

James Connolly

Labour in the New Irish Parliament

(1914)

From **Forward**, July 4, 1914.

What is to be the position of labour in the first Irish Parliament to judge by the written opinion of many of our friends we would be inclined to believe that the representation of labour in that Parliament would be a certainty, and that it would not be a mere nominal representation, but rather on a large, and as one writer has said, a dominating scale. If this were so, then we might truly felicitate the labour movement in Ireland upon its marvellous progress, and felicitate the Irish working class upon the keenness of their insight and the alertness of their intelligence.

Writing as one who has a close inside knowledge of the Irish labour movement, and also as one who does believe in the keen political insight of the Irish workers as a whole, I yet feel constrained to warn the readers of **Forward** that the real outlook in Ireland is not by any means so rosy and full of immediate promise as our sanguine friends are prone to believe. It is somewhat of an uncertainty whether labour will be represented in the first Irish Parliament at all.

There are many reasons why this is an uncertainty. One of the greatest is the financial reason. Most people are of the opinion that the Irish Parliament will at least not be a retrograde institution, or elected upon a franchise or after a method held elsewhere in these islands to be antiquated. That any forward step taken elsewhere will at least be presumed for the benefit of the Irish democracy. It is therefore somewhat of a shock to many to learn that under the new Home Rule Constitution, no provision is made for payment of members of Parliament but it is left to be dealt with by the new Irish legislature. Thus in the first Irish Parliament the members will be unpaid, and as the chief concern of that Parliament will be that of finding the ways and means to keep itself financially afloat, and to soothe the susceptibilities of its critics, there is more than a strong probability that the members will remain unpaid in future legislatures also. Had the present Government or the present labour party in the House of Commons done what the Irish workers had a right to expect that they should do, the chances of labour representation in the Irish Parliament would have been immensely increased by making provision for the maintenance of Irish labour members, and thus making smoother the path of the Irish labour party. But no such provision was made.

The present Home Rule party had and have no desire to see labour in the Irish Parliament represented by an independent party of workers. Representing as they do the capitalist class, the publicans, and the gombeen men or money-lenders of rural Ireland as well as the lowest class of slum landlords in the cities, they dread as they dread retribution, the advent of men or women with ideas of regeneration and social emancipation for Ireland. They do not want anything that might help the victims of their friends and relatives to put a legislative curb to their slave-driving and sweating. Of course that is not the reason they alleged. Oh, no! They alleged that they "considered that the Irish Parliament should have control over its own finance, and they objected to the English Parliament limiting its powers in advance." And of course the British labour party swallowed this yarn, oblivious of the fact that the English Parliament was limiting the powers of the Irish Parliament in a score of ridiculous and even fatally harmful ways with the full consent of their Home Rule colleagues, and that it was only when it came

to increasing the power of the Irish democracy that the Home Rule party objected to the interference of the English Parliament.

An indication by the British labour party that they meant to insist upon payment of members being incorporated in the Home Rule constitution, as a principle that public services should be paid for by the public, would have made the situations infinitely easier for Irish labour, but no such indication was forthcoming.

In every Home Rule speech the precedent of the British colonies is cited as an argument in favour of the measure, but the democratic spirit in which the colonial constitutions are framed was deliberately shut out by the framers of the Home Rule Bill. Whereas the colonial constitutions aim at giving power to the democracy, the Home Rule constitution aims at restricting the power of the democracy. And now there are to be still further attempts at restriction and divisions, in order to please the Bourbons of Ulster, who learn nothing and forget nothing.

Added to this hampering restriction upon the Irish democracy's choice of elected members, there is the fact that there is yet no fund available with which Irish labour constituencies can be contested. Resolutions are all very well, and class feeling is an excellent thing, but in the electoral world neither of these can manifest themselves without the sinews of war. Now if there is one thing the Irish labour movement is at present wanting in, it is finance for electoral contests. The Dublin labour party fight all municipal and other local contests, as does every other district of nationalist Ireland where the new influence is making itself felt, but to do even that is a severe strain upon their resources.

That they could with their present limited resources grapple with the infinitely greater cost of Parliamentary elections is almost unthinkable. In the north the trade unions are for the most part content to play the orange game, and are as bodies merely passive allies of the capitalist-landlord faction in warring upon the progressive movement. Thus the imminence of the Home Rule elections brings into greater prominence the need for some kind of action being taken in

Ireland and elsewhere to equip the labour movement with the necessary funds to assault some of the seats in the Home Rule Parliament.

Without the invigorating presence of an alert and independent labour party in its midst the Irish House of Commons will be for years a most reactionary and anti-democratic assembly, setting a bad example to Tories and reactionists everywhere. It will be obsessed with the idea of placating the reactionary elements in Ulster, and thus of justifying itself against their aspersions. What this means you can best understand when you realise that Ulster is the most capitalist part of Ireland, that the game will be to represent every bit of labour legislation which menaces capitalist profits as an attack upon the industries of Ulster, and that the fear of this cry will cause the new Irish Government, and every non-labour element in Parliament, to oppose all social legislation. Only a strong and determined labour group, with a true revolutionary outlook, will be able to withstand this cry, force forward progressive legislation and combat reactionary measures.

The dice are heavily loaded against us in Ireland. They are loaded by the evil traditions of the past, by the cowardice of many working class elements in the north especially, by the awful poverty of the country, by the ignorant obstinacy of the capitalist class, by sectarian animosities, by unscrupulous politicians, by a lying press.

We can only hope to carry our flag to victory by securing the aid of all those workers everywhere who desire to see an effective force carrying the green flag of an Irish regiment whilst unconditionally under the red flag of the proletarian army.

James Connolly

Yellow Unions in Ireland

(1914)

Forward, 20 June, 1914.
From the collection: **Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table**, Cork Workers' Club 1975.

[In the first part of this article Connolly castigates the Catholic clergy of Co. Dublin and then goes on:—]

How little difference there is at bottom between such priests and the Ulster Orangemen in their hatred of Labour may be judged from the following report of part of the proceedings of the Irish Trades' Congress. I extract this from the chief Orange organ in this City – the **Belfast Evening Telegraph!**

“Before the Irish Trades' Congress concluded, Mr. James Connolly called attention to a circular which, he said, had been issued to their employees by the firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co. Ltd., Belfast, who were Government contractors. It was much on the same lines as that which had been issued to their employees by the employers of Dublin, and which had caused so much trouble in the city last year.

“The employees were asked by Messrs. Davidson to sign a declaration that they were not members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, or any similar unskilled Union, and that they should not become members of any such Union while in their employment.

“That Congress Mr. Connolly contended, could not adjourn without taking action upon this matter. In the firm of Davidson & Co. they had contractors carrying out Government contracts; the circular was in direct contravention of the spirit under which Government contracts were given out.

“This circular had been issued by a man who had been displaying great zeal in recent times for civil and religious liberty. For the last few days they had been discussing the question of Home Rule there, and when it was being considered it was well to remember that in the yards of this firm of Messrs. Davidson & Co., drilling for the defence of civil and religious liberty was going on every night; but here they had in this circular the conception of this firm of civil and religious liberty, and could better proof be afforded to them of the littleness of their action?

“He moved – That this Congress condemns the attempt of Belfast employers to introduce a ban upon the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union and all other Unions of unskilled labourers, calls upon trade unionists everywhere to take action against all employers taking such action against their fellow members, and demands that all firms taking this course against trade unions should at once, be struck off the list of contractors for public bodies.

