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**The Ulster Nationalists**  
**and the Home Rule Crisis**

**A Powerful Letter from Mr. Joseph Devlin, M.P.**

**Every Lover of Ireland Must Look With Feelings of Despair to a Future in Which no Ray of Light Illumines the Clouded Horizon—Asks Are we to Throw Away the Golden Opportunity of Seeing a Free and United Ireland**

(From Ireland.)

In a letter to the Dublin Independent complaining of an unfair report of a meeting of the Belfast Nationalists, Mr. Joseph Devlin, M.P., sets forth the reasons for adopting the Lloyd George proposals:

It would, no doubt, be the ideal solution if Mr. Asquith could put the Home Rule Act in immediate operation in its entirety. But then, there are certain facts which must be faced, and which cannot be effaced by merely shutting our eyes to them. Ulster Unionists may be conciliated, who says they should be coerced? Does anyone light-heartedly propose to provoke another rebellion in the North, and if such were provoked, what hope would there be for many a long year of wiping out the fatal legacy it would leave behind? All Ulster, therefore, cannot be compelled against its will to come immediately under the control of a Home Rule Parliament.

Is there no middle course, leading by gentle suasion, and the powerful influence, of allied interests, that would bring the six counties of Ulster to follow the path that the Unionists in three Ulster counties are not unwilling to tread? Would not the immediate operation of Home Rule in twenty-six counties inevitably tend to draw the remaining six to seek the enormous advantage of complete identity of interest and administration with the rest of Ireland? The acceptance of Lloyd George's proposals by the Unionists of any attempt to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland.

Already Unionists in the South and West are crying out against exclusion in any shape or form. If Home Rule was put into immediate operation, would that hostility be any the less? Would it not be immensely strengthened? Would not all the Unionists in Leinster, Munster and Connaught, plus all the Unionists in the three Ulster counties, which had come under the Irish Parliament, be a mighty influence exerting its power with increasing intensity to get those who share their religious and political views in the remaining assembly in which they would exercise a great and, on many questions, perhaps, a dominating power? In the Imperial Parliament Ulster Unionists would be utterly hopeless and entirely negligible quantity. On the balance between Nationalist and Unionist representatives, the effectiveness of the Ulster Unionist Party at Westminster would be practically nil. On the other hand, in a native Parliament the same forces throughout the whole of Ireland would form a strong, cohesive and compelling influence at College Green. Self-interest would dictate to the Unionists of the six counties the advisability of joining hands with the rest of their co-religionists throughout the country. Reunion would be effected under conditions that would appeal to Protestant sentiment and afford powerful safeguards for Protestant interests, whilst Nationalists would gladly welcome into the councils of the nation men representing those great industrial concerns in the North-east which are such a valuable asset and of which all Ireland is so justly proud. Lloyd George's scheme thus puts into immediate operation forces that tend strongly to bring all Ireland into harmonious unity and co-operation. Might it not be that before the time came when the Imperial Conference would assemble immediately problem, that problem would already have largely solved itself?

**Settlement or Chaos**

In what position would the six counties be if Lloyd George's proposals are adopted? In exactly the same position as the thirty-two counties will be if they are rejected, with this difference; that if a settlement falls through, Ireland will be plunged into chaos; the forces of ascendancy will have the upper hand; English feeling will be antagonized, and Irish representatives in the Imperial Parliament will be forced into a position which, at a time when the whole Empire is fighting for its very existence, may be fraught with appalling disaster for the future of Ireland.

There can be no standing still, and there can be no progress. Every patriotic lover of his country must look with feelings of repitiation, almost despair, to a future in which no ray of light illumines the clouded horizon. That we should discard a

great opportunity for national appeasement and enfranchisement and walk blindly along the road plainly leading to defeat and disaster, seems incomprehensible.

There is not a single honest Nationalist devoted to the ideal of Ireland a Nation who would not view with abhorrence any proposal aimed at the partition of Ulster or any part of Ulster from the rest of the Fatherland. The thing is unthinkable. No one experiences the feeling of revulsion against any exclusion policy more keenly than I do; and it is because I have come to a clear conclusion that the only way to secure real and lasting unity is on the basis of the proposals before us that I appeal to my fellow-countrymen, particularly of my own province, to give a careful consideration to these proposals and to realize the immensity of the issues in any rash or hasty action.

