

SPEECH TO THE IRISH CONFEDERATION, April 5th, 1848.

By John Mitchel.

I have been instructed to bring up a resolution decided on by the committee to be submitted to the Confederation – a resolution which I hope will be found a practical step towards the attainment of our objects. Before coming to that, I wish to remove a misapprehension which I find, by the letter of my friend, Mr. Dillon, has been produced on the minds of some persons, by what I said on the last night of meeting. I said I was a Republican; and I do believe that I am not alone here in holding the Republican creed. I believe that every universal suffrage man, every Radical, every Chartist, every man who demanded equal rights for all, is at heart a Republican. I hold that creed, sir, and will always avow it; but I never meant to commit the Confederation, or any member of it, to Republican opinions.

As to our future form of government, indeed, there is no need now to raise any question: the movement now is simply to win Ireland for the Irish—Ireland for the Irish under any form. If the Irish aristocracy would acknowledge themselves our countrymen—if they would lead us as they ought to do in the struggle for national freedom—if the nation is to move together in its ranks and orders—then, in God's name, let this aristocracy hold its place—let it have its House of Lords in College-green, as we shall have our House of Commons. In that case, the constitution of Ireland, as it stood before the Union, might be accepted for the present.

But, sir, I ask, what hope is there for such an arrangement? The gentry of Ireland will have none of your constitution; they are arming themselves to crush you; they are signing addresses of loyalty to the government, which is high treason against the people. When I speak of an Irish Republic, then, I do so not as a matter of personal predilection, but of political necessity. It is not open to us to choose. For if the Irish nation were united class with class, and could so induce or coerce the British Parliament to repeal the Union peaceably, the

immediate result would, of course, be a Legislature of Queen, Lords, and Commons. But, sir, if a shot be fired, or a sword drawn—if blood flow here in civil strife—if the people, for self-preservation, have to take the affair into their own hands—in abort, if, as in Paris, the revolution must be made by the people, then it shall be made for the people, and, save the sovereign people, there shall be no Sovereign on this soil.

Above all things, let us, in Heaven's name, avoid petty discussions on points that do not immediately press for solution. In fact, there is no ground or material for such discussions. Mr. Dillon and Mr. O'Hagan, I believe, fully agree in every word I have now said; and although those gentlemen disavow Republicanism for the present, I know well that neither one or other of them would hesitate, if the people are to be left alone in this struggle, to go through it with the people, and follow it to all its consequences.

I will now leave this disquisition upon forms of government, and turn your attention to what is far more to the purpose. The resolution I have to propose is as follows; you will all know the meaning of it well.

'That the council suggest to all Repealers, both in town and country, that in order to form the basis of a national guard, they immediately form themselves into sections, each consisting of twenty men, living near each other, in one street, or other limited district, and that each section elect a master and warden, in whom they have implicit confidence; that five of such sections (which should also have their residencies adjacent) form a class, numbered class No. 1, No. 2, and soforth; that the masters and wardens of the five sections elect a vice-president and secretary; and that the several vice-presidents and secretaries of the classes elect a president.'

It may not be absolutely necessary to set forth this plan of organization for the Dublin Repealers; for I am glad to say they are putting it in practice already. Two of our clubs are already formed into sections, and the rest will soon follow. But for the country and the provincial towns it is quite necessary that such an idea as this should be fixed in their minds, so that they might at once begin to lay the basis of a uniform national organisation.

Even those Repealers who are not Confederates, I have no doubt will generally join their neighbours in this scheme. Let the whole country be classified into sections, and the sections into classes—or if you choose to call them companies, with their wardens and masters, or if you like it better, commanders; so that in any national business which is to be done, peaceful or otherwise, there may be an available power ready to act.

And let me exhort you to do all this openly and publicly. The English press accuses us of hatching treason in holes and corners. It is false; I never saw or heard of a meeting of the Confederation or of any of our clubs that was not held with open doors. There is no need of secrecy; and let me tell you there is no possibility for secrecy; for town and country swarms with government spies. Wherever two or three are gathered together, there is a detective in the midst of them.

We had meetings lately of the trades' and citizens' committee; and although there were not generally more than twenty or thirty in the room, one of them was a friend of Colonel Browne's; and it turns out that the most illegal man—the most violent and enthusiastic revolutionist in the room, was this friend of Colonel Browne's—a fellow employed by him, as I heard him say, to do the dirty work for Lord Clarendon, and Lord Clarendon does the dirty work for, I know not whom.

