

Jim Connell

Author of *The Red Flag*



Andrew Boyd

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For
The Red Flag Festival

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Andrew Boyd's Daughter

*In memory of Wal Hannington
who often met Jim Connell
at The Golden Cross*

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The Red Flag and other songs

There are two memorials to Jim Connell, a bronze bust by the Irish sculptor Michael Keane in County Meath where Connell was born in 1852, and a plaque on No 22A Stondon Park, Forest Hill Gate, Lewisham, South London, where he once lived. The plaque in South London was unveiled in February 1989 by Gordon Brown MP.

But the greatest memorial to Jim Connell is, of course, *The Red Flag* which has been sung for more than a hundred years by socialists all over the world. Until 1999 it was sung every year at the close of the Labour Party conference, but not any more. What Prime Minister Blair and his colleagues call 'New Labour' decided that the old anthem must go. But who, apart from New Labour, has not at some time heard *The Red Flag* or has not at least hummed the first verse?

The People's Flag is deepest red;
It shrouded oft our martyred dead;
And, ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts' blood dyed its ev'ry fold.

When he wrote *The Red Flag*, in 1889, Connell was inspired by certain heroic events in the struggle for socialism and the rights of Labour. In May 1920, at the request of the editor of *The Call*, which was published weekly by the British Socialist Party, he explained this more fully.

One thousand eight-hundred and eighty-nine was the year of the London dock strike. It was the biggest thing of its kind that occurred up to that date and its leaders: H H Champion, Tom Mann, and John Bums aroused the whole of England by the work they did and the victory

they won. Not many years previously the Irish Land League aroused the democracy of all countries. I am proud to be able to say that I founded the first branch of the Land League which was established in England. This was the Poplar branch and I remained its secretary until the League was suppressed, and was a member of the Executive during the whole of the time. About the same time the Russian Nihilists, the parents of the Bolsheviks, won the applause of all lovers of liberty and admirers of heroism. Under the rule of the Czar. .. the best men and women of Russia were deported to Siberia at the rate of 20,000 a year. Young lady students were taken from their classrooms and sent to work in horrible mines, where their teeth fell out and the hair fell off their heads their heads in a few months. Nobody could fight this hellish rule with more undaunted courage than did the Nihilists, men and women. There happened also, in 1887, the hanging of the Chicago anarchists. Their innocence was afterwards admitted by the Governor of the State of Illinois. The widow of one of them, Mrs Parsons, herself more than half a Red Indian, made a lecturing tour of this country soon afterwards. On one occasion I heard her telling a large audience that when she contemplated the service rendered to humanity she was glad her husband had died as he did. The reader may now understand how I got into the mood which enabled me to write *The Red Flag*

Many, among them Connell's own nephew Pat Fagan, used to think that *The Red Flag* was written on the overnight train from Glasgow to London. But that is not true. Connell himself said he drafted the first two stanzas during a much shorter train journey, from Charing Cross

to New Cross, on his way home one evening to his house in New Cross Road after attending a lecture by Herbert Burrows, a member of the Social Democratic Federation. He completed the song when he got home, made a few alterations the next day and sent it to Harry Quelch, editor of *Justice*.

The Red Flag was published in *Justice* a few days later, 21 December 1889, under the heading 'A Christmas Carol'. The following weekend socialists were singing it at meetings in Liverpool and Glasgow. Connell later said that so far as he could remember he had not written any other song in quite so short a time.

He was by then a regular contributor to *Justice*. One of his longer poems *The Village by the Mill*, published in June 1889, is a political parable which demonstrates, in simple words, the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism.

The people seized and worked the mill
And when the goods were sold
The price was fairly portioned out
Among the young and old.

Norah Walshe, Jim Connell's daughter, said in a biographical sketch of her father that the Rand miners in South Africa had gone to the gallows singing *The Red Flag*. It was sung at times in the House of Commons by Labour MPs before the First World War. It was once sung in the Mansion House, Dublin, at a public meeting to welcome and acclaim the Russian Revolution. One of Scotland's Labour MPs told Connell that *The Red Flag* had done more for socialism on the Clyde than anything else he could think of. When Wal Hannington was a boy, between 1900 and 1910, he often heard his father singing *The Red Flag*. Hannington would later get to know Jim Connell. He would also lead the nationwide hunger

marches of the unemployed between 1920 and 1936 and write several books about unemployment and trade unionism.

When the great Labour Parliament under the leadership of Clement Attlee assembled after the 1945 general election 393 Labour MPs rose as one huge choir from the government benches and sang *The Red Flag* from beginning to end. Prime Minister Attlee loved *The Red Flag*. He thought it Labour's most inspiring anthem.

The Red Flag has also been sung enthusiastically by at least one eminent American politician, Dean Acheson who, far from being a socialist or Labour in any sense of the word, was Secretary of State during the Presidency of Harry S Truman.

Acheson learned *The Red Flag* from Ernest Bevin, former General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union, and Foreign Secretary in the 1945-51 Labour Government. They would both enjoy singing it as they walked arm-in-arm along the placid and sedate corridors of the Quai d'Orsay, no doubt after some important international conference.

With heads uncovered swear we all
To bear it onward till we fall.
Come dungeon dark or gallows grim,
This song shall be our parting hymn.

Then raise the scarlet standard high, Within its
shade we'll live and die;
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the Red Flag flying here.

Connell intended *The Red Flag* to be sung to the tune of *The White Cockade*, one of the martial airs of Ireland, but in 1895 A S Headingley published a new edition and changed the tune, setting the song to the air known as *Maryland* in the USA and *Tannenbaum* in Germany. Jim

Connell was not pleased though he seemed in a way to understand the reasons for the change. He told the readers of *The Call* that

There is only one air that suits *The Red Flag* and that is the one which I hummed as I wrote it. I mean *The White Cockade*. I mean moreover the original version known to everybody in Ireland fifty years ago. Since then some fool has altered it by introducing minor notes until it is now nearly a jig. This later version is the one on sale in music shops today and it does not, of course, suit my words. I suppose this explains why Adolphe Smythe Headingley induced people to sing *The Red Flag* to Maryland. *Maryland* acquired that name during the American War of Secession. It is really an old German Roman Catholic hymn. It is church music and was no doubt composed, and is certainly calculated, to remind people of their sins and to frighten them into repentance. I daresay it is very good music for the purpose for which it was composed but that purpose was widely different from mine when I wrote *The Red Flag*. Every time the song is sung to *Maryland* the words are murdered. The very slightest knowledge of elocution will show that the words are robbed of their proper emphasis and true value and meaning when sung to that air.

The meaning of the music is different from the meaning of the words. Headingley may as well have set the song to *The Dead March in Saul*.

So *The Red Flag* was not being sung, whatever the tune, in the brisk and martial way Connell intended. Maybe that is why Bernard Shaw once said it was nothing better than 'a funeral dirge'.

Connell wrote and published many songs before he wrote *The Red Flag*. *Workers of Ireland* was published in *The Socialist Song Book Another, Workers of England*, sung to the tune of *O'Donnell Abu*, was included in *Chants for Labour*, a collection which Edward Carpenter published in 1888. It appeared again a few years later in Connell's own collection *Red Flag Rhymes*.

