

Constance Markievicz

IN THE CAUSE OF IRELAND

Eagle Undone

"Remembering Con Markievicz"

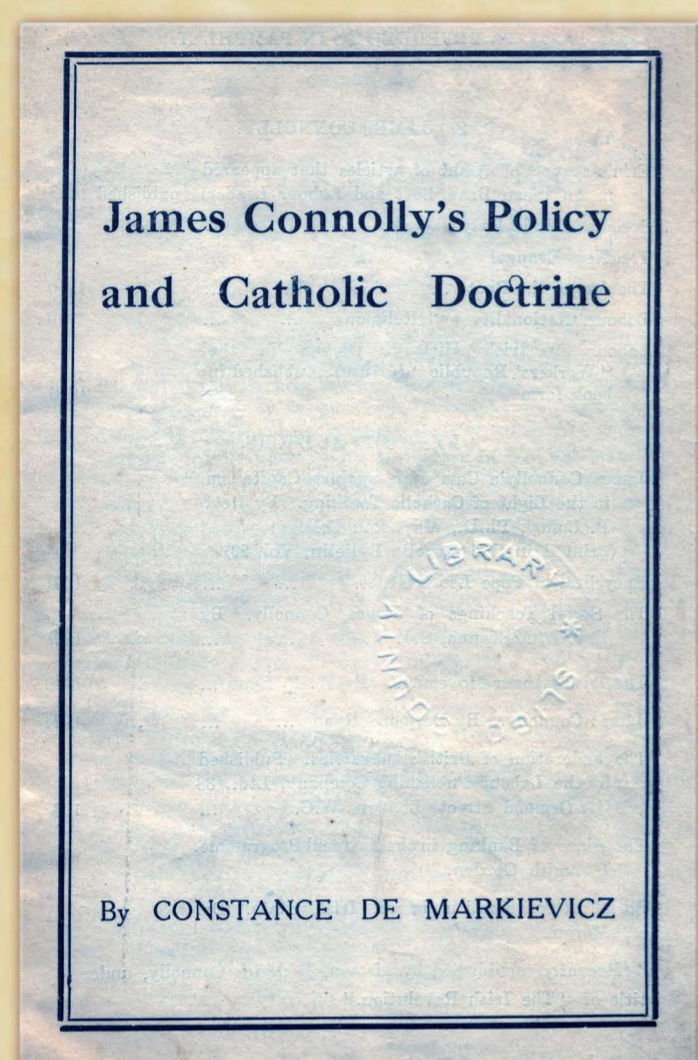
By Cecil Day Lewis

"...And when the treaty emptied English jails,
A haggard woman returned and Dublin went wild to greet her.
But still it was not enough: an iota
Of Compromise, she cried and the Cause fails
Nest disarrayed eagles undone"

Her work as a Minister in the shadow administration was constantly interrupted by other calls on her time. Chiefly her work was that of maintaining morale and encouraging support for what was to be called the War of Independence. Advance publicity for public meetings was responded to by the British administration with the proscription of the meetings. She was arrested after a meeting in Newmarket, Co. Cork on the 17th of May 1919 and sentenced to four months imprisonment. She was released in October. *Dáil Éireann* was declared an illegal organisation and now she was living 'on the run', liable to be arrested. However it was said by Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington that she 'had the freedom of the city, literally' no one would betray her.



Portrait of Constance Markievicz
taken for her tour of America
© Sligo County Museum



James Connolly's Policy
and Catholic Doctrine
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The undermining of the R.I.C. by *Sinn Féin* and the rising tide of 'outrages' was responded to by the British administration with the introduction of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries. Lawlessness was rife, ordinary people who had no involvement were as liable to suffer as any other. Constance was arrested again in September 1920 and placed in Mountjoy prison. In May 1921 there was another election and Constance held her seat. A truce was negotiated between Éamon De Valera and Lloyd George which came into force on the 11th of July 1921. In the meantime Sir Josslyn had been forced to sell *St. Mary's* (her home in Rathgar) to settle Constance's most pressing debts. Constance on her release resided with the Coughlin family but never again had a home of her own. The second *Dáil* met in August 1921 and Constance was re-appointed as Minister of Labour.

Constance now heard from Casimir, whose family has been deprived of their estate by the Bolsheviks and Casimir was now earning his living as an employee of the American Embassy in Poland. Stanislaus, her stepson, had spent a number of years detained in Russian by the Bolsheviks and it would appear that an appeal by

Constance to Jim Larkin, imprisoned in Sing-Sing Prison, was instrumental in securing his release.

Negotiations started by De Valera to secure the truce began in earnest on October 11th 1921 in London to settle the 'Irish Question'. A treaty was signed on December 6th and the delegates returned to have it debated by the *Dáil*. The debates began on the 19th of December and continued until a vote was taken on the acceptance or rejection of the treaty. The result was sixty four for the treaty and fifty seven against. All of the women T.D.'s (Teachta Daila/Members of Parliament) voted against the treaty. They had given too much to accept anything less than a free, independent, 32 county republic. Those who voted for the treaty were prepared to accept a Free State of 26 counties with Dominion status within the British Empire, an oath of Allegiance (to the King/Emperor) and that a Boundary Commission might give them the six counties at some future date. The debates opened divisions that never healed. Those who had fought side by side now separated and each wound suffered in the Irish Civil War that followed was all the more bitter because it was delivered by one who had been formerly, a comrade, a brother, a friend.

Constance was not prepared to accept anything less than a Republic. She wanted that republic to be a workers republic and remained true to the political legacy of James Connolly. She undertook a gruelling, whistle stop tour of America to raise funds for the republican movement sailing on 1st April 1922. While there she wrote to Stanislaus:

"you were always as dear to me as if you had been my own son. Also dear Casi, I hate to think of you having to work on a job. Of course we are all frightfully poor just now...."

Constance never had a job; she had a mission, a cause. She was doing the thing she whole heartedly believed in.



Constance and a member of the
Ursuline Community in Sligo
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