

Midnight

28 January, 1948

Mr. Keough Mr. Chairman, not to all men is it given to stand at the barricades of decision in a moment when destiny is about to decide the future of a whole people, but to we who are gathered here it is so given. We keep this night a rendezvous with destiny. We keep this night an assignation with history. We vote this night upon a matter of supreme importance to the people of this island. And when we have finished with that business there will be no need for a verdict from posterity upon our excellence or otherwise, for in the very act of voting we shall have passed a verdict for posterity upon ourselves. It will not be necessary for posterity to judge us for we shall have judged ourselves.

It may well be that this will be the last time in my life that I shall speak in this storied chamber. Certain I am that I shall have no further occasion to speak during this Convention. And so, sir, I must crave your indulgence for a moment, before I address myself to the motion in order that I may set the record straight on a matter in which I seem to have been much misunderstood. For the benefit of all those who have not been listening to what I have said in this Convention, but who may think that they have been, I wish to make the categorical statement that I have never said that what comes first and before all else in life is three square meals a day. It just so happens that I believe in God. And any man who believes in God must, in consequence, admit to a hierarchy of values in which the spiritual and moral take precedence over the material. I am quite aware that there are more important things in life than three square meals a day. The causes for which all generations of men have suffered persecution, for which they have endured torture and death, for which they have fought and gladly died, have drawn not upon the stomach for inspiration. True it is that men have fought and died and done murder in their time for food. But to bear witness to the good and the true and the beautiful — to bear witness to these things, men have starved.

It will perhaps help to explain my insistence upon the importance of three square meals a day if I say that, in the first instance, I came into this chamber fully determined to insist upon that very thing. I knew in advance that we should hear much of sacred heritage. I knew that there would

be much pointing to these hallowed walls. I knew that we should hear much calling to witness of all those who were giants in their day and generation. Indeed, I was afraid that we should hear so much of all these that we should hear of nothing else. I was afraid that we should work ourselves up into such ecstasies about the glories of our land and past, as to completely forget that there had gone into the making of that glory, in addition to much blood, sweat and tears, much hunger, much bitterness of spirit born of being out at the elbows and down at the heels. And so I did promise myself away back at the beginning to remind this Convention every now and then that sacred heritage is not enough — that it is also of some importance that the people eat. And to keep me reminded of my promise to myself, I brought into this house with me a monitor to sit at my elbow — a monitor whom I have called my last forgotten fisherman on the bill of Cape St. George.

Need I say it has not been a particular, specific, solitary individual in whose name I have spoken so frequently, but rather a symbolic figure, a figure symbolic of all the fishermen in all the harbours, on all the islands, on all the bills of all the capes of this country. Time and again I have undertaken to remind this Convention of that symbolic forgotten fisherman whose shadow is across all our history. I have spoken of the grim Gethsemane he has endured, of how great has been his historic difficulty in making ends meet, of how it has not been easy for him to bring up his children in the fear and love of God, and with their bellies empty. I am satisfied that I have done the most that I could in his name, and I am satisfied that I have been right in doing so. For the person of my last forgotten fisherman on the bill of Cape St. George is just as sacred to me as the person of the most revered statesman who ever sat in this house. I am convinced that I have not been in error in insisting upon three square meals a day for my symbolic fisherman. And in doing so I have thought that three square meals a day for him are not without reference to the spiritual. For I believe that other things being equal, a man can the more easily save his immortal soul on a full stomach than on an empty one. I wouldn't be surprised if that was part of what