



The Provisional Government

To The People of Ireland

1803

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To

THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

You are now called on to shew to the world that you are competent to take your place among nations, that you have a right to claim their recognizance of you, as an independent country, by the only satisfactory proof you can furnish of your capability of maintaining your independence, your wresting it from England with your own hands.

In the development of this system, which has been organized within the last eight months, at the close of internal defeat and without the hope of foreign assistance; which has been conducted with a tranquillity, mistaken for obedience; which neither the failure of a similar attempt in England has retarded, nor the renewal of hostilities has accelerated; in the development of this system you will show to the people of England, that there is a spirit of perseverance in this country, beyond their power to calculate or to repress; you will show to them that as long as they think to hold unjust dominion over Ireland, under no change of circumstances can they count on its obedience; under no aspect of affairs can they judge of its intentions; you will show to them that the question which it now behoves them to take into serious and instant consideration, is not, whether they will resist a separation, which it is our fixed determination to effect, but whether or not, *they will drive us beyond separation*; whether they will by a sanguinary resistance create a deadly national antipathy between the two countries, or whether they will take the only means still left, of driving such a sentiment from our minds, a prompt, manly, and sagacious acquiescence, in our just and unalterable determination.

If the secrecy with which the present effort has been conducted, shall have led our enemies to suppose that its extent must have been partial, a few days will undeceive them. That confidence, which was once lost, by trusting to external support, and suffering our own means to be gradually undermined, has been again restored. We have been mutually pledged to each other, to look only to our own strength, and that the first introduction of a system of terror, the first attempt to execute an individual in one county, should be the signal of insurrection in all. We have now, without the loss of a man, with our means of communication untouched, brought our plans to the moment when they are ripe for execution, and in the promptitude with which nineteen counties will come forward at once to execute them, it will be found that neither confidence nor communication are wanting to the people of Ireland.

In calling on our countrymen to come forward, we feel ourselves bound, at the same time, to justify our claim to their confidence by a precise declaration of our views. We therefore solemnly declare, that our object is to establish a free and independent republic in Ireland: that the pursuit of this object we will relinquish only with our lives: that we will never, unless at the express call of our country, abandon our post, until the acknowledgment of its independence is obtained from England; and



that we will enter into no negotiation (but for exchange of prisoners) with the government of that country while a British army remains in Ireland. Such is the declaration which we call on the people of Ireland to support – And we call first on that part of Ireland which was once paralysed by the want of intelligence, to shew that to that cause only was its inaction to be attributed; on that part of Ireland which was once foremost, by its fortitude in suffering; on that part of Ireland which once offered to take the salvation of the country on itself; on that part of Ireland where the flame of liberty first glowed; we call upon the NORTH to stand up and shake off their Slumber and their oppression.

MEN of LEINSTER, STAND TO YOUR ARMS.

To the courage which you have already displayed, is your country indebted for the confidence which it now feels in its own strength, and for the dismay with which our enemies will be overwhelmed when they shall find this effort to be universal. But men of Leinster, you owe more to your country than the having animated it by your past example; you owe more to your own courage, than the having obtained, by it a protection. If six years ago, when you rose without arms, without plan, without co-operation, with more troops against you alone, than are now in the country at large; you were able to remain for six weeks in open defiance of the government, and within a few miles of the capital what will you not now effect, with that capital, and every other part of Ireland ready to support you? But it is not on this head that we have need to address you. No we now speak to you, and through you, to the rest of Ireland, on a subject, dear to us even as the success of our country, - its honour. You are accused by your enemies of having violated that honour; excesses which they themselves had in their fullest extent provoked, but which they have grossly exaggerated, have been attributed to you. The opportunity of vindicating yourselves by actions, is now for the first time before you; and we call upon you to give the lie to such assertions, by carefully avoiding every appearance of plunder, intoxication, or revenge; recollecting that you lost Ireland before, not from want of courage, but from not having that courage rightly directed by discipline. But we trust that your past sufferings, have taught you experience, and that you will respect the declaration which we now make and which we are determined by every means in our power to enforce.

