was an important way of demonstrating the authenticity and legitimacy of the republican campaign.

For republicans the martial element was of key significance. Gerry Adams, in his 1986 exposition The Politics of Irish Freedom, stated that "the tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance because it provides a vital cutting edge. Without it the

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5 Connolly, "Socialism and Nationalism", p.121.
issue of Ireland would not even be an issue.\textsuperscript{8} Adams’ later reflections on the period before the ‘peace process’ reiterated that armed struggle was (at that time) fundamental to republicanism: ‘Within republicanism, armed struggle was the dominating tendency. There was a belief that only the IRA could move the British government.’\textsuperscript{9} In keeping with this republican predilection for armed action the public pronouncements of the Provisional IRA were suitably bellicose. The 1987 ‘Easter statement from the leadership of the Republican Movement’ (that leadership being the Provisional IRA) declared that ‘[t]he British will only be talked out of Ireland through the rattle of machine-guns and the roar of explosives.’\textsuperscript{10} For republicanism, prior to 1998, the armed struggle was paramount.

The primacy given to the armed struggle was intertwined with a general aversion to ‘politics’. In part this meant a determination to retain republicanism’s abstentionist embargo on taking parliamentary seats. The perceived ‘revision’ of republican ideals – a commitment to armed struggle and abstentionism – by the leadership of the movement in the late 1960s had led to the most consequential of republican schisms - the split that created the Provisional faction. The Provisional Army Council’s first public communiqué commenting on the separation announced: ‘The adoption of the compromising policy ... is the logical outcome of an obsession in recent years with parliamentary politics, with the consequent undermining of the basic military role of the Irish Republican Army.’\textsuperscript{11} Engagement with parliamentary politics was, in the estimation of the Provisional faction’s generalissimos (at least at that time), incompatible with the paramilitary campaign.

The privileging of the armed struggle over ‘politics’, however, tended to extend beyond merely the rejection of parliamentarism. Joe Cahill, a member of that first Provisional IRA Army Council, articulated the suspicion with which ‘political’ activity was viewed. Relating a conversation with Sinn Féin President, Tomás MacGiolla, prior to the split, Cahill recalled that

\begin{quote}
I told him the leadership had gone completely astray. They had given up the military struggle and were concentrating purely on political issues. I also said under the system that existed in the North of Ireland
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Gerry Adams, \textit{The Politics of Irish Freedom}, Brandon Book Publishers, Dingle, Co. Kerry, 1986, p.64.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Gerry Adams, \textit{Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland}, Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne, 2003, p.28.
\item \textsuperscript{10} ‘The only words they understand - Easter statement from the leadership of the Republican Movement’, \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 9, Uimhir 16, Aibreán (April) 23, 1987, p.1.
\end{itemize}
– also in the South but particularly in the North – it was impossible then to work politically to achieve the freedom of the country, and the option of military struggle must remain open to us. ... I told him it was not possible to obtain civil rights in the North of Ireland because Orangeism would not allow it.12

Not only did Cahill see no efficacy in pursuing change through established political structures, the inference was that there was equally no point in pursuing ‘politics’ through the mass mobilisations that characterised the civil rights movement. In an interview with AP/RN in 2003 Cahill recollected that

I was a member of the Civil Rights Movement at the time; … but I didn’t think it was going anywhere. It was obvious to everyone that there were never going to be many benefits to Catholics. … The IRA weren’t doing anything to defend the people. They were making no preparations, because they had been getting more political and had been running down the military machine.13

For the Provisional faction that emerged from the split, armed struggle was the alpha and omega of the republican campaign.

Despite the Provisional’s claim that the IRA was being demobilised, the Official section of the republican movement after the split had not entirely abandoned armed struggle. In Belfast in July 1970, after a British Army raid to seize arms, Official IRA volunteers engaged in gun battles with British troops.14 Later that year the Officials carried out attacks in Ardoyne and Ballymurphy.15 After the introduction of internment in August 1971 the Officials claimed to have killed four soldiers in various attacks; in September they killed a soldier in a landmine attack near Newry.16 As late as January 1972, only months before the suspension of armed military actions, the Official IRA boasted of burning the homes of the rich:

Hitting the rich is the right thing to do. For too long working class pubs, shopping areas and places of work have been the target of sectarian bombers. If all those who claim to be defending the people followed the example of the IRA it wouldn’t be long before we had the ruling class on their knees.17

15 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.162.
17 “IRA Burns Rich Homes in Reprisal”, The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe, Iml. XXVI, Uimhir 1, Eanáir (January), 1972, p.tri (3).
Armed struggle, however, would begin to lose its primacy in the Official faction after the deadly Aldershot debacle and the killing of Ranger Best. The break with the Provisionals had freed the Official faction to begin to seriously contest elections with every intention of taking any seats that were won.

In abrogating abstention the Officials were aware that they could now be accused (by the Provisionals) of "opted for parliamentary action" in preference to the seemingly more anti-systemic parliamentary boycott. The Officials considered themselves part of a revolutionary tradition so with armed actions increasingly consigned to the margins some form of popular struggle was thought to be necessary alongside the electoral contest. The United Irishman clarified the new political method.

The Republican Movement does not exist solely for the purpose of contesting elections: its job is to engage the mass of the people in the struggle for economic, social, cultural and political freedom.

The struggle was still for national emancipation but the political campaign that the Official faction envisaged was not to be just the preserve of clandestine republican paramilitaries. Instead it was conceived of as a popular movement: "an everyday activity that must continue until the Irish people have won the battle to establish the Irish Socialist Republic of Pearse and Connolly." Announcing the suspension of armed activity the Officials explained that the "IRA has decided to reaffirm its political programme in an effort to avoid sectarian war". Later that year at the annual Bodenstown commemoration of Wolfe Tone (the regular occasion for the republican movement to chart its political direction), Sean Garland, Official Sinn Féin national organiser, proclaimed that the "Republican Movement, in building the people’s revolutionary party, refuses to engage in terrorism ... This was not what Tone or Davitt or Connolly fought for". With the mandate of Connolly the Officials had, publically, called an end to the armed struggle to focus on building a political party.

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19 "Ulster What Next?", The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe, Vol. XXIV, Uimhir 5, Meitheamh (June), 1970, p.1. The issue no. (Uimhir) appears to be chronologically incorrect here. In keeping with previous issues it should have been numbered as Uimhir 6.
Meanwhile the Provisionals persevered with the armed campaign and Connolly was mobilised to support the struggle. The Provisional’s northern Republican News quoted a hawkish Connolly: “A destiny, not of our fashioning, has chosen this generation as the one called upon for the supreme act of self-sacrifice – to die if need be that our race might live in freedom.” The southern paper An Phoblacht invoked 1916 and declared that “[t]he whole message of the Rising is that the Leaders who were imbued with the spirit of Fenianism handed on to succeeding generations the defence of the Republic which they proclaimed in arms.” Connolly as the Commandant-General of the Dublin forces in 1916 was among those leaders who were perceived as handing on the legacy of armed struggle.

Two years later the Provisionals affirmed their standing as the ‘true’ inheritors of Connolly’s legacy: “Connolly’s charter [was] championed by [the] IRA”. While careful to point out that both Connolly and the Provisional IRA would have “preferred peaceful means of revolution”, An Phoblacht announced that, “like Connolly, the IRA believe that the risks of a carefully planned and principled armed struggle are nothing compared to the shame of slavery.” An Phoblacht, went further; to not take up arms in “the cause of a free an independent Ireland” would be to “mock the memory of James Connolly.” Connolly, in the eyes of the Provisionals, was very much an armed revolutionary - politically and morally justified in his recourse to arms. The Provisionals dutifully followed in his hallowed steps.

After 1972 it was not necessary for the Officials to invoke Connolly to justify armed struggle but it was possible, and indeed desirable, for them to use Connolly against the Provisional’s ‘terrorism’. During a commemoration of the Rising in 1973 (the Officials still commemorated the Rising even if they were not inclined to ‘re-enact’ it), The United Irishmen reprinted a Connolly article that was sharply critical of those that prioritised violence as a political means:

Here, then, is the immense difference between the socialist republicans and our friends the physical force men. The latter, by

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stifling all discussions of principle, earn the passive and fleeting commendation of the unthinking multitude; the former by insisting upon a thorough understanding of their basic principles, do not so readily attract the multitude, but do attract and hold the more thoughtful amongst them.  

The Official’s clearly sought to direct Connolly’s reproof towards the Provisionals. In a piece that again uses Connolly’s argument against _physical force_ the Officials complained that

Church, State and business interests have combined to negate the selfless principles of Connolly and Pearse. But the greatest disservice to those who fought for a Republic in 1916 has been performed by the Provisional Alliance which claims to be continuing the same fight today.  

The faction changed its name but the censure of the Provisionals continued, using the supposedly virtuous legacy of Connolly and other republican luminaries:

The Ard Comhairle of Sinn Fein The Workers’ Party … totally condemns the Fianna Fail and sectarian inspired actions of the Provisionals and the mindless sectarian inhumanity of the Loyalist para-militaries. They are equally abhorrent to anyone who subscribes to the Republicanism of Tone, Emmet, Davis, Davitt, Pearse and Connolly.

For the Official republican movement Connolly was a revered _socialist-republican_ forerunner. Connolly's Marxism could be _fitted_ to Sinn Fein The Workers' Party's developing left wing perspective; but Connolly was also an iconic republican figure whose writings offered the Officials an opportunity to lambast the “reactionary and counter-revolutionary” Provisionals. Connolly could be arrayed against the Provisionals to some effect in a way that other Marxist thinkers – like Lenin - could not. The Provisionals cared very little about what Lenin (or _Leninists_) might have thought of them; they cared far more for Connolly’s authority as a political guide. Connolly's
legacy, however, would inspire another republican reaction from within the ranks of the Official faction, a reaction that was not adverse to the physical force tradition.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party, along with its paramilitary counterpart, the Irish National Liberation Army, broke with the Official faction in order to pursue an armed struggle that was becoming less of a priority in the Official’s plans. In common with the Officials, the IRSP had no qualms about embracing ‘Marxist’ doctrine as its own but the IRSP combined its ‘Marxism’ with an Irish republicanism that saw a necessity for armed struggle. The politics of the IRSP were heralded as descending from those of James Connolly but the group’s political rhetoric and activity also revealed a legacy from its origin in the republican movement. Despite the political phraseology of *The Starry Plough*, few among the party membership had any serious grounding in Marxist theory. Seamus Costello himself was wary of too great an emphasis on the theetics of Marxism. His political education, like that of many IRSP members, had been gained largely from his experience in the Official faction and a familiarity with the available works of James Connolly.32 On its first anniversary the party reported that it had ‘been involved at local level in strikes, agitation against internment, protests in favour of the nationalisation of our mineral resources and inland waters, the prevention of evictions’.33 Armed struggle loomed, however, as the dominant tendency among the Republican Socialists. For the IRSP 1916 was the critical ‘turning point in Irish history’.34 At a 1976 commemoration of the Rising the IRSP invoked Connolly to support the paramilitary campaign:

Nial Lenoach, a member of the U.C.D. Cumann of the IRSP, quoted Connolly’s statement before his execution: ‘It is the socialists who will never understand why I am here’. Unfortunately many socialists have no better understanding of the national question today that their predecessors had in 1916, he continued. They tried to portray the northern struggle as the isolated action of a handful of militarists, completely ignoring the role of popular support. Similarly the 1916 rising was not an isolated military adventure but the culmination of years of political struggle by the labour and national movements.35

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The IRSP defended the use of armed struggle with reference to 1916 and by characterising it as a popularly supported campaign. If that was not entirely convincing, the Party could fall back on Connolly:

The IRSP position is very clearly that when legal and constitutional methods are undemocratically blocked, the people have a right to armed struggle to achieve their revolutionary goals. And the present struggle is a mass struggle. ... It is a struggle with centuries of tradition, in which an enormous percentage of the population is actively involved or sympathetic – if it were not, the British Army could have dealt with it ... The extent intensity and duration of the present armed struggle gives it total legitimacy. Even if it did not, the imperialist frustration of national democracy in Ireland for centuries gives, 'even a respectable minority' as James Connolly said at his court-martial, the right to resist English usurpation by force. And, like James Connolly’s example, the heroic resistance of masses of Irishmen and women is the best and truest mobilisation of the Irish people.36

The IRSP seemed to be following the grimmest example set by Connolly. The demands of an armed struggle would fatally undermine the development of any coherent socialist politics by the IRSP.

The Provisional’s justification for the use of ‘physical force’ also relied heavily on Connolly and the ‘precedent’ of 1916. In 1979 a correspondent for AP/RN contended that

there was one thing above all others upon which Connolly stood firmly and consistently all his life and in all his writings. And that was the upholding of the morality of the national liberation struggle. As a convinced and determined defender of the morality of the Irish struggle for national freedom, he never questioned the right of the Irish people to fight for liberation – by any methods.37

According to the Provisionals, Connolly’s legacy – defined overwhelmingy in terms of his participation in 1916 - sanctioned the armed struggle. In its 1984 commemoration of the Easter Rising AP/RN took the opportunity to both denounce the Provisional’s ‘Free State’ critics and to defend the paramilitary campaign:

Those Free State hypocrites who will try to draw distinctions between then and now will not like to dwell on the fact that those 1916 freedom fighters also actually shot at the enemy!

…

They will not spend too much time recalling that none of those 1916 leaders were constitutional politicians or even elected at the ballot box.  

Connolly’s last statement to his court martial was cited as the coup de grâce of AP/RN’s editorial riposte.

After the Rising and before he was murdered by a British firing squad, James Connolly unrepentantly said:

_Believing that the British government has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland, the presence in any one generation of Irish people, of even a respectable minority ready to die to affirm that truth, makes that government forever a usurpation and a crime against human progress._

At Easter 1984, just as unrepentantly, we share Connolly’s belief.

Connolly’s apparent ratification of the armed struggle was proffered again four years later:

The message of Easter 1988 from the Republican Movement is as clear as it was when expressed by Connolly in 1916. Never were men and women Volunteers of the IRA more determined to win through to victory. Never were republicans more united and more resolved to see the cause of national self-determination crowned with success.

Leading republican Martin McGuinness expressed the same conviction when he addressed Sinn Féin’s annual Six-County conference in 1991. McGuinness asserted that _—Pearse and Connolly used armed struggle to further their aims and objectives. Without the use of armed struggle their aims, objectives and analysis would have been totally irrelevant, especially in view of the forces ranged against them._ The use of armed force in pursuit of an Irish republic was, for the Provisionals, one of Connolly’s chief contributions to the republican movement; indeed at times it seemed as if the legacy of arms was his foremost contribution.

The compact between the Marxist Connolly and elements of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) that led to the 1916 Rising is the salient political

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quandary that faces any attempt to articulate an overall understanding of Connolly’s politics. "1916" is also a crucial element in comprehending Connolly’s particular prominence in republican discourse. The historian John Newsinger observed that while Connolly’s involvement in the Rising generated some controversy in socialist circles immediately after the event, political discord eventually gave way to scholarly consensus as historians generally arrived at the contention that there was no contradiction between Connolly’s Marxist politics and his participation in the rebellion. Newsinger described this interpretive concord: Connolly’s "whole life was inevitably seen as but a preparation for his martyrdom, and his scattered writings were given the standing of sacred texts wherein he recounted his progress along the road to Easter Week, 1916 ... and historians have yet to rescue him from his apotheosis."42

The work of some of Connolly’s expositors would seem to bear out Newsinger’s point. Desmond Ryan had seen Connolly’s politics as "unchanging but developing".43 Michael Fox had Connolly as "one of those men carved out of a solid piece”, only becoming a "little more rubbed or polished as the years go on."44 For Bernard Ransom in his treatment of Connolly the political alliance between "class-conscious workers’ and "uncompromising nationalists’ was the concept "which made possible the heroic putsch of Easter 1916 ... already evident in Connolly’s changed standpoint of 1896."45 Connolly’s political course, so it seemed for these biographers, led unequivocally to the logical conclusion that was "1916’.

Of course republicans could find much political solace in this historical consensus. For republicans Connolly’s final rebellious act was incontestably the consummation of his previous political reasoning. Describing Connolly’s opposition to the First World War, AP/RN’s readership were informed that

Connolly and other republicans did not just oppose the war with words. They launched an anti-recruiting campaign soon after the war broke out and Connolly himself was president of the Irish Neutrality League. But the ultimate answer to British imperialism was to be


armed insurrection which took place at the height of the First World War and changed the course of Irish history.\(^{46}\)

The clear assertion was that Connolly’s _ultimate_ answer to British imperialism was armed struggle: the industrial action of the working class, the political campaign opposing the war, mass agitation against conscription, were all less effective than _physical force_ in resisting British domination. The republican correspondent, Tom O’Dwyer, expressed precisely this supposition. Writing for _AP/RN_, O’Dwyer revealed the _legacy_ of the 1913 Lock-out – a bitter industrial dispute in which Connolly was a leading figure – from a republican perspective:

> Its real significance couldn’t clearly be seen until the morning of Easter Monday 1916 when the armed militia formed during the Lock-out joined the IRB and others in the Rising. What the Lock-out showed the working class members of the Irish Citizen Army was that there could be no solution to their oppression short of an armed insurrection for a workers’ republic.\(^{47}\)

The Lock-out had brought forth the Irish Citizen Army and this was, in O’Dwyer’s estimation, the event’s most significant product. It was not the revolutionary general strike that would win the workers’ republic – it was the armed struggle.

O’Dwyer’s argument, however, relies on an abridgment of time and context. The place of the Irish Citizen Army in Connolly’s 1913 conception differed from that which he would come to hold in 1916. Soon after the Lock-out ended Connolly postulated that “[t]o the idea of working class unity, to the seed of industrial solidarity, Dublin [the Lock-out] was the great event that enabled it to seize the minds of the masses, the germinating force that gave power to the seed to fructify and cover these islands.”\(^{48}\) The Lock-out demonstrated, even in defeat, “the necessity of concerted industrial action”\(^{49}\); it afforded to a militant working class the prospect of raising “us all upward and onward towards our common emancipation.”\(^{50}\) Connolly did not, in 1913-1914, see the formation of the Irish Citizen Army as the Lock-out’s greatest achievement. He still maintained a belief in the efficacy of industrial action and class

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\(^{50}\) Connolly, “The Isolation of Dublin”, p.158.
solidarity. Yet the republican paramilitaries, as they opted for armed struggle over mass mobilisation, understood themselves as following the example of James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army; Connolly’s tactical change of mind would come later.

It is pertinent at this juncture to emphasize that republicans were not entirely heedless of the opportunities mass mobilisation might offer the republican campaign. The more astute among the Provisional republican leaders came to realise the particular importance of a republican presence in the trade unions. Gerry Adams, the then Vice President of Sinn Féin, urged his followers to ensure that the cause of Ireland becomes the cause of Labour, a task neglected since Connolly’s time, and we must also ensure that the cause of Labour becomes the cause of Ireland.”

Sinn Féin developed an eagerness to advance republican policies in the trade unions. Particularly as conflict dragged on there was recognition that a ‘mass struggle’ of some kind was required to augment the republican paramilitary campaign. The Party’s 1989 Árd Fheis called for the adoption in principle of the need for an all-Ireland anti-imperialist mass movement.” Later that year Adams promoted the strategy in his Bodenstown oration:

“The building of a mass movement is ... the urgent task of all republicans, socialists, nationalists and democrats in Ireland.”

