

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 28



Éire

Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

DOCUMENT W.S. 28.

Statement by

Patrick Sarsfield (P.S.) O'Hegarty,
Highfield House,
Highfield Road,
Rathgar,
Dublin.

Dated

3 October, 1947.

On

Document W.S. 3 -
by Liam O'Briain, M.A.

1 p. - MS. - Octavo.

File S. 49.



ÉIRE

Telefón 61018.

S. 80.

ROINN COSANTA

BURO STAIRE MÍLEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

5 Mean Fómhair, 1947.

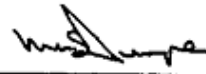
Dear P. S.,

At the suggestion of Professor Liam Ó Briain, University College, Galway, I am sending you herewith a copy of a statement supplied by him to the Bureau embodying his recollections of conversations with Arthur Griffith on certain of the happenings of Easter Week 1916.

In the interests of historical accuracy he is anxious to have your comments, by way of confirmation or otherwise, on any of his statements which relate to matters within your personal knowledge, and that is the reason for my writing this letter to you.

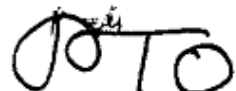
I would like to have the statement back from you in due course as it is a confidential document.

Yours sincerely,


(M. McDunphy)

DIRECTOR.

P. S. O'Hegarty, Esq.,
Highfield House,
Highfield Road,
Rathgar.



Document
W.S. 3

Note

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21

NO. W.S. 28

I have no personal knowledge of this,
but a thing Sean Macdermott said to
me in Westport in 1915 has some bearing
on the position of Farrell generally. He
said, talking about the projected Rising,
"We are going to keep Farrell out of it"

S. O'Hegarty

3 Oct 47

The above is a reply to my letter of 5 Sept 1947
overleaf.

W. J. Murray
Director 5.10.47



ÉIRE

Telefón 61018.

ROINN COSANTA.

BURO STAIRE MÍLEATA 1913-21

(Bureau of Military History 1913-21),

26 RAEDH NA NIARTHARACH,
(26 Westland Row),

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH.
(Dublin).

COPY OF

DOCUMENT WSS 3.

Statement by

Liam O'Briain, M.A.,
Professor of Romance Languages,
Galway University,

dated 20th April, 1947,

on

His conversations with
Arthur Griffith, Eoin McNeill,
and other persons immediately
before and during Easter Week.

10 pp. - MS. - F'scap.

File S. 80.

University College,
Galway.

20th April, 1947.

Notes, 1947
and queries.

In the years between 1916 and his death I became very friendly, I may say intimate, with Arthur Griffith. Although appointed professor in U.C. Galway in 1917, I used come to Dublin very frequently, once a month at least, to meetings of the Coisde Gnotha of the Gaelic League, as well as spending all the Christmas, Easter and summer vacations in Dublin. My meetings with A.G. were not at committees but social when, among friends, he used frequently become reminiscent and confidential. I often walked part of the way home with him. I used stay with my brother in Leinster Avenue, Nth. Strand, on the city side of Annesley Bridge. He lived in St. Laurence Road, Clontarf, and I often walked nearly the whole way with him. I was in his house of course a number of times also.

I do not think these preliminaries superfluous.

It was walking thus home with him one night that he told me of his connection with the Easter Rising and asked me to remember it too, and perhaps be a witness to it some day when he would be gone. The essentials I have already told in my article "The Historic Rising of Easter Week-1916", published in "The Voice of Ireland" (Ed. William G. Fitzgerald - Virtue and Co.) 1924. My article was written in 1922.

He told me how "early in the war" (that is of course, shortly after August 1914) he had been approached by the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. They had asked him would he become a member of that council; if so, they would make him a member (that is, as I understood, either co-opt him or arrange for his election). They gave him to understand, in the most general and imprecise terms, that things might be happening during the war.

A.G. declined saying he preferred to keep his independence: his own open, political (anti-Redmonite) action would of course, be all tending in their way. He asked to be kept informed of any significant or important developments on their part. They promised to do so.

I have the clearest recollection that A.G. understood definitely from them that this definite promise was made to him.

He went on to say that this promise was not kept. He was not given any information by the Supreme Council of their negotiations with Germany; of the plans or date for the Rising. Like others, he only began to hear of what was coming off, shortly before Easter. As I (L.O'B)

This in fact prompted me to write that article in 1922.

