

Hungarian Franchise Bill. A new Hungarian Franchise Bill was introduced in Parliament shortly before Christmas. The advocates of reform are by no means enchanted with the bill as actually produced; but it admittedly represents a very considerable step forward. It enfranchises all literate men of twenty-four who have ever attended four classes of an elementary school, or paid not less than 10 crowns in direct taxes, or possess a trade license, or are permanently employed in industrial or agricultural work. In the case of men who have been two years in active service during this war, or who possess either the medal for valor or the Charles cross, the vote is granted irrespective of age. Women who have attended four classes of a middle school, or have for two years been members of a scientific or literary society, or whose husbands died in war service, also obtain the vote. There are various provisions for checking the appalling electoral corruption which has hitherto prevailed in Hungary, judicial officials being appointed on all the registration and polling booth committees by way of controlling the more than partial county officials, the candidates being in future forbidden to pay the traveling expenses and food bills of voters, and the sale of liquor being prohibited on the eve and day of elections. On the other hand, the ballot is only to be allowed in sixty-six municipal constituencies; public declaration is to be retained in all the country districts, and, consequently, among the non-Magyars, with the obvious motive of still controlling elections.

It has been calculated that this bill will raise the number of electors from 1,800,000 to 3,150,000 men, and will also add 260,000 women. The Hungarian press openly congratulates the cabinet on having so manipulated the reform as to secure to the Magyars at least 3 per cent more of the votes than they were previously entitled to; and it was announced that a redistribution bill would be introduced such as would make it practically impossible for the non-Magyar races (who on a merely numerical basis are entitled to 198 seats out of 413) to be represented by more than a dozen or so.¹

The Irish Convention. Since the Act of Union in 1801 there has been a continuous demand on the part of the Irish Nationalists for a repeal of that act and for some form of home rule. But the Irish question did not rise to first-class importance until in 1885 Gladstone declared that if returned to office he was prepared to "deal in a liberal

¹ *The New Statesman*, January 26, 1918.

spirit" with the demand for home rule. Since then the question has made and unmade cabinets, in quick succession, until it precipitated the recent crisis upon which the outcome of the war itself, so far as England is concerned, may depend.

The events leading to the convention cannot here be traced in detail. We must content ourselves with noting that just before the outbreak of the war an attempt was made by the British cabinet to settle the question by the passage of a Home Rule Act, which, after heated debate and numerous amendments, received the royal assent September 18, 1914. The bill when introduced was not acceptable to Ulster, and was amended by a provision excluding six of the Ulster counties for six years. When the war broke out (August 4), as part of the political truce to which the Unionist party adhered, a Suspensory Act was introduced into the house of commons, September 17, and passed both houses on the following day. This suspended the operation of the Home Rule Act till the end of the war. It settled nothing, and in the meantime the parties in Ireland faced each other for the inevitable struggle that was sure to follow.

On the 23d of April, 1916, an attempt was made by two German submarines to land arms off the west coast of Ireland; a few days later the Easter rebellion was proclaimed. It lasted a week; its leaders were arrested, sixteen were executed, about 3000 arrested and many of them sent to prison. As a result the Sinn Fein party became the most important factor in Irish politics and compelled Mr. Asquith to admit that the "Castle Government had entirely broken down." The Lloyd George War Cabinet proposed that the Home Rule Act be put in operation, excluding the six Ulster counties; and when this was not accepted, arranged for an Irish Convention which should undertake to solve the Irish question.

Formal announcement of the proposed convention was made in the house of commons by the prime minister on May 21, 1917; and three weeks later a statement was made as to the composition of the body. The largest group was to be representatives of the local authorities—the chairmen of the elected councils of the counties and county boroughs, and two delegates from each province to be chosen by the chairmen of the councils of the smaller municipalities. In addition, there were to be six Roman Catholic prelates, a representative of the Protestant Church and the moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Assembly; the chairmen of the Dublin, Belfast and Cork chambers of commerce; five representatives of the trade councils and trades unions in Dublin,

Cork and Belfast; two Irish representative peers; five persons to be appointed by John Redmond, the same number by Sir John Lonsdale, and two by William O'Brien (the leaders of the Irish parliamentary groups); five by the Unionist Alliance (of southern Ireland); five places to be offered to the Sinn Feiners; and fifteen to be appointed by the British government. The total number would be 101.

Objection was made that the convention was not elected nor proportionally representative. In reply it was urged that a popular election during the war was unwise, if not impracticable; and that all important elements were offered representation. But the Sinn Feiners and Mr. O'Brien's league declined to name their representatives.

The convention met first in Dublin on July 25, with 92 members present, and elected as chairman Sir Horace Plunkett, the well-known head of the Irish department of agriculture and technical instruction. A grand committee began to sit August 15, to consider details of a definite plan. Beginning September 3, the convention met for a time in Belfast; later in Cork, and again in Dublin.