Despite the proposed new course, however, the armed struggle continued to be paramount. In 1990 AP/RN, in an exculpatory article, cited the Easter message of the Provisional IRA to justify the continuing paramilitary campaign:

the leadership of the Republican Movement clearly outlined the historic conditions that make armed struggle necessary: ... When in the late 60s the Civil Rights Movement was again bludgeoned into the ground, the men and women of the Irish Republican Army took up arms reluctantly. But, like their counterparts in 1916, once that political decision was taken they committed their lives to the achievement of a free and united Ireland.”

51 “Revolutionary politics needed to back up military gains”, [Bodenstown oration 1979, Gerry Adams, Vice-President of Sinn Féin], An Phoblacht/Republican News, Sráith Nua Iml. 11, Uimhir 5, Meitheamh (June) 19, 1990, p.1.


At least for the time being trade union and other political campaigning would be overshadowed by the prestige of the armed struggle. Connolly’s posthumous blessing was conferred on the paramilitary campaign and the perceived affinity between the volunteers of the Provisional IRA and the rebels of 1916 was preserved.

In an article that again had the legitimation of the armed struggle as part of its raison d’être O’Dwyer elaborated further on the republican view of Connolly’s political trajectory. He conceded that

Connolly never rejected armed struggle but, in his early years in Ireland, he put more trust in the industrial organisation of the working class as a means to secure the workers’ republic. He argued that ‘physical force’ could only be used when the workers were convinced that no other methods would be successful.

O’Dwyer then explained Connolly’s eventual change of heart:

A combination of events in 1913-14 convinced him that the time for armed rebellion had come and that delay would be disastrous. During the 1913 Lock-out, the ITGWU, under his and Larkin’s leadership, had been forced to organise the first armed workers’ militia in European history – the Irish Citizen Army. ... The other major event was the onset of imperialist slaughter in World War One. Britain’s weakness was for Connolly, as for the IRB, Ireland’s opportunity.

The historical account offered by O’Dwyer was perhaps more articulate but the general interpretation of the Provisionals had not altered that much since 1970. For all of Connolly’s previous enthusiasm for organised class struggle, in the view of the Provisionals, the 1916 Rising was still essentially ‘based upon the philosophy of Fenianism’.

Political power grew out of the barrel of a gun.

The explanation provided by O’Dwyer, and the republican narrative regarding 1916 generally, tended to leave certain questions unanswered: why, even given the dire circumstances of the times, did Connolly opt for a ‘Fenian’ revolutionary strategy over a Marxist one? O’Dwyer skated rather too easily over the divergence that took place in Connolly’s political outlook, but the enigma that Connolly’s involvement in the 1916 Rising presented was not a ‘problem’ entirely of republicanism’s making. Connolly’s

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57 O’Dwyer, “Not With Words Alone”, p.8.
59 Mao Tsetung, Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1972, p.61.
politics underwent a discernible transformation: from his early incarnation as a socialist propagandist, when he polemised in print while his political campaigns were for the most part conducted in the electoral arena; to his syndicalist period, when he put his primary faith in the workplace struggles of a militant working class; to his final apotheosis as a republican insurgent. Connolly’s association, and sometimes collision, with other political and social forces caused him to re-evaluate his previous standpoints. Connolly’s political position(s) shifted in response to his experience of a very mutable, and sometimes forlorn, struggle. In the particular case of Ireland – for it should be recalled that Connolly spent seven crucial years immersed in the American political environment – he was obliged to address two great political questions: the sovereign status of Ireland and the emerging class consciousness of Irish workers.

During his first sojourn in Ireland, while he was the organiser of the Irish Socialist Republican Party and the editor of its paper, Connolly had reproached certain nationalists for their attitude towards armed struggle.

Ireland occupies a position among the nations of the earth unique in a great variety of its aspects, but in no one particular is this singularity more marked than in the possession of what is known as a physical force party – a party, that is to say, whose members are united upon no one point, and agree upon no single principle, except upon the use of physical force as the sole means of settling the dispute between the people of this country and the governing power of Great Britain.

Connolly derided this elevation of physical force to the level of a defining principle as an instance of putting the cart before the horse, absolutely unique in its imbecility and unparalleled in the history of the world. And yet AP/RN’s Tom O’Dwyer is quite correct when he contends Connolly never rejected armed struggle. Connolly set out for his readers the Socialist Republican conception of the functions and uses of physical force in a popular movement.

We neither exalt it into a principle nor repudiate it as something not to be thought of. Our position towards it is that the use or non-use of force for the realisation of the ideas of progress always has been and always will be determined by the attitude, not of the party of progress, but of the governing class opposed to that party. If the time should

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60 Newsinger, “James Connolly and the Easter Rising”, p.161. It was in America that Connolly became actively with industrial unionism/syndicalism.


63 O’Dwyer, “Not With Words Alone”, p.8.

64 Connolly, “Physical Force in Irish Politics”, p.208.
arrive when the party of progress finds its way to freedom barred by the stubborn greed of a possessing class entrenched behind the barriers of law and order; if the party of progress has indoctrinated the people at large with the new revolutionary conception of society and is therefore representative of the will of a majority of the nation, if it has exhausted all the peaceful means at its disposal for the purpose of demonstrating to the people and their enemies that the new revolutionary ideas do possess the suffrage of the majority; then, but not till then, the party which represents the revolutionary idea is justified in taking steps to assume the powers of government, and in using the weapons of force to dislodge the usurping class or government in possession, and treating its members and supporters as usurpers and rebels against the constituted authorities always have been treated. In other words, Socialists believe that the question of force is of very minor importance; the really important question is of the principles upon which is based the movement that may or may not need the use of force to realise its object.  

Physical force for political ends was therefore acceptable to Connolly as a means of last resort and only with popular support. Connolly emphasized the political value of the expanded franchise.

The ballot-box was given us by our masters for their purpose; let us use it for our own. Let us demonstrate at that ballot-box the strength and intelligence of the revolutionary idea; let us make the hustings a rostrum from which to promulgate our principles; let us grasp the public powers in the interest of the disinherited class ...  

In this early period, and in common with many other socialists in the Second International, Connolly’s political faith was, in the first instance, placed in the potential power of an enfranchised working class.  

In the 1909 re-issue of the pamphlet Erin’s Hope, Connolly’s attitude to physical force remained largely unchanged. Connolly critiqued the belief that the republic should be sought by means of “secret conspiracy alone, to prepare for revolution”. He

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65 Connolly, “Physical Force in Irish Politics”, p.208.
68 “Erin’s Hope” was first published 1897. The text here is from the 1909 edition. Edwards and Ransom remark that the 1909 edition “commands authority as the last published in Connolly’s lifetime and prepared under his direction.” If Connolly had wished to alter his stance on physical force at this time he had the opportunity to do so. See James Connolly, “Erin’s Hope”, in James Connolly: Selected Political Writings, Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (eds.), Grove Press, New York, 1973, p.165.
rejected the idea that "political action was impossible for republicans." Connolly admonished past Irish "revolutionists" for not seeking the widespread support of the people before "taking the field". A revolution”, Connolly asserted, "can only succeed in any country when it has the moral sanction of the people." According to Connolly each previous Irish attempt at insurrection had been doomed to failure because:

Those who were willing to ‘rise’ had no means of knowing how far their aspirations were shared by their fellow-countrymen elsewhere, and lacking confidence in themselves, with the recognized leaders of public opinion against them, the effort ended in disaster.

In order to avoid future defeats Connolly recommended the formation of a political party seeking to give public expression to the republican ideal.” Connolly argued at length for his proposal:

such a party as I speak of, with an avowedly republican programme, would, in its very definiteness and coherence, have immense advantage to recommend it to the consideration and support of practical-minded men. It would prevent the emasculation of our young men by the vaporings of 'constitutional' patriots; it would effectually expose the sham Nationalists, and, let us hope, drive them from political life; it would at every election in which it took part, afford a plebiscite of the people for or against the republic; it would enlist the sympathy of many earnest patriots whose open natures shrink from secret conspiracy; it would ascertain with mathematical accuracy the moment when the majority of the Irish people were ripe for revolution, and it could not be suppressed while representative government was left in Ireland.

By adhering steadily to the policy of pledging every candidate to its full programme, whether they stood for Parliament or local governing bodies, it would insure that when a majority of the Irish people had at the ballot boxes declared in favor of the revolutionary party every soldier of the cause would know that in the fight he was waging, he was not merely one of a numerically insignificant band of malcontents, but a citizen soldier fighting under orders publicly expressed in face of all the world by a majority of his fellow-countrymen. This, I hold to be an eminently practical method of obtaining our end. It would exclude the possibility of our national principles being betrayed in the moment of danger, or compromised in the hour of success to suit the convenience of interested party politicians; it would inspire confidence in the most timid by its recognition of the fact that to counsel rebellion without first obtaining the moral sanction of the people would be an act of criminal folly.

70 Connolly, “Erin’s Hope”, p.169.
which would only end in disaster. It would make Irish republicanism no longer the ‘politics of despair’, but the Science of Revolution.\(^{75}\)

For Connolly, in 1909, the methods of ‘secret conspiracy’ associated with groups like the Irish Republican Brotherhood represented the ‘politics of despair’; Connolly definitively rejected those politics.

By 1916, however, Connolly appeared to have entirely repudiated this position. The creation of a mass republican party that could test the sympathies and resolve of the people at the ballot box seemed to have ‘been put on the long finger’.\(^{76}\) Instead Connolly now found the cause of failure for the ‘Fenian Rising in March, 1867 ... like the United Irishmen in ‘98, and the Young Irelanders in 1848’ in the notion that ‘the leaders had allowed the golden opportunity to slip away’.\(^{77}\) Connolly insisted that, ‘The United Irishmen waited too long, the Young Irelanders waited too long, the Fenians waited too long.’\(^{78}\) The lack of a popular ‘moral sanction’ for these rebellions was no longer an issue; instead the audacious (if imprudent) insurrectionary gesture was to be elevated almost to an end in itself. Connolly declared that ‘generations, like individuals, will find their ultimate justification or condemnation not in what they accomplished but rather in what they aspired and dared to attempt to accomplish.’\(^{79}\) The emphasis was now less on working class emancipation and more on ‘rescuing’ the ‘soul’ of the nation.\(^{80}\) Connolly saw Ireland as immersed in a mire of war-time imperial jingoism, subservience and opportunism. For Connolly, ‘Judged by the record of its Parliamentary Party, its public press, its capitalist class, this generation of Irish men and women has sunk to a lower depth than has yet been reached by any white race under the sun.’\(^{81}\) Ireland’s salvation lay in emulating the ‘marvellous fight ... [of] those who have stood for an independent Ireland’.\(^{82}\) Connolly concluded his article with an ominous reflection on past Irish martyrs:

Is it not an awe-inspiring, but yet glorious thought, that somewhere above the souls of those martyrs whom Ireland gave to the cause of

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\(^{75}\) Connolly, “Erin’s Hope”, pp.170-171.

\(^{76}\) An Irish phrase that means to postpone indefinitely.


\(^{78}\) Connolly, “The Days Of March”.

\(^{79}\) Connolly, “The Days Of March”.

\(^{80}\) Newsinger, “James Connolly and the Easter Rising”, p.170.

\(^{81}\) Connolly, “The Days Of March”.

\(^{82}\) Connolly, “The Days Of March”.
freedom in March are weighing and judging the actions of those who invoke their memories in March, 1916. Shall our souls rest eternally on the heights with them or in the depths with their betrayers?\(^\text{83}\)

The stage was being set for the Rising that was to take place in just over six weeks time.

The notion that insurrection had a redemptive power to regenerate an effete and degraded people was a telling modification in Connolly's thinking. Rather than deriving from Marx, Connolly's new inclination appeared to replicate the postulates of the Fenian founder, James Stephens; Stephens contended that the Irish Republican Brotherhood's greatest achievement had been to maintain the spirit of Irish nationalism by recourse to rebellion, against, if necessary, overwhelming odds. In each succeeding generation, according to Stephens, the willingness of determined republicans to take up arms, the example of their heroic self sacrifice, would act to sustain the character and honour of Irish national identity.\(^\text{84}\) Connolly tended to affirm Stephens' belief when he ‘celebrated’ the actions of the Fenian ‘Manchester Martyrs’:

We honour them because of their heroic souls. ...

The Fenians of Manchester rose superior to all the whines about prudence, caution and restraint, and saw only two of their countrymen struck at for loyalty to freedom, and seeing this, struck back at the enemy with blows that are still resounding through the heart of the world. The echo of those blows has for a generation been as a baptismal dedication to the soul and life of thousands of Irish men and women, consecrating them to the service of freedom.\(^\text{85}\)

The apparent need for an expiatory act of defiance directed against Ireland's subjugation had begun to emerge in Connolly’s politics.

The altered revolutionary imperative that Connolly was now articulating had, it seemed, become imbued with a romantic nationalism that coincided with that of his fellow leader in the Rising, Pádraig Pearse.\(^\text{86}\) Pearse had written passionately in sacral terms of the Irish nation; he articulated a belief “that there is really a spiritual tradition which is the soul of Ireland, the thing which makes Ireland a living nation”.\(^\text{87}\) The

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\(^\text{83}\) Connolly, “The Days Of March”.


\(^\text{86}\) Newsinger, “James Connolly and the Easter Rising”, p.171.

nation, for Pearse, was "not a mere agglomeration of individuals, but a living organic thing, with a body and a soul".\(^{88}\) Pearse imagined that

> The spiritual thing which is the essential thing in nationality ... expresses itself only partially and unworthily in an enslaved nation like Ireland. But the soul of the enslaved and broken nation may conceivably be a more splendid thing than the soul of the great free nation; and that is one reason why the enslavements of old and glorious nations that have taken place so often in history are the most terrible things that have ever happened in the world.\(^{89}\)

In his memorial to the recalcitrant Fenian, O'Donovan Rossa, Connolly opined in a similar vein:

> For slavery is a thing of the soul, before it embodies itself in the material things of the world. I assert that before a nation can be reduced to slavery its soul must have been cowed, intimidated or corrupted by the oppressor. Only when so cowed, intimidated or corrupted does the soul of a nation cease to urge forward its body to resist the imposition of the shackles of slavery; only when the soul so surrenders does any part of the body consent to make truce with the foe of its national existence.\(^{90}\)

Connolly posited that in the past

> The soul of Ireland preached revolution, declared that no blood-letting could be as disastrous as a cowardly acceptance of the rule of the conqueror, nay, that the rule of the conqueror would necessarily entail more blood-letting than revolt against the rule. In fitful moments of spiritual exaltation Ireland accepted that idea.\(^{91}\)

To his great chagrin, however, Connolly lamented that

> such supreme moments passed for the multitude, and the nation as a nation sank again into its slavery, and its sole articulate expression to reach the ears of the world were couched in the fitful accents of the discontented, but spiritless slave — blatant in his discontent, spiritless in his acceptance of subjection as part of the changeless order of things.\(^{92}\)

The antidote to this national ignominy was to be found in the martial spirit of the Irish Citizen Army. Connolly proclaimed that

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\(^{88}\) Pearse, “The Spiritual Nation”, p.305.
\(^{89}\) Pearse, “The Spiritual Nation”, p.302.
\(^{91}\) Connolly, “Why the Citizen Army Honours Rossa”.
\(^{92}\) Connolly, “Why the Citizen Army Honours Rossa”.
The Irish Citizen Army in its constitution pledges its members to fight for a Republican Freedom for Ireland. Its members are, therefore, of the number who believe that at the call of duty they may have to lay down their lives for Ireland, and have so trained themselves that at the worst the laying down of their lives shall constitute the starting point of another glorious tradition – a tradition that will keep alive the soul of the nation. 93

The romantic nationalist Pearse and the socialist republican Connolly appeared to have found an accord. Connolly aimed his Rossa encomium at the ‘mind of every worker’; 94 but it was the rebellious heroism and sacrifice of the few in the Irish Citizen Army that would save ‘the soul of the nation’. Class struggle was replaced by the armed struggle of ‘a respectable minority’. 95 The mass working class ‘weapons’ of ‘the Industrial and Political Organization of the Wage Slaves to conquer their own emancipation’ had been laid aside in favour of the volunteer rifles of a paramilitary squad. 96

In January 1915 Connolly had acknowledged that ‘war may be forced upon a subject race or subject class to put an end to subjection of race, of class, or sex’ and ‘when waged it must be waged thoroughly and relentlessly’. 97 Nevertheless he urged his readership that there should be ‘no delusions’ as to the ‘elevating nature, or civilising methods’ of war. 98 Pádraig Pearse, later that year, while admitting that war was ‘a terrible thing’, extolled the patriotic virtue of fighting for ‘fatherland’. 99

It is good for the world that such things should be done. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields. Such august homage was never before offered to God as this, the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. 100

Connolly responded sharply:

No! We do not believe that war is glorious, inspiring, or regenerating. We believe it to be hateful, damnable, and damning. And the present war upon Germany we believe to be a hell-inspired outrage. Any person, whether English, German, or Irish, who sings the praises of

93 Connolly, “Why the Citizen Army Honours Rossa”.
94 Connolly, “Why the Citizen Army Honours Rossa”.
98 Connolly, “Can Warfare be Civilised?”, p.213.
100 Pearse, “Peace and the Gael”, p.216.
By February 1916 Connolly appeared to have abjured his previous aversion to the sanctifying sacrifice that war was said to offer. In its place was the bleak avowal that deep in the heart of Ireland has sunk the sense of the degradation wrought upon its people – our lost brothers and sisters – so deep and humiliating that no agency less potent than the red tide of war on Irish soil will ever be able to enable the Irish race to recover its self-respect, or establish its national dignity in the face of a world horrified and scandalised by what must seem to them our national apostasy.

Without the slightest trace of irreverence but in all due humility and awe we recognise that of us as of mankind before Calvary it may truly be said:

Without the Shedding of Blood there is no Redemption. ¹⁰²

Again, the fervid perspectives of Pearse and Connolly seemed to have converged.

That Connolly’s class politics had impacted on the thought of Pádraig Pearse was an assertion that was regularly made in the pages of the Provisional’s publications; ¹⁰³ Sinn Féin leader in the Dáil, Caomhghín Ó Caoláin, plainly stated that Pearse was influenced by James Connolly and vice versa.¹⁰⁴ The contention has some validity; Connolly’s thought likely did influence Pearse and other leading figures in the 1916 rebellion. The influence operated in both directions.¹⁰⁵ As much as Pearse absorbed the notion that no class in the nation is entitled to privileges beyond any


¹⁰⁴ “Ireland, republicanism and Sinn Féin”, An Phoblacht/Republican News, Sraith Nua Iml. 26, Uimhir 10, Aibreán (April) 10, 2003, p.12. Note the issue no. (Uimhir) appears to be incorrect as the previous issue number was 13.

¹⁰⁵ This argument was also made by P. Berresford Ellis, A History of the Irish Working Class, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1972, pp. 223-225.
other class” — going on to suggest the desirability of widespread industrial nationalisation in a future sovereign Ireland — so Connolly conceded, at least in his last phase, to a romantic, mystical ideal of the nation not at all in keeping with his previously expressed sentiment that “the Socialist part of Ireland ... is all I care for”. He now seemed to care very much for the nation’s _soul_. Armed revolutionary struggle was no longer viewed by Connolly as the last resort of a mobilised people denied liberation by a reactionary regime; by 1916 insurrection was reconfigured in Connolly’s thought to become the atonement in arms for a national debasement.