Workers of England why crouch ye like cravens?
Why clutch an existence of insult and want?
Why stand to be plucked by an army of ravens,
Or hoodwinked for ever by twaddle and cant?
Think of the wrongs ye bear,
Think of the rags ye wear,
Think of the hardships endured from your birth,
Toiling in snow and rain,.
Rearing up heaps of gain,
And all for the tyrants who grind ye to earth.

When Jim Connell was born at Kilskyre, five miles from the town of Kells in County Meath, Ireland was still suffering the consequences of the Great Famine during which, between 1845 and 1850, nearly a million people died of starvation on their farms or on the roadside. More than a million fled from their devastated homelands to seek refuge in England, Scotland and North America. Connell's parents, Thomas and Anne O'Connell, survived. They were tenant farmers and Jim was the eldest of their family of thirteen children.

Anne O'Connell hoped, like a great many Catholic mothers in Ireland, that her eldest son would enter the Church and become a priest. She was to be disappointed. Jim: Connell had no calling for the sacred profession. The nearest he ever got to

the priesthood was when he worked for a little while at some sort of domestic job in Maynooth College where young Irishmen who have the vocation are trained to be priests.

One of his brothers did enter the Church and eventually became Canon O'Connell, parish priest to the Roman Catholic community in Scarborough.

Norah Walshe, by the way, never knew why or when her father changed his name from O'Connell to Connell.

Jim Connell was probably never an active atheist though he seems to have rejected Roman Catholicism early in life. He was interested in politics not religion. He was at one time a member of a vestry in London but that was nothing religious. Until 1894 vestries had certain powers of local government, each one administering a civil parish. In his later years he studied Buddhism and Theosophy, his 'bible' in those beliefs being Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. He would, according to Norah Walshe, often inflict his Buddhist philosophy on his friends, whether they were interested or not.

Much of that troubled Canon O'Connell and he once told Norah Walshe that he prayed every day for his brother Jim and his family. Norah could see, however, that her father and her reverend uncle had little in common - beyond the fact that they both died of heart failure.

Jim Connell was a boy of ten when his father had to give up farming and take employment as a groom in the service of the Earl of Ross at Birr Castle in County Offaly. At Birr, when his father was groom, young Connell must have learned much about the care of horses. More than thirty years later he wrote a book entitled *The Horse and How to Treat Him*.

It would seem too that he found more books to read in the town of Birr than he could ever have found in rural Meath, and he read much.

The Earl of Ross was an astronomer and had what was then one of the largest telescopes in the world. That telescope must surely have

interested young Connell even if he might never have been invited to look through it and see the stars and planets in magnification.

At Birr he continued an illegal and dangerous activity which he had started in Meath. He was a poacher and would spend days and nights 'out in the mountains and in the bogs'. Poaching was theft, according to the game laws. The game stolen belonged to the landowner and to nobody else. But Jim Connell disregarded the game laws. In his opinion wild animals could not be anybody's private property.

In boyhood I quaffed with a passionate love,
The breath of the mountain and moor,
And hated the greed of the covetous lord
Who fenced out the weak and the poor;
And later, through covert and pheasant stocked glade
I swept like a blast of the north,
I broke ev'ry law the land robbers made
And mocked at the strength they put forth.

In Meath he had already learned a lot about poaching, from other poachers and particularly from Constable Brennan of the Irish Constabulary. Constable Brennan taught young Connell how to dam a trout stream and how to snare wild geese.

Connell remained a poacher most of his life, even when settled in London with a comfortable middle-class income. Indeed his entry in *Labour's Who's Who*, when he was a successful London journalist and author, gives his recreation as 'poaching'. For years he kept a pack of hunting dogs, greyhounds, and a lurcher bitch he called 'Nellie'. She was his favourite, the leader of the pack. *My Nellie* is one of the songs in *Red Flag Rhymes*.

Let me sing about my Nellie
Just for moments one or two,
Let me tell about her goodness
And the deeds that she can do.
She's the fondest friend I number,
She's the leader of the chase,
She's the queen of all the poachers,
And the bravest of her race.

Norah Walshe remembered that from their house in Lewisham her father would make 'periodical poaching expeditions to the Surrey Hills with a few dozen pals'. She thought it strange that he never got caught by the police or the gamekeepers because 'he made no secret of his excursions' and often gave some of the game he brought back as presents to his friends and to families he knew were in need.

Actually he had many encounters with gamekeepers. And he was, as a matter of fact, caught twice. He was fined £1 and 13s.6d costs by the magistrates at Croydon Town Hall for killing hares on the land of Mr Gladstone at Addington, in Surrey. The second time was at Woolwich Police Court.

By coincidence Connell and one of the magistrates at Croydon, a retired army officer, were in a sense business associates, through the breeding of greyhounds. The charge of poaching and the fine imposed made no difference to their business arrangements. Indeed the magistrate privately admitted after the case was settled that it would be hard to resist a good chase when a greyhound raised a hare.

At Woolwich a police inspector who gave evidence met Connell afterwards in a pub nearby and confessed that he too had been a poacher when he was young. He had been fined, several times, and even sent to prison on one occasion.

Connell once jokingly told Wal Hannington there was no reason why any unemployed man's children should go hungry

when the game preserves of the rich were well stocked with hares, pheasants, rabbits, salmon, trout and all sorts of small game easy to trap, shoot, or catch with rod and line.

He also wrote two books on the subject of game preservation and poaching. The first of those books *The Truth About the Game Laws: A Record of Cruelty, Selfishness and Oppression* was published by the *Humanitarian League* in 1898 and is mentioned in *The Labour Annual* for that year. The second, *Confessions of a Poacher* (with illustrations by ST Dadd), was published by Arthur Pearson in 1901, with a second edition in 1902. That book sold 80,000 copies. The legal deposit copy held by The British Library, formerly the British Museum, is stamp-dated 3 April 1901.

Norah Walshe, who was against blood sports or cruelty to animals in any form, thought *Confessions of a Poacher* both a 'cruel book' and an exposure of her father's 'dual nature'. As a poacher Connell certainly hunted animals and birds with traps and guns and greyhounds, yet he would be furious at the sight of wagoners or cabmen ill-treating their horses in the street, and he actually believed, like St Francis of Assisi, that animals were humanity's younger brothers and should therefore be treated with the consideration'.

There is nonetheless much cruelty in *Confessions of a Poacher*. There could certainly be no crueller sport? than hare coursing. But there are also some good stories in the book.

One of Connell's poaching comrades was a tinsmith. He was persuaded to make a stove, with a long adjustable chimney, within which the poachers would burn a sulphur candle. The fumes from the burning sulphur stupefied pheasants roosting in the trees at night and they fell unconscious to the ground. The first time Connell and his pals used the stove and the sulphur candle they bagged forty-six birds.

Another bizarre way to catch pheasants, and partridges, was to make them drunk by scattering grain soaked in whiskey or rum near where they roosted. They would then quarrel and fight one another stupid. In that state they could easily be collected and bagged.

Connell went to school in Ireland though he would say later in life that his education amounted to only a few weeks 'under a hedge', and that he learned 'little more than reading and writing'. By that he meant that whatever instruction he received was from those itinerant Irish teachers known as hedge schoolmasters.

