

# P. H. Pearse

## Address to Court Martial, Statement Written in Kilmainham Gaol

### 2nd May, 1916

The following is the substance of what I said when asked today by the President of the Court Martial at Richmond Barracks whether I had anything to say in defence:

I desire in the first place to repeat what I have already said in letters to General Sir John Maxwell and to Brigadier General Lowe. My object in agreeing to an unconditional surrender was to prevent the further slaughter of the civil population of Dublin and to save the lives of our gallant followers who, having made for six days a stand unparalleled in military history, were now surrounded and (in the case of those under the immediate command of Headquarters) without food. I fully understand now, as then, that my own life is forfeit to British law, and I shall die very cheerfully if I think that the British Government, as it has already shown itself strong, will now show itself magnanimous enough to accept my single life to forfeiture and give a general amnesty to the brave men and boys who have fought at my bidding.

In the second place I wish it to be understood that any admissions I make here are to be taken as involving myself alone. They do not involve and must not be used against anyone who acted with me, not even those who may have set their names to documents with me. (The Court assented to this,)

I admit that I was Commandant General Commanding in Chief the forces of the Irish

Republic which have been acting against you for the past week, and that I was President of their Provisional Government. I stand over all my acts and words done or spoken in those capacities. When I was a child of ten I went down on my bare knees by my bedside one night and promised God that I should devote my life to an effort to free my country. I have kept that promise. As a boy and as a man I have worked for Irish freedom, first among all earthly things, I have helped to organise, to arm, to train, and to discipline my fellow-countrymen to the sole end that, when the time came, they might fight for Irish freedom. The time, as it seemed to me, did come, and we went into the fight. I am glad we did. We seem to have lost. We have not lost, To refuse to fight would have been to lose; to fight is to win. We have kept faith with the past, and handed on a tradition to the future.

I repudiate the assertion of the prosecutor that I sought to aid and abet England's enemy. Germany is no more to me than England is. I asked and accepted German aid in the shape of arms and an expeditionary force. We neither asked for nor accepted Germany [sic] gold, nor had any traffic with Germany but what I state. My aim was to win Irish freedom: we struck the first blow ourselves but should have been glad of an ally's aid.

I assume that I am speaking to Englishmen, who value their freedom and who profess to be



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fighting for the freedom of Belgium and Serbia. Believe that we, too, love freedom and desire it. To us it is more desirable than anything in the world. If you strike us down now, we shall rise again and renew the fight. You cannot conquer Ireland. You cannot extinguish the Irish passion for freedom. If our deed has not been sufficient to win freedom, then our children will win it by a better deed.

P. H. PEARSE,

Kilmainham Gaol, 2nd May 1916.