

Jus/H277/120/61 (1)

DUBLIN RECONSTRUCTION (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL .

DEPUTATION.

from the

CORPORATION OF DUBLIN.

DEPUTATION RECEIVED AT DUBLIN CASTLE ON 5th JUNE, 1916,

BY THE HOME SECRETARY. (Mr. HERBERT SAMUEL).

Complete copy

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The Home Secretary received at 11 o'clock on the 5th June, 1916, a deputation from the Corporation of Dublin headed by the Lord Mayor. He was accompanied by the Attorney General (Rt. Hon. J. H. Campbell, K.C., M.P.); the Under Secretary (Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Chalmers, G.C.B.); Sir Henry Robinson (Local Government Board); Sir John Barran, Bart., M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Home Secretary; and Mr. A. P. Magill.

The Deputation was composed as follows:-

The Lord Mayor of Dublin,
Mr. John Redmond, M.P.,
Mr. Clancy, M.P.,
Mr. Brady, M.P.,
Mr. Field, M.P.,
Mr. Nugent, M.P.,
Alderman Byrne, M.P.,
.. Moran,
.. Delahunt,
.. Dr. McWalter,
Sir Patrick Shortall,
Councillor Ryan,
.. Scully,
The High Sheriff,
The Town Clerk,
The Law Agent, and
The Assistant Treasurer.

Mr. Redmond, in introducing the Deputation, called upon the Lord Mayor to put the various points before the Home Secretary so that he would understand the views of the Corporation in the matter.

The Lord Mayor said that he thought the Home Secretary knew pretty well already what had brought them there. This terrible insurrection had blown the most prosperous portion of their City to bits, and it was not for them to say who was responsible, but looking at it to-day it looked to them like a Louvain by the Liffey, and he did not think that the Municipal Council of the second City of the Empire, and the seat of your Government, should stand by and see that city left as it is. They came there to-day to ask him to do what he considered the duty of the Government and that was to help them to rebuild that
portion

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portion of Sackville Street, Henry Street, and Earl Street, which had been blown down and burned down, to rebuild it in a manner which would be worthy of the second city of the Empire. There was a glorious opportunity to his mind, if the Government could see their way, to give the Municipal body power to widen some of the streets that were heretofore congested and narrow. Now they did not want the Government to help them in that way to widen the streets. They could do that themselves if they could get the power. They did suggest that the Government should make a grant for the purpose of rebuilding Sackville Street, and if that grant was given they could delegate the duty to a Committee formed by representatives from the Corporation and some other members selected by the Lord Lieutenant or the Treasury. That was their idea. They believed that if men who might get the ex gratia grant started to build they might put up houses that would be unsuitable to the surrounding that would be built by wealthy men. In order to avoid that terrible catastrophe they asked him and the gentlemen associated with him to help them by giving a grant for the purpose of that laudable object. The danger would be that some of those gentlemen who got the grant would not build at all but might put the money in their pockets and retire into private life and retire into some smaller street where they could get other premises. Now that would itself be a calamity and he believed that if the Government would make it a condition that people who got the grant should put up proper houses, houses that would be in consonance with the surrounding buildings and houses, that would fulfil the wishes of the Municipal Authority. He also thought that apart altogether from the grant that a loan might be given to the Corporation at a reasonable rate of interest in order to purchase a house or houses which would enable them to start street widening. He thought that if these things were carried

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carried out the Home Secretary would be able to say to the world at large that he had done the right thing by Dublin. He believed that if the Government treated Dublin well they would make friends in places where they sought them sometimes without finding them. He believed that if Dublin was not well treated a feeling would arise in another part of the world that would not be good for us or for the British Empire. He did not say this as a threat. The Municipal Authority lose very heavily by this devastation and destruction. Their rates would be some £16,000 short in this financial year. Our footpaths are ruined and they did not know what it would cost to replace them. Probably it would take between £7,000 and £10,000. How were they, as a poor city, struggling with bad housing conditions and other troubles, how were they to face this catastrophe that had fallen on them. They had nothing to do with it. In his mind it was the act of a Government. It was not for him to blame them, but they have had an inquiry in the city, which spoke for itself. They asked the Government to treat them properly; they were at their very door; they were their neighbours so to speak; and they thought it would be a good thing to be very friendly with each other. These were his remarks and he thought the Home Secretary knew what the Dublin Corporation were looking for and he hoped that they will not be appealing in vain.

