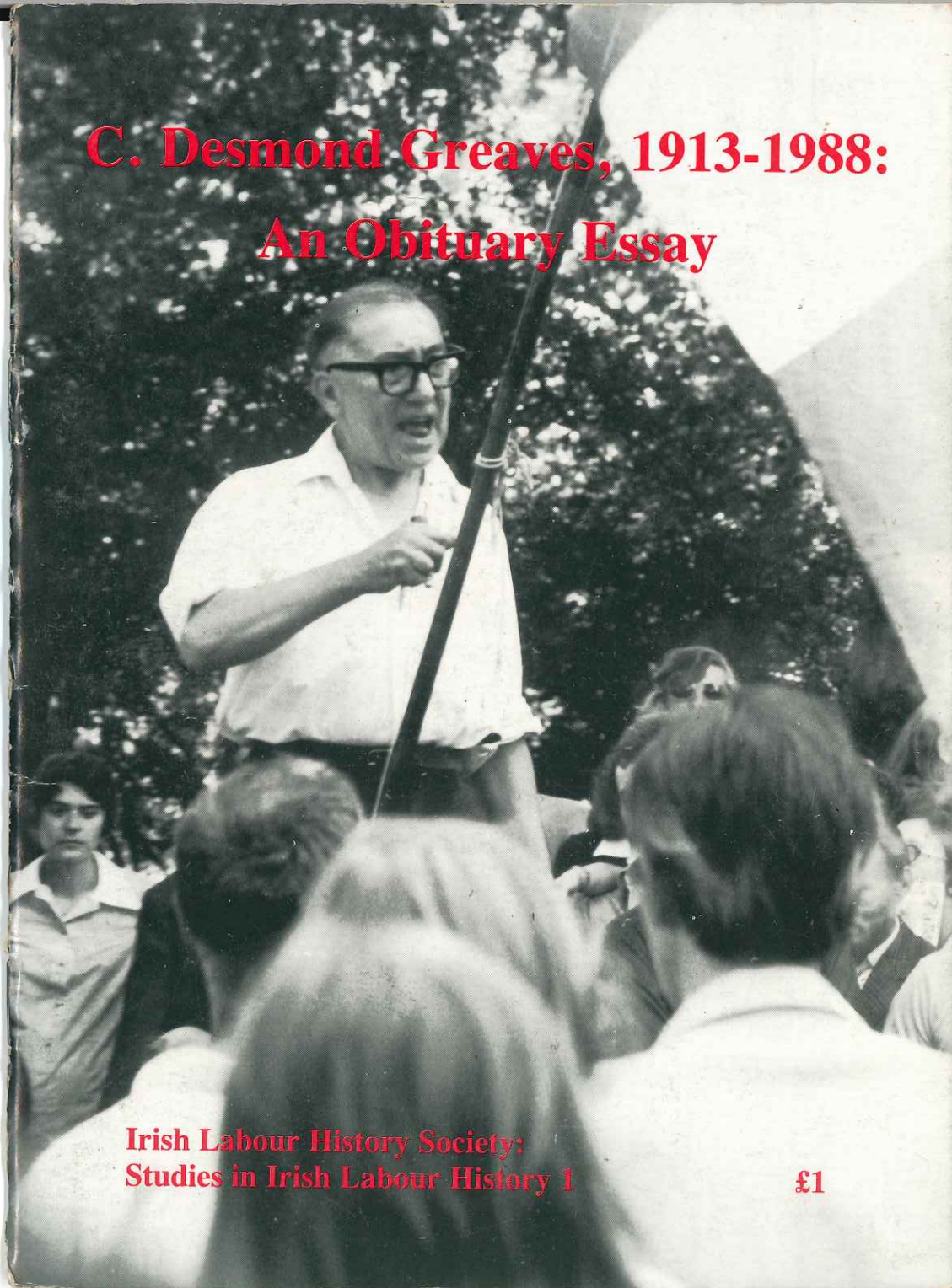


**C. Desmond Greaves, 1913-1988:
An Obituary Essay**



**Irish Labour History Society:
Studies in Irish Labour History 1**

£1

Desmond Greaves, 1913-1988: An Obituary Essay

This pamphlet is the first to be produced by the Irish Labour History Society. It is appropriate that the life of C. Desmond Greaves should be the subject matter. The essay first appeared in *Saothar 14*, 1989, as a tribute to Greaves's contribution to labour history and in recognition of his undervalued contribution as a labour activist. This edition has a number of minor textual amendments by the author and additional photographic material supplied by Anthony Coughlan; Tom Redmond; Aonad Computer Services, Dublin; and Seán Redmond, General Secretary, Irish Municipal Employees Trade Union.

The Irish Labour History Society is grateful to the following organisations who have generously sponsored this publication: Desmond Greaves Summer School, Dublin; Connolly Association; Trade Unionists for Irish Unity and Independence (TUIUI); and the Communist Party of Ireland.

It is hoped that this pamphlet will contribute, as Desmond Greaves would have wished, to an appreciation of the values and political aspirations to which he devoted his life and to the role of labour history in his political formation and that of those with whom he worked.

Francis Devine & Emmett O'Connor,
Irish Labour History Society,
August, 1990.

Anthony Coughlan is Senior Lecturer in Social Administration and Policy at Trinity College, Dublin. He is Desmond Greaves's literary executor and a member of the organising committee of the Desmond Greaves Summer School, which is held in Dublin each year on the last weekend in August.

Front Cover: Desmond Greaves addressing a gathering at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, London, 1980.

Back Cover: Desmond Greaves hiking in the North Wales countryside, 1966/7.

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Anthony Coughlan

Irish Labour History Society: Studies in Irish Labour History 1
1991

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First Published by Irish Labour History Society,
c/o Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 19 Raglan Road, Dublin 4.
August, 1990.

2nd Edition 1991

Designed by Patrick Funge

Set in Times Roman and printed by the Elo Press Ltd., Dublin 8.

Irish Labour History Society

This pamphlet, the first of an occasional series, is an amended version of an article first published in *Saothar 14*, 1989, Journal of the Irish Labour History Society.

ISBN 0791-2838

CHARLES DESMOND GREAVES, internationalist, champion of Irish unity and independence, revolutionary socialist and Marxist historian, was born at 7A Rockville Street, Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, across the Mersey from Liverpool, on 27 September, 1913. His family was of middle-class, Protestant, North of Ireland background. They used go on summer holidays each year to Newcastle, County Down, when Greaves and his sister were children. He grew up in a stimulating social environment. At that time Liverpool was still not far from its Victorian zenith when it had been the greatest port in the world; while a cycle-ride of a few miles across the Wirral through Chester brought one into the hills of Clwyd, where people still spoke their native Welsh.

