

## HOME RULE

## DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

In the House of Commons on March 30 Mr. John Redmond moved the following resolution:—That the present system of Government in Ireland is in opposition to the will of the Irish people, and gives them no voice in the management of their own affairs; that the system is consequently inefficient and extravagantly costly; that it does not enjoy the confidence of any section of the population; that it is productive of universal discontent and unrest, and is incapable of satisfactorily promoting the material and intellectual progress of the people; that the reform of Irish government is a matter vital to the interests of Ireland, and calculated generally to promote the well-being of the people of Great Britain, and in the opinion of this House the solution of the problem can only be attained by giving to the Irish people the legislative and executive control of all purely Irish affairs.

Mr. Redmond's speech was a splendid effort. He avoided the familiar and unanswerable arguments for Home Rule based upon the ruin of the country's industries, the financial injustice, the misgovernment, and the depopulation, and struck new ground by demonstrating as he did in masterly fashion that all the objections taken against the Irish demand in 1886 had lost their force. In the course of his speech he referred to the objections on the score of the incompetence of the Irish people to manage their own affairs. When the Local Government Act came into operation, he said, great obstacles were placed in the way of its successful working.

## The County Councils

were obliged to pension all officials on high scales. They had to face a new rate for technical instruction under the Act of 1899, and to take up their work under great difficulty, caused by inexperience and the tangled condition of local administration. Yet notwithstanding all that, and notwithstanding the fact that these county councils have set on foot and carried out great works in the shape of improvements of roads and other matters of that kind, taking Ireland as a whole, the rates have been reduced by these councils to the extent of 3d in the £ all over Ireland. It is interesting to remember in this connection that the President of the Local Government Board in England stated in answer to a question the other day, that the rural rates in England had been raised in the same period 1s in the £. The second great argument was that if Ireland got Home Rule legislation would be passed by an Irish Parliament to confiscate the property of the Irish landlords. Again the Unionist Party have themselves removed that argument. Take another of these bogies, that of religious bigotry. The English people were told that if the Irish people got control of their own affairs that power would be used as an engine of religious bigotry. I have heard in this House complaints made of the working of the County Councils as proof that that is likely to take place. I have heard members declare as a reproach against Ireland that in practically entirely Catholic parts of the country the County Councils have consisted in the majority of cases of Catholics. It is absurd to raise an argument of that kind. Apply that argument to England, where the proportions are reversed. What would be said if I denounced the English nation as a religiously intolerant nation because of the fact that although there are about two millions of Catholics in Great Britain, yet out of the 567 members returned to the House there are only five Catholics, and if I went on to confound them by saying that in Ireland, where the Protestants are in a small minority, out of 103 members elected 27 are Protestants, and that quite a number of them sit as members of this Party, elected by almost entirely Catholic constituencies? I can prove that if there is intolerance, it is not in

## The Catholic Parts of the Country.

I will give some instances. In Galway, where the Protestants are only six per cent. of the population, they hold 19 per cent. of all the paid offices in the gift of the County Council. In Cork the Protestants are ten per cent. of the whole, and they hold 23 per cent. of all the paid offices, and some of the most highly paid ones. In Cavan the Protestants are only 20 per cent., and they hold 47 per cent. of the paid offices. In Westmeath the Protestants are only nine per cent., and they possess 33 per cent. of the paid offices. Turning to the other side of the picture, I find that in the Northern portion of Ireland the story is exactly

the reverse. In Armagh the Catholics are 45 per cent. of the whole population, but they have only 6 per cent. of the paid offices. In Tyrone, the Catholics have actually a majority of the population—55 per cent.—but the County Council, for some reason or another, has a majority of Unionists and Protestants, and the Catholics only hold 20 per cent. of the offices. In Fermanagh, the Catholics are 33 per cent., and they only hold 23 per cent. of the paid offices. Surely these figures are a fair and a powerful argument for me to use. If I wished to emphasise it further I might say that recently an eminent Protestant divine, Dr. Meade, the present Bishop of Cloyne and Ross, speaking on a public occasion, and proposing the health of the Lord Lieutenant, assured his Excellency that although they might differ in their political views, they lived together in peace and goodwill, and were all lovers of their country. The Moderator of the General Assembly of Presbyterians, the Rev. Dr. M'Kean, speaking last June, dealing with the attitude of the Southern Catholics towards Presbyterians, said all the ministers in the South, with one of two exceptions, were unanimous in speaking highly of the toleration and goodwill shown towards them by those who differed from them in religious faith. I claim, therefore, that the argument drawn from alleged religious bigotry has been utterly destroyed by the experience of the last twenty years. Another argument alleged was the absolute irreconcilability of the landlords, the gentry, and the professional classes of Ulster. The last twenty years has seen an extraordinary change going on in Ireland, and not the least remarkable is the change that has gone on in Ulster. There has arisen in Ulster.

## A New Democratic Body.

The hon. member for South Belfast (Mr. Sloan) will know what I mean—which if it has not come directly and fully to Home Rule, has broken loose from the old official moorings, and is every day gaining power and drifting in the direction of Self-Government.

In his peroration Mr. Redmond said:—We ask from you the power to develop. We ask also the power to heal. There are many wounds to be healed in Ireland, and it may be said that although the wounds inflicted by this country in the past have been many and grievous, yet, probably, the deadliest wounds have been those inflicted by race or class hatreds and the religious dissensions of Ireland's own sons themselves. Our answer to that is that every class hatred, every religious discord or feud has had its origin in the English government of Ireland. Give us, we ask, the power to heal these feuds. Ireland herself alone can do it.

The motion was seconded by Mr. A. R. Rainey (Kilmarnock), and an amendment was moved by Earl Percy.

Mr. Birrell (Chief Secretary for Ireland) said there was not a man in the House who did not know perfectly well that sooner or later there would have to be some substantial modification made in our relations with Ireland. He wished to impress upon the House that, apart from national feelings and things of that kind, he found this fact staring him in the face, that there was no time in the House of Commons to do the things which Ireland imperatively needed, and which it was admitted must be done unless misfortunes and miseries were to dog her path, and unless her final connection with this country was to be her everlasting shame.

Then came speeches by Mr. Barnes (Labor), Mr. Balfour (Opposition), Captain Donelan, Mr. Asquith, and others.

Mr. Asquith's speech drew a stinging reply from Mr. T. M. Healy, who said that the news of the Chancellor's attitude would be received in Ireland with profound disappointment. We are accustomed (said he) in Ireland to disappointments. For centuries we have been battling, but never have you wrung from us one note or accent of surrender. We are not enemies of the English people. Our motives have been impugned, our careers have been searched by that Party. We have been put to the most terrible ordeal to which men were ever put by being indicted on the forged letter, deprived of a jury, dragged to a foreign country before three hostile judges, our careers were arraigned, and the only thing I regret was that our advocate was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was on Ireland that the right hon. gentleman first came into notice. Today he is an important man; to-morrow he may be a god, but we shall not worship at his shrine.

Eventually Earl Percy's amendment was rejected, and the original motion, with the addition of the words 'subject to the supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament,' was carried by 313 votes to 157.

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