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A NATION IN ARMS

The Irish People are Behind the Irish Army

The British Government in justifying its war upon the Irish people always make two main claims. The first is that they are using their "stern measures" to suppress "a murder gang" and are not making war upon the Irish nation. The second is that the Irish people themselves are as anxious to see the extremists overthrown as are the British Government. A mass of minor argument is produced in support of these two claims. It is said that the murder gang is few in numbers but has established itself among the Irish people by a policy of terrorism, and that any assistance, support or shelter given to members of it by the Irish public are exacted by threats of assassination. It is also said that if the Irish people were once freed from the terror of this gang they would rally to the support of Sir Hamar Greenwood's so-called Home Rule Acts or to some other "moderate" settlement with the British Government. By this specious pleading the British Government secures support in England for the acts of its armed agents.

A Trained and Disciplined Force.—But the two main claims made by British Ministers are false and the arguments produced in support of them are inventions. The "Murder Gang" of which they speak is the Irish Republican Army. That it is not few in numbers is clear from the facts of the war in Ireland. This Army has attacked the British armed forces in every one of the 32 counties. According to the official statements of the British authorities in Ireland, it has always attacked in considerable numbers. Further, General Sir Nevil Macready, British Commander-in-Chief in Ireland recently described the Irish Republican Army as consisting of:

"a trained and disciplined force, divided into brigades, battalions and companies with a General Headquarters."

By the showing of the British authorities themselves this "murder gang" is, in fact, an army subject to army discipline, organized as any army and operating as an army. The claim that the British Government are directing their armed force against "a small body of assassins" is proved false by that Government's own official statements.

A National Army.—Such an army as General Sir Nevil Macready describes must naturally have had its origin in the Irish people. It does not need detailed argument to prove that it is part of that people. Its members live amongst their own people and are known to their own people. If their own people wished to be rid of them they could denounce them to the British Government, and the partial extinction of the Army would follow. An army of this kind could not exist if it did not have behind it the admiration and assistance of the general body

of the nation. But it continues to exist, to operate in many counties simultaneously, to attack, to withdraw, reconcentrate and attack again, while Mr. Lloyd George laments in the British Parliament that he cannot get evidence against its members. To the Irish people it is not a "murder gang." It is what the National Army of any oppressed people is to that people. Among the patriotic elements it is an ambition to be admitted to its ranks. This is obvious to any who visit Ireland to inquire into the constitution of this army.

A British General's Opinion.—A British General—Lieutenant General Sir Henry Lawson, K. C. B.—came from England in the December of 1920 to make such an inquiry. His findings were published in a report which appeared in the press of December 30. The report said:

"The Captains * * * appear to have been * * * as a class transparently sincere and single-minded, idealists, highly religious for the most part, and often with an almost religious sense of their duty to their country. * * * They fought against drunkenness and self-indulgence, and it is no exaggeration to say that as a class they represented all that was best in the country-side. * * * They and their Volunteers, were trained to discipline, they imbibed the military spirit and then as now they looked upon their Army as one in a very real sense, an organization demanding implicit obedience and self-abnegation from rank to rank. * * * They stood for much that is best in human nature. * * * There is a spirit of a nation behind the organization * * * sympathizing with and believing that those who belong to the I. R. A. are fighting for the cause of the Irish people."

Tributes to the Dead.—Remarkable illustrations of the place which this army occupies in the mind of the nation were given on three recent occasions. On the morning when Kevin Barry, who had been taken prisoner during a conflict with British troops, was hanged as a murderer in Mountjoy Jail (November 1, 1920) a great gathering of the people of Dublin assembled outside the prison and joined in prayer and the singing of national ballads while the execution was being carried out. On the following days the non-Republican Press reported that children baptised on November 2, 3, and 4, were given the Christian name "Kevin" by their parents. Public bodies in all parts of the country passed resolutions of sympathy and admiration with the boy's mother, and in the churches public masses were celebrated for his repose. Again on February 20, 1921, when 15 members of the Republican Army were trapped in a house at Clonmult, County Cork, by English constabulary, and were killed by them, business was suspended in many parts of the county and public bodies adjourned their meetings in sympathy with the relatives. The third occasion was on February 28, 1921, when six prisoners of war were executed by English troops at the Victoria Military barracks, Cork. The men went to their deaths without fear. Outside the walls of the barracks a great concourse of people assembled. An altar was erected. Public prayers were said. Young girls recited the Litany of the Dead when the muffled sounds of firing came from the barrack yard. A people does not pay such tributes to a "murder gang."