In 1916 Connolly joined a republican insurrection conceived of and undertaken in a shroud of conspiracy. The core group that planned and led the Rising, including Pearse, were all members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB); Connolly too likely became a member of the IRB or at least a _member at large_. Marx had regarded Fenianism positively as “being a lower orders movement”; the IRB’s membership was, at least during the 1860s, overwhelmingly working-class. By 1916, however, the complexion and scale of the IRB had changed. It was by then a smaller middle-class organisation that operated in secret through the infiltration of other nationalist oriented groups. IRB members would seek to gain leading positions in selected organisations to manipulate the activities of those groups to republican advantage. P.S. O’Hegarty, historian and a member of the IRB at that time, outlined the _Brotherhood’s_ modus operandi:

> From the Gaelic League, the GAA, the clubs and the literary societies, the IRB recruited slowly and carefully, and began to build a small but effective and formidable organisation behind organisations. It did not look for numbers but it did look for quality. ... The result was the creation of a numerically small but widespread purposeful group of high intelligence and moving under purposeful direction.

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106 Pádraig Pearse, _The Sovereign People_, Whelan and Son, Dublin, 1916, p.4.
107 Pearse, _The Sovereign People_, p.5.
108 Correspondence between James Connolly and John Mullery quoted in C. Desmond Greaves, _The Life and Times of James Connolly_, pp.184-185.
111 Newsinger, _Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain_, p.79.
The groups that were thus penetrated would, it was hoped, bolster any scheme that might be contrived by the IRB.\textsuperscript{113}

Certainly the means described by O’Hegarty resembled closely the conspiratorial practice of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. The Irish Volunteers, the body that would provide the bulk of the rebel combatants during the Rising, quickly came under the influence of the IRB.\textsuperscript{114} At the outbreak of war the Supreme Council of the IRB determined that an insurrection would be launched sometime during the conflict to take advantage of ‘England’s difficulty’. Even with this decision the Rising itself played out as a ‘conspiracy within a conspiracy’. Peare and a circle of IRB militants formed a ‘military committee’ resolved to ensure that a rising would go ahead. Connolly’s own belligerent rhetoric at the time brought about his co-option to the ‘committee’.\textsuperscript{115} This ‘military committee’ did not, however, report back to the IRB’s Supreme Council. Although the Irish Republican Brotherhood’s revised constitution of 1873 declared the organisation’s task to be that of recovering Irish independence by force of arms, it added that insurrection should only be launched with the majority support of the Irish people – a provision intended to prevent the recurrence of disastrous adventures like the Fenian Rising of 1867.\textsuperscript{116} The IRB’s constitutional embargo on precipitate action, still in effect in 1916, appears to have been largely ignored by the conspirators.\textsuperscript{117}

The leaders of the Rising, including Connolly, did not make use of mass agitation to win over the Irish people nor did they seriously agitate for insurrection even among the rank and file of the armed Volunteer militia. Connolly’s ICA was reasonably well primed for action thanks to the martial tone of his polemics but Connolly made no serious attempt to win the main body of the ITGWU to support for the Rising. No sympathetic strike action was sought by Connolly to accompany the armed rebellion. Instead the Rising’s instigators resorted to subterfuge. The Volunteers would be mobilised at Easter under the guise of training manoeuvres; the conspirator’s plan for the Volunteers to occupy public buildings during the Easter exercises, given the likely response of the police and/or the military, would make the Rising a fait accompli.\textsuperscript{118} As part of the deception Volunteer commanders not already privy to the intrigue would be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Newsinger, \textit{Fenanism in Mid-Victorian Britain}, p.79.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ó Broin, \textit{Revolutionary Underground}, p.169.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ó Broin, \textit{Revolutionary Underground}, p.7.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ó Broin, \textit{Revolutionary Underground}, pp.155-156.
\end{itemize}
stamped into support for the Rising by the release of documents claiming to emanate from Dublin Castle ordering the suppression of the Volunteers and the arrest of its leaders. Finally there was also the promise of German arms and assistance for the Rising.¹¹⁹

The conspirator’s preparations were stymied when the Volunteer’s Chief of Staff, Eoin MacNeill – never fully cognizant of the breadth of the conspirator’s plans, suspicious of the authenticity of the ‘Castle documents’ and now aware that the German ship carrying arms for the Rising had been scuttled at the entrance to Cork harbour - countermanded the orders for mobilisation.¹²⁰ Nevertheless the leaders of the Rising determined to go ahead with historic, and for the conspirators (and many others), fatal consequences.¹²¹

―It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness‖:¹²² Marx’s postulate is manifestly applicable to Connolly. The defeat of the ITGWU in the 1913 Lockout, the collapse of the Second International at the start of the World War, the burgeoning horror of that conflict and the looming repression that Connolly feared would be instituted in Ireland as a consequence must all be factored into an understanding of why Connolly would take part in the 1916 nationalist rebellion. Thus far the interpretation offered by AP/RN appears tenable.¹²³ Yet an understanding based solely on Connolly conceding to a ‘politics of despair’ in the dire circumstances of 1916 is not sufficient to completely explain his involvement in the Rising. Connolly had consistently championed the cause of Irish national liberation. From the time of his arrival in Ireland Connolly sought to infuse the already substantial impetus for national autonomy with a socialist aspiration. ‘Advanced nationalists’ were frequently the target audience for Connolly’s socialist proselytising. Connolly saw republicanism as (at least potentially) representative of a ‘genuine’ Irish nationalism that ideally should have been hostile to an imported ‘English’ capitalist order.¹²⁴ For Connolly the real re-conquest of Ireland necessarily

¹²³ See O’Dwyer, “Not With Words Alone”.
implied the redemption of the Irish worker from the slavery of the capitalist system.”

With this understanding Connolly made significant efforts to win republicans to the struggle for socialism in Ireland.

What was lacking in Connolly’s writings, however, was a vigorous analysis of the class forces that underpinned republicanism. Connolly rebuked republicanism for its tendency towards seeking cross-class alliances.

It may be pleaded that the ideal of a Socialist Republic, implying, as it does, a complete political and economic revolution, would be sure to alienate all our middle-class and aristocratic supporters, who would dread the loss of their property and privileges.

What does this objection mean? That we must conciliate the privileged classes in Ireland!

But you can only disarm their hostility by assuring them that in a free Ireland their ‘privileges’ will not be interfered with. That is to say, you must guarantee that when Ireland is free of foreign domination, the green-coated Irish soldiers will guard the fraudulent gains of capitalist and landlord from ‘the thin hands of the poor’ just as remorselessly and just as effectually as the scarlet-coated emissaries of England do today.

On no other basis will the classes unite with you. Do you expect the masses to fight for this ideal?

Connolly clearly perceived the class basis of Ireland’s ‘constitutional nationalists’. Decrying the ‘Home Rule-Liberal alliance’ and its ‘use of the Irish vote against the candidates of the Socialist and Labour Parties’, Connolly recognised that

In so manoeuvring to wean the Irish masses in Great Britain away from their old friends, the Socialist and Labour Clubs, and to throw them into the arms of their old enemies, the Liberal capitalists, the Irish bourgeois politicians were very astutely following their class interests, even while they cloaked their action under the name of patriotism.

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127 Connolly, “Socialism and Nationalism”, pp.122-123.


129 Connolly, Labour in Irish History, p.133.
There were no illusions on Connolly’s part when it came to the Irish Parliamentary Party: the ‘Home Rule party was essentially a capitalist party, inspired solely by a consideration for capitalist interests’.

What Connolly grasped in relation to ‘Home Rule’ nationalists, however, he could not seem to comprehend in the case of republicanism. Connolly contended that when the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League, and made the land struggle the basis of their warfare, they were not only placing themselves in touch once more with those inexhaustible quarries of material interests from which all the great Irish statesmen from St. Laurence O’Toole to Wolfe Tone drew the stones upon which they built their edifice of a militant patriotic Irish organisation, but they were also, consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of labour.

As much as Connolly might exhort republicanism to place itself in touch with the struggles of the dispossessed classes – and in particular to look towards Ireland’s working class as the agents of liberation – what he did not conceive of was that another political route lay open to republicans. Republicanism was able to articulate a seemingly viable alternative to Connolly’s workers’ republic; it proffered a ‘native’ capitalist ideal that would prove, if not overwhelmingly compelling, then at least acceptable to a section of the Irish bourgeoisie which formerly may have supported only ‘Home Rule’. More importantly, from a Marxist point of view, was the actuality that much of the working class could also be reconciled with republicanism’s ‘non-socialist’ nationalist doctrine. With this skewed perspective on republicanism, in the seemingly grim circumstances of 1916 with no apparent possibility of social revolution, Connolly was ideologically ill-equipped to conceive of any immediate alternative to nationalist insurrection and an alliance with republican insurgents.

The involvement of Connolly with the IRB conspirators during the Rising has been rationalised by some historical commentators – including AP/RN’s Tom O’Dwyer – on the basis that Connolly was allied with a relatively ‘progressive’

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section of the radical republican intelligentsia. During the 1913 Lockout many of the figures who would lead the Rising had broadly supported the workers' cause. Pearse launched a blistering attack on the ruthlessness of Dublin's employers and the poverty that was endemic among the city's workers. Eamonn Ceannt, one of the later signatories of the 1916 Proclamation, rebuked Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin, for his condemnation of ITGWU leader James Larkin and the striking Dublin workers. Pearse's tract, *The Sovereign People*, published in 1916, certainly argued for a material basis of freedom; the nation would control material resources to provide for individual freedom and individual happiness. The *Sovereign People*, however, did not argue for the abolition of private property, it did not contain a rigorous understanding of Irish society in class terms and it did not accept any necessity for the leadership of the working class in the national liberation struggle. Pearse's perception of class was abstract; he compared capitalists as a social group to red-headed men or men born on a Tuesday, failing to comprehend the innate power that came from the possession of capital. Instead Pearse applied the far more amorphous concept of the people; the people are the nation and the people, that is, the whole people, must remain sovereign. He hoped that the people would be wise enough to not choose the makers and administrators of their laws on such arbitrary and fantastic grounds as the possession of capital, but beyond such sage counsel Pearse did not go.

Connolly's political bible, however, was less his alliance with the nationalist insurgents of 1916 and more his neglect in organising working class support for the Rising and in adopting the conspiratorial Fenian method of the IRB. Lenin was often cited, not least of all by republicans themselves, in support of the Rising but he remarked upon the Dublin events from a distance and without firm knowledge of the

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139 Pearse, *The Sovereign People*, pp.5-6.
141 Pearse, *The Sovereign People*, pp. 5-6.
details of the insurrection. In 1917, reflecting on the immediate prospect of the Bolshevik’s own seizure of power, he recognized that “[i]f a revolutionary party has no majority in the vanguard of the revolutionary classes and in the country, then there can be no question of insurrection.” In his discussion of the Rising John Newsinger argued that Connolly should have urged patience, should have argued for keeping the movement intact until the situation had turned to their advantage, until the conditions were right for a successful mass challenge to the British Empire. In the circumstances of April 1916 he should have opposed a rising. From a Marxist perspective Newsinger is surely correct. For republicans, however, with no strong sense of the need for class mobilisation, the Rising was easily viewed as an inspirational example of a brave political endeavour.

As ‘progressive’ as they might have been, the politics of Pearse, Ceannt and their Irish Republican brethren were of a nationalist hue and primarily concerned with the nation as a whole and its salvation. By allowing his Marxist politics to be subordinated to the IRB’s organisational model and its romantic and ‘class-blind’ nationalism, Connolly, admittedly inadvertently, was opening the way for the appropriation of his legacy by nationalists and republicans who would follow in the wake of 1916. Connolly’s tragic death at the hands of a British firing squad robbed him of any opportunity of politically ‘reconstructing’ himself as a revolutionary Marxist in the rebellious tumult of 1917 to 1923. Regrettably some of Ireland’s subsequent national ‘revolutionary’ leaders were far less ‘progressive’ than the ‘martyrs of 1916’. Republicanism was not, as Connolly surmised, an inherently ‘anti-capitalist’ doctrine; it was not intrinsically a working-class movement; and, as much as Connolly might exhort republicanism to do so, it did not necessarily premise the working class as the key agents in the process of liberation. Although republicanism could (and did) appeal to large numbers of workers, the final cast of the Irish Republic when it was established –

145 Newsinger, Rebel City, pp.152-153. I generally concur with Newsinger’s thesis regarding Connolly’s political transformation and his participation in the Rising.
147 It is extremely uncertain whether some of those executed in 1916 would have retained their aura of ‘progressiveness’ had they survived to participate in the later national liberation campaign and subsequent Irish administrations.
as a liberal and capitalist regime – demonstrated the hegemony of the Irish bourgeoisie in the new state’s formation. The workers’ republic would have to wait.

Republicanism harboured an elite _insurrectionism_ that did not seek mass mobilisation but instead relied on the sacrifice of a courageous and committed minority to offer a moral/political exemplar to the _nation_.\footnote{Newsinger, _Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain_, p.73.} Armed struggle had for some time occupied a pivotal place in the republican schema; it was a powerful element in the republican tradition of resistance and a particular rendering of Connolly was mobilised to support it. It would, however, be quite wrong to conceive of all republicans as hidebound ideologues, unbending and stubborn, heedless of the political and social circumstances unfolding around them. There was a genuine belief that the republican campaign could be successful. A republican military campaign had, it seemed, brought about the expulsion of British forces from twenty six Irish counties in 1921; in 1972 republicans had seen the fall of the Stormont parliament and credited their own activity with its demise.\footnote{Stormont Castle was the site of the unionist dominated parliament which administered Northern Ireland. It was prorogued by the British government in March 1972 and direct rule from London was introduced.} Joe Cahill, _Leader of the Provisional IRA_, assured republicans that we should look on the year 1972 as the year of freedom.\footnote{Joe Cahill interviewed in _Spearhead, Ráiteas Nuacht_, (news statement) published by [Provisional] Sinn Féin, Kevin Street, Dublin, Nollaig (December), circa 1971/72.} In keeping with a Fenian tradition it was the Provisional IRA that would deliver that victory; Cahill proclaimed that [t]he Provos are the force in Ireland today.\footnote{“The Provos are the Force in Ireland To-day”, _An Phoblacht, The Republic, Official Organ of the Republican Movement_, Iml. 3, Uimh. 3, Máirt (March), 1972, p.3.} Two years later a military victory by the Provisional IRA was still anticipated by much of the republican movement.\footnote{Brendan O’Brien, _The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin_, O’Brien Press, Dublin, 1999. p.107.} By the mid-1970s, however, a re-evaluation was taking place among some republicans. Gerry Adams described

> a situation of deadlock in which Óglaigh na hÉireann [the Provisional IRA] were able to block the imposition of a British solution but were unable to force the British to withdraw ... The IRA had succeeded in bringing down Stormont and they had promised victory in the form of British withdrawal. But victory had not come and the troops were still on the streets.\footnote{Adams, _The Politics of Irish Freedom_, p.58.}
In these circumstances Adams conceived that there was a desperate need for republicanism to rebuild a sense of political direction. For some considerable period thereafter, while the Provisional’s publicly celebrated their continuity with the courageous men and women of 1916 and still defended the use of physical force as an appropriate means to achieve the Republic, a group among the leadership was beginning to consider alternative routes to their political ends. The version of Connolly so often invoked to legitimise armed struggle would need to be re-interpreted.

The privileging of armed struggle was concomitant with the indifference shown by republicans towards political organising. Gerry Adams observed of the early part of the republican campaign that Sinn Féin was by and large perceived, and was in reality, a poor second cousin to the IRA. This was not only how we were seen by supporters and opponents; in many ways it was also how we viewed ourselves. According to Adams, the republican struggle was at the time entirely dominated by the IRA. Abstentionism and the lack of an electoral strategy had their effect, but more tellingly Sinn Féin was in many ways a victim of the aversion to politics which marked republicanism at this time. Sinn Féin was eclipsed by the IRA, and there was little appetite for political work of the more conventional kind.

The realisation that a political response was as necessary as a military one dawned slowly. In 1975 the Leadership of the Republican Movement sent greetings and good wishes to their fellow Republicans of Sinn Féin assembled in the Árd Fheis. The Leadership’s message defined the relationship of army and party:

Óglaigh na hÉireann ... spearheads the allegiance of the Irish people to the sovereign Republic. The role of Sinn Féin is to assist that spearhead, to back it on every occasion; whether it be as a protest movement in the streets or a political movement in the council chamber, or assisting in a financial drive for the prisoner's dependents, its role is to assist and inspire others to assist.

156 Adams, Before the Dawn, p.263.
Sinn Féin was clearly identified by the ‘Leadership of the Republican Movement’ as the ‘support’ group for the army; the Provisional IRA remained the cutting edge of the struggle.

During this period, while detained by the British authorities and writing under the pseudonym, ‘Brownie’, Adams in a series of articles began to suggest that we as republicans should be engaged in building the elements of alternative administration – alternative, that is, to the sectarian, colonial British administration.” The new structures envisaged by Adams would include street committees, ‘people’s taxis in place of the bus service, [and a] people’s militia in place of the RUC”.

On one level Adams’ ‘political direction’ was predicated on fostering a radical popular ‘grassroots’ involvement in community affairs, but Adams was also seeking a ‘more durable way of quantifying’ the support for Sinn Féin.

By 1979 Gerry Adams, now Vice-President of Sinn Fein, was beginning to gradually redefine the republican agenda. Speaking at the Bodenstown commemoration, Adams declared that

We stand for an Ireland, free, united, socialist and Gaelic.
We contend that the realisation of these objectives and the solution to our many problems, lies within the re-establishment of the Republic declared in 1916. It cannot be fully re-established by military means ...

Adams proposed a political initiative to augment the armed campaign:

Today’s circumstances and our objectives dictate the need for the building of an agitational struggle in the twenty-six counties, an economic resistance movement, linking up Republicans with other sections of the working class.
It needs to be done now because our most glaring weakness to date lies in our failure to develop revolutionary politics and to build a strong political alternative to so-called constitutional politics.

The _cause of Ireland’, it seemed, would become _the cause of labour_. Adams, however, was not yet ready to ardently advance a fully fledged non-paramilitary

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159 Adams, _Before the Dawn_, p.248.
160 Adams, _Before the Dawn_, p.248.
161 Adams, _Before the Dawn_, p.263.
162 “Revolutionary politics needed to back up military gains”, [Bodenstown oration 1979, Gerry Adams, Vice-President of Sinn Féin], _An Phoblacht/Republican News_, Sraith Iml. 1, Uimhir 22, Meitheamh (June) 23, 1979, p.6.
163 “Revolutionary politics needed to back up military gains”, p.6.
campaign. In arguing for the political shift Adams skillfully invoked the radical authority of Connolly (and an array of republican martyrs') while maintaining recognition of the armed struggle's efficacy:

The teachings of Lalor, of Connolly, MacSwiney, Mellows, Pearse and Theobold Wolfe Tone, updated if needs be to suit today's conditions, are the teachings of the Republican Movement.

