

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 790

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 790

Witness

Robert Brennan,  
42 Lower Dodder Road,  
Rathfarnham,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs,  
Dail Eireann, 1921-22;

Irish Minister at Washington, 1938-1947.

Subject.

First and Second Dail Eireann,  
1919-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S. 537

Form B.S.M. 2

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE.

DAIL PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT.

A. Decision to set up a National Parliament.

I was arrested in the last week of 1918, three weeks before the General Election and I was not on the scene when the first meeting of the Dail was held, nor until March 1919, when I was released.

Before I was arrested the Sinn Fein Manifesto for the General Election which appears as an Appendix in Dorothy Macardle's book "The Irish Republic" had been published. I had drawn up the Manifesto by direction of the Sinn Fein National Executive and my draft was accepted with a few slight amendments.

In this it was stated that Sinn Fein aimed at ~~xxxxxxxx~~ setting up the Republic

....."By the establishment of a Constituent Assembly comprising persons chosen by Irish Constituencies as the Supreme National authority to speak and act in the name of the Irish people....."

These words could only mean the setting up of some such institution as Dail Eireann, though these words were not used.

The Manifesto was unanimously adopted by the National Executive at a meeting held in No. 6 Harcourt Street. Most of those present were not original members of the National Executive

but substitutes for such members as had been arrested for the "German plot". So far as I remember Alderman Tom Kelly was in the Chair and others present were Sean T. O Ceallaigh, Harry Boland, Mrs. Wyse Power, John Belton, Henry <sup>Dixon R.F.</sup> ~~Dickson~~, Father O'Flanagan, George Nesbit and myself. Paddy Sheehan was the acting-secretary. The possible military results of such a step were fully in all our minds but I do not think we considered any possible economic results.

It must be remembered that when the Manifesto was drawn up we all knew that we would be in a position to be bound by its conditions and implications because as Director-General of Elections I had reported to the National Executive that we would win not fewer than 73 seats and therefore we would have been empowered by the Irish electorate to implement our programme. Though I made two mistakes having marked Pembroke (County Dublin) for a loss and Waterford City for a gain, my original figure of 73 seats was correct.

#### B. The General Election of December 1918.

The candidates were selected by Constituency Convention consisting of two delegates from every Sinn Fein Club in the area. Occasionally the local people asked me to suggest a candidate who had either some connection with the area or who, because of his record in 1916, might be expected to carry the Constituency. I have shewn in my book "Allegiance" that this was how Kevin O'Higgins came to be adopted as the candidate for Leix Offaly. Similarly, when Father O'Flanagan asked me to stand for Roscommon, I suggested

Harry Boland instead. There was a difficulty in North Sligo where Alec McCabe was backed by one section and Tomas O Donhnallain by another. I presided at the Convention there and I was instructed by the National Executive that if there should be a deadlock I should put forward the name of Madame Markievicz. I was challenged about this at the Convention and I admitted that this was the case. In the upshot, Alec McCabe was selected.

There was a formal pledge submitted to the candidates to the effect that they would conform to the Sinn Fein policy and programme. I do not think that it was explicit in stating that they would not go to Westminster but it was clearly in everybody's mind that they would not do so and that they would take part in such a National Assembly as would be set up.

Regarding the machinery for canvassing and preparing generally for the election, all this is set out in my book "Allegiance", pages 167-170.

As Director-General of Elections I was in charge. This is also set out in my book. There was in every constituency a Director of Elections directly responsible to me.

We depended entirely on the Sinn Fein organisation and on polling day we had the help of the Volunteers in the matter of keeping order and protecting the voters at the polling booths.

I cannot say why the Mansion House was selected for the first meeting of Dail Eireann as I was not on the scene.

C. MINISTRIES

I cannot answer any of these questions as I was in jail at the time the Ministries were set up.

D. STAFFING OF DEPARTMENTS.

I can answer only for my own experience. When Mr. de Valera returned from America about Christmas ~~1920~~ 1920, he suggested I should set up a Foreign Office of Dail Eireann to co-relate all our activities abroad. I consented to do so and received an official letter signed by Mr. de Valera stating I was appointed "Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs". I recruited my own staff, reporting the appointments to Mr. de Valera and to Michael Collins as Minister for Finance. The salaries of all the people on my staff were delivered week by week by either Joe Reilly or someone else from the Ministry of Finance.

