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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. 65
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

W. S. 51

FORMATION OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS: 1913.

In 1901 it was clear to me that the two alternatives in Irish politics were tame constitutional agitation or resort to physical force. The first I discarded as leaving all the advantages in the English hands. They determined the law and we pre-determined to obey it. As James Fintan Lalor said "dogs tied and stones loose are no bargain".

With regard to physical force, I early realised the complete impracticability of insurrections on the model of 1798, but I found in Lalor a method which he had proposed to defeat the Famine, a method of guerilla tactic which appeared to me to be the one form which physical force could take in a situation such as ours with the remotest chance of success.

Lalor's description of his tactic was as follows :

"The force of England is entrenched and fortified. You must draw it out of position; break up its mass; break its trained line of march and manoeuvre, its equal step and serried array. You cannot organise, or train, or discipline your own force to any point of efficiency. You must therefore disorganise, and untrain, and undiscipline that of the enemy, and not alone must you unsoldier, you must unofficer it also; nullify its tactique and strategy, as well as its discipline; decompose the science and system of war, and resolve them into their first elements. You must make the hostile army a mob, as your own will be; force it to act on the offensive, and oblige it to undertake operations for which it was never constructed".

From that time on, the writing of Lalor and the tactic he had advocated were more frequently made the subject of lectures and speeches which I delivered than any other topic, and it was my object to win independence by a condition of passive resistance and by guerilla warfare if the opportunity arose.

I was convinced that on this basis, and on this basis alone, had an armed insurrection in Ireland any hope of military success against the highly trained and well organised armies of a powerful state, and in that conviction I played the part I did in founding the Irish Volunteers in November, 1913, in organising and arming them in the years that followed, and in opposing the insurrection of 1916.

When Sir Edward Carson founded the Ulster Volunteers in September, 1912, I saw clearly that this development was an example which would be followed by the whole of Ireland, and the formation of the Ulster Volunteers was welcomed in an article by P. S. O'Hegarty published in "Irish Freedom", of which I was the editor. O'Hegarty pointed out that the Volunteers of 1782 started in Ulster but soon spread to the whole of Ireland, and that in this case history might well repeat itself.

I realised, however, that if national Ireland were to form a volunteer force too soon, it would be speedily suppressed and that it was advisable to wait a little longer.

In the middle of July 1913, I told the Dublin Centres Board of the I.R.B., of which I was Chairman, - I was then a member of the Supreme Council - that in my opinion the time was rapidly approaching when it would be possible to start an Irish Volunteer organisation. As a preparation, I suggested, and it was decided, that members of the I.R.B. in Dublin should commence drilling immediately.

Members of the Dublin Centres Board who were at that meeting in July 1913, and are still alive, include, in addition to myself,

Seumas O'Connor,	Solicitor,
Seán Murphy,	Housekeeper, Dublin Castle.
George Lyons,	Stationery Office.
Gregg Murphy,	Formerly a messenger in Government Buildings.
Val. Jackson,	Waterworks Department, Dublin Corporation.

Members of the Fianna Circle of the I.R.B. were used as drill instructors

I have dealt with this matter more fully in my statement on the Fianna.

The formation of the Volunteers was entirely distinct and separate from the Citizen Army, and the decision to form one was in no way influenced by the formation of the other.

In October, 1913, we decided that the time had come to start the Volunteers, but that the I.R.B. must not show its hand. We were looking around for a respected figure who would become the focal point of a public movement, when an article entitled "The North Began", over the name of John (Eoin) McNeill, Professor of Early and Medieval History in University College, Dublin, which appeared in "An Claidheamh Soluis", the official organ of the Gaelic League, on 1st November, 1913, provided us with the necessary opening.

This article of McNeill's was certainly not inspired by the I.R.B. McNeill, who was an avowed adherent of John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, was never a member of the I.R.B. and was not in any way in touch with them. His article was for that very reason providential.

