



BERNARD SHAW AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey, and the Dead James Connolly



Nelson O'Ceallaigh Ritschel

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Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries

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For Shaw, O'Casey, Connolly

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Introduction

On 13 January 1893, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) held its inaugural conference (a three-day affair) in Bradford, West Yorkshire. Bernard Shaw attended as one of the Fabian Society's representatives and did so with the intent of "permeating" the ILP in order to supplant "Liberalism with Progressivism" (quoted in Holroyd, *Shaw*, I, 270). On the evening of the conference's third day, Shaw attended a service at the Labour Church, which attracted, according to Shaw, 4,000 people (*Shaw Diaries*, II, 894). No doubt, the ILP conference and church service, held only hours after the conference ended, attracted the interest of many socialists and would-be socialists throughout Britain, including the Edinburgh-born Irish socialist and ILP member James Connolly.

The Labour Church, a Christian socialist society led by John Trevor, attempted to take advantage of the 1893 surge of interest by launching a monthly journal, *The Labour Prophet*, the following year. In its February 1894 issue, an anonymous work was included, titled *The Agitator's Wife*. Written in the form of a short story overwhelmingly composed of dialogue, scholars Maria-Danielle Dick, Kristy Lusk, and Willy Maley argue convincingly that it is the play (or a version of it) authored by James Connolly and alluded to by his daughter Nora Connolly O'Brien in her 1935 *James Connolly: Portrait of a Rebel Father* ("The Agitator's Wife", 1). If the story is this play, its dialogue and characterizations have

much more in common with the New Drama that was emerging in the 1890s, including with Shaw's early plays, than with popular melodramas. Its protagonist, for example, within her modern marriage is strong, independently minded, highly intelligent, and accepted by her husband and his male colleagues as an equal. One might even be tempted to believe its author was familiar with *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. In fact, these years may well have begun Connolly's long interest in Shaw and Shaw's work, which continued after he emigrated to Dublin in 1896 to establish the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP). In 1899, Connolly invited the recently returned to Ireland, from London, journalist Frederick Ryan to lecture the ISRP on Shaw, Shaw's Fabian lectures, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and Shaw's early plays. This study begins from this point and will culminate with the masterful socialistic works of the 1920s authored by Shaw and Sean O'Casey, in which Connolly is a distinct presence.

Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey, and the Dead James Connolly is, in one sense, a continuation of *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* (2011). The earlier study explored Shaw's involvement with socialist developments within Ireland from 1899 through the 1916 Easter Rising, and argued for a stage dialogue between Shaw and John Millington Synge, ranging from 1903 to beyond Synge's 1909 death—including Synge's reworking of Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) into *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and Shaw's *Playboy*-like *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909), written during Synge's final days. That book also explored the simultaneous track of the increasingly militant James Connolly, while showing the interactions—direct and indirect—between him and Shaw, from Shaw's active involvement in Irish politics beginning in 1910 through the Rising in 1916. That monograph contributed to critical literature by reconnecting Shaw to the fields of Irish theatre and politics. However, Shaw's Irish involvement did not end in 1916 but instead increased—significantly impacting Sean O'Casey.

As the previous study functioned by contextualizing Shaw, Synge, and Connolly within the Ireland of their time, the current study is similarly propelled by contextualizing Shaw and O'Casey in relation to Connolly's reputations after his execution in 1916. In doing so, the study examines the parallel tracks of Shaw and O'Casey, their interweaving with Irish labour and political movements up to 1922, then into their literary and critical responses through the 1920s, in *Saint Joan*, *The Plough and the Stars*, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, and *The Silver Tassie*.

Such an exploration of Shaw and O’Casey’s works, strongly suggests that Connolly remained a presence for both, though for diverse reasons. While much of what Connolly advocated for had faded into the shadows by the time the Irish Free State was formed in 1922, Connolly permeates the 1920s masterworks of Shaw and O’Casey as a socialist theorist and, or as a militant activist—either in terms of his socialism or nationalism, depending on Shaw’s and O’Casey’s respective perceptions, and changing times. There was no escaping, for either Shaw or O’Casey, Robert Lynd’s 1917 assertion that Connolly was “Ireland’s first socialist martyr” (“Introduction”, vii).

Near the end of Shaw’s 1904 *John Bull’s Other Island*, a play O’Casey much admired and one that Connolly echoed in his last play through character relations, the defrocked priest Peter Keegan ends a long speech, in which he has detailed how Tom Broadbent will efficiently develop the village of Rosscullen, in order to make profits for the land syndicate he heads, then efficiently ruin the syndicate’s investors in order to acquire for himself the resort “hotel for a few shillings on the pound”: “For four wicked centuries the world has dreamed this foolish dream of efficiency; and the end is not yet. But the end will come” (193). Keegan’s is a prophecy foretelling the collapse of usury capitalism, the formidable goal of socialists—including Connolly. A bourgeois eyewitness to Connolly’s 1916 revolution, L. G. Redmond-Howard in *Six Days of the Irish Republic*, asked why the “general policy of Fabianism” did not serve Connolly’s goal (85). He found the answer, he tells us, in Connolly’s 1915 *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, where Connolly calls for all “to live freely” in a state where such freedom will be “no longer the property of a class”. Redmond-Howard also “discovered the key not only to the man but to the movement as well, in his definition of prophesy: ‘The only true prophets are they who carve out the future they announce.... Every dreamer should also be a man of action’” (85). While “action” can have numerous interpretations, and can equally apply to Connolly, Shaw, and O’Casey, the catalyst for the latter two in the Irish context was Connolly, whether they agreed or disagreed with his methods or directions. Whether right or wrong, in his efforts to force the realization of Keegan’s prophesy, Connolly was integrated into Shaw’s and O’Casey’s separate consciences, profoundly impacting their major literary and theoretical work of the 1920s.

