

James Connolly

**Two Fateful
Christmas
Weeks**

(1915)

From **Workers' Republic,** 25 December 1915.

On the 21st December, 1796, a French Fleet entered Bantry Bay bearing on board arms, ammunition, and an army of fifteen thousand men for the liberation of Ireland. The French army commander had been separated from the fleet in a storm, and his successor hesitated about taking the responsibility of landing his troops. For days the fleet rocked in perfect security in the bay, until another storm arising caused the French commander to raise his anchors and put again to sea, headed for France – and the Empire's danger was over.

Consider it, friends! One hundred and nineteen years ago the freedom of Ireland lay in the power of one man to grasp, had he but had the decision of character necessary to cause him to act. Two years afterwards it took over thirty thousand English soldiers to conquer the one county of Wexford, and that county was one of those which had been most foolish in surrendering its arms at the demand of a government proclamation. Had Wexford risen, had any part of

Ireland risen in December, 1796, even General Grouchy could not have refused to land, and with the diversion his force would have caused the success of the insurrection must have been certain. But the French commander would not risk his troops amongst and for a people who were apparently risking nothing for themselves. The leaders of the United Irishmen hesitated – their arrangements were not complete. The French commander hesitated, everybody hesitated, except the English Government.

One hundred and nineteen years ago. And again Ireland looks across the sea, and perhaps those across the sea look over to Ireland, and wonder.

The doubters asked Christ in His day for a sign. In our day they still ask for a sign. And in both cases it is the same answer.

“The Kingdom of Heaven [Freedom] is within you.”

“The Kingdom of Heaven can only be taken by violence.”

Heavenly words with an earthly meaning. Christmas week, 1796; Christmas week, 1915 – still hesitating.

James Connolly

Notes on the Front

(1915)

Workers' Republic, 25 December 1915.
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MORE POETRY

Watch and Wait, boys, watch and wait,
Let it be your motto, ever,
Foolish zeal, unguarded hate,
Often baulks a brave endeavour.
God ordains, boys, God ordains
That we pine a little longer,
Ere we burst the galling chains,
Ere we crush the brutal wronger.

Did ever you read and ponder over these lines of Gavan Duffy? They were written at a time in Irish history wonderfully similar to the present. At a time of unrest and longing for struggle, tempered by preachings of caution.

It was in the days of the Young Irelanders. Eloquent voices had been preaching of the glories of the sword and eulogising the rights of nations to take back their own with armed hand; sweet singers had been wedding the hope of Irish patriots to deathless verse in heroic measures; the hearts of the young men of the Irish race were swelling with the passions of hatred for oppression and ambition for freedom, and the Great Famine was lashing the most stolid into willingness to try any adventure that held out hope of food for the perishing millions.

Ireland seemed, even to the most cautious and calculating foreign observer, to be on the point of great endeavours.

Instead of the great adventure Ireland witnessed the most sordid, squalid, meanest fiasco in all her history. Fintan Lalor, in one of those biting sentences of his which seem to crystallise a whole volume of history, says:

The soul of this country seems to sink where that of another would soar.

To tell how that fiasco took its place in Irish history instead of a Great Adventure like unto that of Tone and Emmet, would be to give point and corroboration to the above analysis of the character of the soul of Ireland.

It is a hard tale to tell, and a harder one to understand, unless your own soul is attuned in harmony with the passions of the actors in that great squalid tragedy of our history.

As your soul is attuned in sympathy to one side or the other, so one side or the other is comprehensible to you – and the other an unsolved and insoluble problem.

As in all revolutionary movements there came a point when all agreed that force would have to settle the differences between Ireland and the British Empire. But immediately there arose a cleavage between the revolutionists who desired to strike, and the tacticians who counselled greater preparedness and the desirability of “putting the Government plainly in the wrong”.

It was the clash between the outlook of revolutionists, and the outlook of politicians manoeuvring for a political advantage, and yet both sides were earnestly revolutionary.

You can grasp that fact if you study carefully the verse at the beginning of these notes. There is not a sentiment in them that at first glance would not be endorsed by every true nationalist, and yet practically every true nationalist deplores the fact that the counsel there given was taken by the Irish people at the time.

As a counsel of caution they ring true. As a historical fact it was such counsel that permitted John Mitchel to be carried off safely in chains, and stuck a dagger to the heart of the Irish insurrection of 1848.

The literature of the '48 Insurrection was beautiful; the story of the Insurrection itself reads like the book of a badly written burlesque.

Another poem of a similar character to that quoted above written at the same time and for the same purpose, viz: to restrain the revolutionary spirit of the people, is we think one of the finest revolutionary songs in the English language.

It breathes revolutionary feeling and democratic spirit in every line, yet the sum total of its effects at the time was to tighten the hold of the enemy upon this country, and to hold the people in leash until the opportune moment was passed.

Yet its author, M.J. Barry, with peculiar logic declared afterwards that as the Irish people had failed to make even a decent fight in 1848 he considered the cause of Ireland hopeless, and would thereafter accept the English connection with all its consequences.