I went immediately to The O'Rahilly, who was then honorary editor of "An Claidheamh Soluis", and proposed the formation of a National Volunteer Force. O'Rahilly said that if I could get fifty reliable men he would join them. I said I could guarantee five hundred, and although he, like McNeill, was not a member of the I.R.B., he realised what I had in mind and at once consented.

At my suggestion he asked McNeill if he would preside at a committee meeting to discuss the formation of a volunteer body. Next day he said that McNeill was quite willing to take the chair and O'Rahilly and I sent out the invitations to the first Provisional Committee.

McNeill's value lay in the fact that he was a great intellectual figure, able, clear-headed, sincere and well

liked, that he quarrelled with nobody and could throw oil on the most troubled waters. These qualities made him an ideal chairman in the early stages of the movement, and in the year that followed the start of the Volunteers enabled him to keep the Volunteer Committee and the Volunteers together in circumstances of great difficulty.

Having secured the co-operation of McNeill, The O'Rahilly and I selected a number of men to form the first committee. I drafted invitations to them and they were issued by O'Rahilly over his signature.

I engaged a room in Wynn's Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, and the first meeting took place there on Friday, the 14th November, 1913, Eoin McNeill being in the chair.

A report of the meeting appeared in the "Freeman's Journal" on Monday, the 17th November, stating that at that meeting a Provisional Committee had been formed to organise a body to be called the Irish Volunteers "to secure and maintain the common rights and liberties of Irishmen", and that Eoin McNeill and Laurence J. Kettle had been appointed Hon. Secretaries. This is a misquotation. The stated object of the Volunteers was "to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to the whole people of Ireland".

In his pamphlet "The Secret History of the Irish Volunteers" 8th April, 1915, page 3, The O'Rahilly says that the following eleven persons were present at that meeting:-

Eoin McNeill,
 Bulmer Hobson,
 P. H. Pearse,
 Seán McDermott,
 W. J. Ryan,
 Eamonn Ceannt (Kent),
 Seán Fitzgibbon,
 James A. Deaken,
 Pierce Beasley,
 Joseph Campbell,

and The O'Rahilly himself.

This tallies with my own recollection.

The O'Rahilly says in the same pamphlet that another man, D.P. Moran, editor of the "Leader", was also invited but that he did not attend. I do not remember that Moran was invited, and I do not think that O'Rahilly's statement is correct.

In my own book "A Short History of the Irish Volunteers 1918", p. 17-18, I mentioned six other names, viz.

Robert Page,
Seamus O'Connor,
Eamonn Martin,
Colm O'Loughlin,
Michael J. Judge,
Colonel Maurice Moore.

Actually there were several meetings, fresh names being added until the original committee of eleven had reached its final total of thirty.

On page 19 of my book I have given twenty-eight names, but I omitted by mistake the names of Seamus O'Connor and Pierce Beasley. This would bring the total to thirty.

A further name has been mentioned to me, viz. Ted Sheahan, but I have no recollection whatever of him.

Of the original eleven who met on the 14th Nov., three subsequently dropped out and did not become members of the Provisional Committee, namely:

W. J. Ryan,
Joseph Campbell,
James Deaken.

As far as I can recollect the reasons for their discontinuing were:-

Ryan was a Commercial Traveller in the boot trade and was not easily available;

Campbell a poet, was not very interested in the movement;

Deaken a chemist, found it hard to attend. He was a member of the I.R.B.

The rent of the room for these early meetings in Wynn's Hotel was paid for by subscriptions from those present, but it was not realised that a sum of £1 each which was provided by Seamus O'Connor and myself, came from the funds of the I.R.B.

On the 20th November, 1913, a circular letter was issued by Eoin McNeill and Laurence Kettle to national organisations requesting them to put the aims of the Volunteers before their members and a copy was sent to the Press. The text of this is quoted on page 26 of my book.

A summary of this circular appeared as an advertisement on page 1 of the "Freeman's Journal" of 21st November, 1913, attention being called to it in a note on page 4 of the same issue :

"A public meeting for the purpose of establishing a corps of Irish Volunteers will be held in the large Concert Hall of the Rotunda at 8 p.m. Eoin McNeill, B.A., will preside".

