

JOINT COMMISSION ON THE PROBLEMS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT

Memoranda on
Some Crucial Questions

IV

IRELAND

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PRICE TWOPENCE

FIRST MEMORANDUM :

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND

II. ALSACE-LORRAINE.

SECOND MEMORANDUM :

III. POLAND.

GENERAL NOTE.

These memoranda deal with some of the crucial questions which must arise in any attempt to solve the problems of the settlement, in the light of an organized Community of Nations. The acceptance of a world organization, following the war, is assumed as a basis of argument. And, further, the view is taken by the Commission that the adoption of the policy of disarmament is essential to a satisfactory settlement, and alone supplies a possibility for the satisfactory treatment of minority nationalities.

SPECIAL NOTE.

The following memorandum on the Irish Question has been prepared in co-operation with a small group in Dublin, and has been approved by several well-known Irish writers.

JOINT COMMISSION ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT.

IV. Ireland

(a) POLITICAL

i. *History.*

The early history of Ireland reveals a story of singular beauty and spiritual dignity. Instead of a country of barbarian disorder, Ireland appears as a land of mixed races united under Celtic leadership in an intense national faith.

The whole country was, from earliest times, known by a single name, Eire, which later took the form of Ireland. Its chroniclers began writing its history in the seventh century, and from, at least, as early as the eighth century a code of laws existed for the whole of Ireland. National sentiment was inspired by love of the country itself, and its geography was part of the earliest literature. Schools of learning were so ordered as to be in fact a National University, and by their care the Irish language was guarded and perfected as the language of Ireland one and indivisible. It is the early unity of all Ireland in its intellectual and spiritual life which reveals the soul of the country and which has given it from the first the fervour of national consciousness.

What is known of the political life of the time reveals a settled government which commanded the affection of the people and social conditions both humane and reasonable. Communication with continental peoples was frequent, and Irish travellers—poets, missionaries, scholars and traders—were found in every land. Woollen goods, leather work, fine embroideries, and other wares from Ireland were known in Europe as far even as Naples and Russia. Irish scholars above all had a great repute, especially as teachers, in foreign lands. Ireland lived no secluded life, but was in direct contact with the trade, the science, and the literature of Europe. The wealth of the country invited many invaders—Danes, Normans, and English. The invasion of Henry II, in 1169, broke the unity of the national life and the natural progress of civilization, culture and government. Two contending forms of civilization were set against each other, one based on a political and

imperial idea of a State—the other on the national and spiritual tradition of a country. The conflict thus begun has continued to the present day.

In 750 years, since the English first invaded Ireland, three forms of government have been tried. In one respect the methods were alike, since under all three Ireland was to be made identical with England in manners and administration. But there were important differences between the three systems of rule :

1. Ireland was first regarded as a separate Kingdom with a Parliament of its own, subject to the authority of the King of England and his Privy Council. This Parliament represented at first only the invading classes, Norman and English, and the Lord-Lieutenant was posted at Dublin Castle with an army to enforce the new laws and to abolish the national tradition, language, and government. Heavy sufferings were inflicted on the people, but amid all this evil there were some consolations, for the position of Ireland was that of a distinct Kingdom co-ordinate with that of England, and possessing national rights of its own. However foreign in its origin and its first ideals, a Parliament in Ireland did actually form a framework for a possible national life, and under the Tudor kings those who called themselves Ireland-men courageously defended the claims of Ireland as a whole to liberty and justice. Moreover, the Royal policy encouraged trade and manufacture in order to maintain a sufficient revenue for the King from Ireland.

2. A great change came with the Commonwealth when the English Parliament claimed for itself supreme control and powers to pass laws for Ireland over the head of the Irish Parliament. The country was thus degraded from the position of a co-ordinate part of the King's dominions and its inhabitants became a subject people under the English Parliament, and did not possess by right the privileges of English citizens. This form of government continued 150 years, for although the kings were restored, Parliament kept power in its own hands. The rule of Parliament was more disastrous to Ireland than the rule of the King alone, as its members had no knowledge of Ireland which was then almost as remote from England as America is now. They were swayed by the religious passions and trade bigotries of their time, and used their power to crush every industry in Ireland whose competition they feared. While the old social order was broken up no new order was constructed in its place, the English Parliament being unfit to formulate a positive policy of continued action in Ireland. The Irish Parliament, meanwhile, lived on in obscure slavery to the Parliament of Westminster, until the American War of

Independence gave it both the excuse and the opportunity of a less ignoble life. In 1782 it forced from the English Government a Statute declaring that, as in old times, the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland alone could make laws for that nation without interference from the English Parliament. With its new independence the country awoke to new life and traces can still be seen all over Ireland of the activity and prosperity that followed the work of a legislature interested in, and able to secure, the welfare of its own people.