Mr. Clancy said he had been asked on behalf of the Corporation to say a few words. The statement of the Lord Mayor, short though it had been was pretty full and put very plainly the points he desired to put before you. There was one or two points upon which he would like to enlarge. The first was to distinguish between claims made by this deputation and the deputation which was to wait upon the Home Secretary at 12 o'clock with regard to compensation. The other deputation was going to ask him to grant them compensation on a better scale than that suggested by the Under Secretary for property which they owned and had lost. An he need not go into that at all. It was quite

quite distinct from the claim of the Corporation. The owners of the destroyed property in O'Connell or Sackville Street were claiming compensation. They may choose to build only such a house as they have lost and if that be so, some houses will be high, some will be low, some will be narrow, some will be wide, and he thought ^{would} it be an almost ridiculous result after all this disturbance and turmoil if that result should happen. The only way in which it can be prevented is by giving powers to the Corporation, which they have not yet got, of controlling and regulating the building of houses in the city. The only power they have got is to put back the frontage of a house a yard or two in order to widen the street, and they have to pay compensation to the owner of the premises for doing so, which compensation is assessed by a public tribunal. Now much more power than that is required. It would, he thought, be absolutely ridiculous to have one of the finest streets in the whole world composed as to a great part of it of big houses and small houses. Now they want these powers, and they have suggested a Bill to confer them. That is the first thing, and then supposing that these powers are exercised, the owners who are going to rebuilt may say, and he thought, very naturally, we had only such and such a house and such and such a sort of a house, and it would be rather hard lines to compel us to pay for a bigger house or a finer house which would cost more money; and we think that if we are to be compelled to do that we ought to be compensated for the addition to our expenditure; we do not like to put the cost upon our fellow citizens whose rates already are nearly 12/- in the £ and we ourselves cannot do it. The only thing is that the Government should step in and supply the money that is required for that additional purpose. Now He thought that he had made it quite clear what the Corporation wanted the money for. He went on to say that The Lord Mayor alluded to the question of control of the expenditure. Now we are not unreasonable on that point. If the Government make a grant, and if they say - well, we really cannot give this money unless we have a considerable share in

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the expenditure, as far as he knew, the Corporation were willing to agree to it. But at the same time any Commission that may be appointed of that sort ought to contain representatives of the Corporation as such, not merely as individuals, but as representatives of the Corporation; because he thought that for his part he could not tolerate the idea of the Local Authority being entirely ignored in the matter and passed over as if they had committed some crime. Now these are really the two important points and he thought he had stated them correctly. He would like to emphasise the Lord Mayor's statement that the loss to the Corporation in money and material has been and will be very serious. He did not know whether Sir Henry Robinson who was present would contradict him or not or confirm him, but he understood buildings to the assessable value of £33,000 have been lost and ~~wilixkxiuxk~~ until these buildings are restored £16,000 or £17,000 in rates per annum will be lost and the per annum really means over 2 or 3 years. It will take some time to rebuild, it will take some time to revalue, and it will take some time to put them in condition for use, and therefore really in addition to the special loss to which the Lord Mayor alluded as regards the footpaths, there will be a perennial loss, a yearly loss which, he fancied, would amount to nearly £20,000 a year. Certainly, if the Government are responsible, or feel themselves responsible for compensation for any loss of property that loss of property for which they ought to be really responsible was the destruction of the houses. He did not think he should take up any more time, in stating the essential points.

Dr. McWalter said he thought everything necessary had been said. The Government had decided to give a grant to persons whose premises had been ruined, but they of the Corporation knew that these persons would not use the money to build up the city even as it was before. Many of these have lost very heavily. The amount of the ex gratia grant will certainly not be sufficient to enable them to build up their premises as they were before. It was feared that the person in a small shop would satisfy himself by setting up a kind of a shed and seek to carry on business in

that

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that way. ^{not only} We feel that our city would become a bye-word and a reproach/to/the Corporation of Dublin, but also, he spoke simply as an Alderman of the Corporation, it would be a reproach to the Government under whom it occurred. They thought that they had a claim not only for powers to regulate the building of houses but it was absolutely necessary that there should be a money grant; because the position of the Corporation is this that they would exercise no powers against persons who sought to rebuild unless at the same time they could give them a grant or loan of money on favourable terms. They were determined to do their best, and as the Corporation was not responsible they looked to the Government for help.

The High Sheriff pointed out that there had been a deficit this year on the lighting undertaking of £7,000 or £8,000. This was a very serious loss, and he presumed that the rates would have to be taxed next year to find that amount. That would press very heavily on the citizens, indeed.

