

Punching the Wind:

Captain Jack White, the misfit of the Irish Revolution

By Ed Mulhall

The withdrawal by An Post of the commemorative stamp for the Citizen Army, because of the misidentification of the Army leader Captain Jack White, is perhaps the most fitting memorial for a man who in his own term was a "misfit" in the story of the Irish Revolution. That he should be thus forced to disappear from the commemorative story is appropriate for a man who left the British Army, the Citizen Army, the Irish Volunteers and numerous other causes and campaigns, often due to acrimony and perceived slight but also because his individual form of idealism did not sit comfortably with the orthodox narrative. In this he has common cause with other individualists with whom he was for a time associated such as Roger Casement, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, Erskine Childers, Countess Markievicz and Roddy Connolly.



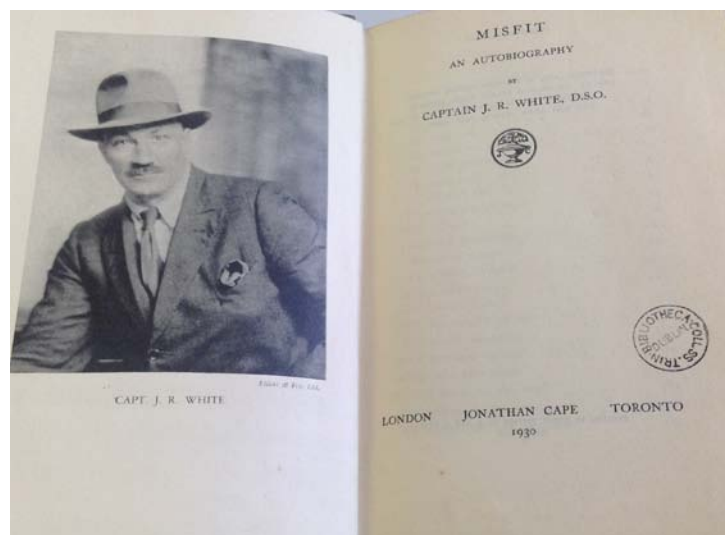
This is the stamp withdrawn by An Post in January 2014 after it was discovered the image used was not that of Irish Citizen Army founder, Captain Jack White. To access Conor Hunt's story on the disputed stamp for RTÉ News <http://www.rte.ie/news/2014/0123/499742-an-post-stamp/>

The story of Captain J.R. White brings a complexity and a nuance to the history of those years and well as being full of incident and controversy. He is therefore a decorated soldier of the Boer War who threatened a fellow officer, a Sandhurst graduate who had been expelled from Winchester School, an ADC to his father as Governor of Gibraltar, an officer under Kitchener in India, who resigned to join a Tolstoyian commune, living as a tramp, then a lumberjack in Canada, who joined the Home Rule campaign with Casement, launched the Citizen Army, organised the Irish Volunteers in Ulster, drove an ambulance in the First World War, was jailed in Pentonville on the eve of Casement's execution for leading a protest strike in Wales against Connolly's execution, who was invited to stand as a candidate in a Free State election in the 1920s and a Northern Ireland election in the 1940s, who was part of the Republican Congress and a Red Cross worker in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, who had literary work published in the *Irish Review* and who became a character in a D H Lawrence novel, who called himself a 'Christian communist' and who wrote a blueprint for anarchism, a Christian, a mystic, a Leninist, a protestant anti-clericalist both of whose wives were Catholics, a radical socialist who inherited his father's estate in County Antrim, a Misfit. If there were to be an image of him for a stamp of commemoration then maybe neither the formal military uniform of the Citizen Army nor the wide-brimmed hatted portrait of the autobiography would be fitting. Better would be the

bandaged, confused, figure just released from detention and accompanied by Sheehy Skeffington - a radical, iconoclast at the centre of the action.

J.R. (James Robert) White, known as Jack, was born in 1879 in Broughshane near Ballymena, Co. Antrim, the only son of landowner and distinguished General Sir George White. Jack White was educated at Winchester School, where after a period of trouble making including a failed attempt to cause an explosion in an unpopular teacher's rooms and escapes to Ascot races he was expelled (by mutual arrangement he says¹). He went on to receive his military training at Sandhurst, where he learned 'fortification and fornication'. He joined the 1st Gordon Highlanders in 1899 and fought at Magersfontein and Doornkop in the Boer War. His father had led British forces in one of the most notable events of that war, the siege of Ladysmith, and became a legendary figure as a result. Jack White received a DSO for bravery in 1901 and he recounts in his idiosyncratic autobiography *Misfit* an occasion when he had to threaten to shoot a fellow officer who was about to kill an unarmed Boer prisoner: "Peering over the rock I saw an extremely frightened youth of about seventeen... Then an officer appeared, my superior in rank and by this time there were ten or a dozen men around. 'Shoot him, shoot him,' yelled the officer. A wave of disgust swamped my sense of discipline.' If you shoot him, said I, pointing my carbine at him, 'I'll shoot you.'" And he passed on... he is now a General that officer and I am a Bolshevik or reported as such".²

His DSO was awarded by Lord Kitchener and he said he and his father now had all the military orders between them, he with one his father with the rest.



The frontispiece from Captain White's autobiography, *Misfit*, published in 1930

Following the war his father became Governor of Gibraltar and Jack White, now a Captain, joined him as his ADC. There they hosted both the German Kaiser William II and King Edward VII. White preferred the "greater naiveté and greater sincerity" of the German. In Gibraltar he also fell in love with a catholic Spanish woman (Maria de la Mercedes Ana Louis Carmen Dolores) Dollie Mosley who, after a turbulent courtship, he married in 1905. White had now gone to India following the end of his father's term as Gibraltar Governor. Here he served under Lord Kitchener (who was living in the same house that Sir George had used when he was commander in India). Following India he moved as adjutant to the territorial battalion of the regiment in Aberdeen. He was now becoming disillusioned by the army and its constraints and heavily influenced by the writings of Tolstoy on the need to have freedom for spiritual adventure. He decided to resign his commission and wrote a rationale for his decision which he sent to his father and also to H.G. Wells and Tolstoy (the latter approved of its spiritual impulse, the former said he would like "to thrash his governesses and schoolmasters"³).