Was the approach officially from the whole Supreme Co. or from the Military Co. or from certain members? I did not ask and don't know. Consult on this point, Denis McCullough, Seán McGarry, Seán T. O'Kelly, etc.

was already aware, he had been with John McNeill on Easter Saturday night, had heard all McNeill's story, knew of his "cancelling order". He had gone home, accompanied by myself, on that Saturday night, and on the Monday morning following was taken completely by surprise by the news of the outbreak.

How did he spend Sunday? Probably at home as usual. Ask Mrs. G.

His private position at the moment was very awkward. His wife had gone away to visit friends or relatives (that morning early, I think he said, and to Cork, if I remember rightly) leaving him in charge of their two young children. His first idea was to get into the city to find out what was happening but an unexpected difficulty occurred. He tried to get his neighbours to take charge of the children but they declined. They were afraid to have anything to do with him. (It is well known that the "rebels" were universally called the "Sinn Féiners" from the very beginning of the Rising and wasn't he the Sinn Féiner par excellence?). This matter apparently took up quite some time and caused him some worry on Monday afternoon and I think also on Tuesday. However sometime on Monday afternoon or evening he did manage to get a message to the G.P.O. in which he told the I.R.B. leaders "what he thought of them" (I remember the exact phrase) for having broken their agreement with him, but stating also that now that they had started it, he would join in as soon as he could.

Ask Mrs. G.

He got a message back from them, either on Tuesday or Wednesday (to the best of my recollection, he said Wednesday) saying that it was their desire and request that he should not come to the G.P.O. or join the Rising anywhere else; that they wanted him at least to survive; they wanted his pen to survive to carry on his own work and some day to defend and justify them.

My recollection is not clear as regards when exactly he sent this message, nor as to whether it was written or oral. He didn't say and I was too absorbed to interrupt.

(Of this last part, I have no doubt whatsoever. It is the part of the story which most impressed me then, even more than the part I am about to relate now).

Oral or written? Who was the messenger? I can't say. I never asked.

On Thursday when the fight was at its height, A.G. could no longer remain inactive. He got a bicycle (had he one? or did he say he borrowed one?, I cannot remember) and resolved to try and get in touch with John McNeill. By then, of course, the affair of looking after the children had been solved). He made a detour around the city (I seem to remember very vaguely his mentioning Blanchardstown) from Clontarf to the neighbourhood of Dundrum where John McNeill lived. He spent the evening talking to McNeill. They agreed that a call should be issued to the country for a general rising to come to the help of Dublin. They agreed to draw up such a proclamation and put their names to it and that Griffith should get it circulated to the country if and when he could. A.G. then mounted his bicycle that same evening and got back home again in the dark. Of course any chance of publishing or circulating any such proclamation was out of the question between that meeting on Thursday night and the surrender on Saturday afternoon.

Nevin Griffith's recollection should be interesting here. His sister is I believe in England.

The place of this conversation was along the road between Aunsley Bridge and the corner of St. Laurence Road. It started, I remember

well, some distance beyond Annesley Bridge, near the Railway Embankment. It ended probably not far from A.G.'s own door. The time would be near midnight. The date? That is the question. I cannot remember exactly. It was in all probability either in 1919 or 1920. The possible period can be narrowed by excluding his imprisonments and mine. After being together in Wandsworth in 1916, during which time I had no conversation with A.G. we were never in the same prison again. I was in Belfast prison from about Nov. 12th, 1919, to about Feb. 20th, 1920. I was arrested again on Nov 22nd, 1920 until the signing of the Treaty released internasses on Dec. 8th 1921. The above conversation took place probably between my release and arrest in 1920 - between February and November that year, but may have taken place before my arrest in Nov. 1919. The dates of A.G.'s imprisonments should be easily ascertainable. Although I saw a good deal of A.G. in the period between the Treaty and his death in 1923, I am sure the above conversation did not take place during that time. I am fairly sure that it was either in 1919 or in 1920.

Wandsworth
prison,
London.

There is one aspect of the story that I wish to be perfectly frank about. When I was writing the above-mentioned article for Mr. W.G. Fitzgerald's publication sometime during the Civil War, it occurred to me that I should hear John McNeill's version. I went to see McNeill accordingly one Sunday morning in Government Buildings, Merrion St. where I was introduced into a very large room. There I met Mr. Cosgrave and most of his Ministers including John McNeill. They were at the time all living there under guard and were almost prisoners. The late Desmond Fitzgerald was present through a good deal of my conversation with John McNeill, the other Ministers were scattered about the room. John McNeill confirmed that Griffith had come to see him on the Thursday of Easter Week, that they had had a long talk together and had agreed about issuing a proclamation signed by both of them calling on the country to help Dublin. A.G. was to undertake the task of trying to circulate it. But I asked John McNeill the question: "Did you both not actually draw up a document and sign it?" He said: "No. I don't remember the writing of any document or actually signing anything. Griffith was to write anything he thought fit, and put both our names to it". I said that it was my recollection that A.G. had said that they had actually drawn up and signed a document. But McNeill was clear in his recollection that he had not actually signed any document.