“Mr. Johnson (Belfast) said this circular was no new thing with this firm, and on that ground it was sought to be excused. He held in his hand a copy of a similar form dated 29th April, 1906. Perhaps Mr. Davidson was the most virulent and unrelenting antagonist of Home Rule in Belfast. Deputations of trades unionists coming from England and Scotland were got hold of and brought to his works, and there introduced to his anti-Home Rule workers, and he sent abroad to trades unionists and others the statement of the industrial case against Home Rule in Ireland. That was the man who had issued that circular to his workers in Belfast in 1906, and repeated it in 1913 and 1914.

“The motion was put and carried unanimously.”

A reporter from the **Telegraph** called upon Mr. S.C. Davidson, of the Sirocco Works, in reference to the statements by Mr. Connolly and Mr. Johnson, published above.

“Mr. Davidson said he thought Mr. Connolly could not have had before him a copy of the resolution passed by the House of Commons, on 10th March, 1909, which applied to contractors for the Government. If he had he would have seen that this resolution was applicable, not to the class of labour that Government contractors employ, but only to the rates of wages which workers engaged upon Government work shall receive.

“The question, he said, was raised by one of the Labour Members of Parliament some years ago when a representative of the Government was sent over to Belfast and fully investigated the matter at the Sirocco Works. The result of this report was that the Government were entirely satisfied that everything was perfectly in order and in accord with their requirements.

“Mr. Davidson informed our representative that the firm has always, and at present, employs a very large number of trade unionists in different departments of the works, but while strictly recognising all real trade unionists societies and rules, the firm do not recognise a society which would foist on to them, as trade unionists, men who have acquired no knowledge of any trade whatever.”

Here is an exact copy of the declaration above alluded to as being enforced upon the labourers employed by this firm:

Declaration: —

“I, the undersigned, hereby state that I am not a member of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, or any similar Unskilled Labourers Society or Union; and that so long as I am employed by the firm of Davidson & Co. Ltd., I will not join or become a member of any such Unskilled Labourers’ Society or Union.”

Date

Signed

Here you see the Catholic priest and the Orange employer meeting upon common ground, brothers in the hatred of our Union. And to complete the picture, I need only mention that the recent annual national conference of the National Transport Workers' Federation at Hull, when I sought permission to appear before the delegates and explain that their affiliated Unions – the Seamen and Firemen's Unions, and the Ardrossan branch of the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers – were still working the boats of the Head Line which is victimising our members in Belfast and Dublin, I was refused permission to state our case, or to appear before the delegates at all.

What a mix-up of a world!

James Connolly

Address to the Delegates

(1914)

Irish Worker, 30 May 1914.

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No body of workers that ever met in Ireland have ever had before them a more important and delicate function to fulfil than you have. You are meeting in the

capital city of Ireland in a year that the millions of the Irish race the world over have been looking eagerly forward to as the year of the political resurrection of the Irish Nation. And you are also meeting in a year whose opening months saw the close of the greatest general engagement between the forces of Capital and Labour that Ireland ever witnessed. To the thoughtful delegate both these considerations will operate to make him or her approach the Irish Trade Union Congress of 1914 with feelings of disappointment. There must be disappointment upon the political field because not only is the political Ireland of our hopes but miserably caricatured in the Ireland offered to us in the Home Rule Bill, but even that Bill lies under the menace of still further dismemberment and emasculation. Still over our head hangs the threat that the political charlatans who control our national destinies will commit the unparalleled outrage of dismembering this country in order to please the unnatural hatred of their own country which a section of Irishmen and women have had instilled into them by the foul brood of aristocracy which for so long fattened upon the vitals and drank the life-blood of Ireland. The Exclusion of Ulster, or any part of Ulster, is the fearful price we are asked to pay for our weakness as a nation – a price so dishonourable that rather than consent to submit such a question to the arbitrament of a vote all patriotic Irish men and women had better far consent to accept the destiny of being rebel slaves of England in an undivided Ireland, as preferable to contented accomplices of English statesmen in the partition of Ireland. That there are in Ireland to-day accepted leaders of the Irish Race who feel that they can receive from an English minister a proposal to dismember their country without being compelled to instantly avenge that insult by throwing such a minister out of office is bad enough, but that such leaders can come back to Ireland and still secure the confidence and be sure of the plaudits of the Irish people is worse, as greater proof of the degeneracy of national life in Ireland.

Disappointed as we may well be at the fact that such a suggested abandonment of the high national ideals of the past could be met in the sordid huckstering spirit we see around us on this question, so also must we feel disappointed that the Labour Movement in Ireland did not emerge from its recent ordeal with more substantial spoils of [success?].

But in this case our disappointment is tempered by the reflection that never did men and women better deserve success than did the heroes and heroines of the Dublin Labour Struggle of 1913-1914. As the souls of the politicians descended to the mire of national betrayal the souls of the workers ascended to greater heights of comradeship and solidarity. By all that makes for the greatness of a people, by heroic refusal to surrender principle, by comprehension of all the true essentials of liberty, by devotion to the common cause, by undaunted facing of all the powers of government and by scorn of its batonings and its jailings, by its patient martyrdom of hunger and its blood atonement of deaths by violence by uniformed bullies, the working class of Dublin have redeemed the honour of their race in an age saturated by the spirit of the huckster and the worshippers of mammon. Never did Ireland in her most heroic moments rise to higher altitudes in the estimation of all lovers of progress than she was raised to by the fact that her working class – although surrounded by the most unclean pack of wolves that ever yelped at the heels of honour, and threatened by the most unscrupulous coalition of tyrants known to industrial and political history – by their own strength had forced forward to the front the question of the moral responsibility of all for the sufferings and degradations of each. That responsibility which the teachers and rulers of all the ages have been engaged in evading or denying was at last raised by the Dublin Working Class into its true position, and forced upon the consciousness of an unwilling public compelled by the events of a great dramatic industrial war to consider its portent. To the Dublin Working Class belongs the honour of making the sentiment of *an injury to one is the concern of all* one that all Labour Organisations and all political parties must henceforth be measured by.

That the Irish people as a whole did not realise the great moral issues involved in this struggle was to be expected and deplored. We are cursed in this country with the most unscrupulous, and where not unscrupulous the most evil minded set of journalists that ever consented to prostitute their talents in the service of a purchaser, and when a naturally open minded people have to depend upon a Press served by such creatures it is but natural that the interpretation of public events which that people receive should be of the distorted and filthy nature such a Press must furnish. It was not so reasonable to expect that even a

small section of the Labour world should fail to rise to the same height as the Labour Movement of Dublin as a whole did rise. But a stream cannot rise higher than its source, and when Trade Unionists take their inspiration from the columns of the Capitalist Press, and accept the praises of that press as evidences of wisdom instead of regarding such praises as proofs of foolishness or worse, then it is but natural that their Trade Unions will fail their brothers in the hour of trial.

We are not mentioning these disappointments in order to carp at or belittle your and our Congress and the movement it represents. Rather do we mention them in order to stimulate you to still further exertions by pointing out the real underlying causes of our present unsatisfactory position, socially and politically. That underlying cause is to be found in the industrial divisions amongst the Working Class. *We have too many unions in Ireland*, too many Executives with separate Balance Sheets to nurse; too much temptation to nurse these separate Balance Sheets at the expense of Solidarity. We need to set our face resolutely towards the task of joining all the workers of each industry into one Industrial Union; all General Workers into one General Workers' Union; all such Unions into One Big Union, able to launch the powers of all in the instant service of each. We need to realise that the Master Class has definitely decided to make war upon the Working Class; that for the purposes of that war they have co-ordinated and disciplined all their forces, and hold them ready to use at a moment's notice whenever the further subjection of Labour seems possible of achievement. We need to feel in every fibre of our consciousness that all the offices and positions through which civilization performs its every function are manned, equipped and sentinelled by alert and implacable enemies of our class, and so feeling we must labour to create a public opinion of our own – a Working Class public opinion that shall eventually supersede and destroy the public opinion of the master class as the standard by which our patriotism and the value and efficiency of our institutions are to be judged. At present the slave spirit is, so to speak, dominant in our souls, and as a result we unconsciously and instinctively accept inferior position and inferior treatment in all things as being right and proper for our class. Hence as we are subjected socially we are ignored politically, and forced to be content with the merest of husks educationally. This slave spirit arises from

the fact that the disorganised, or badly organised, position of our class renders us impotent upon the industrial field, and any industrial impotence finds its accompaniment in our political outlawry and national helplessness in this hour of our national danger.

