

James Connolly

Socialism and Nationalism

(1897)

In Ireland at the present time there are at work a variety of agencies seeking to preserve the national sentiment in the hearts of the people.

These agencies, whether Irish Language movements, Literary Societies or Commemoration Committees, are undoubtedly doing a work of lasting benefit to this country in helping to save from extinction the precious racial and national history, language and characteristics of our people.

Nevertheless, there is a danger that by too strict an adherence to their present methods of propaganda, and consequent neglect of vital living issues, they may only succeed in stereotyping our historical studies into a worship of the past, or crystallising nationalism into a tradition – glorious and heroic indeed, but still only a tradition.

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.

It must demonstrate to the people of Ireland that our nationalism is not merely a morbid idealising of the past, but is also capable of formulating a distinct and definite answer to the problems of the present and a political and economic creed capable of adjustment to the wants of the future.

This concrete political and social ideal will best be supplied, I believe, by the frank acceptance on the part of all earnest nationalists of the Republic as their goal.

Not a Republic, as in France, where a capitalist monarchy with an elective head parodies the constitutional abortions of England, and in open alliance with the Muscovite despotism brazenly flaunts its apostasy to the traditions of the Revolution.

Not a Republic as in the United States, where the power of the purse has established a new tyranny under the forms of freedom; where, one hundred years after the feet of the last British red-coat polluted the streets of Boston, British landlords and financiers impose upon American citizens a servitude compared with which the tax of pre-Revolution days was a mere trifle.

No! the Republic I would wish our fellow-countrymen to set before them as their ideal should be of such a character that the mere mention of its name would at all times serve as a beacon-light to the oppressed of every land, at all times holding forth promise of freedom and plenteousness as the reward of their efforts on its behalf.

To the tenant farmer, ground between landlordism on the one hand and American competition on the other, as between the upper and the nether millstone; to the wage-workers in the towns, suffering from the exactions of the slave-driving capitalist to the agricultural labourer, toiling away his life for a wage barely sufficient to keep body and soul together; in fact to every one of the toiling millions upon whose misery the outwardly-splendid fabric of our modern civilisation is reared, the Irish Republic might be made a word to conjure with – a rallying point for the disaffected, a haven for the oppressed, a point of departure for the Socialist, enthusiastic in the cause of human freedom.

This linking together of our national aspirations with the hopes of the men and women who have raised the standard of revolt against that system of capitalism and landlordism, of which the British Empire is the most aggressive type and resolute defender, should not, in any sense, import an element of discord into the ranks of earnest nationalists, and would serve to place us in touch with fresh reservoirs of moral and physical strength sufficient to lift the cause of Ireland to a more commanding position than it has occupied since the day of Benburb.

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?

When you talk of freeing Ireland, do you only mean the chemical elements which compose the soil of Ireland? Or is it the Irish people you mean? If the latter, from what do you propose to free them? From the rule of England?

But all systems of political administration or governmental machinery are but the reflex of the economic forms which underlie them.

English rule in England is but the symbol of the fact that English conquerors in the past forced upon this country a property system founded upon spoliation, fraud and murder: that, as the present-day exercise of the 'rights of property' so originated involves the continual practice of legalised spoliation and fraud, English rule is found to be the most suitable form of government by which the spoliation can be protected, and an English army the most pliant tool with which to execute judicial murder when the fears of the propertied classes demand it.

The Socialist who would destroy, root and branch, the whole brutally materialistic system of civilisation, which like the English language we have adopted as our own, is, I hold, a far more deadly foe to English rule and tutelage, than the superficial thinker who imagines it possible to

reconcile Irish freedom with those insidious but disastrous forms of economic subjection – landlord tyranny, capitalist fraud and unclean usury; baneful fruits of the Norman Conquest, the unholy trinity, of which Strongbow and Diarmuid MacMurchadha – Norman thief and Irish traitor – were the fitting precursors and apostles.