Chapter 2 introduces one of the study’s thematic threads, the sewing machine, stemming from William Butler Yeats’ dream of being haunted

by a clicking and grinning sewing machine, following the 1894 premiers of his short play *The Land of Heart's Desire* and Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, as told in Yeats' 1922 *Trembling of the Veil*. A question that should arise, which Yeats likely did not consider, is why a sewing machine? The answer is to be found by considering what the sewing machine, from the 1890s to the 1920s, represented. Dominated globally in the period by the Singer Company, the machines were the product of sweated labour, which, in turn, made possible mass-producing clothing companies that utilized sweated labour. Yeats' nightmare implied that Shaw's work was linear and uniformly stitched, like the products of a sewing machine, yet the machine fostered the industrialized poverty produced by modern capitalism that Shaw's political work sought to remedy. This chapter suggests a different take on Yeats' dream.

Pursuing the Singer thread, the chapter goes on to quote from a 1905 letter on sweated labour conditions in Singer's New Jersey factory, written by one of its workers at the time, the very same James Connolly, who emigrated to the United States in 1903. Soon after Connolly returned to live in Ireland, both he and Shaw separately delivered talks in Scotland in October 1910: Shaw advocated for equal incomes while Connolly argued for the syndicalization of all labourers. Within six months, Singer's Kilbowie factory, along the River Clyde, was on strike with fully unified workers, regardless of skill levels, nationalities, languages, religions, and, most importantly, genders, who demanded increased salaries. The strike inspired James Larkin, in Dublin to lead the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) into a series of syndicalist strikes against Irish railways—including the Great Northern Railway that employed labourer John Casey, to become known Sean O'Casey. O'Casey's efforts in the Transport Union would involve drafting the constitution of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), a labour militia organized following Shaw's call for the arming of labour at a London rally supporting Dublin workers during the 1913 Lockout. The ICA would be the militia Connolly led in the 1916 insurrection, albeit without O'Casey.

Chapter 3 continues the socialist thread with Connolly towards and beyond Dublin's 1916 Easter Rising. Connolly's play *Under Which Flag?*, is viewed in the light of *The Agitator's Wife*, Connolly's first play. Given the would-be literary structure of that first play, *Under Which Flag?* must be seen within the closer ties between Shaw and Connolly that were still emerging as it borrowed a social construct from *John Bull's Other Island*, as well as being a response to Shaw's second Irish play, *O'Flaherty, V. C.*

The chapter continues by considering responses to Connolly's 1916 Rising, including Shaw's and Vladimir Lenin's, the latter in Russia's October 1917 Revolution. Shaw's *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1917–1918) is discussed in the Russian context, as well as efforts by Dublin labour leader William O'Brien to rebuild the ITGWU following Connolly's death. In capitalizing on his comradeship with Connolly, O'Brien initiates the 1917 reprinting of Connolly's theoretical works, *Labour in Irish History* (1910) and *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (1915) into a volume titled *Labour in Ireland*, which features an introduction by Shaw's friend Robert Lynd. Lynd, along with Shaw, George Russell, Horace Plunkett, and Richard Tobin (the surgeon who treated Connolly prior to his execution), contributed funds for Connolly's wife and children after the execution. Both Shaw and O'Casey responded to Lynd's Introduction: Shaw in *War Issues for Irishmen* (1918) and O'Casey in *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army* (1919). The latter marked O'Casey's beginning as a professional writer, as well as his public distancing from Connolly's reputation. Having realized that O'Brien's efforts to solidify control of the ITGWU included efforts to minimize James Larkin's role as the union's General Secretary (in anticipation of Larkin's eventual return from the United States), O'Casey began aiming his criticisms against O'Brien. As O'Brien continued to draw on his Connolly ties to enhance his position within Labour, Connolly also became an O'Casey target as the ITGWU grew into two camps, one pro-Larkin and the other pro-Connolly. The above thus sets the stage(s) for Shaw and O'Casey in the 1920s, with the latter drawing inspiration from Shaw.

Chapter 4 moves into the new decade with Shaw's third Irish-set play, *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, the fourth part of the play-cycle *Back to Methuselah* (1922), which is approached within the context of the previous decade. After the years of suffering a note of hope is suggested through the choice of the elderly gentleman Barlow to remain in Ireland instead of colluding with the British Prime Minister's unconscionable lie, even if it means Barlow's death. As the Irish War for Independence gives way to Civil War, O'Casey emerges as an Abbey Theatre playwright, and is viewed in the chapter through his plays *The Shadow of the Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock*. The latter connects directly to the Singer sewing machine thematic thread that runs throughout this monograph. A backdrop to the chapter is Larkin's return to Ireland and the ensuing battle for control of the ITGWU, which soon ends up in court with charges filed by

both sides. Larkin's charges were dismissed and O'Brien emerged victorious, which led to Larkin's expulsion from the union he had founded in 1909. Against what he considered as a great betrayal of Larkin, O'Casey begins writing *The Plough and the Stars* for the coming tenth anniversary of the Rising. Shaw for his part not only visited Ireland for the last time, but was working on his masterwork, *Saint Joan*.

