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Father O'Flanagan's Suppressed Speech.

The following is a verbatim report of the speech delivered to 10,000 people at Ballyjamesduff on Sunday, May 26, 1918, by the Rev. M. O'Flanagan, C.C., Crossna, Vice-President Sinn Fein. The Censor refused to allow even one word of the speech to be published. Father O'Flanagan, who received a great ovation, said:—

Men of Breffni, for many years—ever since I was a youngster at school—I longed to see one spot in Ireland perhaps more than any other. In coming along the 60 miles that separate North Roscommon from East Cavan to-day I had an opportunity of seeing that spot. And although I had to go a few miles out of my way, and even run the risk of being a little late for the meeting, I felt I would not be in a proper position to speak to the men of Cavan if I did not stand for a few minutes on the bridge of Finea, on the spot where the Slasher and his heroic band of 100 kept a thousand of the foreign enemy at bay, and where in the evening, after his long day's fight, when a gigantic enemy soldier opposed to him drove his sword into his cheek, he gripped the blade between his teeth as if between a vice and held it there until he had slain the enemy. And I said to myself, as I stood on that bridge, "You are going to speak to the men in whose veins flow the blood of Myles O'Reilly and his band of 100, and if you are not able to get these men to stand in the bridge for Ireland to-day, as their forefathers did in the past, the fault will be yours, and not theirs."

Within the last few days England has started one of the many campaigns against Ireland, and the first action in the campaign is the effort to fill the whole world with a cloud of poison-gas of lies and misrepresentations. I do not propose to waste your time and mine by trying to examine the network which the little Welsh spider spun in his effort to blacken the name of the Irish people. They are calling us a bad name to-day. In the old days they called us the wild Irish and the mere Irish. But our people are scattered about the earth to-day, and they know in America that the citizenship of the Irishman is not second in quality to the citizenship of any other race. They know us beneath the Southern Cross, and they have learned to know us in the centuries past in France, when thousands of Irishmen laid down their lives under the flag of France for the liberty of the French people. They cannot calumniate us to-day by calling us pro-Irish, and therefore they try to do it by calling us pro-German. They are trying to persuade the world that this quarrel that exists to-day, and is acute, between Ireland and England is a quarrel that began since Germany was discovered four years ago. The quarrel between Germany and England is a quarrel about accidentals, it is a quarrel about trade, about coal mines, about command of traffic routes; but the quarrel between Ireland and England is a quarrel of life and death. The quarrel between Germany and England began four years ago. The fight to the death between Ireland and England began 700 years ago. In a few years more those royal cousins who rule England and Germany will come together and clink their champagne glasses over the graves of millions of the flower of the manhood of Germany and England; but the quarrel between Ireland and England will go on until Ireland is completely separated from England under that beautiful tricolour flag of the Irish Republic. They imagine they can poison the Irish people by their campaign of lies, by telling the world that the source of the inspiration of this movement of ours comes from the banks of the Rhine, and not from the banks of the Shannon. They imagine that they will be able to throw dust in the eyes of a lot of the Irish people themselves to begin with, and the people in foreign countries as well. There is an old American saying that "you can fool some of the people all the time, and you can fool all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

And this little Welsh thimble-rigger has got his supply of thimbles on his little table. On one you have printed Home Rule. On another of the thimbles you have printed the Convention, and on another you have Devolution. And he is not content with these thimbles; They were not enough to hide his false pea of Self-Determination and National Liberty. He is taking up another thimble now, which he calls Federalism, and he imagines that he will be able to persuade the world that under some of these thimbles will be found the solution of the Irish question. The Irish question is not a question that requires much study or much thought to solve; it is quite a simple thing to solve. They don't need to gather together a carefully selected body of their own supporters and put them marking time in Trinity College for eight or nine months in order to solve this wonderfully difficult Irish question. The solution is quite simple. All they have got to do is to take back their French and their Shortt and their soldiers and their police and their judges and all the paraphernalia of their law and get bag and baggage out of Ireland and leave Ireland to the people for whom Almighty God made it, and whom in His Providence He caused to be born and grow up to manhood and womanhood in it.