For the years up to 1912, White led a bohemian lifestyle, including a spell as an English teacher in Bohemia, where he tried to live a Tolstoyian lifestyle, down to the vegetarianism. He also travelled around England, like a tramp on his own account, and emigrated to Canada, where he worked as a

lumberjack. He then returned to England and became a follower of the nudist Francis Sedlak joining his communistic free-love colony in the Cotswolds.

At the start of 1912 and still at the colony, White was becoming disillusioned with the Tolstoyian ethic. He began to take interest in events at home and had another of his life changing epiphanies. Following the growing Ulster Unionist opposition to Home Rule, he was prompted by the refusal to allow the liberal minister Winston Churchill to speak at the Ulster Hall in February to write a protest letter to the *Belfast Newsletter*. In it he condemned this failure to listen to an opponent's view as going against the principle of Protestantism: " ' The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life', that uneasy certainty in advance, which refuses a hearing to an opponent, is the naked spirit of Popery. Let those who believe such a spirit to be life giving shape their actions in accordance with it, but let them leave the name of Protestant to the heirs in spirit of those who called the world into being. Yours etc J. R. White, Late Captain, Gordon Highlanders." ⁴

The letter was not published until three months later and then by the *Ulster Guardian* to whom he had forwarded the correspondence in frustration " My mind is made up thus far , that whatever real obstacles there may be to the amalgamation of the two sections of the Irish people into one self-governing nation the leaders of the so-called Unionist party are appealing to nothing but the spirit of bigotry and stagnation....I hope that if stirring times are in store for Ireland I may not be idle on the side of progress and Protestantism, which I take to mean, the liberty of the reason, and to be represented by self-government or Home Rule in a nation, just as a free reason gives self-control to an individual. I hope to return to Ireland shortly." ⁵

He was soon back in Ireland for another reason as his father died on 24th June and was buried at Broughshane, Co. Antrim. White now had common purpose with members of the Ulster Liberal Association (who had invited Churchill to that meeting) and others who were keen to show that there was Protestant support for Home Rule. On December 6th he was invited to speak at a meeting organised by the Irish Protestant Home Rule Committee in the Memorial Hall in London. With him on the platform were George Bernard Shaw, Stephen Gwynne M.P. and Arthur Conan Doyle. In a speech which you could argue had echoes of Wolfe Tone he saw the Home Rule movement as transcending religious differences. The extension of universal suffrage and Home Rule were representation of the principles of Protestantism which puts an emphasis on individual truth and he concluded: " I hear the spirit of Catholic Ireland crying out to the spirit of liberalism " Give us some of the freedom you have won and we will give you some of the reverence and beauty you have lost". ⁶

In typical humility White was to assess the impact on his mainly Catholic audience "I read the speech with rapt attention. The predominantly Catholic audience cheered it to the echo. At the time I was so fresh and ingenuous I would have got a blessing from the Pope for a eulogy on Luther". ⁷ His address was printed in the January 1913 edition of the *Irish Review* under the title Protestantism and Home Rule and this was the beginning of his contact with that literary and politically active group in Dublin. (Padraic Colum also published a piece by White, which harked back to his time in Gibraltar called *A Ride in Andalusia* in Its April edition.) ⁸

White was now fully engaged with the issue of Home Rule and in particular mobilising Protestant opinion in support. He came back in Ireland, supported by money from his father's estate and he had acquired another aid to his activism, a motor car. In September 1913 he arrived in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, to see if a meeting could be organised of Protestants in opposition to Carson's policy. Among the local organising committee was the local clergyman Rev. J.B. Armour who was also a prominent member of the Ulster liberals. Later that week Armour also received a letter from Roger Casement suggesting a similar meeting and he travelled from Belfast to discuss the possible arrangements. It soon became clear that there was a difference of approach between White and Casement and the two met in Belfast to discuss it.



White's first meeting with Roger Casement (above) was a hostile one. (Image: UCD Archives LA30/PH/408)

It was the first time that they had met and it was quite an acrimonious meeting. As Armour relates Casement's account: "...he opened on Sir Roger, accused him of every kind of crime, winding up with the charge that he was not an 'honest' man. There was a casting of the creels there and then. Sir Roger told me that and bound me over to secrecy...Sir Roger's explanation is that there is a slate off. Certainly White is peculiar." ⁹ White is equally frank in his assessment of the row, explaining his annoyance at Casement seeking to shift the emphasis from the 'lovelessness' of the Carson campaign as he proposed to its "lawlessness". As White put it: "My appeal was to God. His was to Caesar."¹⁰ (The difference could also be seen in their claims of inspiration. White felt his Protestantism was in the tradition of Tone and '98, while Casement hoped " with the assistance of every drop of Fenian blood 'in my soul' to 'light a fire' which would set the Antrim hills ablaze and would unite Presbyterian and Catholic farmers and townsmen at Ballymoney in a clear message to Ireland."¹¹ Their co-operation and friendship survived this tempestuous start. "In our long subsequent association the note of that first interview was often repeated, but affection and a humorous tolerance on his part of my rival messiahship formed a pleasant accompaniment".¹²

These difficulties were overcome by the diplomacy of Armour and the organisers who also had to deal with the risk of disruption from local Orangemen. The meeting went ahead on 24th October, with Captain White as the first speaker followed by Alice Stopford Green, Sir Roger Casement, Alec Wilson (who was a regular contributor to the *Irish Review* under the name Ulster Imperialist) and John Dinsmore, a Presbyterian from Ballymena. The Town Hall was decked out with Union Jacks and a banner hung over the platform declared "No provisional or provincial government for us". It was to be a meeting just for Protestants and it was estimated that there were between 400 and 500 present. With a strong police presence the meeting went off without interruption. Two resolutions were passed. The first rejected the claim of Sir Edward Carson's provisional government to speak for the Protestants of North-east Ulster and pledged lawful resistance to any degrees issued by this 'illegal and non-representative body'. The second was summarised as a call for the rejection of sectarianism as a divisive force amongst Irishmen and an invitation to government to help bring all Irishmen together 'in one common field of national effort'. Captain White also launched 'the new covenant', a Home Rule pledge to match the Ulster covenant " We intend to abide by the just laws of the lawful parliament of Ireland until such time as it may prove itself hostile to democracy, in sure confidence that God will stand by those who stand by the people irrespective of class or Creed."¹³