His father, Charles Edward Greaves, was a post office official, a man of strong musical interests, who conducted the Liverpool Post Office orchestra and ran the local Methodist Church choir. His mother, born Amy Elizabeth Taylor, had a degree in music. Greaves used say he knew more about music than any other subject. He attended Birkenhead Institute grammar school, which he later termed 'a cram shop'; but it stimulated an interest in science, in particular botany. He joined the Liverpool Botanical Society and had his first scientific paper, written at the age of 18, published in the *North-Western Naturalist*. He attended Liverpool University from 1932 to 1936, graduating in botany, chemistry and geography. He began to write poetry in his teens and continued doing so throughout his life. Some of his early pieces were carried in the *Poetry Review* during the 1930s. He became interested in aesthetic theory, on which he later filled several notebooks, and was planning a book on scientific aesthetics at the time of his death.

In the politically dramatic decade of the 1930s, with fascism advancing on the continent, some of the best of Britain's young intelligentsia moved to the Left. At university Greaves became involved in the student Socialist Society and in 1934 joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, which he remained a member of throughout his life. He took to politics like a duck to water, he used say. In the 1930s, he later recalled, he had three regular set speeches: on the horrors of war, the crimes of the British Empire and the evils of Partition! He used sell the paper *Republican Congress* in the Irish districts of Liverpool. From the time of his political awakening, perhaps because

of his Irish background, he was interested above all in the National Question and issues of colonialism and imperialism. He early reached the conclusion that socialist internationalism can be based only on the free co-operation of sovereign, independent nation states. This conviction was strengthened when he went to London in 1937 by friendships formed with leading figures of the British Communist movement. Most notable of these was Thomas Alfred Jackson,¹ the English Marxist historian of Ireland, to whose *Ireland Her Own* Greaves later added a modern epilogue. Jackson had known James Connolly personally and in later life Greaves, who had a strong sense of the importance of the personal transmission of tradition, used say that he regarded himself as having passed on to a new generation the socialist republicanism of Connolly which he had originally got from Jackson. Others he came to know at that time were Rajani Palme Dutt,² Willie Gallacher³ and Jimmy Shields.⁴ These, in their various ways, upheld the classic view of Marx and Engels that complete British disengagement from Ireland was in the interest of the British working class and the advance of the Labour movement and socialist cause in Britain – a view which Greaves championed throughout his political life.

Connolly Association

From the late 1930s until 1951 Greaves worked in the chemical industry, during which time he added several scientific patents to his name. He was employed at Woolwich Arsenal during the War. Later he worked with the British Coal Utilisation Board and Powell Duffryn, where he became chief research chemist. His political activity during this time became oriented largely towards Ireland and the Connolly Association. In 1941 he joined the Connolly Club, as it was then known. This had been founded in September 1938 as a coming-together of the London branch of the Republican Congress, the Irish section of the League Against Imperialism and some people who were former members of the Irish Self-Determination League, which had supported Sinn Féin in Britain during the War of Independence. Its orientation was Republican Labour. During the Second World War it sought to organise the Irish people who were streaming into Britain's war-time industries by urging them to join trade unions and bring their influence to bear on the politics of the country they had moved to. At the same time it defended Ireland's right to stay neutral in the War. Greaves became secretary of the Connolly Clubs' Exiles Advisory Bureau, dealing with countless queries about lodgings, jobs and call-up matters.



The Connolly Association was slow to adapt to post-war circumstances and the advent of the Cold War. For a time it adopted a far-left course, partly under the influence of the erstwhile editor of its monthly paper, Pat Dooley, who was strongly anti-clerical.⁵ The sales of *Irish Freedom* – which became the *Irish Democrat* in 1945 – had been high during the war when no Irish papers were imported. They now fell drastically. In January 1948 the paper was on the point of closing when Greaves agreed to take on the editorship. He gradually turned its fortunes around. He remained editor for the forty years until his death, by which time the *Irish Democrat* could claim to be the longest established Irish working-class paper in existence. In 1951 he gave up his well-paid position with Powell Duffryn to go full-time as editor. Henceforth his political life inextricably merged with the story of the Connolly Association.

Greaves's decision to devote himself full-time to politics constituted the mature second choice which, he used say, all revolutionaries had to make if they were to sustain throughout their lives the commitment first entered into in the idealism of youth. For Greaves that commitment was to the cause of a united independent Ireland, to be achieved by making the ending of Partition the policy of the British Labour movement. He held that the near million-strong Irish community in Britain, if organised, could be a powerful influence on British politics, to their own benefit and that of the country they had come from. Over the next four decades he sought to make the Connolly Association and its monthly paper the means of achieving that organisation. In the process he became known throughout the Irish community in Britain and the wider Labour movement as an indefatigable organiser, public speaker, lecturer and writer who influenced significantly large numbers of those he came in contact with, particularly young people. The material rewards were few. His wage as editor was always of the most modest – in the 1950s close to penury. Greaves was an editor who, like Connolly before him, at once edited his paper, supervised its lay-out and then sold it personally to the readers.⁶ He not only wrote much of it, but went regularly to the printers in the little market town of Ripley, Derbyshire, for over four decades to read the monthly proofs and then hawked it weekend after weekend around the pubs of the Irish districts and outside churches and Irish dance-halls, together with other members of the Association. He continued to do this regularly into his seventh decade. He had an excellent rapport with the immigrant Irish workers, enjoyed the 'craic' and was able to swap repartee with the best. Some of them must sometimes have wondered, though, how such a gifted and obviously

highly educated man had come to devote himself to this political work among them, in a social and political climate which was often of the bleakest.

