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James Connolly, A Full Life: A Biography of Ireland's Renowned Trade Unionist and Leader of the 1916 Easter Rising

Donal Nevin

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‘Hasn’t it been a full life, Lillie, and isn’t this a good end?’, were James Connolly’s last words to his wife in Dublin Castle in the early hours of 12 May 1916 just before his execution for his part in leading the Easter Rising.

James Connolly, the son of Irish immigrants, was born in Edinburgh. The first fourteen years of his life were spent in Edinburgh and the next seven years in the King’s Liverpool Regiment in Ireland. In 1889, he returned to Edinburgh where he was a socialist activist and organiser for seven years. In 1896, at the age of 28, he was invited to Dublin as socialist organiser, founding the Irish Republican Socialist Party and editing *The Workers’ Republic*.

Connolly spent seven years in America between 1903 and 1910, returning to Ireland in 1910 as organiser of the Socialist Party of Ireland. Connolly was appointed Ulster Organiser of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union by James Larkin, succeeding him as acting general secretary in October 1914. As Commander of the Irish Citizen Army, Connolly joined with leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the Easter Rising in 1916, becoming Commandant-General of the Dublin Division of the Army of the Republic and Vice-President of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic.

For their part in the Easter Rising, Connolly and thirteen of his fellow revolutionaries were executed in Kilmainham Gaol by the British government. Connolly, the last to be executed, was wounded in the Rising and had to be strapped to a chair to face the firing squad.

This biography deals with Connolly’s activities as soldier, agitator, propagandist, orator, socialist organiser, pamphleteer, trade union leader, insurgent, and traces the evolution of his political thinking as social democrat, revolutionist, syndicalist, revolutionary socialist, insurrectionist. It is based largely on Connolly’s prolific writings in twenty-seven journals in Scotland, England, Ireland, France and America, and some 200 letters which are particularly revealing of his relationships with colleagues. *James Connolly* is the very best survey of Connolly’s remarkable life and times.

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