popular and media panic, an exaggeration of the actual level of threat involved, the challenges of coordinating intelligence-led policing and of doing this securely within the law. It remains an important story, and it is addressed with admirable diligence here.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2017.19

RICHARD ENGLISH
School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics
Queen's University, Belfast
R.English@qub.ac.uk

HESITANT COMRADES: THE IRISH REVOLUTION AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT. By Geoffrey Bell. Pp xii, 273. London: Pluto. 2016. £18.99 paperback.

Hesitant comrades reviews the response of the British left – including the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party, the Fabians, the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the Pankhursts and related feminists, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the trade unions – to the national revolution in Ireland. The focus is mainly on the period between 1916 and 1921, but there are also sections that reach back to the late-nineteenth century. Aside from bookends on the Easter Rising and the Anglo–Irish Treaty, the approach is thematic, with chapters devoted to the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, and the far left 'alternatives'. The Ulster question, as distinct from the Irish question, looms large in the proceedings, and two chapters deal with the debate on socialism and nationalism in Ireland, and the left in Ulster. The one obvious missing piece in the jigsaw is the Irish Labour Party; a common omission which has usually reflected an Anglo-centric and colonial mindset. In discussing *The making of the English working class*, E. P. Thompson liked to remind historians that the working class was present at its own making. As we consider the reasons for the post-1916 marginalisation of the Irish left in our decade of centenaries, it's worth bearing in mind that Irish Labour had a hand in its own unmaking.

Born and raised in Belfast, Geoffrey Bell has already published with Pluto on Northern Ireland, notably *The Protestants of Ulster* (1976) and *Troublesome business: the Labour Party and the Irish question* (1982). Based on a Ph.D. *Hesitant comrades* is a less polemical work, deeper and rounder. Bell's method is to let events or quotations make the point for him. Of course, these are selected, and the underlying argument is the same as in the earlier volumes. Essentially, Bell's case is that the mainstream British Labour movement always had an ambiguous attitude towards Ireland. On the one hand it took the view that as a movement for democracy, Labour could not oppose the democratic demand for home rule. On the other, there were many in the movement who qualified that view with a belief that the quest for home rule was deluded as it would not lead to the better government of Ireland or that the Irish did not have the right to things – like armed revolt or separation – which might damage British or imperial interests. Always, there was the hope that the Irish question would just go away. Similarly on Ulster, the prevailing view was that Labour could not endorse partition as the unionists were reactionaries, hand-in-glove with the Tories in opposing the Liberal government's social reforms, and partition would institutionalise sectarianism in Ulster, if not in Ireland as a whole. At the same time, once the British government supported partition, most Labourites were willing to accept it as inevitable. The 'alternatives' were more consistent and forthright in their standpoints, but here too there were a variety of perspectives, ranging from the anti-nationalist Fabians to the anti-imperialist communists and feminists.

Much of the ground has already been covered in bits and pieces here and there, and the thematic format does leave the bones of contention well chewed by the conclusion, but never before has the topic been addressed in so concise, coherent, and

comprehensive a form. In particular, Bell undermines the argument, which came into vogue with Marxist revisionism in the 1970s, that the left overlooked, or misunderstood, working-class backing for unionism in Ulster. From James Connolly to Ramsay MacDonald, the left was well aware of it, but decided that forcing the unionists into a united Ireland was the least worst option. One quibble is that Connolly's analysis of the Ulster question is treated as distinctive and influential, whereas it is more likely that he was reflective of the socialist position.

Unfortunately the production of the book is lacklustre and the text is marred by irritating typos. Ramsay MacDonald is frequently cited as Ramsey MacDonald and Feargus O'Connor as Fergus O'Conner. That aside, the account is very readable and the lucid, jargon-free narrative skips along at a steady pace. Ranging over a wide variety of groups, factions, and socialist theorists, Bell demonstrates a gift for nuance, clarity, and simplicity. *Hesitant comrades* will be engaging for the generalist and essential for the specialist.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2017.20

EMMET O'CONNOR
School of English and History, Ulster University
pej.oconnor@ulster.ac.uk

EASTER WIDOWS: SEVEN IRISH WOMEN WHO LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF THE 1916 RISING. By Sinead McCoole. Pp 447. Dublin: Doubleday Ireland, 2014. £22.99.

AT HOME IN THE REVOLUTION: WHAT WOMEN SAID AND DID IN 1916. By Lucy McDiarmid. Pp 285. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015. €25.00

Sinéad McCoole focuses on seven women whose lives were changed forever not only by the Easter Rising, but by the men they married: Áine Ceannt, Kathleen Clarke, Lillie Connolly, Agnes Mallin, Muriel McDonagh, Grace Plunkett, and Maud Gonne McBride. The result is a fascinating treatise on love, marriage, women's work and family life in early twentieth-century urban Ireland. Courtship was sedate and tentative at all social levels: Michael Mallin, a soldier in India, was one year and ten months writing to Agnes Hickey, a hospital attendant, before they started using first names. They were introduced by friends, but respectable couples could and did strike up acquaintance on the street: Lillie Reynolds, a domestic servant in Dublin, first encountered James Connolly when they were both waiting for a tram. According to family lore, he was attracted to her because she was 'refined in an unassuming way' (p. 69). Fanny O'Brennan, a clerk, was reared in the precincts of the South Dublin Union where her mother was a wardmistress; she met Edward Kent in the Gaelic League and so Fanny and Eddie became Eamonn and Áine. Kathleen Daly gave up a successful dressmaking business in Limerick to marry Fenian ex-prisoner Tom Clarke. Muriel Gifford first encountered Thomas McDonagh when he came to lecture to the Irish Women's Franchise League; the shyest of the six Gifford sisters, she had worked at a succession of jobs including poultry instructress. There was nothing retiring about her artist sister Grace; the photograph taken of her by a Chicago journalist not long after the Rising in a light-coloured dress cradling a kitten, was a carefully crafted image of virginal widowhood. Grace's married life was famously brief; the other women could have told her that marriage to a hero-in-training was hard work. Lillie Connolly and Kathleen Clarke were dragged from pillar to post, including across the Atlantic and back, by their restless husbands. Michael Mallin's fierce intelligence led him to a variety of livelihoods after he left the British Army, causing many disruptions for Agnes and their growing family. Muriel McDonagh had life-threatening pre-eclampsia on her first confinement and depression afterwards; having a second baby a few years later was an act of heroism to equal anything her husband did. Áine Ceannt was at death's door not long after the birth of their first and only child. Poor health was a constant in the lives of