

# Theobald Wolfe Tone

## Memorial On the Present State of Ireland Part 2

### 1796

#### SECOND MEMORIAL

Having stated in a former memorial, the actual situation and circumstances of Ireland, I shall now submit those means which, to my judgement, will be most likely to effectuate the great object of separating that country from England, and establishing her as an independent Republic, in strict alliance with France. I shall first mention those measures whose execution depend on the French Republic, and next those which will be executed by the people of Ireland.

In the first place, I beg leave to lay it down as indispensable, that a body of French troops should be landed in Ireland, with a General at their head, of established reputation, whose name should be known in that country, a circumstance of considerable importance, and I must be permitted to observe here, that, if humbling the pride and reducing the power of England be an object with the French Republic, I know no place where the very best General in their service could be employed, either with more reputation to himself, or benefit to the public cause.

With regard to the strength of this army, it is my duty to speak with candour to the Government. It ought, if possible, to be of 20,000 men, at least 15,000 of which should land as near the capital as circumstances would admit, and 5,000 in the North of Ireland, near Belfast. If an imposing force, such as I have mentioned, could be sent in the first instance, it would save a vast effusion of blood and treasure. By having possession of the capital, we should, in fact, have possession of the whole country. The Government in existence there, would fall to pieces, without a possibility of effort. We should have in our hands at once the Treasury, the Post Office, the Banks, the Custom-House, the seat of the Legislature, and, particularly what is even of more consequence, we should have the reputation which would result from

such a commencement. If we could begin by the capital, I should hope we should obtain possession of the entire country, without striking a blow, as in fact there would, in that case, be no organised force to make resistance, but for this, 20,000 men would be necessary. If, however, the other indispensable arrangements of the French Republic, would render it impossible to send such a force, I offer it as my opinion, and I entreat it may be remembered, that 5,000 is the very lowest number, with which the attempt could be made with anything like certainty of success, in which case, the landing should be effectuated in the North of Ireland, where the people are in the greatest forwardness, as to military preparation. It is unnecessary to observe here, that, commencing our operations at 100 miles distance from the capital, of which the enemy would be in full possession, would give them very great advantages over us at first; they would still have, in a degree, the law of opinion in their favour, and they would, at least for some time, retain the Treasury, the Post Office, and all the other advantages which an established organisation would naturally give them. Nevertheless, with 5,000 men, an able General, and the measures which I shall hereafter mention, I should have no doubt of our ultimate success; but then we should have to fight hard for our liberties, and we should lose many great advantages which a sufficient force in the commencement would give us, particularly that of disorganising at once the existing Government of Ireland.

Supposing the number to be 5,000, a large proportion should be artillerists, of which we are quite unprovided. They should be the very best troops that France could furnish, men who had actually seen hard service, and who would be capable of training and disciplining the Irish army. The necessity of this is too obvious to need any further comment. I do not go here into any military detail on the conduct of the war; if the measure be adopted, I shall hope to be admitted to a conference with the General, who may be appointed to the command, and

then, with the map of the country before us, I will submit, with great deference, my ideas on that head.

Before I quit the subject of the force necessary, I wish to observe that, in my first memorial, I have always said that the army, and especially the militia, would, I was satisfied, declare for their country, "if they saw a reasonable prospect of support," by which I would be understood to mean an imposing force in the first instance. I cannot commit myself as to what might be their conduct in case 5,000 men only were landed. I hope, and I believe, but I cannot positively affirm, that they would join the standard of their country; but, even if they were, contrary to my expectations, to adhere to the British Government, the only difference would be, that, in that event, we should have a civil war, which I would most earnestly wish, if possible, to avoid. As to the people at large, I am perfectly satisfied that, whether there were 20 or 10, or even 5,000 men landed, it would, as to them, make no manner of difference. I know they would flock to the Republican standard in such numbers, as to embarrass the General-in-Chief. It would be just as easy in a months time to have an army in Ireland of 200,000 men, as of 10,000 and, therefore, it is, that, reckoning on this disposition of the people, I say, and repeat, that I would not have a shadow of doubt of our ultimate success, provided we had a body of even 5,000 disciplined troops to commence with; a smaller number would, I apprehend, be hardly able to maintain themselves until they could be joined by the people, as the Government of Ireland would be able instantly to turn against them such a body of troops (who, in that case, would, I fear, adhere to them,) as would swallow them up; the consequence of which would be, besides the loss to France of the men and money, the bringing Ireland, even more than she is at present, under the yoke of British tyranny, the breaking for ever the hopes and spirits of her people, and the rendering all prospect of her emancipation, at any future period, utterly impracticable and desperate.

