

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 840

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 840.....

Witness

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

Identity.

Member of Supreme Council
of I.R.B.

Subject.

Irishmen in the London Civil Service
in the Sinn Féin period, 1902 - .

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S.49.....

Form B.S.M. 2

DOCUMENT B

IRISHMEN IN THE LONDON CIVIL
SERVICE IN THE SINN FEIN PERIOD

22ND APRIL, 1953.

This document is in the handwriting of
the author, Mr. Patrick Sarsfield O'Hegarty,
and is signed by himself.

Indifference in the London Circle

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W. S. 840 - S. A. A. Gaelic

So much of the work in Ireland in London League, Sinn Fein, IRB - of the Irish movement was done by, it was dependent on support from, civil servants, mostly clerks and minor, that some account of them may be of interest.

When I went to London in 1902 and mixed around with other Irishmen I found myself for the first time in contact with chaps from other countries. There was no county organization or club and everything mixed with everything else. Everything dissolved, but that is more or less very much the same and that the cement that held us together was not Cork, nor Clare, nor Kerry, nor Tip, but Ireland, and that the chaps from Belfast and Derry were just the same. The various accounts didn't bother any body, any more than they would do in Dix, but I remember being struck once when an Ulsterman remarked to me, sarcastically, "the crack is heavy", and that to have it explained to me. Only a small fraction of the Irish in London, of course, was in the movement at all, but they were all good, not to say very good. Over there either of two things happened, either you became conscious of Ireland or you forgot Ireland altogether.

Most of the chaps I knew were minor civil servants - boy clerks, assistant clerks, Post Office Sorting Clerks & Telegraphists, and so on. Second Division Clerks, Customs & Excise Officers, and so on, kept away from us, or being members of what was then "the major establishment" - I don't know whether the distinction between the major and minor establishments

street holds. About 75% of them were Post Office
Sorters, and they "dipped" in convenient proximity
to their place of employment, that is, convenient to
the centre of the city for those employed in the
Central Letter Office or the Central Parcel Office
at Mount Pleasant, and in the various
districts for those who were employed in the
District Offices. Mount Pleasant bore the brunt
of them.

I had no experience of the working conditions in
these Offices, but I gathered that they were
hard and sometimes difficult in that a number
of the supervising officers were anti-Ind, and made
things as difficult as possible for the rest of us. But
Mount Pleasant has never referred to other than
Mount Misery, and I gathered that, outside
that, the conditions in the other Offices were
tolerable enough.

By my personal experience of the London Civil
Service was wholly favourable. As a Supplementary
Class in the PO Secretary's Office I was a member
of the former major establishment, with a seven-
hour day and 27 working days holiday in the year.
And I found that my colleagues and my superiors
expected an Indian to be unusual and not
to be bound by rules and regulations. I soon
found that so long as I did my day's work
well I could take almost any liberty. I
was a very quiet worker, and it was seldom that
my day's work occupied me more than three hours
in all; so that I soon formed the habit of

coming in late, of being an hour and a half to lunch (3
and of dodging out whenever I felt like it. I was for
a long time Treasurer of the S.A.A., member of the Gaelic League
and Chorists, Secretary to the Central Executive of Sinn
Fein, a Chairman of a Branch, so that I seldom got
to bed - between these and ready - before 1 or 2,
and seldom got to the Office before 10.15 or 10.20.
The line was supposed to be drawn at 10.4, but
it was actually never drawn until 1 PM. It did
not really need to be, because nothing else was ever
late. The Govt Office would look at me, surreptitiously,
at 10.10 to 10.20 as the case may be, as I typed, and
he would say "well, Hearty, I suppose I may now
draw the line". And it was not uncommon for the
Principal Clerk, K.T. Home, to come in to speak to
me about a case, and find me out, and leave a message,
and never ask me, when I saw him, when I was.
I got on well with everybody, and everybody liked me,
and anything outrageous that I did was simply
regarded as what might be expected from a historian.
I was fortunate in my colleagues in the Telephone Branch
of the Secretary's Office, and especially in the two
chiefs, J.M. J. O'Brien, afterwards Sir Andrew and
second Secretary, and L.T. Home, Principal Clerk,
afterwards Assistant Secretary. But I know that
other historians in other Offices were also treated with
much indulgence - though hardly all as much as
I got later on, as I must now record.