The song in question is by its own merits worthy of a place in any nationalist or Labour Concert programme, but we do not remember hearing it sung at any such in Ireland, although it is a favourite in revolutionary circles elsewhere. Here it is:

BIDE YOUR TIME

I

BIDE YOUR TIME, the morn is breaking,
Bright with Freedom's blessed ray –
Millions, from their trance awaking,
Soon shall stand in firm array.
Man shall fetter man no longer,
Liberty shall march sublime;
Every moment makes you stronger,
Firm, unshrinking, BIDE YOUR TIME.

II

BIDE YOUR TIME – one false step taken
Perils all you yet have done;
Undismayed, erect, unshaken –
Watch and wait, and all is won.
'Tis not by a rash endeavour
Men or states to greatness climb –
Would you win your rights forever
Calm and thoughtful, BIDE YOUR TIME.

III

BIDE YOUR TIME – your worst transgression
Were to strike, and strike in vain;
He, whose arm would smite oppression,
Must not need to smite again!
Danger makes the brave man steady –
Rashness is the coward's crime –
Be for Freedom's battle ready,
When it comes – but, BIDE YOUR TIME.

You will perhaps wonder at our statement that a certain section of the revolutionists of 1848 resolved not to strike, unless and until they saw an opportunity of 'putting England in the wrong'. The idea that this left it to the Government to choose the time, the place, and the circumstances for the fight doubtless did occur to them but was not allowed to alter their purpose. They grandly declared that they would not be driven before their time.

Eventually the Government, having leisurely made all its preparations – and preparations made by a government with untold millions at its disposal can always outmatch a thousand to one the preparations made illegally by a few thousand poverty stricken men and women – having made all its preparations the Government issued orders for the arrest of the Young Ireland leaders. They took to the country, and issued the call for insurrection. Smith O'Brien was the chief, and in the course of his peregrinations he arrived at the village of Killenaule. Here it was reported that a body of Dragoons were approaching with a warrant for his apprehension. Instantly the people prepared to fight. They barricaded one end of the village and as the dragoons rode in at the other end the people raised barricades behind them. The soldiers were trapped, and Stephens was about to fire upon the officer in command, when Smith O'Brien ordered him to lower his rifle. Then upon being assured by the English officer that he had no warrant for Smith O'Brien's arrest that gentleman ordered the people to clear a passage for the soldiers who thereupon rode safely away.

You see it would not put the government in the wrong to fire upon the army unless the army fired first, and government outraged their own constitution.

Now do you understand what we have meant when we said that Irish rebels had a constitutional frame of mind – wanted to conduct revolutions according to constitutional procedure?

They wanted to establish it as a fact in history that they were driven into rebellion against their wills. And regarded it as a disgraceful thing that they should be accused of eagerly seeking revolution, and as longing for a chance to begin the fight for freedom.

We do not know if there are any such to-day amongst us. If there are they are a danger. Ireland needs no legal excuses for revolution. The presence of English government in this country, be that government bad or good, is at all times provocation and outrage enough. It is not native, it rests upon no sanction but force, and it holds the interests of a foreign empire to be superior to the well-being of the Irish people.

But once again the old clash of opinions arises. Is the time here, or is it not? Who knows? Perhaps the writer of these Notes on the Front is wrong.

Perhaps the writer of the following poem is right. At any rate, like its predecessors that we have already quoted, it is beautifully written, and worthy of a place. Read:

THE WATCHING HOUR

A steel grey dawn is in the sky,
Above the watchers on each hill;
And you who live and you who die
Shall *preach* a race unconquered still.

Tho' lingering wait may often tire,
And idle critic's words may gall;
Keep watch upon the signal fire,
Whose burning blaze is Ireland's call.

A soldier knows how to obey,
To 'wait the word with arms girth;
Nor lag behind nor chide delay;
Disciplined strength gives Freedom birth.

And you whose ardent souls now chide
The hand that holds you from the fray,
Remember that a nation's pride
A nation's life hangs on *the day*.

Then watch beneath the steel grey sky,
Beside the watchers on each hill,
Till you who live and you who die,
May *prove* a race unconquered still.

PATRICK HOGAN.

So we have given the other side a look in this time. This being the blessed Christmas season we do this in order to show our kindly Christmas feelings to our erring brothers. We have been given to understand that some of them do not appreciate our suggestions at their proper value, and even a few, a very few, are a little irritated, and say that we are not playing the game fair.

Well, all we can say is that our allegiance is not to the game, nor to the players of the game, but to Ireland and the cause of Freedom. To some people the Game has become more important than the Cause, and they as the players of the Game more important than either. It is not a new frame of mind in Ireland, witness the incident of Smith O'Brien who made the question of "Insurrection or no Insurrection" turn upon whether an officer had or had not a warrant for his arrest, but there are few who share it. And these few can safely be ignored.

The needs of our time call for a frank recognition of the fact that our Slogan must be

All for the Cause
and
The Cause over All.

Shall we see another year and Ireland patiently bearing her Chains?

To all slaves in Revolt we wish A Merry Christmas!