From all this the moral is plain. The true path of salvation for our class is along the line of a closer organisation of our forces: let us regard the industries of this country as our own; let us organise our Trade Unions as we would organise them were it our purpose to conduct industry and to have the operatives regimented and brigaded for the task. Let us in short proceed upon the principle that if the employer needs a man or woman in an industry we need him or her in the Union of that industry.

As we reach the completion of that task we will feel the result in the increasing self-respect of the worker, and in the increasing determination to exert upon the political field that working class independence such unity will give upon the industrial. Political power must wait upon economic or industrial power; you must be strong on the dock, ship, railway or workshop before you can be strong in the halls of legislation. But if political *power* will only come as the ripened fruit of economic power political *agitation* need not wait. Nor yet need wait political organisation. Let them march abreast – the army of organised Labour the director of the campaign on both fields.

Had we such an organisation of Labour to-day there would be no fear of the Exclusion of Ulster, nor any other betrayal of our national hopes.

The Ulster Volunteers may be able to frighten a Liberal Government willing to be frightened, but were a Labour Movement able to call out the Textile Operatives of Belfast, or even its spinners, and to keep them out until Ulster threw in her lot with Ireland, the paralysis of industry and loss of profit to Belfast capitalists would frighten the guns out of the hands of the Carsonite army without the shedding of a single drop of blood.

In conclusion we say to our fellow delegates with all solemnity that we believe that there are no real Nationalists in Ireland outside of the Irish Labour

movement. All others merely reject one part or another of the British Conquest, the Labour movement alone rejects it in its entirety, and sets itself the Reconquest of Ireland as its aim.

Let that be the end and aim of all our deliberations. – Yours fraternally,

JAMES CONNOLLY.

James Connolly

The Liberals and Ulster

(1914)

From **Forward,** May 30, 1914.

This is the fateful week when, according to all the authorities, the drums of war are ready to beat in Ulster. Everybody is on the tip-toe of expectation, and many worthy souls are not able to sleep at nights listening anxiously for the first rattle of musketry.

It is all very weird and puzzling. Had some writer gifted with the powers of prophecy attempted four years ago, or fourteen years ago, to sketch in a novel the outlines of the political developments of the past two years in Ulster, he would

have been branded as a foul libeller of the British governing classes or else as an idiot who failed to understand the passion for order and constitutional methods of procedure that inspires those set in authority in these islands. Not in all Europe would he have found one who would have accepted his prophecy as an indication of the probable trend of events.

Permit me briefly to recapitulate the chief marvels that have astounded the world in this political struggle.

A Cabinet Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, announces that he has accepted an invitation from Ulster Liberals to address a Home Rule meeting in the Ulster Hall in Belfast. A meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, with a noble lord in the chair, publicly announces that it will take steps to prevent Mr. Churchill's meeting. Up to that point nobody in Ulster who knows the Ulstermen had taken in the least degree seriously the threats of fighting on their part. All recognised that the rank and file were probably ready enough to fight, but all also recognised that the economic position of the leaders of the Orange forces, their standing as holders of capitalist stock, land, coal mines, shipping, etc., made the suggestion that they should rebel against the Government that guaranteed their investments – a very ridiculous suggestion indeed. It was generally felt that a firm application of the power of the police force would suffice to quell in a few days all the Orange resistance, and nobody dreamt that the Government would hesitate in firmly applying that force upon the first opportunity. Any open defiance of the law, any open declaration of an intention to break the laws, supplied just that opportunity for the Government to act with all the traditions of law and order at its back.

This projected meeting of Mr. Winston Churchill and the Unionist threat to prevent it came almost as a providential gift to a Government desirous, before it should act, to have its opponents entirely in the wrong. All the traditions of British constitutional procedure were outraged; even the most hardened Tories in Great Britain looked askance at this Orange proposal to deny to a Cabinet Minister that right of public meeting theoretically allowed to even the most irresponsible agitator. The occasion called, and called loudly, for a firm application of force to establish, once and for all, the right of public meeting in

Ulster; to convince the Orange hosts that henceforth unpopular opinion must be met by arguments and not by bolts, rivets, nuts or weapons of war.

But, lo and behold! The Government ran away. Mr. Winston Churchill abandoned his right to hold his meeting in the place advertised, and slunk away to the outskirts of the city to hold a meeting surrounded by more soldiers and police than would have sufficed to capture the city if held by the whole Orange forces in battle array. We in Ulster gasped with astonishment at this pitiful surrender of public liberties, and we realised that a direct encouragement had been given to all the forces of reaction to pursue the path of violence.

Mr. Winston Churchill's meeting was for the Ulster Orange leaders a glorious opportunity; it gave them the excuse for a daring experiment in lawlessness. That experiment was a success; it stood and stands to the succeeding events in the same relation as a trial trip of a newly-launched vessel stands to all its following voyages. Such a trial trip demonstrates the amount of pressure that can be safely put upon the boilers; Mr. Churchill's meeting demonstrated how, in what manner, and to what extent, pressure can be successfully applied to the Liberal Government by a reactionary class.

Suppose that the declaration of an intention to take steps to prevent the meeting had been made by a committee representing the Labour movement, do you think that Mr. Churchill would have abandoned his meeting, even although that Committee represented an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the city? You know that he would have held that meeting at all costs, under such circumstances.

Next in importance to the abandonment of the right of public meeting came the tacit permission given to the Ulster Volunteers to arm themselves with the avowed object of resisting the law.

For two years this arming went on, accompanied by drilling and organising upon a military basis, and no effort was made to stop the drilling or to prevent the free importation of arms until the example of the Ulster Volunteers began to be followed through the rest of Ireland. The writer of these notes established a

Citizen Army at Dublin in connection with the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union, and this was followed by the establishment of Irish Volunteer Corps all through Nationalist Ireland. Hardly had the first of these corps been organised, and the desirability of having them armed been mooted, than the Liberal Government rushed out a proclamation forbidding the importation of arms into Ireland. What had been freely allowed whilst Orangemen alone were arming was immediately made illegal when Labour men and Nationalists thought of obtaining the same weapons. Then having allowed the Unionists to drill and arm, the Government made the fact of their military preparations an excuse for proposing the dismemberment of Ireland as a sop to those whom it had allowed to arm against it. Ulster, where democracy had suffered most because of religious ascendancy, was to be handed over to those whose religious ascendancy principles and practices had made democracy suffer.

Then we had the revolt, or mutiny, at the Curragh. Some regiments were ordered North, and the Liberal Minister humbly inquired of the officers if these gentlemen would kindly consent to go. The Orange leaders, their ladies and the royal family itself, had, it is believed, been usually engaged for two years in seducing these officers from all sense of duty – in teaching them to believe that they should refuse to act against the poor dupes who were being humbugged by the brothers, uncles, fathers, cousins and other relatives of those officers. And hence, as the ties of class are stronger than the ties of governments, the officers very quickly told your backboneless Liberal War Minister that they would not proceed against their fellow landlords and capitalists in the North, nor against the poor wretches who had surrendered their political initiative to them. And the Liberal War Minister, instead of promptly cashiering those officers, or ordering them to be tried by court-martial, humbly crawled to them, asked their pardon, so to speak, for daring to suggest such a thing, and gave them a guarantee that their services would not be called for against the Orange leaders. The guarantee was afterwards repudiated, but the rebellious officers are still in high favour with royalty, and still in command of their regiments. And the Liberal Government itself allowed the men who had corrupted the army to put it upon the defensive, and stand it in the dock, pitifully denying that it did the very thing that it is not fit to hold office if it fears to do, viz., to use its armed forces to make an ascendancy

clique beaten at the polls recognise the machinery of the law from which it derived its powers in the past.

