

C J DOLAN'S ORIGINAL LEITRIM GUARDIAN

MANORHAMILTON'S ONLY EVER NEWSPAPER

Dominic Rooney

Its publication coincided with the period when the North Leitrim constituency was becoming the focus of political attention for the entire British Isles, as the fledgling Sinn Fein organisation challenged the powerful Irish Parliamentary Party for the first time in the by-election of 1908.

BACKGROUND

A renewed sense of national identity began to develop in Ireland towards the end of the 19th century. This led to the foundation of such organisations as the GAA in 1884, which aimed at promoting distinctively Irish sports, and the Gaelic League in 1893, which sought to revive the Irish language. Much more important though for Irish people generally was the desire to gain control over their own political affairs. Consequently Parnell, the leader of the Irish Party in the House of Commons, persuaded Gladstone's Liberal Party to introduce an Irish Home Rule Bill in 1885. However due to determined British opposition it was defeated, as was a second such Bill in 1893.

The Conservatives who came to power with an overall majority in 1895 were very much against the granting of Home Rule to Ireland. Instead they passed land reform, local government and higher education acts as conciliatory gestures, thus trying to 'kill Home Rule by kindness'. The Irish Party supported these reforms but otherwise had become rather powerless in the House of Commons. Not surprisingly therefore some observers began to question whether Westminster was the proper place for Irish politicians at all. Arthur Griffith, a Dublin journalist, outlined his Sinn Fein policy in 1905 which advocated passive resistance to

British rule, the recalling of Irish MPs to form an independent parliament in Dublin and the development and protection of home industries. He took his cue from the Hungarian deputies who had all abstained from the Imperial Austrian parliament in Vienna in the 1860s and as a result won the re-establishment of a separate Hungarian parliament in Budapest.

CHARLES J DOLAN (1881-1963)

Charles, son of a prosperous draper in Main St, Manorhamilton (now AIB House), had been a gifted student at the local intermediate classical school in the town, and later in St Patrick's College, Cavan. After spending three years studying for the priesthood in Maynooth he returned home in 1901. Four years later he began legal studies in Wren's College, London, which ended prematurely when he was selected to stand, and won the seat, as the Irish Parliamentary Party candidate for North Leitrim in February 1906 at the age of 25.

The Liberal Party was once again in power in Westminster, but this time with a huge majority that didn't require the support of the Irish MPs. They introduced a very watered-down measure of Home Rule for Ireland in May 1907 as a concession to growing Irish demands for self-determination. It was entitled the Irish Councils Bill but dubbed 'Gas and Water Home Rule' because it would give a Dublin administration control only over local services similar to that of British county councils.

Dolan wasn't long in Westminster when he came to the conclusion that attendance there by Irish MPs was a sheer waste of time. Most British MPs left the Chamber when British business was finished, and



Charles J Dolan

Photo: Courtesy of County Library, Ballinamore

Irish MPs spoke to an almost empty room. He thus began to consider Sinn Fein's idea of withdrawing from Westminster. The last straw for Dolan was the Irish Councils Bill. Although John Redmond, his party leader, supported the measure, Dolan expressed his disappointment with the Liberals in the House of Commons. But it was in St Clare's Hall, Manorhamilton on Sunday 16th June 1907 that he first publicly proposed the adoption of Sinn Fein policy at a meeting of the executive of the North Leitrim United Irish League which was the constituency organisation of the IPP. His motion was passed and within a matter of days he had resigned from the party. However he would retain his seat in parliament until he was ready to recontest it as a Sinn Fein candidate.

THE LEITRIM GUARDIAN

Dolan and his supporters now set about educating North Leitrim's electors about the policy of Sinn Fein by speaking at meetings, organising branches of the party and especially by publishing a new local newspaper – the Leitrim Guardian. This was an eight page paper, somewhat larger than tabloid format, selling at one penny, which was owned by Dolan, and printed and published in Manorhamilton every Saturday morning for seven months between July 1907 and February 1908. The paper's printing works were located in Balam's (now Centra) in Upper Main Street. Sean Mac Diarmada was editor of the paper and also director of elections for Dolan. Although only 24 years of age at the time he was already an accomplished public speaker, and had been organiser for the Republican Dungannon Clubs in Ulster.

From the two known surviving issues of the Guardian—that of the 19th Oct 1907 and the final one of 29th Feb 1908—we can analyse the contents of the newspaper. As one would expect, Sinn Fein propaganda figured prominently. Arthur Griffith's 'Resurrection of Hungary' series of articles about the success of the Hungarian abstentionists from the Imperial Austrian parliament was carried weekly. Other articles recalled Pamell's successful political tactics away from the House of Commons, while there were also many quotations from the political speeches of Daniel O'Connell in the 1840s advocating an independent Irish parliament.

Naturally much of the 19th Oct. 1907 issue of the paper was devoted to the election campaign with reports of Sinn Fein meetings and demonstrations right throughout the constituency. Elsewhere there were lists of officers and members of Sinn Fein branches in Manorhamilton, Cloonclare and Glenaniff. The editorial of this issue called on Redmond to show clearly, at a forthcoming Home Rule demonstration in Drumkeeran, how exactly he intended to obtain home rule. All the main reports and the editorial in the 29th Feb. 1908 issue dealt with the election count, speeches of both candidates and an analysis of the results from a Sinn Fein perspective.