We must implement those teachings. There is still much work to be done. It is only when we have implemented them that we will be able to say: VICTORY TO THE IRA, VICTORY TO THE PEOPLE.\(^{165}\)

Adams' entreaty appeared to have an effect. In less than a year, as part of its annual Easter statement, "the Leadership of the Republican Movement" had seemingly come to concur with the direction proposed by the Sinn Féin Vice-President:

Politically ... the movement has advanced. There is a general realisation of the need not only to build on IRA victories but for our movement to become the voice of all the oppressed people throughout Ireland. We urge all our supporters to embrace the small struggles going on in the community around them. Just as Pearse embraced the cultural struggle and as Connolly led Labour, so we too must tie together all aspects of nationalism and socialism, and all strands of rural and urban discontent into a surging wave of Republicanism.\(^{166}\)

The Provisionals seemed to be discovering that politics' could be the continuation of the struggle by other means.

The electoral success of Bobby Sands and other republican hunger strikers in 1981 created a greater enthusiasm among republicans for a concerted effort to win support at the ballot box. Gerry Adams recalled that prior to the hunger strike we had been planning a slow build-up of electoral intervention, but we were impelled very rapidly into an instant, ill-prepared and insufficiently considered electoral strategy.\(^{167}\)

Adams and the core of people" with whom he worked continued to hone their approach to elections;\(^{168}\) he recounted that by 1986, our leadership put a proposal to the annual Ard Fheis for an end to abstention in the South. ... I came to be convinced that abstentionism towards the Irish parliament – the Dáil – had to go."\(^{169}\)

The effort to have abstentionism overturned, perhaps not surprisingly considering the Provisional's own origins, faced obstinate resistance from within the

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\(^{165}\) "Revolutionary politics needed to back up military gains", p.6.


\(^{167}\) Adams, The Politics of Irish Freedom, p.86.

\(^{168}\) Adams, Hope and History, pp.44-45.

\(^{169}\) Adams, Hope and History, p.45.
party. Two of the most prominent abstentionists were former Sinn Féin President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and former party Vice President Dáithí O’Conaill. Adams described the intensity of the debate: “It was a deeply emotional issue. Words and accusations like ‘traitors’, ‘betrayed’, ‘collaborators’ and ‘sell-out’ began to be thrown at those arguing for a change.” In his presidential address to the Árd Fheis Adams again invoked Connolly to validate the new proposed course and head off the indictment of the traditionalists:

no generation of republicans could or should ever merely absorb the teaching of the previous generations. Those who were successful in the past in advancing the republican cause, even by one inch, updated and modernised the teaching and experiences of their predecessors. This is what Lalor did, what Pearse did, what Connolly did – and it is what we have to do also.

Adams achieved the necessary two-thirds majority required to alter the Sinn Féin constitution. Ó Brádaigh responded by leading his followers out to form Republican Sinn Féin. AP/RN reported that “the 1986 Ard-Fheis is over and with it ends the long-standing abstentionist policy held by Sinn Fein in respect to Leinster house.”

The new group, Republican Sinn Féin, had no intention of abandoning abstention or armed struggle. The judgement of those who had broken with the Provisional faction was that “Free State Sinn Féin … [had] decided to abandon all pretence of Republicanism”. Republican Sinn Féin sought to preserve what they saw as a ‘true’ republicanism; a republicanism that enshrined abstentionism and possessed an unalloyed commitment to armed struggle. There was, therefore, no need to reconstruct ‘a Connolly’ different from that with which the Provisionals had originally started with in the early 1970s. Connolly remained for RSF a republican warrior/saint and the 1916 Rising continued to occupy a definitive place in RSF’s historical and political understanding. For Republican Sinn Féin, “the men and women of 1916 made it abundantly clear that in the final analysis foreign rule could not be tolerated in

170 Adams, *Hope and History*, pp.45-47. Both Brádaigh and O’Conaill had opposed the dropping of the Éire Nua federalist policy in 1983 and both men would leave the party as a result of the over-turning of abstention to form Republican Sinn Féin.
171 Adams, *Hope and History*, p.45.
173 Adams, *Hope and History*, p.47.
175 “Swallowing a British Oath”, *Saoirse, Irish Freedom*, Uimhir 22, Feabhra (February) 1989, p.1. ‘Free State Sinn Féin’ was a derogatory term adopted by RSF to describe ‘Provisional’ Sinn Féin.
Ireland and that Irish people would always be justified in rising up and resisting”.\(^ {176}\) Connolly and the 1916 pantheon were called upon to support the continued necessity of the paramilitary campaign.

Pearse, Connolly and the other leaders decided that only by striking out in a physical and determined fashion for self-determination would the British Empire take notice, and the Irish people gain the courage and insight to see beyond the servility in which they lived under occupation.\(^ {177}\)

At RSF’s 2001 commemoration of the 1916 Rising veteran republican Niall Fagan left his audience in no doubt; \textit{Saoirse}, the RSF’s monthly publication, reported -“[H]e much applause he told the crowd that armed resistance was the way and the means of Pearse and Connolly’.”\(^ {178}\) Connolly and Pearse became part of the contested ideological ground of the republican adversaries; the supporters of RSF were told to -“[r]emember the Provos are not following in the footsteps of Pearse and Connolly but in the footsteps of Éamon de Valera”\(^ {179}\).

Republican Sinn Féin might have had pretensions towards radicalism but the group’s doctrine overall tended towards stasis, even nostalgia. \textit{Éire Nua}, the federalist policy that had been dropped by ‘Provisional’ Sinn Féin in 1982, was reclaimed by Republican Sinn Féin.\(^ {180}\) The policy continues as one of the main elements of RSF’s political platform, along with the accompanying social and economic policy, \textit{Saol Nua} (which was ‘relaunched’ by the group in 2004).\(^ {181}\) Curiously, however, for a group so diligent in asserting its ‘continuity’ with the republican past, the RSF and its ‘fellow-travellers’ in the Continuity IRA\(^ {182}\) could still bristle at claims of ‘conservatism’.

\textit{Saoirse} reported that a Continuity IRA (CIRA) spokesperson

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\(^ {179}\) “Let ‘Resistance’ be the watchword”, \textit{Saoirse, Irish Freedom – The Voice of the Republican Movement}, Uimhir 207, Iúil (July), 2004, p.8. De Valera was anathema to RSF as he was the founder of the Fianna Fáil political party and had entered the ‘Free State’ Dáil.


\(^ {182}\) Republican Sinn Féin regularly denies that it is the ‘political wing’ of the Continuity IRA. See “RSF not a ‘political wing’”, \textit{Saoirse, Irish Freedom – The Voice of the Republican Movement}, Uimhir 194, Meitheamh (June), 2003, p.2 and “RSF has no military wing”, \textit{Saoirse, Irish Freedom – The Voice of the
denied that CIRA was a conservative, right-wing organisation. ‘That’s absolute rubbish. There is nothing in our statements to indicate that. We stand by the ideas of James Connolly. We demand a secular Ireland. The conservative fuddy-duddys are now with the Provos’.  

Conservative or otherwise, the RSF portrayal of Connolly as the ‘gallant martyr of 1916‘ was a theme that retained its ‘continuity‘.

Despite the castigation of RSF, for ‘Provisional‘ Sinn Féin the foray into the electoral arena did not mean the immediate abandonment of armed struggle (or indeed of abstentionism, which still applied to seats won in the British parliament). As early as 1981, Danny Morrison, Sinn Féin Director of Publicity and close associate of Adams, had signalled a ‘two-tier‘ approach that would combine armed struggle with the electoral contest. At the party’s Árd Fheis Morrison conjured a new maxim: ‘Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone object if, with a ballot paper in this hand, and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?’

To allay any disquiet that Morrison’s proposal might have caused, AP/RN reassured Provisional supporters that there would be ‘ballots and bombs‘; ‘Electoral tactics [would] complement the armed struggle‘.

The ‘armalite and ballot box‘ strategy articulated by Morrison was – albeit with changing emphases – to remain in place right up until at least the 1997 Provisional IRA ceasefire. By the mid-1980s, however, confidential overtures were being made by Adams to open a dialogue with other nationalist parties in Ireland with the ultimate aim of finding some form of negotiated settlement to the conflict in Northern Ireland. After 1986 the leading cohort of republicans around Gerry Adams in Sinn Féin had gained the political ascendancy in the Provisional section of the republican movement and the course would be increasingly away from a reliance on armed struggle towards negotiation and electoralism. In 1998, soon after the signing of the Good Friday

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186 The PIRA’s 1996 Canary Wharf bombing can be seen as a means of asserting the Provisional’s relevance in regard to the ‘peace process’ negotiations. Within weeks of the bombing all-party talks had been resumed.

Agreement, Adams asserted — have always made it clear that while our goals and principles must not change, our strategic objectives, strategies and tactics must be constantly reviewed and rooted in objective reality.” The new reality was that the Provisional movement would now be about ballots without bombs. The negotiated end of armed struggle, however, refocussed attention on the political content, the ‘goals and principles’, of Provisional republicanism.

The IRSP meanwhile underwent its own travails. From the moment of its formation the IRSP was plunged into armed feuding with the Official faction. There was some thought among the Official leadership that the new group could (and should) be immediately wiped out but the IRSP (or at least its armed cohort) showed itself to be quite willing and able to respond; the Officials’ Sean Garland was shot six times outside his Dublin home, an attack believed to be the work of IRSP-sympathetic paramilitaries. The attacks took victims on both sides. The leading figure in the IRSP Seamus Costello was assassinated in October 1977. Costello was described by Gerry Adams as ‘an extremely competent leader and a formidable personality’.

Perhaps the IRSP’s greater loss, however, was that of its initial ‘star’ recruit Bernadette McAliskey. McAliskey (nee Devlin) was a socialist, one of the founders of the ‘People’s Democracy’ group and had been a leading activist in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. In 1969 McAliskey was elected to the Westminster parliament and participated in Derry’s ‘Battle of the Bogside’ disturbances after which she received a nine month prison term for incitement to riot. Not necessarily adverse to violence for political ends McAliskey’s departure from the IRSP was, however, provoked by the reluctance of Costello to subordinate the armed activity of the Irish National Liberation Army to the political direction of the party. McAliskey theorized that

The building of a working-class movement requires mass organisation on an open basis, with decisions being reached by rational argument and full discussion, policy coming from the rank and file and being reflected by the leadership. Because of its clandestine and militaristic nature, participation in the [republican] Movement demanded the

190 Adams, Before the Dawn, p.245.
191 Adams, Before the Dawn, p.245.
exact opposite. Since the survival of the organisation, the safety, at times, of its members, depended on personal loyalty, secrecy, unquestioning acceptance of directives from above, it was virtually impossible to envisage the development of a democratic mass organisation from within.\textsuperscript{193}

McAliskey's analysis echoed that which Connolly had put forward in 1909: secret conspiracy could not be relied upon to prepare for revolution.\textsuperscript{194}

McAliskey was not heeded. The Republican Socialists tended to towards Connolly's later _insurrectionist_ position; just as had occurred in 1916 the IRSP/INLA's obsession with the intrigue necessary for an armed struggle was an obstacle to mass political organisation and became a substitute for it. As we have seen Connolly's attitude to armed action underwent a transformation prior to 1916 and it was Connolly's involvement in armed conspiracy that ultimately cost him his life. In a macabre historical re-enactment the political bloodletting of the Irish Republican Socialist Movement (the IRSP/INLA) not only took the life of its founder and most prominent leader but the ongoing violence had the effect of tearing the tendency apart to leave it, by the 1990s, a political wreck. The tradition of physical force republicanism had determined the direction that the Republican Socialists would take. In the absence of an authentic and sustainable mass campaign the logic of armed action and counter-action became the primary _political_ activity by default. As it announced a ceasefire in 1998 the INLA admitted at that point the _conditions for armed struggle do not exist_.\textsuperscript{195} The statement continued: _at times our actions as a liberation army fell far short of what they should have been ... For this we as republicans, as socialists and as revolutionaries offer a sincere and heartfelt apology._\textsuperscript{196} The most overt propagators of _republican socialism_ had called an end to the armed struggle. In later attempting to pick up the political pieces the Republican Socialist Movement (re)affirmed its desire to return to Connolly and the best ideas of the Irish and international left\textsuperscript{.197}

\textsuperscript{193} Quoted in Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, _INLA: Deadly Divisions_, Torc publishers, Dublin, 1994, p.86. Originally published as 'Revolutionary republicanism?' in _Hibernia_, 31 October, 1975.

\textsuperscript{194} Connolly, ‘Erin’s Hope’, p.169.

\textsuperscript{195} “INLA declares ceasefire”, _An Phoblacht/Republican News_, Sraith Nua Iml 21, Uimhir 34, Lúnasa (August) 27, 1998, p.5.

\textsuperscript{196} “INLA declares ceasefire”, _An Phoblacht/Republican News_, Sraith Nua Iml 21, Uimhir 34, Lúnasa (August) 27, 1998, p.5.

The emerging peace process introduced a markedly different invocation of Connolly’s perceived legacy. Prominent Provisionals were eager to reassure supporters that the new strategy was not a deviation from republican doctrine. The 1996 Easter Rising remembrance ceremonies provided the platform for “ex-POW and Sinn Féin delegate to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation Martin Ferris” to state that

Irish republicanism today is no different to the struggle of Pearse and Connolly in 1916. They fought for national self-determination, for freedom, justice and equality. They did not fight and die for a partitioned Ireland. Nor did they die so that thousands of our people would be forced to emigrate or that 450000 of our people as there is today would be unemployed. …

It is only by the achievement of a 32-County socialist republic will we have paid our final and complete tribute to all who have fought and died in the struggle for Irish freedom.198

The paramilitary campaign of the Provisional IRA was still ongoing in 1996 but the shift towards a negotiated settlement was clear. Rita O’Hare, Sinn Féin Director of Publicity (succeeding Danny Morrison), addressing the 1996 Wolfe Tone commemoration, epitomised how republican tradition could be fashioned to serve the organisation’s altered means. Demonstrating Connolly’s hegemony in republican discourse O’Hare invoked Connolly to extol Tone:

James Connolly wrote of Wolfe Tone:

_We who hold his principles believe that any movement which would successfully grapple with the problem of national freedom must draw its inspiration not from the mouldering records of a buried past, but from the glowing hopes of a living present, the vast possibilities of the mighty future._

The hopes of the Irish people for peace are still glowing.199

Connolly was now enlisted to champion the hopes for peace rather than to justify the morality (and efficacy) of ‘physical force’. O’Hare quoted Connolly again:

_We are told to imitate Wolfe Tone, but the greatness of Wolfe Tone lay in the fact that he imitated nobody._ [Connolly quote]

[O’Hare continues] Tone was an innovator and a risk taker. Republicans of today have shown our ability to take risks also. Our peace strategy has been fraught with risk, but we have persisted with it and we must continue to take risks for peace.200

199 “Tide of history is with the forces for change”, _An Phoblacht/Republican News_, Sraith Nua Iml. 19, Uimhir 26, Meitheamh (June) 27, 1996, pp.10-11.
200 “Tide of history is with the forces for change”, pp.10-11.
Connolly’s advice to forego the imitation of past republican icons seemed now to be applied to his own ideology; James Connolly’s “revolutionary impulse” would not be imitated.\textsuperscript{201}

The Provisional IRA announced a ceasefire in July 1997. The ‘Good Friday Agreement’ was signed the next year establishing the framework for agreed political institutions in Northern Ireland – in particular the Northern Assembly. Even with the consolidation of the ‘peace process’, however, the celebration of 1916 and Connolly’s role in it did not disappear from the Provisionals’ rhetoric. During the commemoration celebrations of the year 2000 Adams stressed the importance of the Proclamation drawn up by the rebel leaders of the Easter Rising, saying that they had struck out not just at political injustice, but also for economic and social equality for all”.\textsuperscript{202} He urged the crowds to take a more proactive stance to achieve the aims of equality and justice which the rebels of 1916 had set out to claim for the nationalist population of Ireland.\textsuperscript{203} Connolly’s aspirations (as represented in a truncated form by the Proclamation) were still invoked but in the changed political environment Sinn Féin spokespeople were no longer obliged to use Connolly or 1916 as an occasion to legitimise ongoing republican armed struggle. The focus of the 1916 commemorations was now far more on the egalitarian inference of the Proclamation and Sinn Féin’s promise that it would be the party to “build an Ireland of equals”.\textsuperscript{204}

Adams’ presidential address to the 2003 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis declared that “Our strategy … is about bringing an end to physical force republicanism, by creating an alternative way to achieve democratic and republican objectives.”\textsuperscript{205} The party had definitively moved away from the political primacy of armed struggle but it also seemed that, despite the rhetoric, Sinn Féin had moderated the previous enthusiasm for mass mobilisation as well. Of course Connolly was still indispensible for bestowing a radical aura on the republican agenda. Adams had once proclaimed “I am proud to be a subversive”\textsuperscript{206} but leaving aside “the statements of platform oratory”\textsuperscript{207} Sinn Féin no

\textsuperscript{202} “There will be Change – Adams”, \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 23, Uimhir 18, Aibreán (April) 27, 2000, p.10.
\textsuperscript{203} “There will be Change – Adams”, p.10.
\textsuperscript{205} “Building an Ireland of Equals”, pp.14-15.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Sraith Nua Iml. 21, Uimhir 18, Bealtaine (May) 7, 1998, p.1.
longer appeared in any meaningful sense as ‘disturbers of the political peace’. The ‘revolutionary republicans’ of Sinn Féin were by the turn of the 21st century predominantly concerned with maximising the party’s electoral support in order to achieve representation in the Dáil Éireann and in the Northern Assembly.

It could be argued (and indeed they would likely argue it themselves) that Sinn Féin is the modern manifestation of the party — with an avowedly republican programme” that was proposed by Connolly. Reflecting on the future of Sinn Féin after the Good Friday Agreement former Provisional IRA member and now staunch critic of the party, Anthony McIntyre, commented that ‘Sinn Féin as the expression of state republicanism and a party of votes as distinct from a party of ideas will move to straddle the middle ground.’ McIntyre’s prediction appears to have been borne out. Despite maintaining that it still aspires to a thirty-two county democratic socialist republic what is missing from Sinn Féin’s programme is Connolly’s solid socialist ideals. For Connolly the ‘act of social emancipation requires the conversion of the land and instruments of production from private property into the public or common property of the entire nation.’ But Connolly went further and insisted that

This necessitates a social system of the most absolute democracy, and in establishing that necessary social system the working class must grapple with every form of government which could interfere with the most unfettered control by the people of Ireland of all the resources of their country.

Neither the Dáil Éireann nor the Northern Assembly have emerged as governmental institutions much inclined towards ‘absolute democracy’ (in Connolly’s sense) or the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. Beyond speechifying, either from the opposition benches of the Dáil or from the office-bearer positions held in the North, Sinn Féin have done little actively to push a thoroughgoing socialist agenda. Indeed in the recent past Sinn Féin, as a governmental ‘partner’ in the Northern

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207 Connolly, “The Men We Honour”.
212 Connolly, “Erin’s Hope”, p.189.
Assembly, has presided over cuts to welfare spending, school closures and increases in household charges.\textsuperscript{214} Sinn Féin has also shown little enthusiasm for organising the working class (or any other class) in an oppositional _extra-parliamentary_ campaign that might challenge the political system. First and foremost Sinn Féin participates in entirely _constitutional_ politics: „The party is now part and parcel of government in Northern Ireland, supporting the criminal justice system [and] the police”.\textsuperscript{215} In the south the party engages conventionally in the electoral contest and anticipates an eventual role in governing the state. The volte face from elite paramilitaries to elite politicians appears complete.

