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American career of James Connolly

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AMERICAN CAREER OF JAMES CONNOLLY

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INTRODUCTION

So badly wounded that he had to be propped up in a chair to face the firing squad, James Connolly was executed by the British on May 10, 1916 in Dublin's infamous Kilmainham Jail. He had been one of the leaders of the abortive Easter 'Rising against English control of Ireland. This event in itself was sufficient to guarantee him a significant place in Irish history but Connolly had achieved prominence in other activities as well. Besides being a revolutionary nationalist he had been a Marxist and a labor leader, had founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party and had played a major role in the general strike in Dublin from August, 1913 through March, 1914. Altogether, it is not surprising that all the biographies of Connolly have concentrated on his role in Irish history and that little if any attention has been given to his significance in the history of American radicalism.

From 1902 until 1910, when he returned to Ireland, Connolly was active in American radical movements. He crossed the country on speaking tours and contributed numerous articles to the Socialist Labor Party's Daily People and Weekly People, and to the Industrial Workers of the World's Industrial Union Bulletin. He was elected to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor

Party and then, like a number of others, crossed swords with Daniel DeLeon and left that party. Connolly worked as organizer and as speaker for the Industrial Workers of the World and for the American Socialist Party. He founded, with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the Irish Socialist Federation and edited its journal, The Harp. A self-educated man, Connolly nevertheless brought to American radicalism an intellect well grounded in Marxist economics. Moreover, his Catholicism and detailed knowledge of Irish history enabled him to understand and appeal to the Irish immigrants who constituted an important portion of the American working force at the time. Such activities merit James Connolly a larger niche in the history of American radicalism than he has heretofore been assigned.

Chapter 1

The Great Famine that ravaged Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century and drove hordes of Irish out of their homeland sent John and Mary Connolly from County Monaghan to seek a living in Edinburgh, where they were married in 1856. Living conditions in Edinburgh were hardly any better than in Ireland, however; and the only job John Connolly could find was carting manure for the city. He cleaned the streets at night, picked up the buckets of "night soil" left outside the tenements, and then carted the contents out to neighboring farms for use as fertilizer. It was hard, unpleasant work for meager pay, and it is scarcely surprising that in 1861 these manure carters organized one of the first strikes by unskilled laborers. Their demands were met and the effectiveness of organization was not forgotten by Connolly or by the masses of wage earners crowded into the Irish ghetto. Their Gaelic language kept their Irish identity alive and also communicated "subversive," radical news safely. News travelled fast along the crowded lanes of Cowgate. Ghetto life was harsh and hungry but it did have some benefits: sharing Irishness and Catholicism led to a sense of community in the teeming tenements, a sense of closeness that helped to soften the realities of chronic unemployment,

disease and alcoholism.[1]

Into this impoverished and fervently Irish milieu James Connolly was born in 1868, the third son of a mother suffering already from the chronic bronchitis that finally took her life. His father, though a laborer, was literate and in spite of their severe poverty managed to support his sons long enough for them to learn the basic skills in the local Catholic school, St. Patrick's. There they also received instruction in the basic tenets of the Catholic fath and James began his life-long study of Irish history. But this period of formal schooling was brief; for at the age of ten he was working as a "printer's devil" gaining what would later prove invaluable experience with the printing process. Four years later the family's plight had become so miserable that James decided to lie about his age and follow his older brother into the ranks of the British army. Forced to "take the shilling or starve" he put on the hated uniform though he was already

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[1]C. Desmond Greaves, The Life and Times of James Connolly (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961). There is some controversy regarding Connolly's early life. Biographers Desmond Ryan and R. M. Fox, writing in 1924 and 1946 respectively, simply repeat the rather vague legend, then current, that Connolly had spent his childhood in Ireland. For this paper and especially this chapter, however, I have chosen to draw from Desmond Greaves's biography as a source. Contemporary Irish historians and Connolly's daughter, Nora, assured me that it is the definitive one. Greaves's research, both in Scotland and Ireland, indicates that the earlier accounts were erroneous and that they had arisen partly from Connolly's own reticence to speak about his youth and also from the Irish chauvinism of some of his associates.

politically conscious and spoke of himself as an "Irish nationalist of the extreme type."[2]

As a matter of fact, the Connolly brothers were not alone; English armies were largely composed of Irish troops. "It is a curious contradiction not very often remembered by England that for many generations the private soldiers of the British Army were largely Irish. . . Macaulay described Ireland as 'an inexhaustible nursery of the finest soldiers.'" For these Irish enlistees service in the English army was not at that time quite tantamount to treason. Like the Connollys many were forced by desperate poverty to enlist and, additionally, the militant nationalist Fenians were then urging young Irishmen to enlist and learn the use of arms.[3]

But Connolly learned more than the use of arms during the seven years he spent as a British soldier with the King's Liverpool Regiment in Ireland, for he saw at first hand the land which he had always considered his true home. His first assignment was in the south, at Cork Harbour. He spoke later of standing guard there one night when Myles Joyce, whom Connolly believed to be innocent, was executed. Joyce had been convicted of a capital crime during an outbreak of "agrarian unrest" and, because he spoke only Irish, was

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[2] Ibid., p. 15.

[3] Cecil Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 28.

unable to frame an adequate defense in the English-speaking court. His death evidently made a profound impression on the young Connolly; it certainly exacerbated his resentment of English domination in Ireland. His nationalism was further nurtured during his travels from Cork to Castlebar and later to Kildare and Dublin during which he imbibed deeply from the wellsprings of ancient Irish civilization. Connolly's sense of pride in his Irishness, as well as his hatred of English rule were deeply engraved on his mind during these seven years "at home."[4]

During the long hours off duty he became an insatiable reader, a habit that stayed with him throughout his life. He sent into Dublin for reading material, especially Irish nationalist literature and history. John Mitchell's Jail Journal became his "bible" at this time. Mitchell was the most radical of the Young Irelanders who tried to reproduce the 1848 Paris revolution in Ireland and had urged a social and economic as well as nationalist revolution in his journal, The United Irishmen, until the British deported him. This combination of nationalism and socialism permeated the

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[4]Ruins of ancient pre-Norman monasteries still punctuate the Irish landscape with their high round towers reminding even the lowliest tenant farmer of that age when the flame of Western Civilization was kept alight on this its outermost edge. Even today the Irish guide points them out to visitors as relics of the days "when the English came to Ireland to be educated," and, in Dublin, he exhibits the beautifully illuminated Book of Kells with a typically proud and comic nod to the East that "while this lovely thing was being made in Ireland, they were still running about like savages, painted blue!"

writings of the Land League which also formed a large portion of Connolly's reading material. Michael Davitt had founded the League after his release from seven years imprisonment for Fenian activity. He urged the Irish tenant farmers to resist rackrents and evictions with rent strikes and boycotts and hoped that this "land war," would lead to nationalization of the land. But Gladstone's 1881 Land Act mollified the farmers to the extent that the result of the "war" fell far short of Davitt's hopes. Nevertheless, he went on writing and speaking for the cause of land nationalization and Irish home rule. Connolly's own direction toward these dual goals is scarcely surprising, therefore, given his own ardent temperament and the literature which nourished it.[5]

While his seven years in the army did give him the opportunity to live and travel in Ireland and time for reading and digesting the material which influenced his future course, he hated army life. Later, in his anti-enlistment campaign during the Boer War he wrote in The Workers' Republic of the:

> . . . 'demoralizing effect' of the army; exemplified in the life and language of the soldier himself. . . The Army is a veritable moral cesspool corrupting all within its bounds. . . a miasma of pestilence upon every spot so unfortunate as to be cursed by its presence.

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[5]Connolly's stay in Ireland was also coincident with the height of Parnell's career and the dominant position of his Irish Nationalist (Home Rule) Party in Irish politics. But Connolly rarely mentioned him later - evidently Parnell's parliamentary maneuvering and moderate aims failed to capture his interest.

He was not unhappy, therefore, to abandon his career as a soldier in 1889 and return to Scotland to help his ailing father and mother.[6]

Twenty-one years old, and ablebodied, Connolly had little difficulty finding a job. Along with his older brother John he worked as a carter for the Edinburgh Cleansing Department. Almost immediately the two of them were embroiled in labor agitation. His marriage to Lillie Reynolds whom he had met in Dublin had to be postponed, he wrote to her, because:

> My fellow-workmen on the job are preparing for a strike at the end of this month, for a reduction of the hours of labour. As my brother and I are ringleaders in the matter it is necessary we should be on the ground. If we were not we should be looked upon as blacklegs, which the Lord forbid.

After the wedding the young couple's home soon became a meeting place for labor and socialist groups. James had also joined his brother John as a member of the Socialist League.[7]

For the two young Connolly brothers membership in socialist groups was a logical outgrowth of their interest in Irish independence. English socialists had supported the Land League and Irish claims for independence more consistently than any other party. Karl Marx himself had said that the English socialists should put the Irish question "in the forefront of their agitation." Henry Hyndman, who introduced the writings of Marx to the English-speaking public and in

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[6]Desmond Ryan, "James Connolly," in Leaders and Workers, J. W. Boyle, ed., (Cork, Ireland: The Mercier Press, n.d.), p. 68.

[7]Greaves, op. cit., p. 26.

1881 founded the Social Democratic Federation, included Irish autonomy in the Federation's manifesto of "immediate demands." Although William Morris and the Avelings broke off from the Federation to organize the Socialist League in 1884, they continued to support Irish national and agrarian demands. Articles written in Morris's journal, Common Weal, called for unconditional support for Irish independence. Gladstone's Liberal Party was split regarding even limited Home Rule for Ireland, so the socialists were alone in their unequivocal stand. Later Connolly wrote:

> Keir Hardie was battling for Irish Home Rule when the Liberal Government was filling Irish jails with unconvicted Irish men and women. Bruce Glasier was a member of the Irish Land League in Glasgow in the same stormy time. H. M. Hyndman sat upon the National Executive of Great Britain of the Irish Land League; Edward Aveling, brilliant expositor of Socialist science was the first man outside Ireland to join formally the Irish Socialist Republican Party; his wife, Eleanor Marx Aveling, daughter of Karl Marx, in her History of the Working-Class Movement in England, says sympathetically of our national struggle: 'It is certain that the hope of "Ireland a Nation" lies not in her middleclass O'Connells, but in her generous devoted heroic working men and women!' And within a month of its formation in 1896 she wrote to the Dublin organization offering us whatever help it was in her power to give. . . .

As a result of socialist support for Irish independence the Connollys and other young Irish nationalists in England were naturally attracted to the socialist parties.[8]

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[8] Ibid., p. 29; H. Laidler, History of Socialism (New York: Thos. Y. Crowell and Co., 1953), p. 167; James Connolly, Socialism and Nationalism, Desmond Ryan, ed., (Dublin, Ireland: The Sign of the Three Candles, 1948), pp. 20-21.

Their commitment to the socialist cause was further deepened by involvement in the free speech fight during that spring of 1889 in Dundee when they attended mass meetings and heard prominent socialist speakers such as Bruce Glasier. John Leslie, who the following year led the move to unify the Socialist League and the Social Democratic Foundation in Scotland, was also active in this struggle for the right to hold open-air public meetings with socialist speakers. He told later of welcoming Connolly into the socialist movement at one of these mass protest meetings.

Connolly soon started studying socialist literature with the same intensity with which he had devoured the Irish nationalist material. He was fortunate to live in Edinburgh where the socialist movement was strengthened by the active presence of a number of experienced continental radicals who had found a refuge in its University. Andreas Scheu, an Austrian journalist, organized meetings and with Leo Meillet, a refugee from the Commune in Paris, set up and tutored in the classes in which Connolly studied Marx's Capital. Intensive and extensive knowledge of socialist principles was demanded of the members who were required to take their turns explaining these principles from a street corner stand. Even business meetings were frequently abandoned in favor of study and discussion of whatever socialist or even anti-socialist literature they could find: William Morris's works, Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, and Schaffle's The Impossibility of Social Democracy, a "refutation" of socialism which

contained a fairly balanced description of its teachings.

Of all the socialist leaders, John Leslie exerted the strongest influence on Connolly's development. An articulate Irishman, Leslie was at the time secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation. He shared Connolly's enthusiasm for both socialism and Irish nationalism and possessed writing and speaking skills, political experience, and a respectable grounding in socialist thought. His poems and essays were frequently printed in socialist journals and in 1894 his pamphlet The Present Position of the Irish Question appeared. He quoted extensively from Ireland's early radical economic thinkers as well as the Young Irelanders to show the historic background of Irish socialist thought. Connolly took speaking lessons from Leslie and with his help and sheer will power mastered a serious speech impediment. Most important, he learned from Leslie how to appeal to the Irish workers by reminding them of their radical heritage.

At the same time Connolly continued to be active in local labor movements. He was sent as a delegate to the fifth conference of the Scottish Labour Party in Glasgow and helped organize May Day demonstrations for an eight hour working day. He had for some time been convinced that labor organizations must unite for political as well as economic goals; and when Keir Hardie founded the Independent Labour Party, Connolly arranged speaking engagements for him in the working class neighborhoods of Edinburgh. Perhaps it

was Hardie who pointed out to him the damage wreaked on working-men's families and organizations by alcohol and that labor leaders had a duty to resist this weakness by their own abstinence. At any rate Connolly, like Hardie, was a strict teetotaler for the rest of his life. Connolly eventually parted company with both Hardie and Leslie, rejecting their moderate parliamentary tactics. Nevertheless, they both exerted a formative influence on his early development and they remained friends in spite of ideological differences.

From a bright and enthusiastic student and follower, Connolly in a relatively short time grew into a capable organizer and leader. In 1893 he was elected secretary of the Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Socialist Federation and, therefore, the Edinburgh correspondent for Justice. With increasing frequency he took the stand at open-air street-corner meetings and developed the good strong voice necessary for outdoor agitation. He also began contributing a regular column to the Edinburgh and Leith Labour Chronicle, signed R. Ascal, in which his sharp tongue and wit are for the first time evident in his writing style.

In 1894 he won the socialist nomination for a place in the City Council. After campaigning vigorously he lost to the liberal candidate; but far from discouraged, he entered the hustings the following spring as socialist candidate for a seat on the Poor Law Council. This time he lost more than the election, for the notoriety which he had gained

during the campaign resulted in the loss of his carter's job. Blacklisted as a socialist agitator among conservative Edinburgh employers he was unable to find other employment. But electioneering had given him an appetite for an even deeper involvement in the socialist cause and he decided to try supporting his wife and daughters through his political activities.

