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R E G U L A T I O N 1 8 B

ON the 23rd May, 1940, within the first fortnight of Mr. Churchill's Premiership, many hundreds of British subjects, a large proportion of them ex-Servicemen, were suddenly arrested and thrown into prison under Regulation 18B. For some days the entire press had been conducting a whirlwind campaign, in rising crescendo, against a supposed fifth column in this country, which was declared to be waiting to assist the Germans when they landed.

How untrue this campaign was, is proved by the fact that our most competent Intelligence Service never produced the flimsiest evidence of any such conspiracy, nor evidence of any plan or order relating to it, nor the complicity in such an undertaking of any single man arrested. Had such evidence been forthcoming, those implicated would undoubtedly have been charged and tried, and very properly so. But there was not one case of a man arrested under 18B being a British subject, who was so charged.

Four charges were actually framed against one lady, the wife of a distinguished Admiral, Mrs. Nicholson. She was tried by a Judge and jury, and acquitted on all counts. This, however, did not prevent her being arrested as she left the Law Courts, acquitted, and being thrown into Holloway Prison under Regulation 18B, where she remained for years.

Regulation 18B was originally introduced to deal with certain members of the I.R.A., who were committing a number of senseless minor outrages in London. Without this Regulation, no liege of His Majesty in the United Kingdom

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could be arrested and held in prison on suspicion. This practice had long been abandoned in this country, except in short periods of grave proven conspiracy, and on those occasions Habeas Corpus was always suspended.

18B enabled the mediæval process of arrest and imprisonment on suspicion to be revived without the suspension of Habeas Corpus. It was, in fact, a return to the system of Lettres de Cachet, by which persons in pre-Revolutionary France were consigned to the Bastille. Here, it should be remembered, that those persons enjoyed full social intercourse with their families, and were allowed their own servants, plate, linen, food and drink whilst in prison; a very different treatment to that meted out to persons held under 18B, whose treatment for some time was little different from ordinary criminals, and, in fact, worse than any remand prisoner.

These I.R.A. outrages were so fatuous in themselves and so apparently meaningless, at a time when there were no sharp differences between this country and the Irish Free State, that I commenced making a number of enquiries. I was not surprised to discover at length, that special members of the I.R.A. had been enrolled for the committing of these outrages; and that they were practically all Communists. I had it on excellent authority that the Left Book Club of Dublin had been actively concerned in the matter; and finally the names of 22 of these men were put into my hands; and again I was informed on excellent authority that they were all Communists. Immediately on receipt of this information I put down a question to the Home Secretary, and offered to supply the necessary information if the matter were taken up. Nothing came of my representations. From these Communist-inspired outrages, however, there resulted Regulation 18B. Though the I.R.A. were pleaded as an excuse to the House for a Regulation, hardly any of their members were ever arrested under it; but in due course it