As to arms and ammunition I can only say, that the more there is of both, the better. If the Republic can send to Ireland 100,000 stand of arms, there are double the number of hands ready to put them in. A large train of artillery, that is to say, field pieces, as we have no fortified places, is absolutely indispensable, together with a considerable proportion of experienced cannoniers; engineers, used to field practice, are also highly necessary. As to money, I am at a loss to determine the sum. If 20,000 men were sent, I should say that pay for 40,000 for three months would be amply sufficient, as, before that time was expired, we would have all

the resources of Ireland in our hands. If but 5,000 be sent, I submit the quantum necessary to the wisdom and liberality of the French Government, observing only that we could not, in that case, calculate at once on the immediate possessions of the funds, which, in the other instance, we could seize directly.

Very much would depend upon the manifesto, to be published on the first landing. I conceive the declaration of the object and intentions of the Republic should contain, among others, the following topics:

1. An absolute disavowal of all idea of conquest, and a statement that the French came as friends and brothers, with no other view than to assist the people in throwing off the yoke of England.
2. A declaration of perfect security and protection to the free exercise of all religions, without destination or preference, and the perpetual abolition of all ascendancy, or connection, between church and state.
3. A declaration of perfect security and protection of persons and property, to all who should demean themselves as good citizens, and friends to the liberty of their country, with strong denunciations against those who should support or countenance the cause of British tyranny and usurpation.
4. An invitation to the people to join the Republican standard, and a promise to recommend to the future Legislature of their country every individual who should distinguish himself by his courage, zeal, and ability.
5. An invitation to the people immediately to organise themselves, and form a national convention, for the purpose of framing a Government, and of administering the affairs of Ireland, until such Government could be framed and put in activity.

Other topics will naturally suggest themselves; but these seem to me, from my knowledge of Ireland, to be among the most likely, as well to raise the people, as to remove the fears and anxieties, especially on the great heads of property and religion, of many who might otherwise be neutral, or perhaps adverse, but who would gladly support the independence of their country, when satisfied

as to these points. It is with the most sincere pleasure that I can assure the French Government, that their singular moderation with regard to Holland, when that country lay at their mercy, had an inconceivable effect on the mind of every independent man in Ireland, and removed, almost entirely, the reluctance which many felt to put themselves to the hazard and uncertainty of a revolution.

To recapitulate: What I conceive would be indispensably necessary to be furnished, on the part of the French Republic, would be:

1. *An armed force*, not exceeding 20,000 men, nor less than 5,000. If 20,000, to be landed as near Dublin as possible; if a smaller number, in the north of Ireland, near Belfast.
2. A General whose name and character should be well known in Ireland.
3. Arms and ammunition, as much as could be spared; a train of artillery, with an adequate number of experienced cannoniers and engineers.
4. Such a sum of money as the French Government might feel necessary, and could grant, consistently with their other arrangements.

On the part of the people of Ireland, the measures which I conceive would be most immediately necessary, to ensure success and establish our independence, would be as follows:

*First*, of course, to raise as many soldiers as we had arms to put into their hands, which would be the only limitation as to numbers.

