**CECIL SPRING RICE CORRESPONDENCE IN 1916 FROM WASHINGTON TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE ON THE BLACK DIARIES AND A POSSIBLE REPRIEVE FOR CASEMENT**

**TNA FO 371/2851**

**28 April 1916**

Ambassador Cecil Spring-Rice: An immense amount of attention is being given to the case of Casement. His attempt is generally condemned on the grounds that civil war would drench Ireland in blood and profit nobody but Germany. The [NY] World says that it is easy enough to understand why Irishmen must hate England but it is not easy to understand why they should hate themselves. At the same time while deploring the mad enterprise of Casement the newspaper[s] seem to be almost unanimous in pointing out that to execute Casement will be a very great error. They urge that he is generally believed in this country, where he is well known, to be insane or at least suffering from neurasthenia. It is argued that his execution would raise him to the rank of martyr and that the best thing…would be to put him in a madhouse.

**TNA FO 371/2851**

**1 May 1916**

Spring-Rice telegraphed: “Attitude of press on Irish question is favourable on the whole but execution of Casement would cause many protests. Bigelow offers to send correspondence with Casement showing what he thinks proofs of insanity.

**TNA FO 371/2851**

**4 May 1916**

Spring-Rice to F.O. telegram

“Private. Cardinal Gibbons in the course of an interview with me in which he expressed himself very sympathetic on the subject of Dublin rebellion said that he did not wish in any way to interfere but he thought leniency would have an excellent effect especially in Casement's case. At present he said that all respectable Irishmen condemned revolt in unqualified terms but there was danger of “manufacturing martyrs” - for American use.”

**[Initialled by four persons in the Foreign Office, one noted:]** “It would require a vast amount of ‘manufacturing’ to turn Casement into a martyr. No action.”

**Extract from *Roger Casement: How Effective Was the British Government’s Smear Campaign Exposing the Homosexual “Black Diaries”?* Elizabeth Jaeger, Éire-Ireland, Volume 46:3&4, Fall/Winter 2011.**

**26 May 1916**

“In a message to the Foreign Office on 26 May, British Ambassador Spring-Rice wrote from Washington that in America the opinion was quite widespread about Casement “that his brain had suffered from exposure in the tropics and that his mind did not work normally”—one of the numerous arguments used by Spring-Rice himself to persuade his own government to grant a reprieve.[28](http://uk-mg6.mail.yahoo.com/neo/" \l "f28" \t "_blank) Less than a week before the execution, the *Boston Daily Globe* publicized a special dispatch showing the extent to which the U.S. Senate had rallied behind Casement: “After a comparatively brief discussion, the Senate today (29 July) adopted by a vote of 46 to 19 a resolution offered by Senator Pittman of Nevada expressing the hope of the Senate that Great Britain would observe clemency in the treatment of Irish political prisoners, and asking the president to convey this hope to the British government. Sir Roger Casement was not specifically named, but it was well understood that it applied to him. In adopting any resolution whatsoever, the Senate overruled the Committee on Foreign Relations, which had reported recommending the rejection of all pending resolutions relating to Casement.[57](http://uk-mg6.mail.yahoo.com/neo/" \l "f57" \t "_blank) Thus the resolution in Casement’s favor passed by a margin of more than two to one. Senators who opposed the resolution rarely gave reasons. Could the “black diaries” have influenced some or all of the opposing votes? It is possible that some senators had heard about these diaries. But even if the highly dubious assumption were made that the diaries were common knowledge within the Senate, they had obviously failed to produce the intended effect of weakening official support for Casement.[58](http://uk-mg6.mail.yahoo.com/neo/" \l "f58" \t "_blank)”

**TNA FO 371/2797**

Spring-Rice to F.O.

30 May 1916

“Situation here caused by Irish executions is serious as the whole weight of Irish party is thrown against us during elections. Irish vote is thus anti-British. But there is a large balance of American opinion which has to be considered.

But general feeling is that while executions in hot blood can be excused it is wiser to show clemency [i. e., to Casement] when danger is well over.

Condemnation and subsequent commutation of death penalty is what would be expected here. I fear that execution of Casement would have a very serious effect on public opinion and this is felt by Whitehouse.”

Rowland Sperling noted: “We would expect nothing but hostility from the Irish vote in any case.”

Sir Arthur Nicolson: “I do not understand what Sir C. Spring Rice means by ‘executions in hot blood’ - All those condemned presumably had a fair trial - We need not, in my opinion, steer our course . . . with reference to elections in a foreign country - but act simply according to the dictates of justice.”

