



FIELD DAY REVIEW

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Editors

Seamus Deane
Ciarán Deane

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Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies
58 Merrion Square
Dublin 2
Ireland

fieldday@nd.edu

www.fielddaybooks.com

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We Are Making a New World, painting by Paul Nash (1889–1946) from WWI series. Courtesy Imperial War Museum © Lebrecht Music & Arts/Corbis

‘A Strange Chapter of Irish History’:

Sir Roger Casement, Germany and the 1916 Rising

Angus Mitchell

These two previously unpublished excerpts from the diary kept by Roger Casement during his eighteen months in Germany, from October 1914 to April 1916, provide some critical insight into the international context of the 1916 Rising. They show Casement to have had a candid, prophetic grasp of the tragic turmoil of his age and Ireland’s historic location within that turmoil. Why then, in the writing of the history of the First World War, has Casement’s voice been so unremittingly ignored and sidelined? Part of the reason lies perhaps in the narrative of these two essential moments on his path to the gallows: his journey to the Western Front in November 1914 and his negotiations with the



Roger Casement, 1915.
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German government in the weeks before his return to Ireland aboard a submarine in April 1916.

Independent Ireland has found it hard to incorporate into its foundational history the narrative of this decorated imperial official who played a pivotal role in both the intellectual and practical formation of the Irish Volunteers and then returned to Ireland to try and stop the Rising. Equally, Britain has turned its back on the

renegade traitor and done its utmost to forget the inconvenient truths exposed by the clear logic of his 'treason'. Both these positions are expediently simplified in and by the toxic dualism of his reputation as British 'traitor' or Irish 'martyr'. From his years working within the inner circle of imperial power, Casement had developed an intimate knowledge of international diplomacy and an acute awareness of the intensifying use and power of propaganda and of covert actions as instruments of

state control. His insight into the modern mechanisms of transnational power had been deepened by his involvement with Irish revolutionary politics in the build-up to the Rising. His unique composite of establishment and revolutionary experience provided an international dimension to Ireland's revolution and bequeathed to it an ineradicable anti-colonial dynamic.

After undertaking two investigations into crimes against humanity in the Congo and northwest Amazon during twenty years of official service, Casement resigned from his post as the British consul general in Brazil, in August 1913. His energies were then channelled into the Home Rule crisis and the paramilitarization of Irish politics that followed the signing of the Ulster Covenant. He was a key figure in the founding of the Irish Volunteers in November 1913, taking part in a series of recruiting rallies across Ireland over the next six months. In the summer of 1914, his plan to run guns into Ireland for the Irish Volunteers—hatched with the collaboration of the historian Alice Stopford Green, and the authors Erskine Childers and Darrell Figgis—was successfully accomplished with the landing of the arms shipment at Howth on board the *Asgard*. The success of the plan so elevated him within Irish-American revolutionary ranks, that when Britain declared war on Germany a week later, Casement was already in the US, headlining a series of fund-raising rallies and being fêted by the IRB veteran John Devoy and the Clan na Gael chief Joseph McGarrity. In early October, with the support of the German ambassador in the US, Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, he left New York under a false identity. Having successfully foiled an assassination plot in Norway hatched by the British Minister (ambassador), Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay, he arrived incognito in Berlin on 31 October 1914.

During his years in the British Foreign Office, Casement had built up an extensive network of international support: this included a number of German friends and

officials in positions of influence. Some, like the Celtic scholar and philologist Professor Kuno Meyer, were involved in the Cultural Revival and Irish language movement; others, such as Count von Blücher and the Baron von Nordenflycht, were friends he had made during his consular postings. Within days he had established contact with some of these people, and with the German Foreign Office. Over the next few weeks, he met with some of the most senior officials in the German government. He remained in Germany for the next year-and-a-half, engaged with the German government in discussions of strategy and inciting anti-imperial subversion amongst the groups of itinerant revolutionaries who passed through Berlin during these months.

Casement had three fundamental aims during his mission to Germany. His first priority was to secure German help for the cause of Irish independence. This was partly achieved with the *Declaration of Goodwill*, circulated on 20 November 1914, in which the German government openly expressed its peaceful and non-belligerent intentions towards the Irish people. Over Christmas 1914, a more comprehensive treaty of ten articles was agreed to, which set out the conditions for the formation and deployment of an Irish Brigade. Casement's second priority was to work as a propagandist and to educate the German people about the situation in Ireland so as to obtain public support once the German government threw in its lot with the Irish people. This propaganda campaign involved Casement in a crusade against the British government and a number of its senior statesmen; the viciousness of the response had important and disfiguring effects upon the status of his own earlier official investigations into crimes against humanity. His third objective was to raise an Irish Brigade from among captured POWs and turn them into an efficient fighting unit to help in the independence struggles in Ireland and in Egypt. Some years later, when reflecting on these three dimensions of Casement's



Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, German ambassador to Mexico and the US 1908–17.

German mission, John Devoy commented: ‘Casement did his best in all these things, but did the first ineffectively, succeeded admirably in the second, and failed badly in the third.’¹

The two diary extracts published here conveniently bracket the beginning and end of his eighteen months in Germany. The first excerpt covers the days, from 17 to 19 November 1914, when Casement made

a secret visit to the German headquarters at the Western Front to meet with senior representatives in the German Foreign Office and at the German General Staff. His presence in Germany was still officially unacknowledged and he travelled under the assumed name of ‘Mr. Hammond’. After successfully convincing the necessary senior officials of the sincerity of his purpose, his

1 John Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel* (New York, 1929), 432.

2 Correspondence is held in NLI MSS 17026 & 17027.

identity was revealed on his return to Berlin on 20 November.