James Connolly

Correspondents

(1915)

Workers' Republic, 25 December 1915].

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O'ROURKE (London.) – Thanks, comrade. We are more proud of the comradeship of toilers like yourself than you can well imagine. It is such loyalty as yours that keeps us hopeful of our class and country.

CÚ CHULAINN (Dundalk.) – No! We do not believe that war is glorious, inspiring, or regenerating. We believe it to be hateful, damnable, and damning. And the present war upon Germany we believe to be a hell-inspired outrage. Any person, whether English, German, or Irish, who sings the praises of war is, in our opinion, a blithering idiot. But when a nation has been robbed it should strike back to recover her lost property. Ireland has been robbed of her freedom, and to recover it should strike swiftly and relentlessly, and in such a fashion as will put the fear of God in the hearts of all who connived at the robbery or its continuance. But do not let us have any more maudlin trash about the 'glories of war', or the 'regenerative influence of war', or the 'sacred mission of the soldier', or the 'fertilising of all earth with the heroic blood of her children', etc, etc. We are sick of it, the world is sick of it. And when combined with the cant about 'patience', and 'waiting', and the 'folly of rashness', and the 'wisdom of caution', and all the other phrases that are to be heard from the Irish eulogists of war we confess it gives us a feeling like sea-sickness – nausea.

No, friend! War is hell, but if freedom is on the farther side shall even hell be allowed to daunt us.

James Connolly

Forgive and Forget

(18 December 1915)

As we approach the Blessed Christmas Season we are reminded that this is the period of the year when all good Christians are exhorted to follow the above precept. Forgive and Forget. How sweet the words sound, and how soothing to the mind and conscience of men it is when they can in good faith act up to the counsel!

Can Ireland forgive and forget? Is it wise policy for Ireland to forgive before she has received more than a lip promise that the future will not be as full of wrong as the past? And if she can forgive, would it be, can it be, wise to forget? Ought it not rather be the aim of Ireland, and all who would guide her destinies wisely, to see that she never forgets, but that the memory of the past be forever with her as a lamp for the guiding of her footsteps in the future.

Indeed how can either a nation or an individual be fitted to meet the calls of life, and meet them wisely, if they have not been armed with a knowledge of the experiences of the past?

It will be found that Ireland failed in the present crisis where her children knew least about the past of their race. And Ireland most wisely met the crisis where her sons and daughters knew most of what that past had held for the people of Ireland.

With nations as with individuals it is not wise to forgive an injury whilst the enemy persists in retaining the power to renew the injury, or insists upon the injured person accepting a promise to reform instead of an act of reformation. The first condition necessary for forgiveness is a sign of repentance, and there can be no repentance if the oppressing nation lays it down that the power to oppress shall remain in its hands. Yet this is the condition in which Ireland found itself at the beginning of the present war.

Ireland has for seven centuries struggled in the grasp of England. For seven hundred years Ireland has seen no generation which did not attempt insurrection aiming at driving the English power out of Ireland – for seven hundred years with the exception of one brief period in the 18th century during which religious persecution strangled every thought of national regeneration. This conquest of Ireland, and the battle for the reconquest, has ebbed and flowed, but has never ceased. England insisted that her very life demanded that Ireland should be stripped of all the essentials of true nationhood, that it was not possible that Ireland could be mistress of her own destiny and England live. Therefore that England might remain an Empire Ireland must remain a subject nation. From this standpoint England has not to this day receded one millionth part of an inch. At the beginning of this war England had given Ireland a promise of a Parliament possessing certain local powers, but not possessing any of those national powers possessed by any independent nationality, by the free states of the German Empire or the colonial parliaments of the British Empire.

But this parliament, small and restricted as were its powers, was still too much to give freely and therefore England declared it could not be put in working order until the war was over, and then it would be still further restricted in its powers and curtailed in the scope of its operations. In other words England stood by every power she had gained by her long continued denial of Irish nationality, declared that Ireland was and must remain a province destitute of power to enlarge her status to that of a nation, and then having so affirmed her determination to retain all the spoils of conquest asked Ireland to forgive and forget and send her sons to rally to the defence of her conqueror and despoiler.

When a thief repents he does not expect forgiveness until he has made full and ample restitution – he would not dream of expecting forgiveness if he insisted upon retaining the power to rob his victim in the future. Still less would he expect forgiveness if he continued beating his victim as soon as that victim showed any disposition to arm himself against all future robbery on his part. A thief recognises that he must stop thieving and return the stolen goods before forgiveness can be expected.

England has robbed Ireland of her freedom. England still denies Ireland her freedom. England insists that it is unthinkable that Ireland should ever possess such freedom as would enable her to refuse to do England's bidding. And then England asks Ireland to forgive and forget!

It is the blessed Christmas season, and we are prepared to have Christian charity to all men, but first we wish to see a practical sign of repentance – we wish the thief of our freedom to return fully and completely that, and all of that, which she has stolen. Until that event occurs our counsel to our countrymen shall continue to be like unto that of the Highland Chief in the Scottish poem –

To spoil the spoiler as they may,
And from the robber rend the prey.

