Limerick and the Paris Peace Conference 1919

by Des Ryan

Sarajevo, Bosnia, 28th June, 1914, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, are shot dead by Bosnian-Serb nationalist while visiting the city. The Austro-Hungarian response was to send a list of demands, an ultimatum, to Bosnia's neighbour Serbia, who the Austrians believed, was behind the killings. Although the Serbian government complied with most of the demands, the Austro-Hungarians were not satisfied and declared war on Serbia on July 28th. Within a few days all the major powers of Europe were involved; Russia supported Serbia, Germany backed up the Austro-Hungarians and France sided with the Russians. The German invasion of neutral Belgium, on August 3rd, brought England into the conflict. In April 1917, the American President Woodrow Wilson carried America into the war when Congress passed a declaration of war on Germany.

Just ten months before the end of the First World War, in the early days of January 1918, Woodrow Wilson sat at his desk in the White House, with his friend and close confidant, Colonel Edward M. House, and began writing down what later became known as the Fourteen Points. These were his thoughts on a plan to bring the war, which was then worldwide, to a conclusive end and maintain peace in the world in the aftermath of the war. On January 8th, as he stood before Congress, he read out his plan for a new world order based on his fourteen points which were also a statement of American war aims. Several of these points, which I have listed below, dealt with the concept of the right of people to govern themselves.

Point. 5. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

Point. 10. The peoples of Austria-Hungary [Empire] should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

Point. 11. Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; ... and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly council along line of allegiance and nationality.

Point. 12. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted securi-
their dominions, as a matter of fact they grabbed more territory, in the Middle East, due to the break-up of the Turkish Empire. The idea of nationalities being given the right to govern themselves was only going to be applied in 1914 to the above-named nations. Although the war ended when an armistice came into effect on the morning of the eleventh of November, 1918, fighting continued in Germany, most of eastern Europe, and in the former Turkish empire for many months afterwards.

Ireland, then under British rule, was one of the countries, which hoped to break free from colonial domination. There was a flurry of excitement in the country when it became known that Wilson would be travelling to Europe to take part in the Peace Conference being held in Paris. Wilson had hoped to hold the Peace Conference in neutral Switzerland but civil unrest in the country had put an end to that.

On December 4th 1918, the liner George Washington (formerly German passenger liner) carrying President Wilson and the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, sailed out of New York, arriving in the French port of Brest on the 13th December. One of the passengers on board was Mrs. Anna Hamilton from Limerick. Mrs. Hamilton was a member of the Knights of Columbus and had been assigned by Commander Perkins to look after Mr. and Mrs. Wilson on their journey to Europe. Mrs. Hamilton had been a nurse during the war and had served at the front. She had been on three vessels that had been attacked by German submarines.