3. It was a brief revival. The power of the English Parliament was restored in 1800 by the Act of Union passed by an Irish Parliament packed, bribed, and intimidated by the Government, but unquestionably without the consent of the Irish people as a whole. It was at a time of the darkest political reaction, when in the "Great War" the military spirit and the terror of democratic liberties were at their height, that the English Parliament re-established its dominion over Ireland. The body of Irishmen who sat at Westminster, as representatives of Ireland, were comparatively few in numbers, and lay under such prejudice that they could be disregarded, and were frequently used to reinforce one party or the other in English affairs in the hope—a hope too often proved vain—that some consideration would be shown for Irish demands in return. The Government of Ireland by the Union Parliament has had all the faults of the old system. Instead of a United Kingdom one nation has remained in fact subordinate to the other. During the century Ireland has been an unwilling and discontented partner in the Union and, without the consent of her representatives, has been constantly governed by Coercion Acts, Crimes Acts, and similar repressive measures. One result has been unrest—depopulation and economic jeopardy in Ireland—another has been the increasing determination of Irishmen to realize their own national life and in self-government to find a rule more worthy of their ancient history and more adapted to their intellectual powers and their needs as a nation. It is the intensity of this determination to-day which makes the future government of Ireland a question of immediate international importance.

2. *The Problem.*

If the settlement of the Irish problem be regarded from a definitely international standpoint it does not present many of the difficulties usually attributed to it. To apply the general political principles enunciated in the first pamphlet of this series to Ireland will be a matter of comparatively simple political action as soon as a Government is elected in Great

Britain which is willing to do so fearlessly and without reserve. When Great Britain trusts Ireland political difficulties will soon disappear and an era of friendship and co-operation will replace the old period of mistrust and misunderstanding.

Even the problem of Ulster—or rather of the half of Ulster which does not desire self-government—would be seen in a very different light by a Government prepared to carry out the principle of government by consent for the Irish nation.

That the overwhelming majority of the population of Ireland desires self-government is not disputed and no plebiscite is necessary to demonstrate the intensity of that demand. The only problem is to discover the form of self-government most suited to Irish needs and acceptable to the Irish people as a whole without ignoring the reasonable claims of the minority, differing as it does in religion and in political ideals from the majority.

Many schemes of self-government have been proposed, and these may be classified under three distinct heads, according to the status of the Parliament proposed :

(A) Proposals setting up a Parliament strictly subordinate to the British Parliament, with its powers carefully defined and limited. Such a Parliament might eventually form part of a federal scheme inside the British Isles, and would stand in very much the same relation to the Parliament at Westminster as does the legislative assembly in Quebec to the Dominion Parliament of Canada.

(B) Schemes providing for an Irish Parliament with full and complete powers over all Irish affairs and related to the British Parliament in much the same way as is the Dominion Parliaments of Canada, Australia, or South Africa. The general powers of such a Parliament would be the same as those in the Dominions except to such extent as is rendered convenient by the different circumstances.

(C) Proposals setting up an independent Irish Parliament without any direct political connection with the British Empire.

It would not be possible in the space at our disposal to enter into the details of any of these Schemes, and we are not here concerned with them except so far as they affect the application to Ireland of the principle of government by consent.

Proposals which come under (A) find little or no support amongst Irish Nationalists, and it is certain that neither they nor any variant of them will be accepted by Ireland as a whole. There is no evidence either that they have met with any

acceptance in N.E. Ulster, though the federal idea has gained support amongst Unionists of the South and West. It will be found that almost all the leading advocates of these schemes hail from Great Britain and not from Ireland.

The demand for an independent Ireland as in (c) is officially advanced by the Sinn Fein party in Ireland, and has gained very considerable support, especially amongst the younger generation. It appeals strongly to the intense national feeling which exists in Ireland, but has the disadvantage that it is opposed by very powerful sections in the country. It is also unlikely that it will gain the support of internationalists at the present time, many of whom view with distrust and concern the setting up of another small independent state until the future position of small nations is assured by international control through a League of Nations or in some other way.