His principal activity during the subsequent months was the arrangement of a series of lectures in Edinburgh by English socialist celebrities. Large crowds came to hear Eleanor Marx, Ben Tillet, Edward Aveling, Henry Hyndman, Tom Mann, and others. Listening to them Connolly extended his understanding of socialist theory and improved his own speaking technique. In addition, he made contacts with prominent men in the movement which were to prove extremely valuable later. His own speechmaking, however, failed to earn enough money to support his family and in desperation he considered emigrating to South America. His friend Leslie disapproved of the idea. Convinced that Connolly's talents were needed in Great Britain he wrote a moving plea for his employment which was published in Justice. Leslie recommended Connolly's energy and integrity and:

> Of his ability I need only say, as one who has had some opportunity of judging, he is the most able propagandist, in every sense of the word, that Scotland has. And because of it, and for his intrepidity, he is today on the verge of destitution and out of work. . . .

Connolly was, he said:

> . . . a life-long abstainer, sound in wind

> and limb. . . married, with a young family and, as his necessities are therefore very great, so he may be had cheap.

A response to the appeal arrived from an unexpected quarter: the Dublin Socialist Club invited Connolly to become its paid organizer. He and Lillie were evidently delighted at the prospect of returning to Ireland with their children; he accepted with alacrity.[9]

Connolly had served his apprenticeship in Edinburgh under the tutelage of English and continental socialists. The move to Ireland enabled him to test his merit on his own and from the beginning he assumed a leading role in the little group of socialists who met him in Dublin. First, he recommended successfully that the name of the organization be changed to Irish Socialist Republican Party to indicate its dual aims: socialism and nationalism. Thereafter, he immediately set about formulating a statement of the organization's philosophy and purposes. In the ISRP Manifesto he drew heavily from Hyndman's Socialism Made Plain but added a strong condemnation of British imperialism, especially as it applied to Ireland. He summarized the organization's goals:

> The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects: it is national and it is social. Its national ideal can never be realized until Ireland stands forth before the world a nation free and independent. It is social and economic, because no matter what the form of government may be, as long as one class owns as private property the land instruments of labour from which all mankind derive their substance, that class will always have power

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[9]Greaves, op. cit., p. 57.

> to plunder and enslave the remainder of their fellow-creatures. . . The party which would lead the Irish people from bondage to freedom must then recognise both aspects of the long-continued struggle of the Irish nation.

Within a month the formerly somewhat somnolent membership was suddenly galvanized into unprecedented activity and was advertising weekly out-door meetings at which members expounded socialist ideas for the general public.[10]

The members, however, since they were periodically unemployed, were unable to pay their new secretary regularly and finding steady work proved to be as difficult for Connolly in Dublin as it had been in Edinburgh. The family lived on the brink of destitution. The time between odd jobs did afford him the chance to spend long hours at the National Library. He taught himself German and French and read omnivorously, in history, economics, literature. A legend grew up about his self-taught erudition; frequently he astonished the group of Dublin literati with whom he had some contact with a wry but knowledgeable remark in the midst of their abstruse discussions of culture and nationalism. Urging the other members of the ISRP to deepen their understanding of socialist principles he wrote to friends in Britain and gradually the ISRP collected a small lending library of contemporary expositions of Marxist thought.

His own study led to new insights and publication; Keir Hardie's Labour Leader printed his first major political

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[10] Ryan, op. cit., p. 70.

essay, "Ireland for the Irish." While he had become closely associated with the nationalist cause in Ireland he always associated nationalist revolt with an economic and social revolution. In a prophetic statement he wrote:

> If you remove the English army to-morrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organization of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain.
>
> England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commerical and individualist institutions she has planted in this country. . . .

His writings during this period in Dublin (1896-1902) deal with a wide spectrum of ideas: from the revival of the Gaelic language to the "Growth of Industrial Trusts." He also did considerable research in the National Library on the writings of early doctors of the church on private property and found backing for his contention that property rights are not necessarily absolute in Christian teaching. Nevertheless, during his two campaigns for office from Wood Quay Ward he was bitterly attacked from the pulpit for his socialist position.[11]

Through these writings and occasional lecture tours, Connolly remained in contact with English and Scottish socialists. At the same time, his articles on Irish independence attracted the attention of groups devoted to that cause in Ireland. He worked with W. B. Yeats and other writers in the Celtic literary revival. Together, they

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[11]James Connolly, op. cit., p. 25.

organized demonstrations opposing Queen Victoria's visit in 1898. He enlisted their support for the republication of the writings of James Finton Lalor, a radical Young Irelander and with a borrowed printing press he also began publishing a journal of his own, The Workers' Republic. With apparently boundless energy and a quiet perseverance, he bombarded the Irish public with ISRP propaganda.

The ISRP expanded -- branches were established in Limerick, Cork, and Belfast. In 1900, after having been tutored by Connolly in the intricacies of the internecine arguments in the socialist movement, delegates were sent to the International Congress. There, for the first time, the Irish delegation was recognized as distinct from the British delegation. At that Congress the conflict between the moderate reformists such as Alexander Millerand and the extreme revolutionists such as Rosa Luxemburg was argued at length. The German, Austrian, and English delegations supported the compromise position embodied in the Kautsky Resolution which allowed socialists to assume temporary positions within bourgeois governments. The Polish, Italian, and American delegations were divided on the issue. Only Ireland and Bulgaria unanimously rejected it. Although they obviously disagreed with Luxemburg's assertion that nationalism was tantamount to heresy in the socialist movement, the Irish Socialist Republican Party came down squarely on her side in favor of revolution rather than

reform.[12]

Under Connolly's leadership the Irish party had moved steadily to the left. Along with a group of his friends in Scotland, later called the "unholy Scotch current," he had come under the influence of Daniel DeLeon, the leader of the Socialist Labor Party in the United States, after the publication of the latter's What Means This Strike in 1898. They preferred DeLeon's "clear-cut," uncompromising stand to the more moderate position of the Fabians and the I. L. P. and enlisted Connolly's skill and popularity as a speaker in 1901 to combat the increasingly reformist element in British socialism. He had aroused the ire of some English socialists when he proclaimed his support of the Boers during the Boer War but he still had enough of a following to attract crowds on his speaking tours through England and Scotland. He urged the membership to repudiate the moderate position of the Kautsky Resolution and evidently was able to explain the complexities of the question in understandable terms. One of his listeners wrote:

> He possesses an attribute comparatively rare among socialist lecturers, that of being at the same time simple and perfectly intelligible to the ordinary man, and also perfectly accurate and rigid in his adherence to scientific verity.

Trouble broke out during the meeting he addressed at Oxford and local organizers were impressed with Connolly's ability

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[12] Julius Braunthal, History of the International Vol. 1: 1864-1914, H. Collins and K. Mitchell, transl. (New York: Frederick Prager Publ., 1967), p. 272.

to ward off attackers with a handy flag pole; but on the whole the tour went well and another was arranged for early 1902.[13]

Connolly accepted the English and Scottish speaking tours for numerous reasons, partly because of his ideological commitment and partly because of the need for funds. The family lived under crowded tenement conditions which were not unusual in Dublin at the time. In one of the frequent but fruitless reports on Irish conditions to the English parliament it was reported that:

> Nearly 26,000 families lived in 5,000 tenements while over 20,000 families lived in one room. . . The total of Dublin's 'slum jungle' population came to about 87,000 people or 30 per cent of the city's population of nearly 300,000.

The concommitant disease, crime, and alcoholism were appalling even by contemporary standards; Dublin's infant mortality was higher even than Liverpool's (which was the worst in England) and the tuberculosis death rate was 50 percent higher than elsewhere in Great Britain. Both Ina and Nora remember their father's distress at the impoverished conditions in which they lived. But unemployment and underemployment were endemic in Dublin, and Connolly did well to get the part-time jobs he did, as proofreader, builders' laborer, carter, and shipyard worker. His salary as secretary of the ISRP and editor of the Workers' Republic was always sporadic. Much as they all disliked the long absences it was only by making

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[13]Greaves, op. cit., p. 107.

the occasional speaking tours that he was able to alleviate his family's miserable financial condition.[14]

When, therefore, in 1902 Daniel DeLeon invited Connolly to make a lecture tour of the United States for the Socialist Labor Party, he was pleased. The impoverished membership of the ISRP were also enthusiastic about the prospect, for Michael Davitt's Land League and other nationalist groups had been financed almost totally by Irish immigrants in the United States. Now ISRP members hoped to secure support from American Irish, too, through the sale of subscriptions to the Workers' Republic. Connolly's Scottish associates were eager for him to gain a first-hand view of the SLP and DeLeon, with whom they were increasingly in contact; DeLeon's journal, The Weekly People, was competing with Justice for the readership of the Scottish Socialist groups. They liked his uncompromising ultra-leftist stance, and had tried to incorporate his rule against "pure and simple" trade unions in the S. D. F. Constitution. Connolly's extensive tour through the United States would, they hoped, provide them with an even clearer impression of DeLeon's ideas and tactics. Connolly, himself, of course, was motivated by all these factors as well as his family's desperate financial plight. He accepted.

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[14] E. Larkin, James Larkin (London: Mentor Books, 1965), p. 37; Nora Connolly-O'Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father (Dublin, Ireland: Talbot Press, 1935), p. 62; Ina Connolly-Heron, "James Connolly," Liberty Magazine (Dublin, Ireland: April, 1966), p. 12.

DeLeon had been familiar with Connolly's work since he had been trying for some time to attract Irish national groups to membership in the S. L. P. In 1898 Connolly had been commissioned by the Weekly People to report on that year's Irish famine. Later several thousand copies of the ISRP Manifesto were reprinted by the S. L. P. press and circularized in the United States. Excerpts from the Workers' Republic were included in the People and Connolly's pamphlet Erin's Hope was published in full.

During the early months of 1902 even more Irish material was printed in the paper, including finally a letter written by Marx in 1869 in which he advocated independence for Ireland because he expected that the overthrow of the moneyed class would be accomplished more easily there than in England, since "in Ireland it is not only an economic but a national question." The letter was preceded by a note of editorial praise: "This is interesting because it shows that in the attitude on political and economic questions in Ireland which the ISRP have taken up, they are translating into action the conclusions arrived at by that marvelous judgment of Marx. . . ." Then, shortly before Connolly's arrival in New York a biographical article outlined his past experience in Scottish and Irish socialist groups, reported his activity leading anti-Jubilee and pro-Transvaal demonstrations, and his success in gaining even 431 votes in The Wood Quay Ward election in spite of "priests, Home Rulers, and saloon keepers." His "sledge-hammer repartee" as well

as his "profound knowledge of ancient and modern history" and his ability to apply "abstract economic principles to the ordinary phases of life" were all praised. James Connolly, The Irish Agitator, was scarcely a stranger to readers of the Weekly People when he arrived in New York in September of 1902.[15]

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[15]Karl Marx: Letter to Dr. Ludwig Kugelman (November 29, 1869), in London; Weekly People (September 6, 1902), p. 5; Weekly People (July 26, 1902), p. 1.

Chapter 2

Marxist socialism had been imported into the United States originally by Marx's friends and colleagues, Joseph Wedemeyer and Freidrich Sorge, who, in the 1850's, established the American Workers Alliance and the General German Working Men's Alliance. Later, in the 70's, a new wave of immigrants injected a multitude of new ideas into the stream of American radicalism. Orthodox followers of Marx, as well as the dissident Lasalleans, Blanquists, Bakuninists, and Proudhonists formed corresponding sects within the American Socialist movement. In 1877, in an effort to consolidate these groups, the Socialist Labor Party was formed. Nine years later Henry George was the SLP candidate for the office of mayor of New York City and in a surprising show of strength, nearly won. Daniel DeLeon became editor of its journal, The Weekly People, in 1891 and although his writings won the praise of Lenin, his doctrinaire personality and anti-reformist position led to secession from the SLP of large groups of members. Under the leadership of Morris Hillquit these dissidents ultimately joined Eugene Debs and Victor Berger to form the Socialist Party of America. During the presidential election of 1900 the newer party won almost 100,000 votes for its candidate Eugene Debs, while DeLeon's SLP polled only 35,000.[16]

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[16]Howard H. Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (New York, N. Y.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), p. 364.

In spite of its secondary position in the American socialist scene, the SLP did command sufficient strength to hire European lecturers like Connolly to tour the country. The leadership hoped to broaden the base of membership in the SLP to include the large numbers of Irish working men. The resolutions of welcome passed at Connolly's first public meeting reflected DeLeon's expectations:

> Whereas James Connolly is visiting this country as the representative of the Irish Socialist Republican Party, for the purpose of enlisting the interest of Irish Americans in the Socialist Movement, and
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> Whereas James Connolly in his mission wishes to destroy the influence of the Irish Home Rulers and the bourgeoisie in Ireland and their allies who trade on the Irish vote in this country, therefore be it resolved:
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> That we, the members of the Socialist Labor Party, here assembled to receive James Connolly, cordially welcome him to "our" shores and give his mission our emphatic endorsement.
>
> Be it further resolved that we call upon all sections of the SLP throughout the country to aid James Connolly in his work to the end that Socialism may prevail both here and in Ireland and that International Socialism which knows no race, color, or creed may be triumphantly vindicated.

In addition, DeLeon hoped to increase his own influence in Great Britain. He evidently expected Connolly to return home as an enthusiastic promoter of SLP ideas. Throughout the fall of 1902 appeals for contributions to The Irish Agitator's Fund reminded readers of the great gains being made by his tour for the SLP at home and abroad.[17]

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[17] Weekly People (September 20, 1902), p. 1.

The prominence given the report of Connolly's first lecture indicates its significance to the editor. With an adjectival style which is characteristic the People's reporter wrote that opening the doors of the meeting hall "was like the breaking of a dam and the releasing of a torrent." When Connolly arose to speak "cheers and applause that increased in volume for several minutes ended in round upon round of cheers." Allowing for the reporters proclivity for dramatic exaggeration one still infers that the meeting was a large and enthusiastic one. Connolly was obviously moved. The reporter observed: "The sturdy Irish proletarian was visibly affected by the enthusiastic reception accorded him. But he quickly took up his speech with vigor and calmness." Acknowledging his unfamiliarity with such celebrity, he said:

> I feel under a great disadvantage in addressing such a large and enthusiastic body of working men as are gathered here this evening. Though accustomed to addressing audiences of the working class in England, Scotland, and my own country, I never stood before such a crowd before.