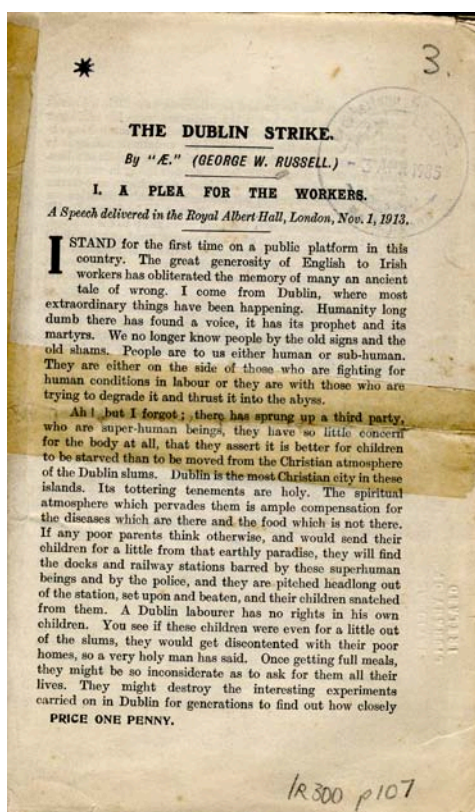
White led off the speeches, asking: "When will Ulstermen see that the question of Home Rule is not or never will be a religious question, but a question of human rights in which the Catholic hierarchy has intervened to hinder rather than help?" Casement gave his first public speech: "While the Empire has been contracting and expanding Ireland has been contracting and falling apart."¹⁴ Angus Mitchell sees

here in the first speeches of these men significant future trends. The 'human rights' argument used for one of the first times, and Casement putting his view that it is imperialism that must be defeated.¹⁵

The meeting was to be, however, an isolated one. It received some press coverage and a pamphlet of the speeches was produced, but it was soon followed locally by much larger pro-Carson meetings which helped support the London *Times* assessment that the Ballymoney meeting represented a "small pocket of dissident Protestants, the last survivors of the Old Liberals : "like the Cheshire cat..It has vanished till only its grin lingers furtively in a corner of Co. Antrim."¹⁶(This assessment was rebutted by Casement in a letter to the paper).

But the meeting did have an impact on its speakers. Casement received a number of compliments including one from Erskine Childers heralding his own move to a more active role. White received an invitation to speak in Dublin at the Literary and Historical Society which was also addressed by John Dillon MP and Professor Tom Kettle. White said in his speech that there was a responsibility on Catholic politicians to assuage the fears of the Ulster unionists that a Home Rule state would be controlled by the Catholic Church, asking: " cannot a supreme effort be made to set their fears at rest?"¹⁷ He didn't feel that he got unqualified approval from his audience for his sentiments and was rhetorically ridiculed by Tom Kettle.

Dublin at the time of this meeting was in the midst of the acrimony of the Lockout and a couple of days later there was a major controversy when Catholic clergy intervened to prevent children of striking workers being brought to England. The demonstrations at the docks were portrayed as the church intervening against the strikers and it stirred White to become involved in the campaign. He offered to speak at one of James Connolly's meetings at Beresford Place and also discussed the background to the dispute with AE whose newspaper article had impressed him. He spoke on a platform with Connolly and the American trade-unionist Bill Haywood. On 1st November George Russell (AE) shared a platform with James Connolly, Delia Larkin, Sylvia Pankhurst and G B Shaw, in the Albert Hall at a meeting to protest against the jailing of James Larkin, where Shaw echoed the growing sentiment that some type of defence force was needed: " If you put a policeman on the footing of a mad dog, it can only end in one way, and that is that all respectable men will have to arm themselves. I suggest you should arm yourselves with something which should put a decisive stop to the proceedings of the police".¹⁸



The text of the speech made by George Russell at the Royal Albert Hall on 1 November 1913. At this meeting , George Bernard Shaw offered support for the idea of a defence force for Irish workers. (Image: National Library of Ireland, Ir 300 p107)

In Dublin White joined the Peace Committee at the time chaired by Tom Kettle and including Padraic Colum, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, Joseph Plunkett, Rev Robin Gwynn of TCD and David Houston, the publisher of the *Irish Review*. At his first meeting in the Mansion House on the 11th of November according to White's account Kettle arrived late and worst for wear ('clutching in one hand a bunch of carnations and another a bag of oysters') and White was elected chair to replace him.¹⁹ The committee however was to be wound down and those interested reconstituted as the Civic League. It seems to have been at this meeting in the Mansion House that White proposed a motion to begin drilling the workers. Padraic Colum recounts his recollection in his biography of Arthur Griffith: "Captain White with his military carriage had bright blue eyes that danced in his moments of elation or exaltation, giving him a curiously elfin look. That he could reach those moments and reveal them made him, a man of action remarkable. His proposal as he stood erect, his blue eyes glancing and flashing was this: he would donate fifty pounds to the workers clause with the exclusive object of buying the men shoes. Men could not march in the broken ill fitting shoes of the Dublin workers, and if they could not march they could not be drilled. His proposal was to drill the locked-out men so as to form a Citizen Army that would be able to protect their right as citizens. The proposal was received with excitement by a committee that had not been able to make any positive move."²⁰

The meeting was forced to adjourn from the Mansion House by the Lord Mayor who was to continue with his own Peace delegates. They adjourned to Robin Gwynn's rooms at No. 40 Trinity College where the first formal meeting of the committee was to be held on the following day. It was announced by Francis Sheehy Skeffington the Dublin Correspondent of the *Daily Herald*: "The Dublin Industrial Peace committee formally dissolved last night having satisfied itself that the obstinate refusal of the employers to meet local men is the sole obstacle to peace.... A new committee has been formed which will speak openly and voice the opinion of independent minded citizens without the restrictions which the defunct Peace committee imposed upon itself. The chairman of the new body is Captain White, son of Sir George White and leader of the new protestant Home Rule movement, its secretaries for the moment are Padraic Colum, poet and Francis Sheehy Skeffington.. The first aim of the committee will be to break down the barrier which the corrupt capital press interposes between the public and the truths".²¹

At the meeting in Gwynn's room on the 12th the core group discussed future strategy and a proposed meeting to protest against the police action. (Darrell Figgis seems to have been also at this meeting²²) The motion to drill the workers was now formally taken and it was here that the Citizen Army began. Captain White gave over his cheque to provide boots and drill staves and it was accepted by David Houston who acted as treasurer. According to Gwynn who confirmed the meeting to R M Fox: "the title was not to suggest military action but merely to drill on military lines to keep unemployed men fit and self-respecting".²³ (This analysis is supported by the involvement of the committed pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington from the start).

