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Why The Citizen Army Honours Rossa 1915

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In honouring O'Donovan Rossa the workers of Ireland are doing more than merely paying homage to an unconquerable fighter. They are signifying their adhesion to the principle of which Rossa till his latest days was a living embodiment – the principle that the freedom of a people must in the last analysis rest in the hands of that people – that there is no outside force capable of enforcing slavery upon a people really resolved to be free, and valuing freedom more than life. We in Ireland have often forgotten that truth, indeed it may be even asserted that only an insignificant minority of the nation ever learned it. And yet, that truth once properly adopted as the creed of a nation would become the salvation of the nation.

For slavery is a thing of the soul, before it embodies itself in the material things of the world. I assert that before a nation can be reduced to slavery its soul must have been cowed, intimidated or corrupted by the oppressor. Only when so cowed, intimidated or corrupted does the soul of a nation cease to urge forward its body to resist the imposition of the shackles of slavery; only when the soul so surrenders does any part of the body consent to make truce with the foe of its national existence.

When the soul is conquered the articulate expression of the voice of the nation loses its defiant accent, and taking on the whining colour of compromise, begins to plead for the body. The unconquered soul asserts itself, and declares its sanctity to be more important than the interests of the body; the conquered soul ever pleads first that the body may be saved even if the soul is damned.

For generations this conflict between the sanctity of the soul and the interests of the body has been waged in Ireland.

The soul of Ireland preached revolution, declared that no blood-letting could be as disastrous as a cowardly acceptance of the rule of the conqueror, nay, that the rule of the conqueror would necessarily entail more blood-letting than revolt against the rule. In fitful moments of spiritual exaltation Ireland accepted that idea, and such men as O'Donovan Rossa becoming possessed of it became thenceforth the living embodiment of that gospel. But such supreme moments passed for the multitude, and the nation as a nation sank again into its slavery, and its sole articulate expression to reach the ears of the world were couched in the fitful accents of the discontented, but spiritless slave – blatant in his discontent,



spiritless in his acceptance of subjection as part of the changeless order of things.

The burial of the remains of O'Donovan Rossa in Irish soil, and the functions attendant thereon must inevitably raise in the mind of every worker the question of his or her own mental attitude to the powers against which the departed hero was in revolt. That involves the question whether those who accept that which Rossa rejected have any right to take part in honour paid to a man whose only title to honour lies in his continued rejection of that which they have accepted. It is a question each must answer for himself or herself. But it can neither be answered carelessly, nor evaded.

The Irish Citizen Army in its constitution pledges its members to fight for a Republican Freedom for Ireland. Its members are, therefore, of the number who believe that at the call of duty they may have to lay down their lives for Ireland, and have so trained themselves that at the worst the laying down of their lives shall constitute the starting point of another glorious tradition – a tradition that will keep alive the soul of the nation.

We are, therefore, present to honour O'Donovan Rossa by right of our faith in the separate destiny of our country, and our faith in the ability of the Irish workers to achieve that destiny.