

James Connolly

**Belfast Labour
Meeting & Home
Rule Bill**

(1912)

Drafted by James Connolly, Belfast, 1912.
From the collection: **Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table**, Cork Workers' Club 1975.

Resolved: That this meeting of workingmen and women of Belfast welcomes the project of the establishment of an Irish Parliament as opening the way for much needed social reform and the reunion of the Irish democracy hitherto divided upon antiquated sectarian lines, but considers that in the interests of democracy in this country more facilities should be offered for securing a full and proper representation of the people of Ireland; and we, therefore, demand that provision be made in the Bill for payment of members and election expenses, proportional representation, and the enfranchisement of women; and also that the proposed Senate be dropped from the Bill, as we consider that experience has proven double chambers of legislature to be useless and dangerous.

That a copy of this resolution be sent to the leaders of the various parties in Parliament, and also to the Parliamentary representatives of Belfast.

James Connolly

Some Rambling Remarks

(1912)

Irish Worker, Christmas number 1912.
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No one at all acquainted with Ireland at the present can doubt that the country is feeling the throbs accompanying the birth of great movements. Everywhere there are stirrings of new life – intellectual, artistic, industrial, political, racial, social stirrings are to be seen and felt on every hand, and the nation is moved from end to end by the yeast-like pulsations of new influences. Amid such a renascence it would, indeed, be a strange phenomenon if Labour remained passive; if Labour alone moved in the old ruts and failed to respond to the call for a new adventuring of the spirit. Such a lack of response would argue a lifelessness of attitude, a blindness of mental outlook in the part of the toilers which would go far to neutralise and discount the value of the higher aspirations of the rest of the nation. Considering the state of slavery in which the masses of the Irish workers are to-day, some few aspects of which we have already noted in these columns, a state of restlessness, of “divine discontent”, on the part of Labour in Ireland is an absolutely essential pre-requisite for the realisation of any spiritual uplifting of

the nation at large. With a people degraded, and so degraded as to be unconscious of their degradation, no upward march of Ireland is possible; with a people restless under injustice, conscious of their degradation, and resolved, if need be, to peril life itself in order to end such degradation, though thrones and empires fall as a result – with such a people all things are possible – to such a people all things must bend and flow. A large nation may become great by the sheer pressure of its magnitude – the greatness of its numbers, as Russia to-day. A small nation, such as Ireland, can only become great by reason of the greatness of soul of its individual citizens.

It is, therefore, a matter of sincere congratulation to every lover of the race that the workers of Ireland are to-day profoundly discontented, and, so far from being apathetic in their slavery, are, instead, rebellious, even to the point of rashness. Discontent is the fulcrum upon which the lever of thought has ever moved the world to action. A discontented Working Class! What a glorious promise for the future! Ireland has to-day within her bosom two things that must make the blood run with riotous exultation in the veins of every lover of the Irish race – a discontented working class, and the nucleus of a rebellious womanhood. I cannot separate these two things in my mind; to me they are parts of the one great whole; different regiments of the one great army of progress. To neither will it be possible to realise its ideals without first trampling under foot, riding roughshod over, all the false conventions, soul-shrivelling prejudices, and subtle hypocrisies with which a tyrannical society has poisoned the souls and warped the intellect of mankind. Apart from the material, political and industrial forms in which the Labourer or the Woman may clothe their respective struggles, there is, in the fact of the struggle itself, in both cases, an emancipating influence which cannot be expressed in words, much less formulated in programmes.

The Struggle Emancipates, let who will claim the immediate petty triumph.

