

Open Letter to the Irish People.

New York City, 17 September 1915

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As an Irishman and one who has been identified with the Irish Volunteer movement since it began, I feel it my duty to protest against the claim now put forward by the British Government that, because that Government has agreed with its political opponents to "place the Home Rule Bill in the Statute Book", and to defer its operation until after the war and until an "Amending Bill" to profoundly modify its provisions has been introduced and passed, Irishmen in return should enlist in the British Army and aid the allied Asiatic and European powers in a war against a people who have never wronged Ireland. The British Liberal Party has been publicly pledged for twenty-eight years to give Self Government to Ireland. It has not yet fulfilled that pledge.

Instead it now offers to sell, at a very high price, a wholly hypothetical and indefinite form of partial internal control of certain specified Irish services if, in return for this promissory note (payable after death) the Irish people will contribute their blood, their honor, and their manhood in a war that in no wise concerns them. Ireland has no quarrel with the German people or just cause of offence against them. Ireland will not

pronounce an opinion upon the British standpoint in this war beyond saying that the public profession under which it was begun, namely to defend the violated neutrality of Belgium, is being daily controverted by the official spokesmen of Great Britain. The London "Times" in its issue of the 14th instant declared that Great Britain would not consent to peace on any terms that did not involve the "dismantling of the German Navy" and the permanent impairment of Germany's place in the world as a great sea-faring nation. That may or may not

be a worthy end for British statesmanship to set before it and a warrant for the use of British arms against Germany, but it is no warrant for Irish honour or common sense to be involved in this conflict. There is no fair, moral or material Irishman can draw from assailing Germany.

The destruction of the German navy or the sweeping of German commerce from the seas will bring no profit to a people whose own commerce was long since swept from land and sea.

Ireland has no blood to give to any land, to any cause but that of Ireland. Our duty as a Christian people is to abstain from bloodshed; and our duty as Irishmen is to give our lives for Ireland. Ireland needs all her sons. In the space of sixty-eight years her population has fallen by far over 4,000,000 souls, and in every particular of national life she shows a steady decline of vitality. Were the Home Rule Bill all that is claimed for it and were it freely given today, to come into operation tomorrow, instead of being offered for sale on terms of exchange that only a fool would accept, it would be the duty of Irishmen to save their strength and manhood for the trying tasks before them, to build up from a depleted population the fabric of a revived national life.

Ireland has suffered at the hands of British administrators a more prolonged series of evils, deliberately inflicted, than any other community of civilized men. Today, when no margin of vital strength remains for vital tasks at home, when its fertile fields are reduced by set design to producing animals and not men, the remnant of our people are being urged

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to lay down their lives on foreign fields, in order that great and inordinately wealthy communities may grow greater and richer by the destruction of a rival's trade and industry.

And this was the highest moral aim in view, as its originators claim for it, it would still be the duty of Irishmen to keep out of it. If Irish blood is to be "the seal that will bring all Ireland together in one nation and in liberties equal and common to all", then let that blood be shed in Ireland where alone it can be righteously shed to secure those liberties. It was not Germany destroyed the national liberties of the Irish people, and we cannot recover the national life struck down in our own land by carrying fire and sword into another land.

The cause of Ireland is greater than the cause of any party; higher than the worth of any man, richer in its poverty than all the riches of an empire.

If we sell it now we are unworthy of the name of Irishmen. If today we barter that cause in a sordid bargain, we shall prove ourselves a people unworthy of freedom — a dwindling race of craven from whose veins the blood of manhood has been drained.

If ~~it is our duty~~ to now fight is our duty, then let us fight on that soil where so many generations of slain Irishmen lie in honour and fame. Let our graves be in that patriot ground whence alone the corpse of Irish nationality can spring to life.

Ireland will be "false to her history, to her consideration of honour, good faith and self-interest" if she now willingly responds to the call of the British Government to send her

brave sons and faithful hearts to fight
in a cause that has no glint of chivalry,
gleam of generosity in all its line of battle.

If this be a war for the small nationalities
as its planners term it, then let it begin
for one small nationality at home.

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Speaking as one of those who helped to
found the Irish Volunteers I say, in their name,
that no Irishman fit to bear arms in the
cause of his country's freedom can join the
allied millions now attacking Germany
in a war that, at the best, concerns Ireland
not at all and that can only add fresh
burdens and establish a new dominion, in the
interest of another community, upon a people
that has already been bled to the verge

of death

Robert Casement.