*Secondly*, To call a national convention, for which a basis is laid in the General Committee of the Catholics, mentioned in my first memorial, who, when joined by Delegates from the Dissenters, would be actually the representatives of nine-tenths of the people. The first act of the Convention thus constituted should be, to declare themselves the representatives of the Irish people, free and independent, and, in that capacity to form an alliance, offensive and defensive, with the French Republic; stipulating, that neither party should make peace with England without the other, and until the two Republics were acknowledged, and also a treaty

of commerce, on terms of mutual advantage. As the immediate formation of a national convention is of the last importance, I wish earnestly to press on the notice of the French Government the unspeakable advantage of having, if possible, an imposing force, in the first instance, for this reason; that the men of a certain rank in life, and situation, as to property, (for instance, the actual members of the Catholic Committee, who must be those who naturally would form the convention,) would, in that case, at once declare themselves, and begin to act, which I cannot venture to ensure that they would do, at least for some time, if they saw but a small force landed. For the great body of the people, whom I have mentioned as being organised under the name of Defenders, and a great proportion of the Dissenters, the number to be landed is of little consequence as to them; for my firm belief is, that if but one thousand French were landed, it would be impossible to prevent the peasantry of Ireland from rising, as one man, to join them; but then, we should lose the inestimable advantages which would result from the immediate organisation of a body, which could call itself the Government of Ireland, and, as such, instantly assume the legislative and executive functions, raise money, grant commissions, and, especially, conclude the alliance with France, the Uclat of which must naturally produce the most beneficial and important consequences. Without such an arrangement, our commencement would have more the air of an insurrection, than a Revolution; and though, I again repeat, I would have no doubt of the ultimate success of the attempt, yet the difficulties, at first, would be multiplied, in proportion to the smallness of the force which might be landed. The measures which I am now about to mention, which can only be effectually executed by a body which can, with some appearance of justice, call itself the Irish Government, will show, at once, the indispensable necessity of a national convention being organised; that not an hour should be lost in framing it; and, of course, that every possible effort should be made, to send such force as would ensure its formation in the first instance.

The convention, being once formed, should proceed to publish, among others, the following proclamations; from every one of which, I have no shadow of doubt, would result the most powerful effects.

1. One to the people at large, notifying their independence and their alliance with the French Republic, forbidding all adherence to the British Government, under the penalty of high treason; ordering all taxes and contributions to be paid

only to such persons as should be appointed by the Convention to receive them; and, in the mean time, making all collectors and public officers responsible, with life and property, for all moneys in their hands. This would at once set the law of opinion on their side, and give a spirit to every individual embarked in the cause. It would then be a war, not an insurrection; and even that circumstance, as operating on the minds of the soldiery, I consider as of great importance.

2. One to the militia of Ireland, recalling them to the standard of their country, paying the value of their arms, and granting an immediate discharge to all who should demand it; and ensuring a preference in all military promotion, and a provision in land, or otherwise, at the end of the war, according to the rank and services of each, to those who should enter into the service of their country. I am convinced, as I am of my existence, that this single proclamation would bring over the entire militia of Ireland, which is, in fact, the only formidable force in the country; but I must add, at the same time, that this proclamation can only be published with effect, by a National Government.
3. One, addressed to all Irishmen now serving in the navy of England, recalling them directly from that service; reminding them that they are a majority, in the proportion of two to one, and, therefore, exhorting them to seize on the vessels, and bring them into the Irish ports; engaging the faith of the nation to purchase the ships at their value, as prizes, to give, as in the case of the militia, an immediate discharge to all who should desire it, ensuring promotion, in preference to all who should remain in the service; stating the hardship to which they are subject in the British service, into which they have been forced, either by hunger or the press-gang; dwelling particularly on the most unjust distribution of their prize money, stating the enormous disproportion between the share of an admiral or a captain, and that of a common seaman; ensuring them an equitable rate in that respect, to be established in the future Irish navy, and reminding them of the immense wealth to be made by captures on the prodigious expanse of the British commerce, which now embraces that of the whole world. From such a proclamation, issuing from an Irish Government, I am sanguine enough to expect the most powerful of effects. Let it never be forgotten,

