

denied by the committee; but the fact that the party, at its first meeting after the election, voted not to publish the letter was interpreted by the public in a very bad light.⁵ The incident undoubtedly contributed more than any other episode of the campaign to the rapid decline in the party's prestige which set in after the general election and which deprived it of that close control over the constituencies that in times past had been one of its main sources of strength.

The document was recently discovered among the private papers of John Dillon. It is in Edward Blake's own handwriting, is written on house of commons notepaper and is still in the original envelope in which it was sent to Dickson. It is accompanied by a copy—also in Blake's hand—which is identical with the original save for one word. This copy was sent by Blake to the secretary of the party committee—J. F. X. O'Brien—with a covering letter dated 19 June 1895; this too is in Blake's handwriting. Together with these documents is a letter dated 23 June 1894 in the handwriting of T. A. Dickson, acknowledging receipt of the Blake letter

F. S. L. LYONS

Confidential

June 19, '94

My dear sir,

I have been requested by my colleagues of the Irish parliamentary committee to address you with reference to some suggestions understood to have been made by you to Mr Sheehy⁶ as to some of the northern Irish seats, and referred to by you in conversation with Mr Dillon, and which were brought by Mr Dillon under the notice of the committee.

You will understand that in these matters the committee deals as little as possible with details of registration, which are left as far as may be to the executive in Dublin.⁷

But it was thought that the special nature of this case rendered it fitting that the committee should so far grapple with it as to come to a conclusion on the advice they would be disposed to give and the action they would be inclined to take. It is regrettable that the uncertainties of our finance rendered an earlier decision impossible. The committee

⁵ 'Minutes of the Irish parliamentary party', 16 Aug. 1895 (Dillon MSS).

⁶ David Sheehy, at that time secretary of the Irish National Federation.

⁷ I.e. the executive committee, which was the effective governing body of the national organisation, the Irish National Federation.

have been driven reluctantly to the conclusion that our financial prospects oblige us to limit in every possible way our contributions to the expenditure of the federation in connexion with registration; and that in this aspect we will be unable this year to recommend to the executive a subvention towards the registration expenses in N. Tyrone, S. Tyrone, N. Derry or S. Derry, in which divisions it is understood that liberal home rulers, not members of the Irish nationalist party, shall be candidates.

It is understood that a large part of the preliminary work of registration in three of these divisions was last year accomplished by the volunteer efforts of the branches of the federation, and that the aid given by the executive of the National Federation (largely out of funds supplied by the committee) was directed to the payment of disbursements connected with this work of the branches.

It is understood that the remainder of the work in connexion with the four divisions was done under arrangements made and with funds provided by your good auspices.⁸

It occurs to the committee that the branches should continue this year to give the aid and do the work they did last year. The federation officers estimate the subventions required by the branches for disbursement in N. Tyrone, S. Tyrone and S. Derry at £190.

The committee being unable to recommend funds for this purpose requested me to see Mr Ellis, the chief liberal whip; to explain the situation to him; and to point out the importance to the liberals, as well as to ourselves, of their fighting the four seats, and the propriety of his making provision for the payment of say £200—in addition to any other provision contemplated in this regard—so as to fill up the deficit occasioned by our inability to contribute in money to the registration work in these divisions.

I saw Mr Ellis accordingly and stated the case to him. He expressed his good will, and his anxiety to meet as far as possible our views; and promised to consider the matter fully; and he asked me, when writing to you, to say that he would be glad to hear from you fully as to the registration expenses in these four divisions; and that he would await your letter before further consultation. May I therefore express the hope that you will write to him without delay.

If the suggested arrangement is carried out, then, apart from the volunteer work to be done by the local branches, the expenses of the registration in these four divisions will be borne by the liberals; and the divisions would of course be treated as liberal home rule, but not nationalist divisions; the nationalists doing all in their power to second the efforts of the liberals to secure the seats.

Any committees or organizations for the management of these affairs in these divisions would naturally be formed locally, under the inspiration

⁸ The copy sent to J. F. X. O'Brien has 'offices' instead of 'auspices'; this seems to make better sense.

of yourself and the leading local liberals, with due regard to the importance of keeping all elements united.

It seemed to the committee to be undesirable to recommend the formation (as they understood to be suggested) of some northern local committee, dealing conjointly with the affairs of these four divisions, and also with those of one or two more divisions, in which nationalist candidates are to be run, e.g. Derry city

It is thought best, for many reasons, to maintain in all the nationalist divisions, the existing system, without attempting to introduce exceptional machinery, or new local authority, dealing in combination with liberal and nationalist divisions.

The limits of a letter makes it impossible to go into details as to the reasonings in this matter; but I venture to hope that on consideration they will occur, and will recommend themselves to your judgment.

I trust it is needless to say that we are fully alive to the importance of strengthening the cause in these divisions, and to the value of co-operation whenever practicable; that we are very sensible of your great kindness, zealous services, and continuous interest in the business; and that we greatly regret that our means do not admit of our recommending a subvention for this year.

Yours faithfully,

Edward Blake

The Rt Honble
Thomas A. Dickson,
St Stephen's Green,
Dublin.