

The only reason that could justify general act of military measures-as distinct from military preparations on the part of Irish nationalists would be are: reasonably calculated or estimated prospect of success in the military sense. Without that prospect, military action (not military preparation) would in the first place be morally wrong - and that consideration to my mind is final and decisive. To enter deliberately on a course of action which is morally wrong is to incur the guilt not only of that action itself but of all its direct consequences. For example to kill any person in carrying out such a course of action is murder. The guilt of murder in that case falls on those who have planned and ordered the general course of action, or the policy, which makes such action inevitable.

The success which is calculated or estimated must be success in the operation itself, not merely some future moral or political advantage which may be hoped for as a result of non-success.

The motive of avoiding reproach or ignoring or misunderstanding without regarding the rightness or wrongness of our conduct as judged by our own consciences at the time of decision, is a bad and cowardly motive, and should not be allowed the slightest weight in influencing our decisions. The same applies to the motive of acting in accordance with what might be, or might be supposed to be, the opinion of any other person or persons other than those responsible for adopting a decision and putting it in force. It has never been a condition or an understanding on our part that our line of action should be decided for us by any but ourselves.

In coming to a decision, as to any proposed or considered line of action, the decisive element must be our calculation or estimate of the military result. Unless this shows a tangible prospect of success, the line of action in view is not to be adopted.

This calculation or estimate must depend on the actualities known to us. It must not be made to depend on so-called instinctive feelings or premonitions or on the adoption of a priori maxims, without regard to the actualities

“I feel”, or “my instinct tells me”, and the like, are the merest self delusions when they are allowed to regulate decisions of this kind. If we have any such “feeling” or “instinct”, it is our duty to bring it to the test, to analyse and examine it. It may be reasonable or unreasonable, its diktats may lead us right or wrong. If we can give no account of it except to say that the feeling or instinct is there, then it gives us no justification for any deliberate course of action involving a moral responsibility. If a man subordinates his judgment to a feeling or instinct, of which he can give no reasonable account, and which is therefore not rational, at the most he may be entitled to say that, for himself, his instinct is better than his judgment. He is certainly not entitled to impose his instinct as a guide upon others who have not his instinct in that particular. The fact that a man is driven back in feelings and instincts to justify an action or course of action which he has thought over and discussed, is good evidence that what he calls his feelings and his instincts are at variance with his better judgement. A man’s feelings or instincts, that is to say his unreasoned propensities in a matter of this kind, are the more dangerous because they are not reducible to reason. They may seem to him to be simple interior voices, when in fact they are the outcome of his own peculiar circumstances, may be shaped by his personal experiences in life

or his prospects in life, and may therefore be worthless or dangerous guides in any wider matter involving the fate of his country or of his fellow countrymen.

It is as bad or worse to propose decision on the ground of a priori Maxims without regard to actualities. I have heard a number of such maxims, for example – “it is essential that Ireland should take action during the present war”, or “Ireland has always struck a blow too late”, “in military matters the advantage lies with the side that takes the initiative (or the aggressive)” To put forward these or any other dogmas of the kind without associating them with the actualities or so as to the actualities, would be a proof of mental incapacity. To act on them would be madness; to act on them without otherwise justifying the action would be criminal.

What is the exact value of the maxim that “Ireland must take military action during the present war”? I have heard it defended on two grounds. First that we should be disgraced if we allow the opportunity of the war to pass; and secondly that our chances of success are greater during than after the war. As to the first ground, I have already dealt with it. We shall be cowards if we fear any disgrace except the disgrace of doing what we know to be wrong and not doing what we know to be right. The second ground is also already dealt with. Whoever puts forward that plea must justify it in the first instance by showing upon calculation and estimate what the chances of success are at any time at which action is proposed. If his calculation and estimate comes to nullity for the present time or the near future or any time during the war, then it is folly to compare with the chances of another time. If they do not come to nullity then let us see what they do come to.

“Ireland has always struck too late”- This is historically untrue. If it were true, it would still not be a sound guide for us at present. It would be substituting an irrational fatalist notion for clear and deliberate judgement. That sort of fatalism is a grave danger and reproach to us, if we adopt it, whether it comes in the form of pessimistic maxims or of optimistic prophesies-from the first I have had to ignore and have ignored both. We must listen to nothing except proper preparation and proper calculation. The most decisive battle and campaign in Irish history, the campaign and battle of Kinsale, was lost by striking too soon. In general, when Ireland lost was through inadequate preparation.

“We should take the initiative”-Does anybody imagine that a formula of this kind is a sort of magic spell that we’re going to win with a formula? What are the facts? The initiative in any military sense, is and has been with the existing military power in Ireland. We might take the aggressive, which is a different thing. If a fortified place is invested but not attacked its defenders take the aggressive when they make a sortie-but they don’t take the initiative. Sorties are not always successful, and our position is not that of the strong and combined force behind fortified lines or walls. If we are to have a plan of action let us have it complete – not breaking off at the end of the formula. Let us see what we expect to do first, and next, and next, and what alternatives there are, and what is our provision for them.