Norah Walshe did not altogether believe that story. She suspected that the 'few weeks under the hedge' was a bit of fantasy and that her father had really received quite a substantial education, for the son of a small farmer, in one of the National Schools that had by then been established all over Ireland. His schooling may, however, have been erratic and irregular, often interrupted by work on the farm and in the stables, or by occasional forays into game preserves of Meath and Offaly.

In 1867 when Ireland was, once again, in a state of rebellion the O'Connells moved to Dublin. There Jim worked in 'various menial jobs'. He also wrote songs, many of which, he confessed, were addressed to the young barmaids of the city. Perhaps *My Little Coquette*, which is also in *Red Flag Rhymes*, was written for one of those girls.

I saw her - I loved her, 'twas hasty I grant,
But cold is the heart that she would not enchant.
"Twere useless to linger or reason the case,
When prudence seemed folly and doubting were base.
She smiled on my passion, encouraged me on,
And led me to think that the battle was won,
But when my whole heart on the matter was set,
My fairy I found was a little coquette

In Dublin Connell made his first contacts with active socialists. Years afterwards he told Norah Walshe that his most satisfying experience in the city was his friendship with John Landye, a man much older than himself. As Norah said

He thought the world of John Landye and remembered him all his life for it was under Landye's guidance and tuition that he learned the difference between capitalism and socialism and became a fluent and attractive speaker and debater.

John Landye, who was also from County Meath, was a pioneer Irish socialist and a member of the International Workingmen's Association, better known as the First International. He was leader and mentor to a group of young men who met on Sundays and rambled for hours through the Dublin Mountains, talking on the way about all sorts of subjects - religion, politics, economics, and no doubt Charles Darwin's highly controversial and, as some believed, alarming and impious theories of natural selection and the evolution of the different species, including mankind, from primitive forms of life on earth.

Norah thought Landye must have been 'truly a remarkable man', if all her father had told her about him was true.

He had scarcely any education at all and actually taught himself to read and write when he was turned twenty. His progress then became so rapid that he soon outshone many well-educated people... They were glad to listen to him with reverence and interest.

John Landye is a recognisable, though minor figure, in the early history of socialism in Ireland. Fintan Lane and John Boyle both refer to his membership of the First International and his activities as lecturer in socialist and literary societies in Dublin.

When living in Dublin Connell joined the Fenian movement and claimed indeed to have been a sworn member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, that inner caucus of rebellion in Ireland. But Fenianism, according to Norah Walshe, 'did not interest him for long'. When he wrote *The Red Flag* he had, as he later put it 'shaken off Fenianism'.

The authorities and the police were evidently not convinced of that. In 1888-9, during the inquiry into what was alleged to be 'Parnellism and Crime', Connell was mentioned, along with others, as 'an advocate of treason, sedition, assassination and violence'. *The Labour Annual* for 1898 also stated that he had been 'a member of the Fenian organisation'.

Connell worked as a dock labourer in Dublin. But such work was casual, day by day, and uncertain. The labourers stood at the dockside every morning, each waiting to be called by the stevedores who were responsible for the loading and unloading of cargo ships at the Port of Dublin. The stevedores would choose the workers they knew would give no trouble, who would work hard, and who would perhaps willingly buy 'the boss' a pint of porter at the end of the day. They could ignore those they did not want to employ.

Unable to get regular work in Dublin, Connell went to London in 1875 and worked for many years in all sorts of jobs. He would later list sheep farmer, dock labourer, navvy, railway man, draper, journalist and 'lawyer of sorts' as the different ways in which he had earned a livelihood.

In London he attended political meetings and read much. With the experience and the knowledge he thus acquired, not forgetting his earlier training with John Landye, he became a prolific and versatile lecturer.

Francis Williams, one of the later editors of the *Daily Herald*, once said that if Jim Connell could lecture on the game laws or socialism he could also discourse learnedly, though often at length, on Darwin and the theory of evolution.

In Socialism and the Survival of the Fittest Connell does indeed demonstrate his knowledge of evolution and also his acquaintance with the work of contemporary scientists and philosophers such as John Tyndall and Herbert Spencer.

In that pamphlet he refutes the traditional claim that capitalism is the survival of the fittest and in accordance therefore with the laws of nature. He inverts that argument, citing bees, ants and beavers as natural communists and arguing that, far from ensuring the survival of the fittest, capitalism often protects the unfit and inefficient, in the form of those weaklings who inherit great fortunes, great estates, and great industries.

Connell joined the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation) when it was founded by Henry Mayers Hyndman in June 1881. He remained ten years in the SDF, becoming an active propagandist and a regular contributor to *Justice*. Yet, according to Norah Walshe, he never cared much for the 'management'

Management could, of course, mean many things. It could mean that Connell did not get on well with H M Hyndman. If so he would not have been the only person prominent in the early Labour movement who disliked and distrusted Hyndman. William Morris, Eleanor Marx, Henry Champion, Tom Mann, and John Burns all disagreed with Hyndman for one reason or another. Some thought him arrogant. Others said he was reckless. They all left the SDF.

In any case Jim Connell himself was not always easy to get on with. Norah Walshe said he was 'very inconsistent'. At times he would be 'wild, uncontrollable, and impulsive', and at other times 'keenly intellectual'. He could charm an audience with his wit, his soft Irish brogue, and his appearance, for he was over six feet tall and of splendid physique and presence. 'He was a very loyal friend', said Norah, but could be a bitter enemy. At home he was autocratic, dogmatic and overbearing.

Wal Hannington, who as a communist was committed to party discipline and loyalty, formed the impression that Connell was very much an individualist who would 'have found it difficult to accept any sort of party discipline'. He was certain that was why Connell did not have an outstanding political record either in the Social Democratic Federation or later in the Independent Labour Party.

Hyndman was also disliked by his eminent contemporaries Marx and Engels. Engels thought him nothing but an 'ambitious candidate for Parliament' while Marx found him much too conceited. Years later John S Clarke, socialist, poet and pamphleteer, was of the same opinion. He knew Hyndman in his old age and thought him still 'a conceited old man'.

Engels and Marx had at least one other good reason for disliking Hyndman. When he published his pamphlet *England For All* at the inauguration of the Democratic Federation Hyndman copied whole sections from the first volume of *Capital* without acknowledging Karl Marx as the author or even mentioning the book. Marx and Engels were, understandably, both very much annoyed.

But was there not an explanation, of sorts anyhow, for that omission? Dealing with the affair in *A History of British Socialism* Max Beer states that in the 1880s the mere mention of the name of Karl Marx was enough to have almost any book and its author condemned and rejected.

Apart from whether he was or was not conceited, inconsistent, ambitious, or something of a plagiarist, Hyndman at least came round to supporting Ireland's demands for Home Rule and land reform. He became a member of the Executive of the National Land League of Great Britain which was set up in March 1881 when Michael Davitt, trade unionist social democrat and founder of the Irish Land League, advised the Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell that he 'might be making a great mistake in not cultivating the public opinion of the English working classes'. Davitt hoped that Parnell and his party

would therefore organise a campaign to 'instruct the English working classes in the merits of the movement for land reform in Ireland'.