Leitrim Guardian Newspaper, Page One 19.10.1907

Courtesy of The National Library of Ireland

Local news figured prominently in the Leitrim Guardian. We learn that Manorhamilton Petty Sessions imposed a fine of 6s on the owner of wandering cattle, and 2s 4d on a man charged with being drunk in charge of a horse and cart on the public road. In a letter to the editor an anonymous writer complained about the neglected state of the street and footpath of Boleyhill. There were also reports of meetings of the Manorhamilton Board of Guardians, the Manorhamilton Trades and Labour League and the local Shamrock Hurling Club. At a recent Manorhamilton market, pork fetched 40s to 48s per cwt., lump butter 8d to 10d per lb., turkeys 2s 4d each, ducks and geese 1s each and chickens 8d to 10d. There was also a column of Bundoran notes, and a report on an

eviction campaign in Ballinaglera. Advertisements made up quite a substantial part of the paper. Gilbert's Medical Hall advertised medical and veterinary prescriptions and sight-saver spectacles; Ward & Co. (now D.M. Auctions) sold grocery, hardware, jewellery, stationery and bicycles; James N. Dolan (brother of Charles) - drapery and haberdashery; John Gallen - ladies' and gents' tailoring; J. Thompson - cycle repairs; James Rooney - tailoring; and John Thornton, Tullys Kearney - trees and shrubs. Thirteen Sligo businesses, as well as seven others from as far away as Dublin, Cork and Limerick, also placed advertisements on a regular basis, many of them advertising items of Irish manufacture in keeping with the ideals of Sinn Fein.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The informal campaign began in late June 1907 shortly after Dolan resigned from the IPP. Several thousand people attended some of the more important rallies on both sides. Violence erupted at meetings in Manorhamilton, Kiltyclogher, Kinlough, Drumkeeran and Drumshanbo. Stones, eggs and other missiles were thrown, Sinn Fein speakers were heckled and had often to be given police protection to the nearest safe house. The violence was accentuated when the rival camps attempted to hold meetings across the street from each other. Scuffles often ensued, arrests were made and police cordons just about managed to keep both sets of supporters apart. During one such confrontation in Kiltyclogher the big drum belonging to the Glenkeel Fife and Drum Band, which supported Dolan, was trampled upon. A few days later in Drumkeeran, Anna Parnell (sister of Charles Stewart) who was speaking on behalf of Dolan had a box pulled from under her and a bucket of water thrown at her. Substantial blame for some of the violence in Kinlough and Manorhamilton was attributed to 30 or so 'corner boys' from Belfast which the UIL transported into the constituency coming up to the election.

Dolan didn't resign his seat in Westminster until 28th January 1908 and the official campaign can be dated from the following week when the chief whip moved the writ for the by-election to be held on 21st February. Francis E Meehan (1864-1946), a member of Leitrim Co Co, President of the North Leitrim executive of the UIL and a near neighbour of Dolan's was chosen to stand for the IPP. Dolan was formally selected as the Sinn Fein candidate. Rallies and demonstrations multiplied. The constituency was humming with excitement. Newspaper reporters from the principal Irish and British dailies were present and great prominence was given to speeches and incidents. Extra telegraphic staff and apparatus were provided from Sligo and Dublin to cope with the demand in the final days of the campaign. Dolan got great support from national Sinn Fein

personalities such as Arthur Griffith, Bulmer Hobson, Sean T. O'Kelly, George Gavan Duffy and Anna Parnell who all canvassed the constituency for him. Moreover, a national collection fund had contributed over £600 to his election and newspaper expenses.

The election day itself, Friday 21st Feb passed off quietly with no major incident reported. The count was held the following day in Manorhamilton Court House with the result being announced at 1.15 pm by the returning officer, Wilton Vaughn: Total electorate (only a house-holder could vote) – 6,324; Actual turn-out – 4,335; Meehan – 3,103; Dolan 1,157; Spoiled votes – 75.

THE AFTERMATH

Sinn Fein, though disappointed, looked for the positive aspects of the results. They said that this was the first time since 1801 that any votes had been cast in an Irish election denying the claim of the British Parliament to legislate for this country. The 1,200 or so votes cast for Sinn Fein in North Leitrim had, they felt, greater significance than O'Connell's by-election victory in Clare in 1828. That election heralded Catholic Emancipation, whereas the North Leitrim election heralded the emancipation of a nation. The Leitrim Guardian ceased production on 29.02.08, one week after the election. An announcement was made to this effect in the final issue of the paper. The reasons given were the unsatisfactory printing arrangements. It was hoped to provide an adequate printing plant in the near future and re-issue the Guardian in an enlarged and improved form, but this never materialised.

Charles J. Dolan went to St Louis in the United States to study the shoe industry in 1909. He returned home fifteen months later with the intention of setting up a shoe factory initially in Manorhamilton, and then in Dublin or Drogheda, but found that conditions were not favourable to its establishment. In April 1912 he went back to St Louis and there married Katherine Kenney. They had one daughter, Alice. He studied law at the local university and began to practise as a

lawyer in 1917. He worked mainly as a member of the St Louis Law Department staff and when he retired in 1960 he was made a freeman of the city. Dolan had remarried in 1950, some years after the death of his first wife. He expressed a wish in 1963 to revisit his native Manorhamilton, but died later that year before he could fulfil his ambition.

With Dolan's final departure in 1912, and a revival of the Irish Parliamentary Party's popularity due to the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in Westminster in the same year, Sinn Fein's fortunes both in North Leitrim and throughout the country declined temporarily. Thus ended one of the most momentous and exciting periods in the history of North Leitrim, in which the original Leitrim Guardian had no small part to play.

WILD GEESE RETURNING

Ray Shephard

Longford County behind us.

*From a rise in the road
we see far ahead.*

*The undulating profile in the
north of the county*

*Has a theatrical backdrop
Of blue grey clouds.*

*Showing whitest white in morning
sunshine.*

The windmills of Leitrim

On their mountain tops.

*Wave welcome and beckon us
onwards.*

The atmosphere is electric.

We are already almost home

Turn right.

Wild geese returning

After doing the shopping