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Statement by

Liam Ó Briain, M.A.,  
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dated 7th May, 1947;

on

The General Plan of the Rising.

".... the residue which has  
remained in my memory of  
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made by various people in  
various places immediately  
after the Rising ...."

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A certified copy of

"The Historic Rising of Easter  
Week, 1916"

by Liam Ó Briain, M.A.

From "The Voice of Ireland"

pp 132-139.

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The general plan of the Rising

I don't know if the following notes will have much value. They represent the residue which has remained in my memory of conversations and statements made by various people in various places immediately after the Rising, in Richmond Barracks, in Wandsworth jail, London, in Frongoch camp and after 1916, here there and everywhere. In most cases I have forgotten the time, the place, the informant. I remember scraps of conversation with Michael Mallin in Richmond Barracks (also with Sean McDermott and Tom Clarke there, but not of the general plan). In Frongoch I spoke with numbers of men about their orders and movements during the days immediately preceding Easter Monday. I heard a good deal in Frongoch from my intimate friend of these years, Sean O'Kelly. I heard a long account of Cork before and during the Rising from Terence Mac Sweeney. Everyone then was eager to tell his story. What remains in my mind is a picture which at that time I accepted as true, that is, after a good deal of rejection and selection, I retained statements which I felt to be important and where I was satisfied that the speakers were speaking from knowledge.

I am very sorry I cannot now give more precision as regards sources, dates and places. Why did we not all write down then what we learnt?

officially from the D. or U. or Executive to Limerick on this mission, but that secretly, orders had been sent to the I.R. B. men there (Mick and Paddy Brennan, Sean O'Murthuille who was in Limerick at the time, and others) to "keep Fitzgibbon moving around" to let him think he was in charge but when the decisive moment came to take things out of his hands - hence his report to McNeill of the unprepared.

afterwards Major Gen Michael Brennan, of Nat Army  
Commandant Paddy Brennan, afterwards for many years of staff of Dail Eireann - Sean O'Murthuille, Gaelic League organiser, afterwards Quarter Master General, Nat. Army, 1922

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The first I heard of a general plan I have already mentioned in my story of Easter Saturday night and Easter Monday morning in Doctor O'Kelly's house 54 Rathgar Rd. There I heard of the proposed landing of arms at Fenit and their passage northwards by rail to Limerick, heard Sean Fitzgibbon speak of the big job which was imposed on the Limerick Battalion of engaging the British garrison there while the arms were transported across the river and then sent forward in a seized train through Clare to Athlery.

I should perhaps mention here that I was informed not long afterwards and believed that poor Fitzgibbon had been sent

where? in front of probably from whom?

officially from the St Vols. Executive to Limerick on this mission, but that secretly, orders had been sent to the J.R. B. men there

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"keep Fitzgibbon moving around" to let him think he was in charge but when the decisive moment came to take things out of his hands - hence his report to McNeill of the unprepared.

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-ness of the Limerick area, true in general, may ~~be~~ have been [too] black. I a little  
 certainly remember Thomas Mac-  
 Donagh referring to Fitzgibbon and  
 Séamus O'Connor as "two talkers" - this was  
 at Headquarters 2 Dawson St. one  
 Sunday a month or two before the  
 Rising / that the British were moving  
 and when volunteers were being  
 hurriedly mobilised.) (when an alarm was given)

2. The next inklings of a general plan  
 I have also already referred to  
 the volunteer groups I got in  
 touch with on Easter Sunday - Tulla-  
 more, Drumraney, Tyrrell's Pass  
 Their orders were generally to  
 move westward to the Shannon  
 and over it - in the case of Tyrrell's  
 Pass they were first to disrupt  
 the line to Dublin.

The same feature appears in  
 what I heard from Tom MacNeill  
 next day - of young O'Brocháin's  
 (or Bradley) statement to MacNeill  
 early in Holy Week, that his  
 orders were to damage the  
 big bridge at Drogheda or at least  
 put the Railway line out of  
 action - again to prevent reinforcements  
 being sent to Dublin.

In Richmond Barracks, I remember small scraps of phrases; Sean McDermott of the Germans; "we were sure they would be here" Joe Plunkett on the Monday after the surrender: "Everything was foreseen, everything was calculated, nothing was forgotten."

But I remember clearly a reference to the general plan by Michael Mallin, a few days later in another room in Richmond Barracks (that is during the week after the surrender.

"When I was shown the plan of the Rising," he said "I said immediately, 'where is the alternative plan for use when this one breaks down. This plan is far too clockwork and there should be an alternative plan'. But they had none" There are not far from the very words used by Mallin. He went <sup>on</sup> to say how every movement of ~~every~~ <sup>every</sup> group of our forces was to dovetail into the movement of some other group; and that that had been his immediate criticism. Mallin was an old soldier (Royal Scots Fusiliers, I was told, and had done the brutal campaign, 1896, but not, he was proud to say, the Boer war. He referred regularly to the



D. F.'s monument at the Grafton St. entry to Stephens Green as "traitors' arch."

This ~~was~~ remark of Mallin's was an echo of the slight animosity, perhaps due to "class" feeling that the Citizen Army officers had towards the Volunteer leaders. In the same conversation Mallin referred to the only plan I ever heard of the Citizen Army having.