Sinn Féin is not the first political party to have tempered its formerly espoused radicalism; the Provisional IRA is also not the first paramilitary group to lay down its arms to allow _constitutional_ politics to proceed. Republicanism is, however, marked out by the malleability it has found in one of its chief doctrinal luminaries - James Connolly. Connolly’s writings do suggest a variety of possible interpretations and Connolly himself is partly _responsible_ for the sometimes contradictory messages that can be taken from them. Connolly’s politics changed significantly during his lifetime; his basic capitulation to insurrectionary republicanism in 1916 has forever _problematised_ his previous commitment to mass agitation and working class self-emancipation. As a Marxist Connolly did not offer a vigorous class-based critique of republicanism; he assumed too uncritically that republicans represented a congenial constituency for the socialist project and he frequently courted its adherents, seeking their support for the workers‘ republic. Connolly’s ideological idiosyncrasy made it less difficult for republicanism to appropriate his legacy after 1916.

The interpretations offered by republicans of Connolly have understandably been _coloured_ by the political (and paramilitary) dictates of the republican campaign at any given moment. Connolly has been used to serve the needs of those wishing to legitimise the armed struggle; he has also been invoked to support the transformation to _peaceful_ politics. The rendering of Connolly has, at times, obviously been employed mainly for effect among republicanism’s followers; Connolly has also occasionally been presented with what appears as a cynical disregard for political and/or historical authenticity. Connolly, despite any theoretical flaws he might have had in relation to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Sam Smyth, “Sinn Féin’s forked-tongue approach just doesn’t cut it”, \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, 17 May 2012.}
\footnote{“The handshake and the wider context”, [editorial], \textit{The Irish Times}, 26 June, 2012.}
\end{footnotes}
republicanism, offered a compelling socialist vision for an independent Ireland. Leading republicans had no serious intention of ‘imitating’ that vision but some republicans took very seriously Connolly’s ideal. The revolutionary element of Connolly’s political legacy precipitated debate within the republican factions as to the political orientation and direction of republicanism itself. In the next chapter we will examine some of the debates and discussions of Connolly that have occurred inside the republican factions as to which ‘Connolly‘ would point the way forward for republicanism.
Chapter 5

Connolly, Catholicism and Left Republicanism

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.

Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*.

Connolly’s hegemonic position in the republican discourse of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is clear. He was invoked even by republicans who articulated a pronounced distrust of Marxism and ‘extreme socialism’; for a younger generation of republicans, like Bobby Sands, Connolly was an inspiration. Part of the explanation for this has already been explored: after 1916 Connolly had iconic status among republicans as one of the martyrs of the Easter Rising; his socialist politics could appeal to an oppressed and disadvantaged people; these politics were made more congenial by Connolly’s own sympathetic attitude to a republicanism that he saw as inherently inclined towards anti-capitalism. There are, however, other elements of Connolly’s thought and republicanism’s response to it which require further scrutiny. Connolly’s conciliatory attitude towards religion tended to make his politics amenable to republicans who were influenced by Catholicism and supported, in some respects, a socially conservative agenda. In contrast to the attraction of the ‘Catholic Connolly’, for other republicans there was a different allure, that of Connolly’s revolutionary socialist politics. Republicanism did not exist in a social vacuum and as society (North and South) became more secular so the political emphases of republicanism also changed. Particularly in the debate regarding republicanism’s political direction as it entered the era of the ‘peace process’ republicans summoned Connolly to support their differing perspectives. These aspects of Connolly’s legacy will be examined, as will be the uses to which they were put by an often disparate yet still dynamic republicanism.

Republicanism frequently affirmed its secular and non-sectarian political character. Des O’Hagan from the Official faction declared that –Republicanism is
separatist, it is secular, it is socialist, and it is internationalist.” Republicans quoted the 1916 Proclamation to give credence to their declared secularism and religious tolerance:

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal right and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

The passage was designed by the Proclamation’s authors to reassure the Protestant community of the Rising’s non-sectarian intent (although it would seem unlikely that Protestant unionists would be much impressed). For the Irish Republican Socialist Party the “democratic settlement” outlined in the Proclamation meant that “such a democracy excludes any acceptance of a Protestant or a Catholic nation.” The IRSP’s “democratic solution to the National Question” would mean a secular united Ireland. Phil Flynn writing for An Phoblacht/Republican News argued that “Irish Republicanism has not been a static concept but a living, developing and growing ideology.” Again with reference to the Proclamation he posited that by 1916 Irish republicanism embraced five principle elements:

- separatism …
- non-sectarianism …
- secularism: to limit the control of the Churches to things spiritual, and to treat everyone equal before God;
- nationalism: promotion of language, culture and national identity, and the restoration of the Irish way of life.
- And socialism: the ownership of Ireland for the people of Ireland, and the subordination of private property to public right and welfare.

Flynn’s formulation of secularism, “to limit the control of the Churches to things spiritual” came directly from Connolly (as we shall see). Gerry Adams professed resolutely that “Republicanism is nothing if it is not resolutely anti-sectarian.” Adams

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2 From the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916.
4 “The Orange Monster”, p.1. The IRSP blame sectarian division in Northern Ireland on British conquest, a common republican assertion.
expressed his personal political preference: “I happen to support, although I am a Catholic, the creation of a secular society”.

Secular or not, republicanism has drawn much of its support from Catholic communities, North and South. The republican doctrine was marked by the devotional allegiance of its members and the movement’s nationalism was intertwined with the Catholic faith. Adding socialism, as Connolly had done, “threw an ideological spanner in the works”. Constance Markiewicz had observed, “the majority of the people of Ireland are very Catholic and many of them shudder at the word ‘Socialist’”, many Irish republicans shared the faith and the fear that Markiewicz alluded to. The gathering influence of socialism in republican ranks in the 1930s was viewed by a section of the movement with suspicion. This cohort considered socialism to be a foreign contaminant and contrary to Catholic doctrine. A list of later republicans would follow Markiewicz in trying to reconcile (or repudiate) Connolly’s socialism element with a Catholic predisposition.

In the 1950s the leadership of Sinn Féin were favourably inclined towards the social teachings of the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and a political programme was drafted to embody its principles. Sinn Féin’s new constitution and policies were vetted by sympathetic clergy to ensure that it was in line with Catholic precepts. After the split in the republican movement the Provisionals’ *Éire Nua* retained the hallmarks of the 1950s programme. Among Sinn Féin’s stated objectives in 1971 was “the establishment of a reign of social justice based on Christian principles by a just distribution and effective control of the nation’s wealth and resources”. The phraseology came directly from the constitution of two decades previously. As we have seen the “distributism” that was a part of the *Éire Nua* policy had been articulated mainly by Catholic social theorists. Its anti-capitalist form was deemed as compatible with Catholicism. Providence, so it was claimed, guided the republican cause; *An

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Phoblacht’s columnist, ‗Freeman’, referring to the text of the Proclamation (and demonstrating the elasticity of that document), affirmed that

Sinn Féin is mindful that the Irish revolution was proclaimed ‘in the name of God’ and that its first leaders, 56 years ago this Easter, saw their actions as an imitation – in the concrete circumstances of early 20th century Ireland – of the liberating and redemptive actions of Jesus Christ.  

Connolly and his fellows had, it seemed, become Christ-like. Even the apparently left moving Official faction on occasion acknowledged the religious depth of feeling that could exist among its constituency. Cathal Goulding attempted to reassure the more devout that, ‘In the brutal world of today with its wars of exploitation, with its submergence of the human spirit to serve profit, the only Christian attitude is to stand to the left’.  

The religious fidelity of the Provisional IRA’s first Chief-of-Staff, Seán MacStiofáin, and his animosity towards what he saw as the infiltration of ‘Marxist atheism’ into the republican movement has been discussed in Chapter Two; that Roy Johnston’s criticism of the customary reciting of the rosary at republican commemorations so raised MacStiofáin’s ire and caused ‘indignation’ among republicans in Cork and south Kerry was indicative of the depth of Catholic feeling in the movement. MacStiofáin was not anomalous among the early leaders of the Provisional faction. Ruairi Ó Brádaigh was a practicing Catholic (although very critical of the Catholic hierarchy’s condemnation of the Provisionals). For many republicans Catholicism had been an integral part of their upbringing. Martin McGuinness recounted that ‘[w]e were reared in the nationalist, Catholic tradition, with the greater emphasis being on Catholic’. At Sinn Féin’s 1980 Árd Fheis, in response to a proposed amendment from the floor that Éire Nua’s ‘Christian principles’ should be replaced by socialist ones, some members argued in opposition that ‘Christian principles’ are what the Irish people stand for, and the movement should not run ahead

16 “Christian social principles” [notebook by ‗Freeman’], An Phoblacht, Iml. 6, Uimhir 13, Márta (March) 28, 1975, p.10.
20 English, Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA, p.130.
21 Quoted in English, Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA, p.130.
of its grass-roots.”

According to An Phoblacht/Republican News, “[a] lively discussion ensued before the amendment was defeated.”

A commitment to ‘Christian’ values among republicans vied strenuously with a desire for a policy based on a secular socialist doctrine and Connolly’s legacy would be mobilised by both sides of the contest.

The influence of Catholicism among Provisional supporters could have mitigated the acceptance of the Connolly as an iconic figure. In his writings Connolly had expressed a great esteem for Marx and generally Connolly advocated a recognisably Marxist political project. Connolly’s expositors, however, had already demonstrated that Connolly could be made to take on a number of political guises – Catholic, patriot, socialist. Republicans followed suit. ‘Freeman’ writing for An Phoblacht, celebrated Connolly as “one of the most original of Irish nationalist thinkers”, but he conceded also that Connolly was an innovative “Marxist socialist thinker” as well.

Part of Connolly’s innovation for ‘Freeman’ was “in relation to socialism and Catholicism”.

As is well known, Connolly rejected the idea that Catholicism and Marxism were incompatible and he united them in his own person. He believed that a man could be Marxist in politics and Christian in religion. Indeed, he went further, holding that the essence of Christianity, as evidenced from the early Church Fathers, agreed with the Marxist view of private property, common ownership, and the rational ordering of society in the interests of the common good. Consequently, he saw socialism as the putting into practice of Catholicism properly understood.

A few weeks later ‘Freeman’ reiterated his contention:

James Connolly was a free-thinking Marxist who held that one could be a Marxist in politics and a Catholic in religion. …

Moreover Connolly argued convincingly that there is a strong Christian tradition which views accumulated property much as Marxist socialism does.

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27 [Notebook by Freeman], “Republicanism and Marxism”, An Phoblacht, Iml. 6, Uimhir 7, Feabhra (February) 14, 1975, p.6.
With Connolly seemingly on-side ‘Freeman’ offered a parting shot at the Officials: “The anti-Catholic bigotry of the Johnston-Goulding faction was not Marxist at all and certainly not Irish Marxist, as the example of James Connolly proves adequately.”

‘Freeman’s’ series of articles continued the representation of Connolly as a Catholic, a Marxist and a nationalist. It was an image of Connolly that was compelling and comforting for many religiously minded republicans. For the Provisionals, at least in the 1970s, if Connolly’s Marxism could be shown to be compatible with Catholicism that made him all the more palatable for the devout supporters of the faction. Connolly was too important an icon to discard just for the sake of a Marxist idiosyncrasy.

The idea that Connolly had sought to reconcile Catholicism with Marxism was not entirely without foundation; it could reference Connolly’s own arguments concerning the ‘religious question’. In the Ireland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Catholicism was expanding in breadth and influence. Many Catholic farmers were becoming more secure in their tenure and income. The sons (and more occasionally the daughters) of larger farmers began to enter the professions, buy property, become merchants and traders - a new layer of ‘gombeen men’ developed. The increased prosperity of this class laid the basis for the growth of the Catholic Church. The number of priests rose: in 1861 there had been one priest for every seven hundred and fifty five Catholics; by 1911 there was one for every two hundred and ten. Fanatical lay organisations like the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), the ‘Popes Brass Band’ as Connolly referred to them, also expanded; in 1909 the AOH could claim sixty four thousand members. The AOH would sometimes demonstrate its religious (and nationalist) fervour by attacking the public rallies of the Irish Socialist Republican Party. The Catholic Church extended little charity to the fledgling ISRP.

In this social milieu Connolly was keen to distance the socialism he expounded from the clerical charge of atheism. He developed a defensive posture towards the Catholic Church that often sought to down-play the contradiction between pious devotion and revolutionary Marxism. Connolly assured his readership that –the most
consistent socialist or syndicalist may be as Catholic as the Pope if he is so minded.”

In general Connolly adhered to a materialist philosophy gleaned from Marx, “that the economic system of any given society is the basis of all else in that society – its political superstructure included.” In the case of Connolly’s understanding of religion, however, his materialism was tempered by the belief that, while particular forms of religion could be explained by material factors, religion overall dealt with the miraculous and the spiritual. For Connolly

Socialism is based upon a series of facts requiring only unassisted human reason to grasp and master all their details, whereas Religion of every kind is … based upon “faith” in the occurrence in past ages of a series of phenomena inexplicable by any process of mere human reasoning.

From this perspective Connolly argued that the clergy should confine itself to matters of religion and should avoid entanglement in the temporal realm of politics. In Labour, Nationality and Religion, written as a fervent counter to the anti-socialist sermonising of a Jesuit priest, Connolly contended that “the Catholic Church is theoretically a community in which the clergy are but the officers serving the laity in a common worship and service of God”. If the clergy, Connolly argued, should profess doctrines not in conformity with the true teachings of Catholicity it is not only the right, but it is the absolute duty of the laity to refuse such doctrines and to disobey such teaching.” Connolly regarded this as the “saving clause in Catholic doctrine which has again and again operated to protect the Church from the result of the mistaken attempts of the clergy to control the secular activities of the laity.” The clergy, according to Connolly,

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had –forgotten or ignored the fact that the laity are a part of the Church, and ... therefore the right of rebellion against injustice so freely claimed by the Papacy and the Hierarchy is also the inalienable right of the laity.”

Moreover Connolly asserted that –[w]henever the clergy succeeded in conquering political power in any country the result has been disastrous to the interests of religion and inimical to the progress of humanity.”

Connolly concluded –that he serves religion best who insists upon the clergy of the Catholic Church taking their proper position as servants to the laity, and abandoning their attempt to dominate the public, as they have long dominated the private life of their fellow-Catholics.”

Connolly was keen to lessen the impact of the blows that could be made on his organisation by the Catholic Church, but he was also concerned to distance his party from becoming entangled –in the disputes of the warring sects of the world”. —≠ identify Socialism with Religion”, Connolly averred, –would be to abandon at once that universal, non-sectarian character which to-day we find indispensable to working-class unity”. Connolly was determined to keep his doctrine and his party out of sectarian squabbles. He insisted that

Socialism, as a party, bases itself upon its knowledge of facts, of economic truths, and leaves the building up of religious ideals or faiths to the outside public, or to its individual members if they so will. It is neither Freethinker nor Christian, Turk nor Jew, Buddhist nor Idolator, Mahommedan nor Parsee – it is only human.

To workers, in Ireland and in America, Connolly emphasised that –Socialism is a bread and butter question. It is a question of the stomach; it is going to be settled in the factories, mines and ballot boxes of this country and is not going to be settled at the altar or in the church.”

While Connolly responded vigorously to pastoral condemnations of socialism from outside, within the Irish Socialist Republican Party the discussion of religion was firmly prohibited. In 1899 Connolly moved a motion of censure against ISRP member Edward Stewart, the party’s recently unsuccessful candidate in a local election, for

exclaiming that the Church had ‘cursed’ the ISRP’s election campaign.⁴⁶ During the
local election campaign of 1900 Connolly went so far as to propose a resolution that
party members should attend Mass.⁴⁷ Despite the assaults launched from the pulpit
against socialism Connolly did not accept that the Catholic Church would always
defend capitalism or even be necessarily hostile to socialist revolution.⁴⁸ He ventured that

the Church ‘does not put all her eggs in one basket’, and the man who
imagines that in the supreme hour of the proletarian struggle for
victory the Church will definitely line up with the forces of capitalism,
and pledge her very existence as a Church upon the hazardous chance
of the capitalists winning, simply does not understand the first thing
about the policy of the Church in the social or political revolutions of
the past. ... in the future the Church, which has its hand close upon the
pulse of human society, when it realises that the cause of capitalism is
a lost cause it will find excuse enough to allow freedom of speech and
expression to those lowly priests whose socialist declarations it will
then use to cover and hide the absolute anti-socialism of the Roman
Propaganda.⁴⁹

Connolly’s prediction was that the Catholic Church in the circumstances of an
impending revolutionary victory would, for the sake of institutional self-preservation,
allow a ‘liberation theology’ to prevail. In the early twentieth century (and even later) it
seemed to be an optimistic expectation.

Not all of Connolly’s comrades were in agreement with his stance on religion.
Fellow ISRP member Con O’Lehane disapproved of Connolly’s adoption of a Catholic
persona as part of his response to clerical criticism; Lehane referred to Connolly
disparagingly as ‘Catholic Connolly’.⁵⁰ It was a harsh judgement but Connolly did
affect a Catholic posture. In 1908 Connolly admitted in a letter to his friend and
comrade J. Carstairs Matheson that

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

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⁴⁶ David Lynch, Radical Politics in Modern Ireland: The Irish Socialist Republican Party, 1896-1904, Irish
⁴⁹ James Connolly, “Roman Catholicism and Socialism”, in The Best of Connolly, Proinsias MacAonghusa
September, 1908.
dogmatism of the Orthodox. In fact, I respect the good catholic more than the average freethinker.  

Connolly confided a lack of faith but persisted with the devotional ruse. The hegemony of the Catholic Church in Irish society (and among the Irish diaspora) would have very been apparent to Connolly; assuming the appearance of Catholicism has been characterised by his biographer, Ruth Dudley Edwards, as evidence of Connolly's 'realism': “it was vital, if he wished to extend his influence in Irish and Irish emigrant circles, to maintain the pose.”

Whatever advantage the religious 'disguise' might have afforded, Connolly often found himself debating on terms set by socialism's clerical antagonists. Connolly may have wished to exclude religion from political debate but his priestly opponents had no intention of excluding politics from their sermonising. Connolly's response to the 'slings and arrows' of the hostile clergy was conditioned by his own qualified materialism; he allowed to religion a spiritual realm in which it held sway. That 'unknowable' domain gave a distinct advantage to Connolly's religious adversaries. Connolly was driven to argue his case from the position of a lay Catholic within the confines of Catholic theology - a situation in which he was, to some extent, disarmed in the face of clerical theological authority. In *Labour, Nationality and Religion* Connolly attempted to reconcile Christianity and socialism by the use of Church history. The anti-capitalist credentials of past religious figures were cited to support the idea that religiosity and socialism were not counter-posed. Connolly contended that "Saints and Pontiffs of the Catholic Church have gone before us on this road, and the wildest sayings of modern Socialist agitators are soft and conservative beside some of the doctrines which ere now have been put forth as sound Catholic teachings."