In 1909, the Secretary to the Department
sent for me one day, with a bombshell. He had

before him a copy of Semi Fei, with a signed article (4)
by me arguing about physical force - with Robert
Lynd. I admitted the authorship, of course, and was
then told that he was afraid I would have to be
dismissed. [He was Sir Henry Babington Smith, an
ex-Colonial-Servant]. I asked him why, pointing out
that I had kept, and would continue scrupulously to
keep, the declaration of loyalty that I had made on
entering the service, which was the only declaration asked
of me. He said no Government could keep in its
service somebody who was so actively disloyal,
and I replied that I was disloyal only to English
Government in India and that I could be entirely
dependent on it to be a model civil servant as long
as I was a civil servant. I added that if I
had broken the law I asked it to be brought to
Court and suggested that if I had not then
should be no presentation of opinion.

He said finally that he would recommend
my dismissal unless I gave him an undertaking not
to repeat the offence, and he gave me this
the following week to think it over. Before
then something happened which gave me some more
ammunition. A civil servant in the Board
of Education who was a Socialist, made a public
speech in South London in which he attacked the
monarchy in no uncertain terms and advocated
a Republic for India, by force if need be. The
Home Secretary, questioned in the House, said that

The Government did not propose to take any action.
 And I produced this to Babington Smith when he
 sent for me in the following week. It shook him,
 but he remained in his demand for an undertaking
 as the alternative to dismissal. He told me that
 both the Home and the Office had given me the
 toughest character and urged that no notice at all
 be taken, but that he could not do that. Finally,
 I said to him that I could not give him such an
 undertaking, and I went on to say that I had no desire
 to be dismissed and that he might take it that I would
 not write that sort of article again under my own name.
 He seized on this & said "I'll take that as an undertaking"
 (which I said "I don't give it as such" and that ended
 it. I suppose that was mechanical in its effect, but it
 was not in fact, the phrase just slipped out in the argument
 and he had accepted it before I could enlarge on it. But I
 frankly did not want to be sacked, having noted how little
 use any member was unless he had a job, and having
 noted particularly that a political job - the only thing which
 would have been open to me - in three out of four cases led
 to a deterioration of character.

This was a sequel to this later. When I was finally
 retiring in 1945 my personal file was sent over from London,
 and in it was my Conduct Record. It bore a large "Serious
 Offence" record in red ink in Babington Smith's own hand,
 saying that I had given the required undertaking, and another
 dated 1910 saying that the Post Office had made another
 complaint, on which no action was taken. With these
 two Records on my file, I don't know how I came to
 be appointed Postmaster of Newcastle in 1913, unless
 it be that there had meanwhile been a new Secretary,
 and that somehow my conduct record was not examined
 when the promotion was recommended. But at any

rate 1st to Queenstown without incident in September 1913 (6)
and was there when the Great War broke out in August 1914.
On the morning of Saturday August 8th I went up to Cork, and on
my return about 7.30 found a note ordering me to undertake
at once temporary duty as Assistant Surveyor at
Shrewsbury, together with a phone message to ring Mr O'Brien,
that he was waiting in the Office for my call. I did so, and
he said he wanted to confirm the lines & that I was to report
at once. I asked him whether this was a genuine need, &
he assured me yes, & I then agreed to go. I left Cork by the
night train, and had breakfast with Tom Clarke, &
reached Shrewsbury on the Monday. I said to Tom that
I still had doubts but that if it was not a genuine need
I'd resign and return. This business of confirming within
an area had not then begun. But after I got to
Shrewsbury the Head Clerk in the Surveyors' Office let it out
that I was to remain in England till the end of the war.
I went down to London at the first opportunity and saw Mr
O'Brien and he said to me that the War Office had fired
him 24 hours to get me out of Ireland otherwise they
would arrest me and "throw you into Spike Island", and
that there was genuine need with the Northcoates and
other areas because of staff being called up, & that
it could not be helped. He said he would send me back
when the war was over ("in about a year") and I had to
be content with that. Mr. Thomas, whom I also saw,
said that the War Office had "gone mad and done
some appalling things". So there it was. In January
1915 I was formally transferred to Welshpool in Montgomeryshire,
and spent the rest of the war years there, under police
surveillance and unable to move out of the area without

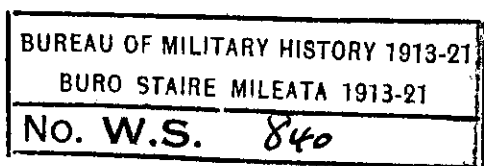
special permission from the Surveyor, who had to have a
week's notice so that he could advise the Police.
[A local policeman who I facilitated about some post office
matter told me this]. In 1917 I was allowed home for a
fortnight for the first time and in 1918 I was again allowed
home. I was at home when, early in August, the House
of Commons carried a resolution directing the Govt to impose an
oath of allegiance on all civil servants, and, judging by the
debate that it would be put through, I formally resigned,
stating that I could not take an oath of allegiance and
accusing the Govt of a breach of faith in that no political
allegiance was called for when I entered the service.