He referred to the time when Jas. Connolly had been missing for a number of days - "arrested" as was said, by the I.R.B. leaders, to prevent him precipitating things and to convince him they meant business as much as he did, by revealing to him their dealings with Germany. <sup>Mallin</sup> had

He was held in a house in Lucan, I heard (in the very early 1920's from Jimmie or Seamus Hughes, employed in Radio Eireann who said he was sure since deceased. — an old I.R.B. man

then gone to the Volunteer leaders and told them "what they didn't know," that he had orders from Connolly to the effect that anytime he was arrested or disappeared he, Mallin, was to lead his men out and fight ~~on~~ on the following Saturday night, that he and the Countess Markievich were therefore going out to fight the following Saturday night and that the Volunteers could join them or not, as they liked.

6  
Then they released Connolly.  
Had the Citizen Army a regular  
list of places to be occupied etc  
by themselves alone? Probably  
Their plan was, in all  
probability, <sup>solely or</sup> mainly an  
attack on Dublin Castle

6  
Connolly then  
joined the I.R.B.  
His name was  
read out for approval  
at the various  
circles in the usual  
way. I heard it  
myself at a meeting  
of the "Blairney  
Manganis" in 41  
Parnell Square.

Where did I hear first  
of Athlery as the "all-Ireland  
Base"? This I cannot remember.

I heard A. G.  
referring to this  
holding of Connolly  
a couple of years  
afterwards and  
saying that, if  
they <sup>were</sup> forced to  
release Connolly,  
that obviously  
made him  
"master of the  
situation" from  
that till Easter  
Week.

Was it from Sean-t O'R-? Possibly.  
The name of Michael Staines, ~~was~~  
Commandant of Frongoch, comes to  
my mind here. I had various  
talks with him there and a  
few since these days about  
1916 and he knows a great  
deal of details that have never  
been printed, so far as I know.

Staines is the "Senior Surviving  
officer of Easter Week and not  
Samson Devalera. Shortly  
before the rising (a matter of a month  
or two or perhaps three) the O'Rahilly  
resigned the post of Quartermaster  
-General and Staines was  
appointed in his place. This  
was not made public and was not  
generally known. His business had  
been and continued to be ammunition  
and ~~as~~ as such, his name was kept

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out of the papers. The British (Judge  
Sankey's) Commission sitting in  
Wormwood Scrubs, told him they  
knew he was a corporal.)

As Quarter-master General, Staines  
was a colleague of Pearse and  
Connolly. ~~He~~ I was specifically  
in charge of the Dublin  
area and had under his direct  
command the Dublin Brigade,  
one of the <sup>area</sup> Commandants of which  
was Devalera. The Citizen  
Army, as I was carefully instructed  
when I joined them, had  
become the "First Citizen  
Division of the Irish Republican  
Army."

and the rest of  
the all-Ireland  
Headquarters  
staff

Or Perhaps <sup>I heard it</sup> ~~from~~ from the Galway  
men later on, Harry Gardner of Athenry, <sup>since</sup> long deceased,  
or some one else like him. I cannot

remember but I am clear that I  
was satisfied then that I had it <sup>on</sup> <sup>namely that</sup>  
"very good authority and accepted <sup>Athenry was</sup>  
it as true. It seems to me <sup>to be the</sup>  
from <sup>all-Ireland</sup>  
<sup>base</sup>

what I know of the happening in  
Galway, Easter week, that the leaders  
there seemed to have no plan but  
to assemble a large number of men  
at one point and stay there. They  
did <sup>so</sup> ~~so~~ concentrating maybe a thousand  
men at Moyode Castle, and sat there.  
One party on their way there had a



8.

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Fusillade with the R.I.C. barricaded  
in Oranmore barracks, another  
gave a fight to a party of R.I.C.  
and gentlemen "specials" from  
Galway at Carnmore, who  
caught up with them. But  
broadly speaking, the ~~orders~~  
orders of the Galway leaders,  
Liam Mellows, Lardner and  
others, seem to have been  
just to hold the position.

one policeman,  
Whelan, was  
killed in the  
Carnmore affair

From Terence W. Sweeney I heard  
a long account of what happened in  
Cork that week. The essence  
of what I remember is that on Easter  
Sunday, the whole Cork brigade were  
to go on an "excursion" to West  
Cork; there they were to wait in the  
hills until and receive their portion  
of the German arms. In other words  
only some of the German arms, after the  
seizure of Tralee ~~to~~ were to be  
sent north to Limerick and  
Blare, another consignment was  
to be sent eastwards and given  
to the Corkmen — I assume in  
the neighbourhood of Ballyvourney  
or Ballingeary.

