

Michael Collins (1890-1922)

Michael Collins was born in Clonakilty, County Cork. In 1906 he went to London where he became a post office clerk and joined the IRB. Collins fought in the G.P.O during the **1916 Rising** and was interned until December, 1916.

Collins became a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB and was Minister for Home Affairs in the First Dáil and later Minister of Finance. During the **War of Independence** he was IRA Director of Intelligence and was a delegate in the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations in London in December, 1921. Collins supported the Treaty and wrote a number of pamphlets in support of his views. In June, 1922 he became Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Army two months later he was assassinated at Béal na Bláth, County Cork on August 22nd, 1922.

This extract is from Collins' **Arguments for the Treaty** (1922).

“Do not believe those who tell you that under the Free State the British Government will be still here, that the British King has any power over you, or that you owe any subservience to him; that your soldiers will be soldiers of the British Crown. It is an infamous and deliberate misrepresentation. It is not so under the Treaty. And it will not be so in fact. How can there be a British Government in Ireland, how can they tyrannise over us, how can they legislate for us, if they are not here?

When were they, in their whole history, ever able to legislate for us when the pistol is removed? Would they have kept their forces here, with the trouble and expenditure it involved, with the loss of prestige it involved, if they could have held us in subjection by the reading or misreading of a document, or by the presence of a figurehead with or without his ear to the telephone? The real point on which the plenipotentiaries had to decide, on which the Dáil had to decide, on which the Ard Fheis had to decide, and on which the nation will have to decide at the election, was and is, whether the Treaty really frees us from British control?

That it does so can be proved, and is being proved. The question is not whether the Treaty gives everything that everybody would like, and in the form and words which everyone would prefer. That, indeed, is not possible, because even the absolute republican form would have been disliked by and would have alienated many Irishmen, probably as many as the Treaty form does. The Unionists would say that they had sacrificed something in accepting the Free State. North-east Irishmen will think that they have sacrificed a great deal when they accept it. But the aim of all of us can be for unity and independence. In public matters it must be realised that we cannot get all each one wants. We have to agree to get what is essential. We have to agree to sink individual differences or only to work for them on legitimate lines which do not undermine or destroy the basis on which all rests and which alone makes it possible for us all, as Irishmen and women, to pursue our own aims freely in Ireland, namely the union and independence of the nation as a whole.

We must be Irish first and last, and must be Republican or Document Twoites, or Free Staters, only within the limits that leave Ireland, strong, united and free.

Would any other form of freedom which was obtainable now, which would have been acquiesced in by so large a body of our countrymen, have fulfilled the objects of Sinn Féin better, have put us in such a strong position to secure any that are yet

unfulfilled?

We claim that the solid substance of freedom has been won, and that full powers are in the hands of the nation to mould its own life, quite as full for that purpose as if we had already our freedom in the Republican form.

Any difficulties will now be of our own making. There is no enemy, nor any foreign government here now to hinder us. Will we not take the fruits of victory, or do we mean to let them decay in our hands, while we wrangle as to whether they are ripe or whether they have exactly the bloom and shape we dreamed of before they ripened?

No freedom when realised has quite the glory dreamed of by the captive. The bargain has been struck and the goods are being delivered. You may think a better bargain could have been made, but can we not stand together, accept delivery of goods, and make use of the unquestionable value they contain.

Are our opponents going to go on making difficulties - to stand aside when the help of every Irishman and woman is needed for the colossal task which is before us? Think of the burden of building up the nation materially, one of our chief objects - Sinn Féin - and now capable of realisation. The Labour Party told us the other day that there were probably 130,000 men and women unemployed in Ireland, and thousands of children are hungry and naked; huddled together like swine in so-called houses; that from all parts of the country were cries of desperation. 'These murmurings' said Mr. Johnson, 'presage something in our minds very like the rumblings of an earthquake'. Unless something is done rapidly, unless something effective is done, a grave situation will develop in this country that will be a problem for an old established government, let alone a new one.

Will our opponents help us so that something effective can be done? How long must our children remain hungry while you argue whether common citizenship, a British King, a Governor General has or has not the power still to prevent us from feeding and clothing them? Isn't it time to stop Nero's fiddling? How can you reconcile it with the objects of Sinn Féin to stand aside, to give no hand, when from our country are going up these cries of desperation, when it is in our power now to silence those cries, in your power, you who are opposing us, who are putting thorns in the path of your own people at the moment when they are ridding themselves of the thorns the enemy put there - you, who keep crying out freedom, a Republic, and are ready to destroy your nation for a name at such a moment?

Those who are not with their own people are against them. That is the question."