

LETTER TO THE IRISH PEOPLE, 17th September 1914.

By Roger Casement.

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As an Irishman, and one who has 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 the Government has agreed with its political opponents to “place the Home Rule Bill on 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 honour, 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.

I 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 seafaring 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 gain, moral or material, Irishmen 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 four million 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 to-day, to come into operation to-morrow, 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 ruined national life.

Ireland has suffered at the hands of British administrators a more prolonged series of evils, deliberately inflicted, than any other community of civilised men. To-day, when no margin of vital strength remains for vital tasks at home, when its fertile fields are reduced by set design to reproducing animals and not men, the remnant of our people are being urged 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. Had this war 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 who 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 Empire. If we sell it now, we are unworthy of the name of Irishmen. If to-day we barter that cause in a sordid bargain, we shall prove ourselves a people unworthy of freedom, a dwindling race of cravens from whose veins the blood of manhood has been drained. If to fight now 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 grass whence alone the corpse of Irish nationality can spring to life. Ireland will be "false to her history, to every 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 or 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.

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 drain in the interest of another community, upon a people that has already been bled to the verge of Death.