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C A B I N E T.FIRST REPORT OF CABINET COMMITTEE ON
THE IRISH QUESTION.

1. The Cabinet Committee appointed to make proposals for dealing with the Irish question have made considerable progress with their task. They have not yet examined its financial features - but before entering upon this question and on matters of detail they are anxious to know whether the Cabinet will approve of the fundamental basis of the scheme on which they themselves are now agreed.
2. The Committee are agreed that in view of the situation in Ireland itself, of public opinion in Great Britain and still more of public opinion in the Dominions and the United States of America, they cannot recommend the policy either of repealing or of postponing the Home Rule Act of 1914. In their judgment it is essential, now that the war is over, and that the Peace Conference has dealt with so many analogous questions in Europe, that the Government should make a sincere attempt to deal with the Irish question once and for all.
3. When the Committee came to consider the problem of dealing with the demand for Home Rule in Ireland in its practical aspects they found themselves limited in two directions. On the one hand, the Government was committed against any solution which would break up the unity of the Empire. On the other, it was committed that Ulster must not be forced under the rule of an Irish Parliament against its will. The first condition, therefore, excludes any proposal for allowing Ireland or any part of Ireland to establish an independent republic; the second precludes them from again attempting what has so often failed in the past, the establishment by the action of the Imperial Parliament of a single Parliament for all Ireland on the lines of the Home Rule Acts of 1886, 1893 and 1914.
4. After some preliminary discussion it appeared to the Committee that there were three possible courses before them:
 - (a) The first was to establish a Home Rule Parliament for all Ireland, and providing for the exclusion of some part of Ulster either by the clean cut, or by allowing the people of Ulster to vote themselves out by county option or some system of plebiscite:
 - (b) The second was to create a single Parliament for Ireland, but to secure Ulster against forced Dublin control, either by the constitution of an Ulster Committee within that Parliament possessed of veto powers so far as the application of Irish legislation and administration to Ulster was concerned, or by the artificial over-representation of Ulster in the Irish Parliament on the lines suggested by a considerable section of the

Irish Convention of 1918.

- (c) The third was to establish one Parliament for the three Southern provinces and a second parliament for Ulster, together with a Council of Ireland composed of members of the two Irish Parliaments, to discharge certain immediate functions, but mainly to promote as rapidly as possible, and without further reference to the Imperial Parliament the union of the whole of Ireland under a single legislature.

5. So far as the first of these alternatives is concerned the Committee was in some doubt as to whether in view of the Government election declaration of November 22nd 1918 the policy of exclusion by plebiscite or county option was possible for the present Government. That declaration reads as follows:-

"We regard it was one of the first obligations of British statesmanship to explore all practical paths towards the settlement of this grave and difficult question, on the basis of self-government. But there are two paths which are closed - the one leading to a complete severance of Ireland from the British Empire, and the other to the forcible submission of the six counties of Ulster to a Home Rule Parliament against their will. In imposing these two limitations, we are only acting in accordance with the declared views of all English political leaders."

6. Apart, however, from this consideration the Committee decided against the policy of exclusion on its merits. If the policy of exclusion is to be based upon county option or some form of plebiscite, it is open to the following objections. Firstly, that the area which would probably thus be excluded would almost certainly be administratively unworkable. Secondly, that if an election or plebiscite were fought on the issue of exclusion it would infallibly inflame religious and political passion in Ireland and do more to partition Ireland in spirit and temper and hinder eventual Irish unity than any separation imposed from outside could do. Thirdly, that it would divide Ireland on purely religious lines. On the other hand, if the policy of exclusion is applied to the six counties or the whole province of Ulster it would leave large nationalist majorities under British rule, which would clearly infringe the principle of self-determination. Finally, the policy of exclusion is open to one general objection of the most serious kind. It involves the retention of British rule in some part of Ireland. There is good reason to doubt whether it would ever be possible to convince Irishmen themselves or Dominion or American opinion that Great Britain was sincere in its policy of Home Rule unless it withdraws its control from the domestic affairs of Ireland altogether. British rule in the domestic affairs of Ireland has been the root of the Home Rule movement from start to finish. If it is retained, anywhere in Ireland the opponents of Great Britain will be able to say either that Great Britain is ruling nationalist majorities against their will, or that it is giving its active support to Ulster in its refusal to unite with the rest of Ireland.

7. As regards the second of the alternatives, the Committee were exceedingly doubtful whether it could be reconciled with the Prime Minister's undertaking not to coerce Ulster under the rule of an Irish Parliament. On this point they would like his ruling. But in any event they decided against this plan. The proposal for the constitution of an Ulster Committee within an Irish Parliament possessed of veto powers over Irish legislation and administration in so far as Ulster was concerned, was worked out last year in a Draft Bill known as Bill B. The Committee are satisfied that this proposal would prove quite unworkable in practice, even if the population of Ulster would accept it as being within the Prime Minister's pledge. It would enable the Ulster Committee to block and stultify the work of the Irish Government and Parliament, without enabling it to develop Ulster itself according to the ideas of the Ulster people. Similarly the Committee are opposed to the proposal for the artificial over-representation of Ulster in an Irish Parliament. They do not believe that such proposals could survive parliamentary or public criticism in view of the great advance of democratic sentiment and practice since 1914. Nor do they think the method of allowing a minority to override or block the will of a majority could really promote harmony and good will in the actual working of an all Ireland parliament.