that two-thirds of the British seamen, as they are called, are in fact Irishmen. I will not say that this proclamation would bring one ship into the Irish harbours, but this I say, that if human nature be human nature, it would raise such a spirit of jealousy and distrust in the naval service of Great Britain, as must most materially serve the cause of the Republic. Will any English Admiral leave Portsmouth with confidence, with such a proclamation as that hanging over his head; against which, too, he has nothing to oppose but the mere force of discipline? How much will that discipline be necessarily relaxed from the fear, lest, by enforcing it strictly, the majority of the crews should instantly mutiny and carry the ship where they would meet with protection and support, amongst their friends and connections, their wives and children ✓ in one word, in their native country? Will any English captain be found to tie up an Irish seaman for a trifling offence, and flog him before the face of the crew, two-thirds of whom are Irish, with the terror of such a proclamation before his eyes? And, especially, what weapon has the English Government to oppose in return? I supplicate the attention of the French Government to this point, which is, in my judgement, of the very highest importance. It would be in her navy that England would be, then, first found vulnerable. If there were no other object proposed but this single one, I affirm with confidence, it is of magnitude by itself, sufficient to decide the French Government to make every effort to obtain it; which can only be effected through the medium of a national Government to be established in Ireland. It would be easy to add a thousand arguments on this topic, but, I trust, knowing as I do the superior talents and information of those whom I address, that what I have said will be sufficient to open the subject; and I do again most earnestly entreat them to follow in their own minds, the long chain of consequences which must flow, as to the naval power of England, from the measure which I have mentioned, supposing it to have that success, which I cannot myself for a moment doubt but it must.

4. A proclamation recalling, in general terms, all Irishmen from the dominions of Great Britain, whether in the land or sea service, or otherwise, within a certain period, under pain of being treated as emigrants. The effect of this measure

will be seen when I come to speak of the actual and casual resources of Ireland.

5. An address to the people of England and Scotland, as distinguished from the Government, stating the grounds of the conduct of the Irish nation, and declaring their earnest desire to avoid the effusion of blood; that they wish merely for the independence of their country, which, at all hazards, they are determined to maintain; warning the English people, by the examples of the American and French Revolutions, how impossible it is to conquer a whole people determined to be free, demonstrating, by calculation, the expense of the war, and applying to their interests, as a commercial people, contrasted and opposed to the personal views of their King and Government; showing them how little they could gain in the most prosperous event, how much blood and treasure they must necessarily expend, and, finally, pointing out the certain consequences to England, if she should fail in the contest. If this proclamation were published, I apprehend, as its principles are just, it might embarrass the British Minister considerably in his operations, so as, perhaps, to render it impossible for him to continue the war. But, as I do not at all calculate on the good sense or spirit of the British people, who seem to me for some years to have totally renounced that share of both which they once possessed, I will submit that, if it totally failed in its object, and the English nation were so infatuated as to support the Minister in the war, this proclamation should be followed by the next.
6. The immediate confiscation of every shilling of English property in Ireland, of every species, moveable or fixed, and appropriating it to the national service, which would then be an act of strict justice, as the English people would have made themselves parties in the war. In this manner, I submit, one of two things must happen; either the English people would decidedly oppose the war; and, if so, peace, and the establishment of the independence of Ireland, which is instantly transferred, and becomes a weapon against them, in the hands of their enemies; not to speak of the discontents, which the loss of such a vast property in land, in money lent on mortgages, in goods, and in debts, must produce amongst all ranks, and more especially

amongst the merchants and traders in England.

I will not trespass longer on the time of the French Government, but hasten to give a brief sketch of the actual and casual resources of Ireland, and then conclude. First, her population, 4,500,000. It is necessary to state on what grounds I assert this: in 1788 there existed a tax on hearths in Ireland, by which the number of houses was known with sufficient accuracy to those who administered the revenue. The number of people in Ireland, allowing six to a family, was, in that year, calculated by one of the commissioners, who, of course, had perfect information, at 4,100,000, and it was allowed to be under the truth, as well because some houses must necessarily have been omitted, as that the population of six to a family was less than what was usually found in Ireland, where the people are naturally prolific. I speak here from memory, but the calculation is to be found in the transactions of the Royal Academy of Ireland, which may, perhaps, be in the National Library, and it will justify my assertion that the people of Ireland amount to 4,500,000. But, though Ireland is populous, she is poor! We are, thanks to the ruinous connection with England, almost without trade or manufactures, and while that connection holds, we shall continue so, for this, among other reasons, that a wretched Irish peasant is tempted even by the scanty pay and subsistence of a foot soldier, from which a well fed and well clothed English artisan turns with contempt. The army of England is supported by the misery of Ireland.