The proposals outlined under (B), if carried out fully and without any attempt to curb the powers of an Irish Parliament over Irish affairs, would very probably meet with the approval of the majority of the Irish people, and would undoubtedly be accepted by many who, in theory, demand complete independence. It offers fair ground for compromise between these latter and the growing body of Irish Unionists who recognize that self-government is inevitable, but who will insist on remaining inside the British Commonwealth.

The official demand of the Irish minority is to be allowed to prevent self-government. This demand is inconsistent with any form of self-determination, so need not be considered here. The question is rather—how far in the interests of good government must minority rights and interests be safeguarded? Irish Unionists are scattered all over the country, but are only numerically strong in N.E. Ulster. They are almost all Protestant in religion—conservative in thought and outlook, and British imperialism has a greater appeal to them than Irish national idealism. In Ulster, men with strong labour and democratic sympathies will be found in the Unionist Camp, but this is not so elsewhere in Ireland. There is very little social intermixing between Protestant and Catholic in the northern province, with the result that much more bitter religious and political feeling exists in Ulster than in the South, where recently many prominent Unionists have publicly urged the need for a speedy settlement. The more extreme attitude adopted by the opponents of self-government in N.E. Ulster has brought the affairs of the province into great prominence in England and “Ulster” is spoken of as a problem by itself and the minority outside Ulster is largely

forgotten or ignored. If safeguards are necessary, the isolated Protestant in the West has as much, if not more, right to expect the protection of his interests as has his co-religionist in Ulster surrounded by large numbers of his own way of thinking.

Without discussing the reasonableness or otherwise of minority fears in Ireland, it is an admitted fact that fears do exist, and to admit their existence is to admit the urgent need in the interests of good government of adequate minority safeguards.

Suggested methods for the protection of the minority in Ireland may be divided under two heads, viz. :

1. *Partition, i.e.*, by separating certain portions of the country—say, four or six counties of N.E. Ulster from the rest of Ireland and continuing to govern it from Westminster.

2. *Constitutional Safeguards, i.e.*, (a) the granting of special representation to the minority out of proportion to its numerical strength, with powers of delay or veto on legislation affecting areas where the minority is strong ; (b) special clauses in the constitution making illegal any legislation interfering with the religious, trade, or educational advantages at present enjoyed by the minority unless their consent is obtained ; or (c) an administrative council for all Ulster or for N.E. counties, with powers similar to provincial legislatures in Canada.

Such provisions should, in the case of self-government inside the Empire, be guaranteed by the Parliament at Westminster, or if an independent Ireland be established, they should be guaranteed by the Supreme Council of a League of Nations or other international body.

We do not know of any satisfactory reason which can be advanced in favour of (1) *i.e.*, *partition*, but the objections are many, though not always clearly understood in Great Britain. The arguments against partition of any kind may be summarized as follows :

(a)—It has never been proposed by any Irish political party, and even those parties which accepted partition proposals did so reluctantly, and as a temporary measure only.

(b)—It makes no provision for minority interests outside the excluded area.

(c)—It does not rid us of a discontented minority even in Ulster, for there is no area which could be cut off without leaving a substantial minority in favour of self-government in the excluded area. Even in Antrim, the extreme N.E. county, there is roughly one Catholic to four Protestants, and in Belfast

at least one-quarter of the population is Nationalist in politics. Politically speaking N.E. Ulster is a mosaic, the local majority, whether Unionist or Nationalist, varying often from parish to parish.

(d)—It violates national idealism which is the vital force in the demand for self-government.

(e)—It involves almost, if not quite, insurmountable difficulties, administrative and economic, in the relations between the excluded and included areas.

The main disadvantages of (2) *i.e.*, constitutional safeguards, are (a) the difficulty of framing these and guaranteeing their effectiveness—this is especially so in regard to safeguards against unfair administration, and (b) the fact that the minority has not stated what kind of safeguards it would accept. The advantages are (a) that such constitutional safeguards are not inconsistent with the carrying out of self-determination for the Irish nation, and (b) Irish Nationalists have always been, and still are, ready to agree to the inclusion of wide and far reaching safeguards to minority interests in an Irish Constitution.