The nation alone possesses the right of punishing individuals, and whosoever shall put another person to death, except in battle, without a fair trial by his country, is guilty of murder. The intention of the provisional government of Ireland, is to claim from the English government, such Irishmen as have been sold or transported, by it for their attachment to freedom; and for this purpose, it will retain as hostages for their safe return, such adherents of that government as shall fall into its hands. It therefore calls upon the people to respect those hostages, and to recollect that in spilling their blood, they would leave their own countrymen in the hands of their enemies.

The intention of the provisional government, is to resign its functions, as soon as the nation shall have chosen its delegates, but in the mean time, it is determined to enforce the regulations hereunto subjoined; - It in consequence takes the property of the country under its protection, and will punish with the utmost rigour any person who shall violate that property, and thereby injure the present resources and the future prosperity of Ireland.

Whoever refuses to march to whatever part of the country he is ordered, is guilty of disobedience to the government, which alone is competent to decide in what place his services are necessary, and which desires him to recollect, that in whatever part of Ireland he is fighting, he is still fighting for its freedom.

Whoever presumes by acts or otherwise to give countenance to the calumny propagated by our enemies, that this is a religious contest, is guilty of the grievous crime of belying the motives of his



country. Religious disqualification is but one of the many grievances of which Ireland has to complain. Our intention is to remove not that only, but every other oppression under which we labour. We fight, that all of us may have our country, and that done – each of us shall have his religion.

We are aware of the apprehensions which you have expressed, that in quitting your own counties, you leave your wives and children, in the hands of your enemies; but on this head have no uneasiness. If there are still men base enough to persecute those, who are unable to resist, shew them by your victories that we have the power to punish, and by your obedience, that we have the power to protect, and we pledge ourselves to you, that these men shall be made to feel, that the safety of every thing they hold dear, depends on the conduct they observe to you. Go forth then with confidence, conquer the foreign enemies of your country, and leave to us the care of preserving its internal tranquillity; recollect that not only the victory, but also the honour of your country, is placed in your hands; give up your private resentments, and shew to the world, that the Irish, are not only a brave, but also a generous and forgiving people.

MEN OF MUNSTER AND CONNAUGHT

You have your instructions, we trust that you will execute them. The example of the rest of your countrymen is now before you; your own strength is unbroken;-five months ago you were eager to act without any other assistance. We now call upon you to shew, what you then declared you only wanted the opportunity of proving, that you possess the same love of liberty and the same courage with which the rest of your countrymen are animated.

We now turn to that portion of our countrymen whose prejudices we had rather overcome by a frank declaration of our intentions, than conquer their persons in the field; and in making this declaration, we do not wish to dwell on events, which, however, they may bring tenfold odium on their authors, must still tend to keep alive in the minds both of the instruments and victims of them, a spirit of animosity which it is our wish to destroy. We will therefore enter into no detail of the atrocities and oppression which Ireland has laboured under during its connexion with England; but we justify our determination to separate from that country on the broad historical statement, that during six hundred years she has been unable to conciliate the affections of the people of Ireland; that during that time, five rebellions were entered into, to shake off the yoke; that she has been obliged to resort to a system of unprecedented torture in her defence; that she has broken every tie of voluntary connexion by taking even the name of independence from Ireland, through the intervention of a parliament notoriously bribed, and not representing the will of the people; that in her vindication of this measure she has herself given the justification of the views of the United Irishmen, by declaring in the words of her ministers,

“ That Ireland never had, and never could enjoy under the then circumstances the benefit of British connexion; that it necessarily must happen when one country is connected with another, that the interests of the lesser will be borne down by those of the greater.* That England has supported and encouraged the English colonists in their oppression towards the natives of Ireland; that Ireland had been left in a state of ignorance, rudeness and barbarism, worse in its effects, and more degrading in its nature, than that in which it was found six centuries before.”†

*Lord Castlereagh's speech

†Considerations on the state of affairs in Ireland, by Lord Auckland

Now to what cause are these things to be attributed? Did the cause of the almighty keep alive a spirit of obstinacy in the minds of the Irish people for six hundred years?