In the 1950s, as the guiding political brain of the Connolly Association, Greaves advanced the view that the way to a peaceful solution of the Irish problem was to discredit Ulster Unionism in Britain through exposing the discriminatory practices which occurred under the Stormont regime, in the process winning sympathetic allies for the cause of Irish reunification. This perspective was embodied in a new constitution adopted by the Connolly Association at its December 1955 annual conference in Birmingham. There followed a fifteen-year-long campaign of education and propaganda, directed mainly at the Labour and trade union movement, which did much to ensure that when, in 1968, the Civil Rights agitation got going in the North itself, British Labour opinion was substantially behind the Nationalist rather than Unionist side. This was a transformation from 1949, when the Labour Government had passed the Ireland Act, which purported to give the Stormont Parliament a veto on constitutional change affecting the North. In 1958 Greaves proposed that the Association send the English lawyer, John Hostettler, to cover the Mallon and Talbot trial in Belfast. Subsequently, in a series of meetings throughout England, Hostettler spoke on the abuses of the RUC which were exposed during this trial and the iniquities of the Special Powers Act. Following the cessation of the IRA's Border campaign of the late 1950s, Greaves and the Connolly Association took up the issue of the release of the Republican internees in Crumlin Road prison, Belfast. Numbers of these were trade unionists, some of them members of British unions whose branches and members found it hard to believe that people could be interned without charge or trial, sometimes for years on end, in part of the United Kingdom, even though the matter could not be raised at Westminster under the 'convention' whereby British MPs were forbidden to raise subjects devolved to Stormont under the Government of Ireland Act. This was a happy way of ensuring that various sleeping political dogs, which might otherwise inconvenience the British Government, were left undisturbed. Through a succession of lobbies at Westminster, Greaves and the Association succeeded in getting over half the Parliamentary Labour Party, together with various British notabilities, to send telegrams to Unionist Prime Minister Brookeborough demanding the release of the internees, which gradually occurred.

This campaign enabled Greaves to build good relations with the old

Nationalist Party and in particular with the late Cahir Healy, Member for Fermanagh in the Stormont Parliament, with whom he stayed in 1962 while on an investigative visit to study anti-Catholic discrimination in the Six Counties. The Association organised other visits to the North by British notabilities, among them Col. Marcus Lipton, Labour MP for Brixton, Miss Betty Harrison of the Tobacco Workers' Union and John Eber, secretary of the Movement for Colonial Freedom – later Liberation – which championed the anti-colonialist cause in the latter decades of the British Empire's existence. There followed a series of civil rights marches across England – the longest being one from Liverpool to London in 1962 – which Greaves both organised and participated in, with a couple of dozen Irish people holding meetings in the towns along the way and describing the injustices suffered by the Northern Catholics. Strictly speaking, these were the first Irish civil rights marches, though they took place in England and were greeted with derision and indifference rather than brickbats. The anti-Unionist campaign was taken up by the National Council for Civil Liberties and the Movement for Colonial Freedom, to which the Connolly Association was affiliated and, from 1965, by the Labour Party based Campaign for Democracy in Ulster. In 1966 Brookeborough's successor, Captain Terence O'Neill, was sufficiently alarmed at the growth of anti-Unionist sentiment at Westminster to write a letter to the Connolly Association attempting to defend the convention of British non-intervention in Stormont's affairs. Details of this anti-Unionist campaign in Britain can be traced in the pages of the *Irish Democrat*. It is an aspect of the background to the Northern civil rights movement and the events which came from it that has hitherto been neglected by historians of the period.

Civil Rights

Though his work was in Britain, there is a good case for regarding Desmond Greaves as the intellectual progenitor of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. For it was he who pioneered *the idea* of a civil rights campaign as the way to undermine Ulster Unionism. Moreover, as suggested above, the successes of that movement could not have taken place without the changed political climate within Britain itself to which Greaves and the Connolly Association's work had substantially contributed. Though Greaves held strongly that movements in Britain should not organise in Ireland, North or South, and that movements in Ireland should not organise or interfere in Britain, he had considerable



Top: Second Connolly Association Civil Rights March, July, 1961, Liverpool-Nottingham. Marchers photographed in Oldham, Lancashire. Left to right: Chris Sullivan, London; Aine Redmond, London; Martin Guinan, Lancashire; Joe Deighan, London; Desmond Greaves; Michael Crowe, Sunderland; Bobby Rossiter, London; Anthony Coughlan, London.

Bottom: Desmond Greaves addresses a memorial meeting at Karl Marx's grave, Highgate Cemetery, organised by the Marx Memorial Library, 14 March, 1959.



personal influence on some of those associated with the foundation of the civil rights movement. It was in response to a suggestion from him that Betty Sinclair, secretary of the Belfast Trades Council, and Billy McCullough, its Chairman, proposed that the Trades Council hold the well-known civil rights conference in Belfast on 8 May, 1965, at which the launching of a campaign for civil rights was discussed, with the Republicans for the first time putting their grievances to the Labour men. This came to nothing because of stalling by the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Greaves always considered that the tragedy of the civil rights movement was that it did not get going in 1965, under the auspices of the mainly Protestant workers of the Belfast Trades Council. For over the subsequent three years Paisleyism became stronger, the Republicans grew more impatient and much inflammable sectarian tinder was given time to pile up. When the Northern Ireland civil rights marches commenced in 1968 Greaves was a strong critic of the tactics of the student-based People's Democracy. As he put it in his *Reminiscences of the Connolly Association*: 'Looking back I would say the Civil Rights movement failed to achieve its object because between 1965 and 1968 control passed from the Trade Unionists to the Republicans. Whereas the Trade Unionists would have known how to resist the 'ultra-left', the Republicans did not'.

Greaves always believed the key to solving the Irish problem to be in Britain, where British Government policy was primarily formed, rather than in Ireland. When Ulster Unionism was squeezed and divided between, on the one side, pressure from London for reform and on the other the pressure of the local civil rights movement, Greaves wrote to Prime Minister Wilson on behalf of the Connolly Association in July 1968, advancing the conception of a Bill of Rights at Westminster as the progressive way forward. This advocated a legislative straitjacket being imposed by the Westminster Parliament on the subordinate Stormont assembly, which would at once outlaw discriminatory practices – thus guaranteeing civil rights and freedoms for the Northern Nationalist population – while at the same time permitting, and preferably encouraging, the devolved administration in the North to develop closer relations with the South. He saw such a constitutional initiative as the best way of enabling Nationalists to take advantage of the divisions within Unionism, encouraging an alliance in a reformed Stormont between Nationalists and liberal Unionists, isolating the Unionist Right and opening up a way in time to peaceful reunification with Dublin. The Bill of Rights demand was taken up

by the Civil Rights Association in Belfast. In September 1971, as a result of the Connolly Association's lobbying, it became the policy of the Trades Union Congress and thus of the entire British trade union movement. But the Labour Government was by then out of office and Harold Wilson had thrown away his opportunity to make a constructive contribution to solving the Irish problem. Four months before, in May 1971, following discussions with Arthur Latham MP,⁷ Lord Brockway⁸ and Geoffrey Bing,⁹ Greaves personally drafted a Bill of Rights in suitable parliamentary form. This was proposed on the same day, 12 May, 1971, by Latham in the Commons and by Brockway in the Lords. It seems to have been the first time in modern British parliamentary history that a Bill was simultaneously presented in both Houses. In the House of Commons the Tories imposed a three-line whip to refuse the Bill of Rights a first reading. A reading was granted in the Lords, but the Bill was thrown out on its second reading there in June.