The Home Secretary, in reply, said:-

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Mr Redmond, Lord Mayor, and Gentlemen,

Let me in the first place express my thanks for the words of welcome which Mr Redmond was good enough to speak in introducing this deputation. As he knows, and as his colleagues in the House of Commons know, for many years past I have taken a very close interest in Irish questions, and it would be a great pleasure and satisfaction to me if by the chance of my holding the office of Home Secretary while the office of Chief Secretary is vacant I can be of service to Ireland and to Dublin. Let me say at the outset that I entirely share your views that it would be a calamity if this devastation to a part of the City of Dublin were to result in unworthy buildings being erected spoiling your fine street, Sackville or O'Connell Street, and I would go further and say that it would be greatly to be regretted if this opportunity were not seized to make Dublin even a finer City than it was before. (hear,hear). I had the privilege of being for about a year President of the Local Government Board in England in which capacity I took a very close interest in the question of Town Planning generally, and I formed the opinion that looking to the interests of future generations there is nothing more important at the present time than to see that our urban conditions are improved; (hear hear), that the bad housing, squalid streets, and miserable inadequacy of many of our towns should be improved in the future, and that we should reform existing conditions when the opportunity arises where new buildings are being erected. Above all let us not repeat the errors of the past. Let us see that things are put upon a better footing in the future.

You have mentioned here to-day - one or two of the
speakers

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speakers - the plans for rebuilding the ruined cities of Belgium. Strangely enough only a few months ago I took part in a Conference in London with Belgian and British architects with that very object, of securing that the ruined cities of Belgium should rise again and rise in a better and fairer form than they had before they fell. Although I am happy to think that Dublin has not suffered so great and complete a devastation as the towns of Belgium, the same considerations present themselves in some degree here now. I am entirely at one with you in desiring that it should not be left merely to the individual, to decide what sort of building he is to put up. We want to secure that the streets should be rebuilt with dignity and with good taste (hear hear) You are as a Corporation here to-day charged with the interests of your constituents and looking at this matter from the point of view of the community. The property owner, however public spirited he may be, nevertheless looks at the problem very largely from the point of view of his own interest and the two may not always coincide. It may be to the interest of the property owner to put up mean buildings with poor facades which might serve his commercial purpose but which would certainly not add to the dignity of your city. I have been considering very carefully with Sir Robert Chalmers and others this problem. It has been suggested that the ex gratia grant should be made to property owners on condition that they should rebuild in a certain style, but the promise has already been given by the Prime Minister that the state will undertake the burden in respect of these properties of paying such sums, subject to certain conditions, as an Insurance Company would have paid had it been a loss in respect of a risk for which an Insurance Company would have been liable, and it is late now to suggest that we should go back upon that promise which had been publicly given. I have been considering whether in some minor ways it might not be possible to bring pressure to bear on the property owners to meet the legitimate desires

desires of the community here in Dublin. The grant is given not merely in order to compensate the individual for what he has lost but also in order to help Dublin to get rebuilt, and if there are any means, and I think there may be some means, of giving these grants in such a way as to act as a deterrent to people who will merely put money in their pockets and go elsewhere or take some existing house in another street and not rebuild at all, and on the other hand if means can be devised to act as an inducement to the property owners to rebuild in a worthy fashion on the site where their premises formerly were. I think it would be very advisable to adopt that plan. I am not in a position to-day to describe them but as at present advised I do not think it impossible to deal with the financial aspects of this question so far as they relate to the ex gratia grant. I wish to make the property owner feel that if he does rebuild and does not merely put the money in his pocket it will be on the whole to his advantage. That I think will be entirely in accordance with your wishes. But after all that will not be nearly enough. There is the need of effective control on the part of the community. You have drafted a Bill to enable you to obtain that control and to exercise it in a certain manner. I would venture to submit for your consideration the terms of the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, an Act which does not apply to Ireland, but which does apply to England, Wales, and Scotland. The terms of this Act were most carefully considered and it contains in its second part an elaborate series of provisions with respect to Town Planning. It has been in operation now for some years in England. It has been adopted by many of the chief cities in England, who have prepared town planning schemes and have established an effective control over the new developing parts of their suburbs, and a number of schemes have been submitted to the Local Government Board in England which have been sanctioned,