For thirteen years, James Connolly had studied and worked for the socialist cause -- often on an empty stomach, worried about how to provide his young family with the bare necessities of life; here, for the first time, that work and study were loudly acclaimed.[18]

The audience listened attentively to "The Irish

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[18] Ibid.

Agitator's" hour long speech which, in substance, he later delivered to similar groups all across the country. He spoke at some length of the political and economic situation in Ireland and outlined the dual aims of the Irish Socialist Republican Party. First, England's domination of Ireland constituted an imperialism that must be resisted by a nationalist revolution. In addition to working for Ireland's independence, however, the ISRP also hoped to foment a socialist revolution because "fighting foreign tyrants to put a native one in their place is no remedy and a waste of time." He described the appalling living conditions in Dublin's slums as well as the impoverishment in the countryside. These problems required a socialist remedy, he maintained. A peasant proprietary, long sought by the Home Rulers, offered no final answer to Ireland's economic problems; given modern conditions such small units were too inefficient and unproductive. The only real solution lay in the collective ownership of land and factories.[19]

Connolly explained that the work of all radical groups in Ireland was complicated by English oppression. Revolutionary meetings in England resulted in arrest and trial by jury while in Ireland they were ruthlessly suppressed. "In Ireland they hang us first and try us afterwards." American Irish, however, had strengthened other movements in Ireland through financial and moral support.

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[19] Ibid.

He urged them now to come to the aid of the ISRP in its fight against all forms of imperialism by subscribing to the Workers' Republic.[20]

Finally, he culminated the speech with a denunciation of American Irish "fakir" politicians and an "eloquent appeal" to the Irish in the United States to vote and work for the SLP, especially in the coming election. Realizing the importance of the religious issue to the Irish, Connolly emphatically denied that a socialist was necessarily an atheist and emphasized the economic nature of the struggle. He pointed out that in Italy, Germany, and France, Catholic, Protestant, and "free-thinking" soldiers had all shot down working men on strike and that it was essential for working men, no matter what their religious affiliation, to unite in solidarity for the economic revolution. A socialist victory in the United States would redound to Ireland, he concluded, by contributing to the defeat of imperialism.

After a brief stay in New York Connolly embarked on what must have been an exhausting tour through New England. The next issue of the People contained a note in which he requested that members arrange indoor meetings wherever possible for these were "not subject to all the chances of bad weather, brass bands, dog fights and other such circumstances against which Demosthenes himself would contend in vain." He spoke first in Elizabeth, and Paterson, New Jersey,

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[20] Ibid.

then moved through upstate New York and on to Boston with a schedule that sometimes demanded two or three talks a day. On several occasions conservative Irish immigrants tried to disrupt his appearances and "stampede the meeting" but without much success. Connolly was generally well received, and numerous subscriptions to the Workers' Republic as well as some new memberships to the SLP were enrolled.[21]

More trouble awaited him as he moved through Ohio but again the disturbances did not prevent Connolly from speaking. He made his appeal to crowds of several hundred both in Cleveland and in Columbus and even these numbers were exceeded by the "rousing meeting in St. Paul and Minneapolis" where he spoke to an audience of over 800. Reports of these meetings included a summary of the first speakers' remarks which usually lasted an hour or more. One is impressed with the endurance of the audiences, and their enthusiastic response to Connolly at the end of the evening becomes all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he was invariably second speaker. Undoubtedly his frequently reported "wit and humor" helped. By mid-November contributions to the "Irish Agitator's" Fund (for Connolly's salary and living expenses) had accumulated to the amount of $475.72, and the treasurer noted that "the tour has been very successful."[22]

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[21] Weekly People (September 27, 1902), p. 2.

[22] Weekly People (October 25, 1902), p. 1; Weekly People (November 15, 1902), p. 6.

The following week's issue, however, contained Connolly's somewhat caustic letter from Salt Lake City. So many members, he wrote, had queried him about his opinion of America that it had occurred to him that his impressions might generally be of interest. First, he commended the SLP for being "a real revolutionary movement -- a movement of fighters." The subsequent paragraphs were not so complimentary, however. On his tour across the country Connolly had undoubtedly been exposed to the factional disputes among American socialists and had surely gained an impression of the divisive effect of DeLeon's leadership. In a not too subtle jibe at the editor he spoke of his impressions of "the tyrant who," he had been told, "had driven hundreds of thousands of men out of the party." But, Connolly wrote, "he struck me as a somewhat chirpy old gentleman. . . who stated a politico-sociological proposition with as little personal feelings as moves a mathematician or a surgeon in a dissecting room."[23]

At first glance one might wonder why DeLeon would publish such a statement. The explanation may lie in De'Leon's concern over Connolly's growing popularity which he hoped would be undercut by the subsequent paragraph in which Connolly called to task the whole American populace for its inordinate patriotism. At any rate, these lines of the letter upbraiding SLP members for partaking in "the

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[23]Weekly People (November 22, 1902), p. 1.

American national disease, swelled head," were scarcely designed to win Connolly friends in America; perhaps for DeLeon that fact balanced the negative effect of the previous lines. Connolly softened his chiding of the chauvinism he had found in SLP members only by stating that once this had been also an Irish trait but "America has robbed us of that, as she has robbed us of Tammany Hall, saloon-controlled politics, slave-driving politicians, and other Irish products now acclimatized in America."[24]

The letter concluded with an obviously humorous paragraph. Connolly reported being disappointed at the paucity of monuments to Irishmen in this country. He had been pleased, therefore, to see that Salt Lake City, at least, had remedied the omission.

> On the topmost spire of the Mormon Temple is a lifesize figure of an Irishman named Moroney blowing a trumpet. Of course, they call him an angel and spell his name Moroni but that is only their ignorance. Possibly they put this distinguished countryman of mine in his exalted position because Irish Mormons were and are as rare as honest politicians.

One wonders if the readers of the generally humorless Weekly People caught the joke.[25]

Connolly's biographer, Desmond Greaves, surmises that Connolly wrote this impolitic epistle because he was exhausted by the tour on which he had been speaking in a different city almost everyday for a month and a half and so had given vent to tactless criticism. However, additional

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

factors seem likely. In the first place, Connolly at this time did not intend to stay in the United States permanently and was not engaged in wooing the SLP membership or its leadership as DeLeon evidently feared. He had come mainly to repair his own and the ISRP's faltering financial state and to report on American conditions to his friends in Scotland and Ireland. Although he must certainly have been tired it is surely mistaken to view the letter as a fit of temporary pique -- Connolly was too deliberate to be subject to peevishness. More probably the letter is an accurate and typically honest report of his evaluation -- colored by his usually witty and occasionally sardonic tone. An Irish nationalist would have met such an attack with a grin and an equally sharp retort. However, DeLeon and his associates evidently were offended. They misunderstood the Irish penchant for stinging repartee and read each passage literally.

At any rate, whatever may have been involved, the appearance of the letter marked a significant change in the amount of space allotted to reporting Connolly's travels in the People. The next issue included a short notice of his meetings in San Francisco and Los Angeles and an outline of the rest of his December itinerary through Colorado and Canada with the terse note: "This will conclude the tour of Comrade Connolly in America." Few reports of his last meetings are included.[26]

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[26] Weekly People (November 29, 1902), p. 3.

Undaunted by the negative response of the People's editor, however, Connolly found other ways to express his criticism of America. He had become convinced, he said, in a special article in the Detroit Today that:

> If Irishmen were to remain at home and fight for socialism there, they would in the near future attain to better conditions of life than is possible by merely throwing themselves on the labor market of the United States.
>
> Undoubtedly the standard of comfort here is much higher than at home, and to that extent the fortunate worker who gets employment is for a time improving himself. But the intensification of labour is greater here than at home, machinery is developing more rapidly, and in my opinion the worker is an old man in this country when he is still regarded as being in the prime of life at home. In other words the emigrant sacrifices his future for his present for the sake of a few extra dollars.

In spite of his adherence to materialistic Marxism Connolly consistently betrayed a concommitant concern for the quality of life. In this regard, he felt, Ireland was richer than the United States.[27]

In his final speeches in Canada and New York City Connolly spoke of the history of socialist ideas and of the origins of poverty and war. He urged the solidarity of workers as a class and said that he was appalled at the individualism he had found in the United States: "In no country elsewhere is individualism so systematically pursued both as a theory and a policy." "Lack of civic interest and lawlessness" were the necessary results of such unbridled

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[27]C. D. Greaves, James Connolly (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), p. 122.

individualism. He surmised that this tendency had been brought by "immigrants who came here to seek their own personal fortunes" and to escape the moral restrictions of older European communities. "Individualism in Europe is restrained and not so remorselessly followed. Mutual acquaintance due to longer settlement and tradition breeds civic interest."[28]

In the United States, Connolly suggested, even trade union leaders were tainted by individualism. He enjoined his listeners to resist such attitudes. Trade union leaders should be corrected for their tendency to be more concerned about their own narrow interests than about the betterment of the working class as a whole. In individualistic America "capitalism was unrestrained by tradition or any other limits" and, therefore, even greater solidarity was required of the working class than in Europe. Again DeLeon bridled at the criticism he inferred from these last statements and he closed the meeting with a firm statement of America's leading role in the development of socialism: "The United States is the country on which the emancipation of the workers of Europe depends." It was a boast that bore out Connolly's criticism of the SLP's chauvinism.[29]

A jubilant "Irish Agitator" set sail for home on January 3, 1903. The four month fund-raising tour had been

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[28] Weekly People (January 3, 1903), p. 1.

[29] Ibid.

a resounding success. Connolly had sent home enough subscription funds to keep the Workers' Republic going for a long time. He, himself, had earned enough to support his family for a while. Most important, however, was the fact that he had gained invaluable experience as well as the confidence born of a broader vision of the socialist movement.

His extensive travels across the American continent had not succeeded in dampening the deep affection he felt for "Little Erin." Connolly was delighted to be at home again. The children noticed his exuberance and excitedly opened the presents he had brought to them: dolls and books and Indian moccasins. The homecoming celebration did not last long, however. He plunged immediately into electioneering as the candidate again of the United Laborers for a place in the Corporation. In his election address he condemned the wage slavery which bound Irish workers and proposed as the only real remedy:

> . . . the socialist republic, a system of society in which the land and all houses, railways, factories, canals, workshops and everything necessary for work shall be owned and operated as common property, much as the land of Ireland was owned by the clans of Ireland before England introduced the capitalist system amongst us. . . .

He appealed to the working class in general and to trade unionists in particular to work en masse in the fight against capitalism. In his insistence on political as well as economic force he reflected the influence of DeLeon and the

SLP.[30]

In spite of the surprising support he gained from the economically conservative Arthur Griffith and his Sinn Fein movement, Connolly lost the election by an even greater margin than he had the year before. Even more discouraging than the loss of the election, however, was his reception by the ISRP membership. The funds he had sent home for the printing of the Workers' Republic had been misused. When Connolly moved that the bill for the printing press be paid to avoid foreclosure he was told that there were insufficient funds. Despite his argument that the newspaper was essential to the growth of socialism in Ireland and that he had incurred a responsibility to the subscribers in America, the membership refused to correct the financial mismanagement which doomed the paper. Connolly angrily resigned and the ISRP dissolved in dissension in February, 1903.[31]

Fortunately his old friends in Scotland were clamoring for him to lecture there again. He left for Edinburgh in April, 1903 so that he could also attend classes in linotype operation at Heriot Watt Technical College. Once there he was able to work out an arrangement whereby Irish material was included in the Scottish Socialist paper, The Socialist, and it was sent to the American subscribers of Workers'

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[30]Nora Connolly-O'Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father (Dublin, Ireland: Talbot Press, 1935), p. 65; Connolly, The Workers' Republic, Desmond Ryan, ed., (Dublin, Ireland: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1951), p. 45.

[31]Greaves, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

Republic. His speaking and organizing work was divided between the "clear-cut, impossibilist" groups in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Increasingly impatient with the "Millerandism" and the reformism of the established Social Democratic Federation, these young Scotsmen were delighted with Connolly's revolutionary zeal. Their enthusiasm was undeterred, but rather enhanced, by the sharp wit that DeLeon had found offensive. (An indication that his criticism of DeLeon and the SLP while in America was not as seriously meant as it was read lies in the enthusiasm with which Connolly urged the group to adopt the name and principles of the SLP.) Hired as national organizer for the nascent organization, Connolly not only spoke himself but also conducted public speaking classes so that others might engage in propaganda activities. He tested their understanding of socialist teaching and prepared them for heckling by posing as an opponent of socialism.

In spite of their enthusiasm for his leadership, however, the "unholy current" was unable to pay their organizer a living wage. Moreover, he was so well known as an agitator by this time that it was nearly impossible for him to get a laboring or printing job to support his family. Once again Connolly decided to come to America, this time looking for a permanent situation. He had been offered a number of positions while on his previous speaking tour and was sorry at this point he had not accepted. However, he hoped some opportunity might still be open to

him.[32]

The time had come, he concluded, for the good of his family and for his own future in socialism to move into a new, fresh milieu.

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[32]James Connolly: Letter to J. C. Mathieson, April 8, 1903.

Chapter 3

Connolly's work in the United States was significant both in the development of his own thought and in the development of radical movements here and abroad. He was frequently embroiled in controversy with DeLeon and it was in the course of those debates that Connolly honed his own ideas in regard to unionism, religion, and nationalism. He matured as an organizer and thinker during his sojourn in America but they were stormy, often discouraging situations which led to that development.