We of the Working Class have much to be thankful for in the fact that in the upward march in which we are engaged, we are permitted to reap advantages of a material nature at each stage of our journey. If our wages are not increased, our toil lightened, our hours lessened, our conditions improved as a result of the daily conflict in which we are engaged, we know that it is because of some faltering on

the part of ourselves or our fellow-workers, some defalcation on the part of some being of our army, and not a necessary or unavoidable part of the conflict itself. The Modern Labour Movement knows that a victory of any kind for the Working Class is better for the Cause, more potent for Ultimate Victory than a correct understanding of Economic Theory by a beaten Labour Army. The Modern Labour Movement is suspicious of theorising that shirks conflict, and seeks to build up the revolutionary army of social reconstruction by means of an army that fights and wins concessions for the fighters while it is fighting. Every victory won by Labour for Labour helps to strengthen the bent back, and enlarge the cramped soul of the labourer; every time the labourer, be it man or woman, secures a triumph in the battle for juster conditions, the mind of the labourer receives that impulse towards higher things that comes from the knowledge of power. Here and there, to some degraded individuals, the victories of Labour mean only increased opportunities for drink and degeneracy, but on the whole it remains true that the fruits of the victories of the organised Working Class are as capable of being stated in terms of spiritual uplifting as in the material terms of cash.

Let us then, with glad eyes, face the future! Ireland salutes the rising sun, and within Ireland Labour moves with the promise and potency of growing life and consciousness, a life and consciousness destined to grow and expand until the glad day when he who in this Green Isle says "Labour" must say "Ireland", and he who says "Ireland" must necessarily be planning for the glorification and ennobling of Labour.

James Connolly

An Exchange on Rome and Irish Catholics

(1912)

From the **Catholic Times**, November 1912.
Texts taken from Owen Dudley Edwards & Bernard Ransom (eds.), **James Connolly: Selected Political Writings**, New York 1974.
Proofread by Chris Clayton, July 2007.

This short, but heated exchange adds an interesting sidelight on Connolly's attitude to religion in general, and to Catholicism in particular. As such it is an important supplement to his other writings on the topic, such as **Labour, Nationality and Religion**.

[Father MacErlean, S.J., and a Labour Publication](#)

[An Extract from Father MacErleane's Reply](#)

[The Controversy with Father MacErlean, S.J.](#)

James Connolly

Father MacErlean, S.J., and a Labour Publication

(1912)

Catholic Times, 8 November 1912

In the issue of the **Catholic Times** of October 18 there appeared a long article upon the above subject by Father MacErlean, S.J., upon which I crave the permission of the Editor to make a few comments. In craving this permission I, of course, assume that the Editor is not at all responsible for the totally disingenuous insinuation of the article in question that my little book was, or is, “a rehash for unthinking Protestant prejudice”, or that because my address is in Belfast I must therefore be under suspicion by all true Catholics. The book was primarily written for and first published in Dublin amongst people of our own Catholic Faith; and we can afford to treat with contempt the suggestion that the Catholics living in Belfast and bearing the brunt of the struggle against Orangeism must also bear the odium of suspicion amongst Catholics elsewhere because of that very Orange bigotry from which they are the sufferers.

Father MacErlean's Indictment

Father MacErlean says: “Mr. Connolly's Catholicity may be gauged by his profession of Socialism; his thoughtfulness is disposed of by the exhibition he has given of his ignorance of history; and his candour may be judged from his falsification and misrepresentation of facts.” After this indictment one would expect to read at least some little proof of the “ignorance”, “falsification”, and “misrepresentation” so blatantly alleged, for in public controversy we do not expect a clergyman to be less honourable than a layman, and to frame such an indictment and then to calmly walk away and leave it totally unsupported would

not be considered honourable nowadays by any reputable lay writer. Yet this is what Father MacErlean has done. The sneer at my Socialism we can leave unheeded save for the passing remark that as no Catholic doctrine forbids the State to hold a thousand acres of land it cannot therefore be immoral for it to hold a million acres; if it, the State, has the moral right to own a square mile of land, it cannot be denied the moral right to own 32,524 square miles – the total area of Ireland. Or, if it can be denied such right, at what point of magnitude does the extent of its possessions become immoral? And if the State can,

According to Catholic Doctrine,

morally own and conduct factories for the production of death-dealing instruments of war, as at Woolwich, why may it not own and conduct factories for the production of life-supporting articles, such as food, clothing, and other necessities? And if it is permissible according to Catholic doctrine that Democracy should be applied to the government of countries, it cannot be immoral for Catholics to advocate the democratic ownership and control of workshops, fields, mills, and factories. If this is conceded – and it cannot logically be refused – then my Socialism is consistent with Catholicism, and we can leave my critic to waste his sneers upon some crude and fantastic Socialism of his own imaginings, but unrecognised in the authorised Socialist programmes of the world.