A final consummation to all this pitiful compromise and treachery to a people's hopes is the gun-running of the past few weeks. A ship sails into Larne Harbour one fine Friday evening, and immediately the Ulster Volunteers take possession of that town and seaport, the Royal Irish Constabulary are imprisoned in their barracks, the roads are held up by armed guards, the railway stations of Park Road, Belfast, of Larne, Bangor and Donaghadee are seized by the Ulster Volunteers and thousands of stands of rifles are landed together with a million rounds of ammunition. Along with the landing at Larne vessels are used to tranship arms and ammunition from the original gun-running steamer and land the cargo so transhipped at Bangor and Donaghadee. Some hundreds of motor cars were used to convey the arms and ammunition to safe places, that night, and the same motor cars worked all day on Saturday conveying them from temporary resting places to more secure and handy depots throughout Ulster.

In a few days afterwards the affair came up for discussion in the House of Commons. The Liberals stormed and raved, and the Tories laughed. Why should they not? All the laugh was on their side. Then up rose again the hero of the Ulster Hall – Winston Churchill. He screeched and shouted and perorated and declaimed about law and order until one might have thought that, at last, a wrathful government was about to put forth its mighty powers to crush its unscrupulous enemy. And then, having attained to almost Olympic heights, Mr. Churchill ended by cooing more gently than sucking dove and blandly assured the Orange law breakers that he had not yet reached the limits of concession – he was willing to betray the Irish some more. If they would only let him know how much degradation of the mere Irish would satisfy them, he would try and work it for them. And Parliament adjourned, wondering what it all meant.

Now let me put the situation regarding the gun-running to any unprejudiced reader. Can anyone believe that the gun-ship, the *Fanny*, which had been reported at Hamburg a month before its appearance at Larne and the nature of its cargo known, could keep hovering around these coasts for a month without the Government having it under close supervision?

Can anyone believe that if this gun-running feat had been attempted at Tralee, Waterford, Skibbereen or Bantry and Nationalists had attempted to imprison armed Royal Irish Constabularymen in their barracks that no shots would have been fired and no lives lost?

Can anyone believe that if railway stations were seized, roads held up, coastguards imprisoned and telegraph systems interfered with by Nationalists or Labour men, that at least 1,000 arrests would not have been made the next morning? Evidence is difficult to get, they say. Evidence be hanged! If Nationalists or Labour men were the culprits, the Liberal Government would have made the arrests first and looked for evidence afterwards. And been in no hurry about it either.

My firm conviction is that the Liberal Government wish to betray the Home Rulers, that they connive at these illegalities that they might have an excuse for their betrayal, and that the Home Rule party through its timidity and partly through its hatred of Labour in Ireland is incapable of putting the least pressure upon its Liberal allies and must now dance to the piping of its treacherous allies.

Who can forecast what will come out of such a welter of absurdities, betrayals and crimes?

James Connolly

The Problem of Trade Union Organization

(1914)

From

Forward,

23

May

1914.

Recently I have been complaining in this column and elsewhere of the tendency in the Labour movement to mistake mere concentration upon the industrial field for essentially revolutionary advance. My point was that the amalgamation or federation of unions, unless carried out by men and women with the proper revolutionary spirit, was as likely to create new obstacles in the way of effective warfare, as to make that warfare possible. The argument was reinforced by citations of what is taking place in the ranks of the railwaymen and in the transport industry. There we find that the amalgamations and federations are rapidly becoming engines for steam-rolling or suppressing all manifestations of revolutionary activity, or effective demonstrations of brotherhood. Every appeal to take industrial action on behalf of a union in distress is blocked by insisting upon the necessity of "first obtaining the sanction of the Executive", and in practice it is found that the process of obtaining that sanction is so long, so cumbrous, and surrounded with so many rules and regulations that the union in distress is certain to be either disrupted or bankrupted before the Executive can be moved. The Greater Unionism is found in short to be forging greater fetters for the working class; to bear to the real revolutionary industrial unionism the same relation as the servile State would bear to the Co-operative Commonwealth of our dreams.

This argument of mine, which to many people may appear as far-fetched, gains new strength from the circumstances related by our friend Robert Williams of the Transport Workers Federation, in the weekly report of that body for the 9 May. After describing how the Head Line Company played with the above Federation in connection with its protest against the continued victimization of the members of the Irish Transport Workers Union, and how he was powerless to

effect anything as the other unions involved still continued to work the scab ships, he goes on to tell of a similar state of affairs in the Port of London. The quotation is long, but it is so valuable an instructive lesson to all your readers that I do not hesitate to give it as an ample confirmation of my argument.

This week, again, there has been a recrudescence of the trouble existing between the Seamen's Union at Tilbury and the Anglo-American Oil Company. This Company has a fleet of oil-tank steamers running between America and various ports in this country.

As a result of the protest made by the crew of the SS Narragansett against the chief steward, who acted in the most inhumane manner towards one of the crew who received a severe injury, this Company displaced union men and took on Shipping Federation scabs. Further than this, they have replaced all union men by obtaining Federation scabs in ship after ship since the commencement of the trouble. On Sunday last the Narragansett arrived once more at Purfleet, on the lower reaches of the Thames, and the Tilbury Secretary of the Seamen's Union, Mr E. Potton, naturally commenced to hustle. He communicated with Mr Harry Gosling, Mr Havelock Wilson, and the Secretary of this Federation, in order, if possible, to bring pressure upon the Company by preventing the ship from being bunkered.

After consultation with Messrs Gosling and Wilson, the Secretary telephoned, and further, wrote the Anglo-American Oil Company asking them to confer with one or more of these three, in order to avoid a possible extension of the dispute to the 'coalies' and the tugboatmen, etc. (Purfleet steamers are bunkered from lighters). As in the case of the Head Line, the Secretary specifically drew the attention of the Anglo-American Oil Company to the nature of the complaints, and also sent a written request, following upon a telephone message, by a special messenger for the purpose of saving time. It should be remembered that the bunkers would all be aboard by Tuesday, and this was written on Monday. The Secretary was not very much surprised, however, to receive a reply asking him "what exactly the complaints are, and on whose behalf they are made". The reply was strangely in keeping with the replies received from

the Head Line Company. The inference is that both these replies received inspiration from the same source.

We are writing these words in the hope that they will be read by all those responsible for the guidance and control of the Transport Workers in all our seaports. On the face of it, it seems that the one course of action was to call off the men who were working on this ship. If the Company are asking for a fight, what earthly use is it to fight with a portion of your men, leaving all the others to render service to your enemy? This Company has made an open attack on all their employees who are members of the Seamen's Union. At the same time the cargo of oil was being pumped into reservoirs ashore by Trade Union engineers, the men employed ashore are members of an affiliated Union in the Federation, the ship is bunkered by members of an affiliated Union, the tugboats and lighters are staffed by members of an affiliated Union, and still we are powerless.

We are not so fatuous as to suggest that continuous warfare shall be waged by general strikes whenever a member considers he has a grievance, or whenever an official encounters a difficulty, but we feel that we are drifting back to the position we were in prior to 1911. A Federation with 29 Unions as its constituents, but with no ties more binding than the payment of 3d. per member per year, will not, and cannot, meet the requirements of modern industry. We are responsible to a quarter of a million men, and the existing methods are utterly incapable of protecting them from the insidious attacks of the employers. The organization that is afraid of making a massed attack will experience a series of isolated disasters. The workers' organization secures respect and consideration in proportion to the extent to which it can hamper and embarrass the employers against whom it is pitted.