The serious differences Connolly was later to have with DeLeon were foreshadowed by the cool reception the editor gave to the returning "Irish Agitator." Only brief mention of Connolly's arrival was made in The People, and no mention was made in the article of Connolly's intention to stay in America and his search for employment. DeLeon was evidently not averse to praising the "Irish Agitator's" work abroad but he did nothing to encourage his renewed activity here. If Connolly hoped he would be hired as a paid organizer for the SLP or as a printer in their printing plant he was disappointed. He spent months looking for a job and finally found employment as an insurance salesman in Troy, New York. A whole year elapsed before he was sufficiently settled to

send for his family.[33]

Neither his disappointment at not finding remunerative work with the SLP nor the resultant practical problem of finding employment deterred Connolly from socialist activity. He continued to seek Irish converts to socialism. The Irishmen's religious ties to the Catholic Church and his nationalism, however, hindered Connolly's work. Both factors made the Irishmen reluctant to accept international socialism. Connolly had for sometime been acutely sensitive to this problem and had gained considerable experience, especially during his six years in Dublin, arguing and debating religious and nationalist questions. He had consistently insisted that socialism need not interfere with one's Irishness or religious beliefs. In a pamphlet published in 1901, he wrote:

> Socialism, as a party, bases itself upon its knowledge of facts, of economic truths, and leaves the building up of religious ideals or faiths to the outside public, or to its individual members if they so will. It is neither freethinker nor Christian, Turk nor Jew, Buddhist nor Idolator, Mahommedan nor Parsee -- it is only HUMAN.

Nor, Connolly pointed out, was international socialism anymore inconsistent with Irishness than the international Catholic Church.[34]

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[33] Weekly People (October 17, 1903), p. 1.

[34] Later in his career Connolly commented: "I've spent most of my life alternating between interpreting socialism to the Irish and interpreting the Irish to the Socialists." D. Ryan, "James Connolly" in Leaders and Workers, J. W. Boyle, ed. (Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press, n.d.), p. 66; James Connolly, "Socialism and Religion," in The New Evangel, rpt. (Dublin, Ireland: New Books Publications, 1968), p. 34.

Early in his first tour through the United States Connolly had observed that parallel conflicts resulting from national and religious loyalties hindered the growth of socialism in the United States. On the tour, therefore, Connolly had repeatedly emphasized the political, economic, and non-religious nature of socialism -- that it need not be equated with "free-thinking" atheism. He had recognized that unless the cultural and religious issues were removed masses of Irish, Italian, and Slavic workers would effectively remain cut off from socialist propaganda.

DeLeon, too, was aware of the problem. He had reprinted in April, 1903 an editorial from the Workers' Republic in Dublin, "Socialism and Atheism," in which Connolly reported that the ISRP forbade any discussion of theology or anti-theology at meetings. "Socialism is based," he wrote, "on material matters of fact, not on the meaning of scripture, which it neither affirms or denies but leaves to the judgment of the individual member." It was absolutely essential that Socialism "have that universal, non-sectarian characteristic which is indispensable to working class unity." Although he printed the editorial, DeLeon scarcely followed its advice. Instead of playing down the religious issue, The People during this period carried numerous reports of anti-socialist speeches by the Catholic hierarchy, followed by blistering editorial response. Then from May 30 through December 19, 1903, nearly a third of each issue of the Weekly People was taken up by a serial edition of August Bebel's

Woman Under Socialism, translated from the German by DeLeon. Since it was an attack on the institution of marriage, the book was scarcely designed to woo the Catholic immigrant to socialism. Finally, to make matters worse, he printed a long anti-Catholic diatribe by the Belgion socialist, Emil L. Vandervelde.[35]

Connolly responded in a lengthy letter to the editor. After reaffirming his continuing allegiance to the general revolutionary principles of the SLP, he stated that there were specific positions held by the leadership with which he differed and which, he hoped, might be debated in the pages of The People. In the matter of wages, for example, he had differed on several occasions with SLP speakers. Connolly had maintained that workers' organizations pressing for wage gains constituted useful activity, not necessarily totally lost in a subsequent rise in prices. He contended furthermore that to hold the opposite position was to undercut the value of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance which DeLeon had founded in 1895 to compete with the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor.

But more importantly he disagreed with the editor in regard to "the woman question" and the Church. Connolly wrote with some fervour about the family stability he thought was essential for the correct upbringing of children. There were, he granted, economic injustices suffered by women,

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[35] Weekly People (April 9, 1903), p. 1.

which would be solved in a socialist state but marriage and family life were social and cultural issues that he maintained need not be affected by the socialist revolution. He used strong terms in questioning DeLeon's judgment in printing Bebel's book, which he called an "excrescence on the movement." The editor had expressed his expectation that it would win to socialism the American suffragettes but on the contrary, Connolly asserted,

> Bebel's Woman is popular because of its quasi-prurient revelations of the past and present degradation of womanhood, but I question if you can find in the whole world one woman who was led to Socialism by it, but you can find hundreds who were repelled from studying Socialism by judicious extracts from its pages. I believe it is destined to be in the future a potent weapon against us in this country. . . .

Indeed, it was just such touchy cultural questions that aroused the Church's ire and provided clergymen with the fuel to fan the anti-socialist flame. Because he was engaged in a life long campaign to win Irish Catholics to socialism, Connolly felt that these questions only muddied the issue and prevented the realization of the essential economic and political goals of the socialist movement.[36]

Shifting from the implicitly religious issue of

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[36]In spite of his long absences from them Connolly was deeply devoted to his family. Years later in The Harp he printed a copy of a poem he had written during this time which expressed his profound loneliness, the longing he felt for his wife and children. In their memoirs two of his daughters speak often of their father's solicitude and gentleness and reminiscences of his associates confirm their memory that he took very seriously the responsibility of fatherhood. Weekly People (April 9, 1904), p. 1.

family life Connolly moved more directly to the religious question. He restated his contention that religion is a private matter, a principle which had been formulated in the Erfurt Program of 1891, and agreed to, he thought, by most of the SLP membership. But, he was sorry to note, "lately one can scarcely take up a copy of The People without realizing from the contents that it and the party are becoming distinctly anti-religious." This increasingly blatant anti-religious stance was evident in the fact that "if a clergyman anywhere attacks Socialism the tendency is to hit back." Moreover, Vandervelde's attack on the church was ill-conceived and unnecessary. It would be better, Connolly thought, for Socialists to avoid time-wasting discussion of what he considered to be divisive and inessential cultural questions in order to concentrate all of their energy on the vital political and economic concerns.[37]

Connolly himself had not been a practicing Catholic for some time but he was still aware of the strong feelings which bound many Irishmen to the Catholic Church and he was very concerned about the effect of such anti-religious harangues on the masses of potential converts to socialism. Connolly was always an eminently practical man and was deeply concerned about the failure of the socialist parties to attract to membership the vast numbers of Catholic immigrants. He was convinced that there was nothing in the

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[37] Ibid.

economic doctrine of socialism that was necessarily contrary to Catholic doctrine. If left alone, the Catholic Church would eventually, he predicted, work out a modus vivendi with the socialist order as it had, historically, with other political and economic institutions. Publishing anti-Catholic diatribes like Vandervelde's simply exacerbated the church's opposition to socialism and prolonged an unnecessary conflict -- a conflict that succeeded only in diverting masses of workers from essential socialist propaganda. He concluded by admonishing the editor of The People to cease such counter-productive polemic: "The SLP is a political and economic party seeking the conquest of public power in order to clear the way for the Socialist Revolution. Let it keep to that. It is a big enough proposition.[38]

DeLeon devoted twice the space of Connolly's letter to his own reply. He defended the editorial positions which Connolly had criticized. He reaffirmed the Lassallean "Iron Law of Wages," and defended the publication of Bebel's Woman and Vandervelde's article. But the reply was scarcely objective and one infers from the emotional tenor of its arguments that a personality conflict was one factor in his differences with Connolly. He referred again, somewhat petulantly, to Connolly's description of him in the letter from Salt Lake City nearly a year and a half previously.

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[38]James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, January 30, 1908; Weekly People (December 13, 1902), p. 2; Weekly People (April 9, 1904), p. 1.

Connolly immediately drafted a rejoinder but DeLeon refused to print it. The "Irish Agitator" was undaunted, however, and sent a copy to his friend, Mathieson, for circulation in Scotland. In it he quoted Marx's statement: "A general rise in the rates of wages would result in a fall of the general rate of profits but, broadly speaking not effect the prices of commodities." Then in support of that principle he pointed out the practical implications of the opposite stand. DeLeon had stated that unions were necessary only to keep wages from going down. Connolly argued:

> Imagine a union which would fight against a reduction of wages but prevented from fighting for a raise because taught by its Organizers that a raise was no good. What a picnic the employer would have; every reduction they could enforce would be a permanent one as our principles would forbid us demanding a rise there being no benefit.

The logical outcome of such a stand would be the total dissolution of unions, including the SLP sponsored Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance.[39]

In regard to their disagreement over Bebel's book and its advocacy of "free lowe" Connolly reaffirmed his stand. "I personally reject," he wrote, "every attempt, no matter by whom made, to identify Socialism with anything of marriage or sexual relations." He also appealed again for neutrality in the question of religious beliefs:

> I claim that the demands of the SLP for absolute unity in all things essential can

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[39] A typescript copy is contained in the William O'Brien collection at the National Library in Dublin.

> only be maintained when linked with absolute freedom of opinion on all things non-essential. But if I am asked how we are to know a non-essential principle, I reply that any principle which we would not feel it to be our duty as a Socialist to establish by force of arms if necessary is non-essential. Such principles are those theories of Marriage or Religion. On these, therefore, I claim the fullest and most absolute freedom of opinion.

In conclusion, he reminded DeLeon of other statements the editor had made with reference to all three questions -- statements which were in direct contradiction to those he had made in the current debate.[40]

Perhaps the most revealing portion of Connolly's reply, that which best delineates the differences between the two men, is in the conclusion. Connolly expressed his dismay that some readers of the People had seen in his article a personal attack on the editor. What a mistake is made by such members who, he asserted,"cannot see the difference between a personal attack and a strenuous criticism and who write to our Editor, naturally hasty and choleric enough, urging him to regard as personal enemy everyone who cannot see eye to eye with him and is man enough to say so." He denied any personal dislike for DeLeon and stated that he had written the article "in a spirit of good-natured criticism." He was astonished, furthermore, at the "owl-like gravity" which had taken his humorous asides seriously and promised in the future to label as "JOKE" any humorously meant remark "so that even

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[40] Ibid.

DeLeon might understand it." These cultural differences which separated the Irishman and the German-educated DeLeon evident in their failure to understand one another's humor, developed ultimately into profound disagreement over the policies of leadership and authority.[41]

In the personal letter to Mathieson which accompanied the reply Connolly expressed more bluntly the bitter disappointment he felt at DeLeon's handling of their argument. He suspected in retrospect that some of the previous defections from the party had been rooted in "Dan's dogmatism and unscrupulous handling of their cases." By preventing the publication of his rejoinder DeLeon had effectively prevented the membership at large from "studying and calmly reviewing the evidence in cold print." DeLeon held, he contended, inordinate power in the SLP and actively discouraged the development of broad-based leadership.

> I believe that the duty of a true Socialist editor or trusted leader is to train as many comrades as possible to fill his position. . . to train and make editors and writers and propagandists and to encourage every member to develop the cool headedness and readiness needed in a revolutionary movement. . . .

But DeLeon's policy was "the direct anti-thesis" of that. His policy is to make himself indispensable. . . the pivot on which the movement turns." Connolly objected to this tendency toward "hero-worship" and too highly personalized leadership and firmly believed that if Socialism truly meant what it preached that its leadership should be drawn

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[41] Ibid.

democratically from the working class.[42]

In spite of these difficulties he maintained active membership in the SLP. He was still convinced that it was the most uncompromisingly revolutionary party and preferred it to the more reformist Socialist Party of America. Moreover, for a time personal concerns intervened and diverted his attention from the controversy with DeLeon. When his family finally arrived from Ireland in August of 1904, they were the bearers of tragic news. While helping in the preparation for the journey thirteen year old Mona had accidentally set her clothes afire and was so badly burned she died the next day. Connolly was shocked and grief-stricken. He had especially loved this oldest daughter and expected that she would greatly benefit from the move to the United States. His bitter discouragement at her loss sharpened his already negative view of American values and institutions. From this point on his commentary on the American scene became increasingly caustic and critical. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who met Connolly early in 1907, described him as a "short, rather stout, plain looking man with large black moustaches, a very high forehead and dark sad eyes - a man who rarely smiled."[43]

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[42]James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, July 22, 1904.

[43]James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, December 27, 1905; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, I Speak My Own Piece (New York, N. Y.: Masses and Mainstream, 1955), p. 69.

For his family, however, the delight in moving into the house in Troy, N. Y., helped to lighten their sorrow. Both Ina and Nora wrote of the children's excitement in the spacious house and garden -- with trees: Even this pleasure was to be short lived, however. The principal industry in Troy was the collar factory and the eight thousand women who were employed in starching and laundering the collars went out on strike early in 1905. Connolly was soon spending more time assisting the striking collar girls than he was at his job as insurance agent. When he was fired the family moved again to Newark, New Jersey, near the Singer Sewing Machine factory where Connolly procured a job as machinist.[44]

In New Jersey Connolly's energies and experience in organization were given real exercise. Early in the summer of 1905 the national convention which established the IWW had been held in Chicago. Soon Connolly was called upon to speak at the street-corner meetings urging the workers to join the new all-inclusive union. A United Labor Council was established in Newark and in their enthusiasm for the new economic organization the two socialist political associations submerged their differences. By early January, 1906, meetings were being held to discuss the amalgamation of the SLP and the SPA. Connolly had become impatient with the weakening divisions in American

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[44]Alice Henry, Women and the Labor Movement (New York, N. Y.: Macmillian Co., 1927), p. 74.

socialism, its "sectishness" and was enthusiastic about unification. When he spoke at the New Jersey State convention he expressed the hope that the IWW would establish its own new political party with which the older two groups could merge.[45]

Although the unity conference failed to achieve its goal (Connolly blamed the national leadership of the two groups) an event in the West galvanized members of both parties to joint effort. On February 17, 1906, William Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone, leaders of the Western Federation of Miners were arrested in Colorado, illegally spirited across the border to Idaho and charged with the murder of that state's ex-governor, Frank Steunenberg. All over the country protest meetings were held and collections taken up to pay for the defense of the three men. Connolly organized the Newark Workingmen's Defense Committee and numerous meetings were held throughout the year to arouse popular support for the defendants.[46]

These activities brought him more directly into contact with the Italian community of over 5,000 Italians who were living there at the time and Connolly was convinced more of them could be won for the socialist cause. The Italian Socialist Federation had recruited few members, partly because they had spent most of their energy and

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[45]Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York, N. Y.: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 191.

