

James Connolly in The Bureau of Military History

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The Bureau of Military History was established by the Irish government in 1947 with the remit of interviewing activists from the period 1913 to 1921. The Bureau approached people through the original IRA brigade structures, from there word of mouth led them to members at all levels of the Volunteer movement. The result is an archive collection with over 1,700 contributions, including witness statements from rank and file members whose testimony is otherwise lost to history. First released in 2003, in 2012 this archive was put online at <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/>.

The Bureau collection was drawn upon by Lorcan Collins in his splendid new biography of James Connolly (OBrien Press, 2012), but examining the archive materials also allows for a renewal of the discussion among socialists of the role of James Connolly in the Easter Rising. A number of Irish Citizen Army members were interviewed by the Bureau and it is from them most of all that we can cast a light on the ideas and practice of James Connolly in 1915 and 1916. Historically, the appraisal of James Connolly's deeds in these years has followed party lines. Those, like Desmond Greaves, who believed that revolutionaries should support republicans uncritically as a first stage towards socialism were very enthusiastic about Connolly's role in the Easter Rising, while others such as Peter Hadden of the Militant (now Socialist Party) who saw only reactionary politics in the national movement, considered Connolly to have been deeply mistaken in dragging unwilling trade unionists and ICA members into battle.¹



James Connolly

The testimony in the Military Bureau archives concerning James Connolly is not of the sort of evidence that can deliver a definitive resolution to the debate over his political activity - after all, those still alive in 1947 had their own political colouration to affect their memories - but it does deepen our understanding of what he was attempting to do and of his personal character.

Following the outbreak of war, Connolly was convinced that the internationalism of the working class, as embodied by his colleagues in the trade union and socialist movement, had not been destroyed. It was temporarily submerged under a wave of jingoism, but he wrote, echoing Voltaire on the American Revolution - the right spark could 'set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out

¹For example, C.D Greaves, 'James Connolly (1868 1916) Marxist', *Marxism Today*, June 1968, p. 177. Peter Hadden, *Divide and Rule* (Second Edition: London and Dublin 1986), pp. 61 66.

until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord.’² And ‘even an unsuccessful attempt at social revolution by force of arms... would be less disastrous to the Socialist cause than the act of Socialists in allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers in the causes.’³

So Connolly wanted a military fight while favourable conditions prevailed and he hoped that this fight would be made easier by the desire of many Irish Volunteers for a rising. But late in 1915, Connolly was growing increasingly concerned that the Irish Volunteers were - like previous generations of radical nationalists - going to miss a chance to defeat the Empire. Britain was massively stretched by the war and the Irish garrison was down to some 8,000 troops.

While the ICA was preparing to strike and a greater and greater tension was growing among its members, the leaders of the Irish Volunteers were shying away from action. Maeve Cavanagh, an ICA member and poet, remembers Connolly at this time saying of Eoin MacNeill’s newspaper, *The Irish Volunteer*, that it was like a ‘great wet blanket spread over Ireland every week.’⁴ Helena Moloney, also ICA, and an actress at the Abbey, said that as a result, it was the *Workers Republic* that was eagerly awaited each week. ‘It was rightly regarded as the real voice of the ‘extremist’ side of the Volunteer movement. The official organ of the Irish Volunteers, *The Irish Volunteer*, edited by John MacNeill and controlled by Bulmer Hobson, had taken on a curious and intangible tone of cau-

tion. We were to be cautious. We must not play the enemys game, we must have no more forlorn hopes, ‘our children’s children would vindicate Ireland’s right to freedom’, etc.