At the suggestion of the Lord Mayor of Dublin there were invitations to Wilson, from all over the country, inviting him to visit Ireland; some cities were going to confirm the freedom of their cities on him. At a meeting held in the Town Hall, Rutland street, on Thursday, December 19th, the Mayor of Limerick, Alphonsus O’Mara, made arrangements to hold a public demonstration for the following Sunday in support of the Lord Mayor of Dublin’s proposal to invite President Wilson to Ireland. A letter from the catholic Bishop of Limerick Dr. Hallinan expressing his regret at not being able to attend the meeting but wishing the Mayor every success was read out to the gathering. In his letter the Bishop wrote that "if there is to be anything like a solid permanent peace after this war, it has to be founded on the principles laid down by the Pope [Benedict XVI] and President Wilson, and if action on the part of the world leaders is to lead to the establishment of international justice and unity, which has long since been suppressed by the secret diplomatic intrigue, political chicanery and unblushing hypocrisy of many rulers and statesmen. The reign of might over right didn’t begin when Alasec and Lorraine [during the Franco-Prussian of 1870] were wrested from France. Much less did it begin when France violated the neutrality of Belgium. It began when the King of Piedmont, using the Italian revolution, began to encroach on the patrimony of the Holy See nearly 60 years ago. The reign of might over right was crowned and consecrated on the 29th September, 1870, in defiance of all right and justice and solemn treaties and pledges Rome was bombarded and captured by the forces of Victor Emmanuel, and that act of war was recognised not by the people but by nearly all the Governments of the civilised world. The work of the coming Peace Conference is to be used, we are told, as one of reparation and readjustments. If that be so, you may take it as certain that there will not be, and cannot be, any permanent peace in the world until that wrong inflicted on the Holy See is righted. It is therefore of primary importance that the Pope he represented at the Peace Conference Without his aid I believe it will be nearly impossible for President Wilson to ensure that his principles prevail in an assembly in which he will find, as all indications point out, people, now that the war is over, who will question in principle Wilson’s principles. These are the very people who loudly acclaimed them when the help of America and its President was needed to win the war. It is matter of vital importance that President Wilson should know and feel that he has at his back all that is best and sanest in the democracy of the world, especially that of small and oppressed nationalities, on whose behalf the war, we have been told, was waged. Foremost amongst these, Ireland should take its place, and invite to her shores him who has raised on high the banner of self-determination for those little nations. The meeting, that Sunday, was held outside the Town Hall at 4 o’clock and was one of the largest seen in the city for many years. The public were entertained by St. Johns Brass and Reed Band, the Boherbuoy and the Irish Volunteer Fife and Drum Band. Cumann na mBan, the ladies section of Sinn Fein, were also asked to attend. The platform, which extended from one of the large windows in the Town Hall out on to the street, was decorated with American and Irish flags. The Mayor, opening the proceedings, said that he had called the people together to let them know he was going, on their behalf, to invite the first citizen of the greatest nation on earth to visit Ireland. President Wilson had gained the gratitude of the American people for his idealistic principals which had brought an end to the World War.

Other nations had accepted his principles [the fourteen points] when they wanted his help. It was not until in certain quarters that these principles were impracticable and impossible. President Wilson was being discredited as an idealist on one hand, and as a crank on the other. The Mayor felt that the American Army had been sent to Europe to fight against oppression, the same principal for which men [in 1916] had lost their lives in Dublin. The Mayor thought that certain principles should prevail, in particular, justice for all peoples and nationalities and the right to live on equal terms of liberty and freedom with one another. Some nations [weren’t waiting for the Peace Conference and were taking the law into their own hands and] were already applying these principles, but there were some little nations like Ireland and it was doubtful if Wilson’s policy would be applied to them. It would be a surprise if the Peace Conference failed to agree to these principles. It is our duty as a nation to make the Peace Conference pay up on the policy they had issued as Ireland had been misgoverned longer than any other nation under the sun. It is for the Irish people to agree to the principles of the national and international rights which America claims by President Wilson whom he said that people should be ruled according to their own internal affairs. We were told that Ireland could have those principles applied, but Ulster stood in the way. Russia had to give up her claim to Poland which had a population of one million Germans. Poland [had been divided between the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian Empires and had] got the Home Rule in spite of Russia and in spite of the one million Germans living there. The Irish people claimed exactly the same rights, they, too, must get rid of the English garrison in Ireland, and if they don’t they should be governed by the people of Ireland.

Ireland’s hope lay in the fact that President Wilson would not desert the principles he had been fighting for, and we trust he will continue to apply them to all nations of the world, because there would be no settlement until the small nations were governed by themselves and not by the big Empires. Ireland had done her part by electing men who believe in the principle of self-determination; if a vote was taken [now] on the issue of self-determination we would have a two to one majority in favour of it.

We are meeting her today to ask the representative of the Stars and Stripes to visit our country, and to assure him that his welcome in Ireland would be greater than the welcome he had received from any other nation. In extending that invitation we are not begging favours from President Wilson, we are not clinging to any power. It had been said that the Irish people were relying on President Wilson and the Peace Conference, but we of Sinn Fein rely on ourselves, and if President Wilson and the Peace Conference fail [to grant us independence] we will carry on.