8. Both these expedients for achieving Irish unity are, in the opinion of the Committee vitiated by the same defect. They assume that it is within the power of the Imperial Parliament to impose unity on Ireland. That is only true if the Act of Union is maintained in its entirety. The Imperial Parliament can compel Irishmen to govern themselves by the simple expedient of withdrawing its own officials. But once it gives Ireland self-government it cannot compel Irishmen to unite. Irish unity can then only come from unity in Ireland itself.

9. The Committee have, therefore, decided to recommend to the Cabinet the third of the alternatives enumerated above. They consider that the first element in the new Home Rule Bill should be the setting up on a definite date of two Parliaments, one for the province of Ulster, and one for the three Southern provinces, and the complete withdrawal of British rule from all Ireland in all matters not specially reserved as hereinafter shown as from that date.

10. The Committee were influenced in coming to this decision by three principal considerations. In the first place, their proposal gets rid of the tap root of the Irish difficulty by providing for the complete withdrawal of British rule from the whole of Ireland in the sphere of its domestic government. It thus meets the fundamental demand of the overwhelming majority of Irishmen ever since the days of O'Connell. Secondly, it is entirely consistent both with the fact that there is a majority in Ulster as opposed to Dublin rule as the nationalist majority in Ireland is opposed to British rule - the fact which has wrecked the three preceding Home Rule Acts.

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Acts. It is further entirely consistent with the Government pledges to Ulster. The Committee's proposal that Ulster should be called upon to govern itself cannot in any sense be called coercion and as will be seen Ulster will retain full representation in the Imperial Parliament according to population and therefore its citizenship in the United Kingdom. The proposal will certainly deeply affect Ulster. But if the withdrawal of British rule and the establishment of local legislature in Ulster is necessary in order to heal the feud which has estranged Ireland and Great Britain for so many decades, and which is now seriously imperilling the relations of Great Britain both with the rest of the Empire and with the United States of America, the sacrifice which Ulster will be called upon to make in assuming control of its own local affairs is one which the Imperial Government and Parliament is ^{clearly} entitled to ask its people to make.

11. Thirdly the Committee's proposal will enormously minimise the partition issue. The division of Ireland becomes a far less serious matter if Home Rule is established for both parts of Ireland than if the excluded part is retained as part of Great Britain. No nationalists would then be retained under British rule. All Irishmen would be self-governing. If, owing to the opposition of Ulster it is necessary on principles of self-determination to divide Ireland into two provinces, reasons of administrative convenience ought to be a principal consideration in drawing the line between them, as it was in the federal constitutions of the United States and the Dominions. The Committee are advised that from the administrative point of view, the retention of the historic boundaries between Ulster and the three other provinces would be far the most convenient. They therefore recommend it. This arrangement has the further advantage that it minimises the division of Ireland on purely religious lines. The two religions would be not unevenly balanced in the Parliament of Northern Ireland.

12. But while recommending the setting up of two Parliaments in Ireland the Committee attach the greatest importance to doing everything possible to promote Irish unity. This is not only desirable in itself but is essential if the scheme is to receive the support of moderate nationalists. To this end they make two further proposals. In the first place, they propose that for one year, but for one year only, certain services which it is specially undesirable to divide, notably agriculture, technical education, transportation, old age pensions, health and unemployment, insurance and labour exchanges, should be reserved to the Imperial Parliament, and that a Council of Ireland should be established consisting of twenty representatives from each Parliament which the Lord Lieutenant or the British Minister in charge of these temporarily reserved services should consult about the policy in regard to them. The Council of Ireland would further have powers

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of dealing with Private Bill legislation.

13. In the second place, however, and this is far more important, the Committee propose that the two Irish Parliaments should be given far-reaching constituent powers. They propose that the two Irish Parliaments, by passing identical legislation, should have the power under the Bill, without further reference to the Imperial Parliament :-

(a) to transfer at any time even within the first year, any of the temporarily reserved services, or any of their own powers, to the control of the Council of Ireland.

(b) to revise the constitution of the Council of Ireland itself in any way they think fit, so that it may, if both Parliaments agree, become a Parliament elected by electors for the whole of Ireland, either on a unitary or a federal basis, controlling all or any of the temporarily reserved services, and all or any of the powers originally allotted to the North and South Ireland Parliaments.

(c) to ask the Imperial Parliament to retain control of the temporarily reserved services beyond the first year, if they want further time to deliberate about their common affairs. Failing such a request, however, these services would automatically be divided between the two Parliaments.

