Jeffrey Leddin, *The “Labour Hercules”: The Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republicanism, 1913-23*

Olivier Coquelin

Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/10392>
DOI : 10.4000/etudesirlandaises.10392
ISSN : 2259-8863

Éditeur

Presses universitaires de Caen

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 31 décembre 2020
Pagination : 201-202
ISBN : 978-2-84133-996-9
ISSN : 0183-973X

Référence électronique

Olivier Coquelin, « Jeffrey Leddin, *The “Labour Hercules”: The Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republicanism, 1913-23* », *Études irlandaises* [En ligne], 45-2 | 2020, mis en ligne le 31 décembre 2020, consulté le 16 novembre 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/10392> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.10392>

Creative Commons - Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Partage dans les Mêmes Conditions 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

COMPTES RENDUS

BOOK REVIEWS

Jeffrey Leddin, *The “Labour Hercules”: The Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republicanism, 1913-23*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2019, xii + 324 p.

Although actively involved in the Irish Revolution, the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) has garnered less attention from academics than the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) since the island was effectively partitioned in 1922. This book goes some way to bridging that gap, as it is the second monograph by an academic on the workers' militia, after Ann Matthews's in 2014, in this decade of centenary celebrations. The books devoted to the ICA had hitherto been written by activists, independent historians, or former members of the organisation, starting with playwright Seán O'Casey as early as 1919. Not until the 2000s, therefore, did university research begin to take a specific interest in it.

Leddin's essay, based on his doctoral thesis, deals with his subject-matter through the prism of Irish republicanism, thus complementing Matthews's work in some respects. It is composed of sixteen chapters that can be subdivided into five sections consistent with the themes covered. The first one (chapter 1, p. 1-16) is intended as an introduction in which the ICA is considered in its international context. We learn in particular that the Irish workers' militia was in the wake of the “armed nation” theory developed by the European socialists as of the 1860s.

The second section covers chapters 2 to 8 (p. 17-145). It recounts the genesis of the ICA, its ideological and historical roots, and the different stages of its evolution from the 1913 Dublin Lockout to the 1916 Easter Rising, including its rapprochement with its nationalist counterpart, the numerically superior Irish Volunteers. A period during which it gradually moved from a defensive to an offensive and subversive position under the leadership of James Larkin and subsequently James Connolly, who undoubtedly instilled in it the republican socialist ideas he had developed from the early 20th century. In the third section (chapters 9-12, p. 146-188), Leddin traces the tragic episode of the 1916 Easter Rebellion – and its consequences, both fateful and regenerative – through which the ICA left its mark on Irish history. This brings us to the fourth section (chapters 13-15, p. 189-226), which addresses its role and activities in the 1919-1921 War of Independence, the period of confused transition from 1921 to 1922, and the 1922-1923 Civil War. Major events in which the workers' militia played a minor albeit useful role, subordinate as it was to a much more powerful IRA numerically and materially. Finally, the last section (chapter 16, p. 227-233) serves as a conclusion, discussing the fate of the ICA in the aftermath of the Revolution and its legacy to Ireland.

The main interest of this book is clearly that it sheds new light on some aspects previously neglected or even unknown, thanks to a wider variety of sources. To

mention but a few examples. It is thus revealed that, despite its increasingly distant relations with what was then the most powerful union, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), from which it had emerged, the ICA was to retain its syndicalist flavour as illustrated by its use as an "armed picket" in a number of industrial disputes in 1914-1915. Not widely known is also the fact that the labour militia was not created *ex nihilo* in the middle of the Dublin Lockout of 1913, but that a corps of bodyguards had already been set up beforehand by the strike committee. Leddin furthermore revisits the myth of Connolly's kidnapping by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in January 1916, pointing out that it was of his own free will that the ICA leader met with representatives of the republican secret society to seal an alliance in preparation for a rebellion. Another aspect of interest is that, unlike Matthews, the author provides some insight into why the ICA hardly developed outside Dublin. The main reason being that the Irish Volunteers already had a strong presence in the rest of the country, leaving little room for another militia.

More disputable, however, appears the assertion whereby the egalitarian nature of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic would have been influenced by Connolly's socialist thinking, not least because of certain similarities with passages in the ICA Constitution. To this it can be replied that the principles of the Proclamation were expressed in sufficiently general terms to elicit the endorsement of non-socialist IRB activists, some of whose leaders nevertheless had a social conscience. One may also regret that some passages seem to depart somewhat from the history of the ICA strictly speaking, such as those dedicated to the Limerick soviet and the rail embargo of British soldiers and military supplies, in which the labour militia did not take any part. Or, in the same vein, at the end of the conclusion, when the author tends to confuse Connolly's legacy with that of the ICA.

The aforesaid reservations notwithstanding, Leddin's book is overall of great analytical richness, supplemented by abundant appendices (p. 234-249). Through its exploration of the working-class and socialist arm of Irish republicanism, the full complexity of the revolutionary process is brought to the forefront. It therefore provides a valuable source for any exhaustive study of the Irish Revolution.

Olivier COQUELIN

James Doherty, *Irish Liberty, British Democracy: The Third Irish Home Rule Crisis, 1909-1914*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2019, xi + 308 p.

The decade of centenaries celebrated in Ireland since 2012 has led to the publication of many new scholarly works re-examining the Home Rule crisis of 1912-1914, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the figure of John Redmond. James Doherty's *Irish Liberty, British Democracy* is part of this still ongoing effort to shed new light