

Mr. de Valera's Reply to Mr. Churchill



Why Ireland Was Neutral

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Taoiseach's Broadcast to the Nation on the conclusion of the War in Europe

Delivered Wednesday, 16th May, 1945

Go mbeannaí Dia dhibh, a cháirde Gael. Is libhse, a Ghaelgeoirí, is ceart dom an chéad fhocal a rá. Tá an cogadh san Eoraip caite. Ba é deonú Dé, as méid A mhór-thrócaire, sinn a shábhail ar an troid agus ar an dóirteadh fola agus sinn a chaomhnadh ar an bhfulang atá ag céasadh furmhór tíortha na hEorpa le cúig bhliana anuas.

Níor tháinigemár slán ó gach cruatan ar ndóigh—is fada fairsing a theigheas droch-iarsmaí cogaidh. Ach, nuair a chuimhnimid ar na tíortha agus na daoine go léir mór-thimpeall orainn, is ceart dúinn ár mbuíochas croí a ghabháil go dílis dúthrachtach le Dia na Glóire as ucht sinn a chaomhnadh in am an ghéibh.

An uair ba mhó a bhí an chontúirt ag bagairt orainn, d'iarraas oraibh-se, a Ghaela, seasamh sa mbearna bhaoil chun an náisiún a chaomhnadh. Bhí a fhios agam go mbeadh fonn ar na Gaeilgeoirí, na daoine is fearr a thuigear céard is brí agus beatha don náisiúntacht, bheith ar tosach imeasc na bhfear a bheadh ina sciath cosanta ar thír na hEireann.

Níor chlis sibh orm, a Ghaela. Rinne sibh bhur geion féin den obair—an obair a rinne, faoi dheonú Dé, sinn a thabhairt slán le cúig bliana anuas.

Caithfidh mé anois ionntó ar an mBéarla. Tá rudaí áirithe ba mhian liom a rá agus a caifear a rá sa teanga sin.

Day of Thanksgiving

The long and fearful war which has devastated Europe has at last, mercifully, come to an end. And my first object in speaking to you to-night must be to try to express in words the gratitude to Almighty God with which all our hearts are full. I am assured that we shall be able to arrange for a day

of national thanksgiving on which we may publicly express due gratitude to God for His immense mercy in our regard.

To the people of all the nations which have been directly involved in the war our thoughts go out in sympathy on their deliverance from the daily terrors in which they lived, and in sorrow that they must still endure the inevitable suffering of the aftermath. We have been spared what so many nations have had to undergo, and there lies upon us, accordingly, a duty, within our limited power, to assist in succouring those who have been less fortunate than we have been.

I have here before me the pencilled notes from which I broadcast to you on September 3, 1939. I had so many other things to do on that day that I could not find time to piece them together into a connected statement. From these notes I see that I said that noting the march of events your Government had decided its policy the previous spring, and had announced its decision to the world.

The aim of our policy, I said, would be to keep our people out of the war. I reminded you of what I had said in the Dáil, that in our circumstances, with our history and our experience after the last war and with a part of our country still unjustly severed from us, no other policy was possible.

I did not have to go into any details then as to what precisely were the circumstances to which I referred, nor had I to go into detail as to what were our experiences after the last war, nor had I to point out what a vital factor in our situation was the partition of our country. I had merely to refer to them and I felt sure you would understand. Similarly, I do not think it necessary to dwell upon them to-night.

I pointed out then that the policy adopted had the backing of practically the entire Dáil and the entire community, irrespective of any personal views which citizens held on the merits of the cause which occasioned the conflict.

That national policy then announced was thus supported by a unity rare to find amongst democratic peoples, a unity tested through two free general elections in 1943 and 1944, a unity which happily survived with us to the end. All political parties and all sections are entitled to their share of credit for what that unity has achieved. It has been a triumph of national understanding and good sense.

There were times when we stood in the gravest danger. But we have been preserved from the calamity of invasion, and such privations as we have suffered in our economic life have been by comparison very slight indeed.

The dire economic consequences which might have been anticipated were prevented by the united efforts of our people, by the co-operation of the public representatives of all parties, by hard work, by careful organisation, and by being enabled to obtain supplies from other countries, particularly Britain, the United States and Canada.

