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WHAT IS



THE CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION?

CONSTITUTION & EXPLANATION

Price 1/-

CONSTITUTION

OF THE
**CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION AND
IRISH SELF-DETERMINATION LEAGUE**

The present constitution of the Connolly Association was drawn up in 1955 and adopted at the Birmingham Conference. The Association had, of course, been in existence since 1938, when it was founded by the amalgamation of a number of Irish groups in London. The 1955 constitution was the result of seventeen years of experience and is worth studying today. We publish it in full for the benefit of our readers and hope they will be convinced that no other Irish political organisation in Britain is necessary, except for the pursuit of immediate objectives.

(1) NAME :

Connolly Association and Irish Self-determination League.

(2) AIMS AND OBJECTS :

To organise Irish men and women resident in Britain for the defence of their interests, in united struggle with the British working class movement, and in particular—

- (a) To win support for the struggle of the Irish people for a united independent Republic, and to fight for the removal of all obstacles placed in their way by British imperialism.
- (b) To stand for equitable treatment for all Irish people living in Britain.

(3) METHODS :

The C.A. seeks to promote these aims and objects by :—

- (a) Winning majority support for them in the organised working class and democratic movement in Britain.
- (b) Working for the unity and strength of the Labour movement, especially the unity of British and Irish workers.
- (c) Supporting the principle of the self-determination of nations on a world scale.
- (d) Publishing or distributing or otherwise making known the teachings of the great representatives of Irish republicanism, especially of the socialist James Connolly.
- (e) The publication of literature explaining its aims and objects and methods.
- (f) Co-operating with other organisations in matters of common concern and affiliating to or accepting affiliation from appropriate bodies as may be decided.

(4) PARTY POLITICS :

- (a) The C.A. is an independent non-party, non-sectarian organisation of Irish people and their friends in Britain.
- (b) The association shall not affiliate to or accept affiliation from any political party.

(5) MEMBERSHIP :

- (1) Ordinary members. Ordinary membership is open to all bona-fide supporters of the aims, objects and methods of the Association without racial, national, religious, or party-political distinction.
- (2) Associate members.

(6) ORGANISATION :

- (a) The control of the Association is vested in the ordinary members through an annual delegate conference based on representation from branches and other local groupings.
- (b) Affiliated organisations may send observers.
- (c) Associate members may attend as observers.
- (d) Voting is restricted to representatives of the ordinary members.
- (e) Branches of the Association may send voting delegates to the annual conference in proportion to the number of their members, this proportion being decided for each conference separately, according to circumstances. Resolutions for Annual Conference, other than emergency resolutions, must be submitted at least six weeks prior to the date of the conference.
- (f) Branches of the Association must consist of the minimum of six members situated in one locality, three of whom must be officials, namely Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

- (g) Branches may determine their own standing orders subject to the rulings of the organisation as a whole.
- (h) Individual members may attend annual conferences, but non-delegates may not vote, except where they represent districts where no branch is established, when they may be grouped with other individual members as a constituency for voting purposes.
- (i) The Annual Conference elects an Executive Council of not less than 12 members which should meet not less than three times in its year of office, and is responsible for the entire management of the affairs of the Association between conferences. Only members of six months' standing are eligible for election to the E.C. except by unanimous vote of Conference.
- (j) The N.E.C. elects the principal officials from among its members, and may delegate its functions to such officers and sub-committees as may be decided.
- (k) The N.E.C. may co-opt members to fill the places of those unable to continue to serve. Sub-committees may co-opt such additional members as are necessary to the conduct of their work and subject to the general control of the N.E.C.

(7) FINANCE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS :

- (a) Membership subscription, 30/- per annum, payable if so desired in two half-yearly instalments of 15/-.

Married couples may have joint membership on payment of £2 annually, of £1 half-yearly.

- (b) Associate members. £1 per annum.
- (c) Affiliated organisations.
 - National £5 per annum
 - District, Area or Divisional Organisations £2 per annum
 - Branch or local £1 per annum

Note:—Affiliated organisations, full subscription members, and associate members receive the "Irish Democrat" each month by post.

- (d) The accounts of the Association shall be audited annually.

(8) DISCIPLINE :

- (a) In the event of any member, branch or group of members acting in a manner detrimental to the interests of the Association, or in such a manner as to bring it into public discredit, the E.C. may intervene and has the power after due enquiry to suspend or expel members.
- (b) Members, branches or groups of members suspended or expelled have the right of appeal to the following Annual Conference, provided they give notice within one week of expulsion or suspension, or two months prior to the Annual Conference.

(9) CHANGES OF RULES :

- (a) The above rules may be altered by a two-thirds majority vote of any Annual Conference, or of a special Conference which may be called for the purpose.
- (b) The interpretation of these rules and the making of arrangements for matters not specifically laid down in them, is the responsibility of the Executive Council.