A meeting, held the same day, in the town of Abbeyfeale, in county Limerick, expressed similar views. A colourfully-carrying Irish and American flags, led the local brass band and a contingent of the Irish Volunteers as they marched to the meeting in the town square. The Chairman, Rev. J. Carr, who was heartily received, said, we are assembled here to-day for the purpose of associating ourselves with the noble lead given to them by the Lord Mayor of Dublin in his invitation to President Wilson to visit this country. President Wilson could judge Ireland personally and to see for himself our fitness for the application of his self-determining principles of liberty to this country. Rev. D O’Riordan, representing the people of Athea, also in the county, pointed out that Wilson was the
elected representative of far more Irishmen than King George, who styled himself King of Ireland, a remark that drew cheers from the crowd.

Mr. R.B. Woulfe, the local chemist, read out a letter from Dr. Philip McGrath who was unable to attend the meeting. In his letter Dr. McGrath said that President Wilson had laid down in his Fourteen Points that people of distinct nationality, culture, language and racial individuality should be free to govern according to their own ideas of government. The invitation to Wilson at this critical juncture was of paramount importance as an unscrupulous Press campaign, richly endowed and subsidised by England, has been carried on in America, besmirching and defaming the fair name of Ireland in order to alienate American sympathy. This invitation to President Wilson by the overwhelming majority of the Irish people will prove to the world that we demand nothing more or less than the right claimed by Poland, and other subject and oppressed races of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Russia, to look after our own affairs, according to our own ideas. This invitation will dispel the gross misrepresentation that Ireland was pro-German and thereby anti-American. Ireland, he went on to say, was pro-German only in the sense that we prayed that some nation might rise up to defeat England [and we would get our independence].

On January 27th, 1919, in reply to a letter from the Irish Society for the League of Nations Bishop Hallinan wrote to say that he agreed with Mr. Balfour [British foreign secretary] in saying that before a League of Nations can be established certain wrongs must be righted. Amongst these the first and greatest is that inflicted by the King of Sardinia on Pius IXth in the spoliation of the Holy See [during the war of Italian unification in 1870 when the Papal states were incorporated into the new Italy]. That sacrilegious crime against the Pope was not only tolerated but connived at and condoned by the Powers of Europe. That crime against Heaven and earth displaced the keystone of international right and Christian civilisation in the world. Until that wrong is righted in a way that will meet the approval of the Pope, in my humble opinion you have no effective League of Nations. Furthermore, I do not think it very probable that the basis even of any kind of permanent peace can be laid by those taking part in the Peace Conference while the Pope, [Benedict XV] who is the Prince of Peace is excluded from its deliberations. We all know how The Hague peace conference, from which the Pope was excluded at the behest of Italy, [tried, without success, to put limits on war] had ended. These conferences have proved to be heralds not of peace but of the greatest war that has ever desolated the world.

As regards Ireland, when her undoubted claim and right to National Independence are recognised by the other nations of the world, it will be time for her to join a League of Nations. To be poking her head into it at present seems to me to be not only opportune but wanting in national self respect.

The idea for an international association where political problems could be put to arbitration, instead of countries going to war with one another, wasn't new. But as the war dragged on more and more people were getting accustomed to the idea of a
"League of Nations" to describe such an alliance. In May, 1915, a League of Nations Society was started in London, similar societies were founded in France, Germany and also in the neutral countries of Europe. The vision of an alliance of nations, to solve international problems, caught on fairly quickly in America, even though the country was far away. In 1915, there was no war in America. Both major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats supported the concept, each declaring that a new international system must be set up; that peace must be assured, if necessary by the armed forces of peace-loving nations. When the Peace Conference met on the first items on the agenda was the setting up of a League of Nations. Monsignor de Valera was born on October 18th, 1882, in New York. His mother, Catherine Coll, was from Bruree in county Limerick. The young de Valera began his education at the Bruree National School, from there he went, a few miles up the road, to the C.B.S at Charleville in county Cork. Dev had a flair for mathematics and after two years he won a scholarship which helped him get a place in Blackrock College in Dublin. When financial difficulties hampered his further education the Holy Ghost Fathers gave him a part-time teaching position at the college which helped him to complete a degree course at Dublin's Royal University.