The news may have taken the public by surprise, but the British security services had been on Casement's trail for many months by then; well in advance of this public admission of his treason, Casement had become a priority of different intelligence agencies in Britain. Such was the urgency of their need to capture, overthrow and subsequently control his legacy, that it drove British intelligence chiefs into a vortex of conspiracy and intrigue. The recent releases of intelligence files held by different security services show that Casement was prioritized as the first serious counter-subversion target of the war, and considerable resources were deployed to unveil his plans and capture him. The efforts to buy the loyalty of his manservant, Adler Christensen, by the British Minister Findlay, provided Casement with plenty of ammunition for his propaganda campaign against the nefarious activities of the British Foreign Office; he spent much time and energy exposing the assassination plot.

By the spring of 1915, as the plans to raise the Irish Brigade had largely failed and as Germany began to pull back from its support for the cause of Irish independence, Casement's health began to deteriorate under the increasing pressure of the worsening situation. Much of his time was consumed in writing articles for *The Continental Times* and the *Gaelic American*, revealing secrets about the British state and contesting Britain's justification for going to war. In an effort to improve matters, the Supreme Council of the IRB in Ireland sent out Joseph Mary Plunkett to try to revitalize relations with the German General Staff. Plunkett's mission was followed by the arrival in the autumn of Robert Monteith, who took over the day-to-day running of the Brigade. But the Brigade never attained the proposed target of two hundred volunteers and the German General Staff lost faith in the project.

During these months, a combination of tropical fever and nervous exhaustion forced Casement to retire to a sanatorium near Munich, where he spent several weeks in early 1916; it was then that he heard the news that the plans for the Rising were well advanced. Despite various ailments and low levels of energy, he made one last effort to exert his influence to stop the Rising or, failing that, to return to Ireland to take part in it. The second extract—covering the period from 17 March to 8 April 1916—is the diary he kept in the last weeks of his mission to Germany. It details his high-level meetings with representatives from the German General Staff, the German Foreign Office and the Admiralty, before he embarked on board a submarine bound for Ireland.

In the sixteen months separating these two extracts, it is apparent how his attitude to Germany's political authorities had undergone a sea-change. His initial belief in the sincerity of the support of the German General Staff for Irish independence had evaporated well in advance of his departure from Germany. Negotiations with some of the most senior officials in the German Foreign Office and German General Staff had turned acrimonious and were undermined by suspicion and distrust. At times, Casement's inner reflections border on the paranoid. His sympathies lay with the German people who were in thrall, as he saw it, to the curse of Prussian militarism. In November 1914, Casement had believed Germany would win the war; this was a view he no longer entertained when he boarded the submarine in April 1916.

The Mystery of the Casement Diary

Shortly before leaving Germany for Ireland, Casement left extensive and explicit instructions with his friend Charles Curry for the safekeeping and eventual publication of his German diaries.²

Casement believed that by publishing his version of events explaining why he went to Germany, and why he was determined to internationalize the issue of Irish independence and to raise an Irish Brigade, the manifest honesty of his motives and the sincerity of his beliefs would add to the logic of his ‘treason’ an appealing, affective dimension. But ultimately, his political views were rooted in a reasoned response to imperial violence. By the time he set sail for Germany from New York, his reputation was so enmeshed in the impasse of First World War propaganda and the ramifying intrigues of the confrontation between British secret services and Irish revolutionary conspiracy, that the most straightforward ‘truth’ was impossible to distinguish or decipher. Casement was well aware that there were special forces at play determined to undermine his reputation and, by deliberate misinformation, to shape public opinion about his aims and purposes. He realized that the publication of his own version of events was therefore vital to his eventual exoneration from the calumnies that besieged him.

Curry followed Casement’s instructions, and the diaries were carefully stowed away until after the war. In 1922, Curry published a carefully edited version in a small Munich edition *Diaries of Sir Roger Casement: His Mission to Germany and the Findlay Affair*.³ He chose to edit out quite significant parts of the complete diary, including the narrative of Casement’s trip to the Western Front reproduced here. The aim of Curry’s edition was to highlight the ‘Findlay Affair’—the efforts by the British Minister in Oslo to bribe Casement’s comrade Adler Christensen to have Casement either captured or assassinated.

The fate of his papers became an increasing concern to Casement in his last days in Berlin. He distributed different parts of his German archive to various friends. Some of these papers were eventually deposited in the New York Public Library among the William Maloney papers, others reached the

National Library of Ireland [NLI]. It is clear, however, that a certain part of this correspondence was picked up by British intelligence. A typed list of documents, compiled by N. C. Harrington of the G-2 Branch of the Department of Defence after the war, lists the German papers intercepted and carefully scrutinized by the British intelligence services, before they were returned to the family.⁴ Like so much of Casement’s extensive archive it is often difficult to trace the precise provenance of papers and what happened to them before they were made available for independent scrutiny.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that Casement kept diaries at many of the critical junctures of his life, although a number of them have disappeared. The extended diary of his 1903 Congo journey, for instance, has not survived. His 1910 Amazon voyage was covered in immense detail in a daily journal, which was later submitted as evidence to the parliamentary select committee inquiry.⁵ Casement admitted to throwing ‘diaries overboard’ on leaving the US in 1914, fearful that they contained incriminating information, which might fall into the hands of the British authorities. In Germany, he deliberately faked pages of his diary in a strategy of misinformation against the British Foreign Office—an incident referred to in the extract published here. He realized that the rationale of his revolutionary turn would one day be explained through his version of events—and much of that explanation was evident in the narrative of his diaries. But he could not have predicted that British secret services would fabricate a sexualized diary narrative of his investigations in the Congo and the Amazon, with the sole purpose of assassinating his character and thereby denying him the moral authority necessary for the impact of his investigations into crimes against humanity and, ultimately, for the creation of an authentic and coherent historical legacy to which his recognition of imperial criminality in Ireland was integral.

