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# WHAT IRELAND OWES TO THE OLD I.R.A.

In the autumn of 1951 the Old I.R.A. Pensions Committee—elected at a mass meeting of Old I.R.A. held in July in the Mansion House, Dublin—issued a pamphlet entitled “Claims of the Old I.R.A.”

The facts disclosed in this pamphlet caused general surprise and indignation among the Irish public.

All patriotic Irishmen and women appreciated the services and sacrifices of the Old I.R.A., which had created an independent State, and secured for Ireland the favourable position she now enjoys. That they deserved well of their country was admitted on all sides, but there was a widespread impression that generous provision for their needs had been made by successive Governments.

It came as a surprise to many people to learn that the average Military Service Pension, awarded for active service (including all ranks and lengths of service) was less than £31 a year; that more than five-sixths of the pensioners received less than £25 a year; that many received as little as £6 a year; that no provision whatever was made for the widows of the vast majority of those pensioners; that many of these pensions, under a special and unprecedented clause of the Act, were entirely suspended; and others, including many as low as £6 per annum, were cut down; and that the “wound and disability” pensions and the provisions for hospital treatment were pitifully inadequate.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that these various **pensions and allowances**, inadequate as they were when granted, **are now of less than half the value they then possessed**—at a time when their recipients are advanced in years, and more in need of their assistance than ever before.

Our claims could have been considered to err on the side of moderation. We did not deal with a number of glaring grievances, such as the fact that **many Old I.R.A. men have worked in the employment of the State for many years—in some cases, nearly thirty years—without being established as Civil Servants or entitled to pensions when their services are terminated.**

We did not advert to the injustices suffered by men who succeeded in having their claims to pensions at last admitted under the 1949 Act. These claimants have been entitled to pensions since 1934 or, in some cases, since 1924, but their pensions are payable **only from the date of the enactment of the 1949 Act.**

Nor did we mention that **those granted service medals under the 1946 Act were specifically excluded from the benefit of the “Special Allowance”** granted to Old I.R.A. men totally incapacitated for work unless they had applied for medals prior to 1st January, 1947.

In our opinion, men with active service should never have been awarded such absurdly low pensions as £6 a year; but, on the basis of the situation as it stands, and the existing legislation, we only claimed:—

- (1) That all old I.R.A. Pensions should be increased so as fully to compensate for the decreased value of money.
- (2) That all classes of disabled persons should be given free hospital treatment.
- (3) That marriage and children's allowances should be paid to disabled men irrespective of the date of marriage.
- (4) That provision should be made for widows' pensions and children's allowances irrespective of the date of marriage.
- (5) That it should be open to a person suffering from disability, due to service, to apply for a disability pension at any time, or appeal against a previous assessment, and that similar conditions should apply to persons becoming entitled to the “Special Allowance.”
- (6) That the suspension or abatement of the pensions of those employed in public services should be discontinued.
- (7) That the benefits of hospital and medical service allowed to one limited category of disabled men should be extended to all Old I.R.A. men.
- (8) That Old I.R.A. men who joined the Civil Service or Local Government Service after the War of Independence and Civil War should be allowed added years of service for assessment of pensions.

These modest and reasonable demands met with widespread support throughout the country from people of every political belief, as was proved by their unanimous endorsement by Corporations, County Councils, District Councils, Trade Unions, Conventions of political parties, national organisations, sports clubs and other public bodies in every part of the Twenty-six Counties.

The claims were subsequently embodied in a memorandum and forwarded to the Minister for Defence, with a request that he receive a joint deputation of the United Conference of the Old I.R.A. and the Mansion House Committee (who were acting in complete concert and agreement in this matter) to hear further arguments and resolve any points that might need elucidation.

The Minister received the deputation sympathetically on 2nd January, 1952, and, after a lengthy interview, undertook to submit the claims, with an estimate of their cost, to the Government for consideration. He mentioned that the sheaf of resolutions which he had received from public bodies and organisations throughout the country considerably strengthened his hand in the submission of the case.

