

course.' That is too sanguine an assumption—for assumption it largely is, and not an assured fact. The most that can be said is that under proportional representation such an achievement would, at least, be possible, which, under existing circumstances it is not. We have no desire to minimise the greatness of the gain, but there is no real advantage in counting one's chickens before they are hatched, or in painting the picture in too roseate a hue. Catholics do not necessarily vote for a Catholic candidate merely because he is a Catholic—he has to be acceptable on other grounds. There are two or three electorates in the Dominion where Catholics are sufficiently numerous to make it easily possible for them, if they were thoroughly solid and united, to turn the scale in favor of a Catholic candidate, but so far they have not succeeded in doing so, though Catholic candidates of extreme ability have presented themselves. The principle of proportional representation has been in operation in Tasmania for some seven years, but it has not so far enabled Catholics to do much in the way of redressing their educational grievances, or ushered in any suggestion of a Catholic millennium. In actual experience the most that we might reasonably hope to secure under proportional representation would be, say, three or four thoroughly Catholic representatives, and that, we readily concede, would mark an immense advance on existing conditions. Mr. O'Regan is also, we think, something less than just in his estimate of the relative ineffectiveness of direct action under our present electoral system. Under this system, 'Catholics,' we are told, 'are practically as powerless to make their influence felt in politics as if they did not exist.' That is manifestly an exaggeration; and is not consistent with the writer's later statement that 'it is well proved that the greatest political landslide is frequently produced by the turnover of a few votes in each electorate.'

If we understand him aright, Mr. O'Regan's suggestion is that political action or effort in any and every form is, under our present electoral system utterly useless, and should be absolutely dropped, and that Catholics should concentrate their energies exclusively on securing proportional representation. We are to put all our eggs into one basket, and until we get that safely home, we are, apparently, meekly to allow ourselves to be the victims of galling injustice and odious discrimination *ad libitum*. He is a bold man and a sanguine who imagines that Catholics could be induced to accept such a programme as their sole policy at a time when injustice is being piled upon injustice, and when injury is accompanied by something closely bordering upon insult. The objections to Mr. O'Regan's proposal, viewed as the immediate, sole, and settled policy of the Catholic body, are briefly: (1) Proportional representation is, for the average elector, a little difficult to understand; and it will be hard to generate enthusiasm for a rallying-cry which the bulk of the people imperfectly comprehend, and the prospect of whose realisation, as is clearly to be seen, must stretch into the very dim and distant future. (2) The mere fact of Catholics making proportional representation their sole and formal policy would of itself be sufficient to arouse widespread if not universal opposition to the movement, and make the task of securing the reform doubly difficult. Mr. O'Regan has sought to guard against that by urging that 'of course the reader will realise that in demanding proportional representation Catholics would not be asking something for themselves alone.' That is perfectly true; but we are not dealing with an enlightened and impartial body of electors whose sole concern is the common good. We are dealing with a public that is largely hostile to Catholic claims; and the fact of Catholics making proportional representation their official policy would be an immediate signal for the anti-Catholic elements in the community to take up arms against the movement, or at best to hang back from supporting it. The fact that Catholics are flying the flag for proportional representation can, it would be argued, bear only one interpretation. They want it, it would be said, for what

they expect to get out of it—and that would be sufficient. (3) It would be unwise and dangerous, not to say suicidal, to give the order to cease firing, and to leave the enemy in undisturbed possession of the field. It would be unwise and unpolitic, because it is doubtful if our people as a whole would pay much respect to such an order. It is not in human nature—and especially in Irish Catholic human nature—to submit indefinitely to kicks and cuffs from the politicians, and to take such punishment lying down. It would be dangerous, because we cannot afford to go staggering on under our present heavy disabilities; still less can we afford to run the risk of fresh additions to our burden. What such a policy of quiescence and do-nothing would mean may be demonstrated by a single illustration. Under present conditions our Catholic children are to be excluded from the benefits of medical inspection, provided, without exception, for all the other children of the State. If there were to be the slightest sign of slackening in our immediate endeavor to have this odious wrong righted, the nefarious provision would become stereotyped in our education system, and a whole generation of children would suffer. To ask Catholics to tamely submit to such a state of things—and this is only one instance out of many—until the goal of proportional representation should be attained, is to ask what is unreasonable and impossible.

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To sum up: In our judgment no case has been made out for the definite and total abandonment of a policy of political action, and we cannot see that the surrender of our traditional fighting policy is in any way necessary in order to secure what Mr. O'Regan has in view. We are, and have long been, ardent and thorough-going supporters of the reform which he so ably and enthusiastically champions; but we are not prepared to submit to repeated and multiplied injustice and to wait till somewhere about Anno Domini 1950 before we can hit back. As we have said, we do not see that there is the slightest necessity to discover the two policies. Let us continue to make the best possible use of the means at present at our disposal; and we are prepared to add thereto the two following recommendations: (1) To keep a watchful eye on the present statutory provision for the election, by a system of proportional representation, of members of the Legislative Council, and to use all possible means to prevent that valuable measure from becoming a dead letter; and (2) to work quietly but determinedly, and in conjunction with other interested organisations, to effect such a reform of our electoral system as will enable us to secure by our own strength at the polls that electoral representation which under the present system we frankly admit we have shown ourselves unable to obtain.

Notes

To Our Readers

We draw the attention of our readers to the serial story, *Phileas Foe, Attorney*, which, by an arrangement with the *Free Press*, we commence in this issue. This story is written by a well-known Catholic authoress, Anna Sadlier. We feel sure that it will prove interesting.

What the Men Want *

A Territorial officer in the firing line in France sends a letter to the *Westminster Gazette*, which seems to show that our political solicitude for the men at the front is very largely misdirected. 'It seems so ludicrous to me—out here in this nightmare country—to read in the papers of all this agitation and fuss about the new register and a General Election and "One Gun, One Vote," and so on. If people at home really think that our men are worrying about being temporarily disfranchised they have got the whole show in the wrong perspective. My men are worrying about