3 There was also a German translation of the diary *Sir Roger Casement: Meine Mission Deutschland während des Krieges und die Findlay-Affaire* (Altenburg/Thüringen, 1925). Extracts from the Curry edition, with some supplementary materials, were serialized in the *Nation* between 30 November 1921 and 8 February 1922.

4 NLI MSS 13085

5 Angus Mitchell (ed.), *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (London and Dublin, 1997).

6 Roger McHugh, ‘Casement and German Help’, in F. X. Martin (ed.), *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising: Dublin 1916* (London, 1967). McHugh also published some excerpts from *A Last Page of My Diary* in his edition *Dublin 1916* (London, 1966).

7 Reinhard R. Doerries, ‘Die Mission Sir Roger Casements im Deutschen Reich 1914-16’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 222, H.3 (June 1976), 578–625; ‘Hopeless Mission: Sir Roger Casement in Imperial Germany’, *The Journal of Intelligence History* 6 (Summer 2006), 25–39.

8 John Devoy, ‘Sir Roger Casement and the Irish Brigade in Germany’, *The Gaelic American*, 28 June 1924. Timothy Quinlisk, ‘The German Irish Brigade: Diary of Casement’s Lieutenant’, in *Land and Water* (6 November 1919). Also see Bureau of Military History Witness Statement 551 Thomas Canon Duggan.

- 9 Andreas Roth, 'The German soldier is not Tactful: Sir Roger Casement and the Irish Brigade in Germany during the First World War', *The Irish Sword* 19, 1995, 315. Joachim Lerchenmueller, "The wretched lot"—a brief history of the Irish Brigade in Germany, 1914–1919", in *Yearbook of the Centre for Irish-German Studies* (University of Limerick, 1998–99), 95–113.
- 10 Michael Keogh, *With Casement's Irish Brigade* (Drogheda, 2010), originally published in the indispensable *Catholic Bulletin*, (January–December 1928). See Bureau of Military History W.S. 741.
- 11 A typescript of the memoir of Sean Kavanagh, *The Betrayal of Roger Casement and the Irish Brigade*, circulated among publishers in Dublin in 1998, but has yet to find its way into print.
- 12 NLI MS 43 570/1–2 contains a 98-page typescript of Zerhusen's recollections about the Irish Brigade from 1915 to 1918. A second, shorter reminiscence is held in NLI MS 31 728.
- 13 Robert Monteith, *Casement's Last Adventure* (Chicago, 1932) republished and revised edition (Dublin, 1953), with a foreword by Franz von Papen. His diary was published in the biographical study by his daughter Florence Monteith Lynch, *The Mystery Man of Banna Strand: The Life and Death of Captain Robert Monteith* (New York, 1959).

Both extracts published here are held in the original manuscript in the National Library of Ireland. The journey to the Western Front is excerpted from a diary notebook [MS 1689], which forms part of the larger diary published by Curry in 1922. The entries are written in reverse: the narrative begins on folio 97 and ends on folio 46. The second extract [NLI 5244] was written on 134 numbered sides of script with additional comments and marginalia added on 8 April 1916. At the start of this extract, Casement contextualized his situation at this critical juncture by recounting some of the most important events from the previous months. He was aware that these last three weeks would prove crucial in determining the historical fate of the Irish Brigade and justifying his own break with the German General Staff and their intelligence chiefs. However, this narrative is selective and deals predominantly with Casement's meetings with German officials; it does not record Casement's liaisons with members of the Irish Brigade.

Much ancillary correspondence relevant to both these extracts, but principally to the second of them, is held among the Maloney Papers at the New York Public Library. This includes copies and originals of the 1916 correspondence between Casement and Robert Monteith. Casement's extensive correspondence with the German Foreign Office is held in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (Archive of the German Foreign Office). Roger McHugh undertook comprehensive work on Casement in the build-up to the 1966 commemoration.⁶ Much of the more important correspondence by and about Casement's months in Germany appears in Reinhard R. Doerries, *Prelude to the Easter Rising: Sir Roger Casement in Imperial Germany* (London, 2000). This is an indispensable supplement to both these diary extracts and I refer to this work extensively throughout. Although Doerries has pioneered scholarship on Casement's activities in Germany, especially

from the specialized perspective of intelligence history, his studies have tended to marginalize the diary narrative and the propaganda war waged by Casement against the British Empire that is contained in a series of quite inaccessible essays written in 1915.⁷ Doerries's defence of the German Foreign Office and German General Staff is founded on his belief that Casement's mission was 'hopeless'.

The history of the Irish Brigade has been treated in several essays and memoirs.⁸ On the Brigade itself, there has been good recent scholarship, most notably by Andreas Roth.⁹ Various memoirs were written by volunteers about the organization. The most extensive published account is by Michael Keogh, *With Casement's Irish Brigade*.¹⁰ An intriguing memoir by Sean Kavanagh is yet to be published.¹¹ Two accounts of the Irish Brigade were written by Joseph Zerhusen, who served as interpreter and liaison officer to it.¹² The most reliable and most intimate witness to Casement's last weeks in Germany was Robert Monteith, who wrote a gripping version of events.¹³ The important chronicle of the propaganda war fought between Britain and Germany for American support is intriguingly told by Thomas St John Gaffney, with chapters on Casement and his last weeks in Berlin.¹⁴ The memoir of the politically biased, English-born, Evelyn, Princess Blücher is atmospheric but untrustworthy.¹⁵ Karl Spindler, the Captain of the arms ship, the *Aud*, wrote his account of events soon after the war; it was translated into French and widely read.¹⁶ Most recently, the journeys of the *Aud* and the U-19 have been exhaustively researched in the work of Xander Clayton.¹⁷ Casement's time in Germany was treated in various studies. The often sentimental hagiography by Dr Franz Rothenfelder, *Casement in Deutschland*, includes important information about Casement's network of German friends and contacts in Dresden, Hamburg, Munich and Leipzig.¹⁸ Eduard Meyer, Kuno Meyer's brother, also left