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and a number of others are under report. These schemes give really effective control to the Local Authority with the approval of the Local Government Board on general lines which have been laid down after much study. They not only secure that the streets should be properly planned but also determine what should be the character of the buildings to face on these streets. The Act deals not only with sanitary questions but also with questions of amenity and suitability of the designs of the buildings, and when the Town Planning Act has been adopted and has been applied to a certain locality nobody may build in that locality except in accordance with the provisions of the town planning scheme applicable to that area. This legislation was devised with great care and elaboration. It gave the right to appeal to the property owner. It works in England quite smoothly and few difficulties may have arisen. It has served its purpose and I would suggest for your consideration whether it might not be possible to take the whole of the Town Planning Act of 1909 as it stands, with possibly some small alterations and to apply it to Dublin and to its devastated areas. I do not ask you to come to any conclusion at the moment. The Law Officers are looking into it also but I suggest that as a subject which deserves your consideration. One further point arises in the same connection. The Town Planning Act provides that when a scheme is in contemplation for a locality no one may build within that area except at his own risk and except in accordance with the requirements of the Town Planning scheme. It will necessarily take time. You will need an Act of Parliament. You will have to frame schemes and it may be a good many weeks, it may possibly even run into two or three months, before the thing gets into proper operation. Meantime there is much danger that outside interests may be established; that new unworthy buildings may be set up; or that buildings may be erected across the line of streets which you may contemplate,

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or transgressing the frontage line which you will ultimately establish. I would suggest that it is very desirable if you approve of that general idea of applying the Town Planning Act to Dublin that the first step should be to give public notice in Dublin to the effect that this measure is in contemplation, that when enacted it will be retrospective applying as from the date of the outbreak and the conflagration, and that anybody who starts to build must clearly understand that he does so at his own risk. I think that will deal with the dangers of the immediate situation and prevent you from being blocked when you come to set the machine into operation.

With regard to finance that was a topic of conversation which not seldom arose when members of the Imperial Government met an Irish deputation. There are two suggestions that have been made to-day. One that there should be a second grant in addition to the grant made to compensate people for the losses they have suffered, the other that there should be a loan. With regard to the first, with regard to a gift of money to enable Dublin to rebuild herself, I think that I should be treating you unfairly and without proper frankness and candour if I should say that it was likely that any such gift would be made. And after all although it may be true that it may sometimes be difficult for a property owner to rebuild his house in proper style, if the money is found from some quarter or other the investment should be a remunerative one. If a £10,000 building should be put on a particular site and if the property owner has only £6,000 compensation for the house that was burned, and £4,000 had to be found from somewhere, I do not see why he should have that £4,000 as a gift. He will build a £10,000 house which will have its commercial value, and why should the taxpayer be called upon to make up the difference? If it is an investment it should stand upon that footing, and I am sure that you as business men will realise that it is not sound finance to

make

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make a gift for a purpose that will ultimately be remunerative. The Prime Minister has already considered the question of making a grant, a free gift, to the City and his view is also adverse. When we come to the question of a loan, that I should necessarily have to consult with my colleagues upon. The Government have not yet considered it but I should certainly be very ready to bring the matter to their attention. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has a voice in this question. There may be difficulties in providing money during the currency of the war, but there also would be difficulties in rebuilding while the war lasts on account of the shortage of labour and material, and so you would not need much actual cash until you are able to start rebuilding after the war. In any case it will be a matter of some months before the plans can be made out and workmen can get to their operations on the sites. If it is your desire that the Government should be asked to make a loan on equitable terms to the Corporation of Dublin in order to assist in financing this rebuilding scheme and to assist in Town Planning I should be prepared to bring that to the notice of my colleagues, but I am not prepared to make any definite statement in regard to it to-day. Let me say lastly in this connection that I am sure that you have very clearly in mind that the greatness of Dublin depends not only on noble thoroughfares and palatial public buildings but also in no less degree on the provision of comfortable sanitary homes for the population, and so far as money is available - I know that you have large schemes in prospect - you would not I am sure wish to spend great sums on too magnificent schemes of town planning while leaving this question of rebuilding slums in the background. It is of the first importance to provide for the health and comfort of the people; it is an important, but only a secondary object to make a noble and architecturally fine city. I hope it may be possible that Dublin will rise in a form which is worthy

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not only of her ancient traditions but also of the still
greater future which we hope for her as the Capital of a self
governing Ireland (applause)

The deputation before withdrawing thanked the Home
Secretary for receiving them.

The Lord Mayor said the only thing he would like to mention is whether their Law Agent would agree that the terms of this Town Planning Act would meet the conditions in Dublin or not. And after they had considered it they would write to Sir Robert Chalmers officially. The Home Secretary said that they could not start rebuilding for two or three years, but he thought that they would find the means to start the rebuilding at once, as there was a good deal of local labour available, and plenty of Irish stone suitable for building could be procured.