Chapter 5 focuses on Shaw's play set in fifteenth-century France, within the Irish context of 1910–1922. While numerous scholars have detected Irish echoes within *Saint Joan*, this chapter argues that the echoes go further. While not arguing that *Saint Joan* is about Connolly's martyrdom, the chapter does argue Connolly is a presence in the play. Given that both the play and its preface significantly focus on the process of history, Connolly's execution, overseen by a zealous British general much like Shaw's portrait of the feudal English Earl of Warwick, is examined, particularly through details that Shaw most likely, even definitely knew. The small group of individuals, including Shaw, that financially contributed to Connolly's partner/wife Lily and children, had access to knowledge of Connolly's last days and the British efforts to proceed with his execution through Richard Tobin, who medically treated the severely wounded Connolly. The decision to execute descended into a contentious debate between the British Commanding-General John Maxwell and the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, with the civil leadership giving way to the military. The links between Joan's Church trial, and Connolly's hastily conducted Field General Court Martial carried out by British officers with no legal background, cannot be ignored, nor can the British efforts to erase as much of Connolly as possible after his death. Again, it is not the book's contention that *Saint Joan* is about Connolly, rather it argues that Connolly's actions and execution informed Shaw's writing of his major 1924 play, and thus reveals additional threads to the play's tapestry and its portrayal of the process of history.

Chapter 6 considers *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey's 1926 play set leading up to and during the 1916 Easter Rising, Connolly's Revolution. This represents the first time the play has been thoroughly explored within the deep context of Connolly's ICA, some of which was made possible by Jeffrey Leddin's 2019 *The Labour Hercules: The Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republicanism, 1913–1923*. O'Casey's setting of Acts I and II in November 1915 is explored, being the month Connolly increased his preparations for Irish revolution. At the same time Connolly continued his interest in theatre by appointing Abbey Theatre actor Helena Molony

to head both the Irish Women's Workers Union and the Irish Workers' Dramatic Company, the same month Shaw's *O'Flaherty, V. C.* entered rehearsals at the Abbey, and then subsequently withdrawn. The events surrounding the play's rehearsals, withdrawal, and the script itself, would clearly have been reported to Connolly by Molony and fellow Abbey actor Sean Connolly (no relation to James)—both of who were also ICA members; Sean Connolly held the rank of Captain, much like *The Plough and the Stars*'s Jack Clitheroe. O'Casey thematically criticizes Connolly in *The Plough*'s Act I for inducing men, such as Clitheroe, to leave their homes and families to go to their death, as voiced by Nora Clitheroe. Nora, however, also expresses Connolly's contention in *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* that working-class women were slaves to their husbands, who were themselves slaves to their capitalist employers. In essence, O'Casey criticizes the insurrectionist Connolly, not the socialist Connolly.

The Plough and the Stars's Acts III and IV are read in the context of specific events in the Easter Rising, complete with echoes from Shaw's post-Rising letters to *The New Statesman* and London's *Daily News*. O'Casey's portrait of the play's tenement residents looting during the Rising's early days, specifically in the play's Act III, is shown to be influenced by Shaw's *Saint Joan*. While the bourgeois make up of much of the Abbey's 1926 audience would have viewed the looting of Dublin businesses through a class lens, O'Casey does not demonize his looters—recalling Shaw's distinct refusal to demonize the historical individuals who colluded in Joan's burning. This is carried to the closing moments of *Plough*'s Act IV when two British soldiers sing of home as the rebel headquarters in the General Post Office burns—the soldiers know they will soon be in the Great War's front-line trenches. In Act IV we learn of Clitheroe's death within the Imperial Hotel, where the ICA's huge socialist *Plough and the Stars* flag flew, machine stitched, likely with a Singer machine. The recounting of Clitheroe's death, and the portrait of Nora's descent into debilitating sorrow, rings of the uselessness of Clitheroe's death, and the uselessness of all the suffering and death that the Rising produced for Dublin's poor—caught in Connolly's conflagration. O'Casey leaves his audience with the emptiness of failed rebellion.

Chapter 7 pulls the threads of the study together by examining Shaw's deposition of socialism, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* and O'Casey's war play *The Silver Tassie*, both published in 1928. The discussion of the *Guide* begins with its exploration of

nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, where smaller companies built around inventions were bought up by larger capitalist companies for their inventions, which were then expanded through massive production with sweated labour. This led to the production of small machines for home use, such as sewing machine, creating an ever-expanding consumer-market. The *Guide's* Irish connections are looked at, including Connolly's presence in Shaw's discussion of labour and syndicalism, and, importantly, in his advocacy for equal incomes. Connolly's theoretical work, which Shaw had access to, is probed for Connolly's views on equal incomes. If, as argued, Shaw had read Connolly's *Labour in Ireland*, specifically *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, he would have detected the influence of his own 1910 Dublin lecture, "The Poor Law and Destitution in Ireland". The chapter discusses Connolly's "Woman" chapter, where he asserts that working-class women bear the greatest burden under capitalism, especially within marriage. Connolly writes that "The worker is the slave of the capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of the slave" (292). Shaw's *Guide* borrows and reiterates this argument in its "Woman in the Labour Market" chapter, using almost the same language, writing: "as capitalism made a slave of the man, and then by paying the woman through him, made her his slave, she became the slave of a slave, which is the worst sort of slavery" (197).