By 1904 he had taken up a teaching position at Rockwell College in Cashel, Co. Tipperary. The following year he moved to Dublin to teach mathematics at Our Lady of Mercy Training College in Careyfort. This was the start of his journey from mathematician to politician. In November, 1913, he joined the Irish Volunteer movement; during the Easter Rising in 1916, he held the rank of Commandant. Arrested after the rising he was interned in England but was released the following year under a British amnesty. He was arrested again in May, 1918, for opposing the introduction of conscription to Ireland. While de Valera was serving his time in Lincoln Prison the British government called a general election in December, 1918. In Ireland Sinn Fein swept the board. Of the 105 seats allocated to Ireland, Sinn Fein candidates won 73, the Irish Party 6 and the Unionists 26. In Limerick, M.P. Michael Joyce lost his seat to the Sinn Fein candidate Michael Colivet. Although still in prison de Valera [with Colivet] was one of the candidates elected on the Sinn Fein ticket.

On January 20th, 1919, the Paris Peace Conference opened. The next day Sinn Fein candidates, those who were not in prison and who would not sit in the British House of Parliament, met at the Mansion House in Dublin to set up their own government, Dail Eireann [Assembly of Ireland]. Despite the lack of administrative experience of its first Ministers, the First Dail became an alternative government to many people in Ireland during the years 1919 to 1921. On February 3rd, de Valera, with the help of Michael Collins, escaped from Lincoln Prison. Dev knew that British recognition of an independent Ireland would only come through international pressure and what greater place to try and exert that pressure than at the Peace Conference in Paris. The Dail had appointed three delegates to represent it at the Paris Peace talks. It had been intended to send de Valera as one of them but, as he had not yet recovered from his injury, he was to send Sean T. O'Reilly and George Gavan Duffy. In a special cable, from Paris, to its office in America the New York Times newspaper reported that Professor Edward de Valera, the escaped Sinn Fein leader, had not yet arrived in Paris, but the so-called Irish Republic has succeeded in sending one of its emissaries. His name was de Valera, and to his name he adds the letters M.P. The report went on to say that Mr. O'Reilly had sent a letter to President Wilson, at the Villa Murat, in which he stated that he had been "appointed by the provisional Government of the Irish Republic to be their representative in Paris, and was directed to request what recognition is to be granted by the Peace Conference and the League of Nations to the Government of the Irish Republic, now established". Mr. O'Reilly states that he has been nominated by the Lord Mayor and Municipal Council of the City of Dublin "to wait on your Excellency if your Excellency so pleases, and to inquire if certain correspondence addressed to you by the Town Clerk of Dublin in January last has reached your Excellency". This was a reference to the proposal that the freedom of Dublin be conferred on Wilson. Sean T. then asked for a personal interview in which he could inform Wilson officially of the claims of his Government to the case of Ireland stated before the Peace Conference and the League of Nations.

The "delegate" is stopping "with friends in Paris," and takes no address in his letter to the President. The question is asked whether, under the circumstances, Mr. O'Reilly counted on receiving a reply. It is also pointed out that by signing himself Sean T. O'Reilly, M.P.; he has not followed the precedent established by the majority of the Sinn Feiners who describe themselves as M.P.I.R., i.e., Members of Parliament of the Irish Republic. Inquiries in American quarters, the report continued, indicated that O'Reilly's letter had so far not created the sensation which the delegate of the Irish Republic may have considered appropriate to his advent in Paris. President Wilson's correspondence is very extensive, and O'Reilly's letter, up to this afternoon, does not appear to have come up for consideration. Possibly it may be carried on board President Wilson's ship amid great bundles of other letters when he sails for the United States, and in that case before the Presidents answer can reach O'Reilly at the unnamed address the said O'Reilly may be cooling his heels for a long time.