The last act in the drama of reducing Ireland to slavery was proposed a few weeks ago, and they were in the hurry of their lives in passing it through and putting it on the Statute Book. It seems to me from our experience in Ireland of their Home Rule Bill of four years ago, and their Conscription Act of some four or five weeks ago, that if you want to get rid of a nuisance the best way to treat it is to put it on the Statute Book. They rushed it pell mell through the House of Commons, and they sat up nights in the House of Lords, and they had the Commissioners and King George waiting in their robes until the House of Lords had passed it through in order to put the King's signature upon it; and one would imagine that it was going to be in full force the next day. All the time they were wondering whether it would be met by passive resistance or by active resistance. Well, my friends, we are quite prepared to meet it with passive resistance as long as it remains passive conscription (cheers). There was a man one day working in a field of hay and a cross dog came along and attacked him. He stuck a fork in him and killed the dog, and he was brought up in court for it. The magistrate began to lecture him about killing a valuable dog, and the man said to him: "Sure the dog attacked me." "Ah, well," said the magistrate, "could not you protect yourself with the other end of the fork?" "Sure I would," said the man, "if the dog attacked me with his other end!" (laughter and cheers). Well, the conscription dog has been quite content so far to attack us with the other end, and thus as long as we have passive conscription I dare say we can be quite content with passive resistance, but if the dog comes along, as he threatened to come along at first, he will find that there are two ends to the fork (cheers).

Well, we are met to-day in a movement that will fill a large place in the history of Ireland, and will, I believe, fill a large place in the history of Europe. What have we to do with the great tragedy that is bringing civilisation into ruin on the Continent of Europe? Go around amongst those conscript soldiers from England and talk to them, and find out from them why they are in the army, and each one of them will tell you a very pitiful story—that they were either shamed into it or pressed into it by force, and that they don't want to be there. All this hatred that is supposed to fill the breasts of the English and French against the Germans, and of the Germans against the English and French, is largely a manufactured hatred, a hatred that is built up by lying newspapers and lying Ministers, who sit in their offices in London and other capitals of Europe and play with the lives of men by the million. These men are in no danger themselves, but they coolly talk of an offensive, and that offensive will probably cost 150,000 or 200,000 lives. With a stroke of a pencil or with some wild speech or some wild sentence about a knock-out blow, they blot out the lives of hundreds of thousands of fathers and children and leave weeping and broken hearts throughout the length and breadth of Europe. My friends, thank God there is one Nation in Europe that has got leaders who are not sitting safely at home, but who are encountering as much danger as the rank and file of their followers. Eamonn De Valera and Arthur Griffith are not sitting safely in some office, protected by the lives of millions, and gambling in other people's lives, but they are risking their own. Eamonn

De Valera two years ago was saved—oh, I believe it was a miracle of God!—to be the leader of the Irish race. We therefore have leaders who sympathise with the people, men who will not risk the life of any man unless it be absolutely necessary in the cause of Irish Liberty. We have men who have not translated the world into terms of machine guns, poison gas, and high explosives, but who still believe that the world was made for those living in it.

Therefore we have one Nation in Europe that does not believe the lies that are fed out to it by the newspapers. We have got one Nation in Europe that has refused to go into the war with a pair of blinkers on. Yes, they appeal to us to fight for Nationality, and they appeal to us to throw in our lot with our brothers across the Atlantic, and they will not allow a little boy or girl across the Atlantic to write a letter to their mother that they will not open lest we get a hint of what the feeling across the Atlantic is. Yes, they want us to join in a cause because they tell us that our people beyond the Atlantic are heart and soul in it, and even when the Lord Mayor of our premier town tries to go out to America to lay a written statement before the President of the United States they will not let him go, unless his statement is submitted to this new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord French. Lord French to be the censor of Ireland's voice to the United States! Lord French, Lord Lieutenant and all that he is, could not get himself elected a member of the Roscommon County Council in the district around his residence in Carrigeenroe. Well, if they want us to find out and to know for certain what this war is about let them give us free scope to go over and discuss the question with our people in America. Let us hear what they have to say, and let them hear what we have to say. Ah! they won't do that. I saw a letter a few days ago from a young fellow of 23, born here in Ireland, who went out to Canada a few years ago and got very fond of Canada, seeing that it was a fine, big, free country—or rather, fairly free. Anyway it looked very free to him, coming from Ireland. When his chums were joining the army he joined, too, and he was brought over as far as England on his way to the front. All the time he was encouraged by the hope that he would have an opportunity of going home to see his father and mother in Ireland; but when he came as far as England he was told by an officer of his regiment that those awful Sinn Feiners had made such a hell upon earth of Ireland that it would not be safe for him to come over here (laughter). And the sad part of it was that this poor unfortunate fellow believed the lies he was told and was full of bitterness against so many of his own countrymen. Ah! yes, they can drown our voices. They can prevent De Valera from coming here to speak to the people of Cavan, for some time longer anyway. They can stifle the voice of Arthur Griffith and compel some other pen in Ireland to write articles in "Nationality." But, men of Cavan, they won't be able to stifle the united voice of the voters of Cavan. That will be one flashlight that will shine up in the sky over Ireland and that will be seen by the Irish in America and Australia and in every part of the world. It will be seen not merely by the Irish, but by the friends of freedom wherever on God's land a real friend of freedom is left. Therefore, you have got an opportunity such as seldom comes to any constituency in Ireland. We got it in North Roscommon a year and a quarter ago, and, thanks be to God, the people of Roscommon were intelligent enough and courageous enough to fling aside all their threats. And I tell you we were threatened with bitter things in those days. If we voted for Count Plunkett we were told that we would bring turmoil and bloodshed on the country. We were told that conscription would be put into force immediately; that we would vex John Bull, and that if we vexed John Bull that he was an awful fellow, and what would he not do with us. Aye, and we were told that by those members of Parliament who are coming down here feeding you up with lies—not, thank God, those who are listening to me, but unfortunately there are others. Really I don't blame the poor people themselves, because I believe if they knew what was right they would do it—they told us in Roscommon that if we elected Count Plunkett the Old Age Pensions would be stopped. As a matter of fact, it was only a few weeks after when they were raised from 5/- to 7/6. Oh, it is a sad tragedy to think that even here in Ireland so many of our people can be blinded by those false newspapers that are bought up in the interests of the wealthy classes, who are filling their pockets with gold while the lives of the noblest in every land of Europe are being poured out on the battlefields. It is sad to think that they