In a column and a half of an article ostensibly an onslaught upon my poor self the critic does not once quote any words of my own, but spreads himself upon a

Quotation from a Book by Judge Maguire

of the Supreme Court of California, and upon an opinion expressed in a review of my book by a writer in the **Daily Herald**. The opinion expressed by the latter writer upon the real attitude of the Pope and the higher clergy of Ireland towards Home Rule are his own opinions presumably, but I have never expressed myself upon the matter (having no means of informing myself reliably upon the question), despite the unwarranted assertion of my reverend critic. But of the

substantial accuracy of the statement of Judge Maguire whatever Father MacErlean may say, there is ample historical confirmation. Let me quote it again: "Under all their Catholic Majesties from Henry II to Henry VIII (nearly four hundred years), the Irish people, with the exception of five families, were outlaws. They were murdered at will, like dogs, by their English Catholic neighbours in Ireland, and there was no law to punish the murderers. Yet during all of this unparalleled reign of terror history fails to record a single instance in which the power of the Catholic Church was ever exerted or suggested by the Pope for the protection of her faithful Irish children." To refute this Father MacErlean cites

A Letter from Pope John XXII

to the Papal Nuncio in 1317 urging King Edward II to take steps for the "immediate correction and reformation of the aforesaid grievances," and carefully avoiding any explanation of the accompanying circumstances, he seeks to create the impression that this is a crushing refutation of the statement of Judge Maguire. What were the circumstances attendant upon that letter? Donald O'Neill, King of Ulster, and a number of other Irish princes had united in sending to his Holiness a Remonstrance setting forth the sufferings of Ireland under the English, and the determination of the Irish to end those sufferings. They informed his Holiness that they had no hope of getting justice from the English King, and had invited the brother of Robert the Bruce of Scotland to aid them in throwing off the English yoke. Pope John XXII responded by sending a letter to King Edward counselling him to take steps for the "immediate correction and reformation of the aforesaid grievances," "lest," the letter goes on to say, "it might be too late hereafter to apply a remedy when the spirit of revolt has grown stronger." It might be difficult to say whether this was intervention on behalf of the Irish, or rather intervention on behalf of English dominion over the Irish, but that there might be no doubt about his meaning the Pope also *threatened with excommunication all those Irish who refused to trust to the clemency of an English King*, but preferred to take up arms for the holy cause of their national independence. Father MacErlean says: "We do not know of Mr. Connolly as distinguished for historical research." Alas, we are utterly crushed by thinking of

the things Father MacErlean does not know of, but surely even Father MacErlean must know of

Father D'Alton,

a brother clergyman and author of a **History of Ireland** which, although but recently published, has already become a standard work of reference. Here is how Father D'Alton tells of the incident we are discussing. Will the reader please compare his account with the garbled and utterly misleading version given by our reverend critic? Father D'Alton says: "Donald O'Neill reminded the Pope that one of his predecessors, Adrian IV, led by false representations and by his partiality for England, had granted Henry II dominion over Ireland, but that he had done so for the good of Ireland itself and in the hope that it would prosper under English rule. He now instanced the evils his country had suffered and was suffering still; his countrymen and himself had no hope of getting justice from England, and had in consequence invited Edward Bruce, brother of King Robert of Scotland, to come and reign over them, and they hoped he would receive the Pope's blessing and support. John XXII did not grant the prayer of the Remonstrance; he had no love for the Bruces, King Robert was already excommunicated, and far from approving Edward Bruce's invasion *he even warned the Irish against supporting it, and threatened with excommunication those who did.*"

Thus Father D'Alton on pages 282-283 of Volume I, and in confirmation of his account he quotes in a note from Volume I, page 275, of Leland, and from Volume III, pages 19 and 20, of Lingard. In fact, no reputable historian tells the story otherwise. Although some slur over the account of the threatened excommunication of the patriotic Irish, it was left for my critic to attempt to give a totally wrong impression of the matter by telling one part of the story and suppressing the other and the most vital part.