[46]E. Gurley Flynn, op. cit., p. 63.

resources in anti-clerical diatribes. Connolly taught himself Italian so that he might appeal for new members and also that he might argue the larger issues at ISF meetings. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who started her career as speaker for the IWW at the defense meetings, describes her surprise when Connolly addressed a predominantly Italian audience: "Connolly arose. He spoke beautifully in Italian, to my amazement and the delight of the audence who 'viva'd' loudly." He also translated articles from II Proletario for publication in The People, appending commentary of his own. He became immensely popular when he joined in Italian resistance to police harassment and succeeded in influencing the leadership to consider broader economic issues.[47]

Connolly's experience with the Italians led him to the belief that national federations were necessary to attract new converts to socialism. Immigrants who might be hesitant to join an American socialist party would feel more at home in a familiar national group where socialist propaganda could then be geared to their own particular history and culture. Although language constituted no barrier to Irish membership in the larger party, Connolly was nevertheless convinced that there existed a real need for an Irish socialist federation which could appeal to the Irish by reminding them of their radical tradition and which also could counter bourgeois Irish opposition. Elizabeth

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[47] Ibid.

Gurley Flynn, her father, Thomas Flynn, and a number of other New York Irishmen were enthusiastic about the idea; the first meeting was held at the Flynns' apartment in the Bronx.

The report in The People of the founding meeting outlined the aims of the Irish Socialist Federation:

> I. To develop the spirit of revolutionary class-consciousness amongst the Irish working class in America;
>
> II. To spread a knowledge of and help to sustain the socialist movement in Ireland;
>
> III. To educate its members upon the historical development of the class struggle in Ireland.

In addition to this positive educative role Connolly was confident that the new organization would:

> . . . help to fill the crying need for some such proletarian organization to combat the evil teaching and practices of the capitalist politicians and schemers who prey upon the workers of our roll in America.

Interested Irishmen and women were invited to join.[48]

With the formation of the ISF Connolly was suddenly embroiled in another controversy with DeLeon. A heated debate erupted in the columns of The People. DeLeon and his followers feared that a proliferation of national groups would divide the party and lessen its effectiveness. Connolly responded that he had no intent of dividing the party. On the contrary, he argued that such national groups were needed in America's pluralistic society to win new converts to

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[48] Weekly People (February 1, 1907), p. 3.

socialism who would then augment the party's membership. But DeLeon used his editorial power again to win the argument. He suppressed Connolly's contributions and dismissed the ISF contemptuously as nothing but an outgrowth of the Irish desire for conviviality. The Irish, however, were undismayed by DeLeon's tirade; they continued to meet and proceeded with plans to publish a journal, The Harp, to promulgate their message.

Connolly's prestige within the New Jersey radical milieu had reached new heights during the winter of 1906-07. In spite of the fact that his health was poor he had added a new endeavor to his already crowded calendar. He started a series of noon hour meetings aimed at organizing the eight thousand workers at the Singer Factory. His effectiveness as an organizer as well as his grasp of socialist principles won the respect of the New Jersey SLP. They elected Connolly to be their delegate to the National Executive Council. DeLeon, however, was firmly in control of this arena; their ensuing contest here would ultimately lead to Connolly's leaving the party.[49]

In addition to their ideological disputes, the two men had always been at odds in regard to organization and editorial policy. Connolly decried the fact that the paper was totally under DeLeon's control, "everything must filter through Dan. . . ." Furthermore, he wrote,

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[49]Ina Connolly-Heron, "James Connolly" in Liberty Magazine (April, 1966), p. 15.

> Every kind of literary initiative is frowned upon, as is every other kind of initiative. We are not treated as revolutionists capable of handling a revolutionary situation but as automatons whose duty is to repeat in varying accents the words of our director general.

Now as a member of the National Executive Council, Connolly thought he was in a position to challenge editorial policy. He proposed that the NEC and its subcommittee be allowed free access to the columns of The People.[50]

DeLeon saw in the proposal a basic menace to his own authority and threatened to resign. From the beginning of their association one infers some paranoia in his attitude toward Connolly; his overreaction at this point further demonstrated this neurotic apprehension. He launched what amounted to a personal vendetta against Connolly. Even members of the Executive Committee who were usually under DeLeon's thumb, Frank Bohn and Justus Ebert, criticized DeLeon's vindictive attack on Connolly and a number of members left the party in protest. For some time Connolly sought to defend himself and his position in the party against DeLeon's accusations. Deprived of a sounding board in the columns of The People, he and his daughter, Nora, transcribed scores of copies of his statement in handwriting. The editor's power, however, was overwhelming, and Connolly finally resigned from the Party.

"The Irish Agitator," usually so firm and confident,

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[50]James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, June 10, 1906.

wrote to his friends in Scotland that he felt "lonely and friendless now." In addition to his other difficulties he had also lost his job at Singer's where the management objected to his efforts to unionize the factory. Fortunately, however, the IWW offered him a position as a paid organizer in New York City. The offer surprised Connolly. "It came at a time when I believed I was utterly discredited in the party. Instead, I found to my surprise that they had come to the conclusion that I had a real grasp of the revolutionary situation and they were willing to attest their belief by their purses." His health immediately improved and he dove into the work of organizing with a vigor that even surprised his friends. Using his old technique of outdoor propagandizing he enlisted tramway men, garment workers, moulders and milkmen as members of the IWW.[51]

As New York correspondent for the IWW's Industrial Union Bulletin Connolly penned the column "Notes From New York." He warned the readers from the beginning that it would not consist of "hot air" such as lists of new charters issued. For, he wrote: "The work that counts the longest is often the longest in doing, and an excessive multiplication of charters is no real criterion of the spread of industrial ideas." Connolly promised instead: "A running commentary on incidents in the fight." And the column was

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[51]James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, April, 1907; James Connolly, letter to J. C. Mathieson, September 27, 1907.

remarkable not only because of its content but also in its perceptive and witty style, characteristic of Connolly's writing but quite unusual in the midst of the IUB's columns of pedestrian and pedantic prose. Reading his "Notes" one acquires a clear and vivid picture of the trials, triumphs, and tribulations of the IWW in the eastern urban setting of New York City.[52]

As secretary of Local 95, The Building and Constructional Workers' Industrial Union, he was particularly aware of their "hardest fight against pure and simpledom. . . Scarcely a week passes by without seeing some of its members fired off jobs as a result of the walking delegates of the pure and simple building trades." A number of IWW carpenters and plasterers had recently been fired when trade unionists refused to work with them, and a group of lathers had been beaten up by a "gang of thugs" when they proposed to join the IWW. The Bronze Workers even lost their meeting place when the corresponding trade union objected to the landlord. Conflict had not dampened enthusiasm, however; Connolly reported that "the men who are fired most have the biggest fight in them."[53]

Connolly's time was not wholly taken up by the affairs of Local 95, however. He was also having some success organizing blacksmiths and longshoremen in New York City and Hoboken.

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[52] Industrial Union Bulletin (December 7, 1907), p. 1.

[53] Ibid.

In his "Address to Longshoremen" he pointed out that during the previous strike of the longshoremen all the other workers on the waterfront (seamen, firemen and warehousemen) remained at work. They were not to be blamed "because that was according to the teachings of the old style of trade unionism. But as long as labor is organized in that manner it will be defeated." To overcome this weakness the IWW proposed to create a union "which shall include in its membership everybody in the shipping industry. . . all those who help to bring goods to or from the port." Then, in a clear summary of the organizational framework advocated by the IWW everywhere he promised that: "All will be governed by one union but each separate class will be organized in different branches to be represented by its delegates at the meeting of the Industrial Union." Thus could the battle lines of labor be strengthened and unified so that "an injury to one" would be acted upon as "an injury to all."[54]

Connolly's activities for the IWW in New York were manifold. While organizing groups as diverse as trolleymen and teddy bear makers he still found time to form Propaganda Leagues and to arrange courses of lectures on industrial unionism. In November he announced the formation of a Preston-Smith Release Committee which would raise funds and petition for the release of two IWW members who had been imprisoned in Goldfield, Nevada. He criticized trade union

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[54] Ibid.

leaders who negotiated contracts which would expire at the worst possible time for a strike. For his debates with them he collected statistical data which showed for example that the average wage for carpenters was $19.16 a week "a far cry from $5 per day" which the Brotherhood of Carpenters claimed was the standard wage. His job also required that he investigate complaints such as the one lodged against the leadership of the cornice workers branch. He discovered that they were charging an excessive initiation fee which went into their own pockets or to "the saloonkeeper." "Their unclean methods constituted a serious threat to the local" and since they refused to correct the practice, "Local 95 had to take the drastic action of expelling the branch. . . We lost them but we also lost the odium of their actions." Never one to shirk from controversy Connolly even criticized the national leadership of the IWW for neglecting "the teeming populations and pivotal industries of the East" while "frittering away energies" on small mining camps in Nevada.[55]

Even in the midst of all this serious work, Connolly never lost sight of the lighter side. He urged readers to attend the Industrial Council's ball: "If you want the gloom chased from your minds. . . let us get together and dance." And the IUB carried a prominent notice of his newly published Take and Hold Songbook, recommending it as "well calculated

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[55] Industrial Union Bulletin (November 23, 1907), p. 1; Industrial Union Bulletin (December 28, 1907), p. 3; Industrial Union Bulletin (December 21, 1907), p. 4.

to arouse enthusiasm among industrial unionists who are musically inclined and recognize the importance of revolutionary sentiments in a musical setting." The composer of the songs, the reviewer concluded, was known as "an active and capable exponent of industrial unionist principles."[56]

Moreover, besides his straight reportage for the IUB Connolly contributed theoretical work to its pages. The old wage-price controversy which had once engaged his attention in the SLP now had erupted in the IWW. For several months correspondents had debated the issue in the columns of the IUB. Because it questioned the value of strikes the issue was extremely significant. Connolly's article, "Wages and Prices," pointed out the danger of confusion in the matter, for just such confusion, he contended, had led to the reduction of the ST and LA "to a negligible economic force." Connolly argued that wage increases won by striking were not necessarily lost in price increases, since a great many workers produced goods which were not directly consumed by the wage-earner. For example:

> A large proportion of the results of the labor of the building trades consist of edifices which the working class neither purchases nor rents. . . .
>
> High rents, he contended, are primarily the result of capitalist concentration in large cities, increasing the value of space that they are not caused by high wages is evidenced by the fact that vacant lots on which not a brick has been laid have also been soaring in price.

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[56] Industrial Union Bulletin (December 14, 1907), p. 3; Industrial Union Bulletin (November 9, 1907), p. 2.

Even if a wage increase does result in higher prices of consumed goods that price increase is absorbed by all classes; the capitalist who consumes so much coal to heat his mansion would absorb some of a rising price also.[57]

His article was remarkably different from the earlier one published in The People. Couched in practical everyday language, it avoided theoretical details and contains only a few brief quotations from Marx. Its clarity brought the debate in the IWW about the usefulness of strikes to a decisive close. But his criticism of the ST and LA brought him once again into confrontation with the redoubtable leader of the SLP.

The General Executive Board of the IWW met in New York City from December 22-24 and Daniel DeLeon requested time in which to present his charges against Connolly before them. First, however, the Board asked Connolly, himself, to present the case of the waterfront workers with whom he had been working. He explained that of the 45,000 dockside workers in and around New York about 12,000 were loosely organized outside the AF of L. Their strikes had been weakened in the past through lack of solidarity among various trades and they were interested in affiliating now en masse with the IWW in order to gain assistance in forming an industry-wide organization. Connolly had been authorized to inquire in their behalf for a position from the GEB in

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[57] Industrial Union Bulletin (October 26, 1907), p. 1.

regard to dues and local autonomy. After some discussion the Board agreed that entrance into the IWW should cost no more than two cents a month per member and that, like all such departments within the IWW, the waterfront workers "would certainly formulate laws and rules for the government of that organization. . . but that such a constitution when drafted must be approved by the GEB of the IWW." After some ensuing discussion about how best to organize internationally in order to eliminate "international scabbery" on the waterfront Connolly asked to be excused to attend the current meeting of the Central Committee of Harbor Workers.[58]

When he returned the next morning to appear before the Board Connolly reported that because the Harbor Workers meeting had "other pressing business to transact" (the nomination of new officers) they had been unable to consider the IWW proposal. But they had promised him "that the subject matter would be taken up in the first meeting in January." Connolly proceeded then to report on his progress in organizing milkmen and other workers and retired before Rudolph Katz reminded the Board that "Fellow Worker DeLeon wished to be heard by the GEB on a very important matter."[59]

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[58]Only five members of the GEB attended those meetings. B. H. Williams was chairman and William E. Trautman, secretary. Vincent St. John was recovering in Chicago from a gunshot wound and Fred Heslewood was busy organizing timber workers in Montana. The complete minutes of the meeting were published in the February 1, 1908 issue of the Industrial Union Bulletin, pp. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

[59]Ibid.

When DeLeon arrived that afternoon he asked that only the Executive Board be present while he presented his "chain of evidence" against James Connolly. After the doorkeeper left DeLeon proceeded to suggest that his Irish antagonist was a "police spy" and at the very least was certainly "an agent of the Jesuits!" In the culmination of his "chain of evidence" DeLeon accused Connolly of deliberately undermining the SLP by injecting the issues of religion and nationalism. Now, DeLeon asserted, Connolly was engaged in a conspiracy to destroy the IWW from within -- with a Trojan Horse composed of predominantly Irish longshoremen.[60]

By this time, however, Connolly's success in organizing had won the respect of the IWW leadership. His scrupulous honesty and integrity, his experience and zeal in the cause of the worker, were unusual in the ranks of IWW organizers. The majority of the Board objected to DeLeon's "star chamber" accusations and instructed him if he wished to continue the matter, to follow proper procedure, through the local level to the national convention. Actually they were growing increasingly suspicious of DeLeon who, they feared, planned to manipulate the IWW for his own purposes: ". . . it was plain shortly after the peaceful third convention that a fight must be made to keep the IWW, from

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[60]Trautman refused to print, in full, all of DeLeon's charges in the IUB fearing, he wrote later, libel suits, "as this chain of evidence dealt largely with the domination of the Catholic Church over affairs in the labor movement, and as names of individuals have been mentioned." Industrial Union Bulletin (February 8, 1908), p. 1.

becoming a tail to DeLeon's kite." His attack on Connolly was particularly significant because it succeeded in bringing "the IWW's quarrel with DeLeon to a head all over the country."[61]

The IWW had always been wary of politicians. In the correspondence following the publication of the GEB minutes members were warned against "scheming intellectuals like DeLeon and his Jesuitical methods." Finally, however, even correspondence on the issue was cut off with publication of Fred Heslewood's blunt note from Montana:

> I hope you won't print any more of that junk about DeLeon, Katz, etc., as the great majority of the members do not belong to the SLP and the continual harping about these things will do more harm than good. Tell them there is too much to do to bother with such matters and if they don't like it to go to hell or some other place. It costs more to be eternally getting out these petty charges than the whole bunch of these political fanatics are worth. The IWW has no political affiliation and that settles it, and any more of this damn dope about DeLeon or SLP will be very obnoxious to me and to hundreds of others that are the life of the IWW.