When the Army Pensions Vote came before the Dail in 1952, no less than twenty deputies, members of every political party, as well as Independents, spoke in strong support of the Old I.R.A. claims, and not a single dissentient voice was raised. The Minister for Defence agreed that the matter was being approached in a non-party manner, on a national basis.

The cost to the State of these increases would be only a trifling item in the Annual Budget. Furthermore, any money expended on "Old I.R.A." Pensions is not, like other pensions, a permanent charge on the country, but is rapidly diminishing and will come to an end in this generation. Each year's Estimates for Military Service Pensions include a significant figure for money saved by "estimated deaths." In not many more years the cost of these pensions, even with the increases claimed, will be negligible.

Reference was made in our former pamphlet to the generous provisions made by other countries for the soldiers who had served them in time of national emergency, and it was pointed out how unfavourably the provision made by our State for its war veterans compares with these.

To begin with, the numbers involved in this country are a small fraction of the population, whereas in other countries where there is general military service, provision must be made for relatively much larger numbers. It might be thought that, as the other countries concerned were all larger and more populous, they were far superior in national resources and consequently able to do things which Ireland, with its limited means, could not afford. This argument is unsound. Ireland is a land rich in national resources, and, now that she controls these resources (thanks to the successful issue of the fight for freedom) has developed and made use of them to a striking extent, so as to be more prosperous and enjoy a higher standard of living than most of the countries of Europe—not excluding England.

What would be the position of our country to-day if the I.R.A. had failed, as their fathers did, to achieve Independence? No doubt, the pattern of dealing with earlier attempts would have been followed—such of the leaders

as were not hanged would have been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and their followers scattered or driven into exile. Conscription into the British Army, which the I.R.A. prevented in 1918, would have been enforced on the Irish people on the outbreak of the second World War and, as a consequence, Dublin and other cities would have suffered at least as severely as did Belfast. The austerity measures and heavy taxation enforced in Great Britain would also operate here. In fine, the position would be one of despondency, privation and national frustration.

**What a contrast does the Republic of Ireland to-day present!** There is a steadily expanding export trade, which between 1943 and 1949 increased from £27,730,919 to £58,973,746. Favourable Trade Agreements exist with European countries and the U.S.A. Successful large-scale enterprises have been sponsored by our own Government, among which may be mentioned the Electricity Supply Board, Bord na Mona, Aer Lingus, The Irish Sugar Co., Irish Shipping and Irish Cement, and there is also a widespread growth of native industries privately financed, which are evidence of the confidence of Irish investors in the future of native industry in a free Ireland.

As an illustration of our progress in the short space of twenty-five years, it may be noted that the gross value of Industrial Output has increased nearly five times, the numbers engaged in industrial production have more than doubled, and the earnings of those employed have more than quadrupled.

The material improvement in the country has been revolutionary and, equally, or more valuable, has been the renewal of self-respect and national pride, and both are the direct result of the efforts of the Old I.R.A., thirty years ago.

The standard of living in Ireland, which forty years ago was one of the lowest in Europe, is now one of the highest. In the days of an "English garrison" and a foreign ascendancy dominating the political and social life of the country, the mere Irishman was a "hewer of wood and drawer of water." But for the Old I.R.A. that position would be unchanged to-day.

The people, and they in the ultimate are the State, recognise these facts and have made it clear in every way open to them that they support the Old I.R.A. claims and desire their grievances to be redressed.

In the discussion in the Dail in June on the Army Pensions Vote, the people's representatives urged the Government to introduce legislation on such a scale as would settle the matter finally. Deputy General MacEoin, in making his contribution, stressed the point that Great Britain was paying £1,500,000 alone to the Black and Tans recruited to wage war on our people.

**What—if any sum—it may be asked, could be regarded as commensurate to reward the Old I.R.A. for the service they gave in defending their people, a service given voluntarily and without any hope, or even thought, of personal gain? They are old now, however; many of them incapacitated and in needy circumstances. They deserve well of their country.**

Is it unreasonable to expect that the Government should, in view of the case here stated, show a spirit of magnanimity towards former comrades-in-arms in dealing with the claims submitted?