As Denis McCullough will  
tell, there was to be no fighting  
in Ulster. The Belfast volunteers

2/11/11

about 100 men strong, were brought by him, into mid-Ulster. These supplies of arms that were to reach him, didnt, contingents from Tyrone that were to march with him, were not allowed to by their priest-commandants (priests who were I.R.B. men or completely in their confidence) and news ~~was~~ of confusion in Dublin began, I think to reach him. In a bitterly hostile country he felt he could do nothing but bring his men back to Belfast. His orders were strictly not to fire a shot in Ulster but to get behind the Shannon into North Connacht. He will tell all this himself. [The orders not to fight in Ulster were impressed on him by Connolly, which perhaps bears out somewhat Griffith's idea, that Connolly was "master of the situation" and that he was the real commander-in-chief.]

~~concern~~

As regards Dublin city, I have always understood:

[ — again, sources? Seán MacDermott before the rising? Seán O'K — ? Staines? various Dublin brigade officers like my own company captain, Fionán Ó huingh? I cannot say now definitely, ] that it was never the plan to allow the Dublin brigade to be cooped up in the city, surrounded and forced to surrender. The plan for the city was inspired by Robert Emmet's idea of a seizure of Dublin Castle to paralyse the govt.

and fire the country to rise and give them time to do so - all of course in connection with a French landing. Mr. Dermott used to phrase it as no childish dream but as a well-conceived

There was a big Emmet commemoration concert at - in Rolinea Park? - towards end of 15 - or whatever week be Emmet's day - was there not a lecture by someone - Mr. Dermott or Pearce? - on Emmet's plan?

plan. In the same way, I believe, the seizure of Dublin city and Dublin Castle by the Dublin brigade was meant to electrify the country; cause it to rally to the support of the Volunteers

~~to~~ who would be rising everywhere, in some places receiving the German arms which would be in process of distribution. After a few days the Dublin brigade, if forced to do so, were to leave the city and beat a fighting retreat westwards - all the way

to Athlone; if driven to it - and receiving <sup>supplies + reinforcements</sup> from the German reserves there (a

of arms and ammunition

successful first landing and a successfully begun Rising would have been followed, of course, by further German cargoes and landings.

In support of this, I think, it will be found that companies and battalions of the Dublin Brigade had particular areas

outside the city in which they manoeuvred and with which they were to familiarise themselves. The first battalion, I think, had generally a north Co. Dublin area, the company I was in, 7. Co. of the 1st Batt. had ~~particular~~ especially the Finglas area.

and thence to the neighbourhood of "King James Bastle" and was often brought out that way. I seem to remember Fionán (now Judge) O'Singh again saying that he expected to be fighting in that area after leaving the city.

[It would be interesting to obtain statements from surviving ~~the~~ old Dublin Brigade officers as to the areas in the County they were to occupy in case of active service.]

~~What was the situation~~

Of the Wexford area all I know is that when Enniscoorthy mobilised and seized the town, a principal motive - apart from the '98 tradition - in the minds of Robt. Brennan, Seamus Doyle, etc, was to prevent reinforcements passing through their town to Dublin from Rosslare. "How could we stand by and see troops and guns passing through the place on their way to crush the men who were fighting in Dublin?" Did I hear that directly or indirectly from Robt Brennan or Seamus Doyle? I think indirectly: somebody told me that one or other of them said that immediately after Easter Week.

~~That was the first time I heard of the Wexford situation~~  
 of the Wexford situation in which I was involved.

As regards Kerry, there was a general concentration of the whole country in Tralee for the vital job there, of landing the arms at Fenit and seizing the railway at Tralee and distributing arms north and east. P.J. Cahill, commandant in Tralee, told me in Frongoch, that up to 7000 men were gathered in Tralee or neighbourhood on Easter Sunday.

quite lately deceased 1947 or 48

But I imagine that if as many statements as possible were collected from company and battalion officers as to their orders in case of active service in 1916, that it would be found that Mallin's criticism was well-founded, that is to say, that there was a general dovetailing in harmony with a national plan

As is well known, the Rising was to take place on Easter Sunday evening. Every where there were orders not to go into action before then. The "Aud" never received the last order brought to America by Tommy O'Connor, not to approach the coast till Sunday evening. Case-ment was arrested ~~to~~ on Good

Friday Austin Stack was often blamed for doing nothing to rescue basement. It is a matter of opinion, but I have often felt that he was so impressed by the strictness of his orders not to spoil everything by moving before Sunday afternoon, especially in his supremely vital area, that he felt justified in not trying to do anything for basement]

Tommy O'Connor then of 4 Lower Sherrard St. Steward on Atlantic liners, bearer of messages to Davy and, I think, of large sums in gold back to Tom Blake. (brother of Johnny O'Connor solicitor - now J.S. (1947). Last I heard of Tommy was that he was a "professor" in some night school of book-keeping in New York, but he may have gone up in the world since.

That leaves large stretches of the country about which I know nothing.



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13  
To sum up, my idea of the general plan was as follows.

There were two vital areas, one Dublin city for political reasons, the other Kerry for strictly military reasons.

Dublin was to be seized and held, government paralysed by the seizure (and perhaps destruction) of Dublin Castle, the country to be aroused and rallied by this startling event, as nothing else could do it. Dublin to be yielded when overwhelming British <sup>forces</sup> compelled it, the Dublin Brigade, via North and South County, to make a fighting retreat westwards to the Shannon and across it all other areas to prevent British reinforcements to Dublin.