The most tangible result of that advice, to quote from T W Moody's book *Davitt and the Irish Revolution*, was the National Land League of Great Britain.

Jim Connell was proud to have been a member of the Executive of the National Land League of Great Britain and, as he told the readers of *The Call* in 1920, he organised and was for many years secretary of the Poplar branch of the league.

In 1882 Connell married Catherine Angier, an English woman who was, like himself, of a 'pioneering temperament'. They settled in South London. There Norah Walshe's earliest memories were of political discussions, socialist propaganda, socialist meetings and protests. During elections Connell's house was always 'a centre of activity for the district'. It was a meeting place for socialists from all over London.

Keir Hardie, Tom Mann, Pete Curran, and Harry Quelch of *Justice* were among the many who came often to the house and there, 'over a roaring fire', they would talk politics into the small hours.

As a girl Norah herself collected for miners, dockers and others on strike and 'lined up on the Embankment with sash and banners for May Day and Labour processions'.

In the autumn of 1890 the SDF named Connell as prospective socialist candidate in Finchley East, even though there would not be another general election until 1892. When the nomination was made public James Rowlands, the Liberal MP for the constituency, and T P O'Connor, newspaper proprietor and Irish nationalist, organised opposition almost immediately.

The Liberals, committed since 1886 to Home Rule in Ireland, were, of course, much more influential politically than the SDF could in the circumstances ever hope to be. The Liberals got, and believed

they were entitled to, the Irish vote in Britain.

Rowlands and O'Connor consequently considered the proposed nomination of Connell to be a disruption, an intervention that would be to the advantage only of the Conservatives and Unionists. Rowlands attended one of Connell's meetings and incited a hostile section of the audience to heckle and harass the speakers. That led to violence. On 20 September 1890 *Justice* reported that:

For some time the social democrats in East Finchley have been subjected to brutal and cowardly treatment at the hands of the Irish and Liberals ... On Wednesday night last a large meeting was held in the Hall of Science to further Comrade Connell's candidature. Comrade Power presided, supported by the candidate and more than fifty comrades from surrounding branches. At the outset of the meeting we were saluted by filthy and blackguardly expressions, one ruffian going so far as to kick Comrade Connell. The Rowlandites earned their money ... They brought their wives and children to the meeting to yell, shout, and behave like persons in an uncivilised country. Comrade Connell went pluckily through his address, at the end of which a friend of Rowlands asked whether Connell would retire from the constituency in the event of a vote of no confidence. In reply Comrade Connell seized *the red flag* and waved it above his head, amid the loud and prolonged cheering of the meeting, saying that in spite of paid bullies, if they did not kill him in the attempt, he would continue to carry aloft the red flag. And in the event of the workers of East Finchley returning him to Parliament ... he would raise the red flag in the House of Commons.

After the meeting the SDF sent Rowlands a copy of Connell's manifesto but there is no record of how he responded or if he even bothered to respond.

Irish Catholics, of which there were many in East Finchley, were in those times terrified of socialism and communism between which in the minds of the great majority everywhere there was no distinction whatever. Socialism and communism were associated with atheism, free love and the confiscation of property and deemed therefore to be wicked doctrines. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum*, the celebrated encyclical in which, according to his way of thinking, he defended the rights of the working class while denouncing the socialists as 'crafty agitators' who preyed upon the poor man's envy of the rich. Pope Leo also denounced those people known as 'career trade unionists' of which there were any number in nineteenth century Europe, as there still are today.

Jim Connell was therefore not very welcome in East Finchley, not when his main theme was socialism and when he flew the red flag at all his meetings. Nonetheless he continued his campaign and in December *Justice* could claim that

Distribution of Comrade Connell's address in East Finchley is doing a lot of good. People who could not hear the views of the socialists at street corners owing to 'fanatical Irishmen' have now been able to understand why Connell comes forward.

When Connell and his wife separated in 1897 Norah Walshe was a girl of thirteen. She was taken to live with her mother but kept in touch with her father, even to the last days of his life.

Soon after the separation Connell went on a lecture in

Scotland. It was then that he wrote *Socialism and Survival of the Fittest* and *Glasgow Municipal Enterprises*. Municipal undertakings such as city transport, gas supply, public baths and markets were then cited by socialists as successful prototypes of the socialist economy they were advocating. In Edinburgh, Connell also got an opportunity to study the planets through the telescope at the university, having made the acquaintance of the astronomers there.

By that time he had left the Social Democratic Federation and had joined the Independent Labour Party. He was now a journalist and on the staff of the *Labour Leader*, the paper which Keir Hardie made the official organ of the ILP.

In 1898, noting that to be the 100th anniversary of the Rebellion of United Irishmen, Connell wrote *Brothers at Last: A Centenary Appeal to Celt and Saxon*. In that short pamphlet, which was published in London and Glasgow by the *Labour Leader*, Connell contended that the party of socialism, i.e. the Independent Labour Party, was the only working class alternative to British Toryism, British Liberalism and bourgeois Irish Nationalism. He asked his fellow-countrymen in Ireland and in Britain to consider if they really did believe it was the 'agricultural labourers of Norfolk or Devonshire', whose wages were nine shillings a week, or the miners, hewing coal in what was often a 'poisonous atmosphere', who robbed the Irish or indeed robbed anyone at all. He argued that

The workers in Britain [were] themselves victimised by landlords and capitalists, often to as great an extent as the Irish.

The socialists, notably Tom Mann, John Burns, Ben Tillett, Keir Hardie and others of similar outlook, were then campaigning for the nationalisation of industry and for politically independent trade union representation in Parliament. Connell was of the same outlook. He was confident that the day was not far distant when the funds of the trade

unions would be used to contest elections’.

Two years later, in 1900, the Trades Union Congress set up the Labour Representation Committee. In the 1906 general election twenty-nine independent Labour MPs, financed by their unions, were elected to Parliament. In 1913 the Trade Union Act accorded unions the right in law to finance parliamentary candidates and subsidise the Labour Party, provided all that was done voluntarily and by ballot of the members. In *Brothers At Last* Connell also predicted that in the inevitable realignment of political parties the Liberal Party would be ‘the first to go down’. He did in fact live long enough to see the first Labour Government and the decline and diminution of the Liberals.

Until Parliament passed the Workmen’s Compensation Act in 1896 workers injured in the course of their employment, through the negligence of the employer himself or of a fellow-employee, could not claim compensation. The common law of England precluded such claims.

Dealing with this in *The History of Trade Unionism (1666-1920)* Beatrice and Sydney Webb have explained how, for example, passengers injured in rail accidents could claim compensation from the railway companies responsible but employees of the companies, engine-drivers, firemen, guards etc, could not. The act of 1896 superseded that interpretation of the common law. Workmen injured in the course of their employment could now claim compensation.

Sometime after the passing of the act an organisation called the Workmen’s Legal Friendly Society was set up in order to assist injured workers, who would have had little or no knowledge of the law or legal procedures, to claim compensation. Whether Jim Connell was the first or a subsequent secretary of the Workmen’s Legal Friendly Society is not clear. He was living on Battersea Rise when he was appointed secretary in 1903 and continued in that post until his death. He was certainly mentioned as secretary of the society by *The Times*

in January 1924 and by *Labour’s Who’s Who* in 1927. His nephew Pat Fagan, from Enfield in County Meath, worked as his assistant from 1908 until 1912.

