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SOURCE FIVE

[Transcript](#) | [Useful notes](#)Letter from Irish parliamentary Party Leader John Redmond commenting on the treatment of Irish prisoners in 1916
(PRO ref: CAB 37/160/31)**CONFIDENTIAL**

I CIRCULATE to my colleagues a letter which I have received from Mr. Redmond.

H. H. A.

December 1, 1916.

(Private.)

My dear Mr. Asquith,

November 30, 1916.

The question of the prompt release of the Irish untried prisoners is, in our deliberate judgment, not only essential to the maintenance of the present satisfactory reaction in Irish feeling, but of the most vital and far-reaching importance to the general interests of the Empire and the successful conduct of the war.

The condition of Ireland, though still far from satisfactory, has vastly improved within the last two months, and that improvement has been due, amongst other causes, to the release of over a thousand of the interned prisoners and the confident expectation, which has been spread by us, that the Government contemplated a policy of conciliation, involving the removal of martial law and military rule, the release of the remainder of the interned prisoners, and some mitigation of the treatment of the convicted prisoners. Recent events and widely spread statements in the press have confirmed that impression, and if, in this matter of the interned prisoners, the popular expectations are disappointed the result will be a fresh outbreak of bitterness and exasperation, which may undo all the good effected during the last two months.

The effect of a refusal to release these men will be most damaging to the position and influence of the National Party in Ireland, and will be pointed to by all those in Ireland who are hostile to constitutional and parliamentary action as a fresh proof that the British Government attach no weight to the wishes of the Irish people expressed through their parliamentary representatives.

An amnesty movement is already on foot, and, in the event of a refusal to release the prisoners, it will inevitably rapidly assume immense proportions. We shall feel it necessary to support this movement with all our influence. It will also be supported actively by the Catholic Church in Ireland. Great meetings and processions will be organised, and the difficulties of the Government in Ireland will be immensely increased.

After months of furious and angry agitation the prisoners will, of course, be released, when infinite mischief has been done and the release can have no healing effect on the Irish situation, but would be hailed by Sinn Feiners and extremists as one more proof that violent agitation is the only argument to which the British Government will listen.

How to use this source

1 Study this source carefully. Ask yourself whether the source supports or contradicts the view that:

- The British left as soon as the people wanted them to
- The British left because of the actions of important individuals
- The British were forced out by peaceful political protests
- The British were forced out by armed resistance
- The British wanted to leave because the area was causing them problems
- The British left because they felt the country was ready to rule itself democratically

2 If you were an **admirer** of the British empire, explain whether you would be able to use this source to support your viewpoint.

3 If you were a **critic** of the British empire, explain whether you would be able to use this source to support your viewpoint.

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