When co-operation is sought from one Union by another, the men involved say – Consult an official. The official says “Get the consent of my E.C.”. The Executive officers say – “Communicate with the Transport Workers' Federation.” The Federation waits on the decision of its own Executive, and by this inconsequent fiddling of time and opportunity, a thousand Romes would have burned to extinction.

The employers move, strike, move, and strike again with the rapidity of a serpent, while we are turning about and contorting with the facility of an alligator. We have at once to determine whether the future is to mean for us efficiency, aptitude, capacity and life, or muddle, incompetence, decay and death.

Just what is the real remedy for this state of matters, it would be hard to say. But it is at least certain that the organizations I have been speaking of have not discovered the true methods of working-class organizations. They may be on the road to discovering it; they may also be on the road to foisting upon the working class a form of organization which will make our last state infinitely worse than our first. It is the old story of adopting the letter but rejecting the spirit. The letter of industrial concentration is now accepted by all trade union officials, but the spirit of working-class solidarity is woefully absent. Each union and each branch of each union desires above all things to show a good balance sheet, and that that might be done every nerve is strained to keep their members at work, and in a condition to pay subscriptions. Hence the pitiful dodges to avoid taking sympathetic action in support of other unions, and hence also the constant victories of the master class upon the industrial field.

I have often thought that we of the working class are too slow, or too loath, to take advantage of the experience of our rulers. Perhaps if upon all questions of industrial or other war we followed more closely after them we would be able to fight them more successfully. Here is one suggestion I make on those lines. I am not welded to it, but I would like to see it discussed:

In the modern State the capitalist class has evolved for its own purposes of offence what it calls a Cabinet. This Cabinet controls its fighting forces, which must obey it implicitly. If the Cabinet thinks the time and opportunity is ripe for war, it declares war at the most favourable moment, and explains its reasons in Parliament afterwards.

Can we trust any of our members with such a weapon as the capitalist class trusts theirs? I think so. Can we not evolve a system of organization which will leave to the unions the full local administration, but invest in a Cabinet the power to call out the members of any union when such action is desirable, and explain

their reasons for it afterwards? Such a Cabinet might have the right to call upon all affiliated unions to reimburse the union whose members were called out in support of another, but such unions so supported would be under the necessity of obeying instantly the call of the Cabinet, or whatever might be the name of the board invested with the powers indicated.

Out of such an arrangement the way would be opened for a more thorough organization of the working class upon the lines of real Industrial Unionism. At present we are too much afraid of each other. Whatever be our form of organization, the spirit of sectionalism still rules and curses our class.

James Connolly

The Legacy

(1914)

From **Irish Worker**, 23 May 1914.

The Dying Socialist to His Son

Come here my son, and for a time put up your childish play,
Draw nearer to your father's bed, and lay your games away.
No sick man's 'plaint is this of mine, ill-tempered at your noise,
Nor carping at your eagerness to romp with childish toys.
Thou'rt but a boy and I, a man outworn with care and strife,
Would not deprive you of one joy thou canst extract from life;
But o'er my soul comes creeping on death's shadow, and my lips

Must give to you a message ere life meets that eclipse.
Slow runs my blood, my nether limbs I feel not, and my eyes
Can scarce discern, here in this room, that childish form I prize.

Aye, death's grim hand is on my frame, and helpless it lies here
But to my mental vision comes the power of a seer,
And time and space are now as nought as with majestic sweep
I feel my mind traverses the land and encompasses the deep;
Search backward over history's course, or with prophetic view,
And sounding lines of hope and fear gauge man's great destiny too.
The chasm deep twixt life and death I bridge at last tonight,
And with a foot on either side absorb their truths and light.
And thus, my son, though reft of strength, my limbs slow turn to clay,
Fired by this light I call you here to hear my legacy.

"My legacy!" Ah, son of mine! wert thou a rich man's pride
He'd crown thee with his property, possessions far and wide
And golden store to purchase slaves, whose aching brain and limb
Would toil to bring you luxury as such had toiled for him.
But thy father is a poor man, and glancing round you here
Thou canst see all his property – our humble household gear,
No will we need by lawyers drawn, no witnesses attest
To guard for you your legacy, your father's last bequest.
"Thy father is a poor man" mark well what that may mean
On the tablets of thy memory that truth write bright and clean.
Thy father's lot it was to toil from earliest boyhood on
And know his latent energies for a master's profit drawn;
Or else, ill-starred, to wander round and huxter-like to vend
His precious store of brain and brawn to all whom fate may send
And cross his path with gold enough to purchase Labour's power
To turn it into gold again, and fructify the hour.
With sweat and blood of toiling slaves, like unto us, my son,
Aye, through our veins since earliest days, 'tis poor man's blood has run.
Yes, son of mine, since History's dawn two classes stand revealed,

The Rich and Poor, in bitterest war, by deadliest hatred steeled.
The one, incarnate greed and crime, disdainful honest toil
Had grasped man's common birthright and treasure house, the soil.
And standing twixt their fellow man and all that earth could give
Had bade them render tribute if they would hope to live.
And, building crime on top of crime, had pushed their conquests on
Till, arbiters of life and death, they stood with weapons drawn.
And blades athirst to drink the blood, on land and over sea,
Of him who dared for human rights to stem their tyranny.
They held our lands, our bodies ruled, and strove to rule the mind
And Hell itself could not surpass their evil to mankind –
And all who strove for human rights to break their cursed yoke –
The noblest of our race, my child, went down beneath their stroke.
And where'er earth's sweetest spots, in nature's loveliest haunt
Each built his fort or castle grim the poor of earth to daunt.
And issuing forth from walls of stone, high over cliff and pass,
With sword in hand, would gather tribute for his class.
And given emblems of their rule, flaunting to humankind
The pit to drown our women, the gibbet for our men,
Stood, aye, beside their fortresses; and underneath the most
Tier upon tier of noisome cells for those the tyrant smote.
Thumbscrews and rack and branding rod, and each device of Hell
Perverted genius could devise to torture men to sell
(For brief respite from anguish dire to end their wretched lives)
The secret of their comradeship, the honour of their wives.

As the fabled upas tree of old, by ancient poets sung,
Consumed with blight each living thing then 'neath its branches sprung,
The rich man's power o'er all the earth had spread its baleful blight
Respecting neither age nor sex to sate its lust and might.
It stole the harvest from the field, the product of the loom,
Struck down the old man in his age, the young man in his bloom.
It robbed the carrier on the road, the sailor on the tide
And from the bridegroom of the hour it took the new-made bride.

Such crimes it wrought not Hell itself and its satanic school
Could fashion crimes to equal those wrought by the rich man's rule.

"The past?" Aye, boy, the method's past, the deed is still the same,
And robbery is robbery, yet though cloaked in gentler name.
Our means of life are still usurped, the rich man still is lord,
And prayers and cries for justice still meet one reply – the sword –
Though hypocrites for rich men's gold may tell us we are free,
And oft excel in speech and print our vaunted liberty,
But freedom lies not in a name, and he who lacks for bread
Must have that bread tho' he should give his soul for it instead.
And we, who live by Labour, know that while they rule we must
Sell freedom, brain and limb to win for us and ours a crust.
The robbers made our fathers slaves then chained them to the soil,
For a little larger chain – a wage – we must change our toil.
But open force gave way to fraud but force again behind
Prepares to strike if fraud should fail to keep men deaf and blind.
Our mothers see their children's limbs they fondled as they grew
And doted on, caught up to make for rich men profits new,
Whilst strong men die for lack of work and cries of misery swell
And women's souls in city streets creep shuddering to Hell.
These things belong not to the past but to the present day
And they shall last till in our wrath we sweep them all away.