Kurt von Lersner (1883–1954), German diplomat and politician, whom Casement met in New York.

a memoir.¹⁹ The understanding of Casement's internationalism—evident in his subversive dealings with other revolutionaries residing in Berlin in 1915, notably Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and Rosa Luxemburg—was greatly amplified with the publication of a biography of Casement by the anti-colonial, Weimar intellectual, Balder Olden. The work was

banned by the Nazis and hastened Olden's exile, first to France and later to Buenos Aires and Montevideo.²⁰ Despite the extensive literature on the Irish Brigade and Casement's adventures in Germany, this gripping supplement to the Irish revolution has yet to be properly integrated into the wider history of Ireland and of the First World War.

- 14 Thomas St John Gaffney, *Breaking the Silence: England, Ireland, Wilson and the War* (New York, 1930). Another relevant study is James K. McGuire, *The King, the Kaiser and Irish Freedom* (New York, 1915), which begins with a chapter explaining Casement's mission to Germany within the wider republican movement.
- 15 Princess Blücher later wrote a memoir, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics and Daily Life in Germany Throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York, 1920).
- 16 Karl Spindler's memoir was published originally as *Das geheimnisvolle Schiff: Blockadedurchbruch S. M. Hilfskreuzer 'Libau' zur irischen* (Berlin, 1921). This was first translated into English as *Gun-Running for Casement in the Easter Rebellion, 1916* (Glasgow, 1921) and into French as *Le Vaisseau Fantôme* (Paris, 1929). Spindler wrote an introduction to a new updated version, published as *The Mystery of the Casement Ship [with authentic documents]* (Berlin, 1931). This was republished in a paperback edition (Kerry, 1965) with an extensive foreword by Florence O'Donoghue, where he takes issue with several aspects of Spindler's account of events.
- 17 Xander Clayton, *Aud* (Plymouth, 2007)

- 18 Dr Franz Rothenfelder, *Casement in Deutschland* (Augsburg, 1917). Also, Karin Wolf, *Sir Roger Casement und die deutsch-irischen Beziehungen* (Berlin, 1972).
- 19 Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, NL Eduard Meyer 357.
- 20 Balder Olden, *Paradiese des Teufels: Das Leben Sir Roger Casement* (Berlin, 1933). Balder Olden and his brother, Rudolf, wrote some of the earliest books attacking the Nazi Party, criticism which cost them dearly.
- 21 Jérôme aan de Wiel, *The Irish Factor 1899–1919: Ireland's Strategic and Diplomatic Importance for Foreign Powers* (Dublin, 2008) is a vital study for understanding the continental context for Casement's months in Germany and the relevance of Ireland as a determining factor in European foreign policy in this period. Aan de Wiel acknowledges his debt to Wolfgang Hünssler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich und die Irische Frage 1900–14* (Frankfurt am Main, 1978), and Hans-Dieter Kluge, *Irland in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik und Propaganda vor 1914 und im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

Over the years, the Irish-German connection has been the subject of several important studies, which were never translated into English. Fortunately, much of this scholarship has been recently synthesized and expanded by Jérôme aan de Wiel.²¹ Aan de Wiel has persuasively illuminated Ireland's strategic value in the diplomatic discussions between France, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia with Britain and the tangled web of espionage, subversion and propaganda linking Ireland's revolutionary network to other anti-imperial networks across Europe and Asia—often supported clandestinely by the agencies of different European powers. The situation of Casement within these wider, interlinking national and anti-colonial associations raises important questions and opportunities for further research into the overlapping and interconnecting European, Atlantic and global contexts for 1916.

The journey to the Western Front

Roger Casement's journey to the German headquarters at Charleville-Mézières, just inside the French border with Belgium, was arranged less than three weeks after his arrival in Berlin. The journey was made incognito, with Casement travelling under his adopted pseudonym of 'Mr Hammond', an American from New York. This secrecy reflected both diplomatic sensitivities and lingering suspicions about his true purpose in Germany. The brief, three-day journey was undertaken in the company of Count von Lüttichau of the German General Staff, Richard Meyer, his Foreign Office 'assessor', who would advise Casement during his eighteen months in Germany, and a driver, Herr Meckle, with considerable local knowledge of the area. Count von Lüttichau organized the trip and had orders to take Casement on a detour through the region to witness for himself the condition of the people less than three months after the German army occupation

of Belgium. On the route to Charleville the car passed through the frozen, forested hills of the Eifel region, before crossing through Luxembourg into the valley of the Meuse.

Negotiations were still underway between Casement and senior officials of the German Foreign Office about how they might co-operate in Casement's plans to further the cause of Irish independence. Casement met with two officials: Kurt von Lersner, a senior German diplomat, whom he had contacted in the US during his dealings with the German embassy in advance of his departure from New York, and Wilhelm von Stumm, the head of the Political Department at the German Foreign Office. The conversation with von Lersner was largely about the Irish Brigade, but the meeting with Baron von Stumm ranged widely and covered the larger, geo-strategic implications of the war and the future balance of power in Europe. Casement was determined that the German government should recognize Ireland's right to independence in the event of any negotiated peace settlement. It was and is well known that Casement pointed out that the British Government's justification for its going to war to defend the rights of small nations was wholly contradicted by its policy towards Ireland.