*If the people of Great Britain were definitely to express through the Government their willingness to agree to the application of self-determination without any qualification except that suggested in the General Principles of the series, *viz.*, that due regard be paid to the general interests and welfare of the world as a whole—we are convinced a representative body of Irishmen called together for the purpose will very speedily devise minority safeguards which will be accepted by the opinion of both England and the World at large as fair and just. It must be remembered that all political efforts to find a solution of the Irish question have broken down, not because adequate minority safeguards were denied, but because the minority refused to agree to any form of self-government which the majority could accept as consistent with national honour and dignity. It is also significant that prominent leaders of Sinn Fein, the most extreme party in Ireland, which demands separation from England, have repeatedly expressed their willingness to accept an international regime under a League of Nations.

In the past the Irish question has been regarded as a domestic one, concerning only the British Commonwealth—the War has changed this and it is now a question of international importance. Its importance lies not only in the fact that a settlement is publicly demanded by America, Russia and Germany, but in that its solution is increasingly regarded by

* See Note on page 10.

the world at large as a test of the sincerity of the principles to which Great Britain stands pledged in this war.

Speaking recently at Derby,* Mr. Asquith stated that Reconciliation between Ireland and England was the one thing most necessary and most urgent in the interests not only of Great Britain and Ireland, or of the British Empire, but of the Allied cause and the *future of the world*.

Viewed from this standpoint it presents considerably fewer difficulties to the application of international principles than either Poland, Alsace-Lorraine or the Balkans, and it has the advantage that these principles can be applied by Great Britain at once without waiting until the Peace Conference.

NOTE.

Since this was written the Irish Convention has concluded its sittings. There has not been complete agreement, but from the various reports there should be no difficulty in formulating one or more schemes of self-government which could be submitted to the Irish people if and when self-determination is applied to Ireland. The creation of the convention was an admission by Great Britain of the need for a change in Irish Government, but does not imply that the principle of self-determination will be applied.

The constitution of the Convention was arranged by the British Government and not by Irishmen, and the Convention was not fully representative of Irish opinion. Unfortunately the issue raised by the publication of the report has been confused by the passing of an Act giving power to the British Government to apply conscription to Ireland with or without the consent of the Irish people. From the almost unanimous expression of opinion in Ireland on this question it is clear that no form of self-government which does not admit the right of the Irishmen to decide whether conscription shall be applied to Ireland or not, will be acceptable.

(b) ECONOMIC

That a country with the natural fertility of Ireland should only produce about 25 per cent. of its estimated capacity for food production is from an international point of view a serious matter; especially during the present food shortage. In the interests of the world and particularly of Europe it is important that any Irish settlement should result in a largely increased development of Irish resources and especially in greater food production.

Ireland, owing to its great fertility, might well maintain from 15 to 18 million people, or more than four times as many as now live there. Eighty years ago it supported 8½ million inhabitants; in sixty years these numbers had shrunk to four

* March 22nd, 1918.

millions, and the population, still declining, is now little over four millions.

Economically the country is divided into two parts— industrial and agricultural. The N.E. corner of Ulster is connected by its harbours with the chief centres of iron and coal in Great Britain. Its people have long been secured by a special tenant-right, and their flax-growing and linen industries have been successfully encouraged. The famous shipyards of Belfast have developed to large proportions, and a highly industrialized community has thus been formed by the double trade which has given employment to men in shipbuilding and to women in linen factories. Both great industries have been built up on free trade, as they import practically all their raw material and export most of their finished products. The district is small as compared with the rest of Ireland but its life is more intense, both in its activity and in its self-conscious pride of prosperity. A coloured map of the rest of Ireland would show a vast grazing plain, with meadow and clover, pushing on steadily over strips of tilled land, which year by year shrink before the advance of the grass till they occupy but a narrow margin of the country. In 1891 these prairies covered more than two-thirds of the arable land in the country, and since then they have been perpetually growing.

Oxen have replaced the people of the land ; the old manufactures lie in ruins and the mill-wheels have mostly rotted away.

The declining population goes to show that agriculture under Irish conditions has not proved a sound basis for national existence, for while other countries were advancing by leaps and bounds this foremost Irish industry was at a standstill and showed but little increase in the value of trade from 1904 to 1914. In spite of the immense cost of freightage the cattle from the grazing lands are sent away as live stock and Ireland loses the profits and the employment which should be given by a host of industries which belong to agriculture, such as tanning, leather work, bone manure, candles, horn, etc.