Connolly was delighted. Here at last he was emerging from a contest with The People's editor the victor. At the 1908 convention of the IWW in Chicago his credentials as a delegate were accepted and his work as organizer and founder of the Propaganda Leagues was praised. DeLeon's credentials were rejected and he was ousted from the convention by a

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[61] Fred Thompson, The IWW, Its First Fifty Years (Chicago, Ill.: IWW Publishers, 1955), p. 37.

vote of 40 to 21.[62]

The contentious relationship between DeLeon and Connolly finally drew to a close. It was marked from the beginning by cultural differences and DeLeon's personal unwillingness to allow any other strong voice within range of his own. "DeLeon went only where he could lead; he wanted disciples not allies, sycophants not comrades." That this quality was rooted in psychological factors is indicated by the emotional tenor of his criticisms, which often amounted to tirades of personal invective. Their differences were also ideological, however, and it would be a mistake to underestimate DeLeon's ability as a proponent of Marxist thought. "Even DeLeon's opponents were usually willing to concede that he possessed a tremendous intellectual grasp of Marxism." Indeed, the very quality of his adversary forced Connolly to reappraise and refine his own ideas especially in regard to those three major points of their differences: the definition and tactics of industrial unionism, the legitimacy of nationalist associations within the international socialist framework and the relationship between socialism and religion.[63]

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[62] Industrial Union Bulletin (April 25, 1908), p. 1; Industrial Union Bulletin (May 23, 1908), p. 1; Melvin Dubofsky, We Shall Be All (Chicago, Ill.: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 159.

[63] Ibid., p. 134; H. Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (New York, N. Y.: Bobs-Merrill Co., 1964), p. 364.

Chapter 4

His differences with Daniel DeLeon alienated Connolly from the movement he had considered to be the one most uncompromisingly devoted to class warfare. He was also deprived of the sounding board for his own ideas which The Weekly People had, at least occasionally, provided. However, other avenues of publication were opened to him after his final break with the SLP. During the last two years of his sojourn in the United States, from 1908-1910, he developed and expounded his ideas in a number of radical journals. As editor of the Irish Socialist Federation's The Harp he penned numerous articles and two book length works on religion and nationalism, arguing that there was no necessary conflict between Irish Catholicism, Irish historical tradition, and socialism. In the pamphlets and articles he wrote for Charles Kerr and Louis Untermann, publishers of the International Socialist Review, he urged members of the SPA to support the concept of industrial unionism and the economic struggle of the IWW. And until its demise early in 1909, the Industrial Union Bulletin printed articles by Connolly which emphasized the importance of political action by the working class membership of the IWW.

Connolly had continued to hope throughout the spring of 1908 that a political party would evolve from

the IWW -- a party with which the membership of the SLP and the SPA might unite, ending the wasteful internecine squabbling among socialists in America.

> On the day that the IWW launches its own political party it will put an end to all excuse for two socialist parties and open the way for a real and effective unification of the revolutionary forces.

He knew that the IWW had always been wary of politics and politicians, that the issue of political action had been hotly debated during its national conventions, and that the membership's suspicions had been fanned during 1907-1908 by DeLeon's machinations. As a known adversary of DeLeon's, however, Connolly was in a fortunate position to argue his position: although he agreed with their attitude toward the SLP he maintained that political action constituted a vital tactic in the class struggle, that it should be carried on concurrently with economic action. He was convinced, moreover, that the direction toward political action was inevitable, "it will be impossible to keep them from taking it." Consequently, he urged that the IWW distinguish between the politics of the two existing socialist groups and the potential political action of a new IWW political party.[64]

In a lecture delivered to an IWW audience in April of 1908 Connolly traced the historical development of

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[64]James Connolly, "A Political Party of the Workers," The Harp (January, 1908), p. 9; C. D. Greaves, James Connolly (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955), p. 184.

political consciousness in the capitalist class. Connolly argued that the political subservience of the merchants and bourgeoise to the nobility ended:

> . . . not because some great thinker had evolved a better scheme. No, it was abandoned because the growth of the industrial system had made the capitalist class realize that they held control of the economic heart of the nation.

Similarly, he prophesied, will the working class assume political dominance when it becomes aware of its economic power through an organization which "will give expression to its economic strength." While assuring the politically wary IWW that the economic struggle was preeminent, he yet urged that it be augmented by "action at the ballot box." In order that that might be carried out in the best interests of the working class Connolly proposed that each district in the IWW establish local Political Committees which would parallel the existing Organization Committees and which would be connected, like the latter, with the National Organization. Such committees would advise the membership in political matters. Consequently, "when the time comes to place an IWW ticket in the field" the organizational foundations would already have been laid. And political strategy would thereby, directly reflect the wishes of the working class, unlike the policies formulated by the remote elitist groups in the existing socialist parties.[65]

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[65] Industrial Union Bulletin (April 19, 1908), p. 1.

The ultimate goal of the IWW, Connolly asserted was to take control of the whole economy and "when that industrial republic is fully organized it may crack the shell of the political state and step into its place in the scheme of the universe." But in the meantime, during that period of gradual economic take-over, he urged the workers to utilize their voting power within the existing political system "to assist in the formation of the embryo Industrial Republic." The political field, he concluded, offered many opportunities for change - "opportunities it would be criminal to ignore."[66]

Connolly was unable to win the non-political IWW to his point of view, however. Even the vague mention of politics was removed from the Preamble during the national convention in 1908 at the insistence of the "Overalls Brigade," the western delegates, who "held that the reference to political action in the old preamble had tended to confuse the workers by all sorts of suppositions as to what political party they favored." Connolly acknowledged defeat, confessing to his friends in Scotland that he:

> . . . would rather have the IWW undertake <u>both</u> political and economic actively <u>now</u>, but as the great majority of the workers in the movement are against me on that matter I do not propose to make my desires a stumbling block in the way of my cooperation with my fellow revolutionists.

Consequently, withdrawal of the economic support of the SLP,

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[66] <u>Ibid.</u>

coupled with depression led to the termination of Connolly's paid contract as organizer for the IWW. However, he continued to write and speak and organize for them until he left for Ireland in 1910.[67]

In spite of the IWW's position in regard to politics Connolly himself never abandoned the political arena. The editor of the New York Evening Call, William Mailley, had become a member of the Irish Socialist Federation and during the SPA's national convention in May, 1908, generous space was allowed for the display of Irish Socialist literature. Then Connolly was introduced to some of the more radical members of that party when he went to Chicago for the IWW convention in September. Although he still had a good many doubts that the SPA was the "uncompromising party" he thought was essential he decided, nevertheless, to join. He "felt it was better to be one of the revolutionary minority inside the party than a mere discontented grumbler out of political life altogether."[68]

While he was still convinced of the correctness of SLP theory "yet its practical immediate effects have been the generation of a number of sectarians, narrow-minded doctrinares who have erected Socialism into a cult with rigid formulas which must be followed or be damned." Disillusioned with the "sectishness" of the SLP Connolly had

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[67]James Connolly: Letter to J. C. Mathieson, November 8, 1908; James Connolly: Letter to J. C. Mathieson, September 27, 1908.

[68]Ibid.

become increasingly tolerant of diversity, as long as there was unity when it was necessary "to face the common enemy." Tutoring his daughter, Nora, in socialist argumentation technique he recommended that first she:

> Always seek some point on which you can agree for then the progression to essential principles would be easier. Finally, then, once you have agreed upon vital points, avoid all discussion of non-essential points "as the Devil does holy water."

While the retreat from the hard-line, clear-cut discipline of SLP dogma involved "a bitter lesson to learn," he had become convinced that, practically speaking, his "proper position" lay in the general labor and socialist movements "as a friendly critic and helper rather than in a special organization as hostile critics and enemies." Although he was still leery of reformist, non-Marxian elements within the SPA Connolly had learned to prefer the greater freedom of opinion allowed within it to the revolutionary dogmatism of the SLP.[69]

The SPA also offered him a new medium for the dissemination of his ideas. Charles H. Kerr and Ernest Untermann, SPA publishers in Chicago, offered to print a collection of Connolly's IWW lectures on socialism, industrial unionism, and political action. Entitled Socialism

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[69]James Connolly: Letter to Mathieson, January 10, 1909; Greaves, op. cit., p. 179; Nora Connolly-O'Brien, Portrait of a Rebel Father (Dublin, Ire: Talbot Press, 1935), p. 101; James Connolly: Letter to J. C. Mathieson, January 10, 1909.

Made Easy the pamphlet contained six of his "Workshop Talks" in which he had sought to clarify socialist theory for working class audiences. It was an immediate success and was soon reprinted in both Australia and England. The little book was first of his writings from which he actually earned money, and Connolly gained confidence and pleasure from its popularity.[70]

His work with the IWW had convinced Connolly that what was needed was not abstruse treatises on theory but rather clear, down-to-earth explanations of the evils of contemporary society, their roots in capitalism and the solutions proposed by socialism. So the pamphlet dealt with some of the questions most frequently asked by working class audiences about socialism and nationalism and socialism and private property. Written in a dialectical style, it presented the reader with a model he could literally follow in his own debates for socialism. Remarkable for its simplicity and clarity, Socialism Made Easy accomplished what its title promised. Its popularity was a result partly of the timely topics and partly because, unlike the usual radical prose, laborious and hortatory, Connolly's writing combined humor and picturesque language. Printed and reprinted

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[70]Ralph Chaplin was called in to do the cover design for the pamphlet. He remembered meeting Connolly in Kerr's office: "He spoke too much like an Irish nationalist to suit me. . . but what impressed me most were his spicy humor and fine friendly manner." Ralph Chaplin, Wobbly, The Rough and Tumble Story of an American Radical (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 105; James Connolly, Socialism Made Easy (Glasgow, Socialist Labour Press, n.d.)

in the United States the pamphlet made Connolly's name familiar to SPA members across the country. As a result the central office hired him to make an 11 month speaking tour of the middle and far western regions and Kerr and Untermann commissioned him to write more articles for publication in The International Socialist Review.

Connolly had emphasized the need for political action when he was speaking and writing for the economically oriented IWW. Now he sought to convince the politically conscious SPA of the need to support the economic struggles of the IWW. He had insisted that it was incumbent on labor organizations to develop political awareness through their educational programs; now he reminded the socialists that a political party not emanating from the ranks of organized labor was, according to Marx, ". . . simply a socialist sect, ineffective for the final revolutionary act." To the SPA criticism that the IWW was engaged in wasteful dual unionism, Connolly replied that the trade unions had also been guilty of that crime when they had pushed aside the Knights of Labor. And that divisiveness, Connolly argued, which had characterized the trade union movement since its foundation, continued to weaken the labor movement, for their structure forbade immediate collateral action of specific craft unions within a given industry. Trade union rules required that action on grievances, any strike action, be referred to the international offices of each respective craft union, a process which made unified industry-wide action almost

impossible, thereby crippling the power of labor to effect change. Connolly acknowledged that a good many Wobblies were given to anti-political expressions. Nevertheless, socialists should not be so easily daunted. Sooner or later, he argued, "in their march to freedom the workers will use every weapon they find necessary." And socialists must be that group "which pushes on all the others, which most clearly understands the line of march." United in their commitment to socialism the SPA should work for greater unity with the labor movement for socialists should be aware of the fact that the political arena might not always be open to them.[71]

Connolly agreed with Victor Berger, the socialist leader in Milwaukee, who had stated that the SPA was in imminent danger of losing the ballot. In fact, Connolly contended, disenfranchisement was already proceeding in numerous areas: in California by means of exhorbitant filing fees, in Minnesota by means of new primary laws and throughout the south by prejudicial educational tests. General disenfranchisement was not only possible but probable for, he prophesied, before the working class constituted a real political threat the capitalist class "will precipitate a fight upon some fake issue." And even if the Socialist

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[71]Karl Marx, quoted in James Connolly, Socialism Made Easy, op. cit., p. 25; James Connolly "Industrialism and the Trade Unions" in The International Socialist Review (February, 1910) rpt. in D. Ryan, ed., The Workers' Republic: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly (Dublin, Ire.: Sign of the Three Candles, 1951), pp. 75-87.

Party managed to surmount all of these political hurdles, the Supreme Court "which applied the anti-trust laws to trade unions or used inter-state commerce acts to prevent strikes on railways" would surely declare unconstitutional any significant electoral victories by socialist or workers' parties. He foresaw the legal issue on which the test would be based:

> I consider that if the capitalist class appealed to the Supreme Court and interrogated it to declare whether a political party which aimed at overthrowing the constitution of the United States could legally operate to that end within the constitution of the United States the answer in the negative which that Court would undoubtedly give would not only be entirely logical but would also be extremely likely to satisfy every shallow thinker. . . in the country.