James Connolly

Economic Conscription I

(1915)

Of late we have been getting accustomed to this new phrase, economic conscription, or the policy of forcing men into the army by depriving them of the means of earning a livelihood. In Canada it is called hunger-scription. In essence it consists of a recognition of the fact that the working class fight the battles of the rich, that the rich control the jobs or means of existence of the working class, and that therefore if the rich desire to dismiss men eligible for military service they can compel these men to enlist – or starve.

Looking still deeper into the question it is a recognition of the truth that the control of the means of life by private individuals is the root of all tyranny, national, political, militaristic, and that therefore they who control the jobs control the world. Fighting at the front to-day there are many thousands whose whole soul revolts against what they are doing, but who must nevertheless continue fighting and murdering because they were deprived of a living at home, and compelled to enlist that those dear to them may not starve.

Thus under the forms of political freedom the souls of men are subjected to the cruellest tyranny in the world – recruiting has become a great hunting party which the souls and bodies of men as the game to be hunted and trapped.

Every day sees upon the platform the political representatives of the Irish people, busily engaged in destroying the souls, that they might be successful in hunting and capturing the bodies of Irishmen for sale to the English armies. And every day we feel all around us in the workshop, in the yard, at the docks, in the stables, wherever men are employed, the same economic pressure, the same unyielding relentless force, driving, driving, driving men out from home and home life to fight abroad that the exploiters may rule and rob at home. The downward path to hell is easy once you take the first step.

The first step in the economic conscription of Irishmen was taken when the employers of Dublin locked their workpeople out in 1913 for daring to belong to the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. Does that statement astonish you? Well, consider it. In 1913 the employers of Dublin used the weapons of starvation to try and compel men and women to act against their conscience. In 1915 the employers of Dublin and Ireland in general are employing the weapon of

starvation in order to compel men to act against their conscience. The same weapon, the same power derived from the same source.

At the first anti-conscription meeting in the City Hall of Dublin we heard an employer declaim loudly against the iniquity of compelling men to act against their conscience. And yet in 1913 the same employer had been an active spirit in encouraging his fellow-employers to starve a whole countryside in order to compel men and women to act against their conscience.

The great lock-out in 1913-14 was an apprenticeship in brutality – a hardening of the heart of the Irish employing class – whose full acts we are only reaping to-day in the persistent use of the weapon of hunger to compel men to fight for a power they hate, and to abandon a land that they love.

If here and there we find an occasional employer who fought us in 1913 agreeing with our national policy in 1915 it is not because he has become converted, or is ashamed of the unjust use of his powers, but simply that he does not see in economic conscription the profit he fancied he saw in denying to his labourers the right to organise in their own way in 1913.

Do we find fault with the employer for following his own interests? We do not. But neither are we under any illusion as to his motives. In the same manner we take our stand with our own class, nakedly upon our class interests, but believing that these interests are the highest interests of the race.

We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working class. But we can conceive of a free Ireland with a working class guaranteed the power of freely and peacefully working out its own salvation.

We do not believe that the existence of the British Empire is compatible with either the freedom or security of the Irish working class. That freedom and that security can only come as a result of complete absence of foreign domination. Freedom to control all its own resources is as essential to a community as to an individual. No individual can develop all his powers if he is even partially under

the control of another, even if that other sincerely wishes him well. The powers of the individual can only be developed properly when he has to bear the responsibility of all his own actions, to suffer for his mistakes, and to profit by his achievements.

Man, as man, only arrived at the point at which he is to-day as a result of thousands of years of strivings with nature. In his stumblings forward along the ages he was punished for every mistake. Nature whipped him with cold, with heat, with hunger, with disease, and each whipping helped him to know what to avoid, and what to preserve.

The first great forward step of man was made when he understood the relation between cause and effect – understood that a given action produced and must produce a given result. That no action could possibly be without an effect, that the problem of his life was to find out the causes which produced the effects injurious to him, and having found them out to overcome or make provision against them.

Just as the whippings of nature produced the improvements in the life habits of man, so the whippings naturally following upon social or political errors are the only proper safeguards for the proper development of nationhood.

No nation is worthy of independence until it is independent. No nation is fit to be free until it is free. No man can swim until he has entered the water and failed and been half drowned several times in the attempt to swim.

A free Ireland would make dozens of mistakes, and every mistake would cost it dear, and strengthen it for future efforts. But every time it, by virtue of its own strength, remedied a mistake it would take a long step forward towards security. For security can only come to a nation by a knowledge of some power within itself, some difficulty overcome by a strength which no robber can take away.

What is that of which no robber can deprive us The answer is, experience. Experience in freedom would strengthen us in power to attain security. Security would strengthen us in our progress towards greater freedom.

Ireland is not the Empire, the Empire is not Ireland. Anything in Ireland that depends upon the Empire depends upon that which the fortunes of war *may* destroy at any moment, depends upon that which the progress of enlightenment *must* destroy in the near future. The people of India, of Egypt, cannot be forever enslaved.

Anything in Ireland that depends upon the internal resources of Ireland has a basis and foundation which no disaster to the British Empire can destroy, which disasters to the British Empire may conceivably cause to flourish.