Mr. Clancy said that the Home Secretary had made one remark which interested him very much as to the housing of the working classes. He had something to do with that and his remarks just now greatly encouraged him. They had failed to get a grant up to the present of any imperial money. They have a small grant derived from Irish funds. He was speaking of the grant to finance schemes under the ^{Housing} ~~Marketing~~ of the Working Classes Act of 1908. This is a small grant, but it is sufficient, nevertheless to finance several schemes. We have brought this matter before the House of Commons. Indeed, he thought the Home Secretary had helped them on one occasion to bring it to the notice of the Government of the day. We have never been able to get a grant out of imperial money and the search he had made for Irish funds proved absolutely fruitless. The Home Secretary's remarks struck him as of great importance, and he hoped that he would recommend a grant in aid of the Irish Housing Fund established by the Act of 1908 in which the interest on loans would have to be very high if the income from the fund, when increased, would not enable further housing schemes to be carried out. He was sure he had the concurrence of everybody present in suggesting to the Home Secretary that his observation might bear fruit.

Mr. Fieldy speaking in support of Mr Clancy said that like him he had taken a great interest in this housing question which he thought was the most pressing question of the present time. As Mr. Clancy had stated they had received no grant from

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imperial funds. He thought with the Lord Mayor that a 2 or 3 years' delay in rebuilding the streets of Dublin that had been blown down. If there is anything to be done, let it be done as soon as possible.

Mr. Samuel said: Allow me to speak on these two points. I do not think the words 2 or 3 years passed my lips. I believe I said 2 or 3 months. I am not so pessimistic to think that the war will continue for that period. In any case it would take some time to get your town planning schemes and architectural designs ready. As to a grant, a gift of money for housing in Dublin, if that were given, what would all the towns in England say, many of which have got very bad housing conditions. In the House of Commons I have had to resist again and again very strong demands for gifts of money for housing purposes in England and Wales. I have always refused them. You in Ireland have been more fortunate in the Labourers Acts, but so far as urban housing is concerned only loans may be given when money is available, but no subsidies.

The Town Clerk said that in his opinion, and it was the opinion shared not only by the intelligent members of the Corporation but by every good citizen, the Government ought to come forward handsomely in this matter. That was the opinion of the Corporation, it was the opinion of the citizens of Dublin and it was the general opinion. The Home Secretary spoke of a loan. He thought that the Lord Mayor and the members of the Corporation would be prepared to take the loan on generous terms. The Home Secretary had compared Dublin with regard to money advances with several cities in England, but there was no basis of comparison. This city had been the Seat of Government since the Act of Union and long before it. Meantime the Government have beautified London. They have built palatial offices to his knowledge and under his eyes. He had been for many years a member of Parliament and during the 4 and 20 years he had been a frequent visitor to London. The money for these purposes had come from somewhere. They have probably come from the pockets of
of

of the ratepayers and taxpayers of the three kingdoms. During the 100 years that had elapsed since the Act of Union the Government had built no building in Dublin. That is the truth - with the reservation that they had built a concrete structure behind the Four Courts, a Police Office, and they had done a little over at Kildare Street and College Green. He humbly submitted that it was up to the Government to come forward handsomely and adequately in this matter and if it was to be a loan to rebuild the City of Dublin, then it should be a loan on the most advantageous terms that the Treasury and Government could grant and there ought to be no compliment about it. He was not speaking offensively but was speaking with feeling for the citizens, not only for the citizens who had lost their business premises in the conflagration but he was also speaking for the hundreds and hundreds of employees who had been cast out without a penny, who lived in little houses paying rates to the Corporation. He shared the views of the Lord Mayor and others that the work of rebuilding should not be delayed. Lord Kitchener had stated that it would be a five years war. It would certainly be two years, even with the help of God, before peace would be concluded and terms arranged. Meantime, the City of Dublin was in cinders. The Corporation were anxious & ready to do everything they could to take it out of that condition. The Town Planning Act was very fine but he did not see that it was at all applicable in this instance. There are only 2 or 3 little parts of the city they could widen. In his opinion, the great need was to get the rebuilding of the City under way even at the great expense of material. The Home Secretary had given all the more greater reason for an adequate, immediate and generous treatment of the question.

The Law Agent said he took it that the Corporation was asking for a loan to the Corporation, to be repaid by the Corporation and to be spent by the Corporation and nobody else.

Mr.

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Mr Redmond said the Deputation were very grateful for the courtesy with which the Home Secretary had received them and they all felt that he would do his best in this matter to relieve them.

The Deputation then withdrew.

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IRISH OFFICE, LONDON.

Subject :— _____