

STATEMENT BY

MR. BULMER HOBSON

ON

I.R.B. AND IRISH FREEDOM.

A copy of this statement was sent at Mr. Hobson's request to each of the following, and any comments received in the Bureau as a result are registered and filed, as indicated hereunder:

<u>Name.</u>	<u>Relevant Register No.</u>
Dr. P. McCartan	S. 63
P.S. O'Hogarty	S. 49
D. McCullough	S. 62
P. O'Riain	S. 32
S. O'Conner	S. 53
S. Fitzgibbon	S. 54
Captain R. Montcith	S. 50

ORIGINAL

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ROGER CASEMENT

I met Roger Casement at the first Feis in the Glens of Antrim, held, I think, in 1904, and formed a close friendship with him, which lasted until his death.

He was much away from Ireland in the following ten years, but we exchanged letters frequently and I still have many of his letters and am giving them to the National Library.

Casement was tremendously interested in every aspect of the National movement. He gave financial help to the anti-enlisting movement, and on one occasion raised all the money necessary for the defence of one of our men who had been arrested. This was Stephen Clarke, who was arrested for distributing anti-enlistment literature at a fair in Ballycastle, County Antrim, in 1905. The leaflet which he distributed was written partly by Mrs. Green, partly by Casement and partly by me. The case was tried in Belfast and the Government did its utmost to pack the jury. Francis Joseph Biggar directed the defence and Casement raised the money. It was a County Antrim jury and Biggar had a very extensive practice among the farmers in the South half of the County. As the result of some very adroit manoeuvring when the trial came on, the Government could only rely on seven members of the jury and we could rely on five. The defence was a complete justification, and we gave a prominent Orange lawyer a large fee on condition that he would justify our leaflet paragraph by paragraph, which he did. As we had five men on the jury we felt that we could afford to go all out and bring our man off scot-free, which we did, at

a time when the Government was getting convictions for similar offences all through the rest of Ireland.

Casement had already become an international figure on account of his exposure of the atrocious conditions in the Belgian Congo. He was selected to undertake the investigation of the Congo because there was no other man who had so extensive a knowledge of the virtually unknown parts of Africa, and hardly any other man who would have gone off, single-handed and alone, to carry out such an investigation.

In his letters, Joseph Conrad relates how on one occasion, putting into an African port, he saw a tall young man apparently setting out for a stroll, carrying a stick and accompanied by two bulldogs. Two or three months later he saw the same figure emerge from the jungle. Casement had been wandering, as he often did, in parts of Africa where probably no other white man had been. He never carried arms and had no companions except the dogs. They were wanted to keep wild beasts at bay, but when Casement got to remote African villages he simply made friends with the people and needed no protection.

His investigation of the Congo was so thorough and so successful because he went in unannounced and investigated the atrocities before those who were committing them were aware of his presence. Had he not acted in this way he would have been shown round officially and allowed to see nothing that the Belgians did not want him to see, but in conducting his investigation in this manner his life was in danger over a considerable period.

Finding that the atrocious treatment of the

natives in the Congo could no longer be concealed, the King of the Belgians did his utmost to get the report suppressed, and on one occasion sent Casement a blank cheque with a cool request that the report should be watered down. It is not necessary to say that nothing in the report was changed.

Casement used to appear in Ireland at intervals, usually with a considerable bank balance, which had accumulated in his lengthy absences from what is called civilisation. This was all given away to various causes in Ireland, helping the Sinn Féin movement, the anti-enlistment movement, the Gaelic League, or arranging for the feeding of school-children in the Gaeltacht.

Casement was tremendously interested in European politics, and, in common with most well informed people at the time, saw clearly that the way in which the great powers in Europe were manoeuvring for position was bound to end in a European war. As early as 1910 he and I had much discussion about the coming war, and how such a situation should be met by the people in the National movement. As a result of these discussions I wrote some articles in 1912 called "When Germany fights England, what will Ireland do?". They were published in "Irish Freedom".

In 1913, at my request, Casement wrote a lengthy memorandum on the position of Ireland in the event of a war between England and Germany. I got the manuscript, in his own handwriting, and Pádraig Ó Riain typed it in my office and we destroyed the original. In the beginning of 1914 I took this document to New York and,

with the help of Devoy, had it given to Count Von Bernstorff, the German Ambassador in Washington. I have not the text of that document, but, as far as I can recollect, it was something on the lines of Casement's later document "Ireland, Germany and the Next War" which was subsequently published.

