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Handwritten letter from Joseph Walshe to Eamon de Valera  
(Dublin)

DUBLIN, 12 March  
1932

My dear President,

Judging from our conversations yesterday I think you will be glad to have a personal note on some of the main issues affected by the method of removing the Oath.

It is all a question of method. The oath can be abolished. Your mandate must be as clear to the British as it is to the people at home. But your mandate is twofold - on the political side - not merely to remove the oath but to take steps to achieve the independence of the whole of Ireland. I am convinced that the latter and more important part of your mandate can be rendered impossible of achievement by the slightest imprudence with regard to the method of carrying out the first.

There is serious doubt as to whether the Oath is or is not in the Treaty. The Treaty debates which I have had examined for this purpose very largely stultify our present argument that the Oath is not in the Treaty. One of the biggest difficulties we have had with the British on the Privy Council question was the fact that Mr. Blythel had made a statement in the Seanad that it was part of the Treaty. Thomas quoted the statement at us in the midst of a hot argument between himself and Mr. McGilligan. We must be ready for liberal quotations in the British Parliament against our present thesis and they will be mainly supplied by the speeches made by our own ministers during the Treaty Debates.

The fact that the State is a continuing thing and that you symbolize the state in your person obliges you to take cognisance of even doubtful obligations which the state has been recognizing for ten years, and which because of that recognition - even [if] it were an isolated factor - must be taken as obligations none the less.

The introduction of a Bill on Tuesday may put us at once in the wrong - and having been put in the wrong at the beginning the rest of our course is going to be exceedingly difficulty. For me the whole future of this country depends on how the first step is taken. A Bill introduced on Tuesday may prove to be a gambler's throw, a von Kluck advance without reserves. What can we lose by waiting for one month? Your political opponents here and in G.B. want you to go fast? The 'Times'

yesterday almost said so. The Tories who hate Ireland as intensely as ever - if not more so (read Statute of Westminster Debates) - are only waiting to see us take the wrong step so that they may go back and amend the Statute of Westminster. They want an excuse for doing so. They can say, plausibly enough, that they did not insist on the amendment because they were told that the Treaty was the basis of their relations with us and that they regard the Treaty (inclusive of Art. 4) as an integral instrument to be modified only by the usual methods.

If they had been let - if Mr. Cosgrave had not made the speech at Rathluirc and if he and Mr. McGilligan had not written very strong letters to MacDonald and Thomas respectively - they would have amended the Statute and reserved the Treaty act of its scope just as they made reservations in regard to Canada and Australia. They could say - if we do something which in their view can be regarded as a breach of the Treaty - that they were no longer bound by Mr. Cosgrave's assurances and the resulting abstention from amending the Statute, and that the Status Quo Ante the letter had been re-established.

I am afraid also of the sentimental reaction through the Court Party (the Tory aristocrats in touch with the King).

A boycott of our goods could be engineered - the Argentine could replace our meat in six weeks - Denmark could replace our butter and eggs with hardly any interval. Large elements of the people at home would then begin to turn against the Government and say we had made a mess of things. Our economic reconstruction here is bound to be grievously slow and even the threat of a boycott on our goods at the beginning on the other side would render the difficulties of reconstruction enormously greater.

Last year in Geneva a member of the Dominions Office staff who was being too generously (but deliberately so) entertained by the Irish staff made this remark:

'You fellows have been the cause of all our troubles for the last ten years. We must stop making concessions. Something must be left for de Valera'.

I have had the definite impression for the last two years in dealing with the heads of the Dominions office that that was their attitude. I fear very much that hurried action by us may put their backs up against us. Why should we create obstacles for ourselves. There will be more than enough of them lying in our path.

Now for the constructive side. What should we do. After Tuesday we have four weeks. During that time we can inform the British that we have come to the definite view that the Oath must be removed if there is to be peace between the two countries. It is a relic of medievalism and in any case the people won't have it. There need not be any visit of ministers to London.

That would cause trouble here. Let me have an attempt at securing an insight into the possibilities. I can convey positive views through the heads of the Dominions office to

their masters. I can tell them that the Oath must be removed; if necessary without British consent - that we have good grounds in our view for doing so etc. In a week we shall know where we are.

I believe that you can achieve the unity of this country within seven years and that we can have our complete independence without calling this country by any particular constitutional name. 'Ireland' will be our name, and our international position will let the world and the people at home know that we are independent.

A false step now will inflame the six counties against (aided and abetted by the British) us and may postpone unity for two generations.

I told you what the British can do internationally. They can isolate us and get the legations withdrawn. Even the Americans (perhaps least of all) won't hesitate to choose between us.

From what you told me yesterday your first and real aim is the unity of this nation. I beg of you most earnestly as the administrative head of your External Affairs Dept. to consider what I have said in this very hurried note. Nobody knows and nobody ever shall know from me that I have written it.

I remain, my dear President, with esteem and gratitude for your kindly reception of me.

Yours very sincerely  
J.P. WALSH