The Bill of Rights approach to the Northern problem sought to leave the Stormont Parliament in existence, with its power to do harm from the Nationalist standpoint taken from it and its ability to develop in a progressive direction extended. The alternative course, which Greaves used all his influence to oppose but which eventually prevailed, was to abolish Stormont altogether and impose 'direct rule' from London. Greaves saw this step as likely to strengthen the Union rather than weaken it, much as the abolition of the corrupt and discredited College Green Parliament in 1800 had strengthened the link with Britain then. The call for 'direct rule' from London was first put forward by the young left-wing radicals of the People's Democracy – who saw the Unionist régime in Belfast rather than its principals in London as the main enemy. It was taken up by the newly formed Provisionals. It swept like wildfire through the British Parliamentary Labour Party. And in due course it was implemented by the Conservative Edward Heath in 1972 – as Greaves put it, 'like a cat being driven into a dairy'. When in February 1971 the left-wing weekly *Tribune* advocated 'Shut Down Stormont', Greaves wrote in the *Irish Democrat*: 'This is Labour assuming the mantle of imperialism. Imagine the difficulty of getting a united Ireland if the whole administration of the North were fused with England. Does *Tribune* want a new fifty years of bitterness as anti-partition leagues, labour organisations and the IRA direct their energies to getting the direct rule administration removed? Every issue would be automatically transferred from Belfast to London. And a solution might wait years as successive English governments fooled, vacillated and temporised as they are well

able to do'. Nearly twenty years later, following several failed attempts to re-establish a devolved Assembly in the North, the advantages of 'direct rule' may appear more dubious to the interested parties. The experience led Greaves to comment that in politics he had rarely known a policy to be adopted on its intrinsic merits; other considerations almost always seemed to have more sway.

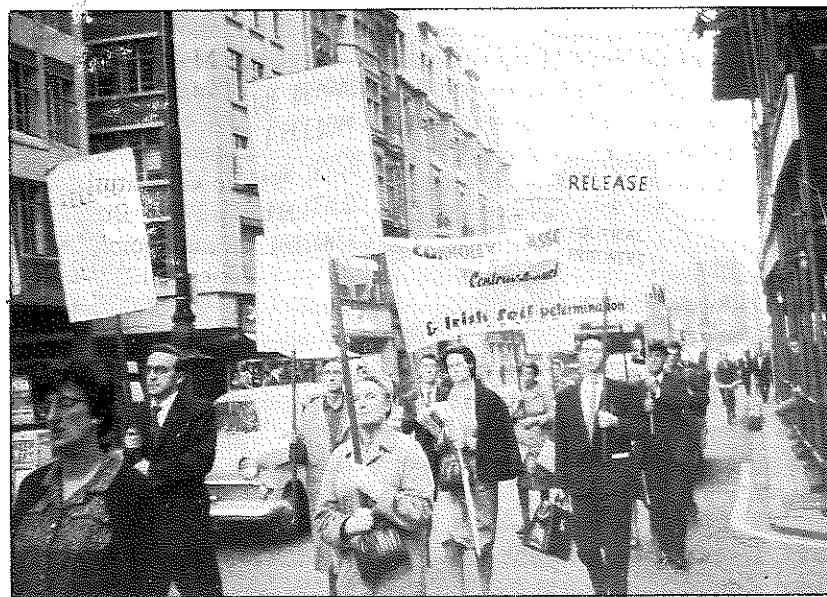
Greaves regarded the military campaign of the Provisional IRA as mistaken, because it could not achieve the end desired – a united Ireland – though he respected the good intentions and dedication of the Republicans. In the 1970s and 1980s his political work in Britain was concerned with the effects on the Irish community of such measures as the Prevention of Terrorism Act and with lobbying in Labour and Trade Union circles for the adoption by them of a policy of supporting Irish reunification. In those years he sought to bring cultural and educational activity to the fore in the work of the Connolly Association, organising lecture series on Irish history, weekend summer schools and the like and contributing to the general growth of interest in Irish studies within the Irish community in Britain, as second-generation Irish people began to explore their historical roots. In recent years he became increasingly concerned with theoretical issues relating to democracy and the Nation State, which he thought were likely to dominate European politics for the coming half century or longer.

Greaves was a strong opponent of the Common Market from its inception. The *Irish Democrat* must have been one of the very first political organs to oppose British and Irish membership of that body. Greaves regarded the EEC as essentially a re-organisation of West European capitalism, and the Treaty of Rome as the Constitution of an embryonic Superstate, drawn up in the interests of Big Business, without the slightest democratic elements. He believed that membership of the EEC would in due time make the National Question, of which Ireland had centuries-long experience, the main issue of politics for all the countries of Western Europe, introducing a whole new ball-game for the participants in the class struggle as they discovered the drawbacks of being ruled by foreigners. He was not optimistic about major political changes occurring in the West 'until,' as he put it, 'revolution sweeps the Third World,' which he thought likely to occur in the first decades of the twenty first century.¹⁰ In 1985 he organised a Connolly Association conference on the theme 'The Defence of the Nation State'. He regarded the nation state as the locus of democracy, because only within national communities were political minorities willing freely to accept majority



Top: Desmond Greaves's home at Mount Road, Birkenhead, Merseyside.

Bottom: Connolly Association campaign for release of internees, 2 July, 1963, London.



rule. He used always say that he looked at politics from the standpoint of 'socialist internationalism'. Internationalism, not nationalism, was the fundamental category: one could only claim to be an internationalist if one stood for the independence and right to self-determination of the different nations into which humanity is divided. He believed that the weakness of the political Left, in Ireland and throughout Europe, was due to its failure to be internationalist in this sense. In Ireland organised Labour had left the solution of the national question to the parties of the bourgeoisie and small-bourgeoisie, Fianna Fáil and the republicans, and was politically marginalised as a consequence. In England and on the continent he regarded the Labour movement as rotten with chauvinism as a result of sharing the imperialistic assumptions of the traditional ruling classes. It was therefore slow to appreciate the loss of democracy entailed by membership of the EEC.

Historian

These were the values which inspired Greaves's work as a historian, for which he is best known in Ireland. He was unusual among historians in having a natural science training in addition to a deep humanistic culture. As a Marxist he did not believe that there could be such a thing as non-partisan history – as least not when the historian is dealing with modern issues touching his own life and times. The important thing, he held, was that the good historian should be conscious of and declare his partisanship. He had a low opinion of academic historians generally for failing to do this and for pretending to an objectivity they in no way possessed. He was concerned that labour history should not become another academic industry, fearing that this would tend to rob the working class of its tradition. He was no enthusiast either for the academicising of 'Irish studies'. In the late 1940s he began working on a Marxist history of the Irish Labour movement, but when this became too long decided to present it in two parts, weaving the story around the lives of Connolly and Mellows. As background to this work he wrote a three-chapter outline history of the development of wage-labour in Ireland, which remains unpublished. He also compiled materials for a life of Seán Murray, but never embarked on it.