In turn, *The Silver Tassie* includes not only O'Casey's condemnation of the Great War, an attitude he shared with Connolly, but also his most effective, hitherto undetected, response to Connolly, specifically to his *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (originally from 1915). *The Re-Conquest* inexplicably contains no mention of the Great War and its impact on the Dublin working class in its first years, even though much of Connolly's journalism from that time focused on the War and its impact both on international socialism and socialism within Ireland. It was a strange reversal of August 1914, when during the War's first weeks, O'Casey was endeavouring to force the aristocratic Constance Markievicz out of the ICA, appearing oblivious to the potential destructiveness of War. By building on *Saint Joan's* considerations of the historical process, *The Silver Tassie*, in contrast, foregrounds the destructiveness of the war, and thereby highlights a weakness in one of Connolly's most important theoretical works.

Compared to Shaw's *O'Flaherty, V. C.*, O'Casey's Great War play highlights the war's cost to the Dublin poor. Even the cost to Susie Monican, who forges a new identity by Act III as a self-assured nurse (at first glance

similar to O’Flaherty’s opportunities from the War), is revealed in late Act IV when she can express no empathy with the War maimed. It conforms to the disturbing perception that life was only for the able-bodied. The play’s stark portraits of its characters also reveal that nothing is learned by its main character Harry Heegan. All he takes from the War is loss, the loss of everything that he thought he was. That loss becomes the thrust of the play, epitomized by the soldiers’ question from Act II of, why War? There is no answer by play’s end, only the question of why remaining. An answer may be found in Shaw’s exactly contemporary work, *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, which argues that the Great War, and all wars that will follow, will exist for as long as “we persist in depending on Capitalism for our livelihood and our morals” (156–157).

Although the Introduction to *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* ended by suggesting that that book would demonstrate “Shaw’s legacy in Irish socialism” (6), it only detailed part of that legacy. This present work completes that task.

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Shaw, O’Casey, Connolly: Stitching the Foundation, 1890s–1915

In “The Tragic Generation”, part of his autobiographical *The Trembling of the Veil*, published in 1922, William Butler Yeats made an infamous remark about Bernard Shaw when recalling the 1894 premier runs of his own *The Land of Heart’s Desire* and Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* at London’s Avenue Theatre with Florence Farr: “Presently I had a nightmare that I was haunted by a sewing machine, that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually” (283). Anthony Roche, in his superb *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899–1939*, argues that this scathing comment undermined Shaw’s reputation in Ireland for decades, leading many Irish dramatists, excluding O’Casey, to dismiss Shaw’s plays, and Shaw’s contributions to Irish drama. As Roche points out, Yeats’ envisioned direction for Irish theatre in both 1894 and 1922 meant that “Shaw’s plays [are] anathema to all he valued in the theatre and certainly did not want them staged at the Abbey [Theatre]”. The exception, prior to 1916, was *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909), which had more to do with Shaw’s defiance of the British censor, and the Abbey’s stand against the British administration in Ireland, than it did with Yeats embracing Shaw’s canon (81).¹ Indeed, Shaw’s masterful Irish play *John Bull’s Other Island* did not premier at the Abbey in 1904 but at London’s Royal Court Theatre.² Furthermore, Yeats’ nightmare image of Shaw contributed to the exclusion of

Shaw's contributions to modern Ireland through the twentieth century and beyond. Roche counters such exclusion and prejudices with his Shaw chapter in the above book. Recent scholars who have contributed to revitalizing Shaw's significant presence in modern Irish drama and politics include Peter Gahan in *Shaw and the Irish Literary Tradition* (2010), myself in *Shaw, Synge, Connolly, and Socialist Provocation* (2011), David Clare in *Bernard Shaw's Irish Outlook* (2016), and the 2012 International Shaw Society conference Audrey McNamara organized at University College Dublin. All of the above built on Declan Kiberd's astute arguments in *Inventing Ireland* (1995) and *Irish Classics* (2000) that Shaw be considered an Irish dramatist (*Inventing*, 181). Yet as Roche argues, Yeats' nightmare commentary was a damning slight against Shaw's critical reputation in Ireland, and perhaps elsewhere, generating later perceptions that Shaw's plays were mechanical and inorganic (81). Yet of all the machines of the Industrial Revolution, why a sewing machine?

Sewing machines in 1894—and 1922—were lifeless unless operated by a sewer (sewist), where linear and uniform stitching became possible yet was devoid of personal artistry. Such, of course, was incongruous to Yeats' aesthetical sensibilities. However, there was more to sewing machines than how they sewed. The machines by the 1870s were mass produced, and were shortly in most middle and upper-class homes, used by domestic servants tasked with repairing or altering their employers' clothing. Perhaps Yeats was insinuating a commercialism and domesticity, with such reflecting Yeats' anticipation of some popular fascination for Shaw, as recalled for 1922; Yeats claimed he was "aghast" with *Arms and the Man's* energy while seeing it performed (many times) in 1894 (Roche, 81). Yet the other side of the popularity of sewing machines is the fact that because the machines were so functional, they made large scale shirt and clothing factories possible, where sweated workers toiled in poorly lit and overcrowded conditions throughout the Western world (then entire world)—and *all* of the mass produced sewing machines at the time were manufactured by underpaid, unrepresented workers toiling through long hours in a prolonged workweek with no safety precautions, and no protection if injured on the job.