The correspondence between the various departments was made by courier, as set out in my book. George Homan, who is now major-domo in the External Affairs Department was my courier.

The letters to our agents abroad were all sent to Collins, who besides his other activities, was Director of Communications.

In this connection I might say that I had two offices, each duplicating the work of the other so as to prevent interruption of the business in case one of them was captured. None of my offices was ~~was~~ ever captured so that when the Truce came, and later when the Free State began to function, all my files were transferred to the

External Affairs Department and they should be available.

E. OPERATION OF THE MINISTRIES.

I can't answer this. In the case of my Department, there was nothing to take over from the British Government.

F. PRESIDENT OF DAIL EIREANN.

I can't answer these questions.~~fax~~

G. IRISH DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ABROAD.

My recollection is that the first Irish Envoys were trade agents employed by the Ministry for Industry and Commerce, who was Ernest Blythe. He had agents in France, Leopold Kerney; Denmark, Gearoid O'Loughlin (I think), the U.S. Lindsay Crawford and Genoa, - Hales, who was a brother of Sean Hales.

When I took over Foreign Affairs we had in America Harry Boland, in London Art O'Brien / in France Sean T O'Kelly and L.H. Kerney; in Rome Gavin Duffy; in ~~Spain~~ Spain Maire O'Brien; in Germany John Charters, Nancy Power and John T. Ryan; in Switzerland Michael MacWhite. Besides Rome, we had the aforementioned Mr. Hales in Genoa. There were various other people scatteree here and there who acted voluntarily for us. The present Bishop of Ferns, Dr. Staunton, showed me quite recently a

letter I had sent him in 1921 from which it is clear that in that year he was acting as a propagandist agent for us in Switzerland.

So far as I know none of these ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> duly accredited, at any rate none of them was afforded official recognition. Gavin Duffy got into trouble in Paris when he sent a communication to the French Foreign Minister and published same. He got twenty-four hours to leave the country.

The function of these representatives was to make known our case for independence, to expose the methods of the British government in Ireland and to set up and maintain contact with as many representatives of foreign countries as they could and also to try and influence opinion through the elected ~~of~~ representatives of the country in which they were located, and through publicity in the newspapers and magazines.

There were special missions for the purchase of arms, particularly in England and Germany.

With regard to the influence of such envoys in the issue of passports to persons interested in a friendly manner in Ireland, they may have had some, but no instance occurs to me.

We were always aware of the fact that the British Government resented the presence of such envoys and they certainly did their best to offset ~~any~~ the effect of such propaganda as they were able to carry out.

I can't recall any case in which the envoys failed to justify their appointments, though the case of Gavin Duffy/<sup>which</sup>I have mentioned

shows that he acted unwisely.

In Rome our envoy got very great assistance from ~~Exx~~ Rev. Dr. O'Hagan, who was the Rector of the Irish College, and from Monsignor Curran who was Vice-Rector.

*Robt. Brennan*

*29 Jan 1953*

(Rob't. Brennan)

29 Jan. 1953.

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QUESTIONNAIRE.

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No. W.S.

DÁIL PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT.

A. Decision to set up a National Parliament.

Prior to the General Election of December 1918, which resulted in the first Dáil Éireann, when and in what circumstances was it decided as a definite operative plan to set up an independent Parliament in Ireland, as distinct from mere abstention from Westminster?

What body decided this?

Who were its chief exponents?

Where did the discussions take place and who were present?

Where, when and in what circumstances was the final decision taken?

Were the possible military and economic results of such a step fully discussed and appreciated?

B. The General Election of December 1918.

How were the candidates elected? Were they chosen by Local Conventions, or were the selections made in Dublin by some central body? If so, by what body and on what basis, and how was local acceptance secured?

Was an undertaking required and given by each candidate that not only would he refuse to sit in the British Parliament at Westminster, but that he would sit and take part in the proposed independent Irish Parliament in Dublin?

What machinery was set up for canvassing and preparing generally for the election?

Who was in charge?

To what extent did he use existing organisations, and which ones?

Why was the Mansion House selected for the first meeting of Dáil Éireann in January 1919?

C. Ministries.

Who decided on the Ministries to be created and for what reasons?

Who selected those who were to be the holders of ministerial offices and on what basis?

What salaries were the Ministers paid and from what sources?

What precautions were taken to prevent the arrest or assassination of Ministers, and what arrangements were made for the appointment of successors or substitutes?