Did the doctrines of the French revolution produce five rebellions? Could the



misrepresentations of ambitious and designing men drive from the mind of a whole people, the recollection of defeat, and raise the infant from the cradle, with the same feelings with which his father sunk into the grave? Will this gross avowal which our enemies have made of their own views, remove none of the calumny that has been thrown upon ours? Will none of the credit [which] has been lavished on them, be transferred to the solemn declaration which we now make in the face of god and our country. We war not against property – We war against no religious sect – We war not against past opinions or prejudices – We war against English dominion. We will not however deny, that there are some men, who, not because they have supported the government of our oppressors, but because they have violated the common laws of morality, which exist alike under all or under no government; have put it beyond our power to give to them the protection of a government. We will not hazard the influence we may have with the people, and the power it may give us of preventing the excesses of revolution, by undertaking to place in tranquillity the man who has been guilty of torture, free quarters, rape and murder, by the side of the sufferer or their relations; but in the frankness with which we warn these men of their danger, let those who do not feel that they have passed this boundary of mediation, count on their safety.

We had hoped for the sake of our enemies to have taken them by surprize, and to have committed the cause of our country before they could have time to commit themselves against it, but though we have not altogether been able to succeed, we are yet rejoiced to find that they have not come forward with promptitude on the side of those who have deceived them, and we now call on them before it is yet too late, not to commit themselves further against a people they are unable to resist, and in support of a government, which, by their own declaration has forfeited its claim to their allegiance.

To that government in whose hands, though not the issue, at least the features with which the present contest is to be marked, and placed, we now turn. How is it to be decided? is open and honourable force alone to be resorted to, or is it your intention to employ those laws which custom has placed in your hands, and to force us to employ the law of retaliation in our defence?

Of the inefficacy of a system of terror, in preventing the people of Ireland from coming forward to assert their freedom, you have already had experience. Of the effect which such a system will have on our minds in case of success, we have already forewarned you – We now address to you another consideration – If in the question which is now to receive a solemn and we trust final decision, if we have been deceived reflection would point out that conduct should be resorted to, which was the best calculated to produce conviction on our minds. What would that conduct be? It would be to shew to us that the difference of strength between the two countries [is such], as to render it unnecessary for you to bring out all your force; to shew to us that you have something in reserve wherewith to crush hereafter, not only a greater exertion on the part of the people, but a greater exertion, rendered still greater by foreign assistance: It would be to shew to us that what we have vainly supported to be a prosperity growing beyond your grasp, is only a partial exuberance requiring but the pressure of your hand to reduce it into form. But for your own sake do not resort to a system, which while it increased the acrimony of our minds would leave us under the melancholy delusion that we had been forced to yield, not to the sound and temperate exertions of superior strength, but to the frantick struggles of weakness, concealing itself under desperation. Consider also that the distinction of rebel and enemy is of a very fluctuating nature; that during the course of your own experience you have already been obliged to lay it aside; that should you be forced to abandon it towards Ireland you cannot hope to do so as tranquilly as you have done towards America, for in the exasperated state to which you have raised the minds of the Irish people; a people whom you profess to have left in a state of barbarism and ignorance, with what confidence can you say to that people “ while the advantage of cruelty lay upon our side, we slaughtered you without mercy, but the measure of our own blood is beginning to preponderate, it is no longer our interest that this bloody system should continue, shew us then, that forbearance which we never taught you by precept or example, lay aside your resentments, give quarter to us, and let us mutually forget, that we never gave quarter to you.” Cease then we entreat you uselessly to violate humanity by resorting to a system inefficacious as an instrument of terror, inefficacious as a mode of defence, inefficacious as a mode of conviction, ruinous to the future



relations of the two countries in case of our success, and destructive of those instruments of defence which you will then find it doubly necessary to have preserved unimpaired. But if your determination be otherwise, hear ours. We will not imitate you in cruelty; we will put no man to death in cold blood, the prisoners which first fall into our hands shall be treated with the respect due to the unfortunate; but if the life of a single Irish soldier is taken after the battle is over, the orders thenceforth to be issued to the Irish army are neither to give or take quarter. Countrymen if a cruel necessity forces us to retaliate, we will bury our resentments in the field of battle, if we are to fall, we will fall where we fight for our country – Fully impressed with this determination, of the necessity of adhering to which past experience has but too fatally convinced us; fully impressed with the justice of our cause which we now put to issue. We make our last and solemn appeal to the sword and to Heaven; and as the cause of Ireland deserves to prosper, may God give it Victory.