The leader in the sewing machine industry was the Singer Sewing Machine Company that in 1873 opened a new factory on 32 acres of land in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in the United States, with a workforce of 6,000; in the same year Singer opened a factory in Kilbowie Clydebank, Scotland, with 2,000 workers. By 1885, the demand for sewing machines

in the British Isles and Europe led to the opening of a new Kilbowie factory, which became Singer's largest with 7,000 employees ("Made in Jersey"). In 1902 Singer opened a third massive factory in Podolsk Russia, then in Buenos Aires, controlling roughly twenty-five thousand mostly unskilled workers world-wide. Sewing machines in the 1890s and early 1900s featured cast iron housing with metal mechanical gears and parts connected to a cast iron foot pedal via a rubber belt that was processed from an African or South American rubber plantation by grotesquely exploited workers; a wooden cabinet, which needed to be built and stained, supported the machine on an iron base. Production involved many workers in different jobs in constant repetition to create thousands of machines, of which the majority in turn made sweated clothing factories and industries, of all sizes, practicable. The sewing machine represented much more than an affront to Yeats' artistic vision through its domestic functionality as the machine symbolized, in the industrial age, more than something linear; it was an international embodiment of the industrialized abuse of workers.

Given Shaw's continuous desire to eradicate poverty in favour of true equality, Yeats' sewing machine commentary is ultimately not completely outrageous; it might be more illuminating in its fuller context—namely, that the machine's manufacturing would eventually reflect workers' revolutions. In fact, five months prior to an important strike action at Singer's Kilbowie, Clydeside, factory in April 1911, Shaw lectured in Edinburgh and Glasgow, the latter within the industrial Clydeside district, with Beatrice Webb (in Edinburgh), Sidney Webb (in Glasgow), and on his own in both.³ On 26 October 1910 at Edinburgh's University Union, Shaw's lecture, "University Socialism", called for equal incomes: "Socialism meant a state of society in which every person received from their birth a sufficient income to keep them in a dignified and handsome condition, without any condition as to character or anything else. Society would start with the assumption that everybody born must be in that position, and also with the further advantage that everybody's income should be precisely and exactly equal" (quoted in "University Socialism", 8).⁴ Calling for equal incomes within miles of sweated workers on Clyde's riverside, including Singer's workforce at Kilbowie, had to have provocatively registered with the socialists and trade unionists who attended the lectures. The lectures, after all, were presented on the eve of what would become the next decade's Red Clydeside Movement, and they would not be the last lectures Shaw delivered during labour unrest.

Shaw's 1910 Glasgow and Edinburgh lectures with the Webbs and solo, were part of their Fabian campaign against destitution, which followed, by two weeks, Shaw's earlier campaign lecture in Dublin.⁵ The lecture, "The Poor Law and Irish Destitution", relegated the Poor Law system as cruel and ineffective, while indicting the comfortable classes for manufacturing and allowing poverty.⁶ Shaw, as an active world betterer against poverty produced by industrialized capitalism, harboured no interest in being a disciple of Yeats' professed aristocracy of art. He openly dismissed Yeats' mystical Irish leanings in 1904 when *John Bull's Other Island's* Larry Doyle dismisses the premise of Yeats' and Lady Augusta Gregory's play *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902): "the Irishman in Ireland" "cant be intelligently political;... If you want to interest him in Ireland you've got to call the unfortunate island Kathleen ni Hoolihan [sic] and pretend she's a little old woman" (*John Bull's*, 81) However, Yeats also noted in "The Tragic Generation": "I delighted in Shaw, the formidable man. He could hit my enemies and the enemies of all I loved, as I could never hit" (283).

One of those enemies included the Dublin capitalist William Martin Murphy, who, through his *Irish Independent* newspaper campaigned against Dublin providing a gallery to house Hugh Lane's impressionist paintings collection,⁷ and led Dublin employers to lockout unionized workers in 1913.⁸ Indeed, Shaw took aim at Murphy, and Murphy's employer class, in 1913, making a crucial impact on Ireland. So, while Yeats unflatteringly portrayed Shaw as a clicking, smiling sewing machine, Shaw was one who could, and would, strike at what the sewing machine fully represented for the working classes, and did so with a formidable wit in the theatre and scathing prose on the speakers' platform and in his journalism.