The security of the working class of Ireland then has the same roots as the security of the people of Ireland as a whole. The roots are in Ireland, and can only grow and function properly in an atmosphere of national freedom. And the security of the people of Ireland has the same roots as the security of the Irish working class. In the closely linked modern world no nation can be free which can nationally connive at the enslavement of any section of that nation. Had the misguided people of Ireland not stood so callously by when the forces of economic conscription were endeavouring to destroy the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1913, the Irish trade unionists would now be in a better position to fight the economic conscription against Irish nationalists in 1915.

The sympathetic strike with its slogan, 'an injury to one is the concern of all', was then the universal object of hatred. It is now recognised that only the sympathetic strike could be powerful enough to save the victims of economic conscription from being forced into the army.

Out of that experience is growing that feeling of identity of interests between the forces of real nationalism and labour which we have long worked and hoped for in Ireland. Labour recognises daily more clearly that its real well-being is linked and bound up with the hope of growth of Irish resources within Ireland, and nationalists realise that the real progress of a nation towards freedom must be measured by the progress of its most subject class.

We want and must have economic conscription in Ireland for Ireland. Not the conscription of men by hunger to compel them to fight for the power that denies them the right to govern their own country, but the conscription by an Irish nation of all the resources of the nation – its land, its railways, its canals, its workshops, its docks, its mines, its mountains, its rivers and streams, its factories and machinery, its horses, its cattle, *and* its men and women, all co-operating together under one common direction that Ireland may live and bear upon her fruitful bosom the greatest number of the freest people she has ever known.

James Connolly

The Housing Problem from a New Standpoint

(1915)

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The magnificent meeting at the Mansion House of Dublin on Tuesday was surely calculated to give food for thought to our rulers. That meeting of serious minded men and women of all classes and religious denominations, in its demand for an adequate loan to the Dublin Corporation to enable that body to provide homes for

the housing of the workers, placed before the government of this country a square issue that can neither be avoided nor ignored. That issue may be thus stated:

According to the Report of the Departmental Committee upon the Housing Conditions of Dublin the present state of these conditions are such that thousands of lives are lost needlessly every year from preventable diseases, cleanliness is rendered almost impossible and thus disease is daily spread, every handicap is placed in the way of morality and every evil and vicious tendency fostered and encouraged. In short, the death rate of Dublin is the highest in Europe, and the conditions which have produced that high death rate are acknowledged to be a disgrace to civilisation.

So much being acknowledged by the British Government that Government in a month following the outbreak of the present war voted a large sum of money as a loan to assist in the rebuilding of Dublin. But upon that money being applied for by the Corporation that body was told in effect that it could not be had as it was now required for the prosecution of the War.

As was well emphasised at the meeting this statement of the Government was equal to an official declaration, *that the immediate well-being of Dublin was incompatible with the interests of the British Empire*, that the poor of Dublin must die in their slums in order that the British Empire may continue to shine in its glory.

We can but wonder at the stupidity of a Government that makes such a statement at such a time, that cruelly breaks its solemn promise to a suffering people – appeals to men to die in its behalf whilst it haggles over the loan of a few thousand pounds to provide houses for those they leave behind.

England has had statesmen in the past, as had Ireland. To-day both countries have but a weird collection of second-rate politicians who imagine that they are big men because they stand upon a big platform, and who fancy they show their greatness by haggling over petty items of expenditure whilst at the same time ordering the spendthrift use of human lives.

Whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad. Surely madness has seized upon our rulers when we see them telling the people of the Capital of Ireland that they cannot hope to rebuild a city of healthy homes on a civilised basis, and that the reason why they cannot so hope is because Ireland is a part of the British Empire.

James Connolly

"Trust Your Leaders!"

(1915)

From **Workers' Republic**, December 4, 1915.

Trust your leaders! Recently we have been treated to a homily upon the above text. Trust your leaders; what do you know of their plans and resources, or what amount of confidential information they may possess that is denied to the rank and file? That is good advice. We endorse it thoroughly; agree with it in every essential. Your leaders have a right to your confidence. Let them know that you will obey them – that is one kind of confidence. Let them know what the rank and file are thinking and saying – that is another sign of your confidence.

The last is the most sacred kind of confidence. It is the confidence you only give to a loved friend, a friend whom you love so much that even at the risk of wounding his feelings you are prepared, for his sake as well as your own, to

challenge his judgment and impeach his wisdom. That is the highest kind of confidence ' the most sacred kind of trust.

If you are adventuring under a leader of proven judgment in the task you both have set out to perform, do not question his judgment rashly. But if his experience is no more than yours - his judgment untested, and his experience nil, do not leave him to flounder along without that saving criticism which must in peace provide the only possible substitute for the terrible punishment with which mistaken judgment is visited in war. If you do, you are untrue to him, to yourself, and above all to the common cause. "Teach them, O Lord," said a French writer, "that in the haven of Liberty there are neither heroes nor great men."