Connolly's enlistment of 'Saints and Pontiffs' to the anti-capitalist cause was superbly adroit but his argument was intrinsically encumbered; on the theological battlefield the Church could always bring bigger canons to bear. As the Reverend Lambert McKenna remarked, "God knows more than any about the things that make for the welfare of the world which he has made; and when, through his Church he has laid down certain

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principles for the ordering of the world it is for Catholics madness to ignore them.”56

[When importunate pious believers try to force God upon them” Connolly might have
been better advised to answer as Engels had suggested, —in the manner of the Dutch
merchants who, when German commercial travellers press their shoddy goods on them,
are accustomed to turn them away with the words: Ik kan die zaken niet gebruiken, [I
have no use for the things].”57

In practice Connolly sought to find an accommodation with the clergy (if not
with the Church hierarchy). Workers’ Republic in January 1916 reported on a great
meeting of workingmen and women overwhelmingly Catholic in their religious faith,
gathering together to discuss problems of social life and national aspirations with a
priest whom they held in affectionate esteem”.58 Ebullient in extolling the rapport that
seemed to have been found between the _everend lecturer‘ and the most _militant
representative of the labour movement‘, Connolly was _ glad ... to be able to say in all
sincerity that we could see no fundamental difference between the views expressed by
Father Laurence and those views we ourselves hold and never hesitate to express. The
differences were apparently only differences of definition.”59 The _programme of the
militant Irish labour movement‘ was then deftly reconceptualised. Connolly, on behalf
of the labour movement, _ accepted‘ —the family as the true type of human society.”60

Connolly explained the familial model he envisaged:

We say that as in that family the resources of the entire household are
at the service of each; as in the family the strong does not prey upon
and oppress the weak; as in the family the least gifted mentally and
the weakest physically share equally the common store of all with the
most gifted and the physically strongest; as in the family the true
economy consists in utilising and conserving the heritage of all for the
good of all, so in like manner the nation should act and be
administered.61

56 Lambert McKenna, The Social Teachings of James Connolly, Veritas, Dublin, 1991 (originally published
1920), p.84.
57 Frederick Engels, “Notes for Anti-Dühring”, Marxist Internet Archive Library,
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/appendix3.htm#notes, accessed 9 December,
2013.
19, 1916. See Marxist Internet Archive Library,
59 Connolly, “The Programme of Labour”.
60 Connolly, “The Programme of Labour”.
61 Connolly, “The Programme of Labour”.
The labour movement, so Connolly claimed, was only trying to extend the values embodied in the family to society and the nation more generally, a project that no good priest should object to.\textsuperscript{62} To legitimise the ITGWU’s militant industrial tactics Connolly resorted to a biblical reference:

We hold that the sympathetic strike is the affirmation of the Christian principle that we are all members one of another, whilst those who oppose the sympathetic strike and uphold sectionalism in trade union struggles are repeating the question of Cain who, when questioned about the brother he had murdered, asked ‘am I my brother’s keeper,’ we say, ‘yes, we are all the keepers of our brothers and sisters, and responsible for them.’\textsuperscript{63}

Connolly (perhaps indulging his reputedly dry sense of humour) ‘rejoiced to find amongst the clergy so many whose hearts also throb responsive to those ideals.’\textsuperscript{64} Whether the observation was delivered with a wry smile or with sincerity, what is apparent is that Connolly, for all his genuinely clever and beguiling rhetoric, was not willing to undertake a concerted political effort to sever Irish workers from the habitual deference shown to priests and the Church hierarchy.\textsuperscript{65}

The influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland and Connolly’s immersion in an Irish working class which took the pronouncements of the Church very seriously inclined Connolly towards a less confrontational approach to religion. Any political ‘failings’ in regard to the ‘religious question’ that Connolly might have had, however, need to be placed in the context of the accepted socialist doctrine of the times. Connolly’s position was not just a response to the difficult conditions of ‘Catholic Ireland’; his attitude towards religion was in keeping with the stance of many of his European socialist contemporaries. The German Social Democratic Party’s Erfurt Programme of 1891 had resolved that socialist parties should not be concerned with questions of religious belief; this had been accepted as authoritative by the Socialist International to which Connolly’s ISRP was linked.\textsuperscript{66} So while Connolly’s attempts to


\textsuperscript{63} Connolly, “The Programme of Labour”.

\textsuperscript{64} Connolly, “The Programme of Labour”.

\textsuperscript{65} Allen, The Politics of James Connolly, pp.28-29.

\textsuperscript{66} David Howell, A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, p.89.
discursively shut the Church out of political debate were in vain, and his counter(s) to church condemnation – as sharp and lucid as they were – tended to be fought on theological rather than political ground, his position in regard to religion, as a revolutionary socialist of the period, was not an unorthodox one.

Connolly’s perspective on religion tended to make his politics susceptible to a particular type of interpretation by the Provisionals. A “Catholic Connolly” - or at least a Connolly compatible with Catholicism - could be put forward. An Phoblacht could align Connolly’s politics with the pronouncements of Pope John XXIII: both were champions of social justice, both condemned the “maldistribution of wealth”.

The Provisionals’ formative statement proclaimed that “their socialism” was founded on “Irish and Christian values.” The Éire Nua policy gave as one of its objectives the establishment of “a reign of social justice based on Christian principles”.

Connolly’s ideas could, it was claimed, inform the practice of the Provisionals “Christian socialism” and he was invoked in support of the Éire Nua programme. Fear Domhnainn, writing for An Phoblacht, suggested that the first step in achieving the Provisionals’ vision of Comhar na gComharan, worker ownership, - a key plank of Éire Nua – would be a “study of the economic and national ideals of Irish patriots”, which, of course included Connolly.

Despite the efforts made by the Provisionals, however, Connolly could not be conceived of as a “Christian socialist”. While Connolly’s approach to religion was cautious, defensive and sought not to antagonise an Irish Catholic constituency, his own socialism was not based in any meaningful way on Christian values. In his letter to Matheson Connolly revealed that his faith had evaporated years before. Connolly vigorously opposed a proposal to have the ISRP named the “Christian Socialist Party”.

In keeping with his conviction that politics and religion should be kept separate Connolly insisted that

68 Statement regarding the split issued by the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin, January 17, 1970, p.6.
70 See for example Christene Elias, “Know Your Éire Nua. Connolly’s warning more apt than ever”, An Phoblacht, Iml. 8, Uimhir 37, Meán Fómhair (September) 21, 1977, p.5.
72 Lynch, Radical Politics in Modern Ireland, p.107.
Every time we approach a Catholic worker with a talk about Christian socialism we make this a religious question and as such a question, his religion teaches him that the clergy say the final word ... Why, then, should we go out of our way to give the clergy the right to interfere in our politics by giving a religious name to an economic and political movement.\(^{73}\)

Connolly may have tried to conciliate Catholic belief with socialist conviction but in attempting to do so he did not repudiate Marxism, nor did he try and _Christianize_ his socialism as the Provisionals did.

The religious sensibility of some Provisionals was connected to a conspicuous vein of anti-Communism within the faction. Any perception that Sinn Féin’s _socialism_ might, even tangentially, concur with Marxism was too much for some Provisional supporters: one devotee was _sickened_ to see Republicanism referred to in the context of Karl Marx’s writings – a man who believed neither in God nor in nationalism.\(^{74}\) In a letter to _An Phoblacht_, M. Ó Callanáin complained that _[i]n an important contribution to the understanding of Éire Nua policy, Christene Elias … was far too charitable in her generous treatment of the Marxist school of socialism._\(^{75}\) Connolly, however, could be exonerated; with a rather casual rendering of history, the correspondent disassociated Connolly from Marxism:

Connell packed in the Marxists for the more tolerant, less doctrinaire Socialist Party of America, … and soon packed them in to become a leading organiser of the militant syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.).

… Connolly’s _Socialism Made Easy_ (1905) and _The Axe to the Root_ are not Marxist but Syndicalist in content; and Syndicalism, which stands for Worker Control, as opposed to State Control, is miles removed from every one of the 57 varieties of Marxism.\(^{76}\)

Connell himself saw no contradiction between his _syndicalism_ and his Marxism. Indeed writing in the wake of his work _Socialism Made Easy_ Connolly lamented that the application of the _methods of Marx_” was severely lacking when it came to an analysis of the laws of growth … of development of the organizations of labour upon the

\(^{73}\) Quoted in Allen, _The Politics of James Connolly_, pp.24-25. From _The Harp_, April 1909.

\(^{74}\) _“Disgusted’ by editorial”,_ (letter), _An Phoblacht_, Iml. 8, Uimhir 27, lúil (July) 13, 1977, p.7.

\(^{75}\) _“How Marxist”_ [letter by M. Ó Callanáin], _An Phoblacht_, Iml. 8, Uimhir 41, Deireadh Fómhair (October) 26, 1977, p.7.

\(^{76}\) _“How Marxist”,_ _An Phoblacht_, (October) 26, 1977, p.7.
economic field”. Connolly hoped that “perhaps some day there will arise in America a Socialist writer who in his writing will live up to the spirit of the Communist Manifesto”; hardly the desire of someone who had “packed in the Marxists”. Ó Callanáin, however, was part of that section of Provisional supporters strongly inimical towards Marxism. For the “anti-communists” within Provisional ranks, Connolly’s Marxism was not to be reconciled with Catholicism or the Sinn Féin programme (even cautiously); it was to be repudiated entirely. Deasún Breatnach would have concurred with Ó Callanáin; Breatnach contended that “Connolly not being a Marxist” was “a scientific statement of fact.” Later that year An Phoblacht’s editorial again stated that Connolly was not a Marxist. Connolly’s perceived Catholicism, blazoned by the Provisionals, was an added boon to the characterisation of Connolly as a “non-Marxist” republican icon. Connolly, for these republicans, simply was not a Marxist. Other sections of the Provisional faction, however, were far less hostile to Connolly’s Marxism.

The same An Phoblacht editorial that had assured its readership that Connolly was not a Marxist had also raised Éire Nua as proof positive of the Provisionals’ “broad left” political credentials. Éire Nua, however, never gained much political traction. As much as the then leadership of the Provisionals might try and enlist Connolly to its support and declare loudly its socialism, Éire Nua was not widely popular even among Provisional supporters, particularly in the north. The tumult of the civil rights struggle in Northern Ireland, conducted against an international backdrop of decolonisation in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and mass anti-war and black civil rights activity in the US, provided the impetus for a generalised political radicalisation. For many of the younger generation of republicans who became involved in the civil rights campaign, the styles and ideologies of the “new left” were more compelling than the staid doctrines

78 Connolly, “Industrial Unionism and Trade Unionism”, pp.166-167.
80 “A little realism from all those opposed to imperialism would speed the day of victory”, An Phoblacht, Iml. 9, Uimhir 41, Deireadh Fómhair (October) 21, 1978, p.2.
81 “A little realism from all those opposed to imperialism would speed the day of victory”, p.2.
of ‘traditional’ republicanism.\(^{83}\) The politics of the older southern republican leaders – MacStiofáin, Ó Brádaigh and O’Conaill – encapsulated in the Éire Nua policy, were largely irrelevant to the young republicans of Derry and Belfast, who instead looked to the radical political message of the People’s Democracy group.\(^{84}\) A 1973 People’s Democracy pamphlet, quoting Connolly, was likely to have struck a chord among militant republican youth embroiled in the ongoing violence on northern streets: ‘Having learned from history that all bourgeois movements end in compromise, and that the bourgeois revolutionaries of today become the conservatives of tomorrow, the Irish socialists refuse to lose their identity with those who only half-understand the problem of liberty.’\(^{85}\) Gerry Adams recalled of this period ‘PD [People’s Democracy] argued quite correctly for wider popular mobilisations, and it struck me that all of the potential for mobilisation was ours, while PD had the theory.’\(^{86}\)

As something of a corollary to the increasing political radicalism in Ireland was a generalised decline in Catholic devotion. Within the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland were raised significant anti-clerical sentiments, not least of all by the youthful leaders of People’s Democracy who often had the ear of the equally young republicans around them.\(^{87}\) The Catholic Church had long been antagonistic towards violent rebellion: the bishops had condemned the ‘unhealthy’ ideas of Wolf Tone;\(^{88}\) the church had denounced Fenianism (despite the fact that most Fenians were faithful Catholics);\(^{89}\) and during the Civil War the Anti-Treaty IRA had been excommunicated.\(^{90}\) The Irish Catholic newspaper had called the 1916 Rising ‘partially socialistic and partially alien’ and stated that ‘only idiots or lunatics can ever have supposed that it could prove successful’.\(^{91}\) Amidst Northern Ireland’s ‘troubles’

\(^{91}\) Quoted in Mary Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland: A social, personal and cultural history from the fall of Parnell to the realm of Mary Robinson*, Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1997, p.61.
individual local priests were occasionally sympathetic to their ‘active’ republican parishioners. In some instances clergymen became directly involved in the conflict. The Standing Committee of the Irish Bishops, however, saw no room for ambivalence; they decreed that ‘It is sinful to join organisations committed to violence or to remain in them. It is sinful to support such organisations or to call on others to support them ... There is no excuse for thinking that the present violence in Ireland can be morally justified.’ The Church could not condone a campaign of violence, even one that claimed to be defending the northern Catholic enclaves and seeking redress for sectarian injustices. Recalling fondly the ‘barricade days’ of 1969-1972 (the popular defence of Catholic enclaves in Derry and Belfast), Gerry Adams commented that ‘[w]orking people took control of aspects of their own lives, organised their own districts, in a way which deeply antagonised and traumatised the Catholic middle class and particularly the Catholic church hierarchy.’ In Northern Ireland the Church had found a measure of accommodation with the Unionist state and in so doing it had alienated itself from sections of its own congregation. Aggrieved republicans could have reflected on Connolly’s acerbic observation:

> Is not this attitude symbolic of the attitude of the Church for hundreds of years? Ever counselling humility, but sitting in the seats of the mighty; ever patching up the diseased and broken wrecks of an unjust social system, but blessing the system which made the wrecks and spread the disease; ever running divine discontent and pity into the ground as the lightning rod runs and dissipates lightning, instead of gathering it and directing it for social righteousness as the electric battery generates and directs electricity for social use.

As the Church condemned their resistance, young radicalised republicans could see less need to conciliate their politics with the Catholic Church and more need to find a solution to what appeared an intractable situation. Young republicans were not adverse to seeking those solutions in radical politics rather than in Christian social principles.

Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, who would rise to the leadership of Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA in the late 1970s and 1980s, were part of the cohort of emerging northern radicals in the republican movement. Adams and those grouped

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around him began to develop an alternative political vision to that articulated by the southern leadership. The amalgamation of the publication *An Phoblacht* with the northern *Republican News* in 1979 helped to consolidate the position of the northern republicans.\(^97\) Adams’ close associate Danny Morrison became the editor of the new unified paper. Morrison dropped the Catholic piety that had been present in the old *An Phoblacht* and replaced it with a journalism that was class-oriented and increasingly questioned both moral and political republican orthodoxies.\(^98\) At the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis of 1980 → a radical update of *Éire Nua*” was proposed.\(^99\) *An Phoblacht/Republican News (AP/RN)* reported that

> An updated version of the introduction to *Éire Nua* (the social and economic programme of Sinn Féin) was accepted at last weekend’s Ard Fheis as a policy document of basic Republican objectives and principles. … the document spells out the basic principles which are the foundation stones of the Republican Movement, as enunciated by Padraic Pearse on the Irish Nation and Freedom and a quote from Connolly re-affirms the Movement’s intention to replace capitalism with socialism.\(^100\)

There was a conscious ‘return’ to the writings of James Connolly, Liam Mellows and other left-republicans, along with theories of decolonization as expressed by people like Franz Fanon.\(^101\) The ‘new look’ *AP/RN* affirmed that — Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon, like James Connolly, recognised the necessity for any colonial power – in attempting to subjugate an oppressed colony – to destroy the native culture.\(^102\) The emerging leaders from the north were willing to articulate a radical sounding politics that would use the language of class more stridently than had the older leadership. Conciliating the ‘updated’ politics or republicanism with traditional attitudes or with Catholicism was no longer such an imperative.

Bobby Sands was typical of the younger generation from Northern Ireland drawn to the Provisionals’ ranks. Sands, whose active republican involvement began in

the early 1970s, was ideologically committed to "the socialist solution" and the "radical socialist thought" of James Connolly. In his prison writings Sands declared that

If there is to be privilege, power or wealth for a certain group or few, denying an equal distribution of those things between the whole nation and not given into the hands of the men and women of no property – those who cannot be bought, those who by their very nature will remain incorruptible, the sweating toilers of the working class – then that is not my hope, for that is not the republic proclaimed at Easter 1916. That would not be the republic of Tone, the republic of Mellows, nor would it be the republic of those countless thousands of heroes who gave all they had that we might see, enjoy and share the mutual happiness of a socialist republic.

The language that Sands employed was resonant of Connolly; In *Labour in Irish History* Connolly had written "only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland." Sands had no fear of the Marxism that lurked within Connolly's legacy and his political theorizing embraced both the class orientation and the revolutionary spirit that could be found in Connolly.

Leaders like Adams wanted to reinvigorate Provisional doctrine with reference to Connolly. There was, however, for some republicans, a particular impetus to use Connolly's inspiration for far more revolutionary ends. The revolutionary fervour of Sands appeared to represent a developing trend. A group of prisoners had been re-evaluating the progress of the republican struggle and had moved politically to the left and towards Marxism. An ideological struggle developed in the _H-Blocks_ in the aftermath of the prison protests and the hunger strikes. A Marxist group of prisoners came to critique the _gradualist approach_ of those republicans who took the line that by slow patient work the Republican Movement could be moved onto a socialist axis. According to the _Communist Republicans_ (as some of the prisoners began to define themselves) this lent a certain spurious leftist legitimacy to a Republican Movement drifting aimlessly into petit bourgeois electoralism. Describing their position at the time, the Marxist group [of republican prisoners] used the old Bolshevik condemnation

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104 "The further writings of Bobby Sands - The socialist republic", pp.10-11.
107 *From Long Kesh to a Socialist Ireland*, The League of Communist Republicans, circa 1988, [no place of publication], p.4.
108 *From Long Kesh to a Socialist Ireland*, pp.4-5.
of the Socialist Revolutionaries –  ‗Your revolution isn’t socialist and your socialism isn’t revolutionary.’”109 As _true_ to Connolly’s revolutionary tradition as the _Communist Republicans_ might have thought themselves, for the Provisional leadership outside the prison walls, even one wanting to rejuvenate itself with Connolly’s legacy, this Marxist turn would need to be moderated.