The horrors of sewing machines for toilers only increased with the beginning of the new century, as in the Clydeside and all of Singer's factories, which would historically witness, in one form or another, revolution. In December 1904, the Singer Company opened its new and ornate office building in St. Petersburg, Russia, on the Nevsky Prospekt Street, heralding the international achievements of the company and signalling the elevation of its owners to the extravagances of the gilded age—yet the building also heralded the other side to gilded wealth. Opened for little more than a month, the building witnessed hundreds if not thousands of proletariat factory workers and reforming agitators march past, with Russian Orthodox icon banners, on route to the Winter Palace

to present petitions and grievances to Tsar Nicholas II. They were met by the Tsar's troops who fired on them, known as Russia's Bloody Sunday. As if immune to such protests and slaughters that evolved into the crushed 1905 Russian Revolution with its 15,000 plus deaths, and ignoring the omen of this Bloody Sunday, the Singer Company furthered its symbols of grandiose achievements in 1908 with its new skyscraper headquarters building in New York—all while the New Jersey factory significantly increased its non-union and underpaid workforce (Mieville, 25; Nevin, *Connolly*, 246). On 19 November 1905, an Edinburgh-born Irish labourer at the New Jersey factory, who had emigrated in 1903 from Dublin named James Connolly, wrote to a friend in Scotland:

I have left Troy [New York] and settled in Newark [New Jersey]. I was working for six weeks as a machinist in a shop here, what we call an engineer at home. I had a Socialist foreman and he employed me at laying out work as it is called, and between us we buncoed the capitalist into the belief that I was an expert mechanic. If ever I am fortunate enough to escape from this cursed country and get back to Europe, when I meet Tommy Clarke he and I will have a great talk about 'our trade' in Scotland and America. At present I am running a lathe in Singer's Sewing Machine factory at Elizabeth. It is like at [Kilbowie] Clydebank. Employs between 8,000 and 9,000 men and a special train runs every morning from Newark. So I and Neil MacLean [in Scotland] are employed by the same boss. (*Between Comrades*, 279)

This very James Connolly eventually began unionizing Singer's New Jersey factory workers. In April 1906, he added German to his languages in order to unionize German workers, which matched his fluency in Italian as he unionized Singer's Italian workers. It was Singer's practice to employ workers of varying cultures to obstruct solidarity, but unifying all workers, regardless of nationalities, religions, genders, and skill levels, would become Connolly's approach to organized labour. Nevertheless, Connolly left Singer's factory once he was "marked" by employers as a union organizer, leaving in an effort to protect his friend at the factory—the socialist foreman alluded to in Connolly's above letter (Nevin, *Connolly*, 252). Connolly would return to Dublin in 1910, within months of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union strike that saw 20,000 women workers striking against nearly 500 waist shirt factories in New York—sweatshops built around rows of sewing machines,

now electric for increased production, in the workers' 12-hours work-days (ilgwu.ilr.cornell.edu/history/earlystruggles.html). A year later saw New York's Triangle Waist Shirt factory fire, in which 145 workers, mostly sewing machine operators, were killed due to being locked-in while at work—with many women workers leaping from the 8th and 9th floors where the factory was located, a block from Washington Square (“Triangle”).

Three months after returning to Ireland, Connolly delivered lectures and talks to small socialist clubs and trade unionist committees in Scotland, just days prior to Shaw's October 1910 Edinburgh and Glasgow lectures. Connolly undoubtedly drew in his talks from his 1908 pamphlet *The Axe to the Root*, stressing the syndicalist tactic of workers' unity to negate the dividing elements management used to stifle unification.⁹ Interestingly, the April 1911 strike at Singer's Kilbowie factory not only called for increased wages, but it was also conducted on the syndicalist tactic for all 11,000 workers, which consisted of Scottish Protestants, Irish Catholics, Russian Jews, skilled and unskilled, and women and men. Two years later, federated employers in Dublin, led by William Martin Murphy, endeavoured to break the syndicalization of Dublin labour, implementing the 1913 Dublin Lockout. During this prolonged action, the former New Jersey Singer employee and union organizer and socialist James Connolly, now based with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), would find himself sharing the speakers' platform with Shaw, united in a cause.

The ITGWU had been formed in 1909 by James Larkin. In 1911, fueled by the initial success of the syndicalist strike at Singer's Kilbowie factory, Larkin took aim at Irish railways; first by endeavouring to unionize workers and then calling for strikes in the Railway shops and divisions. This was specifically attempted with the Great Southern and Western Railway (GSRW) and the Great Northern Railway (GNR). Perhaps not strong enough for two such simultaneous strike actions, the ITGWU's efforts against the railways were unsuccessful. The GSRW's board, including William Martin Murphy and led by its president William Goulding, experimented with locking out all its workers (Yeates, *Lockout*, 3). While nothing had been gained by workers against the GSRW, approximately 90% of workers retained their jobs. The union suffered a worse defeat against the GNR as management sacked all workers suspected of retaining their ITGWU membership (Murray, 81). One employee who was let back, but then dismissed in late 1911 after he was

overheard “praising Jim Larkin” and the ITGWU, was a labourer who had been in the GNR’s employ since 1902 named John O’Casey (Krause, “Notes”, 10). O’Casey, who was not giving up his ITGWU membership, wrote to the GNR in order to ascertain why he was dismissed. After a series of letters, O’Casey was informed that his “service was no longer needed” (qtd. in *O’Casey Letters*, I, 12). In a defiant gesture, O’Casey submitted his correspondence with the Railway’s secretary to the ITGWU’s weekly *Irish Worker*, which its editor, Larkin, published on 4 February 1912. The worker’s gesture was a harbinger of yet another socialist voice for modern Ireland, to be known as Sean O’Casey—who would join the ranks, with Shaw, of Ireland’s important dramatists.