White discussed the proposal with James Connolly who was in charge of the ITGWU as Jim Larkin was in jail. Connolly was enthusiastic. The following day (13th November) at a rally, celebrating the release of Jim Larkin and following a big march through the city, Connolly announced that he was going to talk sedition " the next time we are out for a march I want to be accompanied by four battalions of trained men. Why should we not drill and train our men in Dublin as they are in Ulster". He added that he had competent officers ready to instruct and lead them and he could get arms when they wanted them.²⁴ Connolly was to re-iterate the drilling plans the following night before he left with Larkin for meetings in Manchester and London. The London meeting again saw AE, Shaw and Pankhurst on the platform.

A few days later White was also to call for an Irish Volunteer movement. He did so at a meeting of the Trinity College Gaelic Society on the 18th November the day before a planned major meeting of the Civic League organised to campaign for a police inquiry. The Society paper given by its auditor Joseph Biggar was on the theme "A panacea for Irish life" and Arthur Griffith also spoke. In his contribution Captain White condemned the police action at the time of Larkin's arrest and invited those present to the following night's meeting:²⁵ "If they wanted to complain with irresistible force they must prepare to control the police themselves. He asked them to lay the foundations of a great national movement

for the creation of that order and discipline which they so sadly lacked by rising again the standard of the Irish Volunteers (applause)." ²⁶ He also suggested that the students might strike as a protest. Alarmed by reports of what was said the Provost of Trinity Dr Antony Traill banned Trinity students attending what he termed "Captain White's Home Rule meeting" the following evening. The ban caused uproar and was reported in the newspapers. (It was to be mirrored by Traill's successor as Provost banning a meeting involving P H Pearse a year later).



Meeting force with force: speaking to the Trinity College Gaelic Society in November 1913. Captain White condemned the behaviour of the police in the arrest of James Larkin and call for a national movement to create order and discipline. (Image: Bureau of Military History, Military Archives)

The reference to the Volunteers in White's speech to the Gaelic Society was made as far as can be seen without co-ordination with the efforts then underway to establish an Irish Volunteer force. However the prospects of this were now being discussed openly and the first published report of a proposal was in the *Freemans Journal* of the 17th which said a committee had been formed including Eoin Mac Neill and Lawrence Kettle. The first planning meeting, organised by Eoin Mac Neill, The O'Rahilly and Bulmer Hobson (who didn't attend) had taken place in Wynn's Hotel on 11th of November. After some further preliminary meetings the proposed inaugural public event was to take place on the 25th.

Sir Roger Casement had yet to be formally invited to support the Volunteers but seems to have consulted with White about his intentions. Captain White replied on 19th. In this it is clear that the proposal for the Citizen army and Volunteer force were complimentary proposals. He says he has already offered his services to Liberty Hall to drill the strikers "as I believed and believe that that is the only practical way of commencing a national drill campaign." But this was just a beginning: "I need not tell you that my aim is to link the Labour and National Causes as soon as they can be linked"²⁷. This purpose is furthered by a interview White gave to the *Daily Chronicle* the following day which was reported under the headline "National Volunteers the new protective force " in the *Irish Independent*. "Soon says the correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle* we shall see the formation of an Irish Volunteer movement which will have as it object the organisation of a citizen force ready to uphold the authority of the Crown and Government in Ireland...The two leaders are Sir Roger Casement and Captain James Robert White. It is Capt. White's intention to start with the men of strike in Dublin. They have leisure at the present moment and will be quite ready to respond to his call. But they will only form a nucleus. There are thousands of men in all parts of Ireland who will be only too ready to come forward to enroll themselves in the ranks of the National Volunteers, not for any aggressive purpose but merely as a protective measure"²⁸.

Attached to White's letter Sir Roger Casement had written the text of the telegram of support he sent on to White with instructions it be read out at the meeting (which it was): "Strongly approve proposal to drill and discipline workers as a healthy national movement which I will aid as far as I can as I will also aid and advance another move to drill and discipline Irish National Volunteers as a healthy national movement over the whole of Ireland". Another interesting aspect of this correspondence is the reference White makes to a "hitch" he had with James Connolly when he suggested that before commencing 'there should make a public statement prior to beginning drill of impartiality with as between combatants in the industrial dispute". Connolly reacted angrily to his rationale and after an intervention by Delia Larkin the hitch was overcome. However this passage does led some credence to the claim by William Martin Murphy at the 1916 Inquiry that Captain White has come to him with the suggestion that the drilling of workers was a way of bringing an end to Industrial Dispute : "he said (drilling) would raise their moral tone and they would no longer be guilty of outrages "29 If it happened it would not be the first example in this period of White acting unilaterally.