The discussion with von Stumm also disclosed attitudes held at the highest level of the German command structure, most notably the view that Germany did not believe Britain would go to war in August 1914. This prompted Casement to express his view that a conspiracy and crisis within the inner circle of the Liberal government, combined with Britain's desire to defend its global economic interests, were responsible for the escalation of a European crisis into a world crisis. His arguments on the causes of war had been expanded in his volume of essays—*The Crime against Europe*—which had already appeared in English in the US and would soon be translated into German. Here, Casement argued why Ireland should stay out of the war and why Britain's justification for going to

war was false.²² The essays asserted the case for a German-Irish alliance able to work towards the peaceful and negotiated reconfiguration of European, Atlantic and global power relations. While these essays have been casually dismissed over the last century as Sinn Féin propaganda, his arguments have unavoidable parallels with later analyses on the origins of the First World War made by the Marxist historian, Arno Mayer, and, more recently, by Niall Ferguson in his controversial *The Pity of War*.²³ Ferguson's argument that Britain could have stayed out of the conflict had it not been for reckless imperial policy carried out in secret over many years is a recurring theme in Casement's writing:

England fights as the foe of Europe and the enemy of European civilization. In order to destroy German shipping, German commerce, German industry, she has deliberately plotted the conspiracy we now see at work. The war of 1914 is England's war.²⁴

It was British aggression and not German militarism that was the real *causis belli*. Enmity was founded upon economic concerns and supported by an insidious publicity campaign conducted by the popular press in Britain, deliberately aimed at demonizing Germany and German culture and at stirring up feelings of hatred. Irish independence and neutrality, to Casement's way of thinking, served both the interests of European relations and the greater cause of international humanity. The independence of Ireland was and would remain critical and central to the balance of power. For its day, this was a remarkably European position to take; much of Casement's speculation in this book has, with a century of hindsight, proved both relevant and prescient.

Casement's experience as an advocate for a revolutionary humanism within the circles of European power supports Arno Meyer's argument that domestic policy was a key factor in determining foreign policy

in the months before the declaration of war. Meyer's reading of the First World War as a determined counter-revolutionary strike by conservative and reactionary interests in Europe to protect their economic and hegemonic interests is confirmed by Casement's rapid disillusion with a specifically Prussian militarism in Germany and by his ruthless treatment at the hands of the Conservative and Unionist bloc in Britain after his capture. Casement's efforts to merge different revolutionary forces within Ireland and internationally were anathema to both sides. They contributed towards his alienation from the German General Staff and explain why the British security services—in the widest sense of that term—were so anxious for his capture and silencing by assassination.

Yet in November 1914, Casement still believed that Germany held the key to Irish sovereignty. Once he had reassured senior military officials of the sincerity of his intentions, he was escorted back to Cologne through the towns and cities of Belgium that had stood in the front line during the German advance through Belgium in August 1914. His journey included brief stops in Dinant, Andenne and Liège. Along the way, he noted the physical destruction—of bridges and buildings—and the socio-economic condition of the people reduced to prostitution, vagrancy and destitution. His escort car passed to the south of Brussels, close to the royal palace at Tervuren, founded by King Leopold II as an architectural monument to his colonial policy in central Africa. At Andenne, the driver, Herr Meckle, recounted the story of the *franc-tireurs*, who had opened fire on a column of German soldiers taking ammunition to the front. In reprisal 350 men were arrested and shot against the wall. On hearing this story Casement was provoked to consider and review his own feelings about the war, about the politics of atrocities and German atrocities in particular. He did not deny that appalling incidents had happened, but he saw then in the light of what his

- 22 Andrew McGrath's forthcoming critique of Casement's political writings in the light of just war theory are touched on in his essay 'The Anglo-Irish War (1919–1921): Just War or Unjust Rebellion?'; *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 77 (1) (2012), 67–82.
- 23 Casement's essays might be usefully read alongside Arno Meyer, 'The Primacy of Domestic Politics', in Holger Herwig (ed.), *The Outbreak of World War I* (Boston, 1997) and Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York, 2000).
- 24 Roger Casement, 'The Crime against Ireland', in *The Crime Against Europe* (Belfast, 2003), 62.

25 The 'demographic deficit' of 10 million lives resulting from the rubber wars in the Congo was most recently made by Adam Hochschild in his best-selling history *King Leopold's Ghost* (London, 1998). The figure was also referenced in the dramatized documentary by Peter Bate, *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (BBC 4, 2004). The claim provoked an official response from the Belgian Embassy in London 'Congo under King Leopold II', which categorically denied the estimated figures, claiming that they are 'very inaccurate and, at worst, totally incorrect.' The matter was widely discussed in the Belgium press. For a discussion of the debate see Geert Castryk, 'Whose History is History? Singularities and Dualities of the Public Debate on Belgian Colonialism', Csaba Lévai, *Europe and the World in European Historiography* (Pisa, 2006) and Adam Hochschild, 'In the Heart of Darkness', *New York Review of Books*, 6 October 2005, 39–42.

own official investigation of crimes against humanity had exposed. In a particularly revealing moment, as he stood before a wall in Namur, site of a notorious atrocity perpetrated by German soldiers against Belgian civilians, he reflected:

Sometimes, I must confess, when the present 'agony of Belgium' confronts me—and it cannot well be minimised, it is in truth a national agony—I feel that there may be in this awful lesson to the Belgian people a *repayment*. All that they now suffer and far more, they, or their king, his government and his officers wreaked on the well nigh defenceless people of the Congo basin.

