

A National Council

TO THE EDITOR OF THE 'NATION', TENAKILL, ABBEYLEIX,
Tuesday, 25th May

Sir,—In the leading article of last Saturday's Nation, it is stated that the 'Reproductive Committee' has changed its name, enlarged its basis, and constituted itself into what the writer would seem desirous to consider to be the nucleus of a 'National Council.' He seems also to attach an importance to the transaction, of which, I fear, it is wholly undeserving.

The Nation gives no report. I have seen none elsewhere of the proceedings of the meeting at which the alleged alterations were made. I know nothing, therefore, of the name, nature, principles, or purpose, of the new association into which the committee has resolved itself. I write, consequently, in ignorance, and on mere supposition.

But I know that of necessity it will consist effectively, if not avowedly, of landowners only. Its composition and character will be determined and limited as strictly by circumstances as they could by formal rule of constitution. Originating in Dublin, without any virtual constituency throughout the country to empower or support, formed by its own private act, not by public action, it will never, in public estimation, be anything more than an association of landowners, and it will be practical wisdom to attempt no revolt against a public decision, and to assume no other character or functions than those which general opinion will have certainly assigned to it.

Should it be able to establish and extend itself, a few individuals from other classes might doubtless be induced to join it—a few mercantile and professional men, tradesmen, and tenant-farmers; but never in sufficient number to enable it to assume the character, or exercise the functions of a National Council.

Let it profess to be, what in fact, it is, an association of landed proprietors, and pretend to be nothing more. This will be its true and most effective policy. But no association of landowners, acting alone, can settle a single question of all those which are now fermenting in every house and every heart throughout the island. Be its objects what they may, the noblest or meanest, the greatest or pettiest, not one of them can be effected without the assent and aid of those who occupy the soil and inhabit the land, and who will continue to be occupiers and inhabitants in despite and defiance of open force or covert fraud, of avowed enemies or hollow friends.

If its founders, however, be honest, earnest and capable, and should they succeed in obtaining the adhesion of any considerable number of the landed proprietors, the nascent association may be made to form one component part of a National Council, of which the Commons of Ireland—tenant-farmers and trading classes—would constitute the other portion.

As the most ready and feasible mode that occurs to me of organizing such Council, I beg to present, for consideration and correction, the hasty draft of plan which is stated in the following suggestions:

1. That the 'Reproductive Committee' do immediately constitute itself into an association of landowners, to be composed exclusively of Irish landed proprietors.
2. That should such proposed association of landowners become too numerous to act as a deliberative assembly, it shall appoint a Managing Committee of one or two hundred members, empowered and instructed to assume the office of standing, and speaking, and acting, as the accredited organ of the landed proprietors in Ireland.
3. That a tenant-league, or association of tenant-farmers be formed with as little delay as possible, in each of the several counties of Ireland.

4. That every such county league of tenant farmers shall appointing a managing committee of not less than *five* nor more than *twelve* members—the number to be fixed according to the extent and population of the county.
5. That a trade society, for the revival and promotion of Irish manufacture, be established in each of the thirty most populous cities and towns of the kingdom.
6. That every such trade society shall appoint a secretary, or a president and secretary, or a managing Committee of from three to eight members, according to the greater or smaller population of the town or city.
7. That these tenant-league committees, trade committees, and trade officers, either under special powers and instructions to that effect, if allowed by the Convention Act or otherwise, through the concurrence of accidental circumstances, or other perfectly legal and moral contrivance, shall assemble together in Dublin, to consult and determine upon such questions affecting the interests of the tenant-farmers and trading classes of Ireland, as may be brought before them, and shall, further be empowered (or permitted) to treat, confer, and enter into agreement with the landowners' association on all those several questions.
8. That those committees be further vested with full powers (or allowed full permission) to hold such conference with the landed proprietors in whatever mode may be found most eligible and convenient, and to make such agreement as aforesaid, in whatever form may be deemed most conclusive and satisfactory, and on such guarantees and securities as may be considered sufficient.

This is a very hurried and imperfect sketch of my ideas on the mode in which I think a National Council might be constituted, such as the people of Ireland would acknowledge and accept in that character.

The primary proceeding of forming the several tenant-leagues and trade societies is the only essential portion of the plan. There are many modes in which the ulterior proceedings might be conducted without violating the Convention Act. If the society formed by the 'Reproductive Committee' recommend and carry out this proceeding, or some analogous proceeding, they will have deserved well of their country, saved and strengthened their own class, and done a deed in history.