After 1980 _Éire Nua_, even in its _radically_ updated form, would not last long. The federalist aspect of the policy had been dropped by the party in 1982.110 In 1983 Sinn Féin’s _Christían socialism_ was also finally effaced. At the party’s Árd Fheis of that year

the declaration that Sinn Fein based its objects on _Christían principles_ was changed to read: _Irish republican socialist principles in accordance with the Easter Proclamation of 1916 and the democratic programme of the First Dail in 1919_.111

Along with the apparent change of principle came a change of leadership as Adams ascended to the presidency of Sinn Féin; Ó Brádaigh, closely associated with the dumped _Éire Nua_ policy, did not seek re-election. The generational leadership transition was complete. In his inaugural presidential address Adams mapped the way forward for the party: →believe the clear lesson spelt out by Connolly is one we should keep to the forefront in the days ahead as we expand our membership, broaden and consolidate our base, and develop our policies.”112 Adams and his leadership group would leave behind the apparent rigidities of _traditional_ republicanism and →advance to a socialist republican society”.113 Right away, however, even at the moment of triumph for the _radicalised_ northerners, a note of caution was sounded; Adams stressed that

we should also be mindful of Connolly’s clear understanding of the need for republicans, socialists and progressive nationalists to find unity on democratic republican demands. We must be mindful of the dangers of ultra-leftism and remember at all times that while our struggle has a major social and economic content the securing of Irish independence is a prerequisite.114

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109 From Long Kesh to a Socialist Ireland, p.5.
112 Gerry Adams “Presidential Address: ‘Armed struggle is a necessary form of resistance in the six counties against a government whose presence is rejected by the vast majority of Irish people’”, An Phoblacht/Republican News, Sraith Nua Iml 5, Uimhir 45, Samhain (November) 17, 1983, p.9.
Socialism’ was now included unabashedly in Sinn Féin’s programme, with no ‘Christian principles’ to ameliorate it, but the nationalist goal was still at the top of the Provisionals’ agenda. Demonstrations of Catholic devotion were no longer so prominent but there remained a lingering distrust of ‘ultra-leftism’; how far to the left the party should allow itself to move was a debate that would recur among Provisionals.

While the Provisionals shifted political ground the Official faction also underwent a steady transformation. The process of ‘policisation’ that had taken place among those who would become the Officials – the move on their part to adopt a socialist programme – meant that in the aftermath of the split there was little inclination to pander to Catholic mores. Indeed the Catholic Church was seen by some Officials as having taken the side of the Provisionals in the republican schism. The Official’s Árd Fheis in November 1971 detailed a series of demands that sought to end religious control of education; it also supported the legalisation of contraception and an end to the ban on divorce. The rosary was notably absent from the Official’s main commemoration of the Rising that year, further hinting at the new direction.115

The infiltration of ‘extreme socialism’ had been given by the Provisionals as one reason for the split in 1970. Cathal Goulding replied to this charge later that year in an interview with New Left Review (NLR); he affirmed that the objective of his section of the republican movement was ‘to establish a Socialist Republic as envisaged by Connolly and in keeping with the sentiments of the Proclamation of 1916.’116 ‘A.C.’, commenting for NLR, opined that ‘[t]he statement of IRA perspectives outlined by Goulding must ... be seen as a document of the Republican movements’ continuing attempt to rediscover and redevelop the revolutionary socialism of James Connolly’117. Ostensibly the Officials’ declared objective seemed to resemble that of the Provisionals - both groups claimed to want to see a socialist republic based on the Proclamation of 1916 - but whereas the Provisionals had sought to distance themselves from any taint of Marxism, the Officials were willing to positively embrace the doctrine, or at least a version of it. The ‘authority’ of Lenin was invoked to encourage the ‘correct’ understanding of Connolly’s legacy. The Officials affirmed that ‘Lenin’s praise and

116 ”Interview with Cathal Goulding, Chief of Staff of the IRA”, New Left Review, I/64, November-December, 1970, p.55.
analysis like the interpretation of the Irish situation by Marx and Engels before, was far closer to the full truth than any of Connolly's denigrators.\footnote{118 “Lenin on the Rising” [book review of *Lenin on Ireland* by F.O.R.], *The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe*, Vol. XXIV, Uimhir 4, Abreán (April) 1970, p.cuig (p.5).}

Informed by its adoption of ‘*Marxist*’ theoretics, the Official faction began to style itself as a ‘revolutionary vanguard’. The 1971 autumn edition of the Official’s *theoretical journal* announced that

> The Republican Movement has a vanguard role in the revolutionary struggle that is about to be waged. …
> Our task is to provide the leadership, and to ensure that our aim for the establishment of socialism is carried through to achievement and that the chair of Connolly is not left empty a second time. It is necessary then for us to wage a vigorous ideological struggle against those who would confuse and lead astray the Irish people, for it is only by having a proper grasp of the theory of revolution that we can build a proper revolutionary movement and thereby make a revolution.\footnote{119 “The Necessity of Theory”, *Teoiric: Theoretical Journal of the Republican Movement*, No.2 Autumn, 1971, p.ii.}

The cadre was urged:

> let us not be afraid or ashamed of ... the works of this man [Marx] whose contribution to the emancipation of the human race is immeasurable. We should stop using James Connolly as a respectable crutch for Marx. James Connolly was a Marxist and was proud to be one, as all true revolutionaries must and should be.\footnote{120 “Mass Movements and the Revolutionary Vanguard Organisation”, *Teoiric: Theoretical Journal of the Republican Movement*, No.2, Autumn, 1971, p.2. Italics in original.}

The Official’s were unperturbed by Connolly’s Marxism and saw no need to make a Catholic of him.

At the 1972 Bodenstown commemoration leading Official Sean Garland reiterated the faction’s new task of “building the people’s revolutionary party”.\footnote{121 [Sean Garland, Bodenstown oration], *The United Irishman, An tEireannach Aontaithe*, Iml. XXVI, Uimhir 7, Íuili (July) 1972, p.se (p.6).} He rejected the continued use of terrorism (by the Provisionals) and stated that “[t]he Republican Movement does not wish to bomb one million Protestants into a united Ireland.”\footnote{122 Garland, *The United Irishman*, Íuili (July) 1972, p.se (p.6).} To the anti-Communist vilification coming from the Provisionals, Garland replied:

> We have been accused of adopting an alien ideology. The whisper campaign is mounting to a shout as its opponents see that the Republican Movement is gaining strength. Let them shout. Let them look for reds under the bed. Let them look wherever they will. Let
them ferret out alien influences, for what they will find is the doctrine of Tone, the father of Republicanism … Let them look to Connolly, whose memory they dishonour by their pretence at celebration. Connolly quoted with approval Tone’s humanitarian declaration and added his own pledge of loyalty to the international working class. If this is alien influence, let us acknowledge it with pride. It is the influence and the inspiration of the revolutionary party of the Irish people.\footnote{Garland, \textit{The United Irishman}, Iúil (July) 1972, p.seacht (p.7).}

In 1973, prompted in no small part by Garland, the Official Irish Republican Army Council passed a resolution committing it to transforming the movement into a Marxist\footnote{Hanley and Millar, \textit{The Lost Revolution}, p.264.} party run on Leninist\footnote{\textquoteleft Republican struggle envelops all areas of Irish life; A statement received from JJ McGarrity, Secretary Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, \textit{The United Irishman, An Eireannach Aontaithe}, Iml. XXVII, Uimhir 3, Mártá (March) 1973, p.tri (3). The Official faction, particularly the OIRA, would periodically issue public statements from the \textquoteleft Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, signed by \textquoteleft JJ McGarrity, Secretary\textquoteright. Some semblance of anonymity (and romance) was thus maintained by the faction. The Provisionals used a similar ploy, their statements being signed by \textquoteleft P.O’Neill\textquoteright.} principles.\footnote{\textquoteleft Republican struggle envelops all areas of Irish life; A statement received from JJ McGarrity, Secretary Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, \textit{The United Irishman, An Eireannach Aontaithe}, Iml. XXVII, Uimhir 3, Mártá (March) 1973, p.tri (3). The Official faction, particularly the OIRA, would periodically issue public statements from the \textquoteleft Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, signed by \textquoteleft JJ McGarrity, Secretary\textquoteright. Some semblance of anonymity (and romance) was thus maintained by the faction. The Provisionals used a similar ploy, their statements being signed by \textquoteleft P.O’Neill\textquoteright.} In the pantheon of the Officials James Connolly was joined by new Marxist icons.

Some sections of the Officials\textquoteleft leadership were ideologically committed to the amended political direction but in the faction\textquotelefts rhetoric there could still be detected a sense that the membership might need to be led more gently along the new Marxian path. Even in Garland\textquotelefts Bodenstown address some effort was made to connect republican tradition with socialist aspiration; Connolly (and Tone) remained the inspiration\footnote{\textquoteleft Republican struggle envelops all areas of Irish life; A statement received from JJ McGarrity, Secretary Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, \textit{The United Irishman, An Eireannach Aontaithe}, Iml. XXVII, Uimhir 3, Mártá (March) 1973, p.tri (3). The Official faction, particularly the OIRA, would periodically issue public statements from the \textquoteleft Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright, signed by \textquoteleft JJ McGarrity, Secretary\textquoteright. Some semblance of anonymity (and romance) was thus maintained by the faction. The Provisionals used a similar ploy, their statements being signed by \textquoteleft P.O’Neill\textquoteright.} for the revolutionary party\textquoteright. In a statement from the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau\textquoteright a similar linkage of the old with the new was made:

\begin{quote}
There is a historical basis for the unity of socialist and republican. From the most progressive leaders in the history of the republican movement has come the most advanced social and political thinking in the history of Ireland. Wolfe Tone and Fintan Lalor, the Fenians and Michael Davitt – these, and men of a still older tradition were the sources of Connolly\textapos;s inspiration. In turn, Connolly influenced the development of generations of republicans who have fought the betrayal of the socialist republican ideals since the Treaty and the establishment of the Free State.

It is clear, therefore, that the republican struggle is one that envelops all areas of Irish life; that without the combination of socialism and republicanism, without the engagement of the mass of the working people of Ireland, any effort to achieve full national liberation cannot succeed.
\end{quote}
Political reassurance was sometimes needed for what should have been the most stalwart of members. Part of the Officials’ Easter statement of 1975 appeared to be directed toward imprisoned supporters: “in spite of divergences from the Republican path, they may draw comfort from the knowledge that we grow in strength, and remain committed to the ideals of Tone and Connolly.”126 In the very same issue in which the Official’s membership had been offered some solace, The United Irishman heralded that in Eastern Bloc Romania poverty was now “only a memory”.127 Whatever might be the feelings of the membership, the new Marxist-Leninist direction was being consolidated and with it new allegiances and new Arcadias.

The celebration of regimes that the Officials now identified as being ‘socialist’ became a feature of the faction’s publications. In 1974 an article appeared in The United Irishman lauding the industrial and social welfare development of the German Democratic Republic.128 Early the next year the paper’s editorial defended “the commitment of the Republican Movement to support the struggles of Anti-Colonialist peoples and to defend the gains of socialist revolutions everywhere.”129 By 1976 the Soviet socialist model had become a pronounced ideological influence within the Official faction. The party had contact with the Bulgarian and Soviet Embassies in London and delegations visited regimes in the Eastern Bloc.130 The Official’s newfound political affinity found expression in the writing of some of the faction’s ideologues but the amended political agenda did not mean that the claim to Connolly’s legacy was abandoned. The party’s publication The Irish Industrial Revolution, with its emphasis on developing the state sector and central planning, was promoted as “[t]he first study of its kind since James Connolly’s Labour in Irish History”.131 In content, however, the pamphlet’s suggested programme owed a greater debt to Stalin’s five year plans than it did to Connolly.132

130 Hanley and Millar, The Lost Revolution, p.334.
The perceived successes of ‘really existing socialism’, for the Officials, gave credence to the socialism that was being sought for Ireland. Sean Garland, in putting forward the case for socialism’, claimed that there is now firmly in existence the vast range of socialist countries whose achievements constitute an overwhelming mass of evidence that mankind can not only exceed the benefits of capitalism’, but can do so without vicious defects. Poverty as we know it in the West has been eliminated, unemployment wiped out, health and education services guaranteed free to all citizens, housing provided at minimum rents and the widest possible range of cultural and recreational interests catered for.133

These ‘socialist’ states seemed to offer for the Officials an example of how to achieve economic development and advance towards socialism. Garland argued that to support capitalism was to ignore the powerful, integrated, selfless role that can be played by the State and semi-State companies which alone can resist the force of the multi-nationals and the gross inefficiency of the present system.”134 It was a premise that fitted with the argument made in The Irish Industrial Revolution publication. For the Officials, ‘[t]he state sector is the greatest enemy confronting capitalism in Ireland today”; 135 the state sector was of ‘central importance for the construction of socialism in Ireland ... Beyond monopoly capital the future belongs to the state sector and to the Irish working class.”136 Connolly, it was claimed, concurred with the Official’s assessment; it was only necessary, ‘with the advantage of statistics and historical research not available to Connolly, to underline the truths first revealed by this great socialist”.137 Garland’s proselytising for ‘state socialism’ did not neglect Connolly either; to those who still favoured a capitalist ‘solution’ Garland responded that this was to ignore James Connolly who said that anyone who accepted capitalism had no moral grounds for criticising what happened during the Famine.”138 Connolly’s intellectual legacy had been mobilised by the Officials’ for their new advocacy of ‘state socialism’.

Connolly never lived to witness the form of ‘socialism’ implemented by the Soviet state and its imitators (the Eastern Bloc, North Korea and so on). During his life

135 The Irish Industrial Revolution, Research Section, Department of Economic Affairs, Sinn Fein- The Workers’ Party, Repsol publications, Dublin, 1977, p.51.
136 The Irish Industrial Revolution, p.51.
137 The Irish Industrial Revolution, p.8.
Connolly did, however, express a distrust of “schemes of state and municipal ownership, if unaccompanied by [the] co-operative principle”. For Connolly “Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this co-operative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism – it is only State capitalism.” The syndicalist vision of society with its enthusiasm for direct workers’ control of industry informed Connolly’s suspicions of centralised state authority. Connolly’s conception of socialism was that it would destroy “at one blow all the fears of a bureaucratic State, ruling and ordering the lives of every individual from above”; it would blend “the fullest democratic control with the most absolute expert supervision, something unthinkable of any society built upon the political State.” What Connolly might have thought of the state power eventually wielded by the Stalinist regimes is open to conjecture. On the basis of what he wrote, however, the Official’s contention that somehow Connolly would have concurred with their expressed enthusiasm for “state and semi-state companies” was, to say the least, a dubious assumption.

The Official faction perhaps reached its political zenith in 1989; in that year the Workers’ Party won seven seats in the Dáil Éireann and one in the European parliament. The faction had attempted to develop a socialist politics from the organisation’s republican starting point. By the 1980s the Officials, or perhaps more precisely the Official leadership, were quite consciously moving away from a recognizably republican political narrative. The “national question” was increasingly subordinated to a politics that was concerned with a “scientific socialist” analyses of industrial and economic issues especially as they affected the southern state. Increasingly the Officials began to resemble an “orthodox communist” party of the kind that could be found throughout much of Europe – pro-Eastern Bloc and advocating a programme of planned and centralised industrialisation. The party’s ideological

142 Connolly, “Industrial Unionism and Constructive Socialism”, p.152.
144 Ó Broin, Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism, p.155.
development, however, was leadership driven; it frequently failed to take the rank and
dile membership of the party with it on the political journey it had undertaken. The
party also failed to address the differences in expectation and activity that existed
between the northern Official Republican Clubs’ – still willing to resort to armed force
when it suited them – and the apparently radical, but unarmed, modus operandi of the
southern section. The choice of socialist models from the Eastern bloc and elsewhere
left the party politically exposed when these regimes collapsed.

The Official faction’s changes of name charted its political direction: it had
transitioned from the socialist republicanism of (Official) Sinn Féin, to the
Marxist/Leninism of Sinn Féin The Workers’ Party. The amended title, the Workers’
Party, adopted in 1982, could have signalled the faction’s arrival at a secure political
destination; instead the fall of really existing socialism in Eastern Europe precipitated
a political identity crisis. Proinsias de Rossa, the Workers’ Party president who had
succeeded MacGiolla, commented on the changes he saw unfolding in 1989: 
what people all over Europe are saying is that they want socialism to be democratic. They
want socialism to get back to its classic place – in the vanguard of social democracy.”
The reconsideration of the group’s republican tradition continued alongside the socialist
soul searching that was occurring. Looking forward to the 1991 anniversary of the
Rising de Rossa signalled the need for a through-going political audit:

1991 is the 75th Anniversary of the 1916 rebellion. We must not allow
ourselves to be drawn into unthinking celebration of this event. We
must start now to extract the myth from the reality. Acknowledge that
1991 is not 1916, that the world has moved on since then. This party
has a strong tradition of looking reality in the eye and acknowledging
the need to change.
We have reached a point where we must look at 1916 coldly and
analytically and decide what weight we want to give it in the evolution
of our politics.

Accompanying the reconsideration of the party’s socialism there would, it appeared,
also be a re-evaluation of the party’s republicanism and the legacy of 1916. As the party
had developed intellectuals associated with the group had critiqued Connolly’s politics.
They had even argued for an abandonment of the flawed political project associated

145 Ó Broin, Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism, p.170.
146 “Challenging sacred cows” [Proinsias de Rossa presidential address to Árd Fheis], Making Sense,
Ireland’s political and cultural review, No. 9, April 1989, published by Repsol Ltd, Dublin, p.6.
147 “Challenging sacred cows” [Proinsias de Rossa presidential address to Árd Fheis], Making Sense,
Ireland’s political and cultural review, No. 9, April 1989, published by Repsol Ltd, Dublin, p.7.
with his legacy.\textsuperscript{148} In 1992, however, the forces demanding political reassessment were overwhelming; the Workers’ Party fractured. A new group, ‘Democratic Left’, was formed that jettisoned any republican (or indeed Marxist) pretensions.\textsuperscript{149}

The Workers’ Party continued on. The group could still occasionally look fondly on Connolly. At a 90th anniversary memorial lecture for James Connolly, Sean Garland, re-elected President of the Workers’ Party, could reminisce: ‘We were beginning to be the party which would inherit Connolly’s legacy and achieve his and our aims of a Socialist Republic.’\textsuperscript{150} The Workers’ Party, however, seemed to have run its course. By the end of the 1990s the Workers’ Party was being steadily eclipsed in the republican movement (and more broadly) by the Provisionals.\textsuperscript{151}

In the early 2000s the most successful of the republican groups, the Provisional faction, was still asking itself:

Are we socialists? ... If not what are we? Another anaemic social democrat party with a lingering cordite-induced odour of revolution? ... Where are we going? How are we going to get there?\textsuperscript{152}

The author of the piece, Justin Moran, while not mentioning him by name, used words redolent of Connolly. Connolly had appealed to ‘the wage-workers in the towns ... to the agricultural labourer, toiling away his life for a wage barely sufficient to keep body and soul together;” he sought to rally the disaffected and the oppressed.\textsuperscript{153} Moran similarly urged Sinn Féin to return ‘to basics, to being the voice of the Irish working class ... to clearly say that we are working for the poor, the disadvantaged”.\textsuperscript{154} He queried why the former goal of achieving an Irish socialist republic – a revolutionary

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{149} The Workers’ Party intellectuals who had been critical of Connolly’s legacy did not necessarily gravitate to the new party. Henry Patterson, for example, did not join Democratic Left. Paul Bew became a supporter of and ‘informal’ adviser to Ulster Unionist Party leader, David Trimble.
\bibitem{151} Ó Broin, \textit{Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism}, pp.166-167.
\bibitem{152} Justin Moran, “Left turn needed”, \textit{An Phoblacht/Republican News}, Srathy Nua Iml 26, Uimhir 24, Meitheamh (June) 19, 2003, p.11.
\bibitem{154} Moran, “Left turn needed”, p.10.
\end{thebibliography}
aim that might be seen to coincide with Connolly’s own – was now replaced with the aspiration for _an Ireland of equals_. Moran urged a _left turn_.