It was lucky I was at home just then, for I was legally
liable to conscription. They did, in fact, issue a
summons for me, but I wrote to the Office to be stopped
it. But they behaved very decently on the whole. My
respector was dated 13 August 1914 and was accepted a couple
of days afterwards. My wages were the pro-rata amount
of annual leave due to me and paid me up to the
last day of it. And, in 1919 or 1920, a chap walked into
the Irish Post Office and said to me "I believe you are the
Mr. Heagerty who was Postmaster of Limerick in 1913/14,
about I admitted. He handed me a warrant for £26.
This, he said, is due to you for that year on an old revision
which was held up during the war and has now been
released, and they asked us to try and find you. I was at
the time broke, and never was money so apt and
so unbelievable.

But the Post Office always sought to keep its
proceedings clear of political or social leanings. On that
point the evidence of A.H. Norway, the Dublin Secretary to
the P.O., before the Haveridge Commission, is very illuminating
as regards the method of approval. But what presented

invariably being applied here was the local Freemason
body and the Post Office Surveyors' Establishments. The
people in London knew well there were many things done
but they were popular against the construction of the
Surveyors and the Freemasons. In those days the PO
Surveyor was a Feudal Lord in the PO system. In
his district - all detail was covered by three districts - he
was all powerful, more powerful in the matter of
promotions than the Secretary here himself. And
the Surveyors and Freemasons would have it hand.
The bias, in my opinion, was primarily a Freemason
jobbing bias, it was political and religious only in
a secondary fashion. They had now and again to promote
a non-Freemason of ability, to get the work done, but
the number of such was strictly limited by that factor.
If a Freemason was available and could be propped up
in the job he was promoted. On several occasions
between 1902 and 1913 I explained all this to the
London Establishments Panel - they used to come to me
into cases they did not like and I used to expound them.
That they were unable to do anything. The Surveyors, in
the PO system, were then incredibly powerful, and if
they promoted that I was the best man, although
if seemed to be rather better qualified, even the
Secretary in London could not over ride them.

But I, at any rate, have nothing but positive regard
of Chiefs and colleagues in London, 1902 to 1913.



Asst. Adj. Gen.
22 April 53

Irishmen in the London Civil Service in the Sinn Féin Period.

So much of the work in all Sections - G.A.A., Gaelic League, Sinn Féin, I.R.B. - of the Irish Ireland Movement in London was done by, and was dependent on support from, Civil Servants, mostly lowly and minor, that some account of them may be of interest.

When I went to London in 1902 and mixed around with other Irishmen I found myself for the first time in contact with chaps from other counties. There was no county organization or club, and everybody mixed with everybody else. Everybody discovered, too, that we were all very much the same and that the cement that held us together was not Cork, nor Clare, nor Kerry, nor Tipperary, but Ireland, and that the chaps from Belfast and Derry were just the same. The various accents didn't bother anybody, any more than they really do in Irish, but I remember being struck once when an Ulsterman remarked to me, sarcastically, "the back is heavy", and had to have it explained to me. Only a small fraction of the Irish in London, of course, was in the movement at all, but they were all good, not to say very good. Over there either of two things happened, either you became conscious of Ireland or you forgot Ireland altogether.

Most of the chaps I knew were minor Civil Servants - boy clerks, assistant clerks, Post Office Sorting Clerks and Telegraphists, and so on. Second Division Clerks, Customs and Excise Officers, and so on, kept away from us, as being members of what was then "the major establishment" I don't know whether the distinction between the major and minor establishments still holds. About 75% of them were Post Office Sorters, and they "dugged" in convenient proximity to their place of employment, that is, convenient

to the centre of the city for those employed in the Central Letter Office or the Central Parcel Office at Mount Pleasant, and in the various districts for those who were employed in the District Offices. Mount Pleasant took the bulk of them.