A landing of arms at Fenit in Kerry from ~~the~~ Germany to be followed by a seizure of Tralee, the despatch of arms northward to Limerick, the holding of the British forces in Limerick while arms were to be got across Shannon, sent along by rail with distributions on the way to Athlone (and possibly if all went well further northwards?)

Athlone area to be the general all-Ireland base.

Arms also to be sent eastward from Tralee to West Cork, for distribution among Cork brigades.

The midland areas in Limerick to (more generally) westwards across the Shannon.

Ulster to be abandoned and forces in Ulster to move to North Connaught and try and hold the northern end of the

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Shannon.

In general to make a fight of it, if possible, along the line of the Shannon from the west, with the "strategic" Limerick - Sligo railway line behind the Irish forces.

Comment.

[This may all seem pitiful, when one thinks of the relative strength of the parties engaged. So much fighting took place afterwards between 1919 and 1921 (not to speak of 1922) that those who don't remember pre-1916 Ireland have difficulty in realising what an utterly peaceful country it was then, and what an appalling task, what a ~~seemingly~~ <sup>seemingly</sup> impossible task it must have ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup> at first to Padraig mac Kerais and James Connolly and their companions to get a physical <sup>force</sup> movement, a rebellion, rising or insurrection started among a generation to whom, in general, these words were associated with a romantic past, songs and ballads and Green's Theatre patriotic melodramas, (even great pieces of literature like "Cathleen ni Houlihan" and "The Rising of the Moon" though inspiring to our generation, seemed at the same time to put "rebellion" definitely out of the realm of material reality into the sphere of art.) When I heard Seamus O'Connor say to me in the D.B.C. restaurant at O'Connell St. about 7 o'clock on Holy Thursday evening, "I have just had the life frightened out of me Beasley has just told me that the rising is to come off on ~~the~~ Sunday", I heard the word "rising" used for the first time in my life in a matter of fact way, and without reference to the Fenians, or Emmet or '98 etc. It took me till Griffith's dry-as-dust tone on Saturday night on

an outside-car; "a general insurrection planned to come off tomorrow evening", to make me fully accept these words as real words, so to speak, referring to real and immediate contingencies.

It was in this atmosphere that these men coldly planned nothing less than a "rising". Granted that they had come to the conclusion that a rising had to be made, it is amazing with what detail they planned it and how determinedly they set about making it a real thing, something substantial, in spite the crack-brained thing it must have at moments appeared to them in the Dublin in which they lived and moved. By the whole constitution of the Irish Volunteers, a nation-wide organisation very seriously playing at soldiers, full of men trying to be officers, trying to make themselves real soldiers and with a sense of discipline, derived from their idealism, equal to that of any soldiers, the leaders had to present them with a plan, a big plan, make them feel that their local orders for their local movements or actions were very important and part of a big serious plan. The discipline developed among the men, the unquestioning confidence in "Headquarters" were among the greatest achievements of the Easter Week leaders. The above plans only were a means to get something started, to get hostilities begun, or as Pearse would have put it, to get blood spilt; a blood sacrifice made in Ireland.

Was there more in the plan? If asked, what was to happen after these first movements of brigades and companies? I would be inclined to say that probably the leaders had no further plans; that subsequent movements would be dictated by circumstances. Mallin was

probably right, in his criticism that there should have been an alternative plan to the clock-work plan. But maybe there was, unknown to him. I mean to say that maybe the leaders foresaw that if they succeeded in getting things started, the instinct of the people would carry on that the thing would quickly develop into ~~the~~ the state of affairs that actually did exist in 1920-21, that is, into attacks on the police barracks everywhere, a general paralysing of the machinery of British government in Ireland.

It must be remembered that there were very few troops in the country, on Easter Monday 1916. The number should be ascertainable. Our leaders had certainly information as to their number. Had the Volunteers of 1916 been able to produce for a few months in the summer of 1916, the state of affairs which existed here in 1920-21, ~~per~~ what might we not have seen when we consider the then state of the war, American opinion, etc etc? A few months of guerrilla warfare, and I, for one, ~~could~~ could visualise correspondence, a truce, negotiations, a settlement, all taking place in 1916 ~~was~~ A Republic? 'perhaps not' "We hoped to push the ball up the hill high enough for others to push it up the whole way after us" said Sean Mc Dermott

→ Thomas McDonagh said something to me, to that effect on Good Friday in Croydon Park, but I cannot remember his words. see p. 2

to me during the long conversation I had with him and Tom Clarke, ~~at~~ while we were sitting on the floor of the gymnasium of Richmond Barrack on the Sunday night of the surrender.