British Admit National Status of I. R. A.—But the British authorities in Ireland have always known that the Irish people regard the Irish Republican Army as a National Army. On September 23, 1920, a military order was issued from General Headquarters, Dublin, suppressing public funerals and limiting the number of mourners to 100 persons or less. This order would not have been necessary if the Irish people regarded the Republican Army as a "murder gang" of which they desired to be freed. It was considered necessary because the military authorities knew that every casualty inflicted on the Republican forces

caused widespread sorrow. It was at the suppression of any public manifestation of this sorrow that the military regulation was aimed. Indeed many recent acts of the British authorities have been directed against the display of affection in which the Republican Army is held. The proclamation of Martial Law on December 12, 1920, threatened with death all those who harbored "rebels" or who assisted, aided or abetted them in any way whatever. Mr. J. L. Hammond, an English publicist, writing in the London "Nation" of March 5 after a visit to Ireland, described the effect of this proclamation. He said:

"The proclamation that Irish women would shelter their sons at peril of their lives throw hundreds of doors open to the rebels where they had never been made welcome before."

People Will Not Forsake Their Army.—For over a year every inducement has been held out to the Irish people to forswear their sympathy with the "extreme" section of the Republican Movement. When offers of favor failed (rewards as high as £10,000 have been offered in vain for information against the "extremists") terrorism of the most abandoned kind was employed to compel popular renunciation. That has also failed. Towns have been sacked because the townspeople did not give information against their own troops. Men have been tortured and beaten to extract information from them. They have refused to give it and eventually many of them have been murdered. Women have been treated in the grossest fashion for refusing to state the whereabouts of their men folk. This terrorism has been in operation in all parts of Ireland for six months. Yet on February 15, 1921, the British Prime Minister and the British Chief Secretary both confessed that they were receiving no assistance from the general public in Ireland. In a last desperate effort to organize the Irish people as spies against the Irish Republican Army, General Strickland in the martial law areas on February 6, instituted "Civil Guards." All the available men in certain districts were rounded up, were then split into groups, and each group was instructed that it must convey to the British authorities information of all military operations of the I. R. A. in the district allotted to it. The failure of this method of securing information is sufficiently illustrated by the number of successful attacks carried out by Republican troops in the martial law areas since the "Civil Guard" were formed. A people who, under the most extreme forms of terrorism, continue to give shelter and assistance to the Republican Army can at least be said to hold it in higher regard than they hold the army or constabulary of England.

Nor the Policy for which it Stands.—In political matters the conditions in Ireland are equally inconsistent with the British Government's declaration that were the alleged "murder gang" broken up the people as a whole would surrender their allegiance to the Republic and accept a "reason settlement." For two years every kind of duress has been brought to bear on the Irish people to bring about this renunciation. After the general election of 1918, military force was everywhere used to prevent the spreading of the Republican Movement. Every prominent supporter of it was promptly clapped into prison. Its journals were suppressed wholesale. Its meetings were broken up by force. Yet in the municipal elections of January, 1920, Republican nominees carried the City corporations and the urban councils. The results of these elections were followed by thousands of arrests and imprisonments "on suspicion." Many of those taken were the newly elected councillors. Military violence continued to increase in volume and ruthlessness up to June, 1920. Yet in that month the Republican nominees carried 29 of the 33 county councils and had equally overwhelming success on the rural councils and boards of guardians. After June, 1920, the British terror was loosed in earnest. Towns were ravaged in 29 of

the 32 counties. Men, women and children were killed and wounded to the number of 750. Economic damage was inflicted which is to be estimated in millions of pounds. The result of this war on opinion may be judged from the fact that the British Chief Secretary for Ireland warned the House of Commons on February 21 that the Sinn Fein movement was still spreading.

War on Elected Public Bodies.—A special attack has been made by the British authorities on the Republican Councils. Grants out of which sanatoria, hospitals, asylums and poor law unions were supported are being withheld from the bodies until they submit to the authority of British institutions in Ireland. Several Republican Councillors have been murdered; hundreds have been arrested and imprisoned without trial, and the majority of the remainder are so hunted that the councils of which they are members must meet secretly in the fields. Despite these deprivations and persecutions, and, what is more important, despite the fact that from many councils the Republican majorities have been removed to prison or internment camps, not one per cent of all the public bodies which declared their allegiance to Dail Eireann have rescinded that declaration. Their persistent determination to support the Republican Movement at whatever cost was made evident at the annual elections of mayors of corporations and chairmen of urban councils which took place all over Ireland on January 31 of this year. The same overwhelming majority of Republican nominees were returned. In those councils where the Republican majority had been swept into prison, the chairman of the previous year was unanimously re-elected although in many cases he was in jail.

Failure to Mobilize a Moderate Party.—While these assaults were being made on popular opinion in Ireland the British Government tried every expedient to mobilize a "moderate party" and attract to it public support. These efforts failed. The "moderate parties" which did temporarily result, took the first opportunity to denounce the methods of the British Government in Ireland, and then more or less speedily disappeared for want of public sympathy or support. After it had been made clear that none of these "moderate parties" had any popular backing, the British Government itself declined to discuss a national settlement with them on the plea that they were not representative, thus admitting that the attempts to alienate sympathy from the Republican Movement had failed.

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