

Over taxation of Ireland

THE  
TAXATION OF IRELAND

SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

HON. EDWARD BLAKE, M.P.

(SOUTH LONGFORD)

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON 29TH MARCH, 1897

WITH

Introduction, Index and Tables

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED ON RESOLUTION OF THE  
IRISH PARLIAMENTARY PARTY  
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SEALY, BRYERS, AND WALKER  
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## Introduction.

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this speech by the HON. EDWARD BLAKE may fall into the hands of some not fully aware of the circumstances under which it was delivered, it is well to preface it with a few words of explanation.

"At various times" (I quote from the Report hereafter referred to of the Eleven Commissioners) "since the passing of the Act of Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland, complaints have been made that the financial arrangements between the two countries were not satisfactory, or in accordance with the principles of that Act, and that the resources of Ireland have had to bear an undue pressure of taxation.

"Inquiries into the truth of these allegations have frequently been called for, and Committees of the House of Commons were appointed in 1811, 1812, and 1815, to investigate the financial results which followed the passing of the Act of Union. Another Committee of the House of Commons was appointed in 1864, which took valuable evidence, collected much documentary information, and reported in the year 1865. Nothing practical, however, followed from the Report of that Committee, and complaints still continued. In the year 1890 Mr. Goschen, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, consented that a further inquiry should be made by another Committee of the House of Commons. The terms of reference to that Committee comprised several points, and amongst others 'the equity of the financial relations in regard to the resources and population of the Three Kingdoms'.

" was referred to them. This Committee was appointed too  
 " late in the session to make any substantial progress, and  
 " confined itself merely to calling for financial information.  
 " For various reasons the Committee was not re-appointed  
 " and a change of Government taking place in 1892, Mr  
 " Gladstone announced his willingness, in connexion with  
 " the Home Rule Bill of 1893, to have the financial  
 " relations between the two countries investigated by a  
 " Commission."

The Commissioners, appointed in May, 1894, were:—  
 The Right Hon. Hugh C. E. Childers (since deceased);  
 Lord Farrer, Lord Welby, The Right Hon. O'Connor Don,  
 Sir Robert G. C. Hamilton (since deceased); Sir Thomas  
 Sutherland, K.C.M.G., M.P.; Sir David Barbour, K.C.S.V.  
 The Hon. Edward Blake, M.P.; Bertram W. Currie, Esq.  
 W. A. Hunter, Esq., M.P.; C. E. Martin, Esq.; J.  
 Redmond, Esq., M.P.; Thomas Sexton, Esq., M.P.  
 Henry F. Slattery, Esq.; G. W. Wolff, Esq., M.P.

The following were the terms of reference:—"I  
 " inquire into the Financial Relations between Great  
 " Britain and Ireland, and their relative taxable capacity,  
 " and to report:—1. Upon what principles of comparison  
 " and by the application of what specific standards, the  
 " relative capacity of Great Britain and Ireland to bear  
 " taxation may be most equitably determined. 2. What  
 " so far as can be ascertained, is the true proportion, under  
 " the principles and specific standards so determined,  
 " between the taxable capacity of Great Britain and  
 " Ireland. 3. The history of the Financial Relations  
 " between Great Britain and Ireland at and after the  
 " Legislative Union, the charge for Irish purposes on the  
 " Imperial Exchequer during that period, and the amount  
 " of Irish Taxation remaining available for contribution to  
 " Imperial expenditure; also the Imperial expenditure to  
 " which it is considered equitable that Ireland should con-  
 " tribute."

The Commission reported late last year, and the result

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was laid before Parliament in a Blue Book, with accompanying two volumes of evidence. Of the thirteen surviving Commissioners, eleven (The O'Connor Don, Lord Farrer, Lord Welby, Mr. Blake, Mr. Currie, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Martin, Mr. Redmond, Mr. Sexton, Mr. Slattery, Mr. Wolff,) agreed as follows:—

" I. That Great Britain and Ireland must, for the purpose of this inquiry, be considered as separate entities.

" II. That the Act of Union imposed upon Ireland a burden which, as events showed, she was unable to bear.

" III. That the increase of taxation laid upon Ireland between 1853 and 1860 was not justified by the then existing circumstances.

IV. That identity of rates of taxation does not necessarily involve equality of burden.

" V. That whilst the actual tax revenue of Ireland is "about one-eleventh of that of Great Britain the relative taxable capacity of Ireland is very much smaller, and is "not estimated by any of us as exceeding one-twentieth."