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From: CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION,
283 Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Explanation of the Constitution

THE fundamental conception of the Connolly Association is that the interests of the Irish in Britain as **Irishmen** are in no way contrary to their interests as **workers**.

This is a conception that follows directly from Connolly's teaching that the struggle for Irish independence and the struggle for socialism and the betterment of the workers in Ireland are not contradictory but complementary.

People puzzle over whether Connolly was a nationalist or an internationalist though he explained what he was himself. He thought every internationalist must stand for the freedom of oppressed nations, and thus in that sense he must be a nationalist as well.

The Connolly Association advises the Irish in Britain (by which of course are meant the vast majority who are workers) to found their actions on that teaching of Connolly, by striving to solve their problems both national and social, through the working class movement of the country they are living in.

This may mean however that they must fight to secure certain changes in that movement, before it can serve the interests of the Irish. There is nothing surprising about this. Every new addition to the population of a country presents the organised working class movement (Trade Unions, Co-ops., political parties) with a need to accommodate the new arrivals, so that the working class movement shall be international within the confines of the one country.

When you read through the constitution bear this in mind. And bear in mind also that according to Connolly's teaching the same goes for the English. It is in their interest to support the independence of countries their own imperialists oppress, and at the same time to invite immigrants from those countries to join the Trade Union and Labour movement so as to defend the interests of all the workers who live in the country.

THE centre of the whole conception of the Connolly Association is the working class movement. Although it does not align itself with any particular political party within the working class movement, it is definitely an organisation based on working class interests. Though of course it is not so crude as to think that other classes cannot share interests with the working class.

Here are some points on the wording of the constitution :

The double name arose for historical reasons. In 1938 the Irish knew about Connolly but not the English workers. As the influence of the Association grew some English workers felt that the name Connolly Association was not explanatory enough. So the main objective of the Association was added to its title. It has no special significance.

IN the forefront of the Association's aims is organisation. This involves a point of philosophy. The Association holds, as Connolly held, that the mainspring of history is action by the mass of the

people. The ordinary people have only one asset that can never be taken from them, their numbers. To make these numbers effective organisation is wanted. No amount of individual heroism or sacrifice, or indeed intellectual accomplishment, will ever be effective except through organisation. The mass of the people every time.

Two special interests of the Irish in Britain are mentioned. The second which relates to equal treatment is easily understood. Things have changed since the days when factories had notices outside them saying "no Irish need apply." But the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

From time time Radio, Television and Press deal with Irish people and the Irish question in a totally biased way. There are cases where Irishmen who have got into trouble are alleged to have been accorded less privilege than Englishmen would have enjoyed. And such allegations arise particularly in the allegedly "political" cases. Throughout its long history the Connolly Association has operated Exiles Advisory Services, Prisoners' Welfare Committees, and has run campaigns for the release of political prisoners.

A few points need to be noted with regard to section 2a which was very carefully drawn up and much discussed.

It is implicit in the wording that the Connolly Association does not operate in Ireland. The words are "win support for the struggle of the Irish people" not to lead it or wage it. The particular kind of support is then spelled out. British imperialism has erected a number of barriers in the way of Irish emancipation, for example, the border that partitions

the country, the Trade Pact, economic policies, and so on. Possibly the time will come when the Irish people **smash** these barriers down. The best way to help them is to try and have them **taken** down.

This is only likely to be done properly if there is brought to power in Britain a Government with a socialist policy—it would need to be a bit more socialist than Harold Wilson's was, though he is beginning to look quite rosy by comparison with the Tories who ousted him!

WHAT is a socialist policy on the national question? As laid down by the old International Socialist Congresses, to which Connolly's party subscribed, it is based on the equality and self-determination of nations. We want a Government in Britain that will base its policy on that.

But it must not be forgotten that provided there is unity and organisation concessions can be wrested even from reactionary Governments. Never give up the fight and go off wringing your hands. Besides, the struggle to get concessions from a reactionary Government is an essential part of the process of replacing it with a more progressive one.

So we want all the obstacles placed by British imperialism in the way of Irish progress removed by the country that put them there, and in the meantime we'll be prepared to accept their removal one by one.

Now it is quite obvious that the Irish in Britain alone could not possibly accomplish such a vast task. A very big change in British public opinion is needed. Here is illustrated the importance of organisation, and converting the working class movement to a socialist policy on the Irish question.

Sometimes it is asked why the Association does not talk of supporting the Irish people in their "struggle for socialism." There are several reasons. First the particular stage of the struggle in Ireland at the present time is the struggle for an independent united republic. The struggle for Civil Rights is part of this as the Unionists well know. And we would disdain to conceal that we know too. The struggle for socialism expresses itself at present in the form of a struggle for a united independent republic. And any so-called struggle for socialism that doesn't fight for a united independent Republic is in the opinion of the Association bogus and illusory. Another reason is this: it is not for people living outside Ireland to tell people who are living inside it just when and how they should make social changes. It is sufficient to try and help them to win the power to take their own decisions without British imperialism breathing down their necks.