In his Lenten Pastoral Bishop Hallinan made reference again to the Paris Peace Conference and the allied war aims when he said that the human carnage of the last four years of terrible war has, praise and thank God, receded. Yet the out look was still dark and menacing. In some places the world war has been succeeded by civil war and anarchy and all around there are ominous signs of further upheavals. His Holiness the Pope had ordered prayers for peace to be said throughout the Catholic world and had made an apologetic appeal [during the war] to the heads of the belligerent Powers to enter into conference with a view to a negotiated peace. But all his efforts proved fruitless and the conflict was prolonged. It may be premature yet, the Bishop continued, to form a judgment, but looking at the situation from a human point of view, the prospects for the future peace of the world are not very bright. We do not hear so much now of the noble war aims and grand principles of these Powers which were dimmed into our ears during the stress of war. As far as we can see GOD seems to be as completely excluded from the councils and calculations of the Peace Conference as He was from those of the authors and promoters of the war. Bishop Hallinan deplored that the Pope [again at the behest of the Italian government] had not been invited to take part in the peace negotiations as he felt the Pope's presence would lead to a more solid peace, based not on pagan but on Christian principles. The Bishop called on the people to pray frequently and fervently to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and to our Blessed Lady, that the Holy Spirit of God may so direct the councils of men, even those who seem to ignore Him, that they may lead not only to a desirable peace in general but also the triumph of the Church, the independence of her visible Head, and to the freedom of our own country.

In mid February President Wilson left Paris for a short trip to America. Officially it was for the closing sessions of Congress, unofficially it was to deal with American opposition to the League of Nations. When Wilson arrived back in the United States he was pressed to put Ireland's case for independence forward at the Peace Conference. Wilson's supporters pointed out that Ireland wasn't one of the victorious Allied powers, or a defeated nation, but was part of England. Wilson was also annoyed when he found out that he was expected to press Irish claims for a hearing at the Peace Conference. What he did agree to was that a delegation of Irish-Americans be appointed to lobby that Ireland's case be heard. Arrangements were made for three delegates, Frank P. Walsh, a lawyer and former President of Wilson's War Labour Conference Board, Michael J. Ryan, from Philadelphia, also a lawyer, and Edward F. Dunne, a former Mayor of Chicago and Governor of Illinois, to travel to France. Dunne had spent four years in Ireland during the 1870s and was educated at Trinity College in Dublin. All three had sons serving in the American army during the war. The secretary to the delegation, Mr. Lee, was born in Limerick and had relations living in Co. Limerick. When Wilson arrived back in Paris on March 14th, he stayed at Place des États; the house was the property of a wealthy
The world is not save from democracy when freedom is permitted only to some peoples and denied to others. If it is the right that England should hold Ireland, for example, in subjection against the will of the Irish people, then it was right for any nation to hold other peoples in subjection. In that case, the only test of a nations right to tyrannise over others is its might. And if the doctrine that might makes right is to be endorsed again in Paris, then the right of self-determination is denied. This is a momentous question, and if the answer given by the Paris Conference is a wrong answer, a shuffling, evasive, hypocritical answer, the world might as well begin to prepare now for the next war.

Shortly after the meeting with President Wilson, Walsh, Ryan and Dunne left for Ireland; they arrived in Dublin on Saturday, May 3rd. After visiting Belfast [where city officials refused to meet them] and Cork, they arrived in Limerick on Thursday May 7th, where, at a ceremony beginning at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, they were to be conferred with the Freedom of the City. The footpaths of the streets leading to the Town Hall, on Rutland street, were crowded with people waiting to see the distinguished visitors. The Council Chamber of the Town Hall was decorated with flags for the occasion, especially the Stars and Stripes and the Tri-colour. Prior to the arrival of the motor cars containing the visitors a large contingent of the Irish Volunteers, from Limerick and Clare, led by an American soldier in uniform, marched towards the Town Hall to take up their positions and to help with keeping the crowd in order. The first guests, to arrive by car, were the Most Rev. Dr. Hallinan and Dr. Fogarty the Bishop of Killaloe. Shortly afterwards the car carrying the Irish-American delegation arrived. The band of the National Volunteers were playing popular national airs as the delegates stepped from their car. As they made their way to the entrance of the Town Hall people rushed forward to shake their hands and to wish them good luck in their endeavours for Ireland's freedom. In the Council Chamber every available space was packed, and as the delegates entered they were met with the deafening cheers from the large gathering present. The Mayor opened the proceedings when he said "to-day we make history in Limerick. Perhaps, he continued, in all its varied life this ancient city has never welcomed the representatives of so exalted a mission. We do not believe that President Wilson or any representative of the United States would agree to any peace that would leave Ireland, the only country peopled by a white race still in bondage. There can be no evasion this time by the British Government of the demands Ireland makes. The British Government entered the late war holding herself out as a champion of the oppressed and dispossessed minorities. She lost no opportunity of proclaiming to the world her devotion to the cause of small nations; her long arm is stretched out now, and her hand is mixed deeply in the dough of places where the establishment of free government is in

banker but was not as grand or as large as the Hotel Murat.

