

Sir james connolly

[Literature](#), [Biography](#)



James Connolly was born to Irish parents in Edinburgh in 1868. From an early age, he showed an interest in history, economics and politics and spent much time reading and studying. Perhaps because of his Irish parents, he developed an interest in the Irish struggle for Home Rule and in the land question. He spent some time in Ireland with the British army and seeing the people's struggle first-hand arose his interest even further. He returned to Edinburgh and spent some time working for a Scottish socialist, John Leslie. He taught him public speaking and effective handwriting, two skills which were to become invaluable to Connolly. He joined the Scottish Socialist Federation and the Independent Labour Party and was blacklisted by the employers of Edinburgh and so was forced to move to Dublin. Here he set up the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1898. Its agenda was a combination of his two interests - nationalism and socialism. He published a newspaper called the Workers Republic in which he expressed his ideas. He soon became noted world-wide and was invited to America to lecture on socialist topics.

He returned to Belfast in 1911 after almost ten years in America and he became the local organiser of the new trade union, the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, at the request of Jim Larkin. Because of his interest in Nationalism, he worked to reconcile Catholic and nationalist workers with their Protestant and Unionist counterparts, and the dock strike of 1911 where they stood side by side showed that he certainly had some success. However, his insistence that Unionists should support the demand for an Irish Parliament ended the co-operation between nationalists and unionists.

By 1913, Connolly was a major figure in the ITGWU, and he moved to Dublin which had become the centre of trade union activity. This activity culminated in the strike and lock-out of 1913-1914. Connolly and Larkin had both hoped that British trade Unionists would stage a sympathetic strike. When this didn't happen, their hopes were dashed and they struggled to maintain the pace of the strike with the little funds they had. When workers were shipped in from London and England there was little they could do about it. The Irish workers were too weak after months of starvation for a stand-off between the two groups.

The strike failed and the workers drifted back to work. Connolly was forced to re-examine the Marxist idea of supra-national class unity. The outbreak of World War I added to his disillusion with class theories. In congress after congress, the international socialist had denounced war as a device used by capitalists to control their workers, yet when the war broke out, all the great socialist parties across Europe called on their members to fight for their respective countries.

Connolly, on the other hand, called on the Irish working class not to join the army. His plea was largely ignored, and poverty, patriotism and propaganda enticed tens of thousands to enlist. Clearly international socialism was a spent force, and if Ireland's workers were to find salvation, they had to find it in the context of an independent Ireland. In 1913, Connolly was largely involved in the foundation of the Citizen Army. However, because of his campaigning at the time of the lockout and the huge workload that he had

when Larkin left for America in 1914, he did not have a chance to make his mark in the group.

By 1915 however, he was concentrating his efforts on building up an army for the planned rebellion. His nationalism began to take on some of the characteristics of the more traditional nationalism of the I. R. B. Indeed, he even seems to have been influenced by the ideas of "blood-sacrifice" then popular with the group surrounding Padraig Pearse. When Connolly was told of the plans for 1916, he agreed to cooperate with the IRB and was sworn into the group.

Whether or not Connolly thought the Rebellion had any chance of succeeding is unclear. The insurgents policy of occupying buildings and waiting to be driven out suggests that their principal aim was to make a gesture. It is also possible that they were influenced by Connolly's belief that the British would never use artillery against them because it would destroy capitalist property.

Connolly took on the position of military command of the insurrection, though in the end he directed only the fighting in the G. P. O. Connolly guessed wrong about the British and when they brought in the heavy artillery, the rebellion was quickly crushed. Connolly was executed in a chair because he couldn't stand due to the injuries he sustained in the G. P. O. However, many believe that it is thanks to his sacrificing his life, along with the other signatories, that the Free State came into being. Connolly's achievements are not highlighted as much as those of Pearse or Larkin, but there is no doubt that he made a major contribution to both the nationalist and labour causes.