**TNA FO 371/2797**

Spring-Rice telegraph: United States of America

Decypher Sir C. Spring Rice (Washington)

July 4th. 1916

R. 1 p.m. July 5th. 1916

No. 2036

“There has been surprisingly little comment in the daily Press respecting result of Casement trial. Note is one of pity rather than sympathy and belief prevails that death sentence will not be carried out. A resolution introduced in the Senate by Senator Martine of New Jersey calling on President and State department to lodge a protest against was referred to Committee on Foreign Affairs where it will probably remain. A large number of letters chiefly from Irish Societies are daily pouring in at White House asking President to use his influence toward securing clemency....

Secretary of State told me yesterday that letters would be examined and if found to express views of persons of prominence, their names etc., would be communicated to you quite unofficially by United States Ambassador.”

**TNA FO 395/43**

**25 July 1916**

Ernley Blackwell to Montgomery to enclose “two photos of specimen pages of the Diary” and urging that they, too, be sent to Spring-Rice: “They will help him to convince anyone to whom he may show the copies that the diary is not a fake or forgery.”

**TNA FO 395/43**

28 July 1916

Montgomery to Spring-Rice: “Lord Newton asked me to send you the enclosed photographic reproductions of parts of Casement's diary, which may be useful to you in dispelling any doubts that may exist as to its authenticity if and when the copy of the diary which Lord Newton sent to you last week is shown to anyone.”

**TNA FO 371/2797**

**28 July 1916**

[Spring-Rice “Urgent” telegram to the Foreign Office:]

“Mrs. Newman, Casement's sister came to ask me to present her petition to the King to beg consideration of the services of her family. Her father was captain in dragoons, her granduncle General Sir William C, and her brother were in the Imperial Light Horse in Africa, invalided; four first cousins now in army and navy.

Senate has refused to take up the matter…but sense of the house was strongly for clemency.”

**TNA FO 395/43**

**30 July, 1916**

Sir Edward Grey telegram to Spring-Rice:

I think it much better that you should make no use whatever of Casement's diary. Page has I believe taken photographic copy with him supplied by Home Office & it is obviously advisable that information with regard to it should come from him & not from British Embassy. In fact I had given instructions that F.O. was not to make use of this diary.

**TNA FO 371/2798**

**1 August 1916**

Spring-Rice: “I have made informal agreement with [Michael Francis] Doyle that he say nothing if I say nothing and vice versa. He has not yet made any official definite statement but I warned him if he did I must answer it.

“He (Doyle) tells me privately that Clan-na-Gael want Casement executed.”

**TNA FO 371/2798**

**2 August 1916**

Sir Cecil Spring-Rice cable: “Press announces that President has taken action on behalf of Casement. If Casement is executed you must be prepared for a most serious situation here. President is very personal and his attitude toward us, already changing, will become hostile by force of circumstances and immense influence of Irish in his party. American public, which never reasons, will be inflamed against England and we may anticipate political difficulties of a serious kind.... On the other hand a reprieve at President's request would strengthen his hands in dealing with his own party and place him under deep obligations to us.

Publication of Casement's diary will only be looked on as an act of revenge and would only be effective if his life is spared.”

Sperling noted: “We have been informed of a resolution in the Senate requesting the President to ask H.M.G. to exercise clemency, but no communication has yet been received from the President or U.S.G.” [Telegram marked:] “R[eceived] 8.5 A.M. August 3rd, 1916.”

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1916Supp/d56>

**TNA FO 371/2798**

**4 August 1916**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

POLITICAL

Decypher. Sir C. Spring Rice, Washington

Casement's execution does not excite much comment except in Hearst papers. Senators have been warned not to make a saint of him for fear of revelations. Better leave matters alone now unless new developments turn up. All going well.

**TNA FO 371/2798**

**5 and 7 August 1916**

Foreign Office telegram to Spring-Rice: Nina Casement's was not delivered.

Then it was decided that the wire should not be sent: that it was less cruel to leave her to suppose that her message had reached her brother. But then the telegram was transmitted in error and another sent: “You should not inform Mrs. Newman unless she asks whether her message was delivered.”

**TNA FO 371/2798**

**15 August 1916**

Spring-Rice to FO: as he had previously warned Cardinal Farley of New York, he had that day talked with Monsignor Bolzano, the Apostolic Delegate, and warned him delicately that “His Majesty's Government were in possession of evidence which would make it extremely undesirable that priests of the Catholic Church should publicly ascribe to Casement the character of a Christian martyr, whose life should be held up as a model to the faithful…an ardent and sincere well-wisher of the Church.”

**TNA FO 395/43**

**Spring-Rice cable to Newton:**

**16 August 1916**

“Some friends of Sir R. Casement maintain that there were no signs of perversion here and they maintain journal is forged. I presume you have corroborative evidence if required to produce it. I decline discussion of the question at all and have merely warned people here that such evidence exists, and that they had better be careful.”

[F.O. Geoffrey Butler minutes on Spring-Rice telegram:] “There can be no doubt. Ask Mr. Basil Thomson for further proof of the genuine nature of the diary.”