‘We in the Citizen Army felt very proud and confident in our leadership. We, in common with the Volunteers, had orders to resist any arrest or disarmament and to resist with force any raid on our premises. We knew that in our case there would be no backing down on the part of our leaders, but we were not so sure about the leadership of the Volunteers.’⁵

When a commemoration was held of the centenary of the birth of John Mitchell, in November 1915, Pádraig Pearse spoke about how previous insurrections had always been just too late. Frank Robbins, then a young ITGWU and ICA member, was present in the audience with Connolly, who stood up and said: ‘will this one also be too late?’⁶

Robbins also drew attention to the importance of the incident concerning Robert Monteith. Monteith was an Irish Volunteer against whom the British authorities issued a deportation order. This created a flashpoint, which was defused when the leaders of the Irish Volunteers allowed Monteith to be deported. Connolly, by contrast, declared that any such order applied to a member of the ICA would be resisted in arms and this position made an impression on the more resolute of the Irish Volunteers.⁷

Interpreting these events as meaning the leadership of the Irish Volunteers were pulling away from the idea of insurrection, Connolly tested his own organisation to see

²James Connolly, *Irish Worker*, 8 August, 1914.

³James Connolly, *Forward*, 15 August 1914.

⁴WS0248

⁵WS0391

⁶WS0585

⁷*Ibid.*

if the ICA were willing to fight alone. In autumn 1915, reported Robbins, ‘Connolly ordered a complete mobilisation, which he regarded as being of great importance. He addressed the members present and conveyed to them his opinion that the situation was now becoming dangerous and it might mean that the Citizen Army would have to fight alone without the aid of the Irish Volunteers. From this time onwards, members were told to fight rather than lose arms.’ Every ICA member was asked three questions, one of which was ‘are you prepared to fight without the aid of the Irish Volunteers or any other allies.’⁸

By January 1916, those of the Irish Volunteers who intended to fight were worried that some incident involving the ICA would trigger an insurrection prematurely and they kept a close eye on Liberty Hall. Already, according to P.S. O’Hegarty, a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB, Sean MacDermott had said in May 1915 that ‘well have to do something about this bloody fellow Connolly. Hes going about shouting out his mouth all over the place and we’re afraid he’ll bring the Rising down on us before we are ready.’⁹

Christopher Brady, the printer of the *Workers Republic* and of the proclamation, remembered that ‘Sean McDermott was a weekly visitor to Liberty Hall. He would drop in on Thursday night usually, for an advance copy of the *Workers Republic*. Other occasional visitors were Tom Clarke, Joseph Plunkett and Padraig Pearse.’¹⁰ Pearse could not sleep for a week after the first 1916 edition of the *Workers Republic* made it clear that the ICA intended action.¹¹ Patrick McCar-

tan, a leading IRB member, recalled Tom Clarke saying ‘the Volunteers would not and should not be forced to strike by any action like this.’ McCartan himself, however, disagreed, believing that ‘if the ICA went out, we must go out too, as otherwise the whole movement would fizzle out like the Rising of ‘98. It was at the Supreme Council meeting that I put forward these views.’¹²

Stated in the abstract, without insight into the internal divisions among the Irish Volunteers, the idea of the tiny ICA starting an insurrection can seem reckless, to say the least. But if Connolly was counting on a section of the Irish Volunteers joining in, his calculations were not unrealistic, in that his insurrectionist militancy was creating massive tensions inside the IRB and the Irish Volunteer leadership.

The best testimony to Connolly’s thinking at this point comes from Eamon O’Duibhir of the Tipperary IRB. Speaking to Connolly on a fact finding mission for the IRB, O’Duibhir reported Connolly’s views as being that ‘he feared the national leaders, if they intended a rising at all, might put it off until it would be too late. The time to act was whilst England was engaged in this war, and the war cannot last forever. He further said that he was determined to strike and that before long, unless he had some assurance that the Irish Volunteers would strike soon.’¹³

The IRB resolved this tension by preparing to kidnap Connolly with the intention of showing him that his fears were misplaced. Eamonn T Dore, an IRB member, was one of those told off on 19 January 1916 by Commandant Ned Daly to stand

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ WS 0026

¹⁰ WS0705

¹¹ Desmond Ryan, WS0725

¹² WS0766

¹³ WS1403

by to arrest Connolly if he did not come voluntarily. 'We met, but sometime later were disbanded as Connolly went of his own accord.' Connolly's friends were panicked by his disappearance, 'they thought the police had him and that he would be found drowned in a drain or something.'¹⁴ When, after three days, Connolly returned to Liberty Hall, Helena Moloney was present to witness his conversation with Countess Markiewicz.