If you have any confidence in the Irish people at all, and if you have not don't join the Connolly Association, then you will not worry about how they will use independence when it has been won.

THE methods of the Association follow directly from its objects. The first must necessarily be the conversion of British Labour.

There are only two powers in Britain, the Government and the T.U.C. That is what is meant by winning the working class movement. It means winning people whose actions can be decisive, and at the top-most level. It's a big job.

Clearly the British Labour movement is not going to exert itself on the Irish question unless the Irish are seen as a factor tending to strengthen that movement. Therefore the Connolly Association does everything possible to reduce misunderstandings be-

tween British and Irish workers. It supports the British workers (among which are distributed one million Irish workers, many of them in leading positions) in their economic struggles.

It does not do this merely because it wants their goodwill. Nor does it do so merely because the Irish are workers too. It does so because it does not believe there is the slightest contradiction between the two objectives, which are part of the same thing. The Irish should be inside the working class movement which is their movement, and the working class movement should support the national demands made by the Irish people, many of whose representatives work alongside them and struggle with them against the employers.

Clearly it would be a queer movement that wanted the principles of socialist policy applied to Ireland and didn't want them applied to other nations as well. So that is why clause 3c is spelled out.

THE education clause, 3d, it will be noticed, does not confine the propaganda of the Connolly Association merely to the teachings of Connolly. The history of Ireland, the writings of Irish democrats and Republicans, is a great storehouse of knowledge and ideas. James Connolly was a product of that history and tradition, just as he was a product of the international working class tradition—and indeed these two traditions themselves had a common origin in the ideas of the French revolution and Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

It would be silly to publish and disseminate the teachings of Connolly and say nothing of the tradition of which he was a part.

One of the great things about the London Connolly Association which has given its members their political strength and established its influence

so firmly is the weekly lecture on aspects of Irish history and politics, in which the ideas of Connolly and the traditions of Republicanism and Socialism are shown in their application to current events.

SOMETIMES somebody writes in to ask "is the Connolly Association Socialist." They can get confused when they don't get a simple answer. You do not have to sign a declaration that you support socialism in order to be a member—though you have to support an independent Irish republic of 32 counties.

The whole outlook, policy and work of the Association is informed by Socialist ideas. But it is not dogmatic. Many good Irish Republicans agree with some socialist ideas and disagree with others.

These days socialism is fashionable. There are many people whose ideas are as different from Connolly's as chalk from cheese who proclaim themselves socialists. The Association is not interested in people's consciences. It is interested in what they do. No republican who agrees with what the Connolly Association is doing and wants to forward it is going to be refused admission because he isn't a socialist and his family votes Fianna Fail! And any real socialist will welcome him. And those who will not the Connolly Association does not want.

AS has been indicated the Association thinks that its aims and policy should be enough for all the Irish workers in Britain, and that there is no need for any other general organisation. But of course life is not so simple.

What then is the Association's attitude to other Irish organisations? It is very simple. Provided they are bona fide and not opposed to the Association's main objectives and methods, to co-operate with them

on matters of common concern. With organisations the Association considers not to be bona fide, or who are antagonistic to the aim of a united independent republic, or hostile to the working class, the Association declines to have anything to do.

To organisations set up to achieve some immediate object, such as Civil Rights Committees, and organisations with similar limited objectives, the Connolly Association attitude is one of support.

It also makes a rule that is very important, namely always to distinguish between friends and enemies. If it disagrees with the policy of some other Irish organisation it is of course entitled to say so. But it accepts the responsibility of saying so in a friendly manner so that nothing shall be done to weaken the front of workers and republicans in the struggle against the imperialist employers. For we suppose the reader has noticed that we regard imperialism as the policy of the employing class.

THE Association is only affiliated to two organisations, namely the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Movement for Colonial Freedom. These are organisations in Britain whose purposes correspond with the two main aims of the Association under section 2 of its constitution.

From what has been said it is obvious of course that the Association is non-sectarian. It may be added perhaps if it is needed that not only has it no religious bar, it has no colour bar or national bar. People who want to do the work are welcome. We are not bothered about who their grandfather was or the shape of their nose.

As there are several working class parties operat-

ing in Britain who have not yet succeeded in coming together in a common front, the Association affiliates to none of them. This is an advantage as it can work with all.

And this explanation of the constitution can conveniently end with the section on membership. All bona fide supporters of the aims, objects and methods of the Association (and this means of course with the general policy directions laid down by conference) can join on paying the annual subscription of 30/-. This is really very low. In 1938 it was 1/- a month. The subscription would have to be £3 today if the value of money was taken into account merely to bring in the same as was brought in in 1938.

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