

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1717

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1717.

Witness

Alderman Peter Greene,
Mayor of Galway,
Galway City.

Identity.

Organiser and Teacher, Gaelic League.

Subject.

Sinn Fein and Gaelic League activities,
Galway City 1917 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

S. 3028.

File No.

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STATEMENT BY ALDERMAN PETER GREENE,

MAYOR OF GALWAY.

I was born in Galway City in the year 1895. My father was a native of Carna, Connemara, and a native Irish speaker. My mother was a native of Galway City. I was the youngest of the family. In my early school days, I went firstly to the Presentation Order of nuns, and later to the Brothers of the Patrician Order. While there, I was under a Brother Ambrose, whom I looked upon as a sterling Irishman. I shall never forget on one occasion - in 1905 - it was after an Irish history lesson on Brian Brou and other chieftains, he addressed the class and said: "Boys, I hope none of you here will ever don the Red Coat". At that time the British troops in the city wore red coats. He was also very fond of Irish music and taught us patriotic songs, which in themselves taught us of our country's past.

Later on, in the years 1914 onwards, the then Irish Parliamentary Party, to which the Irish people looked for leadership, went around the country recruiting young Irishmen for the British army, and on one occasion the Irish Guards' Band, with some of the Irish Parliamentary Party, visited our city. They erected a platform in Eyre Square, from which many spoke, asking the young men to join an Irish regiment of the British army, and saying that when the war would be over our country would be given a measure of Home Rule. I and another young man were about to hand in our names after the meeting, when the band played "God Save Ireland" and a woman in the gathering sang:
(I can still hear her sing)

"Never till the latest day,
 Shall the memory pass away
 Of the gallant lives thus given for our land;
 But on the cause must go,
 Amidst joy or weal or woe,
 Till we make our isle a nation free and grand".

I turned to the man who was with me and said: "There must be something wrong", and we turned away from the meeting as the words of the song reminded me of my school days and then we felt we were in the wrong place and quickly changed our minds.

Then came the Rising in 1916 and we knew where we were, but it was not until October, 1917, that the Thomas Ashe Sinn Féin Club opened here, and, with a small group of others, I joined Sinn Féin. While a member, there was a lecture given one night by Frank Fahy on the life of Pádraig Pearse, and in seconding the vote of thanks to the lecturer, who spoke entirely in Irish, which, at the time, I did not understand, I there and then decided to join a class of the Gaelic League. On the following night, I went to the Monastery Schools where the Irish classes were held, and became a member. I studied Irish very hard, with the result that in less than six months I passed the examination for the Fáinne, which was pinned on my coat by Father Michael Griffin who was later foully murdered by the Auxiliaries in 1920.

After reading Pearse's oration over the grave of O'Donovan Rossa, I was determined to concentrate on the language, and while still being an active member of Sinn Féin, I joined the Volunteers but was not impressed by the way things were going on. They seemed to be very sloppily handled.

We were, of course, very busily engaged preparing for the General Election in 1918, which was a glorious

success. In the city, we succeeded in having Pádraig Ó Máille returned. The Parliamentary Party candidate was William O'Malley, who was, I think, actually related to Pádraig Ó Máille. We won by a majority of about two to one. After the General Election, we had the local elections, Sinn Féin capturing the majority of the seats in the Urban Council.

In 1919, there was a regatta held on the Corrib, under the auspices of the Sinn Féin Club. I took part and became a very keen oarsman. We had a strong purpose in doing all this, as all regattas at this time were controlled by the Shoneen element, who always had a band playing and finished up with "God Save the King".

In 1920, with a number of others I competed at the Dublin Metropolitan Regatta which was held at Ringsend. With another crew from Clonmel and some of our crew, we didn't give the band a chance to play "God Save the King", as we all loudly started to sing "The Soldier's Song". We were loudly applauded by the people who followed us away from the river, while the band played to very few. That year we won five important trophies.

The band which they used in Galway was from the Industrial School.

The Galway Regatta was held later in that year, when we were beaten by the Royal Yacht Club and the winners held what they called an "At Home". We went up to compete with them at Menlo. When we arrived, I saw a Union Jack flying from the judge's boat, and we refused to row until it was removed. The committee of the club refused to remove it, so we therefore withdrew.

On the same day, there were a couple of R.I.C. men shot in Merlin Park, a few miles from the city.

All during these years, I was conducting classes for the Gaelic League in Galway City. These classes, which were held in the Columban Hall, were very well attended.

Seamus Quirke and I were close friends, as he was also a member of the Gaelic League. He was murdered by R.I.C. and Black and Tans after the shooting of a Black and Tan named Crum at the railway station. He had been warned by the R.I.C. that if anything happened he would be shot, but, unfortunately, he never seemed to take the warnings seriously.

In November, 1920, Father Michael Griffin was murdered and his body buried at Barna in a field. It is generally believed that the young fellow who called to Father Griffin's house to get him out on a so-called sick call, was Joyce who was hanged by the British after the 2nd World War for broadcasting from Berlin for Germany and was known as Lord Haw Haw. Joyce, who was a fluent Irish speaker, was educated by the Jesuits.

I was arrested in a round-up late in 1920 and brought to Galway Jail. On the morning after, I was questioned by a number of British officers, some in uniform and some in mufti. They accused me of acting as a Republican policeman. I said I never did, but one of them replied, "You gave instructions", which I also denied. I was then asked why I joined the Sinn Féin movement. I replied that it was for the betterment of my country. When they asked if I was satisfied that my actions had bettered the country, I replied "We'll have to wait and see". They made several threats to have me

pulled asunder if I did not give them some information. I said I didn't care what they did to me. As there was such a number of prisoners in the jail, this interrogation took all day. They kept me in jail for about three weeks until one night the warder came in during the night and told me to dress. I was then brought down from the cells to the jail yard, where there was an armed guard awaiting us. Then we were marched over to Earl's Island, where the 17th Lancers were stationed and which was also used as an internment camp for selected suspects. We were afterwards marched, in our turn, midway between the outer gate and the camp to a dark place, accompanied by an officer in mufti who had a loaded butt (stick), and a Sergeant armed with a revolver, and there badly beaten until the officer got tired. I think they were hoping I would make a run for it, when I would probably be shot by the Sergeant as a Volunteer named Moran was shot in the same place about a week before that. To my amazement, I was there and then released, but I walked very quietly and slowly away. Afterwards I slept in different places, and was practically 'on the run' until the Truce.

Our Sinn Féin Club was burned and we were obliged to hold Gaelic League classes and club meetings in different places.

Galway City was one of the heaviest garrisoned places in Ireland, and I regret to say that the enemy had a lot of sympathy from people in the city, who certainly were not our way of thinking. At that time, Sinn Féin was supposed to have sympathy with Germany and, as such, we were looked upon with suspicion by

the people who had relatives serving with the British army and, in particular, the Navy, in which there were 250 from the Claddagh alone.

Signed: Seodap O'K. Davium

Date: Dec 16th - 1957.

Witness: [Signature]
(Investigator)

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