I do not care and will not cause a rap for maxims or formulae or catchwords or feelings or forebodings for the reproaches either of our time or later times. Organization, preparation, calculation are the necessary preliminaries to any decision, except the decision to organize prepare and calculate. I believe however, in having

the right on our side. We have that already and we must keep it. I believe in the help of God. We have had that and must hope to have it.

There is a feeling in some minds that action is necessary, that lives must be sacrificed, in order to produce an ultimate effect on the national mind. As a principle of action, I have heard that feeling disclaimed, but I did not fully accept the disclaimer. In fact is a sounder principle than any of the others that I have dealt with. If the destruction of our nationality was in sight, and we came to the conclusion that at least the vital principle of nationality was to be saved by laying down our lives, then we should make that sacrifice without hesitation. It would not be a military act in any sense and it does not come within the scope of our military counsels.

To my mind those who feel impelled towards military action on any of the grounds that I have stated are really impelled by a sense of feebleness or dependency or fatalism, or by an instinct of satisfying their own emotions or escaping from a difficult and complex and trying situation. It is our duty, if necessary, to trample on our personal feelings and to face every sort of difficulty and complexity and to think only of our country's good.

The plain state of the case is that, at the present time, England has more than ample power to crush us in the military sense. She has had that power at any time since our organisation began. She may or may not have it any time during the war or after the war. The war, especially in its eastern side, may yet have extraordinary developments. At all events it is a complete delusion to think that the future course of the war is likely to increase, in any degree with reckoning, England's military advantage over us. Moreover I have never doubted from the first inception of the volunteer movement and from my own earliest thoughts about it that Englishman of all parties would be hostile to such a movement and would desire to see it crushed.

Why then has it not been crushed? Why has it been allowed to grow stronger and stronger? Why has the government hostility, in its active shape, been mainly shown in tentative acts of provocation like the deporting and imprisonment of organisers? The answer is that the occasion which the government wants for more drastic action is open revolt. If the government knew that a revolt was about to take place, it would allow the revolt to take place. If it knew that it could produce a revolt by the agency of individuals, it would employ their agency. It might even pretend to allow a revolt to make headway for some days, taking only such military measures as would prevent the revolt getting the upper hand definitely.

In the meantime, it would take action of a different kind. We know already the government attitude in the matter of the Limerick riot and in Tyrone - The policy of embroiling the Irish Volunteers a nationalist faction - just as we have it on record that the government of Fox and Northington deliberately set themselves to embroil the volunteers with the Irish parliament. In the case of an Irish volunteer revolt the government would move heaven and earth to get up hostility of as active a kind as possible among Redmond's followers against the Irish volunteers. Mr. Redmond would probably be forced to give the lead by an immediate public manifesto. The whole daily press of Ireland would be the government's command.

A Fortiori, the government would take steps to see that the unionists, especially the armed unionists in Ulster, were placed in active hostility to the Irish volunteers. The government could afford to hold its hand during these developments. It would then intervene with the double or treble justification of the arresting the supremacy of the state in which it would have the sympathy of all states not actively hostile to it - and of preventing the Irish people from killing each other. In short, the Irish volunteers would have committed the ghastly crime of enabling the English government to put itself in the right and the entire population of Ireland in the wrong. For the first time in history it would have made good its claim to dominate Ireland.

Does anyone imagine that, at such a juncture, the claims of Allies on the continent, or even of English interests in Flanders, Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt or India or all these combined, would weigh on the mind of any English government in comparison with Ireland?. What is the alternative policy?

In the first place, we must avow to ourselves clearly and courageously without heeding either sneers or jeers or even the most honest reproaches, that if we can win our rights by being ready to fight for them but without fighting, then it is our duty to do so and we shall not be ashamed of it. I am aware that this is a difficult position to assert to the general body of men organised as a military force, carrying military arms, and trained in military exercises. It might be misunderstood by them, and might lead them to think that in the minds of their leaders their military character was a sham.

Even in regular armies, under states which have no *Causus Belli*, the courageous military man does not like the notion of going through his military career without ever fighting a battle or an engagement. But it must be remembered that the Irish volunteers, if they are a military force, are not an militarist force, and their object is to secure Ireland's rights and liberties and nothing else but that. The reproach of the former Irish volunteers is not that they did not fight, but that they did not maintain their organisation until their objects had been secured.

Secondly we must clearly recognise the position in which we stand and which we have already gained. Until a short time ago England ruled Ireland normally by what are called peaceful means. The country was controlled, even politically, by the police. Except rarely in the case of a formidable street riot the military were not called into action. - in fact, Ireland was, to outward appearance at least and in substance - governed as England itself is governed.

