



**OUR
WORK
FOR
THE IRISH**

REPORTED TO THE ANNUAL
CONFERENCE OF THE
CONNOLLY ASSOCIATION

BY

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(GENERAL SECRETARY)

SUBSCRIPTION
PRICE
6d.

**BIRMINGHAM
DECEMBER
1955**

ANNUAL REPORT—DECEMBER, 1955

AIMS

THE aims of the Connolly Association are

1. **To organize the Irish workers in Britain in the militant defence of their interests, in unity with the Labour movement.**
2. **To win support for the unity and independence of Ireland.**

Since our last conference held in Manchester two years ago, considerable progress has been recorded along each of these two lines. There are now active branches of the Connolly Association in the larger centres, and the frequency and effectiveness of their meetings has increased.

The basis of organization has increasingly been the weekly branch meeting, where members gathered to discuss current political developments, study Irish history and politics, and plan activity based upon the various campaigns of the Association, including the sale of the Irish Democrat.

The greatest asset any organisation can have is a newspaper, and it is not open to question that the leading position of the Connolly Association among the Irish organisations in Britain is in no small measure due to the Irish Democrat. Members have fully realised this and have made immense sacrifices of time, money and energy in order to bring its message to the people.

Month by month the Irish Democrat develops the policy of the Association in accordance with the ever-changing situation, and provides day-to-day leadership to tens of thousands of Irish people, as well as providing educational material to help them in their struggles.

Branches have also provided for weekly open air meeting in the larger centres, and more occasional indoor lectures, mass meetings and have issued leaflets, etc. in connexion with them.

PARTITION

In a continuous campaign of public meetings (over 500 in the two years under review) the Association has made known the basic facts of partition and urged upon British and Irish alike the need for the Labour Movement to take action calculated to bring it to an end.

During the past twelve months in particular it has been both possible and necessary to expose the pretence that there is Democratic Government in Northern Ireland and to show the reactionary Tory character of Ulster Unionism.

In this connection the Association has publicized the campaign of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish T.U.C. for the repeal of the Trades Disputes Act, which still applies in "Northern Ireland." The unfair electoral system (Gerrymandering) and the Special Powers Act have been explained and exposed.

When in 1955 'B' specials were responsible for the shooting of an innocent young man returning from a dance, over 10,000 leaflets were issued, separately, in London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Coventry, Leicester and Manchester, and protest meetings held were well attended. The Association demanded the disbandment of the 'B' Specials. The London Branches organized a 'lobby' of M.P.'s for this purpose, and the matter was subsequently raised in the House of Commons.

When the two Sinn Fein M.P.'s were 'unseated' by the Courts in Northern Ireland a similar series of protest meetings were held and largely as a result of the publicity given by the Irish Democrat, and the communications with M.P.'s, 99 votes were cast against the admission of the defeated Tories into the House of Commons, the largest Labour vote on an Irish issue since the famous 'revolt' against the Ireland Bill.

The Association has sought to gain the co-operation of other Irish organisations in the struggle to end partition, and in some cases united action has seemed possible. The development of wide active unity has never-the-less continued to be opposed by the middle-class leadership of some of the other organisations whose hatred of partition is not so great as their hatred of the working class.

DISCRIMINATION

During periods of full employment discrimination against Irish workers is happily not common. Only one glaring case of denial of employment (in Coventry) came to our attention in the period under review. A protest meeting was held in London and addressed by shop-stewards of several engineering factories with the support of the local Labour M.P.

The Irish Democrat has made a practice of exposing and replying to all newspaper articles derogatory to the Irish people, and knowledge that such replies would be forthcoming is believed to have resulted in some offenders improving. There is still none the less a spate of irresponsible journalism which sees in anti-Irish propaganda an opportunity for increasing circulation based on national prejudice.

In one or two cases advertisements for accommodation and jobs have specifically excluded Irish applicants; in all such cases taken up representations by the Association have led to the withdrawal of the offending advertisements. Particularly in Birmingham a campaign has been waged for the restriction of immigration on grounds of housing shortage. While not taking too seriously such demands at a time when Birmingham needs 50,000 additional workers, the Association fought these proposals on the ground that they introduced the principle of racial discrimination, and it may well be that we have contributed much to the issue now becoming little in evidence.

THE IRISH FLAG

In one or two cases (Glasgow, Manchester) there have been attempts to prevent the Irish flag from being displayed in public. While an extremely unsatisfactory situation prevails in Glasgow, with its long tradition of sectarian bitterness, which the authorities do little to discourage, in Manchester the existence of a strong democratic tradition made it possible to prevent the development of this form of discrimination. Efforts by the Director of Parks to forbid the display of the tricolour at open air meetings were defeated as a result of a vigorous campaign. The support of the Labour group ensured that the City Council backed the Association and the flag has continued to fly.

ARBORFIELD

The arms raid at Arborfield in summer 1955 resulted in widespread attempts to create friction between British and Irish workers, and thus lay the basis for future discrimination, and divisions in the Labour Movement.

The Association bases its own tactics on political action but it considers it essential that public opinion should pay attention to the grievance rather than to the tactics used to remove it. A substantial number of public meetings was held in order to explain partition, and to urge the British public to demand its removal. Workers were urged on no account to allow divisions to arise based on different estimates of the Arborfield action.

When the life sentences were announced the Association held protest meetings in the principal cities, including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham, Leicester, Luton and Glasgow, and set about inaugurating a broad campaign for the commutation of the sentences which are considered to be out of all proportion to the seriousness of the offence. A number of letters to the press have already appeared.