In writing *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, which he undertook in the 1950s and published in 1961, he had the great advantage, he used say, of meeting many people who knew Connolly personally. It was such a meeting which enabled him scotch the widely-held belief that Connolly was a Monaghan man and show instead that he had been born

in Edinburgh. He also established that Connolly served a period in the British Army as a young man. For Greaves the theoretical importance of his biography lay in showing how the Marxist socialist Connolly came to ally himself in 1916 with the radical democrats of the IRB in a revolt for national political independence, which Connolly termed 'the first stage of freedom'.¹¹ Connolly's participation in 1916 did not, in Greaves's view, represent an abandonment of his socialism for nationalism, but was rather an attempt to establish an independent democratic State as the essential prerequisite for socialist advance in Ireland, through providing the freest field of operation for the Labour movement. That socialists should seek to give the lead in solving democratic questions – of which national self-determination is one – was always Greaves's view. He regarded Connolly's final position on this as similar to his own and as indeed in line with the general views of Marx, Engels and Lenin when they dealt with the National Question.

Greaves regarded his *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*, published in 1971, as his most mature and significant work. With its focus on the life of a young radical Republican, this book deals with the complex social dynamics and class relations of the revolutionary period 1916-23. It shows how the destruction of Redmond's Home Rule party in the two years following the Rising left the bourgeoisie without a party. For a time the small bourgeoisie, through Sinn Féin, filled the gap, Labour having opted to remain uninvolved organisationally. Then the split in Sinn Féin and the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Free State gave the forces of conservatism and large property a new rallying point. As he looked from the besieged Four Courts at the Dublin labourers walking along the quays to work, the doomed Mellows wondered whether, if Labour had been with the Republic, things might have turned out differently. Greaves defines the Irish Revolution in Connolly's terms as 'the re-conquest of Ireland by its people', for which an independent Republic for the whole island was required. So defined, that revolution clearly remains incomplete. The attempt made in 1916-23 half succeeded and half failed. We who are heirs to that ambiguous legacy are likely to return again and again to this work whose intellectual riches, as Owen Dudley Edwards has remarked,¹² are likely to become increasingly appreciated with time. Although the Connolly book was well reviewed in Britain, the Mellows biography was virtually ignored there. Greaves offers this explanation in his Table-Talk: 'The Connolly book was socialism. That is safe enough. There is not the least prospect of socialism in our part of the world for the foreseeable

future. But the Mellows book is nationalism. And that is dangerous and unwelcome to the powers-that-be in the era of transnational capital and the Common Market'.

The dialectics of socialism and national independence were transmuted into art in the plays of Seán O'Casey. Greaves's next book, *Seán O'Casey: Politics and Art*, (1979) is an interpretation of the work of the dramatist through whose eyes much of the Left in Britain and Eastern Europe had traditionally tended to view Ireland. O'Casey too had accused Connolly of abandoning socialism for nationalism. In Greaves's view it was about as sensible to extol O'Casey as a political theoretician as it was to judge Connolly's political merits by his verses. He brought to this study of the interaction of O'Casey's politics and play-writing a lifetime's interest in aesthetics. Implicit in the book, he said, is a whole aesthetic theory. In the late 1970s, arising from a meeting with Michael Mullen, General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, he was commissioned by that union's Executive to write its history. This was originally meant to be a three-volume work bringing the story of the union up to the present day. Greaves's own preferred title for the first volume, dealing with the union's heroic early period, was 'The Age of Giants'. Perhaps the implicit contrast with the present was too much for the union leadership, for when Volume I emerged it bore the sober title *The Irish Transport and General Workers Union: The Formative Years* (1982). In 1972 he wrote *The Irish Crisis*, a study of Britain's relations with the North of Ireland, the background to the civil rights movement and the evolution of British policy on Ireland in the early 1970s. This book was translated into Russian, Hungarian and Italian.

Greaves was a meticulous researcher, going to endless trouble to hunt down original sources and having great respect for oral tradition. He had much fun with incidents in O'Casey's *Autobiography*, the books where, as Gabriel Fallon put it, O'Casey 'invented his life story'. He gives sources for his research discoveries in the Connolly biography, but deliberately excluded them from the Mellows book. 'Let the academics do their own work,' he remarked. He believed that all books, including history and works of natural science, were ultimately written to give pleasure and should be conceived aesthetically. 'Thus,' he said, 'in the Mellows book I deliberately heightened the events before Mellows' death, when his fortunes seemed to be improving, in order to make more vivid the contrast with his death sentence. That would be impermissible in an academic thesis, where all facts are equally important; so the overall result is formless.'

Desmond Greaves, The Man

Scientist, historian, poet, musician, political organiser, orator, journalist, wit, excellent cook and dedicated gardener, Desmond Greaves was an extraordinary man. His genius confidently spanned Snow's 'two cultures'. Although without obvious vanity and a caustic subverter of cant and humbug, he did not pretend to false modesty. 'I don't suppose I have a really profound knowledge of any subject,' he once said, 'except perhaps Irish history and affairs; but I think I have a wider knowledge of more things than anyone I have met.' As evidenced by the range of his writing and ideas, it does not seem an exaggerated claim. On another occasion he said: 'I am an Engels man rather than a Marx man'. He was fond of quoting the favourite mottoes which the founding fathers of scientific socialism once gave in a Victorian game of questions to the Marx children: for Marx it was 'Doubt everything'; for Engels 'Take it easy'. Although endowed with a powerful constitution and great nervous energy and capacity for hard work, Greaves was well able to take it easy, especially when relaxing over a drink with colleagues. He believed that man gives his own meaning to existence and that the purpose of a rational human life is, as he put it, 'to seek to make a garden amid the chaos of the universe, expanding one's experience as much as possible during the seventy years or so of consciousness one is granted'. He subscribed to the wisdom of Epicurus and Lucretius. As he said, 'while one might devote oneself to a cause like socialism or Irish freedom, which would go on after one's lifetime, there is no reason one should not enjoy life while doing so'. He liked nothing better than a walk or cycle in the country, interspersed with regular halts at hostelrys, and would show an almost boyish enjoyment in a treat on such occasions.