In Ireland, however, we have ever seized upon mediocrities and made them our leaders; invested them in our minds with all the qualities we idealised, and then when we discovered that our leaders were not heroes but only common mortals, mediocrities, we abused them, or killed them, for failing to be any better than God made them.

Their failure dragged us down along with them because we had insisted that they were wiser than we were, and had stoned whoever declared them to be common mortals, and not all-wise geniuses. Our real geniuses and inspired apostles we never recognised, nor did we honour them. We killed them by neglect, or stoned them whilst they lived, and then went in reverent procession to their graves when they were dead.

We are raising our voice, or using our pen, to insist upon taking the military leaders of the Irish people into our confidence; to ask our readers to insist likewise that if the rank and file must obey, so also is it true that the leaders must listen. We see neither heroes nor great men amongst these leaders, and we are devoutly thankful that it is so. Being common mortals like ourselves we shall refuse to invest them with the super-sanctity of gods or the wisdom and foresight of prophets. And above all we refuse, and we counsel all others to refuse, to assume that our policies for Ireland in this crisis are identical until we know that they are. At a time when all they hold dear trembles in the balance, should the

armed citizens of Ireland fall in behind leaders without questioning what are the policies of those leaders, or what their outlook upon the immediate future?

We do not call for public pronouncements from them, but every man is the guardian of his own conscience and responsible to that conscience if he shirks his duty to his country and its cause. By your choice of a leader now you make your choice of the part you shall play in the hour of destiny. How can you make that choice wisely if you do not know what that leader's policy for the future is?

Do not be deceived, nor deceive yourself by words. For instance, when you hear that some one will 'fight conscription,' push the question until you find out what he means by 'fighting' conscription.

The Quakers in England will fight conscription, the Dukhobors of Russia will fight conscription, the 'No Conscription Fellowship' is already fighting conscription. But no blows are or will be struck by them – indeed their 'fighting' consists in refusing to strike blows. Is that your method, or that of your leaders? Or do you prefer the method of that Catholic priest who recently advised his people to send a deputation of their ten best shots to meet the conscriptors? Words are said to be the medium by which we express our ideas, but in Ireland words are generally the means by which we conceal our ideas. Do not let them be so used in this great game now being played.

It is poor quibbling to say that the **Workers' Republic** stands for reckless fighting and ill-considered action. It does not. The **Workers' Republic** holds that at any time since the war broke out the British Government could have been halted in its inroads upon public liberties in Ireland by a flat refusal on the part of the majority of its armed citizens to allow their rights as citizens to be interfered with.

It needed no insurrection, no flying to arms, no storming of jails, it only needed that the armed Volunteers who claimed to stand for Ireland should mobilise and speak for Ireland. And so speaking should declare that they would not demobilise until all orders of deportation were withdrawn, and full liberty accorded to the Irish Volunteers to organise under their own chosen officers. Not

a troop would have been moved against them, nor a shot fired. The competent military authority would have been repudiated as readily as was the gentleman responsible for ordering out the military on Howth Sunday.

Does anyone imagine that at that period of Captain Robert Monteith's deportation, when everything was going wrong with England, that she would have hesitated to sacrifice her dignity or swallow an affront, rather than provoke in Ireland a conflict that she knew would have tested severely the loyalty of the reserves newly recalled to the colours? Just as Redmond could have gained Home Rule by refusing to speak in the House of Commons until he had called a Convention in Ireland upon the outbreak of the war, so the leaders of the Irish Volunteers could have prevented the flowing over this island of the wave of military despotism by quietly challenging its force when first it broke upon us. But neither had the requisite imagination. Both essayed to grapple a revolutionary situation with the weapons of a constitutional agitation.

The tyranny we have since suffered under has been progressive in its virulence. At first it was only Government employees like Captain Monteith who were arrested or deported, now it is any civilian under any conceivable circumstance. Tyranny grows with what it feeds upon.

We are told that the arrest of our leaders would justify action. Our leaders would have been arrested long ago were it not for the fact that at the protest meeting held by the Citizen Army against the deportation of Captain Monteith it was declared by the chief speaker that the arrest of the Volunteer leaders would be a proof to their followers that the British had been defeated at sea, or that the Germans had landed. Fear lest the people of Ireland should so interpret their arrest has spared them to us up till now.

We believe in constitutional action in normal times; we believe in revolutionary action in exceptional times. These are exceptional times.

When General Friend took down the sign from over Liberty Hall he did not do so in order to provoke us to insurrection. He calculated that a body of 100 armed men would scarcely spring to arms at such an insult after a body of 5,000

armed men had submitted meekly to a greater one in the same city. His calculation was right. Had the numbers been changed his calculation might have missed. We acquit the competent military authority of any intention to provoke a revolt. But we are glad that it was not a Labour paper that pointed out to him that he could at any time provoke a revolt by seizing the leaders of the Volunteers. We are sure that he is grateful for the suggestion, but we do not believe that he needed it.

