

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL.

CONFERENCE

ON THE

REDISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN IRELAND.

LETTER FROM MR. SPEAKER TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.



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Redistribution of Seats in Ireland.

*Speaker's House,
S.W. 1.*

19th January, 1918.

Dear Prime Minister,

On the 7th December, 1917, in the course of the Debate on the Representation of the People Bill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the House of Commons that an agreement had been arrived at, relating to the proposal for a redistribution of seats in Ireland, in the following terms:—

“A conference to be set up to consider the redistribution of seats in Ireland, it being understood that all parts of the country shall have equitable representation, having regard to population. The conference to consist of two members to be nominated by the hon. and learned gentleman opposite on the one hand, and two members to be nominated by my hon. friend (Sir J. Lonsdale), together with Mr. Speaker, who is to preside and have a casting vote. The decision of the conference to be embodied in a new Bill. This is to pass as an agreed Bill, and to be submitted for the Royal Assent at the same time as the Franchise Bill. On the above terms the Schedule dealing with redistribution in the present Bill will be withdrawn.”

In accordance with this agreement Mr. J. J. Clancy, M.P., and Mr. J. MacVeagh, M.P., as representing the Nationalist party, and Mr. D. S. Henry, K.C., M.P., and Mr. W. Coote, M.P., as representing the Unionist party in Ireland, were nominated to confer under my chairmanship, and during the adjournment of the House of Commons, and subsequently, we have met and discussed the points at issue.

At my invitation Mr. W. T. Jerred, C.B., was kind enough to act as Secretary to the Conference, and I am much indebted to him for his assistance.

1. It was agreed that as few alterations as possible should be made in existing constituencies.

2. It was agreed that the Queen's University (Belfast) and the National University (Dublin) shall each be represented by one Member.

3. It was agreed that the Parliamentary Borough of Waterford shall continue to return one Member; that the Parliamentary County of Waterford shall return one Member only; and that the contents of the Borough and County respectively shall be as shown in the Annexe to this letter.

4. It was proposed by the Nationalist representatives that a system of Proportional Representation should be adopted for the Parliamentary Boroughs of Dublin and Belfast, but as this was not agreed to by the other side, and I felt myself in all the circumstances precluded from giving a casting vote in favour of any scheme for the purpose, the matter dropped.

5. The question of the representation and divisions of the Parliamentary Borough of Belfast and the Parliamentary Counties of Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone, as well as the boundaries of the Rathfriland Division of the County of Dublin, was warmly contested on both sides. Various schemes were proposed for solving the difficulties inherent in the framing of a comprehensive plan for dealing with these areas. These schemes were all opposed by one or other of the two parties. One proposal was that the boundaries of four of the Divisions of the County of Down should be altered, and that as regards the other areas mentioned in this paragraph the determinations of the Boundary Commissioners (Ireland), as set out in their Report (Cd. 8830), should not be varied. This proposal was objected to by the Unionist representatives, but as it appeared to me that it presented the fewest practical difficulties and avoided certain anomalies which would be created by each of the other schemes, I gave my casting vote in its favour. The variations to be made in the boundaries of these Divisions are set out in the Annexe.

6. The Nationalist representatives desired to enter a caveat against the possible assumption that they agreed to the disfranchisement of any existing constituency,

but, subject to this, it was agreed by both parties that, save as aforesaid, the determinations of the Boundary Commissioners, as set out in their Report, should stand.

7. It was proposed on behalf of the Nationalist party that a system of Proportional Representation should be introduced for all towns having a population of 10,000 and upwards for municipal purposes only. I found myself obliged to rule out this proposal as being beyond the purview of the Conference, but the Nationalist representatives desired that it should be placed on record.

It will of course be understood that in view of the decisions above mentioned the representation proposed to be given to the Queen's University (Belfast) and the National University (Dublin) will involve an increase of two members in the total representation of Ireland in the House of Commons.

Yours truly,

JAMES W. LOWTHER.

To the Right Hon. the Prime Minister.

ANNEXE.

PARLIAMENTARY BOROUGH OF WATERFORD.

CONTENTS.

The County Borough of Waterford; and the part of the Waterford No. 1 Rural District which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballynakill, Kilbarry, Killoteran, and Waterford Rural.

PARLIAMENTARY COUNTY OF WATERFORD.

CONTENTS.

The Administrative County of Waterford exclusive of the part thereof comprised in the Parliamentary Borough of Waterford.

PARLIAMENTARY COUNTY OF DOWN.

Divisions as determined by the Boundary Commissioners.		Divisions as determined at the Conference.	
Names and contents of Divisions.	Population (Census) 1911.	Names and contents of Divisions.	Population (Census) 1911.
The EAST DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural District of Downpatrick ..	39,196	The EAST DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural District of Downpatrick, exclusive of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballynahinch, Kilmore, and Leggygowan; the part of the Rural District of Kilkeel which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Bryansford, Fofanny, and Maghera; and the part of the Rural District of Banbridge which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballyward, Crossgar, and Leitrim ..	39,944
The MID DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural Districts of Castlereagh and Hillsborough; the part of the Rural District of Newtownards which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballygowan, Ballymaglaff, Kilmoor, Moneyreagh, and Tullynakill; and the Urban District of Holywood ..	34,942	The MID DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural Districts of Castlereagh and Hillsborough; the part of the Rural District of Newtownards which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballygowan, Ballymaglaff, Kilmoor, Moneyreagh, and Tullynakill; the part of the Rural District of Downpatrick which consists of the District Electoral Divisions of Ballynahinch, Kilmore, and Leggygowan; and the Urban District of Holywood ..	40,284
The NORTH DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the part of the Rural District of Newtownards which is not included in the Mid Down Division, and the Urban Districts of Bangor, Donaghadee, and Newtownards ..	38,713	The NORTH DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the part of the Rural District of Newtownards which is not included in the Mid Down Division, and the Urban Districts of Bangor, Donaghadee, and Newtownards ..	38,713
The SOUTH DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural Districts of Kilkeel and Newry No. 1, and the Urban Districts of Newcastle, Newry, and Warrenpoint ..	46,521	The SOUTH DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural District of Newry No. 1; the part of the Rural District of Kilkeel which is not included in the East Down Division; and the Urban Districts of Newcastle, Newry, and Warrenpoint ..	43,578
The WEST DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural Districts of Banbridge and Moira, and the Urban Districts of Banbridge and Dromore ..	44,931	The WEST DOWN DIVISION—consisting of the Rural District of Moira; the part of the Rural District of Banbridge which is not included in the East Down Division; and the Urban Districts of Banbridge and Dromore ..	41,784