



## The Hidden Connolly

### part 4: *The Worker*

#### Municipal Elections

[December 26 1914]

We are glad that we are in a position to inform our readers that the Dublin Labour Party has resolved upon making an attack upon a number of the Municipal Wards at the forthcoming elections. There was fear in some quarters, and hope in others, that the excitement over the war and the demoralisation that has set in owing to the absence of such a large number of reservists with the colours would have so weakened the fighting forces of Labour that no attempt would be made this year to challenge the capitalist forces to the electoral combat.

That fear and that hope were alike without foundation. In the minds of those responsible for the strategy of Labour's political campaign in Dublin there never has been any doubt as to the right course to pursue. That course can be best indicated by the words:—

Fight, fight, and keep on fighting till victory crowns the struggle of any class for its emancipation.

The War now being waged throughout the world has already altered many things, and will doubtless alter many more before it runs its bloody course, but one thing it has left unaltered—the shamefully subject position of the Working Class. That class still remains in the position of a slave class, toiling and moiling in penury and anxiety in order that others may live in luxury and security.

The Working Class people of Dublin are the worst housed in Europe. Daily the ravages of disease amongst them are greater than in the ranks of the Japanese Army during the late campaign against Russia,<sup>1</sup> weekly the slaughter of Dublin's poor is greater than the total of Ireland's loss in the same space of time during many of our most famous rebellions, and yearly the sum of the victims of our long-drawn suffering equals the total casualties of many a British campaign upon the frontiers of Empire. Dublin life to the Dublin poor is one long martyrdom. The houses of the poor of Dublin are altars upon which are sacrificed human life, human happiness, human honour. Altars, aye, altars to the worship of a Devil whose attendant ministers are the political and civic upholders of the capitalist system.

Are we using too strong language? Is the picture we draw too lurid? Let us quote some of the comments of the capitalist press of last year upon the result of the Housing Inquiry Commission in Dublin. This is how our capitalist newspapers describe Dublin, that Dublin which they created in the old and undemocratic past, and which they now seek to perpetuate:—

We are accustomed to hearing hard things said about the housing of the poor in Dublin, but the naked figures are far more impressive than the most violent epithets. There are 21,113 single-room tenements in Dublin. There are 1,488 single-room tenements each inhabited by six persons, 854 inhabited by seven persons, 431 by eight, 146 by nine, 45 by ten, 16 by eleven, and five each inhabited by "twelve persons or upwards." It is difficult for the average man or woman in comfortable circumstances to realise the meaning of these figures without actually seeing the conditions which they imply. Anyone who has succeeded in doing so will hardly be surprised that the corrected death rate for the Dublin Metropolitan Area is as high as 22.3 per thousand of the population. This is below the average for the last decade, but we may profitably compare it with the rate for the suburbs, which was last year 15.4 per thousand. This is one of the results of bad housing: the citizens die before their time, because it is hard for them to remain alive under the prevailing conditions. But the effect upon those who do not die must be almost more terrible. When six or seven and eight individuals of different sexes and ages are living in a single room it becomes impossible for them to reach the standard of existence which is

laid down by even the lowest systems of civilisation. Decency and cleanliness must be words without any meaning for them. Education can only make them realise the more fully the horror of their lives, if it can be said to be possible at all for persons in their position. We cannot wonder if drunkenness and crime are more common than in the more decent parts of the city.