ENTER O’CASEY

O’Casey, like Shaw, was born and raised in Dublin, but most likely not of the genteel poverty that Shaw’s family experienced. Shaw was born south of the River Liffey on Syngé Street, more genteel than not, while O’Casey was born north of the Liffey amid streets of severe poverty. Christopher Murray, in his important O’Casey biography, notes that O’Casey’s family was “lower middle class. Their housing—always rented accommodation—was never ‘slum’ housing in the common understanding of that emotive word”. Still, O’Casey’s family lived among severe poverty that was abundantly visible (Murray, 17). Born four years after 20-year-old Shaw emigrated to London in 1876, O’Casey, according to Murray, was unable to avail himself, as the young Shaw had done, of Dublin’s National Gallery, “for he was ‘too ragged and too shy to venture a visit’” (62). However, O’Casey, like Shaw—and Connolly—was a voracious reader. Such reading over his nine years as a railway labourer led to an enhanced vocabulary. Murray asks rhetorically of the correspondence O’Casey published in the *Irish Worker* with the GNR’s secretary: “Was ever a manual labourer so literate and so literary?” (81).

In his 1945 autobiographical sketch *Drums Under the Window*, O’Casey—by then a renowned dramatist—recalled a friend telling him that Shaw was “The cleverest Irishman the world knows.... A godsend to men who try to think, who’s creating a new world out of a new thought. Read *John Bull’s Other Island* and the Ireland you think you know and love will vanish before your eyes” (*Drums*, 252). This friend informed O’Casey that a “paper-covered” edition of the play could be purchased for sixpence. O’Casey relates that on a pay-day he purchased the sixpence

copy and immediately read it. He was, he tells us, transformed by seeing “Shaw everywhere” and noted that Shaw’s portrait of Ireland was not romantic but as it was, and led him to see Ireland as “being hitched to a power and will to face the facts. And this Irishman Shaw, was helping us to do it” (*Drums*, 255–257).¹⁰ This episode, as depicted by O’Casey, testifies to the success of the sixpence paper edition of Shaw’s major Irish-set play, which Shaw had arranged for with his London publisher Constable to coincide with the 1912 Home Rule Bill. The inexpensive copy, known as the Home Rule edition, was published in January 1912 and made available in Britain and Ireland at a price for most economic classes.¹¹ In 1945, O’Casey was intent on portraying some of the influences and provocations that contributed to his development, such as discovering Shaw soon after his railway sacking.

Following that sacking, O’Casey’s working-class militancy grew in numerous directions (Murray, 82). He became an enthusiast in the Gaelic League, joined the St. Laurence O’Toole’s Club—helped organize its Pipers’ Band with O’Casey as its secretary, embraced nationalist directions, and, of course, continued his interest in the ITGWU.

The ITGWU’s early years saw the blending of labour politics with socialism, particularly under Larkin to October 1914 and then under James Connolly to 12 May 1916. As early as 1911, Larkin formed the ITGWU newspaper, the *Irish Worker*. As editor, Larkin denounced “erring employers and corrupt civil servants by name”, perceived enemies of labour, and quickly reached a weekly circulation of 20,000 (Morrissey, *O’Brien*, 55). The paper also provided Larkin with a platform for benefiting workers. In the 29 June 1911 edition, Larkin wrote: “If it is good for the employers... to have clean clothing and good food, and books and music, and pictures, so it is good that the people should have these things also—and that is the claim we are making today” (as quoted in Morrissey, *O’Brien*, 55).

Part of Larkin’s vision for Irish workers and their families was enhanced when the ITGWU acquired Liberty Hall in early 1912, formerly the Northumberland Hotel. The building not only was the ITGWU’s headquarters, it also became the “centre for the social and cultural activities of the union. The ‘Hall’ soon housed the Irish Workers’ Choir, and the Juvenile and Adult Dancers’ class, while an Irish language class was formed, followed by the founding of the Irish Workers’ Dramatic Company” (Larkin, “James Larkin”, 5). Murray states that O’Casey worked on the renovations to the interior of Liberty Hall, including what became the

first stage for the Irish Workers' Dramatic Company (IWDC) (Murray, 94). The company was organized and led by Delia Larkin, with its first performances on St. Stephens Night, 26 December 1912 (Moriarty, "Delia Larkin", 432). While Delia organized the company, the first productions were staged by A. P. Wilson.

Little is known about the Scottish Wilson, who went by A. Patrick Wilson in Ireland, and later as Andrew P. Wilson in Scotland (Gregory, *Shaw, Lady Gregory*, 97). Eleven months prior to the performances in Liberty Hall, Wilson had joined the Abbey Theatre's acting school, where he became a member of the Abbey's second company in March 1912. Wilson's one-act *Victims* was the first play set in a Dublin tenement, and shared the IWDC's first bill with Rutherford Mayne's *The Troth*, Norman McKinnell's *The Bishop's Candlestick*, and Seumas O'Kelly's *The Matchmaker*.

