

Letter published in The Sunday Times, June 8th 2014

PROTESTANT EXODUS FROM FREE STATE

Irish National Congress,
PO Box 33,
Dublin 7

June 4th 2014

Dear Sir,

Robin Bury (Was the Easter Rising an unnecessary evil?, June 1st) said if the constitutional nationalism of John Redmond had triumphed the exodus of tens of thousands of Protestants from the Free State would not have occurred. Mr Bury claims that the decline in the Protestant population was as a result of "terrorism, intimidation, boycott and land grabbing". This view clearly promotes a sectarian narrative about republican actions which Mr Bury claims drove Protestants out of the Free State during the War of Independence. That theory has been exposed as fraudulent. Extensive research has undermined the sectarian explanation of the decline in the Protestant population. I retain an open mind on the cause of those events. Mr Bury appears to have a closed one.

Although some Irish Protestants were victims of a process of expulsion, coercion, and in some cases murder- acts which would have been abhorred by those who planned and executed the Easter Rising-the primary reason for this population decline can be identified with the Great War and with aggressively encouraged relocation. The horrific slaughter of young Irish Protestant men in the first World War had a devastating and disproportionate impact on the male Protestant population of the South. This was reflected in the birth rate for decades following the war.

In addition, the Northern Ireland regime led by Sir James Craig enticed large numbers of Protestants, through the offer of government jobs and housing, to relocate north of the Border in an attempt to offset Catholic majorities in Border counties. This was, in effect, part of the creation of "a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people".

The strong religious, cultural and political ties which Southern Protestants had in common with the Northern majority resulted in a sizeable shift of Protestants north across the Border. It is worth noting that two Protestants who decided to stay south subsequently became Presidents of Ireland.

Yours sincerely

Tom Cooper,
Cathaoirleach INC