What do you think of the wisdom of those who tell you to be patient and trust your leaders whose plans you do not understand, but if those leaders are arrested, fly to arms? If your leaders who alone have plans are arrested your flying to arms will be that of a leaderless mob in a planless insurrection. And you know, don't you, that the same voices who talk thus of flying to arms, would then talk of waiting until your new leaders would have made new plans to meet the new situation? Finally: think over this chunk of wisdom. A revolutionist who surrenders the initiative to the enemy is already defeated before a blow is struck. It is a fine day if it wasn't for the rain.

James Connolly

Dublin Trade and Dublin Strikes

(1915)

What is the real relation between Dublin strikes and Dublin trade? How have they, how do they mutually affect each other?

There have been many industries destroyed in Dublin whose loss it is the habit of certain writers and speakers to attribute to strikes and labour agitators. How far is that attitude of mind justified? These are some of the questions that need careful consideration – and answer.

One answer to them can be found by a glance at the rate of wages paid in Ireland as compared to what is paid in Great Britain for the same class of work. It will be found that Irish workers are invariably paid far below the British rate, except when the pressure of trade unionism has forced the wages upward to an equality. This discrimination against equality of treatment for Irish workers is universal in Ireland whether the employer is a private individual, or a public authority, such as a Corporation or an Urban District Council, and ranges all the way from the wages of a tramp navvy to the 'salary' of a national school teacher.

Now observe well what that fact implies. It means that Irish employers deliberately refuse to pay Irish workers as well as British employers pay British workers, and that they do this even when no competition exists. That is fact, number one.

Fact number two is just as important. It consists in the fact that whenever a period of unrest occurs, when the workers in these islands feel and respond to the strivings for a better existence the Irish employers stand forth in the fight as shining examples of obstinacy and pig-headedness. Whilst the British employers, or their agents in Ireland recognise that in the work-a-day world of business there can be no such thing as complete victory, and therefore steer clear of any declaration that would be difficult to recede from, the Irish employer nails his colours to the mast so awkwardly that he can not take them down when he wants to. Hence we continually see the spectacle of the British companies settling with their employees and turning to work with a zest, whilst the Irish employer is still

ruffling his feathers in wounded dignity, and keeping up the fight to his own destruction.

In such cases the British capitalists urge the Irish employer on to the fight, cheer him madly to his face, wink at each other behind his back, and grab his trade whilst he is fighting.

Then when the fight is over the Irish employer looks around for his trade, finds it being done by his British rivals, and starts bewailing the 'wicked agitator.' Look around the history of many important Irish industries that have disappeared in the course of the past hundred years, and searching below the superficial crust of shallow-minded writers you will everywhere find the same tale.

Lots of important industries have disappeared from Ireland because Irish employers were encouraged to refuse to treat their workers in a humane and reasonable fashion, and so lost their trade to British competitors who gloried in their fight, and exulted in their downfall.

In every big industrial dispute in Ireland the firms controlled by British capital are always the first to accept a reasonable settlement, the Irish firms are always the last. The British firm wants to get back to profit-making, the Irish firm thinks mainly of humiliating and crushing the workers who dared to defy them.

The explanation is first that the British firms are rather pleased to see their Irish competitors run their heads against a stone wall, and their business to bankruptcy; and second, that British capital is grown up and has assumed the responsibility of the adult, but Irish capital is still immature, and has all the defects of the "hobble-de-troy, not big enough to be a man, and too big to be a boy."

Great indeed is the responsibility of the journalist or publicist of any description who urges on the Irish employer to fight against a set of conditions to which his British competitors have long ago adapted their business.

The Irish workers are gradually accustoming themselves to a self-imposed discipline in the interest of all; they are learning that it is treason to the trade union for any gang or group or individual to strike if the striking endangers the interest of the whole.

What or who will teach the Irish employer that his power is a trust to be administered for the good of all, not a whip to be used like a child to gratify his foolish whims?

James Connolly

"Enlist or Starve"

"Come on or we will fetch you"

(1915)

Workers' Republic, 27 November 1915.

The above seem to represent the attitude of the ruling class to the people of Ireland at present. They represent the dilemma in which the worker finds himself who tries to act up to the dictates of his conscience. The employer whom an absurd social system makes the arbiter of his means of living tells him that he must go and enlist, even should his whole soul cry out in revolt against the degradation of fighting for his own and his country's enemies. That if he does not go he will be thrown on the streets in idleness, and that every other employer will refuse to give him work. That he must enlist or starve.

A meeting of Dublin employers was held on Tuesday in the Mansion House under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, and at the direct command of the Lord Lieutenant who attended in person. Before attending each employer received a circular marked 'private and confidential' asking him to bring to the meeting a full list of all his employees of military age who could be dispensed with, or replaced by older men, boys, or women.

All the employers who locked out their workers in 1913 were there in person or through their representatives. Mr Wm. Martin Murphy, ever prominent in anything that savours of an attack upon popular rights, sent a letter promising his hearty co-operation, and the secretary of the Dublin Employers Association was prominent and zealous in the evil work.

All these employers pointed out to each other in their private conversations that every active trade unionist, or other person of independent mind, could be put first upon the list of eligible men, and that all blacklegs, pimps, and toadies could be certified as 'indispensable', and the military would do the rest. Thus trade unionism could be destroyed by sacrificing the trade unionist to the military press gang now being organised.