"We sweep them." Ah, too well I know my work on earth is done,
Even as I speak my chilling blood tells me my race is run.
But you, my last-loom child, take the legacy I give
And do as your father did whilst he was spared to live.
Treasure ye in your inmost heart this legacy of hate
For those who on the poor man's back have climbed to high estate.
The lords of land and capital – the slave lords of our age,
Who of this smiling earth of ours have made for us a cage
Where golden bars fetter men's souls, and noble thoughts are flame
To burn with vain desire, and virtue yields to shame.

Each is your foe, foe of your class, of human rights the foe,
Be it your thought by day and night to work their overthrow.
And howsoe'er you earn your wage, and wheresoe'er you go,
Be it beneath the tropic heat or mid the northern snow
Or closely penn'd in factory walls or burrowing in the mine
Or scorching in the furnace hell of steamers cross the brine
Or on a railroad's shining track you guide the flying wheel
Or clambering up buildings high to weld the frames of steel
Or use the needle, or the type, the hammer or the pen,
Have you one thought, one speech alone, to all your fellow-men.
The men and women of your class, tell them their wrongs and yours,
Plant in their hearts that hatred deep that suffers and endures,
And treasure up each deed of wrong, each scornful word and look
Inscribe it in the memory, as others in a book,
And wait and watch through galling years the ripening of time
Yet deem to strike before that hour were worse than folly – crime.

This be your task, oh son of mine, the rich man's hate to brave
And consecrate your noblest part to rouse each fellow slave.
To spread the day the world awaits when Labour long oppress
Shall rise and strike for Freedom true and from the tyrant wrest
The power they have abused so long. Oh ever glorious deed!
The crowning point of history, yet child, the bitterest need.

**Ah, woe is me, thy father's eyes
shall not behold the day
I faint and die; child, hold my
hand,
Keep thou my legacy. James
Connolly**

Changes

(1914)

From **Forward**, May 9, 1914.
Transcribed by [The James Connolly Society](#) in 1997.

Reading of the May Day celebrations of the past week brought back to my mind in a very vivid fashion a realisation of the changes that have taken place in socialist propaganda since the inauguration of Labour Day in these countries.

In the earlier period the question of an eight hour working day was to a large extent a test question on all the May Day Committees, as indeed it also was in the Trade Union Congresses of that time. Those who were old-time trade unionists and adherents of the liberal or tory parties stood out for May Day resolutions, demanding simply an “eight hour working day,” whilst those who were of the newer school and were inclined to socialistic ideas quite as vehemently demanded that the wording of the resolution should call for a “legislative” or “legal eight hour day.” One could indeed tell roughly what proportion the antagonistic school of socialists or non-socialists bore upon any such committee by a study of the wording of the resolution, and tracing the emphasis or lack of emphasis given to the call for legislative action.

The same fight was being fought out in all the Trade Unions, Trade Councils, and Trade Congresses. The question of legislative action to restrict or otherwise regulate the hours of labour divided the sheep from the goats all over the country. Many men, now active propagandists of the socialist cause, were first launched upon that path by finding themselves as supporters of legislative restriction

denounced as socialists by the old school of individualist trade unionists, and being thus thrown into the arms of socialists developed a sympathetic attitude towards their general teaching.

The more recent recruits to the socialist ranks can scarcely realise what the position of the movement was at that time when he reads or hears that the passing of a resolution at the British Trade Congress calling for a “legal” eight hours working day was hailed by the socialist propagandists of that period as a great socialist victory. Yet so it was. In the ordinary outdoor and indoor socialist propaganda, the same mental attitude was dominant. If it were now possible to examine the socialist speeches of that period we would find that an inordinately large proportion of time was given up in them to a belittling of industrial action and to what was practically an exaggeration of the ease and facility with which the working class could achieve its rights at the ballot-box.

This belittling of industrial action and denial of its possibilities formed the main theme of the speeches of so many socialist orators that it is more than possible that thousands of good earnest trade unionists were estranged from a friendly examination of the socialist cause by what they felt to be something like insidious attacks upon working-class organisation. The socialist movement at the time was in a nebulous, chaotic state, not only with regard to its organised expression, but also with regard to its growing tactics, and the tendency was for all its speakers to exploit that which for the time being secured the largest audience. Perhaps that is the tendency still. But what I am endeavouring to convey is that consideration of the means towards the end, the tactics to be followed in realising the consummation aimed at formed but a small part of socialist study. Beyond a general affirmation of a belief in ‘common ownership,’ and in political action as the means of realising that common ownership, few speakers dared to venture. In consequence, the demand for political action became the creed of the socialist, and in the endeavour to make the propaganda serve the general purpose of advancing the demand for political action, that demand constantly tended to overshadow the general principle of the socialist movement itself. This stage of socialist propaganda in Great Britain may be said to have reached its highest point in the General Election of 1906, which resulted

in the return of a large number of labour members to Parliament, and the partial reversal of the Taff Vale Decision.

With that victory the propaganda seemed to undergo a radical change. Whether it was because the workers had built too high hopes upon the advent of such a limited number of labour men into the House of Commons, or because the men elected were destitute of the courage and initiative necessary for their position, or from both causes combined, or from neither, I do not presume to say; but certain it is that there was for a long period a falling off of enthusiasm for the political side of socialism. Perhaps it would be better to say that there began to dawn a belief that socialism had really another side and that a man's belief in the efficacy of legislation was not a real test of the sincerity of his socialist convictions. Then there came the industrial upheaval of 1911, with its series of brilliant victories won by labour upon the industrial battlefield, and the growth of an opinion among socialists totally adverse to political action. For a considerable period this antipolitical idea made headway, and we saw its influence making itself felt all over the socialist world. It is the very antithesis of the opinion I have described as being considered formerly as a true standard by which a socialist might be judged yet no one would today argue that because a man held such ideas he could not therefore be rightly classed as a socialist. In the older days we would have at once branded such a man as an anarchist, today we are not so sure of his classification. That in itself is a wonderful change in the attitude of the socialist towards political action.

Because of the slight reverses sustained at a uniform high level of excitement and victory, there is now in many quarters a recrudescence of the older attitude towards industrial battlings.

Leaders in plenty, even some engaged in industrial work, are to be found decrying strikes and deprecating all restlessness and rebellion which does not express itself at the ballot box. In some quarters we can even trace what looks suspiciously like a desire to gloat over industrial defeats and to welcome them as evidences of the futility of industrial action, and the super-excellence of politics.

Now having observed this movement around the clock, and observed it from the standpoint of one caught amongst the wheels, I am inclined to ask all and sundry amongst our comrades if there is any necessity for this presumption of antagonism between the industrialist and the political advocate of socialism. I cannot see any. I believe that such supposed necessity only exists in the minds of the mere theorists or doctrinaires. The practical fighter in the work-a-day world makes no such distinction. He fights, and he votes; he votes and he fights. He may not always, he does not always, vote right; nor yet does he always fight when and as he should. But I do not see that his failure to vote right is to be construed into a reason for advising him not to vote at all; nor yet why a failure to strike properly should be used as a gibe at the strike weapon, and a reason for advising him to place his whole reliance upon votes.

I am glad of the experience of the past few years. I am glad that the extremely doctrinaire political attitude towards strikes received a check, and that that check came straight out of the practical experience of the workers in ship, shore, shop and railway. I am glad that the equally doctrinaire attitude of the anti-political people has failed to sweep the working class off its feet. And I trust that out of this experience will be born wisdom, and that such wisdom will enable us to develop a working class action which will combine the political and industrial activities of the workers on militant and aggressive lines.