We have now reached this position that the ordinary citizen in Ireland is no longer dominated by the English government's peace establishment. The Irish volunteers no longer stand in danger of the police. The only question with them for a long time past has been on what occasions they ought to resist wrongful police action by force of arms. Moreover there is good ground for believing that among the police there is, to say the least, a considerable leaven of men who feel strongly that they should not be used in hostility to the Irish volunteers.

It is not perhaps generally realised what a great change this means in the whole Irish situation and what a substantial gain it is for the Irish volunteers and by them. It is in fact a substantial military gain for them being due to their own sturdiness discipline and courage - as much again as if they had marched against and occupied a military position of the first importance. Its importance is this - not that it makes the Irish

volunteers a match in any sense for the military force at the disposal of the government but that it makes it impossible for the government to suppress the volunteers without adopting military measures. Now the government wants, and has always wanted, to suppress the Irish volunteers. It could at any time have used sufficient military force to suppress them if opposed by them in military fashion. Why then has the government not employed military force against us? Because the government is convinced that it would lose more than it could gain by moving its military forces against us, unless we create a special opportunity for it.

Moreover the position we have gained is such that it enables us to strengthen our general position still further and indefinitely, by increasing our numbers of armed men and developing their training and organisation, and by getting the country more and more on our side. Our policy in these circumstances is to use these advantages not to throw them away or bring them to a standstill. At present we are far from being being at a standstill. We are gaining steadily in numbers, in arrangement, and in training also in general organisation. But is incomprehensible to me that any of us should be so childish as to think that the comparative state of efficiency that has been reached in Dublin is at all representative of the condition of the volunteers elsewhere. Some of us are plainly obsessed by the efficiency of Dublin. No doubt it could not be helped that our HQ staff should have worked so much in Dublin and so little out of it. In general, outside of Dublin, our training of officers is only as yet begun.

There is plenty of scope for courage and enterprise and intelligence in the work of arming the volunteers. On that point this is to be said, that whereas, in my conscientious judgment, an armed revolt would be wrong and unpatriotic and criminal, it is quite a different case with regard to the provision and retention of our arms. I have not the slightest doubt on that point that we were morally and in every way justified in keeping by all necessary force such arms as we have got or can get. I hold myself entitled to resist to death any attempt to deprive me of any arms or ammunition or other military articles that I have or can protect for myself or for the Irish volunteers. If in such resistance any man meets his death through my act or counsel or command I shall have no guilt on my conscience.

We have to remember that what we call our country is not a poetical abstraction as some of us, perhaps all of us, in the exercise of are highly developed capacity for figurative thoughts, are sometimes apt to imagine- with the help of our patriotic literature. There is no such person as Kathleen Ni Uaillachain or Roisin Dubh or the Sean Bhean Bhocht who is calling upon us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish nation which is a concrete and visible reality. Now we believe that we think rightly on national matters, and if possibly we do not all agree on every point we believe that the consensus we hold amongst us is right as far as it goes. We are all agreed that, in worldly matters, our country's good has first claim on us, and can claim the greatest sacrifices from us. We believe it to be our duty to realise this and to act on this principle. Very well, if so, it is also our duty to so act that our country itself, i.e. the Irish nation, shall learn, as far as may be secured, to think in the same way and be ready to act in the same principle. In other words, if we are right nationally, it is our duty to get our country on our side, and not to be content with the vanity of thinking ourselves to be right and other Irish people to be wrong. As a

matter of patriotic principle, we should never tire of endeavouring to get our country on our side.

In a much more narrow sense, as a matter of ordinary military policy, it is imperative that we, who are engaged in national military organization, should most earnestly endeavour to get our country on our side. In the event of actual fighting, it is a military factor of the highest importance to be able to fight in a friendly country.

Now it is universal testimony-I can quote unionists and Redmondites as well as our own least sanguine and most sanguine friends for it-that's the country is steadily coming over to our side. Are we entitled to stop that process, is it wise or excusable for us to stop it? It is really only beginning. The government itself is daily helping to create a deep and solid conviction that we are right. The unionists, even in Ulster, are damping off. The new taxation may be confidently expected to make them discontented.

That applies also to all the rest. I do not know at this moment whether the time and circumstances will yet justify distinct revolutionary action, but of this I am certain, that the only possible basis for successful revolutionary action is deep and widespread popular discontent. We have only to look around us in the streets to realise that no such condition at present exists in Ireland. A few of us, a small proportion, who think about the evils of English government in Ireland, are always discontented. We should be downright fools if we were to measure many others by the standard of our own thoughts.

I wish it then to be clearly understood that under present conditions I am definitely opposed to any proposal that may come forward involving insurrection. I have no doubt at all that any consent to any such proposal at this time and under these circumstances would make me false to my country besides involving me in the guilt of murder. No reproach from any quarter will have the least affect on me as regards this decision. I will oppose any such proposal with all the force I can, actively and not passively. I will not give way or resign or shirk any trouble in opposing it.

If any feasible proposal is brought forward to increase the arming of the Volunteers, I will support it - and those who are impatient of inaction should find scope enough for their activity in that direction.

Eoin MacNeill