Irishmen today are seething in revolt against the military despotism whose excesses have shocked and estranged public opinion throughout the world. Many of the leaders of the insurrectionary movement have been executed; nothing can undo their fate. But there are many others, both leaders and rank and file; condemned to long and weary years of imprisonment and penal servitude. Have we no care for these victims of a militarist Hun-like in severity? Any settlement of the Irish problem must involve an amnesty for these men. We cannot accept freedom while the victims of martial law remain in British dungeons. We have an opportunity to open the prison doors to those men, to welcome them back into a new Ireland, which has broken with an evil past, and has seen the last of revolutionary outbursts and repressive savagery. If no settlement is come to, feeling in Ireland must inevitably become more inflamed. What prospect will there be under such circumstances of the release of the brave but misguided youths who risked their lives in what they believed was Ireland's cause?

If the proposals now before the country are rejected, the Unionists of Ulster will set themselves determinedly to reorganize their forces against any scheme of Home Rule. They will no longer be committed to acceptance of the principle of Self-Government. They will have been immensely strengthened by the suicidal folly of the Nationalists in sacrificing the position of impregnable strength which a National Government, holding supreme authority over twenty-six counties, would confer. They will be able to apply themselves to the work of building up the industrial and commercial prosperity of Northeast Ulster and of increasing the political power in that portion of Ireland where they have been strengthening their position of recent years.

**The Golden Opportunity.**

Mr. Vesey Knox has pointed out that for fifty years Northeast Ulster has been becoming steadily more Protestant and less Irish. Are we to accelerate the process? And if, as some of the apostles of pessimism say, "Better wait for another fifty years," until Ulster has become almost completely Anglicized, and the Catholic Celtic section has grown correspondingly weak and impotent, what likelihood will there be then of bringing about the reunion of North and South that is now within our grasp? Meanwhile the rest of Ireland will be dissipating its energies, not in the great and beneficent work of building up a prosperous and self-governed nation, but in the difficult and possibly fruitless task of trying to get back the golden opportunity that we are asked today so recklessly to fling aside.

In the resolution passed by the Ulster Unionist Council, reference was made to a "definite" exclusion of six Ulster counties. Immediately the opponents of Home Rule seized upon this ambiguous adjective and interpreted it as meaning "permanent." As might be expected, the nation was told that Mr. John Redmond has misrepresented Lloyd George's proposals, and Irishmen were asked to discredit and disbelieve the explicit statement of the Irish leader. The precipitate rush to declare that Mr. Redmond was unworthy of credence is but an illustration of the whole spirit of reckless desperation with which the apostles of dissension are bent upon the work of National destruction. By a happy chance, the speech of the

Prime Minister at Ladybank has come just at the appropriate moment to nail this deliberate lie; but it is by lies like that the mind of Ireland is being poisoned, and that well-intentioned but ill-informed persons and public boards are being stampeded into condemnation of supposed schemes which have no more relation to Mr. Lloyd George's proposals for immediate Home Rule than Tenterden Steeple to the Goodwin Sands. "What is desired now," said Mr. Asquith, "is a provisional settlement. When the war comes to an end, when the reign of peace is re-established, we shall have to take stock as an Empire of our internal relations as an Empire. The fabric of Empire will have to be refashioned, and the relations not only between Great Britain and Ireland, but between the United Kingdom and our dominions, will of necessity be brought, and brought promptly, under close and connected review." Will it be better for Ireland to go into this conference with Home Rule in operation for twenty-six counties with the consent of the Ulster Unionists, with a new spirit of conciliation and co-operation growing up between North and South, with an Irish Parliament giving to our Unionist fellow-countrymen an object lesson in the marvelous opportunities for national development and progress that such an assembly affords; or will it be to our advantage as Irish Nationalists to come before that conference with our people in sullen revolt, the country honeycombed with anti-constitutional societies, and poisoned by a campaign of disruption and dissension, with all the healing influences of nearly forty years of a most successful constitutional movement, smashed and discredited, with racial passions aroused, in their most appalling intensity, and all the forces that have fought for Irish freedom amongst the English democracy disillusioned, embittered and antagonized by the fatal consequences of a rash and suicidal rejection of the greatest chance that has ever been offered to our people to win not only the freedom of their native land, but the friendly co-operation of our Unionist fellow-countrymen in building up a self-governed, a prosperous and, above all, a united Irish nation? This is the issue Ulster Conference will have to face. Let there be no misconception. There is no third alternative. The English people will give us anything that we can agree amongst ourselves to accept; but they will not shoot down Ulster Unionists at the behest of those who reject the olive branch now offered.

As I have pointed out, the extension of Home Rule to the six counties is not defeated, but merely delayed. The Nationalists in these counties will still have the full strength of the entire Nationalist representation of all Ireland to protect their interests, and there is the additional safeguard that, until their future is definitely settled, no contentious legislation affecting them can be passed through the Imperial Parliament. It is not pleasant for them to be asked to wait for a little while longer, but will their position be made pleasanter by having Home Rule denied to the rest of Ireland in the mean-



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