Madame said, 'where have you been in the name of Heaven?' He smiled and said, 'I have been through hell!'. 'But what happened?' said we. 'I don't like to talk about it. I have been through hell, but I have converted my enemies.'¹⁵

Having been sworn to secrecy, Connolly felt honour bound not to speak of his meeting with the leaders of the IRB, even to his closest comrades. In his Bureau statement, Patrick McCartan stated that in fact, once agreement was reached, Connolly was immediately put on the Military Council of the IRB, ready for the Rising, with Tom Clarke saying 'he was very good at this sort of thing.'¹⁶

Connolly now gave a series of lectures on street fighting to the Volunteer Officers, which several Bureau statements refer to. Frank Robbins heard about these from Volunteer member Michael Smith, 'and he made it clear that the lectures were of very great assistance to the Volunteer officers. He also said that each lecture by Connolly was looked forward to by them and that

they were very appreciative of the clear and lucid manner in which he spoke.'¹⁷

From this agreement onwards a new mood swept through both ICA and Volunteers, a real sense that the Rising was going to happen. Again, Helena Moloney is a useful witness. 'At that time the temper of the Citizen Army and of certain Volunteers was such that you could not hold them back. All this time while we were waiting for something to happen the atmosphere was like a simmering pot.'¹⁸

One crisis that nearly precipitated fighting occurred when, on Friday 24 March, 1916, the police raided Liberty Hall with a warrant to intercept *The Gael*. The police picked up bundles of *The Workers Republic* and Helena Moloney drew her pistol on them. James Connolly rushed in to the room, revolver drawn. 'The officer said, "we have come to seize the paper." Connolly said, "you cant." "But I have my orders," said the officer. "You drop that," said Connolly, "or Ill drop you." If the officer persisted,' testified Moloney, 'Connolly would have fired and I would have fired on the other man. However, they walked out saying they would report back.'¹⁹

Frank Robbins remembered that day, because the ICA were mobilised with such effectiveness that Connolly and his fellow leader of the ICA, Michael Mallin, were exultant. 'Men left their employment under the strangest conditions on that day. Some who were carters and had horses to look after turned them into the stables; others brought them to Liberty Hall. Many black-faced men cut a peculiar figure rushing through the streets of Dublin on bicycles or on foot with full equipment rifle or

¹⁴WS0153

¹⁵WS0391

¹⁶WS0766

¹⁷WS0585

¹⁸WS0391

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰WS0585

shotgun, bandolier and haversack.’²⁰

Sixteen-year-old William Oman, bugler for the ICA, provided evidence of the spirit of that organisation at the time and that its members were not being ‘dragged’ by Connolly into action. Oman had been informed he had appendicitis and was worried about missing the Rising. ‘I approached Commandant James Connolly and asked could I speak to him for a few moments. He said, “certainly”, and asked what my trouble was. I asked him could he postpone the scrap for a few weeks. He remarked that it was a very modest request and inquired why I made it. I informed him of my consultation’ Oman recovered from his operation in time to sound the muster for the Easter Rising.²¹

While the small but ideologically coherent ICA were ready to fight as one, the Irish Volunteers, potentially capable of bringing over 10,000 members to battle, split in the face of the Rising. Although a realist, the prospect of obtaining 20,000 rifles from Germany along with a million rounds of ammunition (and ten machine guns), as well as having the numbers to outgun the British troops in Ireland must have raised Connolly’s hopes. For when the Aud failed to land her cargo of weapons and when Eoin MacNeill published a countermanding order in the Sunday Independent, the leaders of the ICA were in tears, said Moloney.