Army, Services, Thanked

I know you all feel with me the deep debt of gratitude we owe to all those who, at heavy personal sacrifice, joined the Army, including the Marine Service, and the various auxiliary defence organisations, and helped to guard us against the most serious of all the dangers that threatened.

The officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Regular Army already in service at the beginning of the war formed, with the Reserve and the Volunteer Force, a well-trained nucleus round which it was possible, in an incredibly short time, to build up an efficient fighting force.

Many tens of thousands of young men responded to the appeals of the Government, and of the leaders of all the political parties in the Defence Conference, to join the Army. Without regard to their own personal interests, these young men left their employment or the studies which they had been pursuing in preparation for professional careers.

Many thousands of others joined the Local Defence Force and the Maritime Inscription, and made it possible for the Army to feel confident that our best-equipped striking force would be capably assisted by large bodies of well-trained men throughout the country.

The Local Security Force, the different branches of the Air Raid Precautions Services, the Irish Red Cross Society, the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the Knights of Malta, also made themselves available to provide services without which it would not have been possible for us to face, with any degree of confidence, the dangers of the military situation outside.

To all of these, to the many other voluntary bodies who helped in the national effort and to the men of our merchant marine, who faced all the perils of the ocean to bring us essential supplies, the nation is profoundly thankful.

Trials Still Ahead

We have survived the ordeal, but I am sure you all realise that the end of the war in Europe does not mean an immediate, or even an early, ending of the period of emergency.

The world is still in a most unsettled state and what may still happen no one can prophesy. Many difficulties concerning supplies of essential goods which the war created will still continue and there can be no relaxation of the regulations relating to the distribution or use of the commodities that have had to be kept under control.

It is indeed probable that for a time supplies of some important goods will be scarcer than ever. A great war is still in progress in the Far East, the requirements of which will be a first demand on the productive resources and the shipping of the countries from which, in times of peace, we were accustomed to import great quantities of goods. There is, moreover, a grave shortage of food in many European countries and a danger of famine in many parts of the Continent next winter.

We cannot, therefore, safely look to other countries to make good the deficiencies in our own production. Not merely will international transport difficulties remain acute, but other peoples will have prior call on such supplies as may be available.

Rationing and other forms of control of the distribution and use of goods will have to be maintained so long as the scarcity continues, and can be terminated only when normal supplies are again freely available.

Must Produce All Food Possible

It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that there should be no relaxation whatever in the effort to produce all the food possible from our own soil. There is every indication that the world food situation will be very serious, not merely this year but for a considerable time to come, and that within the next few years we will have to rely on our own efforts to produce the bulk of the food required to maintain the life and the health of our people.

We must, indeed, not only reduce to a minimum our dependence on imported food-stuffs but, by increasing production, endeavour to make substantial quantities available also for peoples who have been less fortunate than ourselves.

So far as this year is concerned, the intention to provide food from our own resources to help in warding off starvation in European countries can be put into effect only by reducing the supplies available for our own consumption. This may, in fact, involve not merely the reduction for a time of the present rations of some commodities, but the extension of rationing to other commodities not now subject to control.

As to the future, there is no likelihood of any material change in the requirements in regard to compulsory tillage for the year 1946 as compared with those in operation in 1945.

The difficulties which we have experienced during the past years in regard to fuel will also remain. There are no prospects whatever of any early resumption of coal imports on anything approaching a normal scale and our domestic fuel needs and the requirements of industry must, in this coming winter, be met by turf.

The Government desire to restore normal trading conditions as early as possible, and no control or regulations will be kept in force for one day longer than is strictly necessary.

The controls established by the Government to prevent inflation must also be maintained for the time being. It will be remembered that it was after the end of hostilities in 1918, and because of the too early removal of the war-time checks on expenditure, that inflationary forces got out of control.

The economic disorganisation which caused so much hardship and distress in later years had its origin at that time. I know that these restrictions are irksome but in the national interest it is necessary for me to ask you to accept and bear them patiently until the danger is past. Again you may be certain that the Government will remove them as soon as it is found safe to do so.