Were the deputy and substitute Ministers chosen in advance, or were they selected as the need arose?

D. Staffing of Departments.

Who was appointed to be the Secretary or Civil Service head of each Department and why was he selected?

By whom was the appointment made in each case?

How were the rest of the staffs selected and appointed? From what source were the officials paid? To what extent, if any, was membership of the Irish Volunteers a qualification?

Where were the offices of the various Ministries and sub-departments?

What records were kept?

What precautions were taken against arrest of personnel or seizure or loss of documents?

How was correspondence delivered between Departments and to addresses inside and outside the country?

E. Operation of the Ministries.

What plans and arrangements were made by each Department to take over control of the services administered by the British Government and to what extent?

How far were they successful?

What plans were made to meet punitive action by the British Government against local bodies and individuals co-operating with Dáil Departments in this work, and how far were such measures effective?

F. President of Dáil Éireann

At what stage did the President of Dáil Éireann assume the title of/<sup>the</sup>President of the Republic, and was any formal action taken to that end and by what authority?

Before the emergence of the title "President of the Irish Republic" there was apparently no personal Head of the State. Was that fact realised or adverted to and how was the constitutional anomaly explained and dealt with?

Was there any conscious intention to adopt the Swiss precedent whereby the executive authority of the State is vested in a group of ministers, called the Federal Council, the president of which is elected annually, but merely as head of that body and not as head of the State?

The constitution of the I.R.B. provided that the Chairman of the Supreme Council of that body should ex officio be the president of the Irish Republic when that Republic was proclaimed. Why was it that neither in the Proclamation of the Republic on Easter Monday 1916, or in the re-affirmation of that Proclamation by Dáil Éireann in 1919, no effort was made to translate into practice that rule in the Constitution of the I.R.B.?

Did the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. agree with that departure from its rules, and how and in what circumstances was that agreement achieved?

Was there any friction with any section of the I.R.B. as a result?

G. Irish Diplomatic Missions abroad.

At what stage and with what end in view was it decided to appoint Irish Envoys to serve as diplomats abroad?

What countries were chosen and for what reason?

Did these Envoys carry any official documents purporting to be diplomatic credentials?

By whom were they signed and to whom were they addressed?

Did they bear the seal of Dáil Éireann or of the Minister for External Affairs, or any other seal?

By whom were they signed and countersigned?

Was any effort made to have these Envoys accepted as duly accredited diplomats?

If so, what were these plans and what were the results?

If the persons were accepted as duly accredited diplomats, what was the exact status in International Law or Practice of each of these Envoys?

Did they get any recognition whatever from foreign Governments and to what extent in each case?

What was their exact function abroad?

Did it cover publicity, collection of funds, purchase of arms, trade, etc.?

Had they any influence in the issue of passports to persons interested in a friendly manner in Ireland?

Was the presence of these Envoys abroad the subject of adverse representation by the British Government to the foreign governments concerned, and, if so, to what effect?

Did these Envoys justify their appointment in every case?

If not, was the failure due to the unsuitability of the persons concerned, or to the circumstances at the time and place, or a combination of both?

In the case of the Vatican, did the Irish Envoy receive any form of recognition from the Vatican?

To what extent had he -

(a) the goodwill, and

(b) the active assistance

of the Hierarchy or senior clergy in Ireland and/or in Rome?



H. Foreign Diplomatic Missions in Ireland.

Did any country send an Envoy or a Diplomat or quasi-Diplomat to Ireland accredited to, or in any way charged with a mission to the Government of the Irish Republic during the lifetime of the first and second Dáil Éireann, 1919-1921?

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COPY.

S.537.

13th January, 1953.

A Chara,

While the evidence which is being collected by the Bureau is of great historical value, there are still some important points in which historians of the future will be keenly interested on which information is very meagre or altogether lacking.

I append a list of some of these, many of which I think you are in a position to answer, and I would be grateful if you could see your way to set down on record as much information as you can regarding them. In their study and answering, other points closely related to them will probably arise, and the more information which can be placed on record, the better.

I have set them down as they occurred to me, not with the intention that they should be answered categorically but rather for the purpose of stimulating the memories of those who were very close to the things to which they relate.

Mise, le meas,

(M. McDunphy)

DIRECTOR.

Robert Brennan Esq.,  
42, Lower Dodder Road,  
Rathfarnham,  
DUBLIN.