Conformably to the above proclamation, the Provisional Government of Ireland, decree that as follows.

1. From the date and promulgation hereof, tithes are for ever abolished, and church lands are the property of the nation.
2. From the same date, all transfers of landed property are prohibited, each person, holding what he now possesses, on paying his rent until the national government is established, the national will declared, and the courts of justice organized.
3. From the same date, all transfer of Bonds, debentures, and all public securities, are in like manner and form forbidden, and declared void, for the same time, and for the same reasons.
4. The Irish generals commanding districts shall seize such of the partizans of England as may serve for hostages, and shall apprise the English commander opposed to them, that a strict retaliation shall take place if any outrages contrary to the laws of war shall be committed by the troops under his command, or by the partizans of England in the district which he occupies.
5. That the Irish generals are to treat (except where retaliation makes it necessary) the English troops who may fall into their hands, or such Irish as serve in the regular forces of England, and who shall have acted conformably to the laws of war, as prisoners of war; but all Irish militia, yeoman, or volunteer corps, or bodies of Irish, or individuals, who fourteen days from the promulgation and date hereof, shall be found in arms, shall be considered as rebels, committed for trial, and their properties confiscated.
6. The generals are to assemble court-martials, who are to be sworn to administer justice; who are not to condemn without sufficient evidence, and before whom all military offenders are to be sent instantly for trial.
7. No man is to suffer death by their sentence, except for mutiny; the sentences of such others as are judged worthy of death, shall not be put in execution until the provisional government declares its will, nor are court-martials on any pretext to sentence, nor is any officer to suffer the punishment of flogging, or any species of torture, to be inflicted.
8. The generals are to enforce the strictest discipline, and to send offenders immediately before court-martials, and are enjoined to chase away from the Irish armies all such as shall disgrace themselves by being drunk in presence of the enemy.
9. The generals are to apprise their respective armies, that all military stores, arms, or ammunition, belonging to the English government, be the property of the captors and the value is to be divided equally without respect of rank between them, except that the widows, orphans, parents, or other heirs of such as gloriously fall in the attack, shall be entitled to a double share.



10. As the English nation has made war on Ireland, all English property in ships or otherwise, is subject to the same rule, and all transfer of them is forbidden and declared void, in like manner as is expressed in No.2 and 3.
11. The generals of the different districts are hereby empowered to confer rank up to colonels inclusive, on such as they conceive to merit it from the nation, but are not to make more colonels than one for fifteen hundred men, nor more Lieutenant-Colonels than one for every thousand men.
12. The generals shall seize on all sums of public money in the custom-houses in their districts, or in the hands of the different collectors, county treasurers, or other revenue officers, whom they shall render responsible for the sums in their hands. The generals shall pass receipts for the amount, and account to the provisional government for the expenditure.
13. When the people elect their officers up to the colonels, the general is bound to confirm it – no officer can be broke but by sentence of a court-martial.
14. The generals shall correspond with the provisional government, to whom they shall give details of all their operations, they are to correspond with the neighbouring generals to whom they are to transmit all necessary intelligence, and to co-operate with them.
15. The generals commanding in each county shall as soon as it is cleared of the enemy, assemble the county committee, who shall be elected conformably to the constitution of
16. United Irishmen, all the requisitions necessary for the army shall be made in writing by the generals to the committee, who are hereby empowered and enjoined to pass their receipts for each article to the owners, to the end that they may receive their full value from the nation.
17. The county committee is charged with the civil direction of the county, the care of the national property, and the preservation of order and justice in the county; for which purpose the county committees are to appoint a high-sheriff, and one or more sub-sheriffs to execute their orders, a sufficient number of justices of the peace for the county, a high and a sufficient number of petty constables in each barony, who are respectively charged with the duties now performed by these magistrates.
18. The county of Cork on account of its extent, is to be divided conformably to the boundaries for raising the militia into the counties of north and south Cork, for each of which a county constable, high-sheriff and all magistrates above directed are to be appointed.
19. The county committee are hereby empowered and enjoined to issue warrants to apprehend such persons as it shall appear, on sufficient evidence perpetrated murder, torture, or other breaches of the acknowledged laws of war and morality on the people, to the end that they may be tried for those offences, so soon as the competent courts of justice are established by the nation.
20. The county committee shall cause the sheriff or his officers to seize on all the personal and real property of such persons, to put seals on their effects, to appoint proper persons to preserve all such property until the national courts of justice shall have decided on the fate of the proprietors.
21. The county committee shall act in like manner, with all state and church lands, parochial estates, and all public lands and edifices.
22. The county committee shall in the interim receive all the rents and debts of such persons and