After A.G.'s
death.

There was therefore this discrepancy between my recollection of A.G.'s statement to me about three years previously and McNeill's recollection of what had happened about six and a half years previously. Had I misunderstood A.G.? Had my attention been less concentrated at that particular moment of A.G.'s narrative as we walked along Clontarf road? I had certainly gone to McNeill with the impression that A.G. had said that they had drawn up and signed a document. Had the story grown in my mind in the meantime? Or, as A.G. was clearer and more accurate in his memory than McNeill

Observe that these two men would have then known very clearly that such a document would be their death warrant. Yet both narrated this with the utmost simplicity and as if it was the most obvious and ordinary act for them to do. What a period it was, all the same!

(in my opinion) had his version to me been more exact than McNeill's recollections. Subsequent events, his arrest and long imprisonment in England immediately after Easter Week, the whole rush of political events up to the moment of our conversation late in 1922, and also the resumption, at intervals, of his old Irish studies and writings, must have made many of the events of 1916 seem very remote to John McNeill. However poor Griffith was dead so there was nothing for it but to accept McNeill's modification of my recollection and so I expressed it in my article: "that night these 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".

Looking over that article again after writing the above, I notice that I say A.G. "made his way to the house of John McNeill". It only strikes me now, in 1947, that there is a slight assumption in that. Griffith went around the city on a bicycle and got into contact with John McNeill and had a long talk with him. That is the essence of the story. I assumed then and in 1922 and ever since that it was in McNeill's house. But maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was elsewhere. McNeill, I think, went to the House of the Holy Ghost order in the Dublin Mountains on Easter Monday evening. Whether he was still there on Thursday evening or had returned to his own home I do not know. The recollections of the McNeill family on this point would be interesting.

I see that I also stated in that article that it was on Wednesday of Easter Week that A.G. sent his message to the G.P.O. and got his reply - a repetition of what Seán McDermott had already said to him a fortnight before "that they preferred him to stay outside". That article was, as usual, limited to a fixed number of words and I had probably already reached my limit before I came to the paragraphs dealing with A.G. so I was being extremely concise. The story as I have told it in this statement is closer to what A.G. said.

Seán McDermott's words to A.G. a fortnight before the rising would have been deliberately uninformative: "in case of anything happening" or "we expect the Castle will attack us and provoke a fight anytime now" or words to that effect. This is not mere speculation. I remember that A.G. said that whatever Seán said to him did not prevent him from being surprised as he learned of the full extent of the plans much nearer to Easter Week.

I have never met anyone to whom A.G. had also told the above story but nevertheless I solemnly declare that, both in this statement and in the two paragraphs of my article in "The Voice of Ireland" dealing with "Arthur Griffith", I am and was telling the truth as conscientiously as I could and as accurately as my memory could and can recall Arthur Griffith's narrative to me.

If Arthur Griffith was silent on this episode and never published his own version of it,

McNeill is the more likely. A.G. would hardly set out to go home with such a dangerous document in his pocket.

(Augustinian?)
(R. Hayes).

Seán Fitzgibbon
(Dublin Corporation)
knows of McNeill's movements on Easter Monday afternoon, after I had left him myself at 54 Rathgar Rd. (Dr. Seamus O'Kelly's) towards one o'clock. So also, I think, does Bulmer Hobson.

I have for many years been of the opinion that it was because he was a proud man but the very opposite of being a boastful man. In 1917 and thereabouts, there was a good deal of: "where were you Easter Week?" "Why wasn't he out Easter Week?" etc. etc. and I believe that A.G. scorned to reply to such remarks and that they had the effect of making him keep to himself his own share in the events of that momentous episode.

May I remark finally that when the "Voice of Ireland" was reviewed in the Irish Independent of Thursday April 3rd, 1924, the reviewer ("P. de B.") quoted in full my story of A.G. This was an occasion for John McNeill or anyone else to deny it at the time if they knew it could not be true but no one said anything.

(Signed) Liam O'Brien, M.A.,

Professor of Romance Languages,
University College,
Galway.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILESTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 28

Certified to be a True Copy

Liam Connolly
Keeper of Records
5 September 1947