

IRISH DEMOCRACY DEMANDS THE WHOLE ISLAND

The grotesque spectacle of a partitioned nation

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THE RECENT conversations in London between representatives of the British and Irish Governments broke down without the major questions being brought any the nearer settlement.

What's up with those Irish, anyway? Why must this nation of theirs keep putting its head up just at the moment when crises are three a penny? They have always been at it! There is a revolution in America; Grattan responds with a mobilization of Irish Volunteers in the streets of Dublin. There is a French revolution; the Irish rise in '98. A hurricane of revolts pass over Europe in '48; the Irish revolt too. The war between the American States is hardly over when Ireland stages the Rising of '67. The World War comes, and with it the most determined revolt in Irish history. And today, in the latest international crisis, there is Ireland again.

It used to be very puzzling to those who did not know Ireland from the inside. Today's Anglo-Irish tension is, however, no puzzle. It is about the simplest of all the disputes between nations which keep the headliners busy. And for once the main facts are as easy to state as they are to understand when stated. They concern what is grotesquely called the Ulster Question, where a minority has been inflamed against the majority for the benefit of a third party.

Grotesque is the right word. The Ulster Question is not a question of Ulster. Ulster is a province of nine counties. Five of them are predominantly Catholic and Nationalist. The Unionists (as they are called) under Carson wanted Ulster excluded from Home Rule. It was a way, they thought, of defeating the Irish Nationalist claim to self-government. Even Carson had not thought it would lead to Irish dismemberment. When it did, when the British Government saw the chance it gave them and partitioned Ireland under the Act of 1920, the Carsonites in the British Parliament would not vote for the Act. Thus this Statute which so affronted the Irish Nation had not the backing of a single Irish vote either Nationalist or Unionist, Catholic or Protestant. That is an important point in history.

The British were naturally anxious to make the partitioned area as large as possible. The deeper

the wound the longer the healing and the weaker the patient. But they found they could not partition the Province of Ulster because the Nationalists were in majority and could elect a Nationalist Government in Belfast. It was a bit of a shock to the British Premiers of those days, Asquith and Lloyd George. However they did the next best thing. They counted the Protestants in and around Belfast. They numbered 618,000. This concentration could outvote all the Catholics in six counties (420,000) and leave enough over to outvote the Protestant Nationalists as well. Very well then, cut off six counties. So without a thought of the economic effect of a boundary so decided upon, the North-East was partitioned from the rest of Ireland by an Act of the London Parliament for which not a single Irish vote was given.

Two of the Ulster counties, Tyrone and Fermanagh, are Nationalist in majority and if they could vote today would joyfully come under the Dublin Parliament. The parliamentary constituencies of South Armagh and South-East Down are also Nationalist in majority and would also gladly reunite with the rest of Ireland. So would Derry City, the second of the two cities in the partitioned area. In fact were Armagh, Derry County, Fermanagh and Tyrone to vote together they would transfer themselves to the Dublin Parliament. So the Ulster Question reduces itself to a two-county question with the other thirty counties united on the matter of Irish unity. Propaganda is strong and so these facts come with a jolt to those whose diet is mainly propagandist.

Taking the whole nation then we find that of the 4,244,000 there are 3,408,000 who desire one Ireland under one Parliament, and that is as substantial a majority as you will get anywhere. Nor are the remaining 836,000 very happy that Ireland is partitioned. So whatever are the roots of partition they are not in democracy.

There is another reason why Ireland in overwhelming majority desires to re-incorporate the partitioned area within the national boundary. While in the rest of Ireland a perfect tolerance reigns, in the excluded counties there is rampant persecution. In the Twenty-six Counties the Catholics outnumber the Protestants by more than ten

to one, the Catholics being 92.7 of the population and the Protestants 7.3 per cent. There used, once upon a time, be a propagandist fable that if ever the Catholics in Ireland got their own government they would persecute the Protestant minority. Today, after seventeen years of Catholic rule, one cannot open an Irish morning paper without finding some Protestant prelate paying glowing tribute for the generous treatment the minority receives. It has become a chorus, so unanimous is it. Even the *Irish Times* principal organ of Irish Protestantism, urging the Six Counties to re-unite with their fellow Irishmen, said on January 18 last: "We can assure them in all good faith that they have nothing to fear from the majority in the South." The phrase becomes still stronger when we realize that the *Irish Times*, twenty short years ago, led the ramp: "Home Rule means Rome Rule."

