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Ten James Connolly Quotes that are worth knowing

James O'Toole writes about Socialist James Connolly and ten memorable quotes.

James Connolly was a hero of the 1916 Rising – but he was also a lifelong socialist and believed that working class people could run things themselves. Here's a selection of James Connolly quotes that show his commitment to the working class. They are ideas worth fighting for today.

“When socialism is realised every child in our Irish soil will by the mere fact of its existence be an heir to and partner in all the country produces; will have the same right to an assured existence as the citizen today has his citizenship.”

Here Connolly points to an Ireland where every child is born with a right to an equal share of all the wealth we produce – imagine the transformation in our lives if everyone was automatically entitled to a house, a job, an education?

Under the current tax haven economy, we have to fight to get the basics for our children because the wealth is controlled by the billionaires like Denis O'Brien and Larry Goodman – not by the people who produce the wealth.

“Without socialism - without a reorganization of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of common property... green coated soldiers will guard the fraudulent gains of the capitalist and the landlord from the thin hands of the poor.”

Connolly wanted freedom from the British Empire, but he understood that a capitalist Ireland would see the Irish rich use the state to hold down working-class people. How right he was! Just look at how the Guards intervened on the Debenhams picket line or at evictions.

“A carnival of reaction both North and South, which would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements once it endured.”

Connolly understood that the partition of Ireland would only serve to create “a carnival of reaction”- a circus of right wing politics North and South that would hold back progress. He was exactly right. We had the Orange supremacists ruling on one side of the border and the likes of Devalera and Archbishop McQuaid on the other.

But a united Ireland must be part of a fight for a socialist Ireland. People power on both sides of the border can bring workers together and challenge both rotten establishments.

“It’s not a Labour Party the workers need. It’s a revolutionary party pledged to overthrow the capitalist class in the only way it can be done – by putting up barricades and taking over factories by force. There is no other way.”

We have had decades of the Irish Labour Party going in with the establishment and turning on working class people. They always joined the Golden Circle instead of fighting it. Connolly understood that the substantial changes we need – to end the housing crisis or tackle inequality – always requires people power – big protests by working class people that are accompanied by strikes and workplace occupations.

“Yes friends, governments in capitalist society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class”

It’s like he could see our corrupt landlord TDs and their connections to big business. He knew exactly what an Ireland without socialism would look like. The politicians and senior civil servants, the judges and police chiefs, are all part of one ruling class.

Voting in the left can certainly weaken them – but you have to challenge the whole machine, not just change the staff in the Dáil. Connolly was wide to the real nature of politics under capitalism.

“The election of a socialist to any public body is only valuable insofar as it is the return of a disturber of the public peace.”

It is important to elect left wing TDs, MLAs and Councillors but only if they act as a voice for movements on the streets and in our workplaces. Connolly believed their job was to be “disturbers of the public peace” – people who stir up struggle and encourage working class people to fight back.

“Let us be practical. We want something practical. Is always the cry of humdrum mediocrity afraid to face the stern necessity of uncompromising action... Don’t be practical in politics. To be practical in that sense means that you have schooled yourself to think along the lines and in the grooves which those who would rob you would desire you to think.”

Socialists are always told by liberals and Labour Party heads that our politics isn’t “practical” – but their “practical” politics is about nursing capitalism back to health by making working class people suffer. They claim we’ll get rewards later. But the rewards never come, only the pain.

“Socialism properly implies above all things the cooperative control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this cooperative control the public ownership by the state is not socialism – it is only State Capitalism.”

For Connolly socialism was about far more democracy – if you just nationalise an industry that’s not socialism. It’s just capitalism with a nationalised industry or what Connolly called “State Capitalism”. For James Connolly working class assemblies had to oversee industries – a national network of such assemblies would elect delegates to a worker’s parliament.

“All hail then to the mob the incarnation of progress!”

We are told that progress is handed down by enlightened members of the establishment. But Connolly argued that the rule of tyrant Kings and Queens was only ever ended by people power. The same goes for capitalism. There is no way we will overthrow the corporate system that threatens our whole planet without faith in “the mob”.

“Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Freethinker, Buddhist and Muslim will cooperate together ... to abolish the capitalist system.”

Connolly was passionately against divisions in the working class between people of different colour or religion and between men and women. He famously said that women were often “the slave of the slave”. If we want to get rid of capitalism we have to overcome divisions, often spread from the top by billionaire owned media outlets to divide us, and unite.

If you agree, why not join us? Click [here](#) to get in touch.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

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