I have already quoted these words in my article in the "Voice of Ireland". I was intimate with Seán Mac Diarmáid in '14-'15-'16

I have often thought that 1920-21 is the real justification of the Easter Week leaders and that their real greatness was the intensity of vision and faith which foresaw the possibility of such a campaign, at a time when Ireland was profoundly at peace, when "physical force" as it used be called, had passed into romantic dreamland out of practical politics, ~~and~~ when modern weapons had made such action or methods seem absurd and when there was no example of such "résistance" methods against regular troops anywhere in the world of the day, although there have been numerous examples since 1916.

[But of course it may be argued:

~~that the fighting was a necessary and justifiable response to the actions of the British Government in 1916.~~

~~the obvious answer is~~

"in 1920-21, the people had voted, a Republic had been proclaimed, the fighting men had a right to demand the support of the people?"

There it is.

Had the fighting been prolonged even for one other week, what a rush there would have been of journalists and historians to libraries everywhere from



Moscow to Valparaiso, on the orders of hundreds of editors, to prepare articles on Ireland's history, on Ireland's wrongs, on England's crimes or on England's rights, on "small nations" and on "self-determination"! ~~what~~ what a flow back to London there would have been of reports from alarmed ambassadors, ministers, consuls, agents and propagandists all over the world telling of the staggering blow to their cause, especially from the big American centres, from an America still neutral!

These and many other considerations must be taken into account ~~and~~ if one is trying to see Easter Week "comprehensively and to see it whole."

Liam O'Sullivan (Professor U.C. L.)  
24 May 1947

P.S. I don't think there is any more important "document" on Easter Week than "The Singer" of Padraig Mac Piarais. Here you get not only the feelings of the man, not only his side of the case, as against McNeill's, not only his reasons for believing a Rising, a blood sacrifice to be absolutely necessary (in conjunction with his other writings) but an echo, I believe, of the discussions, the planning etc of Plum Kett, M'Dermott, MacDonagh and himself, the confusion, the failures, the hesitations, the "funking", the orders, counter-orders and absence of orders - all are foreseen. The play is almost a prophecy. Reading it, I have always felt that when they came together on Easter Sunday in Liberty Hall with McNeill's published order before them, they said: "Well, we always knew that something like this would happen at the last moment."

Extract from "THE VOICE OF IRELAND".

P 132-139

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THE HISTORIC RISING OF EASTER WEEK - 1916.

By LIAM O'BRIAIN, M.A.

(Professor of Romance Languages in Galway University).

"Acht gradh mo chroidhe na laighnigh  
Siad d'aidhin an teine leo." - Sean-Amhran.

My story may start with the landing in Ireland from America of Thomas J. Clarke, ex-convict and dynamitard, in 1907. Sent by John Devoy - "greatest of the Fenians", as Pearse called him - Tom Clarke, from his little shop in Parnell Street, gave the last dozen years of his life to one thought only - that of preparing once more to engage the old foe in the old way. His main energies were devoted to remoulding the Republican Brotherhood. The old Fenian force, though it had not died since the 'sixties, was in nerveless hands. Young zealots now gathered round the old warrior, and in a few years and after a few struggles they renewed the spirit of the old organisation. From Belfast, where The Republic was edited with the help of Roger Casement, came Bulmer Hobson and Sean McDermott; these became leaders of the Brotherhood in Dublin. As organiser for Sinn Féin, about 1907-08, McDermott toured the country and, with his matchless charm and fervour, made countless converts.

So we come to 1912-13. The new organisation had spread through all Ireland, luring ardent young men. Its secret nature forbade any attempt at military training. The eyes of the people were upon Westminster and the journey of Home Rule to the Statute Book. Something spectacular was wanted to bring our people back to their old ideals, and to prevent them becoming "loyal British subjects" out of gratitude for the miserable mess of pottage. The directing hand of Providence soon provided the very means, for Sir Edward Carson himself revived the Fenian methods in the North of Ireland!

The Asquith Government looked on - either helpless, or in secret complicity. But in Dublin the event gave hope and joy to two parties. In 1913 came the Labour upheaval in Dublin, lead by Larkin and Connolly. Of Larkin it is incontestable that he revived an almost extinct flame of Nationalism in thousands of Dublin workmen. James Connolly - a far more intellectual man, a profound thinker, and an ardent Irishman - had already adopted the Communist theories of direct military action.

Dublin Castle was to Connolly not only the symbol of Ireland's foe, but also the buttress of the whole system of class-enslavement. Both of these appeals he combined in a call to his followers to arm themselves. So the Citizen Army was founded. But it was symptomatic of the newness of the military appeal that, though nearly 20,000 men were on strike that year in Dublin, the Citizen Army never reached more than two hundred at most.

While the Redmond hacks were on the Executive nothing could be done to procure arms. The Executive meetings became a series of quarrels, in one case leading to blows. The I.R.B. chiefs resolved to supply the men with arms, but could not entrust their plans to the Joint Committee. When the first big consignment was landed at Howth, the Redmond nominees knew nothing of it. This was the beginning of that necessary double dealing which was to play such an important part in the events of Easter Week.