For the other incidents mentioned in refutation of Judge Maguire's statement suffice it to say that they all appear to have been interventions on behalf of the right of the Holy See to control all ecclesiastical appointments in

Ireland (as elsewhere), and against the continual encroachments of the English monarchy in

Matters of Church Government.

In short, they were not interventions on behalf of the Irish people, but were interventions in assertion of the immunity of ecclesiastical powers from civil control. On some occasions they worked out in favour of the Irish, on more occasions they operated in favour of English rule in Ireland, but on all occasions they were inspired primarily by considerations for the welfare of the Church. I find no fault with this, nor yet do I waste time by carping at its effects. First as an Irish Nationalist and latterly as a Socialist I have always accepted and understood the doctrine so well expressed by Father MacErlean that the Holy See must always “acknowledge the *de facto* government in any country without examining or deciding the question of its rightful title.” But the considerations which compel the Holy See as such to recognise the *de facto* government, and the *de facto* social order, are not binding upon individual Catholics, and we therefore retain to the full all our rights and prerogatives as citizens and workers for social betterment, without abating necessarily one jot of our Catholicity. As individual Catholics we claim it as our right, nay, as our duty, to refuse allegiance to any power or social system whose authority to rule over us we believe to be grounded upon injustice.

Extract from Father MacErlean's Reply

(1912)

Catholic Times, 18 November 1912

Mr. Connolly now admits that Judge Maguire's statement is not strictly true; that the Popes were justified in recognising the rights of the *de facto* government, that

is, in the present case, the rights of the King of England over those parts of Ireland that had acknowledged his lordship; that the interventions of the Popes worked out on some occasions in favour of the Irish; and that he has no fault to find with the Popes for their being. On all occasions inspired primarily by considerations for the welfare of the Church. Let us see also

What Mr. Connolly Does Not Now Deny.

He does not deny that Pope John XXII sternly commanded King Edward II to remedy the grievances of which the Irish complained; that the Popes refused to recognise any claim of the Kings of England to interfere in the affairs of independent Irish dioceses; that the Popes frequently resisted the pressure brought to bear on him [*sic*] by the King of England and the Anglo-Norman nobles; that there was no systematic favouring of the Norman as against the Irish clergy by the Pope; that a Pope refused to recognise ignorance of English as a bar to an Irishman's being appointed to a bishopric in the English domain; or that the Pope favoured the establishment of an Irish University for the education of Irish students at home. All that is as satisfactory as it is undeniable; but what then becomes of Mr. Connolly's quotation from Judge Maguire that history fails to show a single instance of the Church's intervening for the protection of her faithful Irish children?

What Mr. Connolly Complains Of.

Mr. Connolly complains that I have tried to create suspicions against the Catholics of Belfast in the minds of Catholics elsewhere; that I attacked him without quoting any words of his; and that I suppressed the fact that the Pope ordered the adherents of Bruce to be excommunicated. A few words will suffice to dissipate these suggestions. Far from trying to create suspicion against the Catholics of Belfast I wrote that article to counteract the statements of Mr. Connolly and others which would tend just to create such suspicions. The Catholics of Belfast have never had any sympathy with such sentiments as those of Mr. Connolly. Their faith and their nationality are spoken of throughout the world. They have ever been loyal to Ireland and loyal to the Church, and have always shown themselves ready to shed their blood, if necessary, in defence of

either. If Mr. Connolly wishes to share in the glory of the Catholics of Belfast, let him learn their spirit and do their works. To attempt to divorce the national spirit of the Catholics of Belfast from their spirit of

Traditional Loyalty to the Church

by publishing a pamphlet in which the Church is falsely abused and openly maligned is the work of an enemy, even though he should masquerade as a friend. Cockle is cockle, even though it grow in a cornfield.