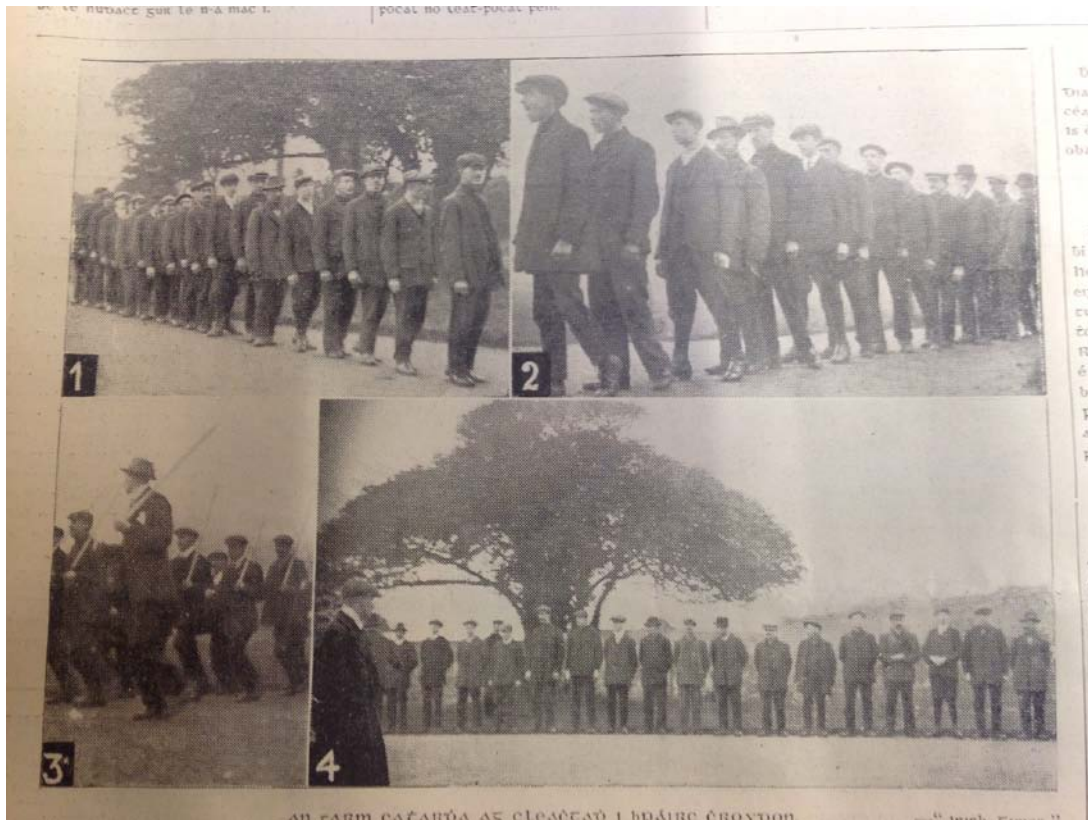
Meanwhile, the workers drilling activity was now officially an Army. On the 18th November in a speech which was reported under the headline "A Citizen Army, Question of a General Strike" Connolly made public the proposal: "he said he had already referred to the enrolment of a citizen army under the Transport Workers Union. Every man who handed in his name would be enrolled for drilling and training under capable officers (cheers for Captain White) Yes, said Mr Connolly, Captain White is prepared to lead you, to drill you... Captain White is you know a heroic soldier, the son of the defender of Ladysmith and a man who has distinguished himself in the field....any man who means in future to become a member of the Transport Workers union must be prepared to enroll himself in our citizen army, so that we will not leave the whole of that work to the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Orangemen who I hear have ordered a supply of rifles. "30



Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the ITGWU. On November 18th, 1913, James Connolly announced plans for "the enrolment of a citizen army under the Transport Workers Union" (Image: National Library of Ireland, Ke 202)

The Civic League meeting took place in the Ancient Concert rooms on the 19th November. A group of 150 students marched to the meeting in conflict with the Trinity ban singing " Oh, oh, Antonio" as a challenge to Provost Antony Traill. (The students' rebellion had its limits however as they announced to the meeting that they had to return before the gates shut at 9!). The meeting was addressed by Captain White who began by saying that he didn't know what had led Dr Traill from the wrong track but went on to deal directly with the drilling proposal according to the Freeman's Journal report : "Threats were no part of the armament of strong men but the time might come, and come soon, when he would come to them and say if they were dallied with any longer- the speaker made a long pause- "we will take the law into our own hands." 31. James Connolly, Countess Markievicz, Conal O'Riordain, Miss Harrison,

Darrell Figgis, Francis Sheehy Skeffington and Rev. Gwynn also spoke. Connolly said he supported White's drilling proposal as it was necessary to drill so as to acquire power to act together. They did not propose to use this drilling to 'take the Castle and annex the bank 'but they believed that men drilled would be better respected by others. ³²



The Irish Citizen Army being drilled in Croydon Park. These images were published in An Claidheamh Solas, 14 February 1914

The first mobilisation of the Citizen Army was that weekend. It included a march from Croydon Park in Fairview, where the drilling was to take place, back to Liberty Hall. Captain White claims there were between five and ten thousand at the first meeting, these he somehow got to march in formation but when it came to formally register the following day only about 15 turned up. It is perhaps this initial meeting that is somewhat romantically described by Sean O'Casey in his short history of the Citizen Army : "and once again the cheers rang out as the tall athletic figure of Captain White appeared...Captain White told them the work would commence immediately. He told them to attend the very next day at Croydon Park Fairview where they would be marshaled, divided into battalions, subdivided into companies and put through the elementary stage of military training." The Irish Citizen Army would fight for Labour and for Ireland" He asked all those who intended to second their efforts by joining the army and training themselves for the fight for social liberty to hold up their hands. Almost every hand was silhouetted out against the darkening sky and a long deafening cheer proclaimed the birth of the citizen army. It was certainly inspiring to watch the stalwart workers marching in column of company formation from Croydon Park back to Liberty Hall under the command of the indefatigable Captain White."³³

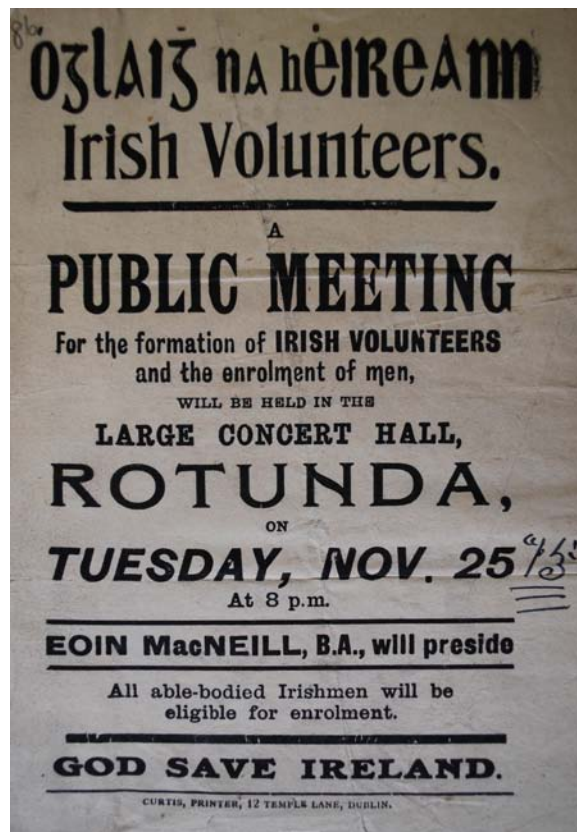
Though O'Casey maybe merging events(he has Larkin at this meeting so it could be a week later)the movement was gaining momentum and on 24th November Francis Sheehy Skeffington had witnessed large numbers signing up and two companies formed. There was no doubt either that White was enthusiastic about the potential of the workers. He wrote to his mother on the 29th " the realisation of a better state of society demands in the first instance a very high state of discipline among themselves. With it I firmly believe they can make life a richer thing, not only for their own class but for ours. Larkin and Connolly, for all the excrescences of their platform speeches are men of ideals and ability." In the same letter he recounts an encounter with Edward Carson: "