The development of the power of the modern state should teach us that the mere right to vote will not protect the workers unless they have a strong economic organisation behind them that the nationalisation or municipalisation of industries but changes the form of the workers' servitude whilst leaving its essence unimpaired; and that in the long run the class in control of the economic forces of the nation will be able to dominate and direct its political powers.

On the other hand, that very development also teaches us that until the workers have perfected their economic power sufficiently to control the economic forces the class actually in control will most relentlessly and scientifically use their political powers to hamper, penalise and if possible destroy the activities of the workers' organisation, and thus prevent the creation of a force sufficient for their suppression.

My reading of history tells me that in all great social changes the revolutionary class always fails of success until it is able to do the work of the class it seeks to destroy, and to do it more efficiently. And when it has so perfected itself that it is able to perform this work, neither gods nor men can stop its onward march to victory. In other words, a new social order cannot supplant the old until it has its own organisation ready to take its place. Within the social order of capitalism I can see no possibility of building up a new economic organisation fit for the work of superseding the old on socialist lines, except that new order be built upon the lines of the industries that capitalism itself has perfected. Therefore I am heart and soul an industrial unionist. But because I know that the capitalist class is alert and unscrupulous in its use of power, I do not propose to leave it the uncontested use of the powers of the state. And because I realise that human nature is a wonderful thing, that the soul of man gives expression to strange and complex phenomena, and that no man knows what powers or possibilities for good or evil lie in humanity, I try to preserve my receptivity towards all new ideas, my tolerance towards all manifestations of social activity.

James Connolly

**Independent Labour
Party of Ireland:
Ireland Upon
The Dissecting
Table**

(April 1914)

Fellow-Workers,

As the only political organisation in the North of Ireland which, seeking first the well-being and freedom of the working class, has yet at all times resolutely stood for the attainment of Irish Nationhood, we desire to appeal to you and the public generally to protest with all possible power and without loss of time against the proposal to allow the unity of Ireland to be placed at the mercy of the voters in a small part of Ireland. The Exclusion Proposals put forward by the Liberal Government and accepted by the Home Rule Party, mean that a vote is to be taken of the electors in the Ulster counties and in the two boroughs of Belfast and Derry on the question of whether these places will continue to be reckoned as part of Ireland, and therefore as subject to the Home Rule Bill. If the majority in any one of these places vote against Home Rule then that county or borough will be cut off politically from Ireland and the Home Rule Bill will not apply to it. This, in simple language, means that a local majority, in Belfast or Derry, for instance, are to be given the power to wreak their hatred upon Ireland by dismembering her, by cutting Ireland to pieces as a corpse would be cut upon the dissecting table.

Cromwell, in his worst days, the Orange Order in its most atrocious moments, never planned a more dastardly outrage upon the Irish nation than this. And remember that this is planned by the political parties who for a generation have taught you to believe that they hoped for and worked for

IRELAND A NATION.

Yet in the moment when it was possible and easy to realise that ideal they consented to betray you, and to place your hopes and the unity of your nation at the mercy of the voters in the Ulster counties and boroughs, where the seeds of intolerance, bigotry and opposition to social progress have borne the most evil fruit and darkened the vision of the largest multitudes.

But we will be told that this Exclusion is to be only temporary, and Home Rule and Liberal politicians are whispering into your ears that they are resolutely opposed to any extension of the six years' limit. Do not be misled. Remember that no man can foretell the course of politics. Could any Home Ruler have foretold one year ago that the Home Rule Party would have consented even to discuss this dismemberment of the Irish Nation? He would have been driven in disgrace out of the A.O.H. or the U.I.L., if he had suggested a year ago that such a thing was possible. But today these organisations are loud in their approval of the proposal to put Ireland upon the dissecting table and to give into the hands of Sir Edward Carson and his dupes the knife with which to cut her up. But truth will out, and even the politicians themselves let slip the fact about the real probabilities of the future. Read the speech of Mr. John Dillon, M.P., in the House of Commons on the night of Wednesday, April 1st, as reported in the Liberal Daily News and Leader of the following day. He laid stress upon the fact that two General Elections will take place within the six years. He said:

“Ulster had been offered the safeguard of two elections, and it would be an event unparalleled in British history for the Unionist Party not to win one of them.”

What would happen then, if the Unionist Party won one of these elections, as Mr. Dillon says they almost certainly would? On the same night the Solicitor-General supplied the answer. He said:

“If the other side came into power and brought forward a Bill to exclude Ulster it would have a royal and triumphal procession to the foot of the throne.”

So that here you have two leading spokesmen of the Liberal and Home Rule Parties admitting that the six years' limit is only a form of speech – that in practical politics it will have no real existence. What this proposal is really doing is establishing the right of, and giving the power to, a small minority to destroy the nation as a nation to – we again repeat it – place Ireland upon the dissecting table, and give into the hands of Sir Edward Carson and his followers the knife with which to cut her up. No amount of speeches against Exclusion which the Home Rule politicians may hereafter make should be allowed to cover or hide

their complicity in this damnable crime, or to obscure the fact that it was and is their acceptance of Mr. Asquith's proposal that alone makes Exclusion possible.

Think of all the measures needed by the workers in this part of the country which will be impossible if this Exclusion is allowed. The Nationalisation of Irish Railways, so badly needed, will be an impossibility; the Extension to Ireland of the Medical Benefits of the Insurance Act, the Provision of Meals to Children at School, the Abolition of Sweating, and the general safeguarding of the interests of Mill Workers and other forms of Labour needing Legal Protection, will all be delayed, if not absolutely lost, if any part of Ulster is cut off from Ireland as a nation. And in addition, all the old sectarian jealousies will be kept up, workers will be kept fighting with workers and progress will be impossible.

We appeal to you then to arouse yourselves to the gravity of the occasion. Make your protest in every possible way. Do not allow it to be said of you by the children of the future that your generation was the only generation in all the history of Ireland that consented to betray her, that granted to an intolerant minority the power to destroy the unity of the country to disrupt and dismember it, and that you granted this at the very moment when Labour elsewhere in Ireland was most assertive of its rights and most desirous of a Free Irish Nation as the natural guardian of those rights.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
Independent Labour Party of Ireland,
Belfast Branch

James Connolly

**Old Wine in New
Bottles**

(1914)

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The latter text is that given here.

Scripture tells us in a very notable passage about the danger of putting new wine into old bottles. I propose to say a few words about the equally suicidal folly of putting old wine into new bottles. For I humbly submit that the experiment spoken of is very popular just now in the industrial world, has engaged the most earnest attention of most of the leaders of the working class, and received the practically unanimous endorsement of the Labour and Socialist Press. I have waited in vain for a word of protest.

THE IDEA BEHIND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

In the year of grace 1905 a convention of American Labour bodies was held in Chicago for the purpose of promoting a new working-class organisation on more militant and scientific lines. The result of that convention was the establishment of the Industrial Workers of the World – the first Labour organisation to organise itself with the definite ideal of taking over and holding the economic machinery of society. The means proposed to that end – and it is necessary to remember that the form of organisation adopted was primarily intended to accomplish that end, and only in the second degree as a means of industrial warfare under capitalism – was the enrolment of the working class in Unions built upon the lines of the great industries. It was the idea of the promoters of the new organisation that craft interests and technical requirements should be met by the creation of branches, that all such branches should be represented in a common executive, that all united should be members of an industrial Union, which should embrace all branches and be co-extensive with the industry, that all

industrial Unions should be linked as members of one great Union, and that one membership card should cover the whole working-class organisation. Thus was to be built up a working-class administration which should be capable of the revolutionary act of taking over society, and whose organisers and officers should in the preliminary stages of organising and fighting constantly remember, and remembering, teach, that no new order can replace the old until it is capable of performing the work of the old, and performing it more efficiently for human needs.

