

ARE WE AT WAR WITH ENGLAND?

By Pádraig Pearse.

The following article, republished in full, is taken from the 1917 book History of the Sinn Fein Movement and the Irish Rebellion of 1916 by Francis P. Jones. According to Jones, the following article of Pearse's was published in four Irish nationalist newspapers, The Spark, Honesty, The Gael and the Gaelic Athlete only several weeks before the commencing of the Easter Rising and directly led to their suppression by the British Government. The title of the article is not given therefore a suitable title has been added in its place.

Since the outbreak of the European war, I have often asked myself, "Are we at war with England?" and have satisfied myself with replying in the affirmative. On deeper reflection I must say, our war with that country is only a war of words, one of lip and feeling.

What are the signs of war, in the purely military sense? There are none, but is it so with the enemy? Oh, no; with her it is war, and real war towards us. Our casualty list is large between captured, imprisoned, and deported. By captured I mean those whom she has deluded and seduced into her ranks.

Where are the successes on our side to offset such losses? Paltry, withal the enemy in our midst has not lost a single man.

We all declare, and justly so, that until Ireland is restored to her place amongst the nations of the earth, come what may, we are at war with England. It is very patriotic, no doubt, and truly national, but what is the value of such declarations if they be not supported by deeds?

I believe that the time has come for a strong and determined offensive against all the entrenchments of the enemy in this country. The effect of such an offensive will be far-reaching. It will show our enemies that we are now conquered; that we are still out for the liberty of one small nationality, Ireland. It will cause an upheaval at home, the news of which will quickly reach our captured brethren

abroad. If they have a trace of patriotism in their veins, and many of them have, they will not help the enemy that is shooting down their kith and kin at home.

In short, an offensive at this moment may be the deciding factor in this war. The longer we delay, the better it will be for our enemies. They want no disturbance in Ireland, and will we help in their desire?

Defeat in Ireland means more for the enemy than any defeat she may sustain in Flanders or elsewhere. The only consequence to us is that some of us may be launched into eternity quicker and sooner than we would like. But who are we, that we should hesitate to die for Ireland?

Are not the claims of Ireland greater on us than any personal ones? Do we not boast of our loyalty and love for the Dear Dark Head? Is it fear that deters us from such an enterprise? Away with such fears! Cowards die many times; the brave die only once.

It is admitted that nothing but a revolution can now save the historic Irish nation from becoming a mere appanage, a Crown Colony, of the British Empire. We do not desire such a consummation of the Island of Saints and Scholars, the land of the O'Neills and the O'Donnells, the land for which the countless have suffered and died.

We call ourselves revolutionists; we glory in the name; we speak with pride of the Dawn of the Day. Were there ever such revolutionists? We want the revolution to start us, and not us to start it. If we really want to free Ireland, now is the time for action. Are we afraid to start up like men and bear the consequences, or is all our talk mere frothing only to delude our enemies as well as our followers?

If we want the revolution, we must make it, and we must realise that such cannot be accomplished without bloodshed. We want war, for war justifies the removal of our enemies in the most expeditious manner. For that purpose we must know who our enemies are, and under no consideration must we allow them to interfere with the onward march of the Irish nation. Either we or they must fall in the fight.

Some will cry out in horror at such a proposal. On what do they base their horror? Is it blood-spilling? Look at the war in Flanders. What blood is being spilled there daily! Do these deaths awake in such people a shudder of horror? No; war to them is justifiable in all countries except in Ireland. We are at war with England, and it is necessary that we should fight it to the bitter end.

Look at the war in Flanders again. What are the motives underlying this struggle? Are these motives just and noble? Is Ireland's struggle with England more legitimate and more sacred? Yes, it is.

Our sufferings extend over centuries; no form of torture and persecution but England has tried on us. She is out for our conquest, and will stop at nothing to effect it. There is no hope for the future welfare of an independent Irish nation but in separation.

God, in His wise providence, has separated us by the seas, but crafty, unscrupulous enemies bind us to that execrable government.

If we remove these enemies, will separation follow? I say and believe "yes." These enemies are the connecting links with Dublin Castle. They are the links that bind, and they shall remain while England holds this country. If we want to break the connection with England, we must remove these links, and we must render government by England impossible in this country.

Is it an impossible task? Decidedly not. At the moment the minions of the government in Ireland stand trembling, afraid to disturb the people. They know their power is weak, and they fearful lest any action of theirs may lose them their government, or at least may have an untoward effect on the Irish troops fighting for them in Flanders and elsewhere.

I fear we do not realize our present strength and our enemies' weakness. Where is the British navy that we were told ruled the waves? Recent events show that her ruling is now past. As for land forces, what has England to put against us? She needs every available man to meet the German offensive. Even her conscript army will be needed. She may send some of them to Ireland, but are they such to make us fear?

We are fighting for freedom; freedom for everyone; they are only conscripts fighting against their will. We are superior to them in every respect. We know our country, and by a simultaneous and systematic action we should shock, demoralise, and rout them.

Comrades, everything favours us. Now or never for the final onslaught. The shades of our immortal dead, the graves of the unavenged, the harrowing cries of our murdered priests, of our violated women, of the coffinless dead who are whitening the Atlantic's broad floor – all rise up and command us to do the noble deed, and fight the last fight for freedom.

We must not wait till the war is over. England will then be at peace, and will be free to send her reserves against us. Will we wait to fail, or will we fight now to win? Yours is the choice.

I am ready. For years I have waited and prayed for this day. We have the most glorious opportunity that has ever presented itself of really asserting ourselves. Such an opportunity may never come again. We have Ireland's liberty in our hands. Will we be freemen, or are we content to remain as slaves and idly watch the final extermination of the Gael?

GOMERAGH.