
Declaration of the United Irishmen

1798

In the present great era of reform, when unjust Governments are falling in every quarter of Europe; when religious persecution is compelled to abjure her tyranny over conscience; when the rights of man are ascertained in theory, and that theory substantiated by practice; when antiquity can no longer defend absurd and oppressive forms against the common sense and common interests of mankind; when all Government is acknowledged to originate from the people, and to be so far only obligatory as it protects their rights and promotes their welfare; we think it our duty, as Irishmen, to come forward, and state what we feel to be our heavy grievance, and what we know to be its effectual remedy. We have no national Government -- we are ruled by Englishmen, and the servants of Englishmen whose object is the interest of another country, whose instrument is corruption, and whose strength is the weakness of Ireland; and these men have the whole of the power and patronage of the country as means to seduce and subdue the honesty and spirit of her representatives in the legislature.

Such an extrinsic power, acting with uniform force, in a direction too frequently opposite to the true line of our obvious interests, can be resisted with effect solely by unanimity, decision and spirit in the people -- qualities which may be exerted most legally, constitutionally, and efficaciously by that great measure essential to the prosperity, and freedom of Ireland -- an equal representation of all the people in Parliament. We do not here mention as grievances the rejection of a place-bill, of a pension bill, of a responsibility-bill, the sale of peerages in one house, the corruption publicly avowed in the other, nor the notorious infamy of borough traffic between both, not that we are insensible to their enormity, but that we consider them as but symptoms of that mortal disease which corrodes the vitals of our constitution, and leaves to the people in their own government but the shadow of a name.

Impressed with these sentiments, we have agreed to form an association to be called "The Society of United Irishmen", and we do pledge ourselves to our country, and mutually to each other, that we will steadily support and endeavour, by all due means, to carry into effect the following resolutions:

FIRST RESOLVED -- That the weight of English influence on the Government of this country is so great as to require a cordial union among *all the people of Ireland*, to maintain that balance which is essential to the preservation of our liberties and the extension of our commerce.

SECOND -- That the sole constitutional mode by which this influence can be opposed is by a complete and radical reform of the representation of the people in Parliament.

THIRD -- That no reform is practicable, efficacious, or just, which shall not include Irishmen of every religious persuasion.

Satisfied, as we are, that the intestine divisions among Irishmen have too often given encouragement and impunity to profligate, audacious and corrupt administrations, in measure which, but for these divisions, they durst not have attempted, we submit our resolutions to the nation as the basis of our political faith. We have gone to what we conceive to be the root of the evil. We have stated what we conceive to be the remedy. With a Parliament thus reformed, everything is easy; without it, nothing can be done. And we do call on, and most earnestly exhort, our countrymen in general to follow our



example, and to form similar societies in every quarter of the kingdom for the promotion of constitutional knowledge, the abolition of bigotry in religion and politics, and the equal distribution of the rights of men through all sects and denominations of Irishmen. The people, when thus collected, will feel their own weight, and secure that power which theory has already admitted to be their portion, and to which, if they be not aroused by their present provocation to vindicate it, they deserve to forfeit their pretensions for ever.