The events leading up to the convention suggest grave political difficulties which must be overcome if it is to succeed; but no one familiar with Irish history can fail to take account of the economic, social and religious problems that will inevitably present themselves. Irishmen have good memories, and they will undoubtedly recall some of the unfortunate chapters of English and Irish history that need not be cited here. They will also be influenced by present social wrongs and economic hardships. The Easter uprising found its most willing recruits from the miserable hovels called tenement houses, from districts where children were starving and men and women were in desperate straits.

The Ulster problem presents both an industrial and a religious aspect. The six counties claiming exclusion are largely industrial; and the Ulstermen feel that their industrial prosperity and their happiness is in part at least due to the union with Great Britain. They also fear discrimination in religious matters; but whatever merits their claims may have, it is difficult to see how the religious question can be solved by separation from the rest of Ireland. In one of the six northeastern counties the Roman Catholics constitute 51 per cent of the population; in none less than 20 per cent; and in all but two, above 25 per cent. On the other hand some of the counties outside the northeastern group have a fair share of Protestants.

Viewed from the standpoint of parties, the problem is even more

difficult than from the economic or religious standpoint, for concessions and toleration might conceivably overcome these latter obstacles. But the parties in Ireland stand for such irreconcilable ideas that this barrier seems at present almost insurmountable. There are three leading parties. First may be noted the Sinn Feiners. They will be satisfied with nothing less than an independent state, a republic entirely free from the British empire. It is difficult to estimate their actual strength; but it is perhaps safe to say that if the results of the convention are submitted to the Irish voters, the Sinn Fein party will be strong enough to defeat them.

Next are the Nationalists, or Irish Home Rulers. These hold, with the Sinn Feiners, that Ireland is a separate nation, but would be content with a measure of home rule, such as is now possessed by New Zealand or Newfoundland. But while asserting that Ireland is one nation, they claim that Irishmen must retain, under a system of home rule, representation in the imperial Parliament, a right granted to none of the Dominion governments.

Then there are the Irish Unionists, who hold that the welfare of Ireland can be best secured by maintaining the union with Great Britain. They would prefer the union of all Ireland, but are ready to resist, by force of arms if necessary, the separation of at least the six north-eastern counties. But while the Nationalists are strongest in the south and the Unionists in the north, and while this division also runs closely parallel to the religious differences between these two parties, it should be noted that the line of demarcation is by no means distinct, and that no geographical limits can be set as a suitable division of a satisfactory basis for separate imperial relations.

To the cross purposes of parties in Ireland must be added the fact that any agreement that the convention reaches must also be accepted by the parties represented at Westminster. The sentiment in England, judged from reports in the leading English journals, is by no means united. Mr. Dicey, for example, has opposed home rule in any form; the English *Spectator* has insisted upon giving Ulster a separate government if home rule is adopted, and points to West Virginia during the Civil War as a proper precedent; while some of the leading men in every party believe the only solution lies in the Dominion form of government. In a speech in the house of commons, October 23, 1917, Lloyd George, observing that the Sinn Feiners wanted separation or secession, added emphatically, "We had better say at once under no conditions will Great Britain permit anything of that kind."

The seriousness of the whole problem may be suggested by the government's unwillingness until lately to force conscription on Ireland; nor can much ground for optimism be claimed in the articles of secession drawn up by the Sinn Fein convention, October 29, in the resignation of Sir Edward Carson from the cabinet, in the death of John Redmond, leader of the Nationalists, in the growing strength of the Labor party, in riots and open threats of revolt, nor in the continuous attempts of factions in every party to defeat all efforts at settlement.

None the less, early April brought important developments. In the first place, the government, through a notable speech of Mr. Lloyd George, announced its purpose to seek legislation extending to Ireland the principle of conscription. And in the second place, the plan of government adopted by the Irish convention was officially made public. This plan was carried in the convention by a vote of 44 to 29, most of the Nationalists uniting with the southern Unionists and labor representatives. It provides for a parliament at Dublin for the whole of Ireland, with full powers over domestic legislation, expenditures and direct taxation. The lower house, of 200 members, is to be in the main a popularly elected body, on the analogy of the British house of commons; the upper, known as the senate, is to consist of 64 representatives of commerce, industry, labor, churches, universities, county councils, and the peerage. The Nationalists agree to guarantee to the Unionists 40 per cent of the membership of the house of commons. The question of control of the customs duties is to be left for later settlement.

Minority reports were also presented by the Ulster Unionists and by a group of Nationalists.

The report contemplates that the new system shall go into operation immediately. The assent of the British Parliament is, of course, necessary; and whether it shall be forthcoming will undoubtedly depend to a considerable degree upon the Irish attitude toward conscription. If conscription is seriously resisted, there is little chance that either the government or Parliament will be in a mood to concede any measure of autonomy.

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Absent-voting in Norway. At every election many voters fail to exercise their suffrage rights. It is unquestionably true that most of those who do not vote voluntarily disfranchise themselves through