

D R O'Connor Lysaght an Appreciation from an ILHS Perspective.

The death has occurred of Rayner (Daniel) O'Connor Lysaght, Killester, Dublin



Rayner (Daniel) O'Connor Lysaght passed away Friday, 2nd July, in Beaumont Hospital after a prolonged illness. He was the eldest son of Arthur Lysaght, surgeon, and Jacqueline Lysaght (née Heard) from Wales. Sadly, missed by his loving wife Aine, his brother William, sister Priscilla Stewart, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, friends, and comrades from around the world. Rayner was a revolutionary Marxist, a historian and author. He lived to make this quote from Trotsky a reality: *"Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full."*

Dr Kieran Jack McGinley, immediate past President of the ILHS.

I knew Rayner for over 40 years, but first began to work closely with him when I joined the ILHS in 1993. He has been a committee member for over 20 years, recently re-elected at a Zoom AGM, he never sought high office but was always prepared to be the Soldier or Sherpa, doing whatever was necessary for the Society. I particularly appreciated his work during my two terms as President of the Society from 2001 to 2004-5 & 2014-15 to 2019-2020.

I also worked with Rayner in my position as Principal of Umiskin Press, in which he contributed with his editing and introduction to Matt Merrigan Seniors Biography *'Eggs & Rashers- Irish Socialist Memories'*, a Chapter in *Left Lives in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Volume 1) with an essay on Sean Dowling 1885-1948 – *The Irish Soviet Man* and in *Left Lives 3* with an essay on Walter Carpenter 1871-1926 *'The First Irish Communist'*.

In 2016 along with a bumper 1916 special issue of ***Saothar 41***, the ILHS published two pamphlets in its *Studies in Irish Labour History Series* numbers 14 & 15 the latter of which was Rayner's *How a Worker's Revolution was Lost and How a Workers' Revolution was Won*. This was a topic he had spoken on previously at ILHS events in Beggars Bush in September 2007 and which featured as an Essay in *Saothar 38 (2013)*. Perhaps his most incisive piece was in ***Saothar 26*** under the title *'Labour Must wait': the making of a myth* -still well worth a read.

Among his recent work for the ILHS he spoke at the Centenary event held jointly with the Labour party in January 2019 in the Gresham Hotel on *The Democratic Programme; Past, Present and Future* and his focus along with Charles Callan was the Past.

Himself; and Emmet O Connor spoke at a British Labour History event in Huddersfield in 2018, which was also attended by John Feely; and Eddie Soye of the ILHS.

Picking out favourite memories of Rayner is a difficult choice however his diversity is perhaps best exemplified by the following:

His mingling with the Young Workers Network at a very early hour on a Sunday Morning (11am Oct 11th, 2015) on the topic of *Reflections on 1915/16 how young people view it* -holding forth and being 'young at heart'.

His lobbying along with Ethel Buckley (SIPTU) and presence in Limerick having the 2019 ILHS AGM in the FORSA-SIPTU premises, where afterwards Liam Cahill delivered a tour de Force delivery on the *Events of the Limerick Soviet*.

In the Crown Bar in Belfast after Teresa Moriarty's lecture on Mary Galway on December 12th, 2015 and being part of the ILHS executive making a presentation of a set of Saothar issues to the Linen Hall Library, in conjunction with the *James Connolly in America Exhibition*.

A few years later being part of the ILHS/NIC ICTU event in the MAC (October 2018) on *William Walker-James Connolly and the associated issues on labour in Northern Ireland right up to the present day*, along with the launch of Byers & Devine's *William Walker Belfast Labour Unionist Centenary Essays* (Umiskin Press)

Walking home from Beggars Bush to Pearse Street, when Rayner accompanied me as far as the Dart Station in Barrow Street, it is funny what you can pack in during those few minutes, but many a good story was relived during those short walks.

I did not always agree with Rayner's point of view, being of a Larkinite background (WUI/FWUI/ SIPTU/Labour Party) however I respected his perspective, scholarship, endeavour, and his dogged pursuit of issues where the committee was not fulfilling its mandate or were shying away from delivering on what we had decided, quickly.

The ILHS is the poorer for his passing, as are his friends, colleagues, comrades, and family and he will be greatly missed but not forgotten, and his scholarship will bear the testament of time.

On learning of Rayner's death, I wrote to the Secretary of the ILHS Kevin Murphy as follows:

Des Derwin (SIPTU/DCTU) advised me by text that Rayner had died on Friday (RIP).

Rayner was a stalwart of the left, very informative, and in both the ILHS and Umiskin Press I was very happy to work with him on his publications. As a chair of meetings, he could tax your patience, with his longwindedness, but he was always willing and able to speak and up to the coming of Covid, was a very good attender at committee meetings, the last non virtual one I saw him at was in February 17th, 2020.

He will be greatly missed., and it would be fitting if we did something for him, in the future to celebrate his commitment to the society. Long may he be remembered. Ruairi Quinn rang me last evening and asked me to pass on his condolences to all here present today.

Finally, Mike Meacham a colleague from London relates the following.... Sad news indeed Jack. A real stalwart of the Irish labour history community who I always enjoyed meeting. I recall vividly a wet Saturday night at the Angel, Islington. I had joined a meeting of Workers Liberty which I discovered in conversation was a revolutionary Trotskyist group. Rayner had come over to give a talk and show a film on the Limerick Soviet. It was evening with plenty of food and drink, paid for on an afford-only basis. His talk went down well, and I was impressed by the knowledge of some in the audience on the detail of Irish radical politics.

On behalf of the Officers, Executive, and all the members of the ILHS both here in Ireland and abroad I salute his contribution to the debates we have had and hope that in the fullness of time his work will be more widely recognised particularly by young scholars and activists in whose company he always seemed to thrive.

Very best wishes at this time.
Jack.

Dr Kieran Jack McGinley immediate past President of the ILHS.

Other publications by Rayner were:

The First Three Socialist Internationals

Patrick Trench: Irish Socialist in the Second World War

Old Wine in New Bottles: Some Lessons of the Dublin Lockout (James Connolly)

The Steam Packet Company Strike

The Great Irish Revolution: Myths and Realities

Frederick Engels How People Make History Letters introduced by D R O'Connor Lysaght

Correspondence to the Editor of **Saothar 5** on the Limerick Soviet in **Saothar 2** re' Jim Kemmy

The Story of the Limerick Soviet (6 Editions) reviewed by Liam Cahill **Saothar 6**; later edition reviewed by John Cunningham **Saothar 29**

The Rake's Progress of a Syndicalist: The Political career of William O'Brien: Irish Labour Leader **Saothar 9**

The Communists and the Irish Revolution, The Irish and the October Revolution. (Reviewed **Saothar 17** Jim Monaghan)

Limerick Soviet 80th Commemoration, 1989 **Saothar 24**

Correspondence to the Editor of **Saothar 25** 'Kit Conway & Cathal O'Shannon'

ILHS Conference Report **Saothar 26** 'Work in Progress' 4 November 2000

Correspondence to the Editor of **Saothar 27** re' Jim Kemmy'

Labour Lives No 7 **Saothar 30** 'Thomas Foran'

Correspondence **Saothar 34** *The social basis of the twenty-six-county civil war*

Correspondence to the Editor of **Saothar 44** *The 1918 General Strike against Conscription*