After the Howth affair the Joint Committee was doomed. The outbreak of a world-war, Redmond's stand with England, and his offer of Ireland's manhood, merely hastened the end. In September, 1914, on the evening of Mr. Asquith's speech in the Dublin Mansion House, the original founders of the Volunteers issued a statement declaring that the "nominees" were no longer members of the Executive, and calling on the rank and file to stand by them. At last we had a real body with a real purpose. Organisation was improved by able leaders like Thomas McDonagh, of the Dublin Brigade, and Brigade-Adjutant Eamon de Valera; Ned Daly and Piaras Beaslai in the first battalions; Tom Hunter, Eamon Price, and Richard Mulcahy in the second, Eamon Ceannt and Cathal Brugha in the fourth.

Special departments were trained for each company; for the smuggling of munitions - a whole romance here - and, for intelligence, the nucleus of Michael Collins' formidable I.R.A. Secret Service of 1920-21. Each company drilled at least one night a week in a small hall equipped with a miniature rifle range. Nearly every Sunday sham battles were held outside Dublin, varied by spectacular route-marches of the whole brigade in full uniform through the city streets and outlying villages. A brisk, if illicit, trade in rifles sprung up between Volunteers and thirsty or reckless soldiers of the British Army. I have seen a lad come into our drill-hall displaying a brand new service rifle, and grumbling that he had had to pay half-a-crown for it, while a friend had got his for two shillings'. Others less lucky or suasive paid for weapons in weekly instalments.

The Women's Auxiliary, or Cumann na mBan, soon trained themselves to help us in peace or war. Other features were an insurance scheme in case of "future casualties", and weekly levies on friends outside. The enthusiasm of the men was wonderful. No call on their time or energy was too great. None in the ranks knew what was toward, yet all placed their lives in the hands of the leaders. The rank and file were of the Dublin artisan class, with many clerks, shopmen, civil servants and students. The democracy was complete. If anything, the higher a man's social status the more he had to do and the sterner the discipline.

What a thrill it gave in the dusk of a Sunday evening after a long march to hear the martial chorus, since sung wherever Irishmen are in the remotest corners of the globe:

"Soldiers are we  
Whose lives are pledged to Ireland!"

For months before Easter the Volunteers were told (and agreed) that any time they went out they might never come back; that they might be attacked, or be ordered, to attack. They accepted this absolutely, with utter faith in their chiefs and with a perfect sense of soldierly discipline. Such was the mentality of the men of Easter Week.

We must now deal with inner developments. The Republican Brotherhood were in touch with Germany, through America, from the beginning of the Great War. The time for action had come. The Supreme Council of the I.R.B. was now superseded by the Military Council, a small body of four - Clarke, McDermott, Pearse, and Plunkett - who proceeded calmly to plan the enterprise. Communications were established through sailors and passengers on ocean liners with the Clan-na-Gael of America; that is to say, with John Devoy, and through him with agents in Germany and the United States. The part that Sir Roger Casement played is told elsewhere.

Towards the end of 1915 Joseph Plunkett reached Germany by way of Spain, Italy, and Switzerland, and had long discussions there. He arranged for the shipment of arms to Ireland, and then went to America to report to John Devoy.

What was the nature of these plans? The main idea was that of Robert Emmet, which also was based on a dramatic seizure of Dublin Castle as a means of firing the whole country into action. Simultaneously, a landing of arms in Kerry would arm the South and West, and we would have had in 1916 the guerilla warfare of 1920-21. And what results were to be hoped? The Republic? Hardly! it was expected that the Rising, if it coincided with a big German offensive in France, would divert large British forces, and later on compel the enemy to negotiate. "We hope to push the ball up the "hill", Sean McDermott said, "far enough to make it easy for those who "came after us to push it up the whole way".

How did the Germans receive our plans? With polite incredulity. Ignorant of Ireland, they viewed us as forlorn visionaries, and even doubted whether we would be rash enough to challenge the armed might of England. Yet on the whole the Germans kept their word with Ireland. They told us they would launch an offensive in the spring of 1916. So Easter was fixed on as the date of the Rising. It was agreed that a cargo of rifles and machine-guns would be off the Kerry Coast, near Fenit, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, April 21st and 23rd. If our campaign was well launched, the Germans would send more arms, and men if possible.

The day drew near, and our activity grew feverish among the ranks of the Volunteers. Headquarters was busy as an ant-hill. Messengers went in and out to bewilder the relays of watching "G. men". Inside in the armoury, the clangour of tools supplied staccato music to a scene which reminded one of a Queen's Theatre setting of Robert Emmet's store-room in Marshalsea Lane on the eve of his fatal adventure. A fortnight before Easter our officers made their wills. We of the ranks heard of prizes for the company that could show the most complete equipment at the "manoeuvres" on Easter Sunday.