I had no experience of the working conditions in these offices, but I gathered that they were hard and sometimes difficult in that a number of the supervising officers were anti-Irish, and made things as difficult as possible for the Irish boys. But Mount Pleasant was never referred to other than as Mount Misery, and I gathered that, outside that, the conditions in the other offices were tolerable enough.

My own personal experience of the London Civil Service was wholly favourable. As a Supplementary Clerk in the P.O. Secretary's Office I was a member of the famous Major establishment, with a seven-hour day and 27 working days' holiday in the year. And I found that my colleagues and my superiors expected an Irishman to be unusual and not to be bound by rules and regulations. I soon found that so long as I did my day's work well I could take almost any liberty. I was a very quick worker, and it was seldom that my day's work occupied me more than three hours in all; so that I soon formed the habit of coming in late, of taking an hour and a half for lunch and of dodging out whenever I felt like it. I was for a long time Treasurer of the G.A.A., member of the Gaelic League and Choisde, Secretary to the Central Executive of Sinn Féin, and Chairman of a Branch, so that I seldom got to bed - between these and reading - before 1 or 2, and seldom got to the Office before 10.15 or 10.20. The line was supposed to be drawn at 10.4, but it was actually never drawn until I got in. It did not really need to

be, because nobody else was ever late. The book officer would look at me, quizzically, at 10.10. to 10.20 as the case may be, as I signed, and he would say "Well, Hegarty, I suppose I may now draw the line". And it was not uncommon for the Principal Clerk, L.T.Horne, to come in to speak to me about a case, and find me out, and leave a message, and never ask me, when I saw him, where I was. I got on well with everybody, and everybody liked me, and anything outrageous that I did was simply regarded as what might be expected from an Irishman. I was fortunate in my colleagues in the Telephone Branch of the Secretary's Office, and especially in the two Chiefs, A.M.J. Ogilvie, afterwards Sir Andrew and Second Secretary, and L.T.Horne, Principal Clerk, afterwards Assistant Secretary. But I know that other Irishmen in other offices were also treated with much indulgence - though hardly with as much as I got later on, as I must now record.

In 1909, the Secretary to the Department sent for me one day, with a bombshell. He had before him a copy of Sinn Féin, with a signed article by me arguing about physical force with Robert Lynd. I admitted the authorship, of course, and was then told that he was afraid I would have to be dismissed. (He was Sir Henry Babington Smith, an ex-Colonial-Governor). I asked him why, pointing out that I had kept, and would continue scrupulously to keep, the declaration of secrecy that I had made on entering the Service, which was the only declaration asked of me. He said no Government could keep in its service somebody who was so actively disloyal, and I replied that I was disloyal only to English Government in Ireland and that I could be entirely depended on to be a model Civil Servant as long as I was a Civil Servant. I added that if I had broken the law I asked to

be brought to court and suggested that if I had not, there should be no persecution of opinion.

He said finally that he would recommend my dismissal unless I gave him an undertaking not to repeat the offence, and he gave me till the following week to think it over. Before then something happened which gave me some more ammunition. A Civil Servant in the Board of Education, who was a Socialist, made a public speech in South London in which he attacked the Monarchy in no uncertain terms and advocated a Republic for England, by force if need be. The Home Secretary, questioned in the House, said that the Government did not propose to take any action. And I produced this to Babington Smith when he sent for me in the following week. It shook him, but he remained in his demand for an undertaking as the alternative to dismissal. He told me that both Mr. Horne and Mr. Ogilvie had given me the highest character and urged that no notice at all be taken, but that he could not do that. Finally, I said to him that I could not give him such an undertaking, and I went on to say that I had no desire to be dismissed and that he might take it that I would not write that sort of article again under my own name. He seized on this and said "I'll take that as an undertaking", to which I said "I don't give it as such." And that ended it. I suppose that was Machiavellian in its effect, but it was not in fact, the phrase just slipped out in the argument and he had accepted it before I could enlarge on it. But I frankly did not want to be sacked, having noted how little use any member was unless he had a job, and having noted particularly that a political job - the only thing which would have been open to me - in three out of four cases led to a deterioration of character.