Given the reality of the threat to the SPA's place on the ballot Connolly agreed with Berger that it was necessary to consider alternative action.[72]

He radically disagreed, however, with Berger's proposal in the Social Democratic Herald that the working man should "buy a gun" if he were denied political tactics. In a prophetic statement Connolly argued that the technology which had revolutionized industry was also revolutionizing weaponry and that "confronted with machine guns and artillery which kill at seven miles distance, rifles are not likely to be of much material value. . . ." Furthermore, he predicted, future development of the "flying machine"

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[72] James Connolly, "Ballots, Bullets, or. . .." The International Socialist Review, October, 1909, rpt. in Desmond Ryan, ed., op. cit., pp. 63-69.

would lead to even more terrifying potentialities in weaponry. Faced with such massive technological power, he concluded, "the gun of Conrade Berger will be as ineffective as the paper ballot in the hands of a reformer."[73]

Connolly was far from being without hope, however. He maintained that the workers had, in their ability to stop production, a weapon far more powerful than guns, "a weapon capable of winning the fight for us against political usurpation and all the military powers of earth, sea, and air." Instructed in the principles of industrial unionism, the working class could, by means of massive protests, general strikes, and "relentless Boycott" take over the economy and then the government of the society. Connolly exhorted the readers of The International Socialist to prepare for "economic paralysis instead of rifle bullets." It was the only tactic which offered realistic hope for the victory of the working class.[74]

In these contributions to radical journals from 1908-1910 Connolly addressed himself to issues of general political and economic interest. But his basic concern for the Irish continued to occupy most of his time and thought, and the Irish Socialist Federation's journal, The Harp, contained Connolly's most intense and personal work. As editor of the monthly (published in New York from 1908-1910) he scolded and cajoled his countrymen, poked fun at

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

their foibles, and prodded them to accept the socialist point of view which he espoused. Sold on street corners by ISF volunteers the paper soon acquired a sizeable subscription list. Within 3 or 4 months it was selling out all copies and before the end of the first year had achieved a circulation of "about 3,000."[75]

Connolly had chosen the name with care. Irish workers in the United States had for many years been contemptuously labelled "Harps;" now that derisive term was to be changed into a proud proclamation of Irishness. Below the title lay the motto: "In all things Essential, Unity; in all things Doubtful, Liberty; in all things, Charity." Another statement on the editorial page promised to admit correspondence from opponents as well as sympathetic readers, with the former given precedence. For years "The Irish Agitator" had tried to convince DeLeon of the rightness of such an editorial policy. Now, for the first time in the United States, Connolly had the opportunity to implement it himself.

Every edition included articles written by others; Connolly welcomed contributions, especially from ISF members whom he was continually urging to sharpen their speaking and writing skills. And there were numerous articles reprinted from other radical journals in the United States, Scotland, and Ireland. In the main, though, The Harp's 12 pages were

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[75]Interview with Nora Connolly-O'Brien, April, 1970.

written by Connolly. Yet the paper is remarkable for its variety, in tone as well as in subject matter; it demonstrates both the extraordinary range of his mind and the wide spectrum of literary styles he had at his fingertips. In most of its serious theoretical work, its humor (both comic and ironic), its poetry and songs, its editorializing and straight reportage, The Harp was, essentially, Connolly's achievement.

Through the paper Connolly hoped to create a community of informed, internationally-minded Irish socialists who would, as Irishmen had since the Dark Ages for the church, go out as missionaries for socialism. Toward that end numerous articles on international affairs appeared in The Harp. Frequent reports of socialist and labor activity in Europe as well as occasional lengthy articles concerning social conditions in India and Latin America reflect the editor's effort to broaden the traditionally narrow interests of his Irish nationalist readers. Actually, he wrote, given the scope of Irish emigration, to all corners of the globe, an international outlook was the only logical one, for ". . . no Irishman [should] throw a stone at a foreigner; he may hit one of his clansmen."[76]

The argument was typical. Rather than try to eliminate their deeply-rooted nationalism, Connolly sought to use it to attract Irishmen to the broader socialist point

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[76]The Harp (April, 1908), p. 1.

of view. Particularly in his economic analysis of Irish history and tradition did he hope to prove to his countrymen that socialism was not, as they feared, some novel foreign importation but rather an economic system with deep roots in the Irish past. The social economic order of early and medieval Ireland, even throughout the first 500 years of English domination, Connolly stated: "rested upon communal or tribal ownership of land." Instead of being a feudal lord the chief of each clan was elected and acted "as an administrator of the tribal affairs of his people" and "the land or territory of the clan was entirely removed from his private jurisdiction." That system was effectively destroyed, finally, by Cromwell "with the forcible breakup of the clans in 1649." Only then were the foreign economic systems of feudalism and capitalism established in Ireland, brought there by the "English oppressors."[77]

The Irish resisted, whenever they could. The massive evictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave rise to secret societies in both north and south. Groups such as the Whiteboys, Oak boys, Steelboys, and Ribbonmen met at night and:

> . . . proceeded to tear down enclosures; to hough cattle, to dig up and so render useless the pasture lands; to burn the houses of shepherds and, in short, to terrorize their social

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[77]James Connolly, Labor in Irish History, in seria The Harp (August, 1908-June, 1910); For the purposes of this paper I will quote from the book, published first in 1910 and reprinted in 1967 by New Books Publications, Dublin. Errors in the newspaper edition were corrected by Connolly before the book's publication.

> rulers into abandoning the policy of grazing in favour of tillage.

Outbreaks of what they called "Irish agrarian unrest" continued to disturb the English until finally in 1870 united in the Land League. The Irish peasantry fought the "Land Wars" which won for them, what Connolly labelled, "half-hearted acquiescence" to their demands.[78]

Championing the indomitable rebelliousness of the Irish spirit Connolly heaped ridicule on those Irish historians who had accepted the mistaken English depiction of early Irish society so that if an Irishman "crouched" or "humbled himself" before a representative of Royalty "his abasement was pointed to proudly as an instance of the 'ancient Celtic fidelity to hereditary monarchs.'" Every "sycophantic vice begotten of generations of slavery" should have been opposed, Connolly maintained, as un-Irish, inconsistent with early Irish societal patterns as they were defined by the Brehon Code. Such historians had further compounded their error by suppressing the radical statements of the truly revolutionary leaders (Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Fintan Lalor, etc.). And they had committed a cardinal error in their reverence for those supporters of the economic status quo: Henry Grattan, Daniel O'Connell, and William Smith O'Brien. These were the men who had led the Irish people to believe that political and religious oppression constituted their major problems. Actually, Connolly maintained,

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[78] Ibid., pp. 16, 137.

capitalism had caused "infinitely more suffering than it was at any time within the power of the Penal Laws to inflict."[79]

This mistaken emphasis on religious differences, Connolly contended, had led inevitably to the divisions between the Protestant and Catholic working classes. During the late nineteenth century Irishmen had fought side by side and the author of Labor in Irish History hoped that his reinterpretation of Irish history, according to Marxist economic theory, would lead to the time when working men in "the North and the South will again clasp hands, again it will be demonstrated as in '98, that the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social democracy." Only then, Connolly believed, could real freedom be won for the Irish people against their "real oppressors," English and Irish capitalists.[80]

Labor in Irish History and much of his other writing for The Harp was completed during the long hours Connolly spent on trains during this period. For eleven months in 1909 and 1910, "The Irish Agitator" toured the West and Mid-west as one of the six paid organizers for the SPA. That organization had learned that "the slow and systematic education of the working class between campaigns counts for more

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[79] Ibid., pp. xxix, 13. [80] Ibid., p. 140.

than any amount of hurrah work" during an election year. Connolly had, by this time, acquired considerable experience in and knowledge of the American radical scene. He was well liked in his capacity as traveling organizer and his pay per diem ($3 + expenses) was greater than he had ever received before. It was evidently a grueling schedule, entailing an early evening lecture, then his attendance at organizational conferences with local leaders which often lasted late into the night followed the next morning by another train ride to the next city. Nevertheless, he found enough energy to continue, during his traveling hours, his editorial work for The Harp, and the profuse references in his writing of this time to historical works, economic treatises, and articles on contemporary affairs indicate that he also found time to appease his voracious reading appetite.[81]

The flyer recommending Connolly as a speaker to local SPA groups emphasized his skill "in dealing with such delicate questions as religion." Indeed, that issue which had been a major factor in his first coming to the United States continued throughout his stay to occupy a good deal of his time and thought. The religious question was discussed, from one angle or another, in nearly every issue of The Harp. Some of the most interesting of these articles

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[81]Announcement of Connolly's tour - from the SPA Executive to local groups. In the National Library collection of Connolly papers.

were those relating the interchange between The Harp and The Catholic Fortnightly Review which revealed a contemporary liberal Catholic view of Connolly and his work. In his review of "Roman Catholicism and Socialism" (a pamphlet by Patrick Cooney which Connolly recommended), the editor of the Review had referred to the Harp: "The Harp shows one that lack of knowledge of great social questions of the day and lack of sympathy for the down trodden masses suffering from the undeniable abuses of our capitalist economic society" was causing the church to lose many of its members to socialism. The Review's editor concluded by quoting a Bishop Spaulding as having said that the church "must snatch from it (socialism) its underlying truth" and "combat atheistic socialism with Christian socialism."[82]

Connolly, however, was extremely wary of the church's political role, even when its power was exerted in a direction which he approved, with a positive stance toward socialism. Therefore a number of articles advocated strict separation of church and state. For example, the response to Father John A. Ryan's lengthy editorial "May a Catholic Be a Socialist?" was entitled, "Will Catholics Permit Clerical Interferences in Politics?." It contained an even more emphatic negative response to that question than that which the priest had given to his.[83]

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[82] Ibid.

[83] The Harp (January, 1909).

Connolly expounded these views most fully in another significant work which he completed during the tour for the SPA, Labour, Nationality and Religion. His Friends in Dublin had sent him a copy of Father Kane's "Lanten Discourses Against Socialism" and asked Connolly to reply. The resulting booklet (reprinted in larger modern type it would compose a whole book) contained lengthy quotes from the lectures followed by Connolly's point by point rebuttal in a style reminiscent of the Thomistic dialectic. The frontispiece contained two quotes which summarized Connolly's point of view. The first was from St. Ambrose: "Only unjust usurpation has created the right of private property." The second was from Rt. Rev. John England, Catholic Bishop of Charleston in 1824 in which the Bishop stated that: "We deny to Pope and Council united any power to interfere with one title of our political rights. . . ." Connolly's arguments throughout the booklet expanded upon two basic principles: that private property is not sacrosanct in Christian teaching and that the church should steer clear of political affairs.[84]

In his "Authors Forward" Connolly reinforced his contention that church and state must remain separate with a discussion of sixteen incidents in Irish history when the official church's judgments in political affairs were, at least from an Irish point of view, faulty. From the time of Pope Adrian VII's Bull which authorized Henry II's invasion

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[84] Labour Nationality and Religion (Dublin, Ire.: New Books, 1969).

of Ireland, the Roman Catholic Hierarchy had (except for the 200 years following the English reformation when the church was suppressed in Ireland), consistently opposed movements directed at the overthrow of English rule. Connolly concluded that the past and present political activity of the Vatican had been rooted in a mistaken "attempt to serve God and Mammon." He saw some irony in its contemporary defense of capitalism:

> The capitalist class rose upon the ruins of feudal Catholicism; in the countries where it gained power its first act was to decree the confiscation of the estates of the Church. Yet today that robber class. . . asks the Church to defend it and from the Vatican downwards the clergy respond to the call.

Connolly called on his fellow countrymen to resist that "call," and to listen to the political pronouncements of the Church with the scepticism he thought they deserved.[85]

First, he pointed out what he considered to be errors in the priest's discussion of the Marxist labor theory of value and responded to his criticism of the "materialistic view of history." Connolly instanced numerous examples when economic development, in trade, transportation, etc., had altered men's ideas and institutions and discussed at some length the changes in Christian moral teaching in regard to slavery and usury -- changes which had been brought about, he contended, because of economic factors. To Father Kane's contention that "the right to

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[85] Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

private property," like "the right to own one's own labor and what it does" were God-given rights, Connolly replied that the two were contradictory, for capitalists and landlords who had privately owned the productive capacity of Ireland had forced the worker and the tenant farmer "to surrender the greater portion of the fruits of his toil to the owners." Nor did Connolly accept the dictum of Pope Leo in his encyclical on labor as the final Christian authority in the matter of private property. He countered with half a dozen quotes from pontiffs and doctors of the church who had condemned it. He argued that "the wildest sayings of modern socialist agitators are soft and conservative" beside those of men like St. Clement, who had written: "The use of all things that are found in this world ought to be common to all men. Only the most manifest inequity makes one say to the other: 'This belongs to me, that to you.'" Similar statements from St. Basil, St. Chrysostom, and St. Gregory buttressed Connolly's argument that there is nothing sacrosanct about private property.[86]

In regard to man's right to free speech and press, "The Irish Agitator" could not resist first pointing out the "irony" implicit in the priest's defense of such rights. The socialist, unlike the Catholic Church, would respect the right of any group, Connolly promised, "even those in opposition" which had "enough followers to pay society for the

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[86] Ibid., pp. 28, 31.

labour of printing its publications." The democratic socialism Connolly envisioned, with "all officials elected from below to hold their position only during good behaviour" would have neither the "right nor the desire to refuse the service (of the printing press, public halls, etc.)."[87]

Actually, Connolly concluded, it was absured for his clerical opponent to speak about "our birthright, freedom" within the context of the capitalistic system - that system of which the "poet Shelly" had written:

> What is freedom?. . .
> Tis to work, and have such pay,
> As just keeps life, from day to day. . .

Father Kane was speaking about man's right to "the struggle of life" from the vantage point of "an assured comfortable living," while 87 percent of the working class in Ireland" and "a million people in London" were really struggling, with a standard of living "below the poverty line - never getting enough to eat." The working class may be "free" in a capitalist society, Connolly agreed, but that freedom was only "theoretical" and would continue to be as long as their "means of life are in the grasp of another."[88]

Father Kane had also affirmed the child's birthright to a stable home life and had accused socialism of the intent to "ruin the home" with divorce laws, etc. Actually, Connolly replied, divorce had scarcely been a "socialist invention" for, although there had never been a socialist

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[87] Ibid., pp. 35, 36.