Fifty years later Fagan recalled that in those days Connell still lectured occasionally for the Fabian Society but otherwise ‘was not as closely associated with the Labour movement’ as he had been in earlier years. Fagan also remembered that Jim Larkin, James Connolly, Tom Mann, Pete Curran and others of that generation were among the regular visitors to Connell’s office in Chancery Lane, but their conversations were seldom seriously political, more a lot of ‘banter and good-humoured chat about themselves and their friends’.

None of their talk made much impression on Pat Fagan. He was probably too young to be interested.

William O’Brien, who became General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union when Larkin left Dublin in 1914 to spend nearly ten years in the USA, was another frequent visitor to Jim Connell’s office in Chancery Lane. O’Brien once heard Connell claim, at a meeting in Dublin, to have been sworn into the IRB three times - in Birr, in Dublin, and in London.

In 1900, perhaps earlier for there is no date on the publication, the Agitators’ Press in Huddersfield and the *Labour Leader* in Glasgow jointly published *Red Flag Rhymes*, starting of course with *The Red Flag* and including songs about the Paris Commune, the class war, socialism, capitalism, poaching, and a variety of other topics. There was a scathing one about the Irish nationalist politician Tim Healey. Connell said that if ‘dirty little Tim’ was ever elected or accepted as leader of the Irish people he would buy himself a tomahawk and join the Red Indians.

Tim Healey

There was a little office boy,
conceited, sharp, and mean,
Whose brazen face was seldom washed,
whose shirt was never clean;

The 'devil's luck', as one might guess,
 upon this urchin fell,
And he was gathered from the mud
 by Erin's chief, Parnell.

He did his master's menial work
 with quite congenial mind,
And ever chose as jobs of love
 the blackest he could find,
The whole immense establishment
 successfully he bled,
And fed and fattened on the fare
 his benefactor spread.

At length the day of trouble came, the
 chieftain had a fall,
With lion heart he faced his foes, his back
 against the wall;
The faithless rabble stoned him there, and
 fractured ev'ry limb,
And foremost of the yelping pack was
 dirty little Tim.

Soon after that with showman haste the
 imp became a saint,
The bishops now his praises sing,
 the priests his merits paint,
He publishes a weekly sheet,
 of morals high and pure,
Oh, can there be a God above who lets
 such things endure.

Connell was seventy years of age and obviously too old to buy a tomahawk and join the Red Indians when in 1922 T M Healey was appointed Governor-General of the Irish Free State, representing the English king, not the people, in that part of Ireland. That may be why the Viceregal Lodge in Phoenix Park, in which Healy took up residence, became known for some time as 'Uncle Tim's Cabin'.

The First World War (1914 - 18) divided the Labour movement, nationally in Britain and internationally throughout Europe. Some of the socialist leaders, H M Hyndman being one, became 'patriots' and belligerents when the war began. Others, like the Bolsheviks in Russia and James Connolly in Dublin, denounced the war as imperialist slaughter and saw the opportunity for revolution in the political chaos that ensued. Some, among them Keir Hardie, founder of the Independent Labour Party, were pacifists. They argued in Parliament and at public meetings that the United Kingdom should remain neutral no matter what happened in Europe and irrespective of what secret agreements the British Government had entered into with France or any other power. Those pacifists who were of military age resisted conscription, refused as conscientious objectors to undertake military service, and were sent to jail.

Jim Connell could not have been a conscientious objector in the strict meaning of that term for he would have been too old during that war to be conscripted, but as a socialist he had always been a pacifist and would remain consistently anti-militarist and anti-war.

Connell came back to Ireland on a brief visit in 1918 when the Ballinlough Back to the Land Committee invited him to address an open-air public meeting at Crosskiel. The Ballinlough committee had been set up to advise tenant farmers how they could become outright owners of their holdings under the Land Purchase Act of 1903. The bronze by Michael Keane has been erected at the place where the meeting was held.

During the 1920s few would have known that Connell, the tall

and distinguished-looking journalist, a familiar figure in Fleet Street, had written *The Red Flag*. From the way he dressed, in his broad-brimmed hat, flowing cloak and flaming red scarf, and with his heavy moustache, strangers often thought he was an actor, a member perhaps of some Shakespearean company. But according to Norah Walshe, V I Lenin, head of the Soviet government, did know who had written *The Red Flag*. Connell often wore the Red Star medal which Lenin sent him in 1922.

Whether the medal was sent by Lenin personally or sent officially as a gesture of recognition and solidarity by the Russian Communist Party or the Soviet Government is, however, another matter. In May 1922 Lenin was struck down by the first of the three strokes that finally killed him. He died on 21 January 1924.

The next day, 22 January, James Ramsay McDonald, leader of the Labour Party, became Prime Minister in the Britain's first Labour Government. That was also the day on which *The Times* published an article about Jim Connell and *The Red Flag*. In that article Connell again recalled his emotions when, on his way home home from the lecture by Herbert Borrows, he began to write *The Red Flag*.

As I sat down in the train for New Cross something urged me to write a song embodying the spirit of that lecture.

The Times noted that although *The Red Flag* had been written thirty-four years ago the author still lived in London and was

a familiar figure in the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane and Fleet Street... a big man with a cheery face and heavy upturned moustaches, wearing a huge sombrero and a flowing tie of bright red.

The Times interviewed Connell because *The Red Flag*, described in the paper as an expression of socialist and indeed revolutionary sentiment, had been sung with much energy and much enthusiasm at a recent Labour election rally in the Albert Hall. Connell did not disagree when the journalist to whom he gave the interview suggested that *The Red Flag* stood for the 'spirit of revolution' and that it 'appealed to the emotions'. He was convinced that most people were swayed by their emotions, in politics as much as in anything else, and that very few responded to reasoned argument.

In February 1924 the *Irish Book Lover* noted that

The assumption by a Labour Government in England has incited *The Times* to an article on that widely-sung modern *Marseillaise* - *The Red Flag*. Its author, James Connell, a countryman of our own, an old Fenian and Land Leaguer, a picturesque figure well known in the vicinity of Fleet Street, wrote it during the great dock strike of 1889, composing the first verse on the train between Charing Cross and New Cross.

Wal Hannington, one of the younger generation of socialists and communists between the two world wars, would sometimes meet Jim Connell, Tom Mann and others in *The Golden Cross*, a pub in the Strand, near Charing Cross Railway Station. Nearly forty years later Hannington remembered that pub very well. The decor of polished brass and oakwood and red velvet curtains had not been changed, he said, since mid-Victorian times. He remembered Jim Connell as 'a great talker' with an unmistakable, though sometimes high-pitched, Irish voice, as 'a man with a very wide knowledge on a variety of subjects', and as one who, even in his old age, 'had a fighting spirit which

blazed forth when he got on to the subject of the class struggle’.