Thus all the plans are being laid for a wholesale, well organised, and persistent victimisation of the working class. Every man of military age is to be given the choice of slaughter abroad or starvation at home. The Employers are planning well. Their father in Hell could not have done it better.

Behind this terrible conspiracy against the lives of the poor there looms up also the spectre of conscription – a conspiracy against the life and honour of the nation. Lord Derby [\[1\]](#) and his associates have told us that if by such means as the foregoing they do not get enough recruits before November 30th all the unmarried men will be compelled to serve. When the unmarried men are exhausted, that is to say when they are all killed or wounded, the married men will be seized and sent out as food for cannon.

The carrying out of this plan means the end of the historic Irish nation.

The peaceful carrying out of it means that the Irish Nation will end *in dishonour*.

Will it so end? Could anything be worse than such an end?

Mr Redmond and his supporters tell us that it is useless to struggle against the Empire, that we should devote all our powers to the task of pleasing the Government by services to the Empire. That we might win by favours what we cannot gain by struggling, and that the sole hope of Ireland is to win reward by giving pleasure.

It is a prostitute's argument. The argument of the street walker who sneers at the poverty of her honest and virtuous sister, and flaunts her jewels as a proof that the ways of sin are more profitable than the paths of virtue.

And yet this argument that Ireland as a nation should seek to win her nationhood by advertising her prostitution – that is the last word in the statesmanship of the Home Rule party and its leaders.

Was ever nation so beset by its enemies? Was ever nation so betrayed by its friends?

Comrades! Scripture tells us that the fool hath his eyes on the ends of the earth. Are *all* our leaders fools? Do none of them turn their eyes from the red glare of battle abroad to note the swift poisoning of the race at home, encouraged by enemies sleepless in their hatred?

Dark clouds hover over us. Is there a light beyond these clouds?

Who can tell?

Note

[1.](#) Secretary of State for War.

James Connolly

Conscription

(1915)

From **Workers' Republic**, 27 November 1915.

We see that the time is now here when it may be very dangerous to talk of opposing conscription in Ireland, and yet that opposition must be organised, and to be organised it must be discussed.

It is to be hoped that whatever discussion takes place now, those taking part in it will recognise that the time has gone past for smooth-sounding generalities, or mere political make-believe. We are now living in an era of ruthless brute force, of blood and iron. Whatever effect public opinion may have in times of peace it has little practical effect in time of war. In times of peace human life weighs heavily in the balance, and the most brutal of our rulers shrink from too readily shedding human blood. But in time of war all such considerations vanish, and the spilling of a torrent of blood in the city streets would cause the ruling class no more compunction than the slaughter of game on their estates.

Indeed that lesson has been all too tardily learned by the people and their leaders. One great source of the strength of the ruling class has ever been their willingness to kill in defence of their power and privileges. Let their power be once attacked either by foreign foes, or domestic revolutionists, and at once we see the rulers prepared to kill, and kill, and kill. The readiness of the ruling class

to order killing, the small value the ruling class has ever set upon human life, is in marked contrast to the reluctance of all revolutionists to shed blood.

The French Reign of Terror is spoken of with horror and execration by the people who talk in joyful praise about the mad adventure of the Dardanelles. And yet in any one day of battle at the Dardanelles there were more lives lost than in all the nine months of the Reign of Terror.

Should the day ever come when revolutionary leaders are prepared to sacrifice the lives of those under them as recklessly as the ruling class do in every war, there will not be a throne or despotic government left in the world. Our rulers reign by virtue of their readiness to destroy human life in order to reign; their reign will end on the day their discontented subjects care as little for the destruction of human life as they do.

Hence they who now would oppose conscription must not delude themselves into the belief that they are simply embarking upon a new form of political agitation, with no other risks than attend political agitation in times of peace.

We will not be asked to accept conscription by the British Government unless the British ruling class has made up its mind that only conscription can save the Empire. If it does make up its mind to that measure it will enforce conscription though every river in Ireland ran red with blood.

The people of Ireland have been so long accustomed to temporising, and evading straight issues, that there is great danger that they may fail to recognise the gravity of their action, and attempt to fight conscription as they would attempt a cattle drive, or the making of poteen. That is to say in the spirit of a joke at the expense of the police.

Such an attempt in such a spirit would fare badly against a drastic resolve of the military to 'make an example' of the first conscripts who refused to obey. A round dozen corpses of young Irishmen would strike terror into thousands, but would not affect the appetites of those who daily order to their death thousands of young men in the prime of life and vigour.

Oppose conscription, by all means, but let us not teach those who look to us for leadership that such opposition can be conducted on the lines of dodging the police, or any such high jinks of constitutional agitation. Those who oppose it take their lives in their hands. Let them be made to realise that in advance. A fool, and ten thousand times worse than a fool, is he who would teach them otherwise. Our rulers will 'stop at nothing' to attain their ends. They will continue to rule and rob until confronted by men who will stop at nothing to overthrow them.