I saw Eoin MacNeill’s countermanding order in the paper and heard the discussion in Liberty Hall. Connolly was there. They were all heartbroken and when they were not crying they were cursing. I kept thinking ‘does this mean

that we are not going out?’ There were thousands like us. It was foolish of MacNeill and those to think they could call it off. They could not. Many of us thought we would go out single-handed, if necessary.²²

Connolly recovered quickly to rally everyone at Liberty Hall and announce the Rising would begin on Easter Monday, rather than during the confusion of the Sunday. Maeve Cavanagh described the scene. ‘I went early to Liberty Hall. I found all the Citizen Army girls assembled around Connolly in subdued excitement. He had already told them of the hitch in the arrangements for the Rising. The girls kept saying, “Ah, theyll never do anything.” He was trying to sooth them saying, “it will be all right.” That night he said to me with a grim and determined air, “we fight at noon and they can do as they like.” I asked Connolly, “what time will I come down in the morning?” “Come down at 8 oclock,” said he. “As early as that?” said I. He turned and looked at me and said, “do you think that too early for a revolution?”’²³

The idea that the ICA could be depended upon, while the Irish Volunteers could not, was not confined to ICA members. Over at the Plunkett farm in Kimmage a group of about sixty Volunteers had been lying low, preparing for action. One of them was Joe Good. ‘We had learned that the mobilisation for Sunday was cancelled; as a result some of the garrison were inclined to be insubordinate. Normally we rose early in Kimmage, but on Easter Monday most of us were dilatory and were lounging about. There was some talk of going to Liberty Hall where,

²¹WS0421

²²WS0391

²³WS0248

²⁴WS0388

apparently, they meant business.²⁴

Could the leaders of the IRB who wanted a Rising call it off in the light of the collapse of their plans? Apart from the problem that the ICA might still go ahead, they were also trapped by their line of argument over the previous months. As Desmond Ryan, Pearse's secretary observed, 'consider how would we look,' said Pearse, 'and what would the people think of us after all our talk and promises if we said, well, after all the British are too strong and we don't feel like fighting them. The people would just laugh at us and our movements would collapse in laughter.'²⁵

Until the events of Easter Sunday undermined it, the Rising was shaping up to be a close fight. But the combination of the failure of the German arms to be distributed around the country and the countermanding order meant that Dublin was isolated and the IRB leaders, including Connolly, now had to face a difficult choice. The decision to fight against very long odds seemed the lesser evil to suffering a defeat without a Rising and so after a flurry of meetings, the insurrection was launched. Once they were under way, the main task was to make as good a job of the effort as was possible. But it is clear Connolly considered his days were numbered.

William Oman saw Connolly walk past Sean Connolly (no relation). 'As we were about to march off, Commandant Connolly approached Captain Sean Connolly, shook his hand and said: "Good luck Sean! We wont meet again".'²⁶ Fate was listening and gave James Connolly's words a bitter twist. Although Connolly was referring to himself, Sean Connolly was one of the first rebel casualties of the Rising, shot in the head while on the roof of City Hall.

Although military commander of the Dublin forces and therefore effective leader of the Rising, Connolly did not adopt any new airs or graces. In fact, he was almost embarrassed by the necessity to wear a uniform that reflected his rank. Maeve Cavanagh recalled that earlier, 'the men were anxious for him to have a uniform. He rather reluctantly got one and appeared in it one Sunday not very long before the Rising. We started to admire him, and, growing shy, he shooed us all away.'²⁷ And from Joe Good on the day of the Rising. 'I remember seeing Joe Plunkett standing with plans in his hands outside Liberty Hall. He was beautifully dressed, having high tan leather boots, spurs, pince-nez and looked like any British brass hat staff officer. Connolly looked drab beside him in a bottle green thin serge uniform. The form of dress of the two men impressed me as representing two different ideas of freedom.'²⁸