succeeded in blinding the people of two constituencies in this old province of Ulster, which so long held the flame of liberty higher than in any other province of Ireland. But, thank God, we are here to-day in a county that is on the right side. We are here amongst a people who value Nationality as highly and as proudly, I believe, as in any other part of Ireland. And we are here to-day amongst a people who in a few days more when this election will come on will send in trumpet tones throughout the world the same demand for Ireland's complete independence that has come already from Roscommon and Clare, Longford, Kilkenny, and Tullamore. And, please God, I hope there will not be found in Cavan any man selfish enough, any man stupid enough not to see that the strength of Ireland's case against conscription rests upon the fact that Ireland is a Nation, and that it is only as a Nation that we can refuse conscription. It is only because we are a separate nationality that our young men can go and, with a clean conscience, look up into the face of Almighty God and say that they are prepared, if necessary, to shed the last drop of their blood upon the Irish soil rather than be swept away to be the bond slaves of Imperial plotters. They talk of their plots, but they are the plotters. Ireland is a Nation. They are criminals to come to Ireland at all. Their Lords Lieutenant and their Chief Secretaries are criminals against humanity by daring to come in and try by force to run a country against the will of the people who are governed. And we can condemn them as criminals out of the mouths of those hypocritical leaders of England who profess that they are fighting a war for Self-Determination.

As a Nation, then, and only as a Nation, are we right in resisting conscription, and as a Nation we cannot have any parleying any longer with any foreign Parliament. We must turn our back upon Westminster and proclaim our right before the whole world. And believe me, Ireland is to-day not merely solving the Irish question, but Ireland is a leader in the solution of a world question. Ireland is a leader in solving the world question because the Irish people alone are refusing to yield to force, refusing to go and fight battles until they have examined freely and fully both sides, and then giving their decision as to which is right and which is wrong. And if Ireland is not to assert its Nationality in this election, how is it going to do it? Is it going to do it by voting for this man O'Hanlon, or is it going to do it by voting for that Irishman who for the last thirty years has been planning and writing and labouring in obscurity and in voluntary poverty in Dublin to save his country? But, thank God, at last, when the soil was enriched by the blood of the men of Easter Week, his crop burst forth and filled Ireland from end to end with its present golden harvest.

Now, I will tell you one thing about Arthur Griffith. At the time when the North Roscommon Election was coming along, last January twelve months, we had no organisation in the country. That was several months before the present Sinn Fein Organisation was formed. There was no branch of that organisation to take up a fight anywhere, and we had no money to run it with—not one red cent. of this German gold that is pouring over Ireland these years past (laughter) was available at the time of the Roscommon election, and as a matter of fact it was only the other day that I succeeded in paying back the last of the money for the Roscommon election. Even since I was not able to pick up any of the German gold (laughter). Arthur Griffith had come out of prison or internment about two or three weeks before the North Roscommon election came on and a number of friends of his got together and subscribed £150 to re-start "Nationality." As soon as James O'Kelly, the member for North Roscommon, died Arthur Griffith came to a friend of mine and he said: "Here, I have this £150 to re-start 'Nationality' and you can have it for the North Roscommon election." Well, thank God, we were able to get along without it, because we got two other men to give us £200 apiece, and we left Arthur Griffith his £150; and so he was able to put "Nationality" on foot again, and we had the first copy of it out to celebrate the victory in North Roscommon! (cheers).

And, I might tell you, for the last five or six months I have had a number of young people from Crossna giving plays up and down the country in order to make up the last of that £400, which was paid last week. I have given you just a little picture of the truth about Sinn Fein, the truth about the motives and the principles of our organisation, and what is still more important for you, men of Cavan, a little of the truth about the real Arthur Griffith (loud cheers).