Others of the Fleet Street fraternity would also gather at *The Golden Cross*. Walter Holmes of the *Daily Herald* and afterwards news editor of the *Daily Worker* remembered that

Some time in the 1920s the *Daily Herald* journalists arranged a supper with beer over a pub in Fleet Street in honour of Jim Connell. Tom Mann and his wife Elsie were also invited. Mrs Mann was a good pianist and it was decided that at a suitable moment during the evening all those present would rise to their feet and with the piano accompaniment of Mrs Mann they would sing *The Red Flag* to the tune to which Jim had written it. They did so sing it, with great gusto, to the evident delight of Connell. He expressed his appreciation of their warm comradeship and said it was a tribute he would long remember.

Holmes did not say in what year that reception was held. It was as a matter of fact in 1926, the year after Ramsay MacDonald tried to do what Tony Blair’s New Labour Party finally succeeded in doing at the end of the twentieth century. MacDonald tried to get rid of *The Red Flag*. He disliked Jim Connell, for whatever reason. He also disliked *The Red Flag* and often said there was ‘not a good line in that song’.

In April 1925 he observed, in the course of a speech, that ‘we still want our great Labour song’ meaning, obviously, that the Labour Party should stop singing *The Red Flag* at the close of annual party conferences or other official party events and sing some other anthem.

MacDonald’s criticism was published in many of the newspapers, national and provincial. The London correspondent of

the *Meath Chronicle* reported that Connell did not mind criticism of the tune to which *The Red Flag* was popularly sung but he could not understand why MacDonald disliked the words of the song. He thought Mr Macdonald probably knew ‘nothing whatever about literature’.

Henry Hamilton Fyfe, the editor of the *Daily Herald*, then the newspaper of the Labour movement, was interested in what MacDonald had said. He took up the challenge with the comment that:

No one with music in his soul who has heard the air of *The Red Flag* sung properly, as it is sung in Germany, for example, or as it is often sung at Labour meetings, could fail to be stirred by it. It is, however, often badly sung, often dragged and slurred, and there are many who agree with Mr MacDonald in wishing for some other Labour song to be the anthem of the Movement.

The *Daily Herald* thereupon offered a prize of £50 for a song which, if judged better than *The Red Flag*, would become the official anthem of the Labour Party. When this was announced more than 300 aspiring socialist song-writers sent in what they had written, each and every one hoping, of course, to be declared the winner and to replace Jim Connell and *The Red Flag*.

Hamilton Fyfe appointed two of the world’s greatest contemporary musicians, John McCormack, the celebrated tenor, and Hugh Robertson, conductor of the renowned Glasgow Orpheus Choir, to read the entries and give their judgement.

Every one of the songs submitted received ‘careful attention’ from those two distinguished judges but in the end they both agreed that not one of them was good enough ‘to have any chance

of replacing *The Red Flag*'. John McCormack told the *Daily Herald*:

I have gone through several times the songs you sent me, and I am sorry to have to report to you that I cannot find one to which, in my opinion, the prize should be awarded.

Hugh Robertson said there were 'one or two fairly good tunes and one or two fairly good sets of verses' but there was 'not a single complete song that would even run a sporting chance of replacing *The Red Flag*'. He was convinced that 'if the song that replaces *The Red Flag* ever comes it will not come in this particular way'. He too advised the editor that 'no prize should be awarded'.

Hamilton Fyfe agreed unreservedly with the two judges. *The Red Flag*, he wrote, 'would remain in possession of the field' but that was all the more reason why everyone should 'take care to sing it as it should be sung'. How *The Red Flag* should be sung was explained by the music critic of the *Daily Herald*.

There must be virtue in a song that has been popular for generations in at least three countries. But certain modern criticisms are pardonable when the dirge-like fashion is considered in which *The Red Flag* is often sung. The verse should be rendered with briskness and vigour; in fact much more swiftly than usual and in almost staccato fashion. The chorus must be slow, but not too slow, and its last line needs an obvious rallentando (slowing down) yet the rhythm should always be well marked and the song never allowed to drag. In short, put 'some guts into it'

Norah Walshe recalled that during the period of judging her 'poor old father, who was getting very feeble, waited with tears in his eyes. It would have broken his heart to see his song displaced'. After the *Daily Herald* had announced the decision of the two judges Connell received hundreds of letters of congratulation. He and his friends were, naturally enough, all very pleased.

But Ramsay McDonald and many others in the Labour Party who disliked *The Red Flag* were evidently reluctant to accept the judges' decisions and comments. They continued to complain and in 1929 *The Worker*, which was published as a supplement to *The Mineworker*, alleged that 'the official Labour movement', which meant the Labour Party and the TUC, had been 'more and more dropping *The Red Flag*'. *The Worker* suspected that official Labour did not like having to sing about 'the weak and base who think more of pelf and place than of keeping the flag flying'.

In 1925, the year of the song competition, Jim Connell was 73 years of age. He had only another four years of life left. His last days are perhaps best described by Norah Walshe. Early in February 1929 she was called to St Bartholomew's Hospital and told that her father was critically ill. He had suffered a stroke on the stairs of his office in Chancery Lane, had been found by the police and taken to the hospital. Norah brought him home to her own house but had to send him away again almost immediately to another hospital. He was 'too big and heavy to manage'.

On 9 February the *Daily Herald* announced that Jim Connell, 'famous author of *The Red Flag*', had died in Lewisham Hospital the previous night. An obituary in the *Sunday Worker* the next day said that Jim Connell was 'one who had never wavered in his socialist faith' and that the verse of *The Red Flag* which 'pours scorn on the weak and base who cringe before the rich man's frown' expressed exactly what Connell 'meant and felt to the day of his death'. On Monday 11 February the *Daily Herald* stated that

Through poverty and persecution the strains of *The Red Flag* have heartened thousands of toilers in their struggle towards a saner, freer and higher state of society.

And in the *Workers' Life* the following week Tom Mann, who had known Jim Connell as a friend and comrade for more than forty years, said that none knew better than himself the immense revolutionary impact of *The Red Flag*. He had seen the effect of that song in 'exceptional circumstances' in Australia and in South Africa and realised how much it expressed the heartfelt aspirations of oppressed people everywhere. He thought that in all the English-speaking countries *The Red Flag* was far and away ahead of all the other songs of the Labour movement.

The Islington branch of the International Class War Prisoners Aid Association expressed 'deepest sympathy on the death of our dear comrade Jim Connell'. *The Worker* said Connell was a 'rebel against capitalism' - particularly against landlordism - to the end of his days.

The *Meath Chronicle*, principal provincial newspaper in Connell's homeland, County Meath, also published an obituary, written by the London correspondent. He had known Connell, if not personally at least by seeing him often in Fleet Street.

The Red Flag, said the obituary, had become the rallying song of the international socialist movement and had 'spread the fame of its author to the furthestmost corners of the earth'. Jim Connell remained 'a convinced socialist' all his life but

despite the unpopularity of his opinions in many quarters he was held in the greatest respect by all who knew him'.

The *Meath Chronicle* concluded that Kilskyre, where Connell had been born in 1852, had 'reason to be proud of its famous and courageous son'.

The 14 February 1929 was, wrote Norah Walshe, 'a bitterly cold day' when the hearse and mourners left Connell's house for Golders Green where the remains would be cremated. A few people waiting outside the house 'reverently followed the hearse for some distance singing *The Red Flag* softly'. At Golders Green there was a crowd of several hundred, many with red rosettes and red flags. They gathered round the coffin and draped it with a red flag on which were inscribed the words *Socialism Advances*.

