

*Social Networks and Social Change: The Role of Individual Agency and Cross-Movement Alliances in the 1913 Dublin Lockout*

Social and political networks are fundamental in shaping historical political developments, providing the structural foundation for collective mobilization, ideological exchange, and political solidarities between political activists. This paper examines their role by analysing the critical role played by interwoven socialist, republican, and feminist networks in early 20th-century Ireland, focusing on the Dublin Lockout of 1913 as a crucial moment of political convergence and radicalization between different political movements. By analysing the Lockout through the lens of social movement theory, particularly the concepts of “latency” and “submerged networks” developed by Alberto Melucci (*Nomads of the Present*, 1989), this study underscores the significance of individual agencies and socio-political and cultural networks in shaping these movements’ political activity and explores how they set the stage for the revolutionary upheaval of the 1916 Easter Rising.

The 1913 Dublin Lockout was initially an industrial dispute between the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) and almost all the Dublin employers who, led by the most important of them – William Martin Murphy –, tried to wreck the organised labour in the city. But this dispute quickly became a broader struggle against systemic socio-political oppression and the terrible condition of living of the Dublin working-class, as it was denounced in a famous newspaper article by the socialist and republican poet and collectivist George AE Russell, called *To the Masters of Dublin* and published by *Irish Times* October 7, 1913. In this context, figures such as James Connolly, James Larkin, Constance Markievicz, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, and Helena Molony played instrumental roles in bridging ideological divides, connecting labour struggles with national and gender emancipation, and involving the other radical movements active in that urban environment in the working-class struggle against the employers. The Lockout, through the strict relationships developed between socialists, feminists, and Republicans in daily political activity, functioned as an incubator for political alliances that would later drive the independence movement, making them ideologically and culturally cross-fertilize each other and demonstrating how working-class mobilization, feminist activism, and republican revolutionary thought were mutually reinforcing rather than separate trajectories.

A key aspect of this study is the emphasis on individual agency within these networks. Leaders and activists did not merely operate within pre-established structures but actively shaped and redefined them through their political choices, strategic collaborations, and ideological contributions. As I will show in this paper, it’s essential for us as social historians to recover and valorise agencies’ roles in

these political developments, particularly if we adopt a transnational lens (Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, 2015).

One of the most important ideological and political agencies in this context is James Connolly. His synthesis of Marxist labour politics with Irish republicanism played a defining role in aligning working-class struggles with nationalist aspirations and paving the way to the revolutionary alliance between leftists and Republicans which characterized the Revolution. As Connolly himself stated, for him and his comrades, “The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour; they cannot be dissevered” (Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, 1910).

Another important aspect of his thought I wish to underline is his intersectionality. Connolly, drawing on Irish left republican and national Marxist traditions, famously bounded together and strictly intertwined class and national struggles identifying one as complementary to the other, as he declared, “We are out for Ireland for the Irish, but who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord; not the sweating, profit-grinding capitalist; but the Irish working class. If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle unless you set about the organization of the Socialist Republic, your efforts would be in vain” (*Workers' Republic*, 1897). But his idea of a strict relationship between class struggles and the others was not limited only to the national one, but it was far wider, including for example famously the feminist one (Andersen, *James Connolly and the Irish Left*, 1994), as testified by his notorious assertion, “We oppose class over class, nation over nation, sex over sex”, which best encapsulates his vision of an egalitarian revolution.

Connolly's intersectional ethos had a huge influence on Irish radicals. For example, feminist activists like Molony and Markievicz, who collaborated with him in the union and the Irish Citizen Army, leveraged their involvement in both suffragist and labour movements to challenge traditional gender roles within Irish political discourse. Markievicz famously urged Irish women to “stand shoulder to shoulder with their men in every phase of struggle” (*The Workers' Republic*, 1915) and to “dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewels in the bank and buy a revolver” (*Irish Citizen*, 1915) to fight against oppression, whether class, gender, or colonial it be.

In addition, it's important to underline how, beyond their national outlook, the socialist and Republican movements were also embedded within transnational socialist and labour movements, drawing intellectual and strategic inspiration from European and American radical traditions. This international dimension highlights the permeability of their social networks, illustrating how Irish activists were both influenced by and contributors to contemporary global revolutionary currents, such as industrial unionism and radical feminism. The presence of American and British trade unionists and socialist politicians, like William Haywood, George Lansbury, Keir Hardie, Dora

Montefiore and Sylvia Pankhurst, and the role of international solidarity in supporting the Dublin locked-out workers further emphasize the interconnected nature of these struggles. Larkin himself saw the struggle as part of a broader global fight against capitalism, as he stated during his famous tour around England and Scotland in November and December 1913 (Devin, *James Larkin, Lion on the Fold*, 2007).

The repression faced by activists during the Lockout—mass arrests, police brutality, and economic hardship—served to radicalize many participants, reinforcing their commitment to a broader vision of social transformation. The solidarity forged in 1913 did not dissipate; rather, it evolved into the alliances that would later manifest in the 1916 Easter Rising. Many of the same activists who had fought for workers' rights in Dublin's streets became key figures in the armed insurrection, demonstrating the continuity between labour radicalism and nationalist revolution. As Helena Molony later recalled, "the Lockout taught us that economic justice and national freedom were inseparable" (*BMH Statements*, 1947).

Understanding the Lockout and its aftermath, like more generally the labour history, requires a nuanced methodological approach that accounts for the complexity of interwoven movements and historical contingencies. The interaction between labour, nationalist, and feminist movements was not linear but rather a dynamic and evolving process shaped by socio-economic pressures, ideological exchanges, and the strategic decisions of key actors. Scholars such as E.P. Thompson and, more recently in the Irish Academia, Niall Whelehan emphasize the necessity of studying history from below, recognizing the lived experiences of activists as central to broader structural transformations (*The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963; *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, 2015). Likewise, Melucci's theory of "submerged networks" highlights how latent connections between movements can resurface in moments of crisis, creating unexpected alliances and new political formations.

This study also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary methods in analysing social change. Combining historical analysis with insights from sociology, political science, and gender studies allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals and networks interact in shaping historical outcomes. By applying these approaches to the study of the Dublin Lockout, we gain a deeper appreciation of the interplay between structural forces and personal agency in driving political transformation (Kyte, *Feminist fusions: Irish socialist feminists, 1900s-1940s*, 2018).

Furthermore, the Lockout reveals the role of media and cultural production in reinforcing activist networks. Radical newspapers such as the socialist *The Irish Worker* and *The Workers' Republic* and the radical feminist *Irish Citizen* provided ideological cohesion and facilitated cross-movement

dialogue, while theatrical and literary circles connected with the broader Irish cultural revival helped solidify revolutionary consciousness. Plays and writings by figures such as Sean O'Casey and W.B. Yeats engaged with themes of class struggle, further embedding the Lockout's significance in the national memory. As O'Casey later wrote, "The streets of Dublin in 1913 were the first stage upon which the revolutionaries of 1916 rehearsed their parts" (*Drums Under the Windows*, 1945).

By examining the 1913 Dublin Lockout as a critical nexus of social movements, this paper underscores the importance of both social and political collective networks and individual agencies in shaping historical political processes. It highlights particularly how cross-movement solidarities emerge, sustain activism and cause forms of ideological and political cross-fertilization, ultimately contributing to long-term political transformation and the development of alliances and collaborations between different groups of activists. The findings provide valuable insights into contemporary social movements, illustrating how alliances across different struggles can generate profound and lasting social change.