

The Ulster Legend: The Manoeuvres of James

The Ulster Legend received a rough handling from Mr. Phillip Snowden, ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Home Office presented a supplementary estimate of £1,250,000 for a grant in aid of the revenues of the Government of Northern Ireland. Incidentally, Mr. Snowden made it clear that the Six-County Parliament could not justify its existence, since from the day of its establishment until now, it had proved a constant drain upon the revenues of Great Britain. It appears that the Northern Parliament could not carry on without grants from the Imperial Parliament, a fact which proves that it is not an Ulster Parliament at all, but is merely a branch office of the Imperial Parliament, the bridge-head which enables Great Britain to hold a place in Ireland.

Mr. Snowden said it was an extraordinary proceeding to be asked to give effect to this new estimate without one word of explanation or justification, although it could be well understood why there was no anxiety or enthusiasm on the part of the Home Office or the Treasury to explain it. It was ostensibly a vote for the Special Constabulary of Northern Ireland, but in fact it was nothing of the sort. If it were permitted by parliamentary usage, he would describe it by a very ugly word. This proposal was the latest concession which had been ground by the Government of Northern Ireland out of the British Exchequer without any justification whatever, and quite illegally. From the time of the passing of the Act of Parliament conferring Self-Government on Northern Ireland the British Treasury had been subjected to constant demands from Ulster for illegal financial assistance.

Origin of Colwyn Committee.

These demands had become so intolerable that in November, 1922, when the present Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer, it was suggested that the whole question should be referred to a special committee or tribunal. That was subsequently done, and later it became known as the Colwyn Committee. It was also agreed that this committee should finally settle all financial questions between Northern Ireland and Britain so as to put a stop to these persistent demands from the Government of Northern Ireland. Sir James Craig himself agreed to that, and when Mr. Baldwin wrote accepting the terms of reference to this Committee, Sir James Craig in reply reminded Mr. Baldwin that he had omitted to state the very important matter that the findings of this Committee were to be binding on both parties.

Treasury Blackmailed.

The Treasury was blackmailed into paying for a policeman for every six families. The Government of Ireland Act provided that any grant out of the public moneys provided by the Imperial Parliament for Special Constabulary purposes should cease. Therefore it was illegal for that House to make the grant proposed. The British Treasury had invariably resisted this demand until the

pressure upon it by its political friends became so strong that it was unable to continue its resistance. The British Treasury had no full information about this Special Constabulary. He reminded the House that there was a note below the Vote stating that the money was to be paid into the Northern Ireland Exchequer as a contribution to the North of Ireland arising out of the present exceptional circumstances. The House was asked to vote this sum of one and a quarter millions and to hand it over to the Government of Northern Ireland without any guarantee and without any assurance as to how the money would be spent. It would be given, not for the purpose of maintaining law and order, but for an entirely different purpose. The information a few months ago was that there were 3000 Royal Ulster Constabulary in place of the Royal Irish Constabulary, of whom something like 2500 were formerly stationed in the Six Counties. Since 1921 there had been a large force of Special Constabulary maintained notwithstanding the provisions to which he had referred, and these had been maintained almost wholly at the cost of the British taxpayer. In 1922 the British grant was £2,700,000 and in 1924 £1,500,000. This Constabulary force was entirely under the control of the Ulster Government. It was believed the men numbered 35,000. Nine thousand of these were whole-time men, and the rest received a retaining fee. There was a full-time policeman for every 160 of the population of Northern Ireland—that was a full-time policeman for every 30 families. If they included the Special Constabulary they got a policeman for every six families in Northern Ireland. (Laughter.)

"Illegal" and "Backdoor."

What was the explanation? It was that these Special Constabulary were neither needed for, nor were they used for, the maintenance of law and order in Northern Ireland. It was a backdoor way of illegally getting money from the British Exchequer.

Sir James Craig's Manoeuvres.

It would be well to remember that when he was dealing with the setting up of the Colwyn Committee he mentioned that Sir James Craig called the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the agreement that the recommendations should be accepted by both parties. The report of that Committee conferred substantial advantages on Ulster by modifying the scale of the Imperial contribution. The previous Government to the Labor Government accepted that report, but as soon as ever that report had been received Sir James Craig began to make an appeal to the British Treasury for concessions which he had failed to establish before the Colwyn Committee. He sprang a further demand for assistance from the British Treasury for unemployment insurance. During the whole time he (Mr. Snowden) was at the Treasury Sir James was pressing that demand, and only a week or two before he left he made an imperative demand—not directly to himself,

because Sir James carefully avoided coming into contact with him. Sir James wrote to him, and he was asked to come over and see him (Mr. Snowden) and discuss the matter. Sir James never came, but he went to the other Ministers of the Labor Government, and then wrote to him to say that he had their assurance that they would agree that this grant should be placed upon the estimates. Sir J. Craig's demand for assistance on behalf of unemployed insurance was submitted to his (Mr. Snowden's) predecessor, and three weeks before he (Mr. Snowden) took office that demand was rejected on the ground that it would be illegal without alteration of the relations under which Northern Ireland and Great Britain operated.

A "Special Constabulary" Blind.

It was quite true that the Government which the Labor Government succeeded had provisionally agreed to place in that year's estimate a sum of £1,000,000 under the heading "Special Constabulary," but this was only done when they knew that their days were numbered. Up to last October there had never been a suggestion to the Government of Ulster that the grant under that head for the present year should be more than £1,000,000. How came it to be £1,250,000? It was perfectly obvious why the grant had been raised by £250,000 since November last. Sir James Craig had not been able to get a special grant towards the relief of unemployment, and that explained why another £250,000 had been placed on that vote, under the head of "Special Constabulary." There were charges which Ulster members did not like to see brought to light. It would be urged that the vote was simply for the sake of preserving law and order in Northern Ireland—that was to say that Great Britain had to find funds sufficient to maintain one policeman for every six families in Northern Ireland. That little statement of fact entirely disposed of the contention that this sum was needed for that purpose. He did not expect that the House would reject the vote. The Government had numbers to carry it. But if it were submitted to any impartial body of men to consider the facts he was confident that no such tribunal could be constituted which would not come to a unanimous decision against the proposal.

The vote was carried by 233 votes to 112.

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