In the meantime, former M.P. Michael Joyce arrived back in Limerick from Paris. Mr. Joyce, as President of the United Kingdom Shipping Pilots Association attended the International Seafaring Conference which was held in the French capital. While there the government arranged a tour of the battlefields. He had visited six cities and spent a night at the Hindenberg Line.

In Dublin, at a second meeting of the Dail, on April Ist, de Valera was nominated Prime Minister of the new Irish government. In an interview, he gave the next day, to the London Daily Herald, he said that the League [of Nations] was central to Ireland's claim for independence and recognition and that "our whole the struggle is to get Ireland out of the cage in which the selfish statescraft of England would confine her to get Ireland back into the free world from which she was ravished to get her recognised as a free unit in a world league of nations.

Meanwhile the Irish-American delegation, after landing at the French port of Le Havre, made their way to Paris. On April 18th, they sent a letter to President Wilson asking him to use his influence with the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George to allow de Valera, Arthur Griffith and Count George Noble Plunkett to travel to Paris: "if these gentlemen were furnished safe conduct so that they might present their case we feel that our mission would be, if not entirely, accomplished. The letter ended with a request for a personal interview, which was granted. Wilson met with one of the delegates, Mr. Walsh and they had a conversation lasting an hour but it would appear that their hope of getting de Valera, Griffith and Plunkett a safe passage to Paris fell on deaf ears. Wilson's aide, Colonel House, arranged for the Irish-Americans to meet with Lloyd George but the meeting was cancelled due to pressure upon the Prime Ministers time. When Mr. Walsh and his colleagues expressed a desire to visit Ireland, Lloyd George let it be known that he wanted them to visit as much of Ireland as they could, including Belfast.

The Paris editor of the Chicago American, in an article on nations rights to self-determination asked what argument was used to justify independence for the Poles, Czechoslovaks and Jugo-Slavs and why the same argument did not apply to the desires of the peoples held in subjection by the English Government who were clamouring for freedom from that subjection.
being. America had made great sacrifices for human liberty in the war, to the extent that had they not been made the British Empire would have ceased to exist. The British Government stood silently acquiescent when Mr. Wilson’s Government promised the American people that they would be fighting for self-determination in every part of the world — not only for the Jugo-Slavs, not only for suffering Poland, not only for bereaved and outraged Belgium, but also for Ireland. The Mayor went on to say that England couldn’t object to Ireland claim to freedom or tell the American government that Ireland was none of their business and not to interfere. It is for this reason that we sincerely believe in Mr. Wilson — it is for that reason that we as a people accept the guiding principle of his fourteen points laid down as a basis for peace — and we are confident of his unwavering support in our demand for the full measure of rights for Ireland. As the Mayor concluded his address he wished the delegates God-speed in the noble task of completing the establishment of an Irish Republic.

After the delegates had receiving their certificates of freedom and signed the Roll of Honour, Mr. Walsh rose to speak. He told the Mayor, the Councillors and the guests in the Council Chamber, of how proud he was of being in such a historic city and of the welcome he and his colleagues had received. They hadn’t gone to the Peace Conference, he told the gathering, to demand an Irish Government but to ask that the elected representatives of the Irish people be given a hearing for the form of government they wished to live under. If

“he said in conclusion” we in our humble way can discharge that duty it will be in a manner, conservative and orderly, but standing for the ideals laid down in the American Declaration of Independence, and contained in the latest utterances of the leader of our nation.

Mr. Dunne then got up to speak; we recognise “he said” that we have been given this honour because of the nobility of the mission with which they were charged. They regarded their mission as a holy one and they would prosecute it to the end and to the utmost of their ability.