Also in 1912, Wilson became a regular columnist for the *Irish Worker*, signing his articles as "Lucan", "Mac", or "Euchan" (O'Brien, *Forth*, 260; Murray, 95). On 8 February 1913, O'Casey, then a regular at republican Tom Clarke's tobacco and news shop on what is now Parnell Street, wrote to the *Irish Worker* criticizing an article by Wilson, signed as Euchan: "The Rebel Movement: Labour and Its Relation to Home Rule". Wilson argued that as the 1912 Home Rule Bill for Ireland was passed, to be implemented in 1914, the need for armed nationalist struggle was over. Instead, Wilson suggested that Ireland's future battle would be between capitalists and labour (*O'Casey Letters*, I, 13–14). O'Casey contested Euchan's view, insinuating that "Euchan" knew little about Ireland as a Scot: "what does he know about Ireland's past?" (13). *The Irish Worker* printed Wilson's reply in which he reiterated his points; leading to the publishing of O'Casey's further response on 22 February: "We are out to overthrow England's language, her political government of our country, good and bad; her degrading social system; her lauded legal code which are blossoms on the tree which springs, not from the centre of Dublin Corporation, nor from the Halls of Westminster, but which has its roots in the heart of the English race" (*O'Casey Letters*, I, 16). The debate would continue in the paper to 8 March, clearly indicating that in early 1913, O'Casey's socialism slanted towards Irish republicanism, while Wilson's was more international. However, O'Casey's slant was not inappropriate for the *Irish Worker* in 1913—nor would it be within three years' time.

Adrian Grant, in *Irish Socialist Republicanism 1909–1936*, asserts that the ITGWU's *Irish Worker* embraced certain traditions of Irish Republicanism. This was evidenced in its “masthead [that] proudly quoted from [1840s] James Finan Lalor: ‘the principle I state and mean to stand upon is that the entire ownership of Ireland, moral and material, up to the sun and down to the centre is vested of the right in the people of Ireland’” (quoted in Grant, 37). Later in the year, on 10 May 1913, O’Casey qualified his views as he contributed an article to the paper in which he stated:

If a union of Labour and Republican forces would result in the achievement of an independent Ireland, or even bring that happy consummation appreciably nearer, would we hesitate and say, ‘Not yet, not yet; wait for the aristocrats’?... It is up to us now to turn away from the self satisfied gentry and the soulless controllers of commerce, and to unite the Separatist ranks with the forces of Labour for a free Ireland and the social advancement of the people. (qtd. in Grant, 55)

O’Casey was articulating republicanized socialism. It was a position that carried influence from Connolly’s 1910 book *Labour in Irish History*, if without Connolly’s nuanced reasoning and arguments.¹² In his debate with Wilson, O’Casey referenced Connolly: “James Connolly could give you some valuable information on this quest” (*O’Casey Letters*, I, 23).

Labour in Irish History, a socialist reading of Irish history, had been published in 1910 Dublin as Connolly returned from the United States, eventually becoming the ITGWU’s Belfast organizer.¹³ The book posits that Irish rebellions against Britain failed due to their dependence on the bourgeois class, who became informants out of greed. Most notably, the book undermines some iconic Irish historical figures, such as Daniel O’Connell, who was instrumental in achieving Catholic Emancipation in 1828. Connolly asserts that O’Connell, as a product of the capitalist class, participated in suppressing Robert Emmet’s 1803 rebellion. In turn, Connolly classified Emmet as a socialistically slanted republican. Connolly designed the book to promote Irish socialism within the sphere of republicanism, and endeavoured to promote his book through socialist and ITGWU meetings in Ireland and Scotland.

In *Drums under the Windows*, O’Casey recalls seeing Connolly either after Connolly’s return in 1910, or, as possibly indicated, prior to his emigration from Ireland in 1903. He relates seeing Connolly rise to

address a small gathering when he overhears an acquaintance state, "That's James Connolly, our secretary, an' if you knew all you should know, you'd know without askin'". O'Casey replied by asking "Secretary of what?", with the reply being, "Secretary of the Irish Socialist Republican Party [ISRP]" (15–16). Prior to this dialogue, O'Casey mentions another individual moving about the meeting offering various publications for sale, including Connolly's *Socialism Made Easy* (15). Confusion stems from the fact that the ISRP, of which Connolly was its Secretary for most of its existence since forming in 1896, ended in 1903, a few months after Connolly resigned and emigrated to the United States. *Socialism Made Easy* was published in Chicago in 1909, six years after the ISRP's collapse. While such underscores the shortfalls in recalling strict history in O'Casey's reflective autobiographical books, it does relate Connolly's speaking efforts, which he undertook before he left Ireland and resumed after his return. Connolly used such talks to promote his published socialist theoretical pamphlets and books, including *Labour in Irish History* after returning in 1910. Given the sometimes loose history in O'Casey's later reflective books, relying on them for his mindset during the periods being related can be problematic. After all, O'Casey's thinking, as with most people, changed over years and decades. So, while O'Casey later resented some of Connolly's actions, he had more in common with Connolly's ideologies in the years prior to 1916 than not, which possibly continued into 1918. As revealed above in his debate with Wilson, and his May 1913 *Irish Worker* article, O'Casey then favoured a republicanized working-class Irish socialism. Yet by late August 1913, Wilson's position that Ireland's future battle was to be between capitalists and labour became the immediate reality for Dublin—while in Russia, 300 years of autocratic Romanov rule was being celebrated as the poor struggled to survive as lights blazed and glistened on the Nevsky Prospect before the Singer Building.

LOCKOUT

In the months leading to the 1913 Dublin Lockout, the very battle Wilson had foreseen, Larkin took aim through the *Irish Worker* at William Martin Murphy, who, in addition to being on the GSW Board, chaired the Board of the Dublin United Tramways Company. His newspaper holdings included the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Catholic*, both of which advocated employers' positions. Throughout these months, Larkin was