I met Ronald McNeill in Grafton Street walking with Carson. He introduced me to Carson as 'the redoubtable Captain White' Carson said ' Oh I know he's always abusing me' to which I replied I haven't abused you for two months." Carson wasn't gushing and I was not favorably impressed by him." ³⁴

That week also saw the inaugural meeting of the Irish Volunteers. Following the first planning meeting in Wynn's hotel a number of other meetings were held to build wide support for the proposal. A note in the *Freeman's Journal* of 17th November put the context firmly as a reaction to the Ulster Volunteers and Eoin MacNeill's article. It was followed by the formal notice of the Rotunda meeting in the *Journal* of 21st November and a circular in the names of MacNeill and Lawrence Kettle outlined the proposal for the Volunteers.³⁵

In London Roger Casement had heard he was to be invited to attend but was not impressed by the ideas as portrayed in the circular. He knew MacNeill from the Gaelic League and felt an affinity with him as they shared Antrim roots. (another link with White]. Casement wrote to MacNeill on 24th November : " I do not see how I could join so loosely a movement. I may be better therefore for me to confine my help, such as it is, and it can only at best be slight, to the purely civic force Captain White is seeking to organise in Dublin".³⁶

Meanwhile in Dublin MacNeill was concerned that the meeting would be disrupted by men from 'Liberty Hall' and contacted Padraig Pearse and Captain White to see if they could use their influence with Liberty Hall to prevent it. Pearse showed no interest and MacNeill suggested to White that he should bring a group of his best men from Liberty Hall along to prevent disorder. The meeting on the 25th was chaired by MacNeill and featured Lawrence Kettle, P H Pearse, trade unionist Peadar Macken, GAA representative Luke O'Toole and Michael Davitt (a student leader and son of the Land League founder).It was so full (over 7,000 in the main hall) that overflow meetings were also held. It was also boisterous as a large number of " Larkinites" were inside and outside the Rotunda ice rink. They chanted and sang Larkinite songs and when Lawrence Kettle tried to read the Volunteer Manifesto he was drowned out by heckling (due to his alleged anti-union past). Order was only restored when Captain White arrived and was ushered onto the platform party.³⁷ As Aine Ceannt, who was on the specially arranged (and segregated) women's platform, related in her Bureau of Military History Witness Statement " his father happened to be involved with a dispute with his workers and some of the audience objected to Mr Kettle. A few shots were fired, but there really was no panic and Captain White went to the platform and addressed the meeting".³⁸



A poster announcing the public meeting at which the Irish Volunteers would be formed" (Image: South Dublin Libraries)

Although the newspaper accounts do not mention shots they do credit White with calming the situation. The demonstrators moved on to a meeting at Beresford place where they were addressed by Connolly. Eoin Mac Neill writing to Casement that evening stressed that the action of the demonstrators backfired: "The strikers demonstration was a sad blunder.. if the leaders do not repudiate their actions tonight their cause will be in a bad way here." He is keen to stress his cordial relations with Captain White though not referring to his intervention at the meeting. "Captain White has been twice with me and we have had long talks. I think we are pretty much agreed. In my opinion a sectorial volunteer organisation among the workers on strike would lead to nothing permanent. The Labour movement has as many cross currents as British Politics." ³⁹He writes on 27th to Casement that he has told White that he cannot 'hold hands' with him at present " but have written to him to say that if the labour talks in Dublin reaches a settlement I trust the men he has been training will be a valuable asset to the volunteers organised on a national basis'.⁴⁰

The tension between the movements was to be a feature of their existence right up until the Rising and play a part in White's own history in both organisations. Drilling was now organised by White in Croydon Park on a regular basis and a telegram in the archives from December shows him booking Croydon Park which was a union resource with Mc Keowan in Liberty Hall. (see Telegram 8th December 1913⁴¹) Nora Connolly O'Brien, daughter of James Connolly in her memoir describes some of the frustration White may have felt with his raw recruits:

"Captain White had suggested that the locked-out workers would be in a better position to meet the bludgeoning tactics of the police if they were a drilled and disciplined body- and out of that suggestion the Irish Citizen Army was born. And here were its members, marching now to the right, now to the left, at the command of Captain White. He was tireless in the work of drilling them, and the men responded as tirelessly. Once he stopped beside Daddy and he was in a rage. Some command he had given was misinterpreted, His hands were clenched and he was fairly gnashing his teeth.

"Easy now, Captain," warned daddy. "Easy now. Remember they're volunteers."

And aren't they great?" said Captain White, forgetting his rage in his admiration of the men.

Another order, and the men marched past, and at a given place were given broom handles to practise rifle drill.

Daddy and Nono watched it all. Every now and then they would glance at each other and share an understanding smile at an unspoken thought."⁴²

After the initial enthusiasm for the Citizen Army the attendance at drills tended to wax and wane and was also under pressure from the slow collapse of the strike. William O' Brien the Labour leader reports that in March 1914 it was down to fifty men.⁴³ Many of the Army men were returning to work but tensions were still very high. Conditions in the city were very poor and White was involved in direct talks with Chief Secretary Birrell to access funds to relieve distress. There were tensions within the movement too and White once left a platform of a meeting in Sackville Street when he felt Larkin had 'unceremoniously disregarded' his feelings by saying: " Captain White was the son on Sir George White who defended the British flag at Ladysmith, the flag under which much disease and degradation had been experienced than anything else he (Mr Larkin) knew of."⁴⁴

On 13th of March Captain White led an unemployment march from Liberty Hall to the Mansion House . There was a police baton charge on the march and scuffles. White who was armed initially with a shillelagh was disarmed, arrested and then while resisting being brought into custody stuck on the head (over three times according to the medical report)



Captain White (with bandaged head) and Francis Sheehy Skeffington driving from the Police Court having been released on bail after the altercation with the Police. (*Freemans Journal*, 16 March 1914)

On the insistence of Countess Markievicz he got medical attention in jail and was released on bail posted by Sir Horace Plunkett and Prof. Houston. White was charged with assaulting a van driver, a police inspector, a police sergeant and two constables. At his arraignment hearing he arrived with his head heavily bandaged and accompanied by Francis Sheehy Skeffington. Skeffington who was to become for White the 'first martyr to Irish socialism, "for he linked Ireland not only with the little nations struggling for self expression but with the world's humanity struggling for a higher life" ⁴⁵White was to make a number of public appearances both in Ireland and London with the bandage until his trial and appeal were concluded, over a month later, with an agreed settlement and an apology.