Moran’s article was part of an _ongoing debate_ in the pages of _AP/RN_. In the next issue of the paper Paul O’Connor responded; he defended the _Ireland of Equals_ slogan and disagreed with Moran’s (alleged) proposition – that we have no choice between adopting the rhetoric of old-fashioned socialism and becoming a party of anaemic social democrats.” O’Connor then set out a political vision that seemed to revive elements of the old _Éire Nua_ programme. _[C]ommunity credit schemes_ and _representative local enterprise boards_ were suggested as policies that might _honour socialist principles while addressing the pressing concerns and economic realities of a new age._ Connolly and the revolutionary socialism that he advocated went unmentioned.

Declan Kearney then weighed into the debate with Connolly as part of his rhetorical arsenal. He reassured supporters that _our vision is intact. Sinn Féin’s ideological genealogy goes back to Tone and McCraken and has evolved a republican revolutionary tradition personified by Lalor, Connolly, Mellowes and of which we are the present day descendants._ Kearney was clear that _Sinn Féin doesn’t need a left turn_. Instead what was needed, according to Kearney, was a seemingly more practical approach to politics. Kearney bent Marx to his contention:

> But let’s get it right! Marx once opined that philosophers only interpreted the world and that others had to change it. We should take note. Unless republican policy is in sync with the context of our existing strength – our ability to deliver and effect change in the prevailing political conditions – and also measurably generate increased political strength, it becomes nothing more than polemic.

Connolly took a decidedly different message from Marx. In 1907 Connolly penned a song that derided the sort of programmatic moderation that Kearney put forward:

> Some men, faint-hearted, ever seek
> Our programme to retouch,
> And will insist, whene’er they speak

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155 Moran, “Left turn needed”, p.11.
That we demand too much.\textsuperscript{162}

If Kearney’s politics were _the present day descendent_ of the _revolutionary tradition_ personified by Connolly\textsuperscript{163} then they were a far more timid relation.

Sinn Féin’s National Chairperson, Mitchel McLaughlin, joined the debate putting the Proclamation of 1916 to the fore in his argument. For McLaughlin — the 1916 Proclamation was a socialist manifesto.\textsuperscript{164} He was certain —[t]he signatories understood what they were about. They had declared a revolution and that revolution was socialist.”\textsuperscript{165} That the Rising did not even really attempt to mobilize the working class en masse or that the likes of Tom Clarke and Eamonn De Valera would not have envisaged themselves as fighting for a socialist republic was ignored. McLaughlin did, however, articulate an idealised vision of the Proclamation’s promise:

The Proclamation is not a narrow nationalist tract; it is the antithesis of reaction and conservatism. It is a generous and potent statement of the achievements possible within a free, united, socialist nation. It remains the basis for Irish unity and for the establishment of the Irish Republic.\textsuperscript{166}

Connolly, as one of the signatories (and almost certainly one of the authors) of the Proclamation, would not likely have taken issue with McLaughlin’s worthy sentiments; but Connolly was not the sole contributor to the 1916 declaration — the politics of less _socialistic_ republicanism were also accommodated in the text. A clear enunciation of class politics was absent from the Proclamation. The only social division that was openly acknowledged in the Proclamation was the sectarian one: —The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens\textsuperscript{167}. The class demand for expropriation was hedged. The Proclamation’s declaration of —the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies” does not specifically dictate a communal/social form of ownership.\textsuperscript{167} The Republic that was proclaimed in 1916 was not unambiguously a _worker’s republic_. While the Proclamation was influenced by Connolly’s politics it was in a particularly mediated form — a form that in many ways

\textsuperscript{165} McLaughlin, “The Proclamation and Working Class Politics Today”, p.9.
\textsuperscript{166} Text from the ‘Proclamation of the Irish Republic’ 1916.
\textsuperscript{167} Text from the ‘Proclamation of the Irish Republic’ 1916.
suited Sinn Féin’s own mediated _socialism_. McLaughlin qualified his idealism in the last lines of his article: “It is the duty of all republicans and democrats to help reinterpret it [the Proclamation] for today.”168 Such _reinterpretation’, of course, allowed for the sort of _policy development’ that had been previously advocated by Kearney.

A large picture of Connolly adorned Seán MacBrádaigh’s contribution to the political discussion in _AP/RN_ but MacBrádaigh immediately warned that “obsession with ideological purity and the following of dogmas that don’t suit objective conditions is a recipe for disaster.”169 “Successful revolutionaries”, according to MacBrádaigh, _combine pragmatism with determination and vision_.170 MacBrádaigh further counselled that “very now and again, just like the good Catholic, we need to renew our faith and remind ourselves of what we are about.”171 Using Connolly’s phraseology MacBrádaigh attested that “in essence” Sinn Féin was “about the reconquest of Ireland by the Irish people.”172 MacBrádaigh lauded Connolly’s legacy: “A major high point in the evolution of Irish political thought over the past 200 years was James Connolly’s marriage of socialism to democratic republican philosophy.”173 Connolly’s _socialist_ politics was then placed in a firmly republican context: “in reality, Connolly was a successor to other _proto-socialists_ within Irish republicanism, who had never used the word _socialist_ but who nevertheless represented that class who had always been to the fore in the struggle for freedom – the men and women of _no property_.”174 The ultimate objective of a 32-county socialist republic” was apparently still embraced by MacBrádaigh.175 Indeed he chastised members who “would challenge the very validity of socialism and the concept of an Ireland of Equals.”176 MacBrádaigh advised that “somebody should point out to these members that a commitment to a socialist republic has been a part of the Sinn Féin constitution for some time. No motion to any Árd Fheis that I can recall has ever suggested removing it.”177 Yet despite the support expressed for the _socialist republic_ there still appeared to be a nagging fear in the party of

‗Extreme socialism‘ creeping in. The ‗old‘ message of political caution still seemed to chime through; MacBrádaigh offered the sage advice, ‗be true to our roots and speak to the people in their own language; Avoid ultra-leftism.‘ Just like the good Catholic, Connolly’s revolutionary Marxist politics was still not a doctrine that Sinn Féin was willing to advocate without equivocation.

Republicanism sought, often, to reconcile Connolly’s socialism with Catholicism. Despite the claim to secularism, republicanism’s adherents were commonly drawn from a community that was still influenced by Catholic teaching. Connolly had operated in a similar environment in his day and his own political attitude to the ‗religious question‘ allowed his politics to be conciliated with Catholic belief. As the republican movement developed and religious devotion in general declined the imperative to ‗make Connolly Catholic‘ seemed to wane in favour of Connolly, the socialist republican. The Official faction perhaps went the furthest in adopting a socialist aspiration, assiduously (if sometimes inappropriately) invoking Connolly along the way. The party’s dream, however, was decimated in the wake of the collapse of socialist regimes that had come to be viewed as ideal political models. Provisional republicanism also appeared to ‗modernise‘ its political doctrine, discarding ‗Christian principles‘ in favour of ‗republican socialism‘. Again Connolly was summoned to support the renovated objective - the ‗socialist republic‘- but this socialist republic was always qualified. Regular cautions were issued against ‗extreme socialism‘ or ‗ultra-leftism‘. The Proclamation served to set the limits on what was envisaged: a republic that would cherish ‗all the children of the nation equally‘, an ‗Ireland of equals‘. For republicanism’s main factions Connolly’s revolutionary ideals, at some point, were either too much or too little to be taken on. For the Official faction Connolly’s legacy needed to be updated with and assimilated to the ‗scientific socialism‘ of the ‗Communist‘ bloc. For the early Provisionals Connolly’s socialism had to be articulated with reference to Catholicism; in the faction’s electoral phase, ‗ultra-leftism‘ was the anathema and Connolly’s Marxism had to be moderated for the sake of party building and vote catching. In neither case did Connolly’s socialist legacy emerge unscathed.

Conclusion

And for God's sake, don't let them bury me in some field full of harps and shamrocks. 
And whatever you do, don't let them make a martyr out of me. 
No! Rather raise the Starry Plough on high, sing a song of freedom.

"James Connolly", song written by Larry Kirwan of the band, Black 47.

James Connolly was, and continues to be, predominant in the Irish national narrative. "Mainstream" politicians from Eamon de Valera in the 1930s to the current Irish Labour party leader, Eamon Gilmore, have summoned Connolly's legacy in support of their political agenda. It is among republicans, however, that Connolly has achieved the most iconic status: in 2012 Gerry Adams could still invoke James Connolly to lambast Sinn Féin's political foes. — What would James Connolly think", Adams asked, — of the Labour leadership's implementation of right wing austerity policies?"¹⁷⁹ Through all the splits in the movement, the political changes of direction, in armed struggle and out of it, Connolly retained his allure. No faction of Irish republicanism ever jettisoned Connolly. Republicanism's resilient enthusiasm for Connolly has derived from features inherent in republicanism as a political movement. Components of Connolly's message have, at times, always found a resonance among republicans and external factors effecting the movement have operated to extend Connolly's relevance for modern republicans.

Connolly's execution in the wake of the 1916 Rising qualified him to join the republican assemblage of martyrs. His name could be recited in historical litany with other Irish "patriots". Connolly had honoured the Fenian "Manchester Martyrs", Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien and now he joined them as one of republicanism's revered "glorious dead". Connolly was numbered with those who "fell" in 1916 - Pádraig Pearse, Thomas Clarke, Éamonn Ceannt, and Seán MacDiarmada - but among them Connolly stood out. He attained a unique place in republican discourse. Connolly attracted the attention of modern republicans even before the outbreak of renewed political violence

in Northern Ireland at the end of the 1960s. His political thinking had been the inspiration for the Republican Congress in the 1930s. Those who would come to lead the republican movement in the later 1960s often had the Republican Congress as part of their formative political experience and with it a sense of Connolly's legacy. As the republican movement attempted to revitalise itself Connolly's thinking offered the prospect of something more meaningful than "the old sad tragedies of our past history".\(^{180}\) Connolly's politics related to a changing Irish society in a way that the romantic traditionalism of older republicanism did not. Even when a section of republicanism broke-away, distrustful of a perceived left turn in the movement and adverse to the down-grading of armed struggle, these "Provisional republicans" still maintained an affinity with James Connolly.

For Irish republicans (and nationalists generally) an appropriate account of the national past has always been crucial. Those who wrote the story of James Connolly after his death had helped to establish his revered status in Irish national history. The portrayal of Connolly could be arranged, so it seemed, to offer something to all hues of national and political opinion. Constance Markiewicz had Connolly as a "Catholic friendly" socialist who wrote the "Gospels of our Nationality."\(^{181}\) Desmond Ryan's Connolly was "Marxian, Separatist, and Workers' Republican".\(^{182}\) For Desmond Greaves, the Connolly biographer most favoured by republicans, Connolly was a "socialist republican" who "regarded national independence as the primary goal".\(^{183}\) Most republicans could reconcile themselves, in one way or another, with one of these "Connollys", Catholic, nationalist, socialist republican, or a mixture of all three. When the "revisionist controversy" broke out in Irish historiography republicans demonstrated their devotion to past presentations of Connolly by vigorously opposing the critical interpretations offered by the "historiography of the Irish counter-revolution".\(^{184}\) The most "revisionist" inclined republicans in the Official faction of the movement could not entirely efface Connolly's standing; historians associated with the Officials launched a critical assault on Connolly's legacy but the faction would not completely relinquish


\(^{181}\) Constance De Markievicz, James Connolly's Policy and Catholic Doctrine, no publisher or date given, p.46.

\(^{182}\) Desmond Ryan, James Connolly - His Life Work and Writings, Dublin, 1924, p.2.


him. In 2010 the Workers’ Party’s Look Left magazine could still see fit to publish an article on “the ideas of Irish socialism’s most important thinker”.185

The historical ‘tale’ surrounding Connolly has been interpreted in various ways and many of the tellings (particularly the earlier narratives) have suited the purposes of Irish republicanism; but Connolly’s own writings, his political orientation towards republicanism and the re-evaluations that he made in the heat of political struggle has made his thought and the history surrounding him liable to flexible appropriation by the republican movement. Republicans proved adroit at shaping Connolly’s ideas to apply to the particular needs of the political moment. Connolly’s imprimatur was invoked to legitimise the ‘left turn’ of the Official faction, while the Provisionals used Connolly to denounce the influence in the movement of an ‘alien social philosophy’. The Provisionals were certain Connolly was not a Marxist; he ‘found his inspiration in the Republican philosophy.’ In the incessant intra-republican squabbles Connolly’s legacy was used as an ideological weapon; factions faced off at ten paces, each primed with their own opposing ‘Connollys’.

Connolly was mobilised to justify the ongoing republican armed struggle. In claiming to be the political scions of the Rising the Provisionals gained a republican legitimacy; the invocation of Connolly also gave to the Provisionals a radical ‘revolutionary’ aura. As the Provisional faction developed politically and moved towards a peaceful settlement the need to affirm the armed struggle waned. Now Connolly became the emblem of the Provisionals continued ‘radical’ political aspirations for, not a workers’ republic, but an ‘Ireland of equals’.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party, which seemed to put ‘Connolly-type’ socialism very much at the centre of its programme, suffered from its adherence to a republican political tradition; it too celebrated Connolly’s venture in 1916 and believed itself to be emulating that heroic fight. But the IRSP was too suspicious of political delving, too wedded to armed struggle and too late in applying a critical analysis to its practice. Its republican-socialism was destroyed by factionalism and gun fights. The remnants of the IRSP were left to re-examine Connolly in the aftermath of their fratricidal bloodletting.

Not all republicans were adverse to the ‘Marxian’ theoretics that Connolly offered. The Official faction, starting from the ‘lessons of Connolly’, eventually transformed itself into the ‘Marxist-Leninist’ Workers’ Party, only to be wrecked on the rocks of Eastern bloc collapse post-1989. The Irish Republican Socialist Party propagated a Marxist sounding rhetoric, heavily informed by an understanding of Connolly. Some of the younger generation of Provisionals went further than their leadership ever seemed able; in the prisons of the North a small section of ‘communist republicans’ were formed intent on reclaiming Connolly’s revolutionary legacy. For some republicans that project continues today, to articulate a Connolly-inspired socialist republicanism.187

Republicans embraced and embellished the interpretations of Connolly that were offered to them. Not surprisingly they accepted the version of Connolly that most suited their political needs and inclinations. Sometimes these renderings were partial, sometimes they were quite credible. There were, however, firm reasons why republicans could find something compelling in Connolly’s writings. Connolly perceived republicans to be a constituency that could be won (or at least reconciled) to the socialist cause. Republicans, Connolly hoped, could be convinced to go further than just the examples of republics in France and the United States – beyond reorganised ‘capitalist tyranny’ - to strive instead for the Irish workers’ republic.188 Despite his best efforts in his own lifetime Connolly largely failed to attract republicans to his banner. He joined with republican insurgents in 1916 but their agreed Proclamation fell significantly short of Connolly’s ultimate socialist aspiration.

Connolly and his legacy have suffered historically by being disconnected from his humanity. Human beings are not entirely static in their thought. Ideas develop in the light of experience. Too often Connolly has been glorified without a proper engagement with his politics as a totality; too often Connolly has been characterised as an infallible political sage marching resolutely on to a predetermined finale. Connolly’s expositors, republican and otherwise, often contributed to this myth of the man ‘carved out of a solid piece’, a man who ‘from his earliest days in Dublin did not change his thinking in

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187 The republican group Éirígí provides a good example of the continued influence of Connolly and ‘socialist-republicanism’. See http://www.eirigi.org/.
any substantive respect’. Republicans have frequently been only too eager to accept this construct uncritically. The reverence in which Connolly is held by republicans and the solemn commemorations of his role in the Rising do nothing to disturb this illusion.

Connolly was, however, operating in a political environment when the ‘Irish question’ was pushed to the fore again and again. Connolly, the Marxist, adapted his doctrine to the dictates of the political situation. He was determined to unite theory and practice. Connolly formulated (and reformulated) his approach in order to take advantage of any opportunities for political struggle; revolution was his ‘business’.

Connolly’s politics developed from a Marxism that owed much to the Second International; like many of his socialist contemporaries Connolly put political faith in propaganda and the ballot box. He then, again like many socialists of the time, became enraptured with a syndicalist vision, first inspired by Daniel De Leon, then activated by the IWW. Back in Ireland, in desperate circumstances, battered industrially in the Lockout, disheartened as war broke out across Europe, Connolly retaliated in union with the only forces he thought could be mustered – insurrectionary republicanism.

In the late 1960s Connolly’s legacy seemed more successful; a younger generation of republicans were attracted to his radical political message. To many republicans in the North Connolly’s workers’ republic seemed politically preferable to the sectarian police-state they lived in and it seemed preferable to the ramshackle, hidebound, poverty-stricken Republic in the south. A workers’ republic also seemed more compelling than the qualified ‘socialism’ offered by Sinn Féin’s Éire Nua policy of the early period. Armed struggle might have been accepted as an appropriate political response but if young northern republicans were going to risk their lives in pursuit of an ideal it had to be republic whose promise matched their willingness to sacrifice.

In a way modern republicanism appears to have reversed Connolly’s historical trajectory. Connolly was impelled from the ballot box to industrial struggle, to armed rising; republicanism moved from armed struggle to the electoral contest (the industrial struggle seems yet to come). The political reasoning that went along with this transformation owed little concretely to Connolly. In the political shifts Connolly’s

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190 Reportedly when asked about his knowledge of revolutionary and military questions Connolly replied “You forget that revolution is my business”. Desmond Ryan, *James Connolly - His Life Work and Writings*, Dublin, 1924.
radical social agenda has been abraded – no more is sought the workers’ republic, at least not by republicanism’s main protagonists.

Connolly, just before his execution, reputedly bemoaned the likely response of socialists to his involvement in a nationalist rebellion: “They will never understand why I am here”, he said, “[t]hey will all forget I am an Irishman.” As an Irish socialist and as a socialist active in Ireland Connolly had to have an answer to the Irish national question. The position he arrived at was appropriate for a revolutionary Marxist; he sought a workers’ republic. His extrapolation from this premise, that advanced nationalists’, republicans, should readily accept his proposed socialist-republican goal, was less well conceived. It ignored the class content of republicanism. Leading republicans like Arthur Griffith, Tom Clarke, Eamon de Valera, and (later) Michael Collins were not much attracted to socialism. Even Pádraig Pearse, who showed some sympathy for Connolly’s ideas, can hardly be described as a republican-socialist. Republicanism was not a movement inherently inclined towards socialism; it demonstrated that it was quite capable of establishing an Irish republic (in twenty-six counties) on a capitalist basis. The tragedy of the Rising was not so much that Connolly was doctrinally mistaken about republicanism, or armed struggle, or Northern Protestants or the backwardness of Irish society, it is that he did not live long enough to learn whatever lessons needed learning in practice. He did not survive to see a workers’ revolution in far off Russia inspire many Irish people to seek for a better outcome to the national struggle that took place in 1918 to 1922. He was not there to learn from and to lead the Irish working class and he was not there to see republican revolutionaries settle for a bourgeois state. Those who have followed in Connolly’s wake have had no more political success in meaningfully linking socialism with republicanism. Despite Connolly’s posthumous popularity among revolutionary republicans few of his apparent followers seem to have learned from his legacy.

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