The "Freeman's Journal" of the 24th November contained a notice that the venue for the meeting had been changed from the Rotunda Concert Hall to the Rink, and that a manifesto from the Provisional Committee would be read. A list of those who would speak was given :

P. H. Pearse.
T. P. O'Brien,
Alderman Macken,
Professor Henry, Belfast.

I do not remember Professor Henry. I do not know who T. P. O'Brien was. It is probably a mistake for William O'Brien.

The arrangements for the meeting in the Rotunda were made by me. I went to the then Lord Mayor, Lorcan Sherlock, and asked him for the use of the Mansion House. He refused. I then engaged the large concert hall in the Rotunda. This Hall held only about five hundred people, as at first we were too dubious of the amount of popular support we would get to risk taking a bigger room. As the day approached for the holding of the meeting I took the Rotunda Rink, a large temporary building in the grounds of the Rotunda Gardens. The Rink was then the biggest hall in Dublin and held about four thousand people.

At the meeting the stewards who were equipped with pads of enrolment forms, of which I still have copies, were mostly members:

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of the I.R.B. We got 3,000 of those forms signed that night.

In addition to the 4,000 people inside the hall a crowd of about 3,000 were unable to gain admission. The path from Cavendish Row down to the entrance of the hall was a steep slope and we were much afraid that the pressure of people would smash in the doors which had been closed. Traffic in Cavendish Row was blocked by the crowds, and McDermott and some others went out and addressed them.

Amongst those who spoke were McNeill, who acted as Chairman, Laurence J. Kettle and P. H. Pearse. I decided not to speak as I was looked upon by many people as being very extreme. It is interesting that at the beginning of the Volunteers, P.H. Pearse warned Eoin McNeill of the danger of allowing extreme nationalists like me to gain control of the volunteer movement.

A brief report of this meeting is given on page 27 of my book "The History of the Irish Volunteers". The text of that book was read before publication by J. Fitzgibbon and Eimer O'Duffy and it may be taken as correct except where supplemented by this statement. It must be remembered that it was published at a time when there was a strict censorship against national publications, and that it was in fact passed by the Military Censor at the time.

In the course of our approaches to various organisations prior to the formal inauguration of the Irish Volunteers on the 25th November, it became clear that John Redmond, Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, was hostile to the movement. There is nothing on record, but in personal contacts there was no mistaking the atmosphere. Redmond offered no direct opposition, however, but a prominent member of his party, Richard Hazelton, M.P., obviously speaking with official approval, later attacked the movement in the "Freeman's Journal" of 17th December, 1913.

I have recently heard it suggested that, following the formation of the Volunteers on the 25th November, 1913, the Provisional Committee sent McNeill to London to see John Redmond,

to offer him the allegiance of the Volunteers, and to offer to disband them if Redmond did not approve. There is no truth whatever in this. It is possible that McNeill, as an individual follower of Mr. Redmond, may have informed Redmond of what had taken place, a thing which he was quite entitled to do as an individual, but if he did so, he did not go with any authority from the Provisional Committee. The Committee were neither consulted nor asked for their approval of any such mission, nor would they have authorised it if they had been consulted. Certainly the I.R.B. would never have permitted the disbandment of the Volunteers.

I have been asked whether James Connolly, who was executed in 1916, was a member of the I.R.B. or whether he was invited to become a member of the Provisional Committee. He was not then a member of the I.R.B. nor was he asked to be a member of the Provisional Committee, nor was he consulted about its organisation at this period.

As to the disturbances made by labour men at the inaugural meeting in the Rotunda, this arose merely out of a local labour dispute with which one member of the Provisional Committee, Laurence Kettle, was connected in some way.

As a result of the steps taken by the I.R.B. earlier in the year, those members of the Volunteers who were members of the I.R.B. were mostly all well drilled. Ex-British Army men were employed as instructors, ^{by the Volunteers Committee} and these used to meet frequently, presided over by me, and I told them to pick out the promising men and train them specially as officers. In their selection they were to have regard only to efficiency and to choose the best material irrespective of party affiliation or otherwise. The result was that the trained members of the I.R.B. came into prominence and became officers. The control of the I.R.B. was not apparent in this or suspected, but it operated in practice.

