**REPLY TO MANUS O’RIORDAN’S ARTICLES ON CASEMENT, JAMES LARKIN AND WOODROW WILSON IN THE *IRISH POLITICAL REVIEW* (OCTOBER & DECEMBER 2011)**

**BY JEFFREY DUDGEON**

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Manus O’Riordan, in his *Irish Political Review* article, ‘The 1934 Larkin Affidavit’ (Part I, October, pp. 21-25), attacks James Larkin at length for an affidavit he made to American commercial lawyers in 1934. This named many of those involved, including Irish socialists, in German sabotage operations in the US and Canada in 1915-17. This collaboration is described as unconscionable, indeed reprehensible, something never before noticed.

I was then criticised, in passing, for having suggested in my Casement book that it was Casement’s contribution to this sabotage (it comprised some one hundred bombings and arson attacks), more than his diaries, that ensured no intervention by President Woodrow Wilson with London to save him from execution.

Manus asserted (p. 21) “there is not the slightest evidence that Wilson had any awareness in 1916 of Casement’s name cropping up in association with German sabotage operations” so doubting my “flamboyant claim…that Wilson’s refusal to intervene on behalf of Casement’s life…was primarily due to knowledge of the contents of intercepts that had yet to be decoded.”

It is Manus’s case that Wilson’s only reason for silence was homophobia - not American interests. After a compliment to me, Manus indicated surprise that I should “attempt to minimise President Woodrow Wilson’s wholehearted embrace of the Ulster Presbyterian prejudice to “*Save Ulster (and the World) from Sodomy!*”.

This “embrace” is the reason invoked for the President declining to seek clemency for Casement from the British Government. He later states it was obvious that “President Wilson’s raw-nerve of pure-and-simple Ulster Presbyterian homophobia had been touched in July 1916.”

It is anachronistic and itself religiously prejudiced to suggest President Wilson and Ulster Presbyterians were suffused with a peculiar homophobia at the time, one it is implied which lingered on until my Strasbourg case 60 years later and to Dr Ian Paisley’s and Peter Robinson’s unsuccessful “Save Ulster from Sodomy” campaign in the 1970s.

The prejudice against homosexuals was in Casement’s time universal. Next to nobody, except some advanced Liberals were other than utterly condemnatory. It is plain too that the longstanding campaign by Catholic nationalists and Republicans to deny the authenticity of Casement’s Black Diaries was entirely motivated by a horror at the hero patriot being revealed as a homosexual and as engaging in sodomitical practices.

The attitude of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Randall Davidson, is a rare example in 1916 of at least a compassionate attitude to gays. The Archbishop, like others, first tried to promote the insanity argument in order to bring about a reprieve. He wrote, “If Casement is now guilty in the vicious way alleged it may be taken as further evidence of his having become mentally unhinged. I have to do pretty frequently with problems of vice of that sort, and I suppose it is indisputable that sometimes a mental upset takes the shape of vicious behaviour, especially of an unnatural kind.”

As I wrote, “Dr Davidson being an Anglican would have, as he said, more experience of the subject,” while he exhibited due Christian charity saying, “One feels that an incident such as this sends us all to our knees and that is really all we can say, but it is the best.”

The Archbishop was to make a final plea to the Lord Chancellor two days before the execution, and, in a last artful throw, tried to turn the circulation of the diaries to Casement’s advantage. He adduced the fear that people in America and Ireland would make mischievous capital of the execution “far more so if they could (as they would) spin a tale to the effect…that the authorities had been privy to the trumping up of an infamous story about the man’s immorality, an accusation with which he had never been confronted.”

In contrast, it is worth noting that sixty years later, during my Strasbourg case, the Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh, Tomás Ó Fiaich, endorsed the British Government’s attempt to maintain the criminalisation of homosexual men in Northern Ireland. One could be permitted to ask Manus if Irish Catholicism is also homophobic or simply paedophiliac?

The British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Spring Rice, sympathetic to clemency for Casement but stymied by London, perhaps started this prejudice against President Wilson. Brian Inglis in his Casement biography quotes him saying, “The President is by descent an Orangeman and by education a Presbyterian,” adding his own view that “Wilson’s sympathies were with the allies, and with Ulster.” (p. 357)

The Ambassador’s opinion on President Wilson carried no accusation of homophobia (although the word had not then been coined nor had it when Inglis wrote). Spring Rice was from a Limerick background and had a cousin, Mary Spring Rice, involved with Casement in the 1914 Howth gunrunning. She was famously photographed beside ammunition boxes and rifles on the yacht *Asgard* with Mrs Erskine Childers.

The Ambassador probably retained a certain sympathy for Home Rule and a concomitant antagonism to Ulster. Manus’s view however probably says more about his own prejudices regarding Ulster Presbyterians than about homophobia.

On the main topic, attributing Larkin’s behaviour (and his lapse from socialist virtue) in providing this affidavit to the US to a prolonged nervous breakdown and “severe depression” is unconvincing and evidentially lacking.