There was a sequel to this later. When I was

finally retiring in 1945 my personal file was sent over from London, and in it was my Conduct Record. It bore a long "Serious Offence" record in red ink in Babington Smith's own hand, saying that I had given the required undertaking, and another dated 1910 saying that The Irish Office had made another complaint, on which no action was taken. With these two Records on my file, I don't know how I came to be appointed Postmaster of Queenstown in 1913, unless it be that there had meantime been a new Secretary, and that somehow my conduct record was not examined when the promotion was recommended. But at any rate I got to Queenstown without incident in September, 1913, and was there when the Great War broke out in August, 1914. On the morning of Saturday, August 8th, I went up to Cork, and on my return about 7.30 found a wire ordering me to undertake at once temporary duty as an Assistant Surveyor at Shrewsbury, together with a phone message to ring Mr. Ogilvie, that he was waiting in the office for my call. I did so, and he said he wanted to confirm the wire and that I was to report at once. I asked him whether this was a genuine need, and he assured me yes, and I then agreed to go. I left Cork by the night train, and had breakfast with Tom Clarke, and reached Shrewsbury on the Monday. I said to Tom that I still had doubts but that if it were not a genuine move I'd resign and return. This business of confining within an area had not then begun. But after I got to Shrewsbury the Head Clerk in the Surveyor's Office let it out that I was to remain in England till the end of the war. I went down to London at the first opportunity and saw Mr. Ogilvie and he said to me that the War Office had given him 24 hours to get me out of Ireland otherwise they would arrest me and "throw you into Spike Island",

and that there was genuine need in the North Wales and other areas because of staff being called up, and that it could not be helped. He said he would send me back when the war was over ("in about a year"), and I had to be content with that. Mr. Horne, whom I also saw, said that the War Office had "gone mad and done some appalling things." So there it was. In January, 1915, I was formally transferred to Welshpool in Montgomeryshire, and spent the rest of the War years there, under police surveillance and unable to move out of the area without special permission from the Surveyor, who had to have a week's notice so that he could advise the police. (A local policeman whom I facilitated about some Post Office matter told me this). In 1917 I was allowed home for a fortnight for the first time and in 1918 I was again allowed home. I was at home when, early in August, the House of Commons carried a resolution directing the Government to impose an oath of allegiance on all Civil Servants and, judging by the debate that it would be put through, I formally resigned, stating that I could not take an oath of allegiance and accusing the Government of a breach of faith in that no political allegiance was called for when I entered the Service.

It was lucky I was at home just then, for I was legally liable to conscription. They did, in fact, issue a summons here, but I wrote to Mr. Ogilvie and he stopped it. But they behaved very decently on the whole. My resignation was dated 13th August, 1914, and was accepted a couple of days afterwards. They worked out the pro-rata amount of annual leave due to me and paid me up to the last day of it. And, in 1919 or 1920, a chap walked into the Irish Book Shop and said to me "I believe you are the Mr. Hegarty who was Postmaster of Queenstown in 1913/14",

which I admitted. He handed me a warrant for £26. This, he said, is due to you for that year on an old revision which was held up during the War and has now been released, and they asked us to try and find you. I was at the time broke, and never was money so apt and so unbelievable.

But the Post Office always sought to keep its proceedings clear of political or social leanings. On that point the evidence of A.H. Norway, the Dublin Secretary to the P.O., before the Hardinge Commission, is very illuminating as regards the method of approach. But what prevented impartiality being applied here was the local Freemason body and the Post Office Surveyor's Establishments. The people in London knew well there were wrong things done but they were powerless against the combination of the Surveyors and the Freemasons. In those days the P.O. Surveyor was a Feudal Lord in the P.O. system. In his district - all Ireland was governed by three districts - he was all powerful, more powerful in the matter of promotions than the Secretary here himself. And the Surveyors and Freemasons worked hand in hand. The bias, in my opinion, was primarily a Freemason jobbing bias, it was political and religious only in a secondary fashion. They had now and again to promote a non-Freemason of ability, to get the work done, but the number of such was strictly limited by that factor. If a Freemason was available and could be propped up in the job he was promoted. On several occasions between 1902 and 1913 I explained all this to the London Establishments Branch - they used to come to me with cases they did not like and I used to expound them. But they were unable to do anything. The Surveyors in the P.O. system were then incredibly powerful, and if they persisted

(8)

that X was the best man, although Y seemed to be rather better qualified, even the Secretary in London would not override them.

But I, at any rate, have nothing but gratitude towards my Chiefs and colleagues in London, 1902 to 1913.

(sd.) P. S. O'Hegarty,

22nd April, 1953.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 840