Once the fighting began, Connolly was anxious, to the point of recklessness, to show that he was not asking of others deeds that he was unwilling to perform himself. Often he would venture out of the rebel HQ at the GPO and ignore the bullets flying around. One of the less well known incidents of this sort was one of friendly fire. Volunteer Oscar Traynor was among those volunteers who were coming into the GPO from the northside, accompanied by captured British soldiers whose uniforms confused the rebels on O'Connell St. 'As the single file of volunteers and British soldiers were doubling across the road, fire was opened on them from the Imperial Hotel, which was occupied by our own men. In the course of this firing, James Connolly rushed out into the street with his hands over his head, shouting towards the Impe-

²⁵WS0725

²⁶WS0421

²⁷WS0248

²⁸WS0388

rial Hotel. Immediately following his appearance the firing ceased, but not before a couple of our men had been wounded.’²⁹

Oscar Traynor was given orders by Connolly to create communication lines through the Metropole Hotel. ‘I reported in person to James Connolly in the GPO and informed him of what we had done. He then accompanied me to the Metropole Hotel, went through the building, examined all the positions, examined the holes which we had dug, made an effort to get through one of these holes and got through with some difficulty. I followed Connolly through the hole in the wall, and he said to me: ‘I wouldn’t like to be getting through that hole if the enemy were following me with bayonets.’ I then reminded him that these holes were built according to instructions issued by him in the course of his lectures. We reached Easons in Abbey St., and, although at this time heavy firing was taking place, Connolly insisted on walking out into Abbey St. and giving me instructions as to where I should place a barricade. While he was giving these instructions, he was standing at the edge of the path and the bullets were actually striking the pavements around us. I pointed this out to him and said that I thought it was a grave risk to be taking and that these instructions could be given inside. He came back, absolutely unpeturbed, to Easons with me, and while we were standing in the portico of Easons a shell struck a building opposite - I think it was the Catholic Boys Home - and caused a gaping hole to appear in the front of that house. Connolly jokingly remarked: ‘they dont appear to be satisfied with firing bullets at us, they are firing shells at us now.’³⁰

Again, from Volunteer Seumas Robin-

²⁹WS0340

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹WS0340

³²WS0564

son. ‘There was a side door into Abbey Street [at Mansfield Corner] and there were two young Volunteers on guard at it. There was heavy cannonading, machine-gun, and rifle fire. Abbey Street was being swept by fire. Suddenly there was a clatter of feet running outside the street, followed by very heavy knocking on the outside of the door. The young Volunteers, fearing, I presume, a British attack through the door, retreated. I called on Martin and Joe Gleeson to stand by me and I jumped across the sand-bags barricading the inside of the doors and challenged the person who was knocking on the door. He replied, “a Volunteer, let me in.” I opened the door and found that it was James Connolly. I cannot explain why he was there and he did not appear to be injured.’³¹

And from Commandant Thomas Byrne, ‘we retreated to the Post Office. At the Henry Street entrance, which we never entered, we met Connolly at the door. “Come on”, he said. He told me we were to occupy a house at the corner of Liffey Street and the quays which would cover along the quays facing west. I and my party followed Connolly. We went down Liffey Street. The most useful corner on Liffey Street was derelict. He told me to take the one house that was standing there. Connolly went off. He went around the corner and into the Independent offices I think in evacuating that building he got wounded.’³²

Connolly paid the price for his active leadership in the form of two wounds. The first, a bullet through his shoulder, was not too bad, but the second, a ricochet that shattered his lower leg, might well have proved fatal had the British not executed him before he succumbed to gan-

green. That Connolly's willingness to expose himself to enemy fire was not just bravado is evident from the statement of Frank Henderson, Captain of IV Brigade, who was generally hostile to the socialist leader and therefore whose positive report carries all the more weight. 'During the afternoon James Connolly came to my position through the passage we had made via the walls, and ordered me to have ready for him in about five minutes' time eight or ten of the best men that I had. He said that he was going to lead them down to Liffey Street to try to dislodge a British party who were reported to have occupied some buildings there, and to have cut off some men whom Connolly had sent down via Abbey Street... With this party Connolly went out into Henry Street, while it was still under fire. He led the party in single file down to Liffey Street and seized some buildings there. He had some skirmishing with the enemy and was out all night, returning the following morning via Abbey Street. I believe that Connolly succeeded in dislodging some party of the enemy and also in rescuing his own party who had been cut off.'³³

