

James Connolly Commemoration



An event in Derry to commemorate the life, work and legacy of James Connolly was held on 26th July last to coincide with Connolly's return to Ireland – via Derry in the Gasyard. This latter point in some ways set the tone for the evening with a glaring omission of anything about the Protestant working class. Instead we had an evening of republican socialists looking at Connolly's life and taking stock of the republican socialist world and worldview. This in itself was not really surprising, given the topic and the speakers selected but it was still all in all an interesting event.

Labour historian Emmet O'Connor kicked things off and gave quite an entertaining account of Connolly's politics and relationship to socialist republicanism, claiming Larkin was a more ardent nationalist in many respects. He stressed Connolly's clarity of thought and the accessibility of his writings but returned (maybe because of the audience) to his republicanism and place in the pantheon of that ideology rather than his syndicalism, which had a bit of a poor show. This has been a feature for Emmet O'Connor (the seminal historian of Irish syndicalism) in recent years, with a fascination for industrial unionism replaced somewhat with a fascination for socialist republicanism. His work on Larkin certainly has moved in that direction, emphasis-wise, and his discussion of Connolly was similarly focused, which disappointed for there was little else mentioned about syndicalism and most of that was dismissive - cast aside in favour of vanguardism by a number of speakers.

Tommy McKearney for the Independent Workers' Union

followed with a talk mainly about trade unionism in the south and social partnership, and the need for people to go for a dual unionist position as a response. He held back from actually recruiting for the Independent Workers Union of which he is an organiser, but tied in his narrative very much with Connolly's stance on Irish-based unions and the One Big Union idea (albeit alongside the Vanguard party). He was a bit adrift at times and more than a little vague and was followed in like style by Bernadette McAliskey. Bernadette always had good flourishes and is a gifted speaker if more than a little patronising to her audience, but basically stuck to a very republican interpretation of this is where 'we' (republicans) have been and where 'we' (republican socialists) should be headed. Cue more talk of 'organising' those pesky working class proles, looking back at 'our' history but to 'agitate, educate and organise' on the basis of the society we have and the one we'd like to see, i.e. a socialist republic of some sort. The floor responded in kind with two Scottish members of long-time Provo cheerleaders, the Revolutionary Communist Party at their earnest best, though their appeal that we have no more to do with the Labour Party was a good laugh. A Socialist Workers' Party representative reinforced the 'organise our class' stuff and Éamonn McCann made a call for two priorities - work on supporting the dissident prisoners in Maghaberry in their campaign for better conditions and activism against the public assemblies bill, including an October 5th march especially focused on this. Undoubtedly the republican prisoner stuff is about maintaining

the link between the local Trots and the anti-agreement former Provos and Irps well ahead of and in preparation for the Stormont elections next year. The Irps though, may well decide to go it alone and some of the Republican Network for Unity people in Derry have already announced they intend to stand a candidate next year. Ironically, the evening ended on a word from Emmet O'Connor that Connolly's life tells us to stick to one's principles and don't fall in with the 'ultras', at that point I thought, 'I'll get me coat'.



Derry Pride



Derry had its first Pride march on 28 August and the event was a resounding success. Colourful, raucous and refreshingly free of the commercialism that has come to dominate Belfast Pride in recent years.

The march followed the route of the October 1968 civil rights march from the Waterside to the Guildhall and the marchers were supported by thousands on their way along the route. Of course, a small protest was held by religious bigots but they were dwarfed by the huge turn out and the festive

nature of the procession.

Members of Organise! helped carry the 40 foot Rainbow Flag, and a couple of red and black flags,

The huge support that the event got on the streets, along the length of the procession, is vital in sending out the message that homophobes and homophobic attacks will no longer be tolerated in the city. Unfortunately the message hasn't quite got through to some as an organiser of the days events was later attacked by four men as he left a pub in the city.