Among the mourners were Tom Mann and Shapurji Saklatvala, MP for Battersea. George Hicks, Alonso B Swales and A.A Purcell represented the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. William O'Brien represented the Irish TUC.

Henry Noble, a friend who had known Jim Connell for forty years could only say, 'He was a good comrade, a poet and a socialist fighter. I shall miss my old friend'. Norah's husband said Connell had been 'an ardent student of Shakespeare, a lover of nature, a man who had been a law unto himself but - always loveable'. Tom Mann read some of Connell's songs. 'Jim Connell', he said, 'was no meek and mild platitudinarian. He was first and foremost a fighter. *The Red Flag* had inspired thousands, possibly millions'. George Hicks concluded the obsequies with a few simple words.

Farewell, old comrade. We are glad you have lived. We are sorry you have departed this life.

Then, said Norah Walshe; 'We all sang *The Red Flag*, just as he would have wished, and the coffin slowly disappeared from view. It was a sad and wonderful parting'.

On 15 February the *Daily Herald* reported that

It was a very impressive occasion. Just as Jim was no ordinary man this was no ordinary funeral. The service opened in the lofty, ice-cold, red-bricked chapel with *The Red Flag*. First it was played to the tune of *The White Cockade* and then to *Tannenbaum*. A red flag draped the coffin bearing the words *Socialism Advances*. The chapel was filled. There were bearded stalwarts who had fought many a brave fight. There were frail-looking women with red rosettes. When they were offered song sheets they said: We know *The Red Flag* by heart; of course we do.

After the service Norah Walshe, her husband, a few family friends and the principal mourners watched the cremation and saw the ashes scattered in the Garden of Rest. Jim Connell had gone from this world. *The Red Flag* lived on.

Finding Jim Connell

Andrew Boyd first wrote the story of Jim Connell and The Red Flag in the form of a radio programme which was broadcast by BBC Home Service in January 1962. He now recalls how that broadcast was compiled and the interesting sequence.

In 1960 when I set out to find Jim Connell there were not more than five or six people alive who had known him. One of them was Wal Hannington whom I got to know when I lived in London.. Everybody knew *The Red Flag*, but other than the name ‘J Connell’ at the bottom of each copy very few knew for sure who had written the song. Like many others, I thought Connell might have been an Irish American. Then one day I read a reference to ‘the genial Jim Connell’ in an article about the early Irish socialists.

Some time during the year 1960 I asked Hannington how well he had known Connell and if he knew anybody else who had known him. I was then thinking of writing a radio talk on Connell and *The Red Flag*, but apart from the fact that he was an Irishman and that Hannington had known him I had nothing whatever to go on. Some years earlier I had looked up the original publication of *The Red Flag* in *Justice* and knew Connell had intended the song be sung to the tune of *The White Cockade*. I also remembered what had been said about Connell in the Report of the Parnell Commission.

Hannington thought, however, I would have great difficulty in getting any further information. His actual words were:

Snatches of information might be collected from people who knew him but for most of them I think you will need the aid of a spiritualist - they have joined him in the Great Valhalla.

I was hoping, of course, they had not all gone to the 'Great Valhalla' and that some of the people who had known Connell might still be alive. Hannington talked about the pub in the Strand where he used to meet Connell in the company of Tom Mann, Tom Quelch, whose father Harry Quelch had been editor of *Justice* when *The Red Flag* first appeared, and others of that pioneering generation. Hannington was, in fact, able to give a splendid description of Connell as he remembered him.

He was a fine hefty man over six feet tall and very picturesque in his style of dress. He usually wore a black sombrero wide-brimmed hat and a bright red scarf tied in a bow at the neck with the ends flowing across his broad chest. On some occasions he wore a long cloak.

He could carry it off all right because of his size. He was a very striking figure and I believe many people who saw him thought he was an old Shakespearean actor. He had an enormous moustache, with a rather high-pitched voice and from his brogue nobody could mistake him for other than an Irishman.

The red scarf was usually changed for a green one on St Patrick's Day.

Hannington asked Walter Holmes, at the *Daily Worker*, if he had known Jim Connell. Indeed he had. He told Hannington about the reception for Connell over the pub in Fleet Street when Elsie Mann played the piano and the company sang *The Red Flag*.

All that information was in a letter which Hannington sent me on 12 April 1960. It was a very good beginning.

I was then a divisional organiser for the National Council of Labour Colleges, of which J P M Millar had been general secretary since 1923. Millar knew of Connell but he had not

known him personally so he suggested that I write to Jim Middleton who was then in his 'eighties. Middleton had been General Secretary of the Labour Party for many years.

Middleton, like Millar, did not know Connell personally but he claimed to have seen him at times 'tramping up Fleet Street, fowling piece in hand and red tie fluttering bravely'.

I had my doubts about the fowling piece in Fleet Street and I would have disregarded Middleton altogether had he not also sent something more valuable - an obituary on Connell which he had written for *The Labour Magazine* in March 1929. It was a discursive obituary but it did include one vital fact, the date, 14 February 1929, on which the remains of Jim Connell had been cremated.

I sent that date to Wal Hannington who lived not far from the National Newspaper Library in Colindale. The newspapers were all there, among them the *Daily Herald* in which there were bound to be reports of the death of Jim Connell and of the funeral.

On his first visit to Colindale Hannington found that William O'Brien had attended the funeral. O'Brien was living in retirement in Dublin. He replied, on 31 October 1961, to the letter I sent him, saying he had known Connell very well and that before meeting him in person in 1910 had read much about him in socialist publications and had heard James Connolly speak about him often.

O'Brien's letter was full of even more interesting information about Connell - his parents, his emigration to London, his association with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Independent Labour Party.

Meanwhile Hannington had found, in the Labour Who's Who for 1927, the date and place of Connell's birth, 27 March 1852 at Kilskyre in County Meath; the date on which he became secretary of the Workmen's Legal Aid Friendly Society; and the titles of some of the books he had written.

With O'Brien's letter, the press reports Hannington had collected in

London, and information I gathered from other sources I felt confident enough in November 1961 to submit a memorandum to Philip French in the BBC Talks Department in London. French was interested but thought the first draft of the talk not good enough. A second draft was submitted. After certain changes and additions, suggested by both French and Hannington, the script *The Man Who Wrote The Red Flag* was finally judged to be 'in good shape and accepted for broadcasting.

It was recorded in the Belfast studios of the BBC by John Boyd, senior talks producer, and broadcast from London on the morning of Saturday 27 January 1962. Walter Holmes previewed the talk in the Daily Worker on Friday 26th. That was welcome publicity. It must surely have increased the number of listeners.

The search for Jim Connell had been interesting. It had taken the best part of two years. The response to the broadcast was even more interesting. Hannington wrote immediately to say the talk had been informative and that it must surely have impressed many of the younger people in the Labour movement.