The difference between this one-eleventh and one-twentieth amounts to about £2,750,000 per annum extra taxation.

Separate Reports were made: jointly by The O'Connor Don, Mr. Redmond, Mr. Martin, Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Wolff (28 pages); jointly by Lord Farrer, Lord Welby, and Mr. Currie, (22 pages); Lord Welby (7 pages); jointly by Mr. Sexton, Mr. Blake and Mr. Slattery (45 pages); Mr. Blake, Draft (3 pages); Sir David Barbour (18 pages); Sir Thomas Sutherland (10 pages); and a Draft Report by the deceased Chairman, Mr. Childers (62 pages).

All has been published as a Parliamentary Return [C 8262, 1896] with two volumes of evidence [C 7720, 1895, I and II].

The following general conclusions are arrived at in the able and exhaustive Report of Mr. Sexton:—"Having regard to the relative taxable capacity of Ireland (1) at the period of the Union, and (2) at the present time;



"also to the continual increase of British population, and  
 "more rapid multiplication of British wealth, contrasted  
 "with the decline of Irish manufacture and trade after the  
 "Union, and the great reduction of Irish population, manu-  
 "facturing industry, and agricultural income since the  
 "famine, it does not appear that Ireland's fair proportion  
 "of Imperial revenue collected since the Union amounted  
 "to more at the utmost than an average of 3 millions per  
 "annum; or a total, up to 1894, of about 280 millions.  
 "The revenue actually raised in Ireland during the period  
 "of the separate exchequers and 'contributed' since then  
 "(according to Treasury computations) has amounted to  
 "about 570 millions, or an average approximately of 6 mil-  
 "lions a year, being double the amount stated as the fair  
 "proportion of Ireland in view of her relative capacity."

The clearness with which Ireland's case was educed  
 from the mass of evidence is largely due to the ability of  
 Mr. Sexton's examination and cross-examination of the  
 witnesses, of which, said the Chairman, the Right Hon. The  
 O'Connor Don, "it would be impossible for me too highly  
 "to speak." "It may, perhaps," he added, "be invidious  
 "to mention any other name, but I feel so strongly that  
 "we are much indebted to another member of the Com-  
 "mission that I cannot refrain from mentioning him, I  
 "refer to the Hon. Edward Blake, M.P. To Mr. Blake's  
 "wise foresight, to his conciliatory address, to his large-  
 "minded views, and his clearness and precision in enun-  
 "ciating them, we are much indebted for having secured  
 "practical unanimity in what is called the Joint Report;  
 "and as Chairman of the Commission I feel bound to  
 "notice the important assistance he has rendered in bring-  
 "ing about that agreement which has proved of so much  
 "value."

The Report has excited widespread interest and agitation  
 in Ireland—all political parties being united on this ques-  
 tion. Interrogated regarding their intentions, Government  
 declined to remedy the grievance exposed, expressed itself

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dissatisfied with the inquiry as not covering the whole ground, and announced its intention of appointing a fresh Commission, the terms of reference to which would include a consideration of Imperial expenditure in Ireland, as a set off for excessive taxation. It, however, gave an opportunity for debate; and Mr. Blake, acting on behalf of the Irish Parliamentary Party, on 29th March, moved the resolution that will be found prefixed to his speech. A three days' debate followed. The motion was negatived by 317 votes to 157.

The speech delivered by Mr. Blake on that occasion was generally felt to be a masterly and comprehensive statement of the Irish case; and as a mark of their sense of its great and permanent value, and of the service to the National cause rendered by Mr. Blake in making it, it was unanimously resolved at a meeting of the Irish Party—

“That the speech delivered by the Hon. Edward Blake in moving the resolution on the Financial Relations between Great Britain and Ireland be printed and published at the expense of the Party.”

At the request of the Party, I have undertaken the task of seeing this speech through the press and arranging for its publication and distribution. It has been to me a congenial duty.

I have ventured to prefix an Index, and, with efficient assistance, to add some Tables illustrative of the argument.

It is to be hoped that this broad statement of Ireland's case will bring home to the minds of many, who have never before examined the question, a realization of the economic injustice under which Ireland has been suffering.

A. W.

DUBLIN, *May*, 1877.

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*"But remember when you have completed your system of impoverishment, that nature still proceeds in her ordinary course, that discontent will increase with misery."*

—EDMUND BURKE.

*"There is no debt with so much prejudice put off as that of justice."—PLUTARCH.*