At all company parades that last week the men were told to be ready for anything on Sunday. Confessionals were crowded on Saturday night; many a Dublin church on Easter morning saw lads in full kit, with rifles, waiting their turn at the Communion rails ..... Yet when they went home and read the papers, all were aghast to see the order: "To all Volunteers" - that no Easter manoeuvres or parades whatever were to be held." With still greater amazement they saw the signature of "Eoin MacNeill, Chief of Staff". What had happened? The inevitable clash between the inner and the outer Executives - between the I.R.B. chiefs, who had planned all with secrecy, and the rest of the Volunteer Executive, who had been left in the dark. In placing MacNeill at the head, the founders had sought only an ornament. They came to respect him more and more, though he tended to revert more and more to his studies, leaving the chair to be taken by Padraig Pearse. Still the inner chiefs did not take MacNeill into their full confidence. They knew him opposed to a rising. On his side, MacNeill was not blind to what was going on. He began to ask questions, and was answered evasively. Only on the Thursday of Holy Week did he learn of orders for the Sunday of the blowing-up of bridges and railroads.

Now fully aware, Eoin MacNeill charged Pearse and the Revolutionary leaders with preparing an Insurrection without his knowledge. They admitted it, adding that it had gone too far to stop it. MacNeill declared that he would do all he could to do so, and they parted in confusion.

On Good Friday Bulmer Hobson was arrested by Volunteers. He, like MacNeill, was opposed to any Rising, preferring to defer all action until after the Great War. Hobson discovered before MacNeill what was intended on Easter Sunday, so in the middle of Holy Week he began making counter-moves. This was no part of his work as Secretary, so he was detained in a Dublin house till after the fight had started on Easter Monday.

Thus, up to Good Friday all went smoothly and with marvellous secrecy. But from now on disaster fell on us. Strange things happened on a wild stretch of coast near Tralee on that fatal Friday morning. A collapsible boat from a German submarine threw up three half-drowned men on the beach. One of these was Sir Roger Casement, the second was Captain Monteith, the third an Irish soldier, who had been a prisoner of war in Germany. Leaving Casement in a cave, Monteith pushed on to Tralee, and got in touch with the Volunteers. Austin Stack, the local commandant, with Con Collins, who had been sent from Dublin to assist him unload the expected cargo of arms, went out in a motor to pick up Casement. But the local police were already inquisitive, and Stack, Collins and Casement were all arrested in the simplest way. Brought into Tralee, Casement - who had concealed his name - showed great anxiety to get news through to Dublin. A message from him reached the I.R.B. leaders very early on Saturday morning. It was an agonised appeal to stop the Rising at all costs, as he was convinced that the Germans would leave us in the lurch, and only wanted to use Irish blood in a cynical way for their own ends.



Casement had acted in Germany as agent of the I. R. B. and Devoy's Clan-na-Gael. He had long known the plan, and had himself arranged for the transfer of arms. But he was not secretive enough - a poor conspirator who took the wrong men into his confidence. Devoy, angered at this, and relentless towards any man who stood between him, and the dream of his life, asked the Germans to deal no more with Casement, but to keep "putting him off". They obeyed. This explains all the tragic outcries of Casement in his published diary.

The German ship, with all its arms on which we depended, was now gone! When final touches were being added to the plans, a message from Dublin asked that the "Aud" should not approach the Kerry coast till Easter Sunday at midnight, when Volunteers would be at Fenit pier for the unloading. This message, brought from America by a passenger, never reached the German ship. The rest we know.

With all hopes dashed, Pearse and McDermott visited MacNeill early on Saturday morning. And for the first time this patriot-scholar learned of the "Aud" débacle. This altered MacNeill's views. Protesting that he had been unfairly dealt with, he now feared the British would come down on us with all their might. Therefore, we might as well stand together and meet the coming storm as best we could. The others said, "Thank God"! At least there was to be unity of action.

As the day wore on and nothing happened, Dr. MacNeill changed his mind. He thought the situation might be saved if a clash with the British could be averted, but knowing it useless to put this view to the others, he decided to issue the order cancelling operations on the following day on his own responsibility. In so doing, MacNeill had in mind the almost unarmed state of the Volunteers over the greater part of the country.

With MacNeill on the Saturday evening was Arthur Griffith. He, too, had cause of complaint. He had been asked to join the Supreme Council of the I. R. B., but had declined, promising to help by his pen, his influence and personal example. In return he had asked to be kept fully informed, and this promise was given him. It was not kept; and Griffith fully approved of MacNeill's action.

The fighting leaders were now bewildered. They knew what had been done, for both Plunkett and McDonagh visited MacNeill and saw the cancelling order being taken away to Limerick and Kerry by the O'Rahilly. Meanwhile, their own staff-officers - one of whom was Michael Collins - were still busy on the last details of Sunday's blow in Dublin. It was clear that MacNeill's order would be accepted by the mass of the Volunteers, who had no suspicion of any disagreement between the leaders.

Very few details survive of the Sunday Conference at Liberty Hall, for the chief participants were dead within three weeks of it. But no doubt their decision was unanimous. Consider the men: Tom Clarke, with his thirteen fearful years in English gaols, and his one life-thought to deal a blow before he died against the hated foe.

Flame-like ardour burned in the soul of Sean McDermott, who, a week later, as a prisoner in Richmond Barracks, remarked to me: "The only failure in Ireland is the failure to "strike!" Recall also the brooding mind of Pearse, who had written: "There are worse things than the shedding of blood, and one of them is "slavery". Above all, there was the impetuous James Connolly, who yearned for a fight over a year before this. So set was he on "going out", even with his own handful of citizen-levies, that he was arrested for a few days and let into all the inner secrets.

