

What Does De Valera Want?

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JUST what is going on in the mathematical and dialectical mind of Eamon De Valera has for years been a source of concern to English statesmen, and has sometimes been a bit baffling even to Mr. De Valera's friends.

There is such a thing as being too logical, and it is not surprising, of course, that the English have considered him a most unreasonable man. Yet, step by step and year by year, they seem to be yielding to his reason.

Since February, 1932, concomitant with his return to power as head of the Fianna Fail Government, Mr. De Valera seems to have taken greater strides than ever toward making the English mind uncomfortable. As an unhappy English bootmaker, coming across on a trans-Atlantic liner with me, expressed it: "We don't seem to know exactly what he wants."

Now I was never surprised at any Englishman's lack of comprehension. This probably evens things up a bit, for it has been said that the English are never surprised at the lack of comprehension displayed by American bankers and statesmen, of which I am not one, but on whose judgment my humble destinies in a sense depend. But it was surprising, on my return to certain American cities where the Irish blood runs strong, to note just how many with real affection for Ireland were quite quizzical concerning the newer phases of the De Valera policy. They seemed to be as much at sea as was my English friend.

It does not, in my way of thinking, require an erudite, dialectical mind to understand the business that Mr. De Valera is about. Everyone knows that an economic war has broken out between Ireland and England as a result of the withholding of the land annuities. From the De Valera viewpoint, this economic war has implications more deep-seated and far-reaching than a mere passing phase.

What Mr. De Valera had set out to do, in his premeditated way, was to make Ireland economically self-sufficient. Toward this end, the Fianna Fail Government, on coming into power last February, had adopted a five-year plan. It may have been based, though I do not say it was, on the Russian five-year plan. In any event, it was designed particularly for Irish use, and its principal aim was to rescue the Irish people from a very unhappy position of economic dependence on England. And the most important result of the present trade warfare is that what was expected to be done in five years will now have to be done in one year. Over 30,000 people cheered Mr. De Valera to the echo when he so expressed himself in a notable speech in College Green, Dublin.

It appears that Mr. De Valera has his followers in a very happy state of mind. An Irishman, if you reduce his table fare by as much as two potatoes and two gooseberry tarts a week, is likely to raise a mighty stir, particularly if he decides that it is his own Government that is

responsible for this rationing. But if you prove to him that it is the English Government that he is getting back at by enforced dieting, it is probable that he will not only be contented, but will voluntarily give up another potato and two more gooseberry tarts, in which the Irish are like many other people.

As Mr. De Valera puts it, the policy of successive generations of English statesmen has been to reduce Ireland to be, on the one hand, a cattle ranch in order to supply the British markets with cheap food; and, on the other hand, a dumping ground for British goods. This has left Britain free, in times of crisis or strained relations, to refuse to accept Irish products and to cut off Irish supplies. Such a crisis is now faced. The most important exports of Ireland to England are represented by the cattle produce. When the British free-trade policy came into being with the repeal of the corn laws in 1846, the production of cereal crops on Irish farms became unprofitable. From that date tillage declined, while pasturage and the number of livestock increased rapidly. Emigration on a large scale has continued ever since, because the number of agricultural workers required for livestock in comparison with tillage is in the ratio of four to seven.

Against this enforced policy of devoting too much attention to the breeding of livestock, Mr. De Valera now trains his guns. In recent years, as he pointed out at College Green, Ireland has had to compete with relatively undeveloped ranch countries like Argentina. Soil that might have been used for agriculture was used for cattle raising, and the result had been that the population of Ireland had diminished to an extent that made her unique among the nations. While other countries developed, Ireland had seen her population cut in half, and even during the past eight or ten years she had lost 250,000 of her best people.

While emphasizing her efforts towards the raising of cattle, Ireland had likewise permitted herself to become a dumping ground for British goods. The people were importing in vast amounts finished products that should have been produced in Ireland for Irish consumption. So hand in hand with a reorientation of Irish agriculture must go a building up of Irish industries.

In 1926, as one small example, the number of men and women employed in the Irish boot, shoe, slipper, and clog trade was 1,825. Ireland that year imported 400,936 dozens of pairs of boots to a value of £1,792,394. With a consumption of about 5,000,000 pairs per annum, approximately only 500,000 were Irish made. Already, under the Fianna Fail regime, there has been a revival of interest in boot making. A Limerick firm with an output of 1,500 hides weekly, said to be the largest engaged in the leather trade in Ireland, has made plans for the establishment of a boot-manufacturing plant at Tralee. Drogheda is to have two new boot-and-shoe factories.

These are, of course, only straws in the wind, but they serve to show which way the wind is blowing—in the direction of economic self-sufficiency.