In this comment, Casement instinctively dismantles the colonial hierarchy of humanity: in British propaganda, gallant little Belgium was being subjected to the unprecedented inhumanity of the 'Hun', while the Congo—or any of the sites of European massacre in Africa—had no place in the accepted hierarchy of suffering 'humanity'. Some estimates claim that the casualties resulting from King Leopold II's administration in the Congo Free State were as high as the death toll of the First World War.²⁵ Comparison of such statistics is hazardous, but the question of violence and its concealment within the concept of 'humanity' arises directly from Casement's visit to the Western Front. His comments on German atrocities and the 'agony of Belgium' are central to understanding his career and to the hypocrisy of the atrocity claims of the First World War and the propaganda struggle for ownership of the terminology of civilization by the warring colonial powers. He had shown the merciless nature of colonial rule in sub-Saharan Africa and in South America. The First World War was being fought by the perpetrators of those 'crimes against humanity'; the phrase was then and continues to be a central trope of the propaganda of colonial and imperial powers. Casement's pioneering

interrogation of colonial power and the destructive capacity of international venture capitalism had a revolutionary impact that was at the heart of his dedication to Ireland's struggle.

As a leading authority on the investigation of crimes against humanity, Casement was well placed to observe the allegations made against the German occupation of Belgium. He had journeyed through part of this region during a European holiday in May 1912, enabling him to make an informed comparison between the territory as it was then and in 1914. In 1914, he was of course aware of how images and rumours of German atrocities were being used by Britain to sway public opinion, both domestically and internationally, against Germany, to justify Britain's own entry into the war, and to help in the conscription campaign. At one point in his diary, on the road back to Cologne, Casement commented:

Of all the lies England has distributed in recent years throughout the world, by her admirable system called 'free trade', I guess this lie of German barbarism and 'German atrocities' is the most wilful, the most perverse and the most evil intentioned.

This is one of many such attacks on the strategic use of German atrocity stories to influence world opinion, especially American opinion, in the battle for hearts and minds. In his writing and correspondence during 1914 and 1915, Casement claimed forthrightly that much 'official' evidence in Britain was manufactured and invented. In his opening essay in *The Crime Against Europe* he claimed:

To find the causes of war we should turn not to Blue Books or White Papers, giving carefully selected statements of those responsible for concealing from the public the true issues that move nations to attack each other, but

should seek the unavowed aims of those nations themselves.²⁷

Casement's determination to reveal the deceptive practices behind officially sanctioned truths was a principal theme in his political writings in the last three years of his life. It was not only the atrocities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Amazon that had shocked him; it was the difficulty of reporting them that alerted him to how such allegations could be manipulated for political ends. His innovative use of graphic descriptions and images of atrocities to expose oppressive administration in the Congo, Putumayo and Ireland had involved him in acrimonious disputes and accusations of inventing evidence, distorting truth, exaggeration and fantasizing. But Casement skilfully defended his investigative practices and procedures and placed them indelibly on the official record. In 1913, as he harnessed his own investigations of crimes against humanity to the cause of Irish independence and his own overtly political purposes, a counter-strategy was implemented to deny him moral authority and undermine the truth of his accusations. Nevertheless, in the exposure of colonial atrocities that would feature prominently in the advanced nationalist and socialist press in Ireland in 1914, Casement's hand was clearly at play.²⁷

Casement's earliest comments on the politics of atrocity can be traced back to 1894, when he undertook survey work along the contested frontier between the emerging British administrative district of the Oil Rivers Protectorate (Niger Delta) and German Cameroon. His later investigations in the Congo Free State and the upper Amazon prompted European diplomacy to rethink aspects of international trade and the question of native rights. His Putumayo report had been deployed in the switching of international capital away from the extractive rubber economy to the plantation

economy of Southeast Asia. Unofficially, Casement had used his investigations to draw attention to the degenerative and destructive capacity of empires and to justify his own path to rebellion. Therefore, the account of his brief journey through war-torn Belgium is an important and vivid report because it is by the man who had investigated more atrocities at first hand than any other official of that era. Despite his pro-German and anti-British sympathies, no one better understood the potential for the use and abuse of atrocity claims. Casement had been fastidious in his own reporting of crimes against humanity and rigorous in substantiating claims, corroborating testimony and investigating allegations at first hand. He was well placed therefore to critically evaluate the official investigative practices into German atrocities in Belgium.

The historiographical controversy over the allegations made by agencies of the British government against the German army in their invasion and occupation of Belgium is extensive and endures.²⁸ From August 1914, Britain launched a highly effective publicity campaign detailing the brutal treatment of the civilian population. The Rape of Belgium, as it was called, contained graphic accounts of gratuitous violence—rape, infanticide, the cutting off of hands and mass executions. Many of the rumours were later shown to have been black propaganda, most notably the story of the German corpse factory.²⁹ Several figures who campaigned most vigorously against the distortions of the truth and the unhealthy alliance between state agencies of propaganda and the press were members of the Union of Democratic Control (U.D.C.). The U.D.C. was the anti-war organization established on the outbreak of war in 1914 by Casement's main collaborator in the Congo Reform Association, E. D. Morel. It lobbied against secret diplomacy and worked as a pressure group for a more democratically accountable foreign policy. Numbered among its cohort of recognised supporters and members were