The office staff of the organisation was also I.R.B. It included:

Liam Mellows, Paid Secretary (in succession to Liam Gogan who was not a member of the I.R.B.),
Eimer O'Duffy,
Barney Mellows (brother of Liam).

I have been asked what part the I.R.B. played in selecting or appointing the men who came to the first meeting in Wynn's Hotel and those who were subsequently appointed as the Provisional Committee. There was no formal control. The I.R.B. were satisfied to see the Volunteer movement started and run on a practical basis, and they left the selection of the Provisional Committee to me. An analysis of the affiliation of the members of the original Committee and the Provisional Committee of the Volunteers may be of interest.

Of the eleven men mentioned by The O'Rahilly as having been present at the original meeting, the following analysis indicates who were members of the I.R.B. at that stage and who were not:

Members

Bulmer Hobson
Seán McDermott
James A. Deaken
Pierce Beasley

Non-Members

Eoin McNeill
P. H. Pearse
W. J. Ryan
Seán Fitzgibbon
Joseph Campbell
The O'Rahilly

Of the Provisional Committee of thirty set up on the formation of the Volunteers, the following is the analysis, as far as I can remember:

Members of the I.R.B.

Bulmer Hobson
Seán McDermott.
Pierce Beasley
Seamus O'Connor
Eamonn Martin
Pádraig Ó Riain
Robert Page
Con Colbert
Michael Lonergan
Peadar Macken
Liam Mellows.

Members of the United Irish League - Irish Parliamentary Party.

John Gore
 Laurence Kettle
 Colonel Maurice Moore
 T. M. Kettle.

Ancient Order of Hibernians

Peter O'Reilly
 Michael J. Judge
 James Lenehan
 George Walshe

Not formally affiliated with any party

Pádraig Pearse
 The O'Rahilly
 Tomás McDonagh
 Joseph Plunkett
 Roger Casement
 Eamonn Ceannt
 Eoin McNeill
 John Fitzgibbon
 Peadar White
 Liam Gogan
 Colm O'Lochlain

Pearse, O'Rahilly, McDonagh and Plunkett later became members of the I.R.B. Liam Gogan was brought in ^{to the Volunteers} by Eoin McNeill. He was a student of McNeill's in the Faculty of Celtic studies. He acted for a while as Secretary, being succeeded by Liam Mellows. McNeill and Kettle were Hon. Secretaries, but they were not members of the I.R.B.

There was no formal executive until after the Volunteer Convention of 1914. McNeill, Fitzgibbon and I, however, met almost daily and were often joined by Casement, Moore and O'Rahilly. We frequently met in McNeill's house in Herbert Park.

Casement was not present at the meeting in the Rotunda on 25th November. He came over from London a week afterwards.

McNeill played a very big part in the formation and control of the Volunteers. He attended practically every meeting of the Provisional Committee. He missed a few in the summer of 1914, as he was head of the Irish College at Omeath, but whenever

he was available, which was nearly always, he was a regular attendant up to late 1915 when he began to get a little slack, but even at the slackest period he attended three-fourths of the meetings. It was sometimes difficult to get him to a meeting, but he usually got there. The aims of the Volunteers and most of the early Volunteer documents were drawn up by him.

The first official notepaper of the Provisional Committee formed in November, 1913, bore the address of my private office, 12 D'Olier Street, where I worked as a free-lance journalist.

I have still samples of this headed paper and will loan a copy to the Bureau for reproduction. I have already given a lot of my papers to the National Museum.

I would like my statements on the Volunteers to be shown to John Fitzgibbon, Seamus O'Connor and to Pádraig Ó Riain, who may be able possibly to remember points where my recollection is incomplete or inaccurate.

Palmer Ashton

11th November, 1947.

Witness:

Mundurray

Director,

Bureau of Military History

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