Ireland would, however, in case of a revolution, possess, amongst others, the following resources:

1. Her actual revenues, amounting, at present, to about £2,000,000 per annum, making 48,000,000 livres.
2. The church, college, and chapter lands, whose exact value I do not know, but which are of vast amount.
3. The property of absentees who never visit the country at all, amounting, at least, to £1,000,000 sterling, or 24,000,000 livres.
4. The casual property of emigrants, which would amount to a very great sum, but which, as depending on circumstances, cannot be reduced to calculation.



5. The property of Englishmen in Ireland, whether vested in land, mortgages on land, trade, manufactures, bonds, bills, book debts, or otherwise, to be confiscated, and applied to the discharge of the obligations incurred in the acquisition of the independence of Ireland; I cannot say what the amount of this might be, but it must be immense. One English nobleman, Earl Mansfield, formerly Ambassador at Paris, under the name of Lord Stormont, and an implacable enemy of France, has £300,000 sterling, or 7,200,000 livres, lent on mortgages in Ireland; another English gentleman, Mr Taylor, has £150,000 sterling, or 3,600,000 livres, lent in like manner. I mention these instances to point out to the French Government what unspeakable confusion the measure I propose would be likely to produce in England, and what a staggering blow the separation of Ireland would be, in a commercial point of view, not to speak of the military, or, which is of far more consequence, the naval part of the question.

I have now done. I submit to the wisdom of the French Government, that England is the implacable, inveterate, irreconcilable enemy of the Republic, which never can be in perfect security whilst that nation retains the dominion of the sea; that, in consequence, every possible effort should be made to humble her pride, and to reduce her power: that it is in Ireland, *and in Ireland only*, that she is vulnerable √ a fact, of the truth of which the French Government cannot be too strongly impressed; that, by establishing a free republic in Ireland, they attach to France a grateful ally, whose cordial assistance, in peace and war, she might command, and who, from situation and produce, could most essentially serve her; that, at the same time, they cut off from England her most firm support, in losing which, she is laid under insuperable difficulties in recruiting her army, and, especially, in equipping, victualling, and manning her navy, which, unless for the resources she drew from Ireland, she would be absolutely unable to do; that, by these means, and suffer me to add, *by these means only*, her arrogance can be effectually humbled, and her enormous and increasing power at sea reduced within due bounds, an object essential, not only to France, but to all Europe; that it is at least possible, by the measures mentioned, that not only her future resources, as to her navy, may be intercepted and cut off at the fountain head, but that a part of her fleet may be actually transferred to the Republic of Ireland; that the Irish people are united and prepared, and want but the means

to begin; that, not to speak of the policy or the pleasure of revenge, in humbling a haughty and implacable rival, it is, in itself, a great and splendid act of generosity and justice, worthy of the Republic, to rescue a whole nation from a slavery under which they have groaned for six hundred years; that it is for the glory of France, after emancipating Holland, and receiving Belgium into her bosom, to establish one more free Republic in Europe; that it is for her interest to cut off, for ever, as she now may do, one half of the resources of England, and lay her under extreme difficulties in the employment of the other. For all these reasons, in the name of justice, of humanity, of liberty, of my own country, and of France itself, I supplicate the Directory to take into consideration the state of Ireland: and by granting her the powerful aid and protection of the Republic, to enable her at once to vindicate her liberty, to humble her tyrant, and to assume that independent station, among the nations of the earth, for which her soil, her productions and her position, her population and her spirit, have designed her