Although he could be savage in private judgement, Greaves was always polite in public controversy, believing in the principle of the strong hand in a velvet glove and seeking to understand the valid points in his opponent's arguments. Though sometimes dubbed a 'Stalinist' by political enemies, one could scarcely meet a less dogmatic person or a mind more open to alternative explanations of events. He was always anxious to encourage the talent of others, especially women and the young. While in private he often deplored what he used to call 'the ham-handedness' of the Russians and expressed himself as 'continually amazed at the extraordinary incompetence of the Left', he refused to criticise the Soviet Union publicly, considering that to do so was to line oneself up with the most reactionary forces in the capitalist world. He believed that the Russians would in time have to come to terms with the

Stalin period. As far back as 1973 he said: 'The socialist countries have made so many mistakes, which has had an enormous effect in holding back socialism in the West. The most fundamental one, I think, is the way they have mixed up the Party and the State. The Party should go in for education, persuasion, propaganda. The State should always act strictly according to the law, treating all citizens equally'. These words seem apposite in this period of Gorbachev, whose advent to the Soviet leadership Greaves welcomed.¹³ Greaves's attitude to socialism was based on his appreciation of the values of community and good neighbourliness as the basis of civilised society. These values, which he regarded as in principle best protected by national states organised on socialist lines, he saw as under fundamental attack from contemporary transnational monopoly capital, with its all-pervasive cult of private profit and consumerism. Perhaps because of his scientific background, Greaves was an ecologist before ecology became fashionable. He was an early critic of the cult of an economic growth which ignored social costs. 'Balance is what is needed, not growth', he used say of the industrial countries.

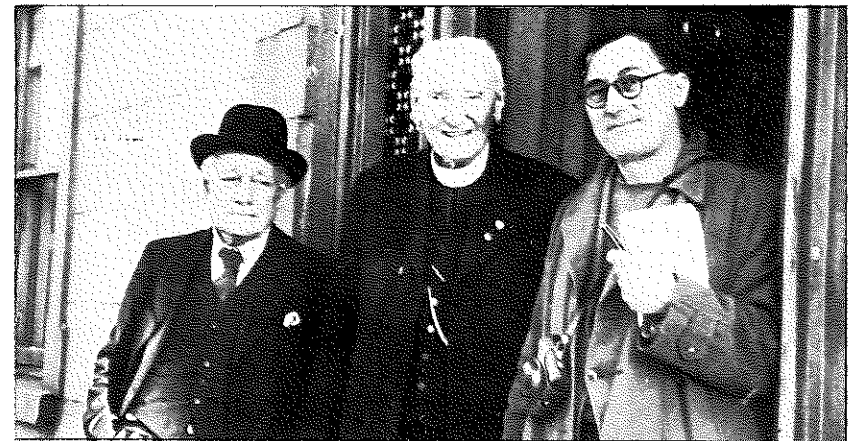
It would be difficult to meet a more sanguine and less neurotic person. Although he was fond of children, capable of great kindness and consideration for others and had numerous female political colleagues, Desmond Greaves never married. He seems to have made a conscious decision when he took up full-time political work on a miniscule wage in the conditions of the 1950s that this was not compatible with the responsibilities of a wife and family. After his sister's death in 1966 he made his base in what had been their family home, at 124 Mount Road, Birkenhead, from where he used take the train regularly to London on Connolly Association business or travel the length and breadth of Britain lecturing and holding meetings. Perhaps because he lived on his own, he showed an exuberant geniality in company, bringing zest to any occasion. He exuded a kind of life-enhancing vitality when with others, which made all the more potent the impact of his extraordinary intelligence and breadth of knowledge. To use a phrase he himself applied to Tone: 'he had the gaiety of all dedicated men.'¹⁴

'I do not fear death', he used say, 'though I can imagine fearing dying.' He considered that the best death was a sudden one, which came in the middle of the work one wished to do. This wish was granted, for he was struck down, on 23 August, 1988, by a sudden heart attack as he sat in the buffet-car of the train bringing him back to Liverpool from Glasgow, where he had gone to speak at a Connolly Association branch meeting



Top: Desmond Greaves as a young man of about 21.

Bottom: Cahir Healy, MP; Canon Thomas Maguire; and Desmond Greaves pictured at Newtown Butler, Co. Fermanagh, April, 1962.



the night before. His body was taken off the train at Preston. The funeral took place at Anfield crematorium, Liverpool, and his ashes are buried in Bebington cemetery, Birkenhead, near the corner to the left of the main entrance to the cemetery. In his will he left his estate to be used for political purposes, at the discretion of his literary executor.

Notes

1. Thomas Alfred Jackson, 1879-1955; writer, lecturer and political activist; member of the Socialist Labour Party and founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920; author of *Ireland Her Own, Dialectics, Charles Dickens, Trials of British Freedom, Solo Trumpet*, etc.; see the lengthy biographical entry in J. Bellamy and J. Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 4.
2. Rajani Palme Dutt, 1896-1974; editor of *Labour Monthly* from 1921; executive member of the Communist Party 1922-1965; author of *Fascism and Social Revolution, India Today, The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire, The International, Problems of Contemporary History*, etc.
3. William Gallacher, 1881-1965; leading member of the Communist Party and the Communist International from 1920; Communist MP for Fife 1935-1960; author of *Revolt On The Clyde, Rolling of Thunder and Rise Like Lions*.
4. Jimmy Shields, 1900-1949; political activist; born Greenock, Scotland, of Irish parents; Secretary, South African Communist Party, 1925; editor *Daily Worker*, 1933-35; member, International Committee, CPGB and widely known in British Empire anti-colonial circles; died of TB.
5. John Lawrence (Pat) Dooley, 1902-1958; journalist; born in Yorkshire; joined the Irish Self-Determination League 1919; first full-time editor of *Irish Freedom*, 1942-1945; member of editorial board of *Irish Democrat*; worked in late 1940s and early 1950s as a journalist in Eastern Europe and on several British newspapers; see obituary references in *Irish Democrat*, March and May, 1958. He was author of *The Irish in Britain*, (Connolly Association pamphlet, 1943) and *Under the Banner of Connolly*, (Irish Freedom pamphlet, 1945).
6. Academic historians, often remote from practical affairs, tend to forget the work-burden and immediate concerns of such editors and later, as in Connolly's case, ignore such contexts when offering criticism of a particular text or drawing some academic conclusion from minor contradictions in argument or detail.
7. Arthur Latham, born 1930, Labour MP for Paddington North 1969-1979.
8. Fenner Brockway, 1888-1988; Independent Labour Party MP 1929-31 and Labour MP for Slough 1950-1964; Chairman of the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism 1948, of the Movement for Colonial Freedom from 1954, of the British Council for Peace in Vietnam in 1965; made a life-peer in 1964.
9. Geoffrey Bing QC, 1909-1977; Labour MP for Hornchurch 1945; Assistant Government Whip 1945-1946; leader of the Friends of Ireland group of Labour MPs in the House of Commons in the late 1940s; opposed the Labour Government's passage of the Ireland Act 1949; Constitutional adviser to Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana 1956-57; Attorney General of Ghana 1957-1961.
10. These and other references to Desmond Greaves's conversation, are from his 'Table-Talk', which will be deposited in due course with his papers in the National Library.