FIGHTING SPIRIT MORE THAN MASS ORGANIZATION

As one of the earliest organisers of that body, I desire to emphasise also that as a means of creating in the working class the frame of mind necessary to the upbuilding of this new order within the old, we taught, and I have yet seen no reason to reconsider our attitude upon this matter, that the interests of one were the interests of all, and that no consideration of a contract with a section of the capitalist class absolved any section of us from the duty of taking instant action to protect other sections when said sections were in danger from the capitalist enemy. Our attitude always was that in the swiftness and unexpectedness of our action lay our chief hopes of temporary victory, and since permanent peace was an illusory hope until permanent victory was secured, temporary victories were all that need concern us. We realised that every victory gained by the working class would be followed by some capitalist development that in course of time would tend to nullify it, but that until that development was perfect the fruits of our victory would be ours to enjoy, and the resultant moral effect would be of incalculable value to the character and to the mental attitude of our class towards their rulers. It will thus be seen that in our view – and now that I am about to point the moral I may personally appropriate it and call it my point of view – the spirit, the character, the militant spirit, the fighting character of the organisation, was of the first importance. I believe that the development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation; that, indeed, the most theoretically perfect organisation may, because of its very perfection and vastness, be of the greatest possible danger to the revolutionary

movement if it tends, or is used, to repress and curb the fighting spirit of comradeship in the rank and file.

SUCCESS OF THE SYMPATHETIC STRIKE IN 1911

Since the establishment in America of the organisation I have just sketched, and the initiation of propaganda on the lines necessary for its purpose, we have seen in all capitalist countries, and notably in Great Britain, great efforts being made to abolish sectional division, and to unite or amalgamate kindred Unions. Many instances will arise in the minds of my readers, but I propose to take as a concrete example the National Transport Workers' Federation. Previous to the formation of this body, Great Britain was the scene of the propagandist activities of a great number of irregular and unorthodox bodies, which, taking their cue in the main from the Industrial Workers of the World, made great campaigns in favour of the new idea. Naturally their arguments were in the main directed towards emphasising the absurdity implied in one body of workers remaining at work whilst another body of workers were on strike in the same employment. As a result of this campaign, frowned upon by leading officials in Great Britain, the Seamen's strike of 1911 was conducted on, and resulted in, entirely new lines of action. The sympathetic strike sprang into being; every group of workers stood by every allied group of workers; and a great wave of effective solidarity caught the workers in its grasp and beat and terrified the masters. Let me emphasise the point that the greatest weapon against capital was proven in those days to be the sporadic strike. It was its very sporadic nature, its swiftness and unexpectedness, that won. It was ambush, the surprise attack of our industrial army, before which the well-trained battalions of the capitalist crumpled up in panic, against which no precautions were available.

WEAKNESS OF THE NATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION

Since that time we have had all over these countries a great wave of enthusiasm for amalgamations, for more cohesion in the working-class organisations. In the

transport industry all Unions are being linked up until the numbers now affiliated have become imposing enough to awe the casual reader and silence the cavilling objector at Trade Union meetings. But I humbly submit that, side by side with that enlargement and affiliation of organisations, there has proceeded a freezing up of the fraternal spirit of 1911; there is now, despite the amalgamations, less solidarity in the ranks of Labour than was exhibited in that year of conflict and victory.

If I could venture an analysis of the reason for this falling-off in solidarity, I would have to point out that the amalgamations and federations are being carried out in the main by officials absolutely destitute of the revolutionary spirit, and that as a consequence the methods of what should be militant organisations having the broad working-class outlook are conceived and enforced in the temper and spirit of the sectionalism those organisations were meant to destroy.

Into the new bottles of industrial organisation is being poured the old, cold wine of Craft Unionism.

The much-condemned small Unions of the past had at least this to recommend them, viz., that they were susceptible to pressure from the sudden fraternal impulses of their small membership. If their members worked side by side with scabs, or received tainted goods from places where scabs were employed, the shame was all their own, and proved frequently too great to be borne. When it did so we had the sympathetic strike and the fraternisation of the working class. But when the workers handling tainted goods, or working vessels loaded by scabs, are members of a nation-wide organisation, with branches in all great centres or ports, the sense of the personal responsibility is taken off the shoulders of each member and local officials, and the spirit of solidarity destroyed. The local official can conscientiously order the local member to remain at work with the scab, or to handle the tainted goods, 'pending action by the
General Executive'.

RECENT EVENTS FORETOLD IN 1914

As the General Executive cannot take action pending a meeting of delegates, and as the delegates at that meeting have to report back to their bodies, and these bodies again to meet, discuss, and then report back to the General Executive, which must meet, hear their reports, and then, perhaps, order a ballot vote of the entire membership, after which another meeting must be held to tabulate the result of the vote and transmit it to the local branches, which must meet again to receive it, the chances are, of course, a million to one that the body of workers in distress will be starved into subjection, bankrupted, or disrupted, before the leviathan organisation will allow their brothers on the spot to lift a finger or drop a tool in their aid. Readers may, perhaps, think that I am exaggerating the danger. But who will think so that remembers the vindictive fine imposed by the NUR upon its members in the North of England for taking swift action on behalf of a persecuted comrade instead of going through all this red tape whilst he was suffering? Or who will think so that knows that Dublin and Belfast members of the Irish Transport Workers' Union have been victimised ever since the end of the lock-out by the Head Line Company, whose steamers have been and are regularly coaled in British ports, and manned by Belfast and British members of the Seamen's and Firemen's Union?

TACTICS THAT WILL WIN

The amalgamations and federations that are being built up today are, without exception, being used in the old spirit of the worst type of sectionalism; each local Union or branch finds in the greater organisation of which it is a part a shield and excuse for refusing to respond to the call of brothers and sisters in distress, for the handling of tainted goods, for the working of scab boats. A main reason for this shameful distortion of the Greater Unionism from its true purpose is to be found in the campaign against 'sporadic strikes'.

I have no doubt but that Robert Williams, of the National Transport Workers' Federation, is fully convinced that his articles and speeches against such strikes are and were wise; I have just a little doubt that they were the best service

performed for the capitalist by any Labour leader of late years. The big strike, the vast massed battalions of Labour against the massed battalions of capital on a field every inch of which has been explored and mapped out beforehand, is seldom successful, for very obvious reasons. The sudden strike, and the sudden threat to strike suddenly, has won more for Labour than all the great Labour conflicts in history. In the Boer war the long line of communications was the weak point of the British army; in a Labour war the ground to be covered by the goods of the capitalist is his line of communication. The larger it is the better for the attacking forces of Labour. But these forces must be free to attack or refuse to attack, just as their local knowledge guides them. But, it will be argued, their action might imperil the whole organisation. Exactly so, and their inaction might imperil that working-class spirit which is more important than any organisation. Between the horns of that dilemma what can be done? In my opinion, we must recognise that the only solution of that problem is the choice of officers, local or national, from the standpoint of their responsiveness to the call for solidarity, and, having got such officials, to retain them only as long as they can show results in the amelioration of the condition of their members and the development of their Union as a weapon of class warfare.

ADVANCE OR RETREAT

If we develop on those lines, then the creation of a great Industrial Union, such as I have rudely sketched in my opening reminiscence, or the creation of those much more clumsy federations and amalgamations now being formed, will be of immense revolutionary value to the working class; if, on the contrary, we allow officialism of the old, narrow sectional kind to infuse their spirit into the new organisations, and to strangle these with rules suited only to a somnolent working class, then the Greater Unionism will but serve to load us with great fetters. It will but be to real Industrial Unionism what the Servile State would be to our ideal Co-operative Commonwealth.