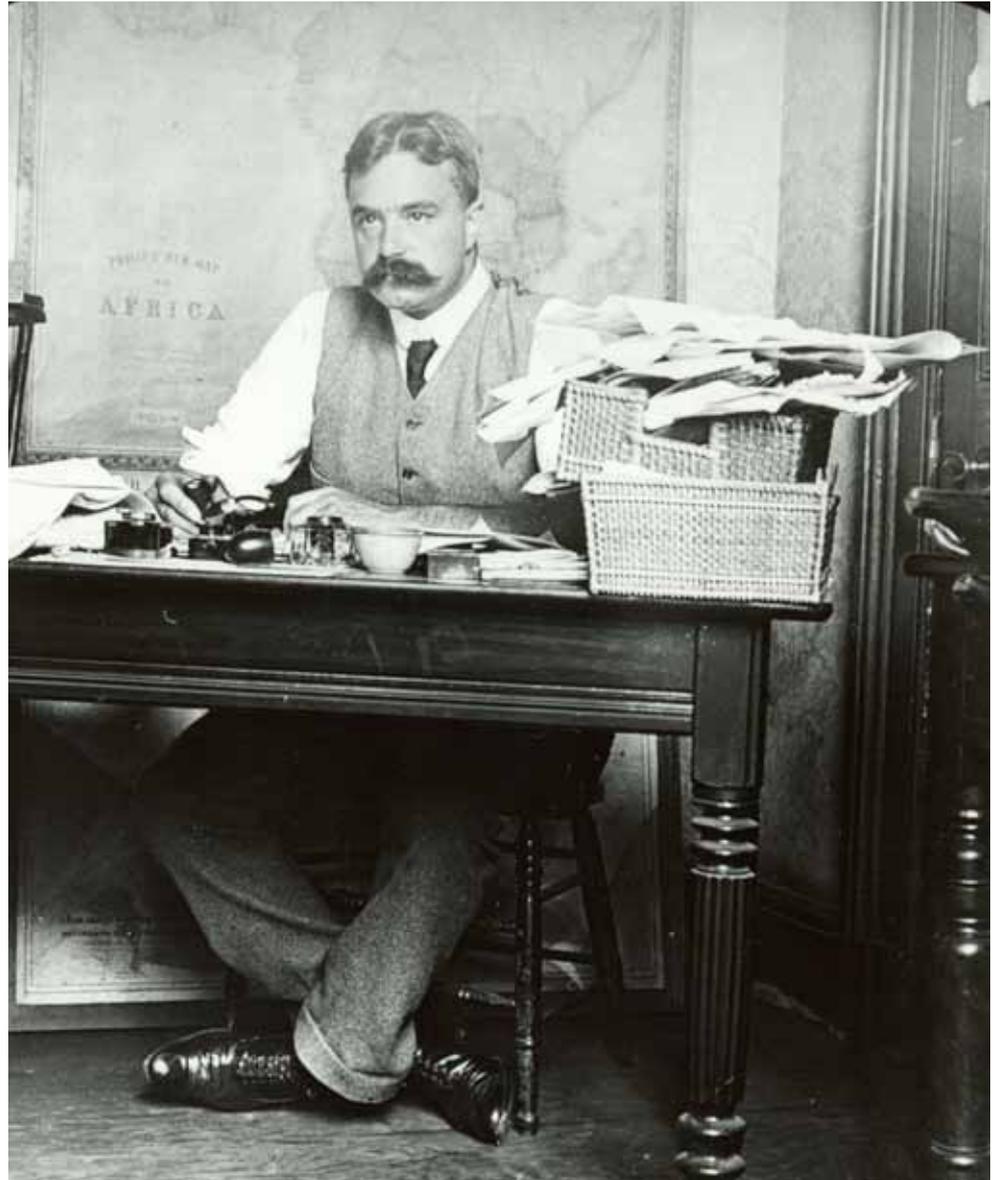
26 Roger Casement, 'The Causes of the War and the Foundations of Peace' in *The Crime Against Europe* (Belfast, 2003), 64.

27 See, for instance, James Connolly, 'Belgian Rubber and Belgian Neutrality', *The Irish Worker*, 14 November 1914, and an anonymously written article, 'Atrocities', in *The Hibernian*, 1: 16, 18 September 1915, 2–3.

28 See the studies which have reignited the issue: John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, 2001) and Jeff Lipkes, *Rebearsals, The Belgium Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven, 2007).

29 Joachim Neander and Randal Marlin, 'Media and Propaganda: The Northcliffe Press and the Corpse Factory Story of World War I', in *Global Media Journal (Canadian Edition)* Vol 3: 2, 2010, 67–82. For a contemporary analysis of the treatment of war crimes and the political use and abuse of the word 'humanity', see Danilo Zolo, *Invoking Humanity: War, Law and Global Order* (London, 2002); *Victor's Justice: From Nuremberg to Baghdad* (London, 2009).

Edmund Dene Morel (1873–1924) c. 1905, British journalist, author and socialist politician. (Photo by Images of Empire/Universal Images Group via Getty Images).



30 *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (London: HMSO, 1915)

the philosopher, Bertrand Russell; the journalist, H. N. Brailsford; the activist, Norman Angell; and Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald.

The critical document in establishing both the legal and historical claims for German atrocities was the Bryce Report, named after the historian, jurist and diplomat, James Bryce.³⁰ From the spring of 1915, as Casement began to channel his energies towards writing about the war and revealing secret dimensions of British

power, he spoke out vehemently against the manipulation of truth and the circulation of falsehoods and exaggeration of German atrocities. He took issue in particular with Bryce for lending his name to the commission officially appointed by Prime Minister H. H. Asquith to report on the nature and extent of German war crimes in Belgium.