If you remove the English army to-morrow 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.

England would still rule you to your ruin, even while your lips offered hypocritical homage at the shrine of that Freedom whose cause you had betrayed.

Nationalism without Socialism – without a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of that common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin - is only national recreancy.

It would be tantamount to a public declaration that our oppressors had so far succeeded in inoculating us with their perverted conceptions of justice and morality that we had finally decided to accept those conceptions as our own, and no longer needed an alien army to force them upon us.

As a Socialist I am prepared to do all one man can do to achieve for our motherland her rightful heritage – independence; but if you ask me to abate one jot or tittle of the claims of social justice, in order to conciliate the privileged classes, then I must decline.

Such action would be neither honourable nor feasible. Let us never forget that he never reaches Heaven who marches thither in the company of the Devil. Let us openly proclaim our faith: the logic of events is with us.

James Connolly
Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
(1897)

“The great appear great to us, only because we are on our knees:
LET US RISE.”

Fellow Workers,

The loyal subjects of Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, etc., celebrate this year the longest reign on record. Already the air is laden with rumours of preparations for a wholesale manufacture of sham ‘popular rejoicings’ at this glorious (?) commemoration.

Home Rule orators and Nationalist Lord Mayors, Whig politicians and Parnellite pressmen, have ere now lent their prestige and influence to the attempt to arouse public interest in the sickening details of this Feast of Flunkeyism. It is time then that some organised party in Ireland – other than those in whose mouths Patriotism means Compromise, and Freedom, High Dividends – should speak out bravely and honestly the sentiments awakened in the breast of every lover of freedom by this ghastly farce now being played out before our eyes. Hence the Irish Socialist Republican Party – which, from its inception, has never hesitated to proclaim its unswerving hostility to the British Crown, and to the political and social order of which in these islands that Crown is but the symbol – takes this opportunity of hurling at the heads of all the courtly mummies who grovel at the shrine of royalty the contempt and hatred of the Irish Revolutionary Democracy. We, at least, are not loyal men; we confess to having more respect and honour for the raggedest child of the poorest labourer in Ireland today than for any, even the most virtuous, descendant of the long array of murderers, adulterers and madmen who have sat upon the throne of England.

During this glorious reign Ireland has seen 1,225,000 of her children die of famine, starved to death whilst the produce of her soil and their labour was eaten up by a vulture aristocracy, enforcing their rents by the bayonets of a hired assassin army in the pay of the –best of the English

Queens'; the eviction of 3,668,000, a multitude greater than the entire population of Switzerland; and the reluctant emigration of 4,186,000 of our kindred, a greater host than the entire people of Greece. At the present moment 78 percent of our wage-earners receive less than £1 per week, our streets are thronged by starving crowds of the unemployed, cattle graze on our tenantless farms and around the ruins of our battered homesteads, our ports are crowded with departing emigrants, and our poorhouses are full of paupers. Such are the constituent elements out of which we are bade to construct a National Festival of rejoicing!

Working-class of Ireland: We appeal to you not to allow your opinions to be misrepresented on this occasion. Join your voice with ours in protesting against the base assumption that we owe to this Empire any other debt than that of hatred of all its plundering institutions. Let this year be indeed a memorable one as marking the date when the Irish workers at last flung off that slavish dependence on the lead of 'the gentry,' which has paralysed the arm of every soldier of freedom in the past.

The Irish landlords, now as ever the enemy's garrison, instinctively support every institution which, like monarchy, degrades the manhood of the people and weakens the moral fibre of the oppressed; the middle-class, absorbed in the pursuit of gold, have pawned their souls for the prostitute glories of commercialism and remain openly or secretly hostile to every movement which would imperil the sanctity of their dividends. The working class alone have nothing to hope for save in a revolutionary reconstruction of society; they, and they alone, are capable of that revolutionary initiative which, with all the political and economic development of the time to aid it, can carry us forward into the promised land of perfect Freedom, the reward of the age-long travail of the people.