Finally, it was Mr. Ryan’s turn to say a few words: “I know of no distinction which I value more than the honour just conferred. When America went into the world war it was to make the world safe for democracy, to ensure the right of self-determination to every people. Their kin and their sons — of Irish manhood in America — rallied to the defence of the Republic across the ocean, and they died in France that the world should be made free. We pray that our mission will be successful. We are going to urge that Irelands voice be heard at the Peace Conference, and to try and break down the barriers that impeded her sons in their efforts to reach the world’s ear. Concluding, he said the Ireland was now looking to the free nations of the earth for support, and she could assure them of every assistance from America at least. After the ceremonies had finished the distinguished visitors left for Dublin. It was hoped that they would visit Killmallock, where the people of the town were waiting, but unfortunately they were unable to go there.

Meanwhile, in Paris, a letter, dated May 17th, signed by Sean T. O’Kelly and George Gavin Duffy was sent to Georges Clemenceau the French Prime Minister. In it, they asked Clemenceau to bring to the attention of the Peace Conference a warning that the people of Ireland repudiated the claim of the British Government to speak or act on behalf of Ireland. They also requested that Clemenceau notify the Conference that, they, O’Kelly and Gavin Duffy, had been appointed and authorised by the duly-elected Government of Ireland to act on behalf of Ireland in the proceedings of the Conference and to enter into agreements and sign treaties on behalf of Ireland. A few days later the Irish-American delegates arrived back in Paris, bearing a letter with advice from de Valera, to O’Kelly and Duffy, on how to handle Ireland claim to freedom. “In all cases” he wrote “where a document has been officially handed in, [at the French Foreign Office at Quai d’Orsay] copies of the documents should be given to the Press. We must keep the Irish Question continually hot before the public. This is the time for beginning our big push everywhere. In addition to using the Press you should get into the closest possible contact with [other countries under British rule] the South Africans, Egyptians, Indians, Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders. Also with the representatives of the smaller states of Europe, and those who were neutral during the war. When dealing with political questions discuss trade questions e.g. the possibilities of direct exchange of commodities; ships coming with foreign cargoes to Ireland and returning with Irish products.
Keep us in constant touch with what you are doing. The Irish papers will keep you informed as to the general situation in Ireland. If there is anything special we shall take means to inform you. We shall be particularly anxious to hear as to how our American friends are progressing and their plans for the future.

We here in Ireland should not demand safe conduct from the British Authorities until we have failed to get it from the Peace Conference or have been referred to the British Authorities by the Conference. In a post-script, de Valera added that if communications between Ireland and Paris were cut off, they [O'Kelly and Duffy] had wide discretionary powers to act on their own initiative as long as it did not conflict with the instructions they had received from Dublin.

O'Kelly, in his reply to de Valera, pointed out that there were errors in the translation of letters, from English to French, coming from Ireland, and that they had to be corrected before handing them to the British Premier, Lloyd George, or for distribution to the Press. He went on to say that they were in contact with the South Africans and the Egyptians who were looking to them for aid and assistance in writing up their documents for presentation to the conference and the newspapers. He also wrote that Michael J. Ryan, of the Irish-American delegation, wasn't happy about the reception that he had received in Ireland; this was due to the fact that he didn't get to speak to de Valera privately and was hindered from meeting Mr. John Dillon of the Irish Parliamentary Party, that he had left Paris for America and that Walsh and Dunne hoped to return home in early June. He told de Valera that there was no point in coming to Paris as he felt there was no chance of the Dail delegates being allowed to appear before the Peace Conference or of any of its committees or commissions. It is our view that it would not be wise or proper to bring you here to have you and the Irish Republic snubbed by the Peace Conference. We, and the Irish Americans are of the opinion that Wilson is not going to take action in pressuring our claim for a hearing and if he did it is felt that the English would never agree. Our American friends feel that the fight should be transferred to the United States and they are prepared to do their share in making the issue a burning one. For that reason we are of the opinion that it would be useful if you could go to the States as soon as it is known that we have been turned down here, and that all hope of achieving anything through the Peace Conference has vanished.

