

John Bruton's speech on home rule

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Sir, – Speaking at the Irish Embassy in London on the 100th anniversary of the passage of the third Home Rule Bill, former taoiseach John Bruton denounced the Easter Rising in Dublin, saying it legitimised violence and that he was against violence (“Padraig Pearse rejoiced in violence”, says Bruton, July 2nd).

Mr Bruton stated that he was a Redmonite and always had been. Mr Bruton's endorsement of Redmond is at odds with his rejection of violence. John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1914, was a zealous admirer of the British House of Commons and sought only limited Irish self-government, considering it undesirable that Britain and Ireland be separated as he had no wish to see the dismemberment of the British Empire.

Despite the fact that Redmond opposed physical force, he nonetheless enthusiastically encouraged young Irishmen to enlist in the British army in 1914 in return for the promise of home rule.

Mr Bruton is an ardent admirer of Redmond and the version of Home Rule which was on offer in 1914. Home rule, the old reliable weapon used to attack those of 1916 who secured our independence, was aptly described by Roger Casement as “a promissory note payable only after death”, or more accurately, after the deaths of 35,000 Irishmen fighting for freedoms that were being denied to their own land.

Mr Bruton apparently finds no contradiction between his support for Irishmen being part of the mass-murder of millions of people in the Great War, and his trenchant opposition to Irishmen using force to rid this country of an imperial power.

Mr Bruton ignores the widespread opposition, not just in nationalist Ireland, to home rule. Half a million Ulster unionists signed a covenant to use “all means necessary, including civil war” to resist an act of parliament giving home rule to Ireland.

Furthermore, the leader of the Conservative party during this period, Bonar Law, in undeniably seditious language, showed his utter contempt for the democratic institutions he was elected to uphold by stating “there are things stronger than parliamentary majorities”. When faced with this opposition to home rule, British prime minister Asquith failed to uphold and defend an act of his own parliament. In the general election of 1918, John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party was swept from power by an electorate that espoused separatism and emphatically rejected home rule.

John Bruton ignores this wholly constitutional and parliamentary decision of the Irish people.

Yours, etc,
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