To you, workers of Ireland, we address ourselves. **AGITATE** in the workshop, in the field, in the factory, until you arouse your brothers to hatred of the slavery of which we are all the victims. **EDUCATE**, that the people may no longer be deluded by illusory hopes of prosperity under any system of society of which monarchs or noblemen, capitalists or landlords form an integral part. **ORGANISE**, that a solid, compact and intelligent force, conscious of your historic mission as a class, you may seize the reins of political power whenever possible and, by intelligent application of the working-class ballot, clear the field of action for the revolutionary forces

of the future. Let the 'canting, fed classes' bow the knee as they may, be you true to your own manhood, and to the cause of freedom, whose hope is in you, and, pressing unweariedly onward in pursuit of the high destiny to which the Socialist Republic invites you, let the words which the poet puts into the mouth of Mazeppa console you amid the orgies of the tyrants of today:

But time at last makes all things even,
And if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power
That could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient hate and vigil long,
Of those who treasure up a wrong.

James Connolly
Let Us Free Ireland!
(1899)

Let us free Ireland! Never mind such base, carnal thoughts as concern work and wages, healthy homes, or lives unclouded by poverty.

Let us free Ireland! The rackrenting landlord; is he not also an Irishman, and wherefore should we hate him? Nay, let us not speak harshly of our brother – yea, even when he raises our rent.

Let us free Ireland! The profit-grinding capitalist, who robs us of three-fourths of the fruits of our labour, who sucks the very marrow of our bones when we are young, and then throws us out in the street, like a worn-out tool when we are grown prematurely old in his service, is he not an Irishman, and mayhap a patriot, and wherefore should we think harshly of him?

Let us free Ireland! “The land that bred and bore us.” And the landlord who makes us pay for permission to live upon it. Whoop it up for liberty!

“Let us free Ireland,” says the patriot who won’t touch Socialism. Let us all join together and cr-r-rush the br-r-rutal Saxon. Let us all join together, says he, all classes and creeds. And, says the town worker, after we have crushed the Saxon and freed Ireland, what will we do? Oh, then you can go back to your slums, same as before. Whoop it up for liberty!

And, says the agricultural workers, after we have freed Ireland, what then? Oh, then you can go scraping around for the landlord’s rent or the money-lenders’ interest same as before. Whoop it up for liberty!

After Ireland is free, says the patriot who won’t touch socialism, we will protect all classes, and if you won’t pay your rent you will be evicted same as now. But the evicting party, under command of the sheriff, will wear green uniforms and the Harp without the Crown, and the warrant

turning you out on the roadside will be stamped with the arms of the Irish Republic. Now, isn't that worth fighting for?

And when you cannot find employment, and, giving up the struggle of life in despair, enter the poorhouse, the band of the nearest regiment of the Irish army will escort you to the poorhouse door to the tune of *St. Patrick's Day*. Oh! It will be nice to live in those days!

“With the Green Flag floating o'er us” and an ever-increasing army of unemployed workers walking about under the Green Flag, wishing they had something to eat. Same as now! Whoop it up for liberty!

Now, my friend, I also am Irish, but I'm a bit more logical. The capitalist, I say, is a parasite on industry; as useless in the present stage of our industrial development as any other parasite in the animal or vegetable world is to the life of the animal or vegetable upon which it feeds.

The working class is the victim of this parasite – this human leech, and it is the duty and interest of the working class to use every means in its power to oust this parasite class from the position which enables it to thus prey upon the vitals of labour.

Therefore, I say, let us organise as a class to meet our masters and destroy their mastership; organise to drive them from their hold upon public life through their political power; organise to wrench from their robber clutch the land and workshops on and in which they enslave us; organise to cleanse our social life from the stain of social cannibalism, from the preying of man upon his fellow man.

Organise for a full, free and happy life **FOR ALL OR FOR NONE.**