

## Current Topics

### A Notable Victory

In another column we publish the text of the agreement signed by the English and Irish delegates who pledged themselves to recommend it for acceptance to their respective parliaments. The terms as cabled to us were welcomed with much satisfaction by practically all sections of the community. They represent a remarkable advance on anything hitherto offered by England, and if they failed to satisfy all Sinn Fein's demands they were at any rate a notable gain, and were hailed as an Irish victory. People were misled by early reports, and many took it that the signatures affixed to the document were to all intents and purposes a real ratification. To make clear the real force of what was signed we here quote from *Old Ireland*, October 18, what is an authoritative view of the position of the delegates: "The conference is not a conference to make a settlement, but to explore the possibility of a settlement, and, as we pointed out last week, in the event of such a possibility becoming an actuality, neither party could carry it through without reference to their respective countries. If, and when, the agreement is come to, then there will be ample opportunity for discussion and criticism." From this it is clear that what the delegates signed had no binding force on their respective parliaments, and none on the respective peoples until ratified by the parliaments.

### The Free State

To some people the name chosen came as a surprise. But those amongst us who have followed the Sinn Fein papers welcomed it with delight as a further sign of victory. It was pointed out during the past few years that the name *Saor Stadt* (Free State) was more in keeping with the ancient Irish regime than *Poblacht* (Republic). We have also heard that at the recent reunion of the new Dail Eireann the oath administered was one of fealty to the Saor Stadt Eireann. Consequently there is no need for even the most ardent spirit to feel disappointed because the title of *Poblacht*, or Republic, has been dropped. The new title expresses identity with the ancient Irish State, and is in accord with the aims of Sinn Fein. Its adoption rather than that of "Dominion" is one more sign of victory. Note too that it was assumed as the result of a Treaty between Ireland and Great Britain. Some people are trying to minimise the value of such things, but we can leave them in peace.

### The Oath of Allegiance

Another matter that calls for comment is the form of the oath. Sinn Fein would never yield as long as there was question of taking an oath to be faithful to the King of England. Ireland as a Nation never did owe any allegiance to England, and it was a matter of vital principle that there should be firmness on this particular point. Remember how our papers used to tell us some time ago that de Valera was a moderate man who was controlled by extremists like Michael Collins. Well, the acceptable form of oath was proposed by Michael Collins in the end. It affirmed primarily and directly the allegiance of Irishmen to Ireland, and secondarily and *contingently* faithfulness to the King as head of the Empire into which Ireland would come by virtue of the Treaty. Once more, certain critics try to minimise the value of this distinction, but the fact that it has its constitutional weight is best manifested by the dissatisfaction of Orange Ulster at its wording. Any reader can see for himself that the text bears out our interpretation:

*I do solemnly swear my true faith and allegiance to the constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established, and that I will be faithful to George V., his heirs and successors, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland*

*with Great Britain and her adherence to the membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.*

### The Substance

Another disappointed critic has had the temerity to assert that Sinn Fein might as well have accepted the terms offered five months ago, as they were practically the same as those now accepted. Readers will recall that we pointed out how the former terms did not give Ireland anything even approaching control of her own affairs. And our criticism has since been supported by such important papers as *Steud's*, the *London Nation*, the *Irish Bulletin*, etc., etc. The former proposals were, like the original Act of Union, intended to secure the economic domination of England and to strangle Irish industries. As Mitchel pointed out long ago, when dealing with the Union, to withhold the right of protection from Ireland was to render her unable to compete with the established and wealthy firms of England. The terms offered and rightly rejected five months ago had exactly the same purpose as those of the Act of Union, namely, to prevent Ireland from controlling her own affairs. The present agreement shows that Sinn Fein has won a magnificent victory on nearly all the essential points, and that the Free State represents far and away more than Parnell or Grattan ever dreamed of attaining. Ireland is now to be independent and free, in deed as well as in name. She is to control her own finance, to regulate her tariffs, and to collect and impose her own taxes. England has for the first time been forced to give way on these fundamental and essential rights of a free nation. Had such rights not been won we should at once write the agreement as a failure; the fact that they have been won is in itself the substance of freedom. Control of her own army and navy has also been won by Ireland, and this again is a victory which no previous party ever came within measurable reach of.

### Shortcomings

Our readers will recall that de Valera always insisted that the basis of any settlement he would accept for the Irish people must be the principle of Self-Determination, i.e., the right of the people to determine their own form of government without any outside interference. Now the document we are considering goes a long way, but does it grant Self-Determination? First there is the question of saddling Ireland with a share of a debt incurred in a war that in no way concerned her. Perhaps that is a minor point and not worth dwelling on. But there is a more serious matter. England's arbitrary establishment of an artificial region called "Ulster" is still maintained. England will not break down what she unjustly set up; having deliberately fomented the hatred of the Orangemen and organised a hostile minority within Ireland she still persists in holding that that little minority—the result of *outside interference*—is justified in breaking up the unity of Ireland. Is this granting Ireland the right of Self-Determination without any outside interference? Again, the document does not provide for a satisfactory and final solution of the "Ulster" problem; it leaves a running sore unhealed. Is it impossible that at some future date mischievous English capitalists might once more organise trouble between "Ulster" and the rest of Ireland, and that England should once more use press and platform to persuade the world that Irish conditions were such that she was justified in making a scrap of paper of the constitution of the Irish Free State? Do not say that such a possibility is not worth thinking about. Where the life of a Nation is at stake every possibility is worth considering. And, unfortunately for England, her past record in the matter of keeping agreements and treaties with Ireland is not good enough to guarantee her future fidelity. It seems to us that although the document is as it stands a substantial measure of independence, yet we can hardly say that it gives to the Irish people the right of Self-Determination. And we know that on this right de Valera, the most consistent