
RICHARD MULCAHY

[On the Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland]

* * * None of us want this Treaty. None of us want the Crown. None of us want the representative of the Crown. None of us want our harbours occupied by enemy forces; and none of us want what is said to be partition; and we want no arguments against any of these things. But we want an alternative. * * * I, personally, see no alternative to the acceptance of this Treaty. I see no solid spot of ground upon which the Irish people can put its political feet but upon that Treaty. * * * I can realise the difficulties of those who can put their finger upon the line and letter of the document which says that, in Ireland, all power of the Executive and otherwise comes from the King,¹ and will, under the circumstances that will be created by the acceptance of that Treaty, come from the King. I can understand the difficulties of that person. But the feeling of my mind, and the instinct of my bones was, that the power of the Executive Government to control and discharge the resources of this country lies in the people. The 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, as far as we can hear, have brought us constitutional usage and practice, and I take it that the arrangement has been that when people took away their power from their princes, in order to leave their princes down lightly, they said: "This is constitutional usage." And if these centuries have provided us with constitutional usage and practice, and if the constitutional outlook of the King in Ireland at the present moment is to be that Executive power and control come from him, I think it won't be very long, under whatever arrangement is set up in Ireland—Treaty or otherwise—until the Irish people show, both for the benefit of themselves and perhaps for the benefit of others, that sovereign rights in this country lie in the people, and that the sovereign rights in every other country do and will be the same. With my understanding leading me in that I can see no other road to go but the road of this Treaty, with the appreciation that this Treaty distinctly states that it does secure to Ireland the control in Ireland with full executive and administrative powers, and the Executive in Ireland responsible to that control. I am not afraid of the influence of the King, or the influence of the King exerted through some supposedly corrupt court of his representative here. I am not afraid of that power interfering with the power of the Irish people; because, if we have control, it is full control over legislation, over order, over peace, over the whole internal life and resources of the country, and if we have executive responsibility to that Parliament I don't see the way or in what way pernicious to the Irish people, the King or his representative could interfere with them. As to our ports, we are not in a position of force, either military or otherwise, to drive the enemy from our ports. We have not—those to whom the responsibility has been for doing such things—we have not been able to drive the enemy from anything but from a fairly good-sized police barracks. We have not that power; and with regard to the ports, I doubt if anybody in this assembly at the present

1. Of England.

moment—visualising the necessity for coastal and external defence—who, visualising the financial aspect of these things, would be able to point to the mark we are aiming at as regards the necessity for defence and the financial aspect of it. When we have established a police force that will do the internal work of the country, and when we have established such small internal defence force as is necessary, we shall probably—both intellectually and from the ordinary, common understanding—we will be coming to a point of intelligence at which we can decide what our external defences should be like. With regard to partition, I don't look upon the clause with regard to Ulster in this Treaty as prejudicing the Ulster position in any way. I see no solution of the Ulster difficulty or of the Six County difficulty at the present moment. On the other hand the Treaty leaves the Irish people that they will be in absolute possession of their country's resources, and, in my opinion, with full executive power and control over them; and—if in order to bring the Irish people to the goal that they have always aimed at, and that we have always aimed at with them—if we were given on one side this Treaty, and I on the other such military power that we might reasonably equate with the enemy's power, and left to decide by which of these two instruments we would bring Ireland definitely to a status of equality with our old enemy, and if the responsibility of deciding between these two instruments were placed in the hands of any one particular person here, I think there would be very great searchings of heart and mind and conscience before taking the alternative of the two instruments—the instrument of war on one side, and on the other the instrument of this particular Treaty of the Irish people battling upon their own powers, upon their own resources, to bring the nation in power and equality with the enemy. We have before us today in Europe the spectacle of France and Germany striving for supremacy over each other with military force, and we see the internal unhappiness, the waste of human life, sorrow, misery, and the degradation it all involved. The fact that these two countries had elected to struggle for supremacy with one another, involved, not only these two countries, but disturbed the peace of the whole world, by the weapon of war we see what it has brought these two countries to—not only these two countries, but the peace of the whole world was disturbed—and we now stand at a time when we have it in our power to take our choice. Shall we grow to equality of status with our old enemy by taking complete control of our own internal resources? And, if at the present moment there are disabilities with regard to ourselves in this particular Treaty, whether we shall endeavour to outgrow these by taking our own resources, or rather by taking the chances of war—not with anything like adequate military forces, but with very small forces, sufficient to make our country resist force for years, but certainly not able to win even a war of internal liberation? That is one outstanding aspect of the situation at the present time. Are we going to choose in the next onward march of this nation the weapons which will give us dead in our country the Crompton-Smiths of England and the Potters of Ireland;² or, are we going to take our own resources and grow to manhood, in friendliness and with some chance of avoiding that polarisation of mind and polarisation in antagonisms with the English people that have been forced into at the present time?

2. Crompton-Smith was a British major in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers executed after capture by the IRA in reprisal for the execution of IRA prisoners.

Potter was a Royal Irish Constabulary inspector in country Tipperary executed for the same reason. Both were shot in April 1921.

* * * We have suffered a defeat. But even in that defeat we have got for the Irish people, at any rate, powers that I believe—if this Dáil passes away, if every bit of organisation that is in the country as its result at the present moment passed away with it—I believe that the Irish people would rise upon their resources, if left untrammelled and unfettered in their hands, to the full height of their aspirations and to the full vigour which has been so long lying undeveloped in our people; and with the responsibility of peace, the responsibility of taking their own materials and living their own lives and delving for their own materials of subsistence, they would find in that work all those high influences which in our war have developed—the character and manliness and their valuable characteristics that our period of warfare has developed in the country.³

1922

3. Although the Dáil approved the treaty concluding the Anglo-Irish War, the Republican wing of the IRA (led by Eamon de Valera) rejected it. Some two thousand lives were lost in the ensuing Civil

War before, in 1923, de Valera ordered the “Rear-guard of the Republic” to cease hostilities. (See Yeats’s *Meditations in Time of Civil War*.)