So the great decision was taken, and Thomas McDonagh, of the Dublin Brigade, was ordered to mobilise for active service on Monday morning at 10 o'clock. Word was sent out to undo the work of MacNeill's messengers. This time there was no pretence of consulting Eoin MacNeill. McDonagh justified this in a letter written before his death, saying that he was bound not to reveal the secret of his own organisation. Meanwhile, the cancelling order threw the Castle authorities off their guard. They had no suspicion of any dissension, and assumed that events in Kerry had put an end to all.

So the gathering Volunteers on Monday morning excited no comment. The first battalion, under Ned Daly, marched into the Four Courts; the second, under McDonagh himself, with Commandant Hunter and Major McBride, occupied Jacob's biscuit factory; the third, under De Valera, went to Boland's Mills; the fourth, led by Eamon Ceannt and Cathal Brugha, into the South Dublin Union. The military staff and revolutionary leaders - Clarke, Pearse, McDermott, Plunkett and Connolly (who was in active command of Dublin) - seized the General Post Office in O'Connell Street.

The main body of the Citizen Army, under Michael Mallin and the Countess Markievicz, occupied the Stephen's Green area. Another body, under Sean Connolly, marched up to the gate of Dublin Castle. These drew first blood by shooting the policeman at the gate and trying to enter. The rest seized the Evening Mail office opposite, and the City Hall overlooking the Castle, where the brave Sean Connolly was shot an hour later. The Rising had begun.

The mobilisation that morning was very poor - little more than a third of the possible muster. There were barely 800 Volunteers - most of them members of the I.R.B. - and less than two hundred of the Citizen Army. This left the total engaged at well under a thousand men. So the occupation of the city was incomplete from the start. Trinity College and the Provost's House should not have been neglected. Shortage of men forbade the occupation of the commanding Shelbourne Hotel in the Stephen's Green area. With more men, De Valera could have occupied the stretch of the canal on either side of the Mount Street Bridge instead of only a house or two, and so on.

Yet among us all was a vast elation. We seemed to breathe a purer air and dwell in sublime heights. It was a unique experience to feel that once again, after a hundred years or more, the foreign yoke had been cast off, and that men in their own capital, with their own flag above them, should be standing at bay before the foe of their race.

The Post Office was shelled from at least two points - the southern side of O'Connell Bridge, and from the Parnell Monument. On Friday afternoon the roof took fire, and that evening the big building had to be evacuated. Pdraig Pearse was the last man to leave. James Connolly, badly wounded, had been taken to hospital the day before. The O'Rahilly made a gallant though hopeless attempt to charge down Moore Street at the head of a few men. The street was swept with machine-gun fire, and he had only made a few paces when this gallant gentleman (he had opposed the Rising, but joined it on the outbreak) found a glorious death facing the enemy.

The end was near. Cooped up in a few houses of Moore Street, with many wounded, and an iron ring of thousands round them, Pearse, Clarke, Plunkett, and McDermott were forced to surrender on the Saturday morning. A nurse carried out the white flag.

The British insisted on unconditional surrender. Pearse, whose position was that of Commander-in-Chief for the whole country, wrote an order for the surrender of all positions in Dublin for the sake of the city and people, and for a general surrender all over Ireland, as no further object could be gained.

Our positions on the south side of the Liffey only received Pearse's order on Sunday. The outcry among the men was frenzied. It needed all the efforts of officers to prevent the wilder spirits from rushing out and seeking death in a last onset in the streets.

There was much confusion in the country. In Enniscorthy the Volunteers rose under Robert Brennan so as to prevent the transport of men and material from Rosslare to the capital. In north County Dublin a small band of well-armed Volunteers, under Thomas Ashe and Richard Mulcahy, controlled the district. In a smart engagement at Ashbourne, against twice their number of constabulary, these inflicted heavy loss and forced all the survivors to surrender. This fight is important, as it was the model for all the ambush warfare of 1920-21.

Mention has already been made of Arthur Griffith and his treatment by the revolutionary leaders. On Easter Monday and Tuesday he found himself isolated in his home in Clontarf. On Wednesday he got in touch with the leaders, and volunteered for service in the Post Office. In reply they repeated McDermott's wish, expressed to him a fortnight before - they preferred him to stay outside.

On Thursday Griffith could no longer remain inactive. Mounting his bicycle he made his way by long detours to the house of Eoin MacNeill beyond Rathfarnham. That night those two men agreed that Griffith should issue a call to the country to rise and relieve Dublin. He was to attach their two names to it, and circulate it if he could. But, of course, it was too late.

Be that as it may, it is certain that those whose names were attached to the Republican proclamation of Easter Monday - Clarke, Pearse, Plunkett, MacDonagh, McDermott, Ceannt and James Connolly - had no illusions as to their fate. And they met it joyfully. These men passed in the sure hope that the triumph of their death would make up for their military failure, and that their names would go down on the bright scroll of Ireland's heroes.

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