Reply to Mr. Churchill

Certain newspapers have been very persistent in looking for my answer to Mr. Churchill's recent broadcast. I know the kind of answer I am expected to make. I know the answer that first springs to the lips of every man of Irish blood who heard or read that speech, no matter in what circumstances or in what part of the world he found himself.

I know the reply I would have given a quarter of a century ago. But I have deliberately decided that that is not the reply I shall make to-night. I shall strive not to be guilty of adding any fuel to the flames of hatred and passion which, if continued to be fed, promise to burn up whatever is left by the war of decent human feeling in Europe.

Allowances can be made for Mr. Churchill's statement, however unworthy, in the first flush of his victory. No such excuse could be found for me in this quieter atmosphere. There are, however, some things which it is my duty to say, some things which it is essential to say. I shall try to say them as dispassionately as I can.

Mr. Churchill makes it clear that, in certain circumstances, he would have violated our neutrality and that he would justify his action by Britain's necessity. It seems strange to me that Mr. Churchill does not see that this, if

The Six Irish Counties under British control are (including Belfast) — Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone.



accepted, would mean that Britain's necessity would become a moral code and that when this necessity became sufficiently great, other people's rights were not to count.

It is quite true that other great Powers believe in this same code—in their own regard—and have behaved in accordance with it. That is precisely why we have the disastrous succession of wars—world war No. 1 and world war No. 2—and shall it be world war No. 3 ?

Surely Mr. Churchill must see that if his contention be admitted in our regard a like justification can be framed for similar acts of aggression elsewhere and no small nation adjoining a great Power could ever hope to be permitted to go its own way in peace.

It is, indeed, fortunate that Britain's necessity did not reach the point when Mr. Churchill would have acted. All credit to him that he successfully resisted the temptation which, I have no doubt, many times assailed him in his difficulties and to which I freely admit many leaders might have easily succumbed. It is, indeed, hard for the strong to be just to the weak but acting justly always has its rewards.

By resisting his temptation in this instance, Mr. Churchill, instead of adding another horrid chapter to the already bloodstained record of the relations between England and this country, has advanced the cause of international morality an important step—one of the most important, indeed, that can be taken on the road to the establishment of any sure basis for peace.

As far as the peoples of these two islands are concerned, it may, perhaps, mark a fresh beginning towards the realisation of that mutual comprehension to which Mr. Churchill has referred and for which he has prayed and for which, I hope, he will not merely pray but work also, as did his predecessor who will yet, I believe, find the honoured place in British history which is due to him, as certainly he will find it in any fair record of the relations between Britain and ourselves.

If England Lost Six Counties—

That Mr. Churchill should be irritated when our neutrality stood in the way of what he thought he vitally needed, I understand, but that he or any thinking person in Britain or elsewhere should fail to see the reason for our neutrality I find it hard to conceive.

I would like to put a hypothetical question—it is a question I have put to many Englishmen since the last war. Suppose Germany had won the war, had invaded and occupied England, and that after a long lapse of time and many bitter struggles she was finally brought to acquiesce in admitting England's right to freedom, and let England go, but not the whole of England, all but, let us say, the six southern counties.

These six southern counties, those, let us suppose, commanding the entrance to the narrow seas, Germany had singled out and insisted on holding herself with a view to weakening England as a whole, and maintaining the securing of her own communications through the Straits of Dover.

Let us suppose, further, that after all this had happened, Germany was engaged in a great war in which she could show that she was on the side of the freedom of a number of small nations, would Mr. Churchill as an Englishman who believed that his own nation had as good a right to freedom as any other, not freedom for a part merely, but freedom for the whole—would he, whilst Germany still maintained the partition of his country and occupied six counties of it, would he lead this partitioned England to join with Germany in a crusade? I do not think Mr. Churchill would.

Would he think the people of partitioned England an object of shame if they stood neutral in such circumstances? I do not think Mr. Churchill would.

"These six southern counties, those, let us suppose, commanding the entrance to the narrow seas . . ."
(The six counties mentioned by Mr. de Valera in his broadcast, shown in black on the map, are — including London — Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Essex, Middlesex and Hertford.)



