



James Connolly, by Dublin artist Brian O'Neill. Above: A letter sent by Connolly to Éamonn Ceannt on Easter Sunday morning, summoning him to a meeting at which it was decided to go ahead with the Rising the following day, despite Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order.

MILITARY ARCHIVES/
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Right: Dr Darragh Gannon, Curatorial Researcher to the National Museum of Ireland's Exhibition, 'Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising'.

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burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bone and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last warlord". Europe's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity.

The military plans for the 1916 Rising have not survived. However, during 1915 James Connolly provided a tactical blueprint for what was attempted during Easter Week. In a series of articles, entitled 'Insurrection and Warfare', Connolly presented historical case studies on street fighting. Using the Belgian Revolution (1830), the June Days uprising in Paris (1848) and the Moscow Insurrection (1905), as examples, he emphasised the tactical superiority of defensive warfare if reinforced by cleverly positioned barricades, thereby exposing state forces to lateral lines of fire from 'civilian soldiers'. Subsequently 'kidnapped' by the military council on 19 January 1916, he remained locked in political and strategic discussion with Mac Diarmada, Pearse and Plunkett for three days, agreeing to join their Easter Rising. In Joseph Plunkett, who had predominantly mapped-out a Dublin-based Rising, Connolly had found a kindred spirit.

"Bill, we are going out to be slaughtered." These were the words uttered by Connolly to William O'Brien on Easter Monday morning. Connolly's performance that week as Commandant-General Dublin Brigade belied such fatalism. On leading a combined Irish Volunteer and Irish Citizen Army force into the GPO, Connolly ordered the men to smash the windows and barricade them, in keeping with street fighting exercise.

He later stood beside Pearse as the latter read the Proclamation, to which

Connolly had almost certainly contributed several articles. Most rebels' recollection of Connolly is of an authoritative military leader despatching orders. One such order saw the raising of the Starry Plough flag over William Martin Murphy's Imperial Hotel.

Connolly was a highly visible presence on Sackville Street preparing and repairing barricades, in keeping with anticipations of a British infantry attack. Instead, from Wednesday, artillery shells from Trinity College rained down on the rebel positions. Connolly was militarily unprepared for this tactical upturn. Sniper fire increasingly raked the streets surrounding the GPO. On one Thursday sortie into Prince's Street, Connolly took a stray bullet to the arm. He quietly had his wound dressed in the GPO before returning to Middle Abbey Street. Within minutes, however, he was injured again, this time seriously, a bullet having shattered his left ankle. Incapacitated and in acute pain, Connolly survived his final days in the GPO on a makeshift mattress, dictating orders. In one latter moment of light relief he was to remark of his unfavourable circumstance: "A morning in bed, a good book to read, and an insurrection, all at the same time. It's revolution de luxe."

James Connolly was executed on 12 May 1916. His had been a hurried uprising against long-established authority.

Dr Darragh Gannon, UCD, is currently Curatorial Researcher to the National Museum of Ireland's 'Proclaiming a Republic: The 1916 Rising' exhibition



'Connolly'

By Liam MacGabhann

*The man was all shot through that came today
Into the barrack square;
A soldier I – I am not proud to say
We killed him there;
They brought him from the prison hospital;
To see him in that chair
I thought his smile would far more quickly call
A man to prayer.*

*Maybe we cannot understand this thing
That makes these rebels die;
And yet all things love freedom – and the Spring
Clear in the sky;
I think I would not do this deed again
For all that I hold by;
Gaze down my rifle at his breast – but then
A soldier I.*

*They say that he was kindly – different too,
Apart from all the rest;
A lover of the poor; and all shot through,
His wounds ill drest,
He came before us, faced us like a man,
He knew a deeper pain
Than blows or bullets – ere the world began;
Died he in vain?*

*Ready – present; And he just smiling – God!
I felt my rifle shake
His wounds were opened out and round that chair
Was one red lake;
I swear his lips said 'Fire!' when all was still
Before my rifle spat
That cursed lead – and I was picked to kill
A man like that!*

AN ASSESSMENT DR LUCY COLLINS



The idealism of James Connolly's life, and the stark facts of his death, are the twin concerns of this poem. It offers a striking perspective on the subject; its speaker is a British soldier who remembers his role in Connolly's execution at Kilmainham Gaol.

The stumbling rhythm expresses the soldier's regret and uncertainty – 'Maybe we cannot understand this thing / That makes these rebels die'. His thoughts are disjointed but he recognises the human need that shaped the rebellion, the universal desire for freedom and justice. Connolly's capacity to inspire loyalty among his followers is given an almost religious significance here, and its powerful effect is clearly felt by the speaker himself.

Yet though he reflects on the moral force of the rebels' actions, he registers his own responsibility as a soldier too. The poem meditates on the obligation of the individual to the group. Connolly is set apart from the rest of the rebels in his commitment to improving the lives of the poor, and his suffering expresses the collective distress of all marginalised people.

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