

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 121

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 121

Witness

Diarmuid Lynch

Identity

I.C.A.

Subject

Comments on a talk by P.H. Pearse
to G/Coy. 2nd Bn. I.V. on 6.2.1916.

Conditions, if any, stipulated by Witness

File No. S.30.

Form B.S.M. 2.

ORIGINAL

Tracton, Ballyfeard,
Dec. 30, 1947.

Major F. O'Donoghue,
Bureau of Military History,
Baile Atha Cliath.

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Pearse's remarks, 6.2.16

Dear Florrie:

You asked me to comment on Pearse's talk to "G" Co., 2nd Battalion, I.V., Dublin on February 6, 1916, as published in the "Irish Volunteer", Vol. 2, No. 63.

His purpose was, of course, self-evident, viz.: to focus attention of the rank and file on a definite objective which was neither specified nor suggested in the I. Volunteer Declaration of Principles; to attune their minds to participation in an insurrection for the achievement of Irish independence (secret preparations for which were then far advanced).

This outspoken advocacy of "Separation" as the goal of the Irish Volunteers, coupled with his statement about being "called into action", was fraught with possible dangers:

First, it might have impelled the "moderate element" on the I.V. Executive Committee to challenge openly his right - as an individual member of that Committee - to advocate any policy other than that laid down in the Declaration of Principles.

Second, his remarks might have excited the suspicion of the British Government with relation to the Irish Volunteer organisation, which in turn might have led to moves by the British calculated to wreck any plans the Volunteers might have had of "going into action".

Fortunately, neither of these untoward results eventuated from that talk:

(1) Eoin MacNeill and his colleagues who desired the Volunteers to adhere to the Declaration of Principles did not realise until Holy Week that Pearse and his associates actually contemplated an insurrection and the participation therein of the Irish Volunteers.

(2) What with the attitude of the Parliamentary Party and that of the vast majority of the Irish people at that time, the idea of an armed insurrection seems to have been entirely beyond the conception of the British Govt. That Pearse's remarks on the 6th of February were noted by the British officials in Ireland may be taken as axiomatic, but whatever danger the latter may have sensed around that period it evidently did not appear to them to be immediate. Pearse's intimate contact with Clarke, MacDiarmada, etc was unknown to them. Furthermore, I'm inclined to the opinion that they deemed Padraig Pearse more or less a literary visionary, and discounted his remarks accordingly. They did not know ~~xxxx~~ Pearse as we knew him.

Pearse's role was a difficult one: to exhort the Volunteers to a "separatist" conception of their existence, and at the same time to allay the fears of those whose opposition would have been serious. He was careful to preface the words "IF EVER" in the phrase: "IF EVER the Irish Volunteers went into action", and to add another qualification: "It would be wrong for me to say they might SOON be called into action"


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The subject of this talk was in all probability discussed in advance by the Military Council, at the instigation of Pearse who was a deeply conscientious man: The Irish Volunteers were not founded nor was the organisation promoted, - not in so far as some of the founders, nor the vast majority of the Volunteers themselves, nor the general public understood, - as a "separatist" body. Yet, we know that in pursuance of the purpose which the I. R. B. had in mind for them from the beginning, the Military Council aimed at throwing the Volunteers en masse into the proposed Rising, and that this was to be accomplished through the instrumentality of Padraic Pearse in his capacity of Director of Organisation on the Irish Volunteer Staff.

This situation demanded some adjustment - in so far as it could be accomplished with reasonable degree of safety - before the Irish Volunteers were actually "called into action for the achievement of Irish freedom". It was a delicate undertaking, and Pearse himself was, par excellence, the man for it. He succeeded in not alone conveying the desired idea to those who were ready to be impressed by it, but at same time in minimising the full and immediate purport of his remarks from others. Had the effort not been essential under the circumstances he would certainly be open to censure for "Sailing too close to the wind".


DIARMUID LYNCH

P.S. I also send you herewith my promised comments on "the National Flag" - with particular reference to Easter Week.


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