

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 427

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 427.....

Witness

J.J. O'Kelly (Scailg),
173 Botanic Road,
Glasnevin, Dublin.

Identity

Chairman (Speaker)
of Dail Eireann, 1919.

Subject

The Irish Nation League.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

Nil

File No. S. 263.....

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINALSupplementary statement of J.J. O'Kelly
(Sceilig)

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The Irish Nation League.

The Irish Nation League was formed, I think, some short time after the 1916 Rising. The first meeting of it that I attended was a public demonstration in the Phoenix Park. It was presided over by a solicitor ^{called} called O'Mara who had an office in Pearse St. You could hardly hear him speak and he died shortly after of cancer of the throat. The principal speakers were Fr. Phil O'Doherty from the north and Jim Larkin whom I heard then for the first time. The founders of the Nation League were Frank O'Connor, a Galway man who practised as a solicitor in Omagh; George Murnaghan, also a solicitor in Omagh, and Michael Lynch, a newspaper proprietor in Omagh; Alec Donnelly, another northern and a clerk in a wine merchant in Dublin, and Archie Savage, a Belfast publican. There were others, but I can't recall the names.

They wanted to establish the organisation in Dublin, so as to make it an all-Ireland movement. I was co-opted a member at, I think, the suggestion of Frank O'Connor. He was a very fine man and I came to like him immensely. Michael O'Callaghan of Limerick, young Stephen O'Mara and a man named Williams from Waterford were also co-opted. Williams claimed to be a relative of Dalton Williams. He had been in Australia and came back to settle down in Waterford. O'Connor used to come to Dublin to the meetings. He took a leading part in the Roscommon election, where he got a bad chill and was feeling rather ill. He was an enthusiastic nationalist and generous to the last degree. He led the opposition to Devlin at the Redmondite Convention in Belfast, where the resolution in favour of partition was carried in spite of the unbending opposition of O'Connor and others.

O'Connor came to Dublin immediately after the Roscommon

election. He had met Griffith a little at the election and he asked me to speak to Griffith and tell him that he was going to propose him for co-option. They also co-opted the two Littles - Paddy Little and a relative of his - also a lawyer.

We used to meet in a room in a house opposite the Mansion House, called the Dawson Chambers. Griffith and myself were coming from a meeting there in February 1917, when I was arrested.

While I was in Fairfor^dth, O'Connor died rather suddenly of a cold contracted at the Longford election. He had written me a letter and I answered him on a leaf out of a notebook. He at once sent me a packet of vellum and told me not to be short of anything, but to apply to him. We were great friends and I thought a lot of him.

I was not present at any conference in Count Plunkett's house after the Roscommon election. I am clear on that, or at any meeting of any sub-committee formed at it. I know that subsequently Count Plunkett held a conference which was opposed by all non-republican elements and that in the Mansion house he started Liberty Clubs. These and the Nation League were then absorbed in the republican movement. A composite committee was made up of representatives of Sinn Fein, the prisoners and the Nation League.

When I was released the day after the general release I came to find myself elected to the composite committee as a nominee of the Irish Nation League, and possibly Paddy Little and George Murnaghan were on that committee too. It was superseded by the committee elected by the Sinn Fein Convention in October 1917. I attended several meetings of that composite committee. Griffith used to be in the chair and, of course, the main feature of the meetings was the

difference in outlook between Cathal Brugha and Griffith, Cathal maintaining that the policy of Sinn Fein should be of a fully military character, and Griffith having a different view. Cathal had his way and it was he that outlined the main resolution for the policy and constitution of the organisation, which was to be submitted to the Sinn Fein Convention, and I think it was he proposed it and, to the best of my recollection, it was unanimously carried. I was present, but I am not quite clear about the details now. I think I recorded them either in my pamphlet "The Three Martyrs" or in my "Irish Life of Cathal Brugha".

Signed: Seán na Ceallaráí
 Date. 11: 14: 1950

Witness: Seán Coady