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- estates, and shall give receipts for the same, shall transmit to the provisional government an exact account of their value, extent and amount, and receive the directions of the provisional government thereon.
23. They shall appoint some proper house in the counties where the sheriff is permanently to reside, and where the county committee shall assemble, they shall cause all the records and papers of the county to be there transferred, arranged, and kept, and the orders of government are there to be transmitted and received.
24. The county committee is hereby empowered to pay out of these effects, or by assessment, reasonable salaries for themselves, the sheriff, justices and other magistrates whom they shall appoint.
25. They shall keep a written journal of all their proceedings signed each day by the members of the committee, or a sufficient number of them for the inspection of government.
26. The county committee shall correspond with government on all the subjects with which they are charged, and transmit to the general of the district such information as they may conceive useful to the public.
27. The county committee shall take care that the state prisoners, however great their offences, shall be treated with humanity, and allow them a sufficient support to the end that all the world may know, that the Irish nation is not actuated by the spirit of revenge, but of justice.
28. The provisional government wishing to commit as soon as possible the sovereign authority to the people, direct that each county and city shall elect agreeably to the constitution of United Irishmen, representatives to meet in Dublin, to whom the moment they assemble the provisional government will resign its functions; and without presuming to dictate to the people, they beg to suggest, that for the important purpose to which these electors are called, integrity of character should be the first object.
29. The number of representatives being arbitrary, the provisional government have adopted that of the late house of commons, three hundred, and according to the best return of the population of the cities and counties the following numbers are to be returned from each:-
Antrim 13 - Armagh 9 -Belfast town 1 - Carlow 3 -Cavan 7 -Clare 8 Cork county, north 14 -Cork co. south 14 -Cork city 6 -Donegal 10 -Down 6 -Drogheda 1 -Dublin county 4 -Dublin city 14 -Fermanagh 5 -Galway 10 -Kerry 9 -Kildare 4 -Kilkenny 7 -Kings county 6 -Leitrim 5 -Limerick county 10 -Limerick city 3 -Londonderry 9 -Longford 4 -Louth 4 -Mayo 12 -Meath 9 -Monaghan 9 -Queen's county 6 -Roscommon 8 -Sligo 6 -Tipperary 13 -Tyrone 14 -Waterford county 6 -Waterford city 2 -Westmeath 5 -Wexford 9 -Wicklow 5 –
30. In the cities the same sort of regulations as in the counties shall be adopted; the city committee shall appoint one or more sheriffs as they think proper, and shall take possession of all the public and corporation properties in their jurisdiction in like manner as is directed for counties.
31. The provisional government strictly exhort and enjoin all magistrates, officers, civil and military, and the whole of the nation, to cause the laws of Morality to be enforced and respected, and to execute as far as in them lies justice with mercy, by which [sic] alone liberty can be established, and the blessings of divine providence secured.
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