

W.S. 1,228
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1228

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,228

Witness

General Sean MacEoin,
Department of Defence,
Parkgate,
Dublin.

Identity.

Minister for Defence, 1955.

Subject.

Summary of conversation
which he had with Sir Alfred Cope, British
Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland, 1920-'22,
on the Irish question.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. S, 557

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL



ROINN COSANTA
 (Department of Defence),
 BAILE ATHA CLIATH
 (Dublin).

18th August, 1955.

Dear McDunphy,

This is to confirm what I told you the other day of my recollection of a conversation I had with the late Sir Alfred Cope, former British Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland in 1920-1922.

I went to London on holidays in 1923 sometime in the Summer. I will get you the exact date. I rung up Sir Alfred to tell him I would like to see him as there was a matter or two which I would like to discuss with him. He invited me to lunch and to the British House of Commons. I accepted both invitations. After the lunch he said that when in the British House of Commons I would meet various personages - Irish and English - and that they would question me on certain aspects of the situation in Ireland prior to and up to that date. Sir Alfred informed me that he was political Manager for the Liberal Party and that they were about to engage in the General Election of 1923-1924; that it was extremely difficult to secure the re-election of a Liberal Government; that Mr. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, had lost many friends and supporters due, in his opinion, to his handling of the Irish question; that he had failed to bring peace to Ireland but that had he succeeded in doing so it would be his justification, but as matters now stood he had failed to satisfy either the Irish people or his English and Conservative supporters; that, withstanding his promises he had conceded more than a great many of them desired and that he had not conceded enough to meet the Irish demands and rights; that the Treaty was too narrow and while it could be interpreted on a general scale, as it stood, it could be interpreted unfairly both from the Irish and English point of view; that Lloyd George at the present time could not get an invitation to a drawing room in London and that this meant disaster for any British Prime Minister; that, in his opinion, the Liberal Party would get it very difficult to survive the Election and if that were so he would surrender from politics and go away to his anthracite business.



ROINN COSANTA
(Department of Defence),
BAILE' ATHA CLIATH
(Dublin).

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He said that before he would introduce me to certain members of the British House of Commons there were three questions that would be put to me by them; that he would tell me what the questions were and that, for his own information, he would like to know the answers beforehand. He was not interested in two of them but that he was particularly interested in one; that he did not know in what order the questions would be put but that at some stage the questions would be put in the way as follows:-

How are things in Ireland now? Is peace likely to be restored? Will normal Government soon be the order of the day?

The second one would be:-

What about the Border and what about the Boundary Commission?

On these two questions he said "I do not mind what the answers are but the third question to me is all important and it is:-

When the Government here called the Truce, weren't you fellows beaten and didn't you have to soon surrender?"

He said he would like to know the answer to that question. Needless to say, I was quite positive that we were unbeatable and that no matter what happened British rule could never be restored in Ireland nor could the British Government ever function over the country again; that our forces were so organised that no matter how many men were arrested or killed there were ten men to take the place of each casualty and that if any of the members of the British Government or House of Commons thought that we were defeated I invited them to terminate the Truce now and that



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we would start again; that I could assure them that we would not make any mistakes when we would start again. He definitely declared that this was a splendid answer and asked me to make sure that I would impress this point upon all concerned who questioned me on that aspect of the situation.

We then proceeded to the House of Commons and, sure enough, the questions were asked by Lord Reading, Mr. Samuel McGuffin, M.P., a Mr. Long, Unionist member and several others. I emphasised our ~~un~~impregnable strength to them all and repeated the answers to the third question which Cope had put to me, but instead of it being third, it was the first with McGuffin and Lord Reading. Cope expressed complete satisfaction by the conversation I had with the Unionist members who surrounded me when we arrived. He was positive that on the Border question a Commission could be set up that would give Ireland complete unity.

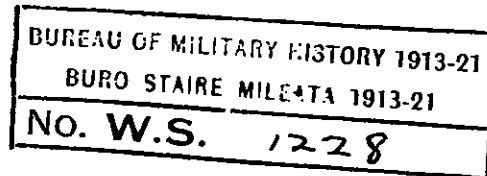
I saw the correspondence you had with Sir Alfred and I am disappointed with his reply to you as it does not give a true picture of what Sir Alfred then felt. I attach herewith a newspaper cutting taken from the Dublin Evening Herald, dated 12th March, 1927, in which Cope expressed himself in very friendly terms concerning Ireland and the Irish people.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Mac Eoin

(Sean Mac Eoin)

Mr. M. McDunphy, B.L.,
Director,
Bureau of Military History,
26, Westland Row,
DUBLIN.



SIR ALFRED COPE.

High Tribute to the Irish People.

Sir Alfred Cope, who was Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland in 1920-'22, has written to a Cardiff paper pointing out that what he said in an address on Monday to colliery workers at Cwmgorse, Carnarvonshire, on the revolutionary period in Ireland was not that the Irish people had always shown themselves incapable of self-government, but

that they had always shown themselves quite capable of self-government. The reported statement, he says, involves a gross injustice to the Irish people.

Sir Alfred Cope, who is at present a director of the Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries, paid a tribute in his lecture to the courage and chivalry of General Sean McKeon, on the one side, and Major Compton Smith, on the other, and, declaring that he was proud to number amongst his friends many of the Irish leaders, expressed complete confidence in the Irish Government under the guidance of President Cosgrave.

SPAGHETTI a l'Italiano at the Broadway, 3 Lower O'Connell Street.

Sir - Cutting from last night
"Herald" - maybe it escaped your
notice.
Respectfully,

W.C.