The over-population of the city is easily seen on comparing the number of persons to an acre in Dublin with that of other cities. The number of persons residing in the city area is in proportion of 38.8 to an acre. The proportion in the whole Dublin registration area, including the suburbs, is 29.2 per acre. In Belfast it is 26.2 per acre, and in the 22 Irish town districts, including Dublin and Belfast, it is 19.8 per acre. On this question Sir Charles Cameron<sup>2</sup> writes—“I have always maintained that the comparatively high death rate of Dublin is mainly due to the large number of the very poor who reside in it. Amongst the poor in every town the death rate is much higher than it is amongst the higher and middle classes. That Dublin has an unduly large population is proved in several ways, but chiefly by the fact that an unusually large number of families occupy only a single room each.” And, pursuing that aspect of the question, he says:—“The death rate in the city districts is, of course, greater than in the metropolitan registration area, which includes the suburbs. In the latter the majority of the population are placed under far more healthy conditions as regards air space, house accommodation, pecuniary means, etc.” The size of the slum problem is by no means limited to the 21,000 single-room tenements. In all cities two-room and three-room dwellings are being reduced, and the increase begins with four-room and five-room dwellings. The *Times* the other day, discussing the housing question in English cities, said that all the authorities were agreed that there must be a minimum of three rooms for the workingmen’s dwellings in order to provide for the separation of the sexes and for other reasons. The number of tenants of one and two rooms in the Dublin slums is 34,200, and the number of three rooms and less is 40,777. The high death rate and ill-health in Dublin is, Sir Charles Cameron says, due to the condition of the slums. The death rate in Dublin is 22.3, in Belfast 20.7, in Cork 20.9, and in the 95 largest English towns it averages 13.8, reaching the maximum of 15.8 in Stoke-on-Trent. The high infantile mortality is one of the most unpleasant features of the Dublin death rate. The deaths of children under one year old reaches the proportion of 137 per thousand of the population of that age, whilst in the 77 largest English cities and towns it averages 101 per thousand. The proportion of infant deaths to births within the year 1912 was 14 per cent in Dublin, as compared with 10 per cent in English cities. In Dublin the mortality amongst infants was at the rate of 69.2 per thousand of the population. The adult mortality was at the rate of 22.5 per thousand.

The great fight of last year<sup>3</sup> brought to the notice of the world the horrors of the housing of Dublin. As soon as the tumult of the conflict was over and the Working Class of Dublin had received a temporary set-back those horrors were at once conveniently forgotten—a sure proof that the slave can only hope for an amelioration of his position by the fears of his masters, never by their sympathies. Dublin fighting against the Master Class has a world in sympathy with it, and scores of schemes for its betterment are in the air. Dublin men fighting for the Empire are left to fight as their dear ones at home are left to stew unheeded in their awful misery.

The slums exact a heavy toll on citizen life and on the health of the city generally, for disease bred in these centres spreads outward. The poor suffer first and most, but the richer citizens, however comfortably housed or well provided for, cannot escape a share in the evils that come from the slums. Tuberculosis diseases and diseases of the respiratory organs caused eight deaths per 1,000 of the population; and typhoid and diphtheria, and well as measles and scarlatina, come from the slums.

All this misery is now forgotten by all save those who are contemptuously left to rot in it, all those fine schemes are now put aside as too costly by those who gladly spend upon a single shot from a battleship more than would build a decent house for a working class family.

But just because we have lost the snivelling sympathy of the capitalist journalist, just

because we have lost the co-operation of the “public-spirited philanthropist” (on the lookout for a Government job), just because we are once again thrown contemptuously aside, so we must fight all the more relentlessly for our own hand, develop all the more strongly our own strength.

Labour is never so strong as when it stands alone. Labour never so terrifies the masters of the world as when it strikes out in its own name for all that is its own.

The coming municipal elections in Dublin give Labour that opportunity of forcing its position to the front, and elevating its Cause to the height of a dominant issue despite the ambitions and blood-lust of its masters. The most commonplace arena may be made sacred by the holiness of the cause battled for within its confines. Within the sordid squalid tenements of Dublin the hosts of Labour are called upon to battle for the most sacred of all earthly causes—the right of those who toil to inhabit and enjoy the earth. Dublin slums, Dublin politics, Dublin misery are all but manifestations of the denial of that right for which we ask Dublin toilers to battle. The sacredness of the battle transfigures and glorifies the arena of the battle; the battlers themselves draw beauty and grandeur from the grandeur and beauty of the mission they fulfil.