Ireland's Lone, Long Stand

Mr. Churchill is proud of Britain's stand alone, after France had fallen and before America entered the war.

Could he not find in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there is a small nation that stood alone not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression; that endured spoliations, famines, massacres in endless succession; that was clubbed many times into insensibility, but that each time on returning consciousness took up the fight anew; a small nation that could never be got to accept defeat and has never surrendered her soul?

Mr. Churchill is justly proud of his nation's perseverance against heavy odds. But we in this island are still prouder of our people's perseverance for freedom through all the centuries. We of our time have played our part in that perseverance, and we have pledged ourselves to the dead generations who have preserved intact for us this glorious heritage, that we too will strive to be faithful to the end, and pass on this tradition unblemished.

Many a time in the past there appeared little hope except that hope to which Mr. Churchill referred, that by standing fast a time would come when, to quote his own words, "the tyrant would make some ghastly mistake which would alter the whole balance of the struggle."

I sincerely trust, however, that it is not thus our ultimate unity and freedom will be achieved, though as a younger man I confess I prayed even for that, and indeed at times saw no other.

In latter years, I have had a vision of a nobler and better ending, better for both our people and for the future of mankind. For that I have now been long working. I regret that it is not to this nobler purpose that Mr. Churchill is lending his hand rather than, by the abuse of a people who have done him no wrong, trying to find in a crisis like the present excuse for continuing the injustice of the mutilation of our country.

I sincerely hope that Mr. Churchill has not deliberately chosen the latter course but, if he has, however regretfully we may say it, we can only say, be it so.

Meanwhile, even as a partitioned small nation, we shall go on and strive to play our part in the world, continuing unswervingly to

work for the cause of true freedom and for peace and understanding between all nations.

As a community which has been mercifully spared from all the major sufferings, as well as from the blinding hates and rancours engendered by the present war, we shall endeavour to render thanks to God by playing a Christian part in helping, so far as a small nation can, to bind up some of the gaping wounds of suffering humanity.

Agus anois, caithfidh mé slán a fhágáil agaibh. Nuair a bhios ag caint libh i dtús an chogaidh, chuireas an tír agus a muintir faoi choimirce Dé agus a Mháthar Muire, agus isé mo ghuide anocht: Go raibh an choimrí chumhachtach chéanna oraibh san aimsir atá romhainn!

What Mr. Churchill Said

The passage in Mr. Churchill's broadcast of Sunday, May 13, to which Mr. de Valera replied reads:—

"The sense of envelopment, which might at any moment turn to strangulation, lay heavy upon us. We had only the north-western approach between Ulster and Scotland through which to bring in the means of life and to send out the forces of war.

"Owing to the action of Mr. de Valera, so much at variance with the temper and instinct of thousands of southern Irishmen, who hastened to the battle-front to prove their ancient valour, the approaches which the southern Irish ports and airfields could so easily have guarded were closed by the hostile aircraft and U-boats.

"This was indeed a deadly moment in our life, and if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland, we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr. de Valera, or perish for ever from the earth.

"However, with a restraint and poise to which, I venture to say, history will find few parallels, His Majesty's Government never laid a violent hand upon them, though at times it would have been quite easy and quite natural, and we left the de Valera Government to frolic with the German and later with the Japanese representatives to their heart's content.

"When I think of these days I think also of other episodes and personalities, I think of Lieut.-Commander Esmonde, V.C.; Lance-Corporal Kenneally, V.C.; Capt. Fegen, V.C., and other Irish heroes that I could easily recite, and all bitterness by Britain for the Irish race dies in my heart.

"I can only pray that, in years which I shall not see, the shame will be forgotten and the glories will endure, and that the peoples of the British Isles and of the British Commonwealth of Nations will walk together in mutual comprehension and forgiveness."

IRELAND

SHOWING NORTH-EAST AREA OF ULSTER
i.e., "NORTHERN IRELAND".

AREA SHOWN WHITE 29,121 SQ. MILES
AREAS SHOWN HATCHED 2,716 SQ. MILES

MAP BASED ON POPULATION
STATISTICS OF RURAL AND
URBAN DISTRICTS (Census, 1926)