'I knew Lord Bryce well—he used to be an honourable man—but this lending

his name to a faked and obviously fraudulent investigation, undertaken for one object only, is beneath contempt.³¹

When serving as British ambassador in Washington, Bryce had helped Casement broaden his Putumayo investigation into the U.S. State Department and had arranged a meeting in early 1912 between Casement and the U.S. President, William Taft. Bryce was also highly regarded for his measured historical writings and as an architect of the Anglo-American special relationship. Furthermore, he had spoken out against the Bulgarian atrocities and the genocide of the Armenians under Ottoman rule in 1915. Casement's attack on Bryce was therefore more than an attack on the government's manipulation of the truth for the purposes of war; it read as an attack on the politics of what might be cautiously termed the 'atrocities culture' and how the historical record was vulnerable to deliberate acts of management and manipulation for official purposes. The argument was most assertively developed in his essay *The Far-Extended Baleful Power of the Lie*, published in 1915.³² Here the unequivocal accusation was made that Bryce had been co-opted to lead the commission in order to attach his name and reputation as a historian to a report which was based upon unsubstantiated evidence: 'by lending weight to an official campaign of slander, defamation and calumny conducted on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilized nations during the last three centuries'. It is a claim that was not lightly made and which Casement, as a former Foreign Office official and troubleshooter was in an informed position to make. This attack also made explicit reference to Casement's journey to the Western Front and his direct witnessing of German-occupied Belgium.

Unlike Lord Bryce I have been in Belgium since the war began. I was there within a few weeks of the passing of the great wave of invasion. I saw the

wrecked and ruined houses; I passed through some of the stormed and battered cities Namur, Liège, Dinant; I conversed with Belgians in the streets of those terrorised towns and I formed a judgement of my own, not derived from hearsay in another land or the lips of fugitives afar, but from the scenes and spots and human wreckage I passed through ... Wrongs were undoubtedly committed in Belgium, but they were not all committed by Germans upon Belgians.

The shadow of the war on truth entangled with the controversy over German atrocities and the fabrication of historical evidence might also be read into the secret history of Casement's trial. Professor J. H. Morgan, part of Casement's defence counsel and the *amicus curiae* during his trial and appeal, was deeply implicated in compiling testimony and statements about German atrocities in Belgium. For over a decade, Morgan had been personally known to Casement and, as a professor of constitutional law at the University of London, he had edited an important collection of essays on Irish Home Rule in 1912.³³ In the autumn of 1914, Morgan was appointed to the adjutant-general staff as Home Office representative with the British expeditionary force to inquire into the conduct of the German army in Belgium. Over the next two years, he published numerous articles, pamphlets and books on legal aspects of the war. In his co-authored study *War: Its Conduct and Legal Results*, he wrote on the Defence of the Realm Act and the question and meaning of treason in war time. His writings on German atrocities in Belgium were widely circulated through articles and various mass-circulation books. His most important publication was *German Atrocities: An Official Investigation*. His case exposing German war crimes was published in a more accessible version in *Germany's Dishonoured Army*,

31 NLI MS 33726 Roger Casement to Fräulein Meyer, 1 July 1915.

32 *Continental Times*, 3 November 1915. The essay was reproduced in *Roger Casement: The Crime against Europe* (Belfast, 2003).

33 J. H. Morgan, *The New Irish Constitution: An Exposition and Some Arguments* (London, 1912) This was published under the auspices of the Eighty Club, a London-based political club, closely aligned to the Liberal Party, and of particular consequence to the political careers of both H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George. Morgan's introductory essay argued how a delegation of authority at the level of both the executive and legislative would make the imperial government stronger. Home Rule, he argued, was a way by which the Imperial parliament could reorganize and strengthen its own constitutional attachments through the establishment of an Irish parliament. Devolution, he believed, was not a step backwards but a step forward.

Dinant, Belgium, August 1914, Captured by the German Third Army under General Von Hausen, who ransacked the town and rounded up and shot 612 civilians (Photo by Popperfoto/Getty Images).



34 George Gavan Duffy Papers NLI MS 10763 (20)—J. H. Morgan to Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, 4 August 1916.

printed by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee—the state agency responsible for issuing propaganda posters justifying the war and conscription. In 1917, he wrote *Gentlemen at Arms* under the pseudonym ‘Centurion’—a series of sentimental short stories about the experience of war. Morgan was closely involved in the construction of an official narrative of the war, which dichotomized the public imagination between the brutal, scheming and dishonest ‘Hun’ and British heroism, fair play and sacrifice. His writings on German atrocities supplemented the official government report produced by the Bryce commission and helped to popularize parts of the evidence for popular consumption.

Whether Casement knew about Morgan’s work for the Bryce commission is unknown. Nothing in his trial notes would suggest that he did know, and he maintained complete trust in Morgan to the bitter end. Likewise, Morgan persisted in his defence of Casement and wanted to take on unnamed government agencies over the use of the ‘Diary’ (acknowledged today as the Black Diaries) which helped railroad Casement to the gallows and have ever since dominated his public mythologizing

and historical management. On 4 August 1916, the day after Casement’s execution, Morgan wrote to the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel:

there is a very strong feeling abroad—*The Times* gives expression to it this morning that someone in authority ‘inspired’ a campaign of malignant and studied calumny against the prisoner which was not only necessary to the course of justice but calculated to pervert it.³⁴

Morgan had inside knowledge on the use of the ‘diary’ to destabilize his defence and undermine the different petitions for clemency. Because of his close personal knowledge of Casement, he was also in a position to know whether the rumours about Casement were founded in truth. In the immediate aftermath of Casement’s execution, Morgan contacted Casement’s solicitor, George Gavan Duffy, seeking his views on a letter he wished to send to F. E. Smith, the arch-Unionist attorney general and founder of the Ulster Volunteer Force, who led the Crown’s prosecution against



Remember Belgium Poster by
Ellsworth Young, 1918
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