To all workers, then, we appeal to rally to the cause of Labour in the coming battle for a clean life in a clean city—a city worthy to be the capital of a country aspiring to be free.<sup>4</sup>

### Casualties

[January 2 1915]

We would like to write this week upon “Casualties.” It has become a standard heading in all the capitalist papers, much in the same manner as “British Disaster” did during the Boer War.<sup>5</sup> Every week the press gives us three or four columns of names of soldiers killed and wounded in the war, and instead of cries of horror and anguish, or protests against the awful loss of human life, we print in the press shrieks of joy over the sufferings of the “enemy,” and complacent references to the list of slaughtered British soldiers as a “Roll of Honour.” To declare that every soldier killed makes his country the poorer, and brings misery and suffering inevitably to the doors of the loved ones he left behind is treated as an act of treason, involving the danger of a drumhead court martial, but to laud every act of slaughter as “glorious,” and to pass over as trifling the loss of a few thousand of the lives of our former neighbours and workmates is to be considered loyal, patriotic and respectable. Hence, when writing of “Casualties,” we must exercise due care and not affront the delicate susceptibilities of our military governors—those governors who are now in charge of that Ark of the Covenant which enshrines the British Constitution.

Little over a year ago this city of Dublin was in the throes of the greatest industrial conflict in the history of Ireland. Indeed, in many respects it was the greatest conflict known to the history of these islands. Judged by the issues at stake, the numbers involved in relation to the numbers of the wage-earning class in the city, the dramatic incidents attending the conflict, and the tragical developments which accompanied it, the struggle was of a character which might truly be described as phenomenal. All suffered—the heroic men, women and girls suffered in hunger, cold and privation, the employers suffered in pocket and in reputation, the citizens suffered in inconvenience and annoyance, the city suffered in credit and self-respect. Had the list of the names of people who suffered each week been printed in the newspapers under the heading of “Casualties,” the “Roll of Honour” would have taken up many columns each week the fight continued. So much so was this the case that the capitalist press filled its columns daily for months with long recitals of the sufferings (casualties) caused by the strike, and furious attacks upon the Trade Union leaders supposedly responsible for it. The gains in the pockets of the workers, the increased comforts in the homes of the poor, the amelioration of the conditions of Labour, and all the thousand and one changes for betterment which the Transport Union had won for Labour by that battling which the employers said had driven them to the Lock-Out—all this was declared to be nought compared to the sufferings and discomfort brought upon Dublin by strike and locks-out. In fact, their contention seemed to be that if the working class could not better themselves without disturbing the smooth surface of events, then it should be prepared to rest content in its misery, to stew in its squalor and horror. Every stoppage of work was an

“atrocities,” every shilling lost in wages or profits a “casualty.” How they shed tears over the sufferings of Dublin, and how they worked themselves and their gullible members into a fine frenzy of wrath against the Labour Leaders, and against Irish Trade Unionists generally!

But now observe the change. It is a moderate estimate to make that any one day of the present war causes more suffering in Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Belfast or Sligo than was caused in Dublin by the whole dispute in all its length. There are Irish widows and orphans created every day during the hostilities at the front; there are hundreds of Irish workers permanently deprived of the power of working and earning a living for themselves and their families every time the British Army goes into battle in Flanders; there are “casualties” each day a hundredfold greater than the sum total of all the strikers imprisoned, or all the women and girls batoned by the gallant members of the police and constabulary forces. And yet no word of protest arises from the capitalist press; no cry to stop the war; no peace committee to try and arrange terms between the combatants; no appeal to the workers of Dublin or of Ireland to consider their wives and children and refrain from this senseless conflict; no one of all these exhortations with which we were all so familiar during the Labour Disputes in Dublin can now be read, seen or heard.

Instead, every agency urges us on to greater and greater slaughter and dislocation of trade, to greater and greater conflict and contempt for peaceful industry, to greater and greater disregard for the growing total of “Casualties.”

Hence it seems to us that a “Casualty,” when it occurs during a murderous war that will leave the Working Class at least as badly enslaved as it found it, is deserving of a place among the “Roll of Honour,” but a “Casualty” that comes as part of the age-long upward struggle of the Working Class for emancipation is a thing that all loyal and respectable editors must grieve over, denounce and destroy.

Ah, yes —

We are they whose trumpet rings that all wars might cease;  
We are they who'll pay the kings their cruel price for peace;  
We are they whose watchword still is what Christ did teach —  
Each man for his brother first, and all men then for each.

*Red Banner* 33  
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#### Notes

- 1 Japan and Russia were at war from 1904-5.
- 2 Medical Officer of Health, and author of the commission's report.
- 3 The Dublin lockout.
- 4 Three Labour councillors were elected to Dublin Corporation, the same number as before the election.
- 5 Between Britain and the Boer settlers in South Africa, 1899-1902.