Once incapacitated, Connolly did his best not to be a burden and to offer a cheerful disposition. According to Volunteer Seamus Robinson, Connolly strove to project good humour. 'I got a large jug and filled it with water and went around giving drinks to whoever needed them. I entered one room and saw James Connolly laying on a stretcher. He appeared to be very cheerful and waved his hand to me, saying "hello, Townie."³⁴ And during the retreat in Moore St, 'James Connolly was carried up a narrow staircase. The staircase was so narrow that it was impossible to take him up the stairs until four

strong men lifted him horizontally at extended arms length over the banister rail. While this was being done the stretcher was sometimes at an acute angle, but James Connolly made no attempt to clutch the sides or pass a remark. He made a remark to one of his carriers, "heavy load, mate", recognising an English accent.'³⁵

So, what can we conclude from these eyewitness observations? Firstly, it is perhaps worth making a point about James Connolly's character. He emerges from these accounts as a very determined, but not dour, character. He matched his actions to the political perspectives he formulated, was conscientious about playing a full part in the fighting, and apart from the necessary secrecy in regard to the date of the Rising and his role on the IRB's Military Council - was open about his beliefs. As a result he had a group of around two hundred or so persons around him who were staunch in their support for him, through thick or thin. Whether his political outlook was an accurate one is a harder question to answer.

In two fundamental regards, Connolly read the situation correctly. Internationally, there was a substantial undercurrent of working class opposition to the war: the February Revolution in Russia was less than ten months away. In Ireland, Connolly was right to perceive that the more cautious leaders of the Irish Volunteers were shying away from insurrection. But did a clear understanding of these two issues mean it was necessary to embark on a project of precipitating the Rising?

Reading the Bureau testimonies brings home how unstable was the situation in 1916. This was not a period in which Connolly could stand still, patiently making socialist arguments and waiting for con-

³³WS0249

³⁴WS0821

³⁵WS1721

ditions to ripen. There was a white hot tension between the existence of the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army and the desire of the British Authorities to destroy these armed bodies. Already Dublin Castle was testing the possibility of deporting leading militants and of cracking down on Liberty Hall. In Scotland, anti-war figures like John Maclean were jailed and James Connolly was undoubtedly in their sights. The path chosen by Connolly had this advantage, that it avoided a repetition of 1798, where the United Irishmen only rose after the British had rallied from the shock of near invasion in 1795 and had decapitated the movement. It meant going down with a fight instead of without one and that made a great difference to the years 1919-23.

The credibility of those who fought was enhanced enormously among the middle class and the working class and if by some accident James Connolly had survived gangrene and execution, he would have been in an extraordinarily influential position. He didn't, of course. His old adversary, William Martin Murphy saw to that, agitating through the Irish Independent for Connolly's death, even after Prime Minister Asquith had announced in the Commons that there would be no more executions and therefore giving General Maxwell the green light to carry out Connolly's murder. Connolly had foreseen his own death and it must have been hard as a father of six children,³⁶ to embark on this path. But while Connolly was willing to put personal considerations aside for the sake of the cause he believed in, his self-sacrifice seems to have arisen partly out of a - characteristic - modesty and underestimation of his own importance to the so-

cialist movement and partly from his previous experience in the labour movement. Here, there is nothing new to add to long-established assessment, to be found say in Kieran Allen's *The Politics of James Connolly* (1990) or more recently in *Roddy Connolly and the Struggle for Socialism in Ireland* by Charlie McGuire (2008), that, in common with most of the left of that era, it had yet to be demonstrated how precious was the the existence of a body of socialists who had sufficient weight to influence events in the working class movement, and - of equal importance - who had through years of working together developed the kind of comradely team spirit that allows for sharp arguments but unity in action.