But it is not to be expected that every man, woman, and child in the Free State sees eye to eye with Mr. De Valera and the Fianna Fail policy. His opponents, represented by the displaced Cumann na nGaedheal party leaders and some of the organs of the old ascendancy, are active in denouncing it and ridiculing it as a "hairshirt" policy, which in the long run will mean disillusion and despair for the Irish people.

More than that, in public debate during the session of the Dail when the Government moved that the Ministry be entrusted with a sum of £2,000,000 to take such necessary steps as might be needed to meet the raising of a British tariff wall against Irish products, they denounced it as Communistic and designed to destroy Ireland not only economically but morally.

The dream of a self-sufficient Free State [declared the old imperialist organ, the *Irish Times*] is a vain thing. President De Valera and his supporters seem to regard the economic struggle as a thing desirable in itself. . . . Can they regard with utter equanimity a condition of affairs in which the Irish farmer will be left with his cattle, his eggs, his butter, and his bacon on his hands, and the inhabitants of the twenty-six counties will be forced to exist by taking in one another's washing?

Professor O'Sullivan, following the lead of his Cumann na nGaedheal leader, Mr. Cosgrave, in voicing the charges of Socialism and Communism professed to see the Government's action in seeking a £2,000,000 emergency fund as one in the direction of State control. He had no doubt, he said, that the Government believed it could combine the financial, social, and economic system of Russia with Christian principles, but the thing would be impossible. The system would be that of Russia and it would have the same results. It would mean not only the economic but the moral destruction of Ireland.

Inspired by Professor O'Sullivan's remarks, the *Cork Examiner* devoted a long editorial to an analysis of the alleged failure of the policy of Russia in respect to agriculture, drawing a parallel and uttering a warning:

The breakdown of the Communist and Bolshevik ideals in Russia is of peculiar interest at the moment in this country where there is an intensifying movement toward devising on paper five-year and other plans for the betterment of the Irish population. Communal ownership and control have definitely failed in Russia where the peasantry have always been used to dragooning. Is it likely to work in Ireland, where the individual sense is so strong?

The *United Irishman*, a weekly publication which has for its chief business the attack on the De Valera government, made much of a speech by Miss Louie Bennett, outgoing President of the National Trade Union Congress.

The national self-sufficiency theory [she declared] is old-fashioned—out of date. It is at the present moment enjoying a sporadic revival, inspired by the capitalistic classes. Modern civilization is essentially international in character and demands cooperation rather than competition among the nations. Economic self-sufficiency is a risky thing in the hands of a government, and we shall find it so in the Free State whether Fianna Fail sets up an independent Republic or remains within the British commonwealth. . . .

Thus it appears that in addition to training his guns on the British Government, Mr. De Valera must at the same time be prepared to defend himself and his party from the attacks of a considerable and powerful opposition within the country.

To these attacks, in his addresses to the people, he had replied with the philosophy that has earned for his policy the sobriquet of "hair shirt."

There is no need for panic [he advises]. The situation must be faced quietly. The best way to meet it is to practise the simple virtues, such as spending your money wisely. Money spent on necessities is far more beneficial to the community than money spent on luxuries or amusements. Pay your bills and meet your taxes. Keep down imports. The line of action we think best at the present time is less one of retaliation upon England than one of constructive effort on our part to build up a position that will make us strong in the future so that we will never have to bear a crisis like this again. If we bear it in that spirit the suffering and hardship we will have to undergo will be of lasting advantage to our country.

It is not of record that a hair shirt has ever before been used as a symbol of the struggle of a nation to be economically free. I do not even know that Mr. De Valera is pleased with it as such. But I do believe that there are a great many Americans who wish sincerely that Mr. Hoover, a few years ago, had called our attention to its virtue.

Professor Don Quixote

JAMES WILLIAM FITZPATRICK

NOT long ago a Professor of Applied Psychology, playing hookey from his classroom, attended a luncheon of Plain People in the great industrial city hard by the university to whose existence the public utterances of the professor had from time to time called attention. He went not only to eat, because free meals are not easily speared these parlous days but, as is the habit of professors, to talk. So, in a moment of pleasant expansiveness whilst the post-prandial tripe was being served with the coffee, he broke the news of a great discovery he had just made: the emotion of fear was no longer being played upon by the writers of advertising copy. What his hearers did upon receiving this momentous bit of information was not related in the press account of the event. In fact the item just managed to get into print. Its failure to make the front page is a sad commentary on the perspicacity of telegraph editors and another proof that we are living in an age of gross materialism.

Ordinarily the speeches of university professors stuffed with food take rank with barrel mysteries, gangland murders, and love-nest slayings. It is a poor day on the wire when some spokesman of the Higher Education—usually from Teachers College, Columbia University—is not good for a column of hot stuff. In this instance the professor was in a bad spot. He did not hail from University Heights and was therefore only an ordinary publicity gate crasher. In addition to that deplorable fact there were unusual demands that day upon journalistic space.