14. The Committee feel that starting from the assumption that regard must be had to the principle of self-determination, they have thus done everything which an outside authority can do to bring about Irish unity, without in any way infringing the freedom of Ulster to decide its own relation to the rest of Ireland. The reservation of certain administrative services for a year is a powerful practical recognition of the objections to partition. The automatic transfer at the end of the year is not only a proof that Irish self-government is to be genuine, but a strong incentive to immediate action towards Irish unity. The constitution of the Council of Ireland brings together elected representatives of the whole of Ireland in a single chamber for the discussion of common Irish affairs, who are thus compelled to meet and do business together, with no suspicion of coercion on either. At the same time either through the agency of the Council of Ireland or by other means, the two Parliaments, which will not be mere political conventions, but the bodies actually responsible for Irish Government and therefore far more sober and practical, will have complete power by agreement to bring about Irish unity on any basis ranging from federation to what is practicably Dominion status.

16. Finally there is the Imperial aspect of the problem. The Committee would propose to reserve to the Imperial Parliament complete control over the following matters :-

- (1) The Crown
- (2) Peace and War.
- (3) Army, Navy and Air Force,
- (4) Treaties and foreign relations.

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- (5) Dignities and honours.
- (6) Treason, naturalisation etc.
- (7) Trade with any place outside the jurisdiction of the Irish Parliaments, quarantine, navigation etc.
- (8) Wireless.
- (9) Postal services outside Ireland.
- (10) Coinage, trademarks etc.

The aforementioned powers are substantially the same as those reserved under the 1914 Act. They provide completely both for the unity of the Empire, and for the strategic security of the British Isles.

17. The Imperial Parliament would also at the outset reserve the following powers which would not go over to Ireland automatically at the end of a year.

- (a) Customs and Excise.
- (b) Income Tax and Excess Profits Duty.
- (c) Internal postal communications.

The question of what is to happen to these powers must depend upon what the two Irish Parliaments agree upon as the future constitution of Ireland. In the opinion of the Committee, however, if North and South Ireland agree to constitute a single legislature for Ireland and to ask that these powers should be transferred to it, they should have the power to take them over, thereby setting Ireland up on the same basis as a Dominion except in the sphere of defence. Unless and until the two Parliaments agree to set up such a legislature and to confer upon it these powers, they should remain vested in the Imperial Parliament. As to the details of this part of their scheme the Committee reserve judgment pending a consideration of the financial aspect of their proposals.

18. In regard to representation in the Imperial Parliament the Committee are clear that so long as the Imperial Parliament exercises taxing powers in Ireland, Ireland must have the right to representation in the Imperial Parliament on the basis of population. This, however, should be coupled with a provision that Irish members shall not be allowed to speak or vote on any question which in the opinion of the Speaker, if it related to Ireland, would lie within the scope of the Irish legislature. As to what contribution Ireland should make to the Imperial Services if it elected for Dominion status, and as to how Ireland should then be represented in the Imperial Parliament, the Committee has reached no conclusions. These questions will be further examined in connection with the finances of the Bill.

19. To sum up, what the Committee propose is to follow the Peace Conference by respecting the principle both of responsible government and of self-determination and to give to the two parts of Ireland immediately state rights together with a link between them, and to give them also the power to achieve Irish unity on any basis ranging from federal unity for the United Kingdom to a qualified Dominion status which they can agree upon among themselves. The Committee consider that this is a fair and generous proposal, and one that offers a fair road to Irish Home Rule, to Irish unity, and to a reconciliation between Ireland and Great Britain. It has the advantage that it follows all American and Imperial precedents. In every case a beginning was made with self-government for the several provinces or states, and this was followed by voluntary agreement to unite. Further Ulster, while compelled to govern itself, will suffer no coercion and will retain, until it otherwise consents, its representation and citizenship in the United Kingdom Parliament, and, if it can persuade nationalist Ireland to its views, it will be able to secure that Ireland forms part of a United Kingdom federation at the price of agreeing to Irish unity themselves. On the other hand Nationalist Ireland will receive immediately state rights, and will further be able to establish Ireland practically on a Dominion basis if she can persuade Ulster to accept union on these terms, finally by withdrawing British rule once and for all from Ireland in all Ireland's local affairs, it takes away the reproach of coercion which is the principal ingredient in Irish hostility to Great Britain, and in American and Dominion suspicion of British policy.

20. There is only one other point the Committee wish to mention at this stage. They consider that the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police should be retained as an Imperial service for a period of at least three, and some members think six, years, or until a united Parliament has been established by consent for all Ireland. This is essential both in order to safeguard the rights of individual members of these forces and to provide an effective safeguard for personal safety during the transitional period. At the same time it is no less essential that the local Irish ministries should have the real responsibility for the maintenance of law and order. The Irish Ministers, therefore, corresponding to the Home Secretary should have the necessary power to order the movements of the police in the interests of public security. The quota system upon which the organisation of the Constabulary is based would appear to make some such arrangement possible.

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November 4th 1919.