**BELFAST TELEGRAPH**

**DEBATENI**

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This weekend in Tralee there will be a big conference on Roger Casement, close to where he landed off a German submarine in 1916. The event is organised by the American University of Notre Dame. Casement was accompanying an arms shipment for the Easter Rising, this being the second cargo of guns he had shipped into Ireland. The first was in 1914 at Howth.

As a Casement biographer and the only publisher of all his Black Diaries, my talk is on the peculiar fact that Casement is celebrated in Ireland despite coming from Berlin to thwart and postpone the Easter Rising, while British Intelligence knowing of the arms shipment and the Rising failed to take adequate measures to frustrate both. Some in London foolishly thought it better to let the Rising proceed and the ‘festering sore’ be cut out, so Dublin Castle was not told of the deciphered German messages. One of those key players was Major Frank Hall of Narrow Water Castle in Warrenpoint who was ‘Q’ in M.I.5.

Significantly none of the many Tralee conference talks addresses Northern Ireland and Casement’s signal failure – the creation of a united Ireland. A century of partition was the result of his efforts, not least because he lacked empathy for those very Ulster Protestants he claimed to belong to. He had in fact been brought up in England, only coming to a boarding school in Ballymena as a teenager.

Exactly a century ago he organised a famous meeting in Ballymoney for Protestant Home Rulers on the ‘Lawlessness of Carson’. His separatism and Anglophobia however left most cold and there were no further meetings. The Dublin government which is internationally proud of Casement’s human rights achievements when a British diplomat in Peru and the Congo, ironically plays down his successful role in Irish revolution and his execution.

The renaming of a Dungiven hurling team after Kevin Lynch, an INLA hunger striker, was raised against Peter Robinson’s much praised speech at a dinner celebrating the GAA’s cross-community achievements. A fellow Dungiven republican and GAA celebrity, Joe Brolly, said people “could like it or lump it”; such naming after paramilitaries was “nobody else’s business”. That the premier Gaelic ground in Ulster is called Casement Park was then used as an example of another such historic reality, one justifying his blunt remarks.

And there is a certain rationality in what Brolly said. Attempts to square circles between Unionism and Nationalism often make matters worse by exacerbating those unchangeable differences. Ethnic disputes never get resolved; they are best put into cold storage once people agree to disagree.