Dr A J Potter of the Royal Irish Academy of Music wrote from Greystones in County Wicklow to say how much he had enjoyed the programme but also to point out that I was wrong to describe *Tannenbaum* as a German hymn. He was aware of the fact that *O Tannenbaum*, to give the tune its full name, was German. He had learned it as such at school. But he had never heard anything about its religious origins and, candidly, was not convinced. Then in words which, though specific to musicians, Jim Connell would have been delighted to hear he said that *Tannenbaum*

had all the characteristics of a particularly deadly type of tune which is endemic in Teutonic folk music; rigid adherence to an elementary formal theme and a maddening repetitive implication of varying successions of tonic and dominant.

A week or so later I got a letter, dated the day of the broadcast, from Norah Walshe who was then nearly eighty and living at St Leonards-on-Sea. She said she had been listening to the broadcast with tears in her eyes for it brought back memories of her father and her earlier days. She also said that although Lenin had sent him the Red Star medal in 1922 Connell had never joined the Communist Party. He did, however, believe Soviet Russia was on the right road to socialism, especially when Tom Mann came back from Moscow with 'glowing accounts' of Soviet society. Finally she told me that years earlier she had written a 'short biography' of Connell, soon after he died. So far as she could remember it had been published in one of the Irish newspapers but the Irish members of the family 'being all Roman Catholics were not very pleased'.

Norah's first letter was misdirected by the BBC and sent by mistake to Andrew Boyd, the foreign editor of The Economist. It eventually reached me and I replied with thanks. With her next letter Norah sent a copy of the short biography which, I could see, could be an invaluable source for any future biographer interested in writing a book on *The Red Flag*, Jim Connell and his times.

Almost the entire fraternity of early socialist leadership in Britain and Ireland, and the leaders of the succeeding generation, would appear in such a book - Hyndman, Keir Hardie, Tom Mann, Pete Curran, Harry Quelch, Connolly, Larkin, Ramsay MacDonald, George Lansbury, Hannington, and many many more.

In a further letter Norah said that years ago she had given the Labour Party all the old files of the *Labour Leader* and of *Justice* but feared they may have been lost when London was blitzed during the Second World War. She had, not unexpectedly, obtained 'a good price' for a bundle of Bernard Shaw's letters to Connell. She also sent me a copy of *Red Flag Rhymes*. Upon reading the thymes again she had found some of them 'amusing, some 'awful', and some quite good in their way'.

But altogether, she thought, they contained ‘too much hate and bitterness’.

The following year, on 17 October 1963 when I was talking to the BBC about a television programme on *The Red Flag*, Norah sent a letter in which she had ‘something rather interesting to tell me’. The previous year her son, Dr Maurice O’Connell Walshe, and his wife had taken the tenancy of a first-floor flat in a house, No 9 Howitt Road, near Hampstead Heath.

They had been no more than a few weeks in the house when the London County Council asked permission to erect a plaque on the wall outside. The plaque was to record the fact that it was the house in which Ramsay MacDonald had lived for nine years, 1916-1925. Who should be ministers in Britain’s first Labour government was decided, in January 1924, at a meeting in one of the top-floor rooms in that house.

O’Connell-Walshe and the other tenants agreed and on the day the plaque was unveiled, Friday 24 May 1963, the company that assembled included twenty-three members, three generations, of the McDonald family, among them Richard Clements, editor of *Tribune*, and his wife Bridget. Bridget Clements was the daughter of Alister McDonald and the granddaughter of Ramsay MacDonald.

Alister MacDonald was surprised, indeed quite enthusiastic, when O’Connell-Walshe told him that it was his grandfather Jim Connell who had written *The Red Flag*. He mentioned that in his speech when unveiling the plaque.

The police closed the roads nearby before three o’clock in the afternoon. By that time many well known people’ had arrived, among them Clement Attlee (then Lord Attlee) who had been Prime Minister in the 1945 Labour Government; Lord Reith, first Director-General of the BBC; the publisher Sir Stanley Unwin; and Sir Alec Martin, former chairman of Christies.

Norah Walshe was also invited. She and Attlee sat together and, as she told me, had an interesting chat’ for the best part of half-an-hour.

Attlee must also have been surprised to find himself talking to Jim Connell’s daughter. They would have had much in common and were both of the same age. Norah also chatted with the MacDonalds and found them very pleasant people.

In that letter she recalled that her father had never liked Ramsay McDonald nor did Ramsay MacDonald have any love for Jim Connell. But did that matter any more? After all, she wrote, McDonald had been Britain’s first Labour Prime Minister and deserved therefore ‘to be remembered’.

Postscript

In 1963 the Workers' Musical Association thought it time to settle the argument about either *Maryland* (Tannenbaum) or *The White Cockade* being the proper air to which The Red Flag should be sung. The association produced a record of The Red Flag, sung by the Glasgow Socialist Choir and the Young Communist League Singers to the tune of *Maryland* on the one side and to the tune of *The White Cockade* on the other.

Reviewing the record, on 19 January 1963, Fred Dallas, music critic of the Daily Worker, decided there was 'no question' which tune the Labour Movement should choose. The answer was

Maryland simply because it is so much better sung. The Maryland version is sung so as to give each word its proper weight and the diction of the massed Glasgow Socialist and Young Communist League Singers is so impeccable that the whole point of the song comes over.

But *The White Cockade* version is taken at a tremendous lick, with the words emerging like mouth music, a meaningless gabble which passes in one ear and out the other.

Fred Dallas also observed that as soon *The Red Flag* was sung in Glasgow and in Liverpool in December 1889 it was no longer Jim Connell's property. It belonged to the Labour movement which had created both Connell and the song. The movement had therefore right to sing *The Red Flag* to whatever was judged to be the better tune.

Writings of Jim Connell

As well as being the author of *The Red Flag* and contributor for many years to *Justice*, *The Labour Leader*, *The Call* and other early socialist journals Jim Connell wrote:

Confessions of a Poacher

The Truth about the Game Laws.

The Horse and how to treat him

Glasgow Municipal Enterprises

Red Flag Rhymes

Socialism and the Survival of the Fittest

Brothers at Last: A Centenary Appeal to Celt and Saxon

All Connell's books, pamphlets and songs, except of course *The Red Flag*, have been out of print since the early years of the twentieth century. They belong to another age. The following, however, are the locations of the few copies of his work that have not been lost:

The Truth About the Game Laws - London School of Economics

Socialism and the Survival of the Fittest - London School of Economics; Trinity College Dublin;

Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

Brothers at Last - Bodleian Library, Oxford

Confessions of a Poacher - The British Library

Glasgow Municipal Enterprises - Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Red Flag Rhymes - Andrew Boyd, Belfast.

The Red Flag

The people's flag is deepest red.
It shrouded oft our martyred dead,
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold,
Their hearts blood dyed its every fold.

(chorus)

Then raise the scarlet standard high.
Within its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.

Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze,
The sturdy German chants its praise,
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung
Chicago swells the surging throng.

It waved above our infant might,
When all ahead seemed dark as night;
It witnessed many a deed and vow,
We must not change its colour now.

It well recalls the triumphs past
It gives the hope of peace at last;
The banner bright, the symbol plain,
Of human right and human gain.

It suits today the weak and base,
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place
To cringe before the rich man's frown,
And haul the sacred emblem down.

With heads uncovered swear we all
To bear it onward till we fall:
Come dungeons dark or gallows grim,
This song shall be our parting hymn.