During these weeks and following a proposal from Sean O'Casey to White, that a formal structure be put on the Army, a Constitution was prepared. The Constitution was adopted at a General Meeting of workers at Liberty Hall on March 22nd 1914, presided over by Jim Larkin. The provisional committee had Captain White as Chairman, Jim Larkin and Francis Sheehy Skeffington among the vice-chairs and Countess Markievicz as Honorary Treasurer. Moves were made to buy uniforms and an order made with Arnotts (White ordered fifty uniforms with dark green serge, the receipt is in the OBrien papers in the National Library) ⁴⁶. The initiative gave a new impetus to the movement and numbers increased.

White was now involved with Larkin attending recruiting meetings around the country, his car being a notable asset. He wrote to his mother on 16th of April following a meeting with Larkin in Bray: "The principle activity I am now engaged in is a plan to spread the Citizen Army. I think it will result in compelling the National Volunteers to cease from their suspicious aloofness and draw together the Middle Class and Labour National movements, if it cannot succeed as a Labour National Movement alone." ⁴⁷That Bray meeting was held outside the Town Hall as the Volunteers were meeting inside. Around this time White apparently made a unilateral approach to Eoin Mac Neill to solve the conflict between the two organisations by proposing that two companies of the army could be offered to the Volunteers as long as they could remain an independent but affiliated body. The offer was evidently rejected by MacNeill because his organisation could have nothing to do with one that had been in conflict with the police, a reference to the Mansion House fracas. There had been great tension within the movement about any relationship with the Volunteers and suspicion of those like White and Countess Markievicz who were in favor of closer contacts. Larkin and Sean O'Casey were particularly vehement in their opposition with O'Casey later bringing a motion against the Countess which he lost (and which precipitated his own withdrawal). His opposition had been noticed by the IRB as evidenced by Tom Clarke's letter to John Devoy in May where he said. "Larkin's men have been making war on the Volunteers. I think it is largely inspired by disgruntled fellow named O'Casey. Liberty Hall is a negligible quantity here."⁴⁸

It was inevitable that White's unilateral action would cause difficulty and he was subject to more oversight by the Army committee and in particular by O'Casey. As he recounts: "I turned to Connolly saying 'All you'll do will be to destroy my work,' and to O'Casey who was secretary of the committee saying 'And it's all your fault'. What I alleged to be his fault I forget. Then I marched out of the room a free man, to spread myself with the rapidly spreading Irish National Volunteers; say rather a swollen-headed young ass looking for limelight in a movement with which spiritually I had little or nothing in common" ⁴⁹

News of White's resignation was reported in the *Irish Worker* of May 16th with the announcement that Larkin had taken over as Chairman (in which capacity he was to remain until October when James Connolly took over on Larkin's departure to the US). O'Casey had this assessment of their time working together: "White did not obtain the ready and affectionate co-operation his nature craved for. His efforts to understand the mysterious natures of working men were earnest and constant and were never fully appreciated by those amongst whom he spend his time and a good deal of his money....and those who sat with him and differed from him most, now wish to express their sincere affection for one who honestly and unselfishly endeavored to use his gifts, natural and acquired, to lift the workers to a higher plane of usefulness and comfort."⁵⁰

White was to regret his departure from the workers movement as he said later "I should have stuck with the Citizen Army, where I had the clear guidance of international revolutionary principle undercutting and outlasting the conflict of national interests that caused the Great War."⁵¹ But in the immediate aftermath of the break he became an organiser for the National Volunteers in the North together with Col. Maurice Moore. ⁵²He began in Derry where he commanded a brigade of men many of whom were old soldiers and where Casement visited him on a number of occasions. (While there he also proposed a training camp for officers for which he says Eamon de Valera had applied but abandoned it due to the power struggle in the Volunteer leadership with the arrival of Redmond's supporters into the enlarged movement). He describes the situation in Derry as being one where there was a constant fear of conflict with the Ulster Volunteers and attributes his obstinacy in the face of sectarianism as leading to his ousting from command and departure.⁵³

He moved to a command in East Tyrone where on paper he had up to ten thousand under him and where Darrel Figgis visited him to see the maneuvers. He was in Omagh for the outbreak of war and in his memoir includes a circular he sent on August 17th where he recommends the Volunteers should approach the Government to train them as a Home Defense unit and arm them once trained. The training camps were to be under the charge of the Volunteer officers but the military authorities were to have a representative present with control of the instructing staff. "The Military Authorities will not I expect jump at it; but I believe they will take it if given clearly to understand they won't get anything

else". White adds later: "I was profoundly misunderstood. I was taken to be recruiting for Britain where I was trying to use Britain to put Ireland in a position to enforce her own claims" ⁵⁴His proposal was also sent to Col. Maurice Moore, one of the national leaders of the Volunteers, and publicly discussed at a meeting in Dublin. According to White the opposition to it from Sinn Fein supporters lead to him losing his command in Tyrone.



