

RIGHT OF PUBLIC MEETING IN IRELAND

POSITION OF IRISH PRESS.

The new Defence of the Realm Order which prohibits (1) the holding of public meetings without a permit, and (2) the publication in the newspapers of reports of meetings for which no permit was obtained, has come in for a storm of criticism in Ireland. The new Order is described as "erratic and impossible despotism." Editors do not see how the papers can be expected to comply with the order, and claim that such an arbitrary exercise of power would not be permitted in Germany. The almost unanimous newspaper opinion (outside the Irish Party organs) is that the measure is directed solely against Sinn Fein. At first, the National Party decided not to apply for permits for the meetings of August 15, but subsequently permits in most cases were asked for. The Sinn Fein Party applied for no permits and held their meetings all over the country where a few only were suppressed by the police, total suppression being impossible.

We quote a few opinions from the Irish press on the order and its intended and possible effects.

"The Irish Executive have given the coercion screw another twist," says the *Freeman's Journal*. "In future newspapers in this country will be precluded from printing reports of public meetings, however lawful, whose organisers refuse to ask the Government for permits. . . . If such meetings are held any report which appears in a newspaper, though the matter published be wholly innocent, will expose that paper to as grave risks as if it used its columns to reveal the secret plans of General Foch."

It is pointed out also that the prohibition is issued under the D.O.R.A., which was passed purely for the purposes of the war. Not even Lord French could contend that the meetings, reports of which were now to be penalised, could interfere with the effective prosecution of the war.

What the Government now demand is a grossly illegitimate power to control, at their absolute discretion, the meetings of their political opponents in Ireland, so that not only shall the right of free speech be abrogated on the eve of a General Election, . . . but that the press shall be forbidden to place the issue . . . before the electors."

The *Irish Independent* says: "We believe that the Party will not be slow to take advantage of the muzzling of Sinn Fein and the comparative freedom which is . . . ensured to Mr. Dillon and his supporters. The only gathering interfered with on Lady Day was Mr. Dillon's public meeting at Omagh, and the police were moved to act in that instance because if they suppressed the Sinn Fein meeting and permitted Mr. Dillon's to be held, the discrimination would be so patent that it would tell against the leader of the Irish Party. But the stage management of the performance at Omagh was rather too crude. Though Mr. Dillon's public meeting was not held, he was allowed by special permission of the authorities to receive addresses in the Foresters' Hall, and he took advantage of the occasion to deliver there the speech which was meant for the public meeting, and which occupied several columns of his organ on the following day. Mr. Devlin's meeting at Monaghan was held under

permit, and the three-column report of his oration could not have been affected by the new Order. Mr. Nugent's Crossmaglen meeting, also held under police permit, could not have been affected by the Order. If the truth were known, we believe that other party meetings in Ulster on Lady Day were held under like conditions, and so would not have been prejudiced by the Order. Yet we find that the speeches delivered in these circumstances were mainly devoted to vilifying Sinn Fein, and, will it be believed, denouncing the Government for introducing the permit rule which was alleged to favor Sinn Fein and helping to kill the 'constitutional movement.'"

The *Waterford News* writes:—"The Government was recommended by an English newspaper this week to give Mr. Dillon's party a clear field. This undoubtedly has been done already. The party is allowed to hold meetings without any effective military or police interference, in spite of the Order proclaiming all public meetings in Ireland; whilst, on the other hand, Sinn Fein meetings are bloodily menaced, and often cannot be held, and the speeches of Father O'Flanagan [acting president Sinn Fein] and other revered and honorable gentlemen are entirely suppressed.

"In this way the Party is getting so much rope that it will no doubt end by hanging itself. For instance, by way of acknowledging the kind attentions of the Government on his behalf, Mr. Dillon at Omagh shamelessly announced that what he wanted was a *continuance of the Union with Great Britain.*"

Most of the Irish provincial papers write in a similar strain. The *Irishman* charges Mr. Dillon with running away from the pre-arranged issue in Omagh by applying for a permit. The *Armagh Guardian* states that inasmuch as the Sinn Fein leaders are all in prison, the National Party have the field to themselves. The *Ulster Herald* declares that the country is "fled up with meaningless platitudes about the 'old flag,' 'old platform,' and 'old cause,' and awaits but the opportunity of consigning the lot to the limbo of forgotten things, at the General Election."

FAREWELL TO A SISTER OF ST. JOSEPH.

Sister Gaetano, who has been Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph's Convent, Arrowtown, for the past 21 years, left for Sydney on Monday last (says the *Lake County Press* of November 14). To mark their appreciation of Sister Gaetano's services during her lengthy connection with the local Convent School the members of St. Patrick's Church assembled in the schoolroom on Sunday morning last to wish her goodbye and to make her a presentation. In presenting Sister Gaetano with a well-filled purse Father Corcoran expressed the regret of the congregation and of the parents of the children attending the school at Sister Gaetano's departure, and wished her a pleasant trip to Australia and every happiness in the future. On behalf of the pupils attending the school Miss Grace Cotter read an address and presented Sister Gaetano with a sum of money with which to buy some memento. Sister Gaetano feelingly returned thanks for both presentations.

It happens many times that we seem much deceived in others because we first deceived ourselves.

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