[88] Ibid.

law making body before 1910, in "almost every capitalist state, the capitalist lawmakers. . . have established divorce as an institution." Nor had it been accidental that the capitalist system had given birth to the institution of divorce, he concluded. It had been the natural outgrowth of a system "which exalts the individual pursuit of riches" with a consequent "loosening of all social bonds."[89]

Moreover, the capitalistic emphasis on the individual had necessarily led to the poverty and misery which the priest decried, for it had "made men isolated units in a warring economic world. . . ." It seemed strange to Connolly that the same Church which still "curses the Protestant Reformation - the child, blesses capitalism - its parent." He argued that:

> The Reformation was the capitalist idea appearing in the religious field; as capitalism teaches that the social salvation of man depends solely upon his own individual effort, so Protestantism, echoing it, taught that the spiritual salvation of man depends solely upon his own individual appeal to God. . . .

Furthermore, he had nothing but contempt for the solutions proposed by his opponent: "pity," and "social reform." He derided the Church for "ever patching up the diseased and broken wrecks of an unjust social system" while it was, at the same time, "blessing the system which made the wrecks and spread the disease." It was necessary, Connolly

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[89] Ibid., p. 42.

concluded, that the capitalistic system be abolished, and since the Church "shrinks from leading the forces of righteousness against it," men of all religions must cooperate as socialists. In working for that goal, he promised, "We reject the firebrand of capitalist warfare and offer you the olive leaf of brotherhood and justice to and for all." Matching the rhetorical style of his priestly opponent, Connolly thus concluded Labour, Nationality and Religion, and with it, one of the earliest "dialogues" between Marxism and the Catholic Church.[90]

Notices of its coming publication, appeared in The Harp which during its last six months (from January, 1910-June, 1910) was printed in Dublin and mailed to its American subscribers. In spite of the success of his tour for the SPA and the growth of the ISF (branches had been established in several New England cities and in Chicago) Connolly had felt an increasing longing to return to Ireland. He had been corresponding with former members of the ISRP during 1909 and was aware of the resurgence of Irish interest in socialism. He had urged that they merge first with the Sinn Fein movement, then with the Irish industrial unionists, led by James Larkin. Unity meetings that resulted from the publication of his letter in Dublin were attended by as many as 400, the largest audiences ever to come to hear socialist speakers in Ireland.

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[90] Ibid., pp. 62, 63.

Larkin and the membership of the ISRP wrote that they were anxious to have Connolly come himself for a speaking tour, with the hope that he would remain permanently. Connolly's pleasure at the invitation was apparent in his enthusiastic, affirmative reply. After one last struggle in the United States helping Justus Ebert in the IWW's Free Speech fight in New Castle, Pennsylvania, during May and June of 1910, Connolly embarked for Ireland and was followed a few months later by his family.

Connolly's voice continued to be heard in the United States even after his departure. His article, "Revolutionary Unionism and War" appeared in the International Socialist Review, in March of 1915. In it he decried the failure of continental socialists to organize the "revolutionary industrial organization" which could, he thought, have prevented the war by refusing to work. He warned his American socialist readers that to wield real power they must organize economic power, that they must not fall into the European error of allowing the weakening "divorce between the industrial and political movements of labor." Thus, in his reading of American socialist journals and his writing for them Connolly remained in contact with his "old comrades in the United States."[91]

Essentially, however, Connolly's career in the United

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[91]James Connolly, "Revolutionary Unionism and War," in The Best of Connolly, Pronsias MacAonghuse, ed. (Dublin, Ire.: Mercier Books, 1968), pp. 166-170.

States ended when he departed for Ireland. The struggles of labor and nationalist movements in Ireland demanded nearly all his time and energy from 1910 until he was executed in 1916. His disillusioning encounters with Daniel DeLeon had, early in his stay, jaundiced his view of American socialism, but his continuing tireless work for the SLP indicates that he kept hoping the leadership would open and the organization establish itself as something more than a small sect dominated by its "Pope." When Connolly was ousted from the National Executive Committee because of DeLeon's mechinations, that glimmer of hope was finally extinguished and from mid-1907 on Connolly's gaze was increasingly directed toward Ireland although he subsequently won praise and some unknown within the ranks of the IWW and the SPA. He had always felt somewhat alienated and frustrated within the American radical milieu; only in Ireland could he devote himself wholly to that cause for which he finally gave his life: the Irish Worker's Republic.

Chapter 5

Because of the importance of James Connolly in Ireland from 1910-1916, the prominent role he played in major historical events, his formative American experience is of undoubted historical significance from an Irish point of view. During his eight years in the United States he clarified his theoretical stance, especially in his debates with Daniel DeLeon, and formulated his positions in publications which were widely read in Ireland as well as in the United States. Later, in Dublin, this theoretical background was extremely helpful when, during the months-long transport workers strike his cool intellectual understanding and explanation of the issues stood as a necessary counterpoise to James Larkin's fiery charismatic rhetoric. Although Connolly did not radically alter any of his ideas while he was in the United States, he gained a firmer grasp of them and learned better how to express them simply and forcefully.[92]

Perhaps more important, he had gradually moved away from the purist, doctrinaire position he had when he came to the United States. At the beginning of his stay he had condemned the SPA as a party of ineffectual reformists and supported the SLP as the organization "uncompromisingly devoted

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[92]The books he wrote while in the United States are still influential among young socialist groups in Ireland. In fact, such organizations are often called "Connolly Clubs."

to class warfare." After a few skirmishes with DeLeon's rigidity, however, he began to be aware of the "sectishness" and divisiveness of such a position and of the need for unity. While Connolly continued to uphold the tenets of radical Marxism, he became convinced that theoretical purity was less important than revolutionary solidarity and that it was necessary, pragmatically, for all groups with revolutionary goals to work together. Later, in Ireland, that conviction enabled him to work with a broad spectrum of revolutionary, nationalist groups in planning the 1916 Easter 'Rising.

It is more difficult to assess the significance of Connolly's work on the American scene. Many of the controversies in which he was engaged during his stay in the United States had troubled the waters of the American radical stream since its beginnings. The debate over the value of strikes and economic activity as opposed to political activity, for example, had been imported during the 1860's by followers of Ferdinand Lassalle, who maintained in his "Iron Law of Wages" that no real wage gains could be won by worker organizations. The Lassalleans argued with Marxists who held that the economic struggle was, indeed, a significant one, with political implications. The differences between the two groups over this issue were sufficiently profound to lead to the division in the American branch of the International in 1872. Even the issue of the Catholic Church's relationship with the radical movements had been raised before Connolly's arrival. Henry George's defeat in the New York City mayoralty contest in

1886 was brought about, at least in part, by the Church's objection to his "socialistic tendencies," and the excommunication of a popular priest who had campaigned for George resulted in controversy and debate over these issues which lasted for five years. Because these theoretical problems with which Connolly dealt had already been argued in the United States and continued to be debated after his departure, it is difficult to sift out his effectiveness from that of others who held similar views.[93]

Nevertheless, the popularity of his books on socialism indicates that he reached a broad, grass-roots readership. While the pure theoreticians expressed their ideas in a specialized Marxist jargon, Connolly developed the remarkable ability to translate socialist principles into language that the common man could understand. His writings, especially the pieces for the Industrial Union Bulletin and Socialism Made Easy were significant contributions to American radicalism because they made elements of socialist theory accessible to large numbers of readers.

His writings on the relationship of socialism to the Catholic Church, on the other hand, were not widely read and evidently had little effect on either the clergy or the general church membership, except for the relatively small readership of The Harp. The small (though surprisingly influential) number of Irish-American socialists, people like Elizabeth Gurley

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[93]Carl Wittke, The Irish in America (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisianna State University Press, 1956), p. 224.

Flynn and William Z. Foster, simply abandoned the church and generally made little effort to rationalize their position for Catholics. Although they did not gain the wide popularity (in this country) of his other works Connolly's writings on the church and socialism are of historical interest for they constitute a serious effort by a Marxist to reconcile the tenets of Marxism with those of Catholicism at a time when there was little dialogue between the two groups.

It is as difficult to assess the immediate impact of Connolly's work as organizer and speaker as it is to judge the effect of his writings, for only during his brief stint with the IWW were specific results of his work reported. After his first tour the Weekly People gave little space to reports of his tireless activity in behalf of the SLP, and the only perception we have of the significance of that work is Connolly's own. Though colored by his bitter disillusionment and anger, his sense of effort wasted is probably an accurate judgment of his impact on the SLP. Its tyrannical leader refused to allow anyone else to attain decision making power in the organization. Connolly's presence did prove to be negatively effective, however, for the controversy surrounding his work for the IWW served as the issue which finally led to DeLeon's ouster from that organization.

The work Connolly subsequently did for the SPA was evidently highly regarded since the organization's leadership sought to renew his contract as one of their few paid traveling organizers. It is tempting to speculate about what

position he might have attained in the SPA had he remained in this country. Realistically, however, one must conclude that because he spent most of his time in the United States in an abortive attempt to influence the SLP, and only a few months in the organization in which his ability was recognized, his presence failed to have the impact it might otherwise had had on the American radical scene.

The historian of American radicalism might well wish that Connolly had spent more time in the IWW and the SPA. He was a keen and articulate observer and his commentaries and criticism of DeLeon and the SLP deserve to be read not only for their acerbity and humor but also because they provide a sharply defined, if biased, picture of the man and the organization he led. Connolly's letters to Mathieson, in which these commentaries appear, possess real historical interest and should surely be consulted by scholars who study the SLP. It is to be regretted that Connolly did not write in equal detail about the leading figures in the more important IWW and SPA.

Connolly's work should also be of interest to the American historian because it suggests a number of questions worth examining in depth. Given his assiduous and intelligent efforts, why were so few Irishmen attracted to membership in Connolly's Irish Socialist Federation? The Irish in the United States were scarcely strangers to radical movements; they were leaders in the resistance to the Draft Laws during the Civil War and had played an increasingly prominent role

in labor organizations during the late nineteenth century. One of the earliest instances of labor riots in the United States was the outgrowth of Irish organization in the coal fields and led to the Molly Maguire trials in 1876. Later, within the Knights of Labor, Irish membership was both sizable and influential. Terence Powderly, the Grand Master Workman of the Knights from 1879-1893, had come as a child from Cork as had "Mother" Mary Harris Jones, who served as one of the Knights' traveling organizers. Nor were Powderly and Mother Jones alone. Wittke cites numerous instances of Irish leadership in early America labor unions, people like John Siney, J. T. Carey, and P. J. McGuire. As they had throughout the English speaking world, Irishmen in America played an extremely significant role in the radical labor movements of the nineteenth century.

Why then did they stop short when Connolly advocated further radicalization to socialism? Connolly saw the Catholic Church as the principle barrier. The Church was unequivocally opposed to socialist doctrine, and there can be no doubt that it did wield a powerful influence in the minds of most Irishmen. Cardinal Gibbons argued similarly that "of all peoples the Irish are the most ready to accept the advice of God's minister." However, Connolly also cited numerous counter-instances in the history of Ireland when revolutionary nationalists ignored the proscriptions of the Church. And in the United States itself Irish activity within early labor movements was widespread and influential in spite of hierarchical opposition. The Church's

acceptance of the labor movement, promulgated in Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum, really came after the fact in 1891 since thousands of Catholic Irish-Americans had, for many years, been maintaining membership in both the Church and the labor movement without a scruple.[94]

Irish resistance to Marxist radicalism cannot, therefore, be attributed simply to the influence of the Catholic Church; other factors must have been operative which Connolly failed to recognize. The element of timing, for example, was doubtless extremely significant. By the early 1900's, the Irish-American occupied a far more secure place in the economy and had much more to lose from participation in radical movements than he had during the previous century. Irish preponderance in the trade unions attests to the fact that many Irishmen had achieved the rank of skilled worker. Since most of the Irish had arrived in the United States in a condition of extreme destitution only a few decades earlier, their awareness of relative prosperity must have been unusually acute and the opportunity for upward mobility which generally retarded the growth of American socialism was an especially significant factor among Irish Americans. Having finally achieved some measure of economic security after generations of struggle in Ireland and decades of unrest in the United States, the American Irishman was, therefore, scarcely the most likely candidate for

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[94]Mark Karson, American Labor Unions and Politics (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Ill. University Press, 1958), p. 224.

an economic movement which threatened his hard-won gains. Had Connolly recognized the importance of the economic factors he might have redesigned his appeal to the Irish. One doubts, however, if at this point in time any argument could have succeeded in winning the working-class American Irish to the cause of socialism, even if it had not conflicted with the Church.[95]

Connolly, himself, could not understand these negative reactions because he had never been tempted away from his Irish revolutionary stance by the American promise of prosperity. His zealous advocacy of economic radicalism fell on deaf ears, therefore, and alienated "The Irish Agitator" from the group he most wanted to reach. The American Irishman later financed the Revolution that finally won independence for Ireland but his revolutionary zeal stopped there. Connolly's idealistic vision of the socialist Workers' Republic could not compete with the materialistic gains American Irish had won in capitalism.[96]

All told, therefore, Connolly's sojourn in the United States was a lonely and frustrating one. Alienated from the Irish-Americans by his socialism, he was alienated from the socialists by his Irishness and the great purpose of his coming

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[95]Mark Karson composed an "incomplete" list of no fewer than 62 Irish presidents of international unions during the period from 1906-1918; Ibid., pp. 222-4.

[96]His daughter Nora remembers her father's saying that he would rather be a pauper in Ireland than a millionaire in the United States. Interview with Nora Connolly-O'Brien, April, 1970.

to America as "a mistake." Historical analysis, however, denies the validity of Connolly's judgment. His years in the United States were significant, particularly in preparing him for the crucial years in Ireland. Moreover, the ramifications of his presence on the American scene, while difficult to measure, are not without consequence; his writings were widely read and his organizational skill was highly praised. His observations of the American socialist scene from 1902-1910 are remarkable for clarity as well as wit and deserve study by any scholar of the period. And finally, that very quality that led to loneliness and discontent, his uniqueness as an Irish socialist, makes James Connolly a figure of historical interest and invites further study of Irish activity in early American radicalism. Connolly's work suggests that the stereotype of the conservative Irishman drawn from twentieth century political activity is without validity in the nineteenth century, and that, in fact, other Irish Agitators had preceded him. At an earlier time American Irish might well have been aroused to revolution by a countryman as intelligent, articulate, and humorous as was James Connolly.[97]

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[97]James Connolly, letter to William O'Brien, May 24, 1909, in William O'Brien, Forth the Banners Go (Dublin, Ire.: At the Sign of the Three Candles, 1969), p. 253.

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INTERVIEW

Interview with Nora Connolly-O'Brien, April, 1970.