[Another note ran:] “Mr. Blackwell…has the question of corroborative evidence in hand about 14 days ago. Let him have a copy of this & ask him how far he has got.”

[Lord Newton:] “He must have received the photographs by now, and the inquiry therefore seems curious.”

**TNA FO 395/43**

22 August 1916

Newton cable to Spring Rice: “Excellent corroborative evidence exists at the Home Office. Did you never get the photographs of two pages which were sent to you by bag on July 28?”

**See also**

**TNA CAB 37-147-33 FO memo to Cabinet relating Spring Rice on US opinion re execution 13 May 1916**

**and TNA CAB 37-153-13 FO to Spring Rice on no reprieve 2 August 1916.**

**RELATED JOHN QUINN LETTERS**

**Cecil Spring-Rice to John Quinn**

**NYPL Quinn collection**

**26 August 1916**

**Letter 2p. typed. Stamped Received Aug 28 1916 9:00 a.m. John Quinn, 31 Nassau St, New York.**

Wood's Hole

26 Aug.

Dear Mr. Quinn:

I am very glad you saw [Captain] Gaunt and I am most delighted that you like him as you do. What you say about him is just so and it is hard to express what he is to us. Your epithets are exactly fitted to his case.

I fear there can be no doubt about the papers. **[Herbert]** Ward who like you was a great friend of C's on humanitarian grounds was quite ignorant of what was going on. But in the journal there are one or two things which, I learn from Ward’s son-in-law **[Phipps]** who is with us are proof that the journal is authentic. It is no good entering into details but the case is clear. Edward Grey gave me strict instructions against publicity and the papers have only been used to warn people against taking a certain line about C - especially the Catholic Priests. I showed them in confidence to an intimate friend of Bolzano’s and this I trust will be enough to prevent an awkward controversy in which the enemies of the Church would be provided with a very convenient weapon. Above all we want to avoid a religious controversy.

Kuno Meyer is going at it. Intercepted correspondence shows that Germany counted on the Irish rebellion as a means of alienating American opinion from us, in which indeed they have been successful. The fact that C was employed to enlist Irish prisoners in Germany is undoubted. Also that to their eternal credit be it said, the Irish prisoners, in spite of promises, threats, starvation, even death, (with a very few exceptions) refused to break their oath. I think this fact should speak volumes and should never be lost sight of by those who are trying to cast aspersions on the loyalty of the Irish to the U.S. as Cardinal Gibbons said, no Irishman will be false to his allegiance here whatever temptations are offered by the disloyal Germans. Germany is using Ireland and the Irish for her purposes as she is using Austrians, Turks and Bulgarians - as she tried to use the Boers. The examples are not very alluring and I hope our people will not be fooled.

I am sorry you have raised this swarm of wasps about your head. Professor Gottheil has received numbers of threatening letters for writing to the Times. We live in curious times, don't we?

Yours sincerely,

C.A.S.R.

**John Quinn to Frederic R. Coudert**

**NYPL Quinn Collection**

**24 August 1916**

August 24, 1916

Personal

My dear Coudert:

Just a line to say that I had a very pleasant meeting with Captain Gaunt yesterday afternoon. I like him very much. I found him a man of an open and lucid mind. I have for many years felt that there was something about the sea that made naval officers and seamen men of clean and decent mind. I suppose it would take a Joseph Conrad to give the psychology of the sailor clean-mindedness. At any rate the Captain, whether because he was a sailor or because God made him so, has a clean mind. And I respect him for it.

Frankly, I went there candidly to tell him the substance of what I wrote to you, that if these quasi-official insinuations should continue, as they have since Casement's arrest, both in England and in this country, I should be driven to reply. My gratification was the keener, therefore, when he told me that a peremptory cable had been received from Grey yesterday forbidding any publicity or publication of any kind. I told him that was real statesmanship, as well as mere decency.

I would not write this to anyone except to you, for from your letter to me you knew of the Photographic copies in the Embassy. I regret of course that there has been the quasi-official Scotland Yard talk for the last two months.

The Captain showed me the photographic fac-similes, and without being a handwriting expert and without having studied them under the magnifying glass (the handwriting was much smaller than Casement's usual handwriting) I told him frankly that there was a great resemblance and that if I had there and then to give testimony on the subject I should be compelled to admit the genuineness of the handwriting. But I told him that I should like to submit the genuine handwriting that I had and these photographic copies to an expert. That I may do for this reason: in order that I can put the soft-pedal upon certain pro-German Irish and Germans here. I have been threatened right and left by the Germans. And yesterday I got a very nasty threat, accompanied by a snarl, from Kuno Meyer in Chicago. He is going to show me up and do all sorts of things. But with him too I shall reserve my fire.

Sincerely yours,

[Quinn]

Frederic R. Coudert

2 Rector Street

New York City.