

Confidential

4 Feb 1914

Copy
Dear Mr. Asquith

I have submitted the suggestions to my colleagues, which you made to me in our conversation of last Monday. I need not say that any suggestions from one we regard as so genuine a friend of our cause, were considered most respectfully, and with the strongest desire to find a common ground for common action.

(1) Your suggestions appear to us to raise two separate issues, which must be separately considered, ~~and~~ which also differ in their urgency, and, therefore, in their importance at the moment.

(2) We feel justified, therefore, in devoting our observations in the main to what we regard as the urgent, and, for the moment, more important issue, namely, whether any definite proposals as to Ulster should be stated in the debate on the Address.

(3) As to the merits of your suggested proposals, we believe many of them are open to grave objections, but we do not enter into these objections at this moment; partly, because we do not consider the merits of these proposals the *primary and* immediate question, because, even if the suggestions were as acceptable, as we consider them unacceptable, we believe this is not the moment to put them forward; and, finally, because we adhere to our consistent policy of closing no door against any proposal within the limits that you yourself have

stated, that might lead to the Bill being carried by consent.

(4) Coming, then, to what we regard as the vital question for the moment, namely, whether any definite proposals should be made at this moment, these are our views :

(1) It is admitted that the proposals suggested by you would be rejected by the Opposition as not supplying ~~even an approach to~~ a basis of settlement.

(2) What, in all probability, would the attitude of the Opposition be? They would proclaim that the Government had surrendered; that the Home Rule Bill was dead; that a new Bill must be introduced; and, even if they did not immediately reject the proposals, they would demand that they should be put in print, and would try to compel the Government to go again over the old ground; and bring the whole session to confusion.

(3) In any case these proposals could not be dealt with in the House of Commons until the Bill was actually before the House some months later. Meantime, they would be a target of attack from every quarter, and subjected to such destructive criticism as to destroy their usefulness as a method of settlement by consent.

(4) The effect upon Ulster, meantime, would be grave. It would be represented that its firm attitude had already forced the Government to a complete transformation of the Bill; and that they had only to maintain and accentuate this attitude to force on the Government the abandon-

ment of the Bill altogether, or such large concessions as would make the Bill not the end but the re-opening of the whole Irish problem.

(5) It would further be argued that, at last, the reality of Civil War in Ulster,^{as} - to which we reiterate our conviction that the peril has been gravely exaggerated - had been recognised in England^{and} by the Government; and we feel assured that, under such appeals, it is probable that the making of these proposals at this stage, so far from relieving the strain in Ulster, would lead to some serious explosion of violence there.

(6) If we look to the effect of any such proposals at the moment, on the position of our own party, we feel bound, in full sense of our responsibility, to express the opinion that it would be disastrous. We should be met by an immediate explosion of popular condemnation; and this revolt would be aggravated when it was seen that what would be called our betrayal of the Nationalists of Ulster, and the rights of Ireland, had not brought us any nearer to the gaining of Home Rule by the winning over of Orange Opposition.

(7) As to the Liberal Party we do not feel entitled to say any further than this; that we believe it would lead to a demoralisation which would surely weaken the Government in the serious fight which would confront

them after the proposals of the Government had been rejected.

(8) We are deeply impressed by the observations you made to me as to the perils which may come from a refusal on your part to make any definite proposals to the Orangemen next week. But grave as the perils may be, we believe it would be far better to face them than to place your Government and ourselves in the impossible position in which any such proposals at the moment would place us.

(9) As to the possible action by the Tories and by the House of Lords on the Army Bill, it is our view that, instead of this action being impeded, it would be *encouraged* by the partial victory which they would claim as having already won.

(10) We put also this important question to ourselves, namely, what attitude I should take, on behalf of the Irish Party, in the debate which must necessarily follow any speech containing these suggestions. Am I to accept them? Am I to reject them? It would be impossible for me to accept them, in view of the certainty that they would be rejected by the Tory speakers. Am I to reject them? Then I would give to the Tories the argument that the suggestions of the Government, rejected by them *and* by us, could not supply any basis for settlement by consent.

Moreover I might be forced into closing the ~~door~~ door on proposals which, if they came at a later stage in the struggle, and under other circumstances, I might be in a position to consider in a different spirit.

(11) We have finally to point to the fact that all our experience conclusively proves that all offers to the Orange Party have up to the present greatly stimulated their movement ~~there~~. The unfortunate intervention of Lord Loreburn led to an increase in the preparations, such as they are, for violent resistance in Ulster, and, in our opinion, first gave some substance to the Orange Campaign.

For all these reasons, we appeal to you strongly to limit your statement during the debate to a reiteration of your frequent declarations that you were ready to consider favourably all proposals consistent with an Irish Parliament, ~~and~~ an Irish Executive, and the integrity of Ireland; that you desired, and would do everything in your power to lead to a settlement by consent. Such a statement by you would place me in a position to give it my whole-hearted support.

While we remain convinced, speaking with intimate knowledge of Ireland, including Ulster, that the preparations for Civil War have been greatly exaggerated, we have a passionate desire to avoid any conflict with our countrymen in the North, ~~that~~ ^{certainly} we will ~~not~~ only place no obstacle in the way of

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