By that time the attitude of the American diplomatists, in Paris, had changed towards their fellow countrymen in the Irish-American delegation. They soon discovered that their visit to Ireland had done more damage than good for the Irish cause. When they returned to Paris they wrote a letter to the American Secretary of State Robert Lansing reiterating their request for de Valera, Griffith and Plunkett to be allowed to travel from Dublin to

Paris. They also wrote to President Wilson looking for second interview, and telling him of their inability to get a hearing from the British Premier, Lloyd George. They urged the President to use his influence to gain safe conduct for the Irishmen. Wilson passed the letter on to Lansing who replied as follows: "I have further notified you that, when the question of approaching the British authorities with a view to procuring the safe conduct in question was first considered every effort was made in an informal way to bring you into friendly touch with the British representatives here, although owing to the nature of the case it was not possible to treat the matter officially. The British authorities have consented to you visiting England and Ireland, although your passports were only good for France, every facility was given to you to make the journey. Before your return to Paris, however, reports were received of certain utterances made by you and your colleagues during your visit to Ireland. These utterances, whatever they may have been, have been informed the deepest offence to those persons with whom you were seeking to deal, and consequently it seemed useless to make any further effort in connection with the request which you desire to make. In view of the situation thus created I regret to inform you that the American representatives feel that any further efforts on their part connected with this matter would be futile and therefore unwise.

As for Wilson, he told his legal adviser, at one stage, that when the Irish nationalists asked him for support, he felt like telling them to go to hell. His view was that the Irish lived in a democratic country and they could sort out their problems through democratic means.

Ireland did not get a hearing at the Peace Conference and de Valera, it would appear, took the advice of O'Kelly and the Irish-Americans and made his way United States where, he felt, he could make a better case for Ireland freedom. Smuggled out on British ship from Liverpool, he arrived in New York on June 11th, 1919, and didn't return to Ireland until December 1920.

Is it possible that if the Irish-American delegates hadn't visited Ireland and stayed in Paris, that Ireland might have got a hearing at the Peace Conference and avoided the partition of the country and the civil war which followed.

Woodrow Wilson left Paris after the German delegation had signed the Treaty of Versailles. When he returned to the United States, in July, he had to face the mounting opposition towards the Treaty and the constitution of the League of Nations, which, if passed by the Senate, would commit the United States to involvement in international affairs. In an effort to try and overcome the opposition he decided that he would take his message to the people of America. In the course of his tour he visited San Francisco, where, on September 11th, he publicly put forward, for the first time, his interpretation of the Leagues Constitution as it affected Ireland. Wilson was asked why the case for

Ireland was not heard at the Peace Conference and what was his position on the subject of self-determination for Ireland. In his reply he said that "it was not possible for the Peace Conference to take any action with regard to the self-determination of any territories except those which belegged to the defeated Empire, but my position on the subject of self-determination for Ireland is expressed in Article XI of the Covenant, [constitution] in which I may say I was particularly interested, because it seemed to me necessary for the peace and freedom of the world that a forum should be created to which all peoples could bring any matter which is likely to affect the peace and freedom of the world."

In short Article XI gave the right to any Member of the League, to bring to the attention any circumstances whatever affecting international relations which threatened to disturb international peace or good understanding between nations upon which peace depends. In the case of an emergency arising, the General Secretary of the League could, on the request of a Member of the League, summon a meeting of the League Council.

When the debate came up before the United States Senate, on November 19th, on whether or not the United States should accept the Treaty of Versailles and the Constitution of the League, it was defeated - and so were Irelands hopes of getting a hearing under Article XI. The Americans signed their own treaty with Germany and remained outside the League of Nations during the 1920s and 30s.

On Monday, September 10th, 1923, the Irish Free State, a partitioned Ireland, was admitted as a Member, to the League of Nations. With the exclusion of the United States the League was dominated by Great Britain and France. It is only believe that de Valera saw how ineffective the League was, as a collective body, against Japanese aggression in China, against Mussolini in Abyssinia, during the Spanish Civil War and of course German aggression in Europe. It may have influenced de Valera to keep Ireland neutral during the Second World War. Why should Ireland have got involved in a world war which quite obviously could have been avoided.

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