I arrived in New York about a fortnight after Pádraig Pearse, who had gone there on a lecture tour to raise funds for St. Enda's College, but Pearse was in no way connected with my mission and, in fact, knew nothing whatever about it.

Casement and I had long been convinced that a European War was imminent, and we wanted, if possible, to ensure that in the event of a German victory the German Government would assist us in establishing an independent Government in Ireland.

I raised the question of this journey at a meeting of the Supreme Council late in 1913 and got the approval of the Supreme Council. They did not see the actual text, but they approved the general purport of the document and paid my expenses.

When I got to New York, Devoy and the other leaders of Clan-na-Gael, to whom I went in the first instance, were very sceptical about the probability of a European War, but they very firmly took up the attitude that if I was going to return to Ireland I must not personally go and see Von Bernstorff in Washington. In consequence I gave the document to Devoy, who had it conveyed to Von Bernstorff. This was in January or February 1914.

It was to follow up this opening move that

Casement, who had retired from the British Consular Service, went to America in the following May. He was not sent by the I.R.B., nor did the I.R.B. finance him. The decision was made by Casement and myself, and Casement paid his own expenses. I probably told Tom Clarke, however, what was happening.

I have very little knowledge of what Casement did. Our intention was that he should get in touch with Von Bernstorff and try and get an assurance from the German Government that in the event of war and in the event of their winning it, we were to get independence. He thought that the war would probably come in 1915 but it broke a year earlier.

After the war had broken out, Casement, who stayed with McGarrity, went from the U.S.A. to Berlin and did succeed in getting an undertaking from the German Government in the form of a letter signed by Herr Zimmerman, Assistant Foreign Secretary. It declared the intention of the German Government to establish an independent Government in Ireland under whatever form was acceptable to the Irish people, in the event of the German Government winning the war. I have a photostat copy of that letter and will loan it to the Bureau for copying.

The rest of Casement's story can be read in the biographies written by Gwynn, Parmiter and the ^{brilliant} book entitled "The Forged Casement Diaries" by William J. Maloney.

Casement was not a member of the I.R.B. and he and I conducted this affair without any specific authority from any organisation, but I went to America

in the beginning of 1914 with the full consent of the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., and when Casement went to America a few months later he was in the closest touch with prominent members of Clan-na-Gael, and particularly with Joseph McGarrity in Philadelphia. Casement was not financed by the I.R.B. or any other organisation, and paid his own expenses. He and Devoy did not succeed in getting on well together, and many of Devoy's later references to Casement were grossly unfair and misleading.

I have met everybody of any importance in Irish politics in the last forty-five years, and of them all I hold Casement to be incomparably the finest character, a man of the most generous mind, completely selfless, and, whether he served the cause in Ireland or tried to prevent the torture and destruction of the native populations in the Belgian Congo or in the Putumayo, he was in my opinion the noblest figure of our time.

The English propagandists, who so largely influence public opinion in Ireland and are slavishly echoed in the Irish newspapers, said that Casement had no right to take such a course, but when ^{in 1914} Professor Masaryk and Dr. Benes made their escape from Prague, the one to London and the other to Paris, the English and French Governments welcomed them, financed them, signed treaties with them, arranged for a Czech Brigade to fight against Austria in the service of the Allies, and at the end of the war Masaryk was installed as President of the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia, amid the plaudits of the Allied world; what he had done was an act of heroic patriotism. Casement went to Berlin and did much the same things. Unfortunately for him, the

side to which he appealed lost the war, and, as a consequence, he was executed as a traitor. The most extraordinary exertions were undertaken to cover his name with obloguy, and it will probably be at least another generation before these events are seen in their true historic perspective.

With regard to Maloney's book "The Forged Casement Diaries", it is a brilliant piece of work and completely reliable, and finally disposes of the foul mud which Lord Birkenhead in particular, and the English Government in general, tried to throw at Casement.

Parmiter's biography of Casement is written by an Englishman who did not share Casement's political views and who did not agree with his political acts, but who nevertheless admired the man for his courage and integrity. It is a careful, painstaking and accurate book.

Denis Gwynn's book, although it contains a number of minor inaccuracies, gives a very fair picture of the man and in all important particulars is completely reliable.

Bulmer Ashton

26th January, 1948.

Witness:

W. D. Murray

Director

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