I would argue the view, one Manus discounts, that it is much more likely it was the involvement of Franz von Papen in the Hitler government that prompted Larkin’s statement, particularly as it was not then a police matter but a commercial compensation claim.

Manus writes that von Papen, the German military attaché in Washington “had no hand in the July 1916 explosion on “Black Tom” Island in New York Harbour” nor was he ever “accused of complicity in that act” (Part II,December 2011, *From Sing Sing to Sing and Sing,* pp. 19-23).

This is Republican-lawyer argumentation not an historian’s assessment. It is unworldly not to assume von Papen was involved in long-planned acts of sabotage since he was expelled from America six months earlier, being properly “accused by the US government of complicity in a plan to blow up US railroad lines.”

It is most likely that Larkin was of the view that the German National Socialist Government was a great threat to socialism and that his affidavit was given in “an anti-Nazi context.” The affidavit came in 1934, the year after von Papen became Hitler’s deputy and Vice-Chancellor of Nazi Germany

Although he left government after the 1934 executions during and around the *Night of the Long Knives* and the extinction of German democracy, von Papen did not leave power. He became Ambassador in Vienna until the 1938 Anschluss with Austria, and was then posted to Ankara to the key post of Ambassador to Turkey.

Franz von Papen was therefore at the centre of the Nazi operation for more than a decade. He was far from uncomplicit in the events of that period, especially in the 1930s. Larkin could have done no other than assume he was part of Hitler’s system, indeed an enthusiastic supporter. He was certainly privy to most of its crimes, endorsing the regime with his presence until he left office in 1944 despite acquittal at Nuremberg of the specific charge of “crimes against peace.”

Manus writes, “Nor can any amount of either foresight or hindsight justify Larkin ‘fingering’ von Papen in 1934 for conspiracy to commit murder in the USA” (Part II, p. 20). I hope if I was in Larkin’s position I would have fingered von Papen. Present sight of him as Hitler’s deputy would have been sufficient justification. Frank Ryan is excused for vastly more collaboration with the Nazi regime than Larkin is for an affidavit over events nearly twenty years earlier.

I didn’t intend to take up a defence of Larkin until I realised the two articles had charged and convicted him in an unfair and unbalanced way. It is not as if the US authorities acted against any of the people he named. There was no felon setting involved.

Manus seems desperate to convict and then excuse him although I cannot see why. He is however guilty of writing history backwards, with England, as usual, being defined as a criminal nation for acting in its own interests. For some reason this does not apply to other countries as if none, particularly Ireland, acts on self-interest.

In tangential musings, he deals at length with the role of American statesman John McCloy who in 1934 was the lawyer who persuaded Larkin to prepare the affidavit. Oddly he does not speculate over the probability that McCloy, like Woodrow Wilson, was another American of Ulster Presbyterian stock.

He also asserts, as stated earlier “there is not the slightest evidence that Wilson had any awareness in 1916 of Casement’s name cropping up in association with German sabotage operations,” partly, as the intercepts which I quoted “had yet to be decoded” (Part I, October, p. 22).

I am afraid this will not do. It is accepted that British Intelligence decoded the cables going to and from Germany’s Washington embassy, for one, and in sufficient time to act on them. Why they often failed to act is another question.

When I mentioned that it is unclear “when these messages were decrypted,” I was not suggesting it happened long after the event, rather that it was unclear which day they were decrypted and indeed who was told, when, of their contents. I did point out that London, through decrypts, knew about the Easter Rising a month before it happened.

It is absurd to suggest that President Wilson was unaware of Casement’s name cropping up before the execution. As he had gone over to the Germans after his stay in America and his 1914 contacts there with von Papen, it was hardly remarkable to assume he had conspiratorial connections with both German diplomats and Irish revolutionaries.

British decrypts naming Casement however were not even necessary for a case as the US had a sufficiency of knowledge tying both him and von Papen to sabotage.

The reality is that on Tuesday 18 April 1916 the Americans raided the offices of Wolf von Igel, a German diplomat masquerading as a an advertising executive in New York, and gathered up a cache of documents left lying out on sabotage operations in the US, on Casement and on von Papen amongst many others. (See the *New York Times* news article of 23 September 1917 <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9502E6D9103AE433A25750C2A96F9C946696D6CF>)

The seized documents were erroneously thought by John Devoy to be the reason for Casement’s capture on Good Friday (21 April) in Kerry. In fact his arrest was a matter of luck as the British had not warned the RIC in Tralee of his imminent arrival.

Whether decrypts of Berlin’s January 1915 message to von Papen in Washington specifically naming Casement as someone suggesting people “suitable for sabotage in the United States” reached Wilson matters not. He knew enough by April 1916 to be assured Casement = von Papen = US sabotage and thus was someone he was not going to be seeking a reprieve for.

Manus admits to being wrong about Larkin (and to neglecting the 1934 affidavit) and will have to again over President Wilson’s supposed lack of awareness of Casement’s link to German sabotage.

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