**Sir Roger Casement's Speech Following his Conviction as a Traitor, 29 June 1916**

**Reproduced below is the speech given by Roger Casement following his conviction on 29 June 1916 of treason, specifically of bringing German arms to Ireland with the aim of stirring an armed uprising.**

**The main thrust of Casement's speech was that he had been denied the fundamental right to be tried by his peers - in this case by fellow Irishmen in Ireland.**

As I wish my words to reach a much wider audience than I see before me here, I intend to read all that I propose to say.

What I shall read now is something I wrote more than twenty days ago. There is an objection possibly not good in law but surely good on moral grounds against the application to me here of this English statute, 565 years old, that seeks to deprive an Irishman to-day of life and honour, not for "adhering to the King's enemies" but for adhering to his own people.

When this statute was passed, in 1351, what was the state of men's minds on the question of a far higher allegiance - that of man to God and His Kingdom?

The law of that day did not permit a man to forsake his Church or deny his God save with his life. The heretic then had the same doom as the traitor. Today a man may forswear God and His Heavenly Realm without fear or penalty, all earlier statutes having gone the way of Nero's edicts against the Christians; but that constitutional phantom the King can still dig up from the dungeons and torture chambers of the Dark Ages a law that takes a man's life and limb for an exercise of conscience.

Loyalty is a sentiment, not a law. It rests on Love, not on restraint. The government of Ireland by England rests on restraint and not on law; and, since it demands no love, it can evoke no loyalty. Judicial assassination today is reserved only for one race of the King's subjects, for Irishmen; for those who cannot forget their allegiance to the realm of Ireland.

What is the fundamental charter of an Englishman's liberty? That he shall be tried by his peers. With all respect I assert that this court is to me, an Irishman, a foreign court - this jury is for me, an Irishman, not a jury of my peers.

It is patent to every man of conscience that I have an indefeasible right, if tried at all under this statute of high treason, to be tried in Ireland, before an Irish court, and by an Irish jury.

This court, this jury, the public opinion of this country, England, cannot but be prejudiced in varying degree against me, most of all in time of war. From this court and its jurisdiction I appeal to those I am alleged to have wronged, and to those I am alleged to have injured by my "evil example," and claim that they alone are competent to decide my guilt or my innocence.

This is so fundamental a right, so natural a right, so obvious a right, that it is clear the Crown were aware of it when they brought me by force and by stealth from Ireland to this country. It was not I who landed in England, but the Crown who dragged me here, away from my own country, to which I had returned with a price upon my head, away from my own countrymen, whose loyalty is not in doubt, and safe from the judgment of my peers, whose judgment I do not shrink from.

I admit no other judgment but theirs. I accept no verdict save at their hands.

I assert from this dock that I am being tried here not because it is just, but because it is unjust. My counsel has referred to the Ulster Volunteer movement, and I will not touch at length upon that ground, save only to say that neither I nor any of the leaders of the Irish Volunteers, who were founded in Dublin in November, 1913, had quarrel with the Ulster Volunteers as such, who were born a year earlier.

Our movement was not directed against them, but against the men who misused and misdirected the courage, the sincerity, and the local patriotism of the men of the North of Ireland. On the contrary, we welcomed the coming of the Ulster Volunteers, even while we deprecated the aims and intentions of those Englishmen who sought to pervert to an English party use - to the mean purposes of their own bid for place and power in England - the armed activities of simple Irishmen.

We aimed at winning the Ulster Volunteers to the cause of a united Ireland - we aimed at uniting all Irishmen in a natural and national bond of cohesion based on mutual self-respect. Our hope was a natural one, and, if left to ourselves, not hard to accomplish.

If external influences of disintegration would but leave us alone, we were sure that nature itself must bring us together. It was not the Irish Volunteers who broke the law, but a British party.

The Government had permitted the Ulster Volunteers to be armed by Englishmen to threaten not merely an English party in its hold on office, but to threaten that party through the lives and blood of Irishmen. Our choice lay between submitting to foreign lawlessness and resisting it, and we did not hesitate. I for one was determined that Ireland was much more to me than empire, and that if charity begins at home so must loyalty.

Since arms were so necessary to make our organization a reality and to give to the minds of Irishmen menaced with the most outrageous threats a sense of security, it was our bounden duty to get arms before all else.

I decided with this end in view to go to America. If, as the right honourable gentleman, the present Attorney General, asserted in a speech at Manchester, Nationalists would neither fight for home rule nor pay for it, it was our duty to show him that we knew how to do both.

Then came the war. As Mr. Birrell said in his evidence recently laid before the Commission of Inquiry into the causes of the late rebellion in Ireland, "The war upset all our calculations."

It upset mine no less than Mr. Birrell's, and put an end to my mission of peaceful effort in America. War between Great Britain and Germany meant, as I believed, ruin for all the hopes we had founded on the enrolment of the Irish Volunteers.

I felt over there in America that my first duty was to keep Irishmen at home in the only army that could safeguard our national existence. If small nationalities were to be the pawns in this game of embattled giants, I saw no reason why Ireland should shed her blood in any cause but her own, and if that be treason beyond the seas I am not ashamed to avow it or to answer for it here with my life.

And when we had the doctrine of Unionist loyalty at last, "Mausers and Kaisers and any King you like," I felt I needed no other warrant than that these words conveyed - to go forth and do likewise. The difference between us was that the Unionist champions chose a path which they felt would lead to the Woolsack, while I went a road that I knew must lead to the dock.

And the event proves that we were both right. But let me say that I am prouder to stand here today in the traitor's dock to answer this impeachment than to fill the place of my accusers. If there be no right of rebellion against a state of things that no savage tribe would endure without resistance, then am I sure that it is better for men to fight and die without right than to live in such a state of right as this.

Where all your rights become only an accumulated wrong; where men must beg with bated breath for leave to subsist in their own land, to think their own thoughts, to sing their own songs, to garner the fruit of their own labours - and even while they beg to see these things inexorably withdrawn from them - then surely it is a braver, a saner, and a truer thing to be a rebel in act and deed against such circumstances as this than tamely to accept it as the natural lot of men.

My Lord, I have done. Gentlemen of the Jury, I wish to thank you for your verdict. I hope you will not think that I made any imputation upon your truthfulness or your integrity when I said that this was not a trial by my peers.

**Source: Source Records of the Great War, Vol. IV, ed. Charles F. Horne, National Alumni 1923**