James Connolly

**The Controversy
with Father
MacErlean, S.J.**

(1912)

Catholic Times, 22 November 1912

He would indeed be a hardened controversialist who could repress a feeling of sympathy for Father MacErlean in his latest pitiful attempt to wriggle out of the absurd position created by his first article on the above subject. By no other name can his article be described. A pitiful wriggle exciting a feeling of sympathetic wonderment that he should rush in so lightly to essay a task for which he was so poorly equipped. An attempt to suppress a material incident in a certain period of Irish history when exposed is airily followed by a declaration that he was not discussing that material incident. Such antics may serve to obscure the issue –

and perhaps that is why they are introduced – but that they can deceive the discriminating reader I refuse to believe.

I have proven that the so-called intervention of Pope John XXII in favour of the Irish was in reality an intervention in favour of the English power over the Irish, and a threat to excommunicate all those who preferred the chance of national independence to the hopes or promises of English justice.

The Fact of the Excommunication

was the dominating factor in the national war for national liberty, and an attempt to explain the letter of his Holiness without mentioning that threat of excommunication would be more ridiculous than the proverbial play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out. Yet it is this ridiculous travesty which Father MacErlean attempts to foist upon us as history. Save us from such history! In a similar manner he most disingenuously attempts to misinterpret my statement that I found no fault with, nor spent any time in carping over the obligations resting upon the Holy See to recognise the *de facto* government in any given country. He says that I admit that “the Popes were justified in recognising the rights of the King of England over those parts of Ireland which had acknowledged his lordship,” but he adds quite gratuitously and unjustifiably that this is an admission of the justice of the act of the Pope in excommunicating all those who refused to acknowledge such lordship, as in the case under discussion. As this point is as vital today as it was then, and is of the last importance to the understanding of

My True Position,

which he is so studiously striving to distort, permit me to again re-state the position as indicated in the conclusion of my last letter.

I admit unquestioningly the obligation resting upon the Holy See to recognize the *de facto* government and *de facto* social order in any given country or age. But side by side with, part and parcel of that admission, and not to be divorced from it, I insist upon the right of the individual Catholic to disregard

that obligation, and to be a reformer of, or rebel and revolutionist against the government which the Holy See is compelled by its international relations to recognise. Without this right Catholicity would be synonymous with the blackest reaction and opposition to all reform. As an example Ireland is illuminating. For the greater part of seven centuries

The “de facto Government” of Ireland

has been a foreign government imposed upon the country by force, and maintained by the same means. The Holy See was compelled by its position to recognise that government, but the holiest and deepest feelings of the Catholics of Ireland were in rebellion against that government, and in every generation the scaffold and the prison, and the martyr’s grave have been filled in Ireland with devout subjects of the Holy See, but unrelenting enemies of the *de facto* government of Ireland.

The firm distinction in the minds of Irish Catholics between the *duties* of the Holy See and the *rights* of the individual Catholics has been a necessary and saving element in keeping Ireland Catholic, and he, by whatever name he calls himself or to whatever order he belongs, who would seek to destroy that distinction or make acquiescence in the political obligations of the Papacy a cardinal article of Catholic faith is an enemy of the faith and liberties of our people.

My Pamphlet

was and is no more than a setting forth of the above position – illustrated by such references to recorded facts as serve to prove the point that disregard of the political instructions or commands of the Vatican has in the past been practised upon occasions by devout Catholics, and such disregard has been justified by the event. My pamphlet was published for Catholics. I know of no way by which Protestants could be prevented from reading it, were I ever so desirous, but I do not believe that the Catholic Church need fear the result of a difference of opinion, or even a sharp discussion amongst Catholics upon matters of historical interest to all.

We have long since learned that some clergymen are more Catholic than the Pope, and that some others seem to see an enemy in everyone who refuses to see eye to eye with them upon all points as well as upon Church doctrine, but we believe that the hope of the Church is in those who refuse to accept such bullying and who stand by their rights as citizens, whilst observing their duties as Catholics.

Upon the historical points raised – the questions of fact, as, for instance, that of

The Battle of the Boyne

I shall, with the Editor's permission, write hereafter. But upon the interpretation of such points as, for instance, whether the letter already discussed of Pope John XXII was an "intervention in favour" or a condemnation, I shall not endeavour to further follow Father MacErlean in his casuistry or verbal gymnastics.