Had Connolly lived long enough to absorb the lessons of the Russian Revolution, he would have factored in the value of the nascent revolutionary party that was beginning to coalesce around him and sought a means of preserving it along with the immensely valuable resource of his own brain. How exactly, this could be done in late 1915, early 1916 is not a simple matter. Those who write that Connolly should have called for a general strike and raised a socialist programme are making life easy for themselves through the abstraction of their approach to this question. Of course Connolly would have called for a general strike against the Empire was that in any way an option, but the wider working class movement had not yet recovered from the defeat of the 1913 Lockout.

Trotsky disagreed with Lenin over the timing of the October revolution in a way that is suggestive here. For Trotsky it was vital to act when the All Russian Congress of Soviets convened and when action came, that the insurrection be explained as a 'de-

³⁶In 1904, the eldest of James Connolly's seven children, Mona, had died tragically aged thirteen in a domestic accident while waiting to depart for the ship to join her father in the USA. See Conor Kostick, Lorcan Collins, Mac Thomáis, 'Tragedy in the Connolly Family', *History Ireland*, Vol. 12. No. 3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 7-8.

fensive' measure, taking away the danger of counter-revolution against the soviets by pre-emptively disarming and disbanding the Provisional Government. Once it was clear that the majority of workers favoured Soviet power, Lenin, on the other hand, was over-anxious at all delays at insurrection, fearing that the opportunity would be lost to a crack-down or a demoralisation among workers that yet again their leaders had failed to act. Trotsky was right in this disagreement and was able to bring a sizeable body of allies, the Left-SR Party, into action on his basis as well as neutralise potentially hostile army garrisons.

With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that Connolly's position in 1916 was too urgent. His sense was that it was necessary to ensure a Rising took place at all, rather than risk it being sabotaged by repression. But the British Government were preparing to introduce conscription as well as threatening a crack-down on radical movements. To have made opposition to conscription the centre of socialist agitation and to have cast the Rising as a necessary defensive measure against this (or even against deportation) would have been to have been to gather considerably greater support on the day and in the aftermath. A fight might still have been forced upon Connolly by the authorities before the Russian Revolution had changed the political landscape, but perhaps not.

The question of how, if you are a socialist, you think Connolly should have acted in this period, also depends on how you understand the relationship between socialist revolutionaries and other radicals who are based more on the middle class than the working class. Of course socialists should

be willing to form alliances with such radicals. Inevitably though, in such cases the national or left-reformist militants want the social revolutionaries to cease their independent existence. But on the occasions when that has happened,³⁷ the subordination of the socialists leaves the direction of events in the hands of those who, ultimately, will fail the working class and more often than not (and as a result) will fail in their own cause. Socialists entering such alliances can agree to put time and money into the joint effort; can form united organisational structures; can sacrifice their own preferences for the sake of united policies and publicity. But one condition has to be insisted upon, that the revolutionaries be entitled to maintain their own organisation and openly advocate their own policies.

Returning to James Connolly, it is clear that in principle, there was nothing mistaken about seeking an alliance with the Irish Volunteers for the defeat of the British Empire. Later, in the period 1919-1921, the working class movement grew enormously radical, partly in battles over economic issues, but also in employing distinctly working class methods such as general strikes and soviets for the achievement of independence. But in 1916, the alliance was an unequal one and once sworn into the IRB, Connolly ceased offering any criticism of them, apart from (possibly) warning ICA members to hang on to their guns in the event of victory. As a result, he left no clear address to workers north and south outlining his strategy, nor (and this is a question that goes much deeper into Connolly's past) a revolutionary socialist party to carry forward his beliefs after his execution.

³⁷And this scenario has happened dozens of times over the years, beginning with perhaps the most tragic example, the self-sacrifice of the Chinese Communist Party 1927.