11. *The Workers' Republic*, 15 January, 1916; Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, p. 384.
12. Obituary in *The Independent*, London, 31 August, 1988.
13. Though in one of his workbooks for 1987 occurs this perhaps prescient note: 'Gorbachev – going too far to the right?'
14. In *Wolfe Tone and the Irish Nation*.

The Desmond Greaves Archive

It was Desmond Greaves's wish that his literary remains should be deposited in the National Library of Ireland at the discretion of his estate. The most important of these is his *Journal*, a political and personal record which he kept from his youth. It occupies several feet of shelving space. There are volumes for several years in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, as well as a continuous daily record covering the thirty years prior to his death. This is obviously an important source for biographers, as well as being an invaluable mine of information for researchers on the political life of the Irish community in Britain and of the Left-wing of the British and Irish Labour movements over the past half-century. It contains a record of numerous interviews, sometimes with reconstructed conversations, with people in the National and Labour movements whom he met in the course of his historical researches. While the whole work could not be published unexpurgated for some years – for fear of libel writs among other reasons! – perhaps sections of it may be.

Second, is a 150-page comic epic in iambic pentameter, *Elephants Against Rome*, which he was working on at his death. Fictional in form but autobiographical in inspiration, this is complete in itself and comprises four books. It appears to be a significant contribution to English literature and will be published in due time by his estate.

Third, come the notebooks, research materials and correspondence relating to Greaves's work on Connolly, Mellows, O'Casey, the ITGWU history, Seán Murray and other matters, all carefully catalogued and indexed, which should be helpful to researchers on these topics once they learn to read Desmond Greaves's rather difficult handwriting.

Fourth, is the three-chapter outline history of wage-labour in Ireland mentioned above. Fifth, is a collection of several hundred letters to political and literary acquaintances over half a century which he kept copies of or which others kept, as well as various letters sent to him. Sixth, though strictly speaking not part of his estate proper, is a collection of Desmond Greaves's Table-Talk – interesting and insightful comments on events and things, amounting to 200 or so typed pages, noted down unbeknownst to him by various friends over the past thirty years. Finally, there are a number of books from his library dealing mainly with Irish and labour movement history, which contain critical annotations and marginal notes that may be of interest to researchers.

The Irish Collection in the Working Class Movement Library, Salford

Desmond Greaves's library of books on Irish history has been donated to the Working Class Movement Library, The Crescent, Salford, established by Edmund and Ruth Frow and now maintained by the Library Service of Salford City Council. The books have been placed side by side with the extensive Irish library of the late T. A. Jackson. Together they constitute the most comprehensive collection of Irish historical material in Britain and it is hoped that use will be made of it by researchers. The Greaves estate has undertaken to keep the collection up to date by adding significant new historical material which

will be published from time to time. It is intended that the archives of the Connolly Association will also be deposited in the Library, which hopes that other organisations of the Irish community in Britain will consider depositing their archival material there. A bibliographical article by Edmund and Ruth Frow on the Greaves-Jackson collection is published in the *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 1990, part 2, and a similar article by John B. Smethurst in *Saothar* 15, 1990. Desmond Greaves's books on British and international labour movement history are being donated by his estate to the library of the Irish Labour History Society.

Select Bibliography

The largest volume of Desmond Greaves's writing is in the monthly *Irish Democrat*, which he edited continuously for forty years, apart from occasional issues brought out by others when he went on holiday. He invariably wrote sections of the paper himself – sometimes indeed writing most of it – building up over time a huge mass of journalism, ranging from humorous squibs, news stories, pieces of commentary and book reviews to lengthy theoretical articles. Many of these items are of a longer-term interest and may bear replication. The bibliography below is as comprehensive as possible at the time of writing so far as books and pamphlets are concerned. Greaves also wrote regularly throughout his life for the left-wing and radical press in Britain, as well as for a variety of publications in other countries, ranging from the *Capuchin Annual* to the *Monthly Review*. The articles listed under (4) below are but a few of the more interesting pieces which he wrote since 1972; but there are many other items both before and after that date, the great majority contributed to newspapers, which are not listed.

1. Books, Prefaces and Chapters in Books

- The Life and Times of James Connolly*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1961; paperback edition Seven Seas Books, Berlin, 1972.
- Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971; paperback edition 1986.
- Preface to *Marx and Engels on Ireland*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, and Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971.
- Epilogue to T. A. Jackson's *Ireland Her Own, An Outline History of the Irish Struggle for National Freedom and Independence*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971.
- The Irish Crisis*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1972, and Seven Seas Books, Berlin, 1974; Italian edition *La Crisi Irlandese*, Editori Reuniti, 1972; Russian edition, Moscow, 1974; Hungarian Edition, *Az 'ir Valsag*, Kossuth Kosyvkiado, 1973.
- Seán O'Casey, Politics and Art*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979; paperback edition 1979.
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- The Easter Rising in Song and Ballad*, Kahn and Averill, London, for the Workers' Music Association, 1980; reprinted 1991.
- The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union: The Formative Years, 1909-23*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1982; paperback edition 1982.
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2. Poetry

- By the Clock 'Tis Day: Poems of Alan Morton and Desmond Greaves*, Thos. Knight and Co., London, 1946.
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3. Pamphlets

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- The Irish Question and the British People, A Plea for a New Approach*, Connolly Publications, London, 1963.
- How Far is Ireland Free?* by 'Anna Livia', *Irish Democrat*, London, 1964.
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- Connolly: Socialism and Nationalism*, Tuairisc No. 3, A Wolfe Tone Society pamphlet, Dublin, 1976.
- James Connolly and Trade Unionism*, No. 2 Branch ITGWU, 1977.
- Reminiscences of the Connolly Association*, Connolly Publications, London, 1978.
- Towards a United Ireland*, Connolly Association, 1984.
- The Irish Question and World Peace*, Connolly Association, 1984.
- National Sovereignty and the Defence of the Nation State*, Connolly Association consultative conference papers, mimeographed, 1985 and 1986.
- British Labour and the Irish Question*, Connolly Association, 1987.