It is all dirty work; and I have no doubt that the object of it is to get up a case that would enable Lord Clarendon to proclaim and disarm the city. Unquestionably those were the fellow's instructions, since we find him going about to smiths, and talking of the coming insurrection, in which the pikes he was getting were to be used.

I endeavoured at the Police-office to make the magistrates detain this spy, and send him for trial, if not on a charge of conspiracy, then for high treason—in short, upon any charge that would get him into a public court, and enable us to put Colonel Browne and Lord Clarendon upon their oaths, and drag out of them the secrets of their plots against the people.

But it was in vain; their worships were too wise, or too complaisant for that; and the moment the Police Commissioner said the man was one of his spies, they seemed only anxious to get him out

of sight—in fact, they dropped him like a hot potato, fearful, apparently, of seeing their own names some day in his memorandum book, for sedition against the detective, as in constituted authority.

Another motive of this plot was, of course, to throw an air of secrecy and criminality about the purchase and sale of arms—to produce a vague impression that it is illegal and dangerous to have pikes. Now, there is nothing to prevent any smith or ironmonger to expose pikes for sale in his windows as freely as horse-shoes, or any other kind of ware. In fact, I would like to see pikes exposed for sale, upon stalls, in the streets, like books, or under the porticoes of the Bank of Ireland, where umbrellas are sold in rainy weather.

We must get rid of this ridiculous idea about the criminality of having arms; and I am glad to see that in Limerick, where the government people tried the same trick, a man named Ahern was dragged before magistrates, for making pikes; Ahern has proclaimed his intention of exhibiting his pikes for the future in his shop-window.

You will excuse me for dwelling so long upon this point; for, in truth, there is no national manufacture now in Ireland so important as pikes and guns. As to fire-arms, let me beg of you not to buy the wretched Birmingham guns that are sold here for ten or fifteen shillings. Fire-arms that are not ball-proof, are absolutely good for nothing—a good big stick is better.

Union amongst Repealers has been spoken of. Nobody, certainly, desires that union more heartily than I do; and, indeed, I think the meetings in Cork, Limerick, Kilkenny, and other places, exhibits a spirit that will no longer tolerate our paltry quarrels, but will force leaders of all sections to work together whether they like it or not. However, the true way of bringing about this union is not negotiation and expostulation—it is simply to show that you are sincerely determined to free the country from foreign dominion.

I have said little hitherto about the union of Repealers; but I believe that I have done something towards bringing such a union about; and how? Why, by proving beyond all question that I hate foreign dominion, and am determined, at whatever cost, to root it out of the land. I wish, indeed, that we could effect a combination with our fellow-countrymen, the Protestant farmers of the north. I have lived

amongst those people, and know them well; and indeed it seems strange to me that I, a native of Derry county, with none but northern Protestants for my kindred, should be supposed to be ranged in this national struggle with Munster, Connaught, and Leinster, and against my own province. And I tell you this, my friends—if Ireland were now united as in '82, and had her citizen army arrayed, each battalion under its own banners and emblems—my place in that army should be where the orange and purple were waving; but until those Protestants declare for Ireland, and against England—until their colours are seen on the right side, the green is the colour for me.

And I should like to know what quarrel the Protestant democracy of Ulster have with us (for I speak not of their gentry at all). What is their great demand at this moment? Is it not security for their tenant-right? Well, and who attacks their tenant-right? Against whom do they want this security? Is it against their brother farmers of the south? No; it is against their own Orange landlords, leaders, and grand masters. Now, we want the democracy of the north to make common cause with the democracy of the south, and secure national freedom and tenant-right both together.

I would far rather see 5,000 northern Protestants joining this Confederation, than hear of 50,000 Frenchmen whom somebody surmises to be ready to come here at our bidding. Indeed, I was sorry to see the enthusiasm with which you hailed the vague promise of possible aid from France—as if Irishmen were well content to let Frenchmen, or Americans, or anybody else, do for them what they ought to be doing for themselves. You will never, believe me, never see 50,000 Frenchmen, or one Frenchman, on your side, until we have shown ourselves not only willing, but able and ready to achieve our own freedom. I, therefore, do entreat you to organize in sections, as recommended by this resolution, to continue steadily, openly providing arms; and then, when Irishmen are ready to turn out—then, and not till then, will we be entitled so much as to negotiate a foreign alliance.