ELECTION

In the British General election the Association advised the Irish in Britain to strive for the defeat of the Tories. There was a strong feeling among many Irish sections that British politics does not concern Irish people, and this was strengthened by those who considered the Ireland Act as the last word of the Labour Party. Public meetings were held in all the principal centres, especially in London where there were nightly 'lectures' in Hyde Park for over a month, to explain the connection between British politics and Irish interests and to urge the Irish to support the Labour movement while striving to make anti-partition, already accepted by some sections, the policy of the majority.

The incidence of the budget with consequent rises in the prices of food and wages together with restriction of housing and the threat of possible unemployment, is held to have justified the Association's stand on the class issue.

LABOUR MOVEMENT

In the work of convincing the Labour Movement of the justice of Ireland's national demands, the Association continued to the fore. Speakers addressed the Birmingham and Rotherham Trades Councils, and the E.C. of the Nottingham Trades Council, together with about fifty Trade Union Branches mostly in West London, but also in provincial centres including Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, and one mass meeting on a building site in Stevenage.

At the same time it was appreciated that winning the Labour movement to support Irish independence must go hand in hand with winning Irishmen to see the solution of their own problems through the struggles of the Labour Movement.

In this connection there was organized in London in 1955 an important conference backed by the Executive Committees of several Trade Unions, on the subject of the best way to ensure that Irish immigrants become members of their appropriate Trade Unions. Representatives of various levels of the N.U.M.G.W., Agricultural Workers, A.ScW., Tobacco Workers Union, Painters, A.U.B.T.W., Plasterers, A.E.U., N.U.V.B., N.U.R., U.S.D.A.W., etc., etc. were present and the results of the conference were published in an attractive booklet, price 9d. Trades Councils and Shop Stewards were also represented.

The Irish Democrat conducted a campaign of explanation of the functions and purposes of Trade Unions, and messages inviting Irishmen to join their appropriate Trade Unions were published from such well-known leaders as Sir Richard Coppock, Mr. Jack Stanley, Mr. John Burns, Mr. Ben Gardner, etc.

A representative of the Association went to Ireland to secure co-operation from across the channel and addressed the Executive Committee of the Dublin Trades Council ; Belfast Trade Unionists also co-operated.

HEALTH

Reports of the possible dangers to the health of immigrants, especially among the youth, led the Association to call a conference on that subject which was probably one of the most successful activities of 1955. The problem of tuberculosis contracted after arrival in Britain took first place, and following the conference Connolly Association representatives attended the meetings of the appropriate

sub-committee of the Socialist Medical Association, and from this co-operation arose the questions which were subsequently asked in Parliament, and the assurances from the two Governments that the matter would receive attention.

With a view to ensuring the immigrants were aware of the precautionary measures that were available the Irish Democrat circularized local authorities and made public the places where mass radiography facilities were available in the principal cities.

Other health hazards, arising from overtime, unsuitable and overcrowded accommodation, the necessity to keep two homes, etc., were dealt with on the lines of urging action through the Labour and Trade Union movement, but in the case of lodgings it was felt that local authorities could be urged to take a stronger interest than many of them do.

The allied subject of education received consideration and publicity was given to the location of evening classes which would enable immigrants to improve their skill.

Representations have been made to British Railways to improve their rail and steamer services but up to the present, nothing has been achieved comparable with the past proposals of the Association for example, in the re-opening of the Fishguard-Rosslare service, and the serving of meals on the Irish Mail.

PROPAGANDA

The total volume of propaganda conducted by the Association must completely dwarf anything seen in this country since the early nineteen twenties. The 500 public meetings, the issue of nearly thirty separate leaflets, the continuous distribution of the Irish Democrat, has now been joined by the publication of a series of pamphlets, five in number, all published during the past year.

Irish History provides a treasure house of political experience which should be made available to every Irishman. Accordingly the Association has held commemoration meetings not only at Easter, but in June (Wolfe Tone), December (Liam Mellows) and May (Connolly) Concentrated campaigns lasting a week, with public meetings each evening have been held in Birmingham, London, Glasgow and Nottingham. Individual meetings have also been held in Coventry, Luton, Northampton, Huddersfield, Wigan, St. Helens, Liverpool, St. Albans, Melton Mowbray, Leicester, Mansfield, Barnsley, Corby, Sheffield, Greenock, Clydebank and Coatbridge.

The Association organized the Centenary commemoration of the great Irish Chartist Feargus O'Connor, in London and Nottingham, where in the latter city practically every organization of the Labour Movement was represented in an effective short ceremony in the Arboretum. A ninepenny pamphlet was published which is the only extant life of Feargus O'Connor. Other pamphlets published included the 'Irish Historical Calendar,' the short policy-pamphlet 'What 800,000 Irish can do' and the 'Life of Father Michael O'Flanagan' which is the only existent biography of the great Republican Priest.

The activities of the Association which were confined to London the Midlands and Lancashire at the time of the last conference have since been extended to Scotland where the Glasgow branch is slowly getting on its feet; and it is hoped that by the time of the next conference, progress will be reported from two at present quiet areas, namely, Yorkshire, and the West.

While looking back on two years of unexampled activity in the history of our Association, when we have at last forced our way through the wall of silence previously imposed by a hostile or indifferent press, and are generally recognized as a political force, it is none the less necessary to note that insufficient has been done to consolidate the influence we have won in terms of a big increase of membership, and our aim to treble the circulation of the Irish Democrat. Much social activity has been conducted, especially in London and Manchester, and possibly the extension of this may help solve the former question. The relative successes of the past must not blind us to the challenge of the future. We have scarcely scratched the surface of the work that we have to do, but granted a continuance of the hard work and enthusiasm of our members, the impression made will steadily deepen in the coming year.