4. Selected Articles

- 'James Connolly, 1868-1916, Marxist', *Marxism Today*, 12, 1968, pp. 177-185.
- 'Marx and Engels and Irish Question', *Quarterly Bulletin of the Marx Memorial Library*, October-December, 1969.
- 'Liam Mellows' in the *Capuchin Annual*, 1972.
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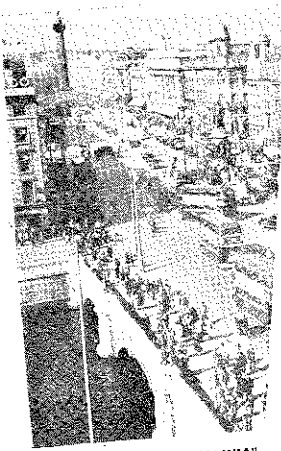
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Translation from the French of Marcel Prenant, *Biology and Marxism*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1938.

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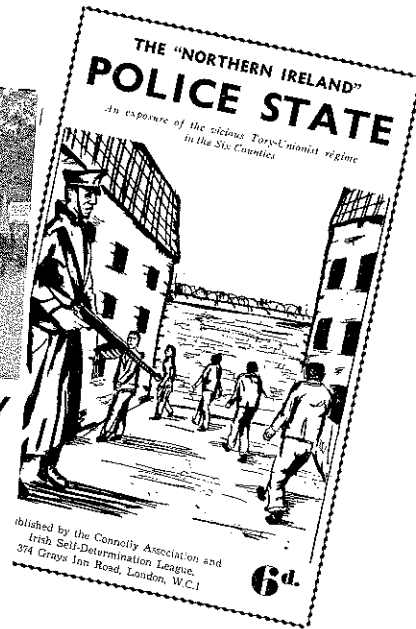


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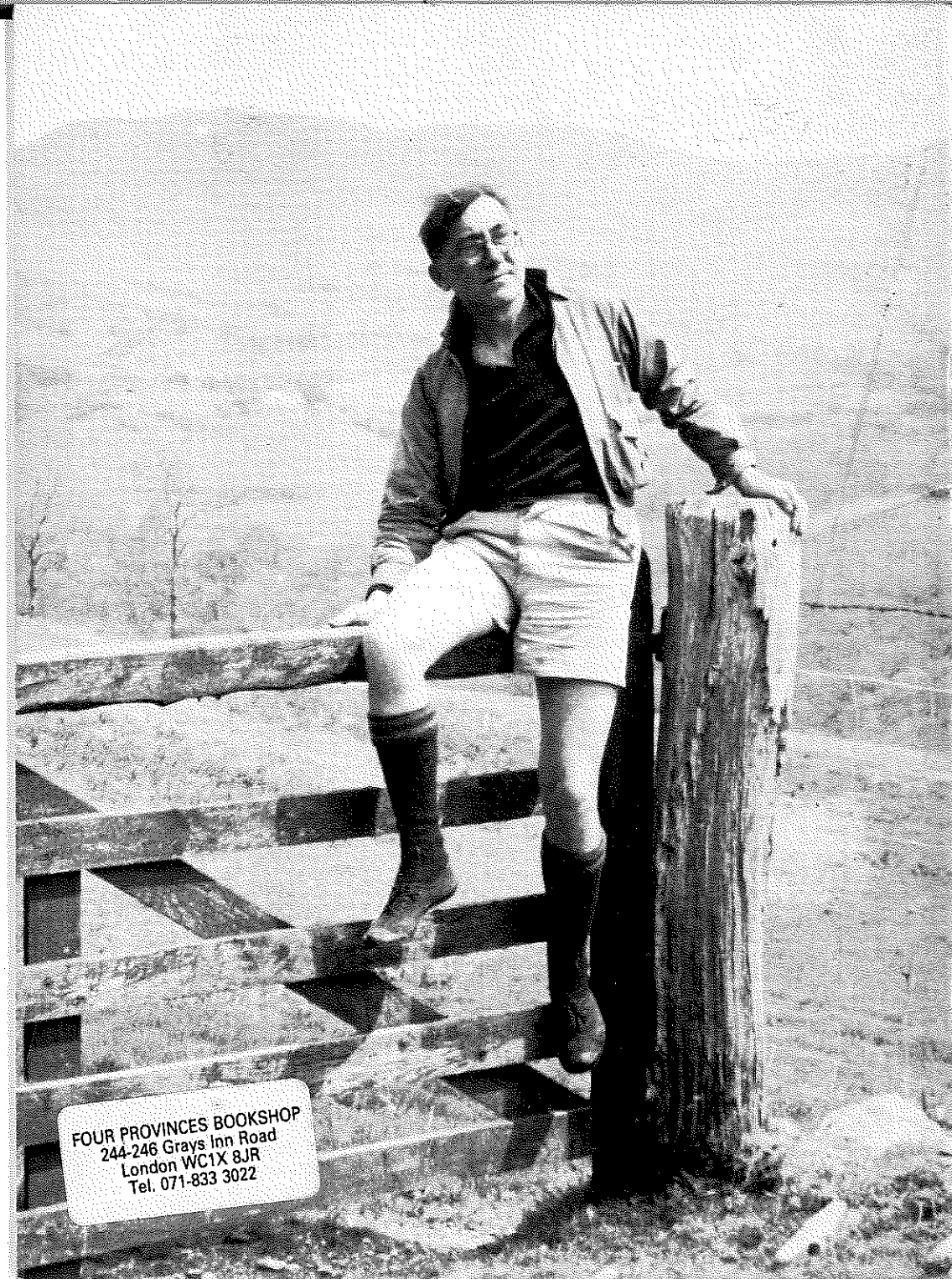
Annual membership is £10 per calendar year (£5 if unwaged). This entitles members to the Society's journal *Saothar* and to participate in Society affairs through the AGM. Enquiries and applications should be addressed to The Treasurer, ILHS c/o ICTU, 19 Raglan Road, Dublin 4.

The Desmond Greaves Weekend Summer School

This is held in Dublin each year as an occasion for the study of C.D. Greaves's political and theoretical legacy, and in particular for examining the contemporary application of the following propositions which he upheld:

- (a) that the principle of democracy is based upon community and must operate at the level of the nation before it can operate internationally;
- (b) that internationalism rests upon the free co-operation of independent sovereign Nation States;
- (c) that the Labour movement and socialists ought to be the foremost advocates of the fullest democracy;
- (d) that the ending of Partition and the establishment of a united independent State is essential for opening the way to the achievement of socialism in Ireland.

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