But over the border where the Protestants have the majority there is a crueller spectacle. The *London Church Times* said on January 22: "While genuine religious toleration exists in Southern Ireland, Roman Catholics are largely excluded from public appointments in the North." That was putting it mildly. They are not only excluded; the Ministers of the Six County Government themselves have led movements for their dismissal from what employment they have. A few years ago the present Minister for Finance in Belfast apologized for one of the thirty-one porters in the Belfast Parliament being a Catholic, saying he was but temporarily employed. Sir Edward Archdale, when Minister for Agriculture, boasted that in his Department there were only four Catholics out of 109, adding by way of explanation that three of the four were there when he took over from the British and could not be dismissed! The present Minister for Agriculture, Sir Basil Brooke, urging the non-employment of Catholics, declared at a meeting in Fermanagh (which by the way is Catholic in majority): "I have not one about my place." And all this although the Catholics are more than a third of the entire population and pay more than a third of the taxes.

And thereby hangs another tale. When the British passed the Partition Act in 1920 they put a clause in it that for the protection of minorities Proportional Representation must be the system of election in Ireland. Mr. deValera's Government has not only acted up to this but has actually made it a constitutional right of the minority to have Proportional Representation. What did the majority in the North do? They abolished Proportional Representation (Britain consenting) the year after the Belfast Parliament was set up; and not being content with this they carried through one of the most wonderful pieces of gerrymandering (Britain again consenting) that ever graced the statute books of the world. Here are some typical details:

1. Every 22,000 Unionists get a seat: 39,000 Nationalists get none—in County Antrim.
2. 32,455 Nationalists get one seat while 25,529 Unionists get two seats—the minority getting twice the representation of the majority—in Fermanagh.

3. The Nationalists in Derry City are 27,000; the 18,000 Unionists in the city get the same representation.

In the whole area 420,000 Nationalists if they polled every vote would get 11 seats; but 836,000 Unionists get 41.

The gerrymandering of local government is an equally pretty piece of work. In Tyrone under Proportional Representation the Nationalists got eleven seats and the Unionists, who are the minority, got nine. Now the minority get 17 seats and the majority get ten! In Derry City the Nationalists, being the majority, got under Proportional Representation 21 seats while the Unionists got 19. Today the Nationalists can get only 16 seats while the Unionist minority get 24. Could one blame tens of thousands of Nationalists for refusing to vote at the recent elections?

In view of these facts it is not so hard to realize why that Irish Question keeps poking its head up in this disturbed world. If the Germans can ask back colonies; if France can take Alsace Lorraine; if Italy the Tyrol; if Austria must join Germany because the Austrians are German-speaking; if the whole world sees that divided territories must be re-united if peace is ever again to settle on mankind, must Ireland for politeness sake remain silent though she has the most unanswerable claim of them all to her own territory?

Nor can it be that the Irish got that double dose of original sin Birrell used to talk about. Like any other people they are equal to managing their own religious differences if the interfering hand from outside is withdrawn. Their treatment of the seven per cent Protestant minority shows how finely they can settle these questions. Does anybody suggest Holland should be partitioned because the north thinks one way and the south another; or that Canada should be because of the French-speaking Catholics; or Belgium because of the Flammands; or Germany because of the Bavarians? The Irish can be as just and as painstaking with their minority as any race the world over.

Indeed, the settlement of Partition which the Irish Government itself proposes is of the stuff of generosity. They offer to the Northeast that they keep their local parliament, with guarantees to the Catholic minority of just treatment, and that they then participate in the All-Ireland Parliament through proportional representation in which every minority vote counts. That is a statesmanlike offer, and just men and democrats everywhere ought to back it. Peace-lovers should back it too because the wrong of Partition divides every democracy where the Irish are strong and throws their powerful influence against what might be the wisest foreign policy at the moment.

Britain started Partition, she should undo it; today, for her own purposes she still subsidizes the Belfast Parliaments. If her hand were withdrawn the Irish could find as workable a solution as the Canadians found and as the Dutch found. "Hands off Ireland" is not a bad slogan at all—and it might mean a lot to the peace of the world—if it were addressed emphatically enough to London.

