

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1492

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1492.

Witness

J.J. Moran,
21, Dawson Street,
Dublin.

Identity.

Subject.

Irish Republican Association of
South Africa, 1916 - 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILITA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,492

STATEMENT BY Mr. J. J. MORAN,

21 Dawson Street, DUBLIN.

South Africa has never attracted Irish Emigrants in the way they had been attracted to America and Australia. The labour market there (excepting the mining industry) has always been supplied by the large native population; and large industrial concerns, beyond the one already mentioned, were few.

But these Irishmen who had settled there certainly found in their ranks men of character and ability who were proud in their motherhood and always ready to spring to her defence if, and when, she was attacked. In 1916 the British section of the population controlled the Press in all the main centres. In Capetown, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London, the Afrikaner section of the population had only a few struggling papers and these were in Capetown and one or two other centres. Durban was more English than London and its powerful 'dailies' were organs of British Imperialism of the most extreme and intolerant kind.

This was the position when the cables carried the staggering announcement of the Irish Insurrection on Easter Monday 1916. The whole of the British-controlled Press and their news agencies and correspondents in England and in Ireland, denounced the Rising as a stab in the back for Britain then at war with Germany in the interest of small nations, Truth, Justice, Self-determination and all the high-souled principles known to man.

Ireland was described as a worse enemy than Germany and cries of "Show no mercy!" were raised when the leaders of the Insurrection were in British hands. This was the test for South Africans of Irish birth.

With very few exceptions they did not fail. Even these who formerly were of the opinion that a measure of Redmondite Home Rule was the "be all and the end all" of Irish aspirations, now stood firm for complete independence.

There was no organisation of Irish-South Africans available and no paper or journal except a small monthly magazine ("The Catholic Magazine") published in Capetown. This did all that it could but those of us who wanted to controvert the day to day British propaganda had to use the correspondence columns of the British Press itself. There were Irish South Africans in every centre ready and willing to write the "Truth about the Rising in Ireland" and to write it so clearly and emphatically that it commanded respect and very often was given publication because of its literary merit alone! It did little to stem the flood of British propaganda, but it did help to clarify the position for those who were interested and to win sympathy among the Afrikaners. Its great value lay in its effect on those who wrote in defence of Ireland; it brought them into touch and strengthened hopes of forming an organisation to carry on the fight and to preserve Irish traditions. Compatriots "in the wilds" wrote to those who were carrying on the fight applauding their efforts and offering financial assistance etc.

In replying we always urged these good people to improve their knowledge of Ireland so that they, in turn, might be ready to defend her if necessary. We recommended a study of Irish Nationality from Tone to Pearse and later to De Valera, taking in the Young Ireland and Fenian movements, the works of John Mitchel, Thomas Davis and all, including contemporary writers, who were in the Tone tradition. This effort went on right through the Black and Tan years and showed results by the formation of "The Irish Republican Association of South Africa". This had an official organ published bi-monthly.

and known as "The Republic". Its projection coincided with the death of Terence McSwiney and the first issue carried a picture of McSwiney on the cover. Branches of the association were formed in any centre where there were supporters, however few, and these branches did noble work for Ireland. They distributed "The Republic" and any Irish literature that came in from overseas. The heroic hunger-strike and death of the Lord Mayor of Cork strengthened the unity and determination of the Association and stimulated every effort and that spirit of selflessness that was so valuable at that time.

Mr. De Valera's decision to send an Envoy to South Africa to tour under the auspices of the Association was warmly welcomed and when he (Mr. P. J. Little) arrived the resources of the Association were at his disposal. He, acting as an Irishman: we, as Irish South Africans. His lectures "The Truth about Ireland" were organised in each centre by the Association and they focussed interest on Ireland and Ireland's case for Independence.

When (in 1921) it was announced that the Prime Minister, General Smuts, was going to Europe, the Association decided to seek his intervention in the Black and Tan struggle raging in Ireland.

Some difference arose through some members feeling that the Memo to Smuts should be addressed to him as from Irishmen resident in South Africa. This was illogical and it was drafted as from South Africans of Irish extraction to their Prime Minister.

Subsequently, General Smuts' Secretary, Captain Lane, told us how Smuts read the Memo during the voyage and decided to do something about it. His early and effective intervention followed. In consequence, it may be claimed that the Black and Tan devilry was

halted by the Truce and that this followed Smuts' interview with King George V., Lloyd George and with the Irish leaders at the time.

There can be no doubt that the short Memo of about 300 words influenced General Smuts and, therefore, the end of hostilities came (at least in part) through the action of the Irish Republican Association of South Africa.

Signed: *J. Moran*
Date: *Sept 17 - 1956*

Witness: *Mancee Ryan*

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