On every side, in agriculture and in trade, the economic strength of Ireland has been diminished and the natural resources of the country disused. That the remedy lies in leaving it to Irishmen to develop their own country is proved by the success of the co-operative agricultural movement, which was opened by private effort in 1899 and was established by the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, founded in 1894. From the humblest beginnings it has already created 991 co-operative societies for dairy, agriculture, poultry, pig, and cattle industries, with credit banks and other activities which

have now a yearly turnover of £7,000,000 and a rate of increase of nearly £1,000,000 each year. While it has taught Irishmen self-reliance it has brought European methods even to the holdings on the Atlantic coast and has broken the old tyrannies of isolation, ignorance and despair. In this co-operation Ulster is united with the rest of Ireland in the closest fellowship and all political and religious parties work together in harmony.

There is no real or necessary antagonism between industrial and agricultural Ireland. Ulster indeed depends largely for her capital on the South and West, and all Ireland is proud of the success of the North-East as an Irish achievement.

No settlement of the Irish question can be complete which ignores both the past and present economic conditions in Ireland, and no form of self-government is likely to be successful which does not give to Ireland control over her own taxation, customs, excise, and trade policy without outside interference, except such as is necessitated by international agreements or treaties. This is evident from the fact that the true revenue of Ireland has never yet, under the present system of government, been ascertained, and without this knowledge it is impossible to make a national balance-sheet, or to know the true fiscal relations between Ireland and England. The future responsibility for Irish economic policy must rest on Irishmen, and full responsibility is only possible when there is complete control. Any attempt at divided powers over taxation between English and Irish Parliaments will only lead to fresh antagonisms and a prolonged struggle between the two countries. There is fear in some quarters that Ireland may use its new power to set up protective duties against other countries. We believe such action would not be in the interests of Ireland, but we recognize that free trade enforced by England against the will of an Irish Parliament can have no lasting value. In any case, the retention by Great Britain of fiscal powers over Ireland does not of itself provide any guarantee of the continuance of free trade. Ireland has nothing to lose and much to gain from the establishment of International Free Trade and will, we believe, gladly accept any International Trade agreements arrived at in the interests of the world's Peace.

If demanded by the Ulster minority, special economic safeguards may have to be devised to protect the special industries of N.E. Ulster from possible legislative interference, though there is every reason to believe that a definitely Irish trade policy would be more likely to develop rather than injure the one great industrial centre in Ireland at the present time.

The granting of fiscal autonomy to Ireland will raise the

question of the responsibility or otherwise of Ireland for the British National Debt, and the extent to which, if at all, an Irish Parliament ought to be made responsible for a share of the British National Debt which has accumulated since the Union. This raises many intricate and difficult considerations—many of which cannot be usefully referred to here and which would vary according to the status and the powers of the proposed Irish Parliament, but in any real settlement the following points must be remembered :

1. That since the Union Ireland has not economically prospered.
2. That it is admitted that Ireland has been taxed above her relative capacity as compared to England.
3. That it is undesirable to encumber a new Parliament with a National Debt unless such debt is balanced by real assets such as railways, harbours and public works handed over to the new Government.

(c) CULTURAL

Ireland has all the attributes of a nation. Her boundaries cannot be disputed. Her peoples from the earliest times have known the country by a single name, and given it an undivided affection. She has borne the marks of a distinct civilization. Through long ages she has been famous for work in gold and metal, in stone and in parchment. Her written history, compiled by her own scholars, is as old as that of England. She possesses an ancient and splendid literature. The work of her unbroken roll of learned scholars and poets for over a thousand years has, during the last three hundred years, been preserved by the devotion of the people, who in their darkest hour still laboured in their cabins to copy and continue the manuscript tradition left them by their fathers. There is no other instance in Europe of a zeal such as this. The national consciousness of the people, based on a great tradition, has never failed, and is now of passionate intensity.

This larger history of Ireland is unknown in England, to the loss of both countries. But there can be no understanding of the country unless we recognize the deepest passion of the race, the soul that has been fashioned in that long spiritual and intellectual history. Economic questions and political discontents are important, because until they are rightly settled the greater matters of material life are withered and broken. But after a century of conflicts over the material problems of land, and local government, and an Irish Parliament, the

national uprising of to-day has made it clear that the greater demand which lies above and beyond all others, is that Ireland shall have the power to establish a true national civilization, and a culture worthy of the tradition which is the proudest inheritance of the race.

Ireland desires "to possess her own soul, so that it may be at liberty and rest, and free to contribute to the higher development of neighbouring races and of the human race generally."*

* See Memorandum I. General Principles.