

# VARADKAR SLURS IRISH PATRIOT

(Irish Examiner, June 10) "Taoiseach Leo Varadkar speaking on RTÉ 2FM said that there were some statues in Ireland 'that we need to talk about' such as the statue in Fairview Park 'to a Nazi collaborator' ".

This is a reference to the statue of Seán Russell which has been vandalised on many occasions. These attacks on memorials to Ireland's patriotic dead should act as a wake-up call to those of us who value our independence, sovereignty and democratic right to choose whom we wish to honour.

Mr Varadkar's criticism of Russell was high on hyperbole, but lacking in substance. There is not a shred of evidence to support the claim that Russell was a Nazi supporter. Russell was loyal to a cause, not an ideology. He had no world view other than a commitment to end British rule in Ireland. In previous years, he had made similar expeditions to the US and the Soviet Union seeking arms. Russell is portrayed as an Irish Republican weak link, because of the universal loathing for the Third Reich, and the revulsion attached to any individual who had dealings with it, even though not endorsing its policies.

Russell was in fact prominent in opposing Ireland's home-grown fascists, the Blueshirts, from organising. He was a consistent anti-fascist and encouraged many republicans to go to Spain to fight fascism. Indeed, when Russell died on board a German U-boat in 1940, he was accompanied by his political comrade and anti-fascist leader Frank Ryan who had led Ireland's International Brigade to fight General Franco's fascists.

Russell had been returning to Ireland from Germany, having tried to secure an arms shipment to launch a military campaign against British rule in Ireland. At the time Russell was seeking arms from Germany, Avraham Stern, founder of Lehi, the Zionist organisation in pursuance of a Jewish state, collaborated with the Nazi authorities, offering to "actively take part in the war on Germany's side" in return for help in securing Jewish independence. Stern and his successor, future Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, rejected collaboration with the British, and claimed that only the defeat of the British Empire would lead to an independent Jewish state. Does Mr Varadkar regard Stern and Shamir Nazi sympathisers and collaborators?

Russell is entitled to have not just his statue protected but also his reputation defended. It should be made clear that if the statue to Seán Russell is removed from Fairview Park, then British Imperial monuments,

memorials and place names in this State should also be removed including the memorial to the "Famine Queen" Victoria in Dún Laoghaire.

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## *POST SCRIPTS*

If Leo wants a lesson on anti-Semitism perhaps his Minister for Justice, Charlie Flanagan can revisit his family history when his father, Oliver J, in 1944 commended Hitler for rooting the Jews out of the country and said in the Dáil "where there are bees you find honey where there are Jews you find money."

And what about the memorial to the English pirate and slave trader Sir Francis Drake, which was erected in Carrigaline Co Cork in 2005?. In what can only be described as a bizarre event, a Government Minister and a detachment of the Irish Naval Service was in attendance to honour Drake who had been responsible for the slaughter of hundreds of Catholics on Rathlin Island off the County Antrim coast in 1575 and was a slave trader from Guinea and Sierra Leone that transported thousands of Africans between 1562 and 1567.

Then there is the little matter of the statue left standing in the garden of the Dáil in memory of Prince Albert Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, husband of Queen Victoria, who complained to the Sultan of Turkey that he was sending too much for famine relief in Ireland, because it exceeded the amount she was prepared to give.

Finally, when is Leo going to denounce the founder of Irish fascism and first Leader of Fine Gael, Eoin O'Duffy? Perhaps, he might wear a blue, if doing so.



Of course, getting back to Seán Russell and the Nazi collaborator slur, FG-toady media hacks can always be relied on, in their columns, to tow the Leo line.