John Redmond presents a flag to Irish National Volunteers in Maryborough, August 1914. White opposed Redmond's outright support for British recruitment when European war broke out the following month. (NLI: INDH12C)

In September White wrote a memorandum which he sent to Lord Kitchener and Sir Ian Hamilton who he knew and where friends with his family (and later to Lord Roberts). In it he takes issue with the blanket support for recruitment just given by Redmond at Woodenbridge, cautions the British army leaders that they must respect the integrity of the Irish Volunteer movement and recommends that key to this is to ensure that they are led by Irishmen. He warns of the dangers of not doing this. "It is not merely the failure or success of a recruiting campaign. It is a question of Ireland actively loyal or disloyal. There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and potential energy generated by the Irish Volunteers. This will not simply evaporate in the event of the failure of Redmond's campaign. It will turn into a more violently bitter anti-English feeling than ever before, The Irish Volunteers came into being to exert a force in support of Home Rule equal to or greater than Carson's force exerted against it. I think Redmond will find it hard to satisfy them with the Home Rule settlement as they realise that Carson will be in a stronger position than ever to nullify it at the end of the war. They may not exactly realise what Home Rule is going to do for them but the desire is a consuming passion. Unless by wise and generous handling they can be induced to advance toward the real attainment of Home Rule by service to the Empire, no consideration of its impossibility will, I believe, prevent them from trying to get it by the wildest means what they think they have been cheated of in the constitutional struggle. They are not wanting men who preach the most thorough-going treason, and there is practically no limit to the fantastic conceits which an Irish crowd can be got to pin its faith to, when its national pride and bitterness is played on. The men who trade in the bitterness of the past for the gratification of their own vanity can be silenced once and for all now by care and judgment. Once allow them to get a seeming modern instance of England's treachery, and repression of their propaganda or themselves would only face the flame of suspicion and discontent." ⁵⁵

Kitchener replied that it was impossible to do what he was suggesting. Hamilton discussed the proposal that the Volunteers be mobilised as a territorial force with its own officers and no obligations beyond defense with Asquith and wrote back to White that Asquith took up " his favourite non-possumus attitude, shook his head somewhat sadly, I thought, as he replied " Hors la loi" as if that ended it all, I suppose it does for a lawyer" ⁵⁶. According to White Hamilton told him that when Asquith discussed it with Kitchener later he was even more opposed " Kiltchener declared he would

not trust one single Irishman with a rifle in his hand one single yard and he made no exception for Redmond or anybody else. " ⁵⁷ White made a last effort by writing to Lord Roberts as Horace Plunkett had shown him his correspondence about the prospects of coming to Ireland for a recruitment campaign. However it was again rejected as Roberts wrote to Lady White: "I would have responded to his call to go to Ireland if I felt there was the slightest chance of his being able to do any good but from what I heard from everyone in Ireland of whom I knew enough to write to, I was satisfied it was a hopeless task to undertake, and I reluctantly gave it up. ⁵⁸Despite the futility of these efforts it is notable that they were referred to in the newspaper death reports of Captain White in 1946.

Thus ended Captain Jack White's involvement with the Citizens Army and the Volunteers - but not his activism. He immediately left for France and adapting his own Ford two-seater with an Ambulance body went to work with an Australian Ambulance Unit and then later at Dunkirk where his wife Dollie joined him to work as a nurse. His experience close to the front line had a powerful impact. By 1916 he had abandoned these efforts, filled with loathing of the 'whole filthy mechanical slaughter'. ⁵⁹His wife having long gone home he had an interlude in Paris where he stayed with Maud Gonne and spent time mingling with the Latin Quarter community. On hearing that James Connolly might be executed for his role in the Rising White agitated amongst miners in South Wales for a strike to protest for leniency. He was jailed in Swansea on May 24th and some weeks later moved to Pentonville Prison. ⁶⁰ He was put in the prison hospital and on the day after he arrived Roger Casement was hanged there in the adjacent yard. "The hospital authorities were very kind. They allowed me to exercise at will in the hospital compound. Ten yards the other side was Roger Casement's grave. It was not the government's attention but Casement and I were reconciled, even united, at last."⁶¹



A young Jack White during his days serving with the British army (Courtesy of Dr Leo Keohane)

From then on there are just fleeting glimpses of White in the story of the new Ireland. He received an exclusion order from Ireland, from the Chief Secretary Henry Duke, on his release from Pentonville. In December 1916 he proposed to the Labour Leader Thomas Johnson a plan for he called "the full utilisation of Ireland's manpower" as a way of avoiding conscription and through the assistance of Stephan Gwynne MP met the Chief Secretary Duke to discuss the proposal. The plan was rejected and when White wrote to Johnson (and George Russell) to condemn the 'blind discourtesy' shown to the TUC, he also complained of their failure to assist in getting his exclusion order revoked.⁶²

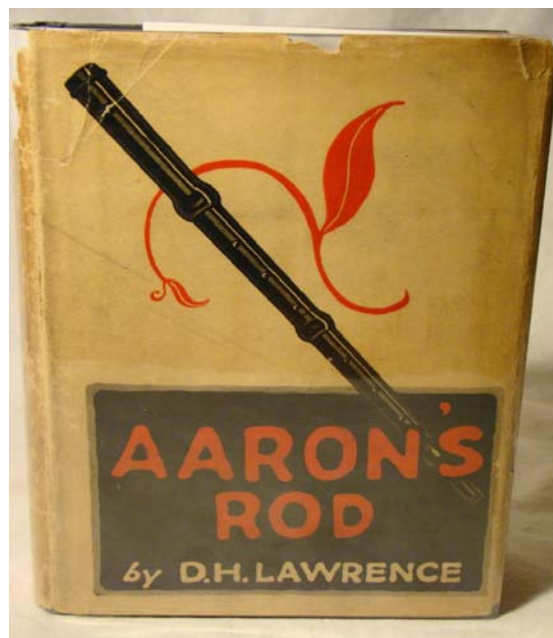
White also made submissions to the Chief Secretary to try and improve the prison conditions of Countess Markievicz and he was part of the welcoming party on her release. He joined her and Eve Gore-Booth for strawberries and cream on the balcony of the House of Commons in a show of defiance reported in the press.⁶³ In 1918 he published a pamphlet called *The Significance of Sinn Fein* which explained the rise of the party in the aftermath of the Rising: "the inborn race-inspiration of Ireland, which Labour represents, has got to be harmonized with the conclusions and demands of Labour. Failing that, Labour's efforts will lack the subliminal elements of genius and Sinn Fein will be in danger of lapsing into hysteria".⁶⁴

He offered to stand as a Labour candidate in the 1918 election, writing to William O'Brien and Thomas Johnson from Surrey on October 7th but his offer was rejected as "candidates must be and remain members in good standing of Labour organisations. and as I understand you are not a member of any such Union you could not be adopted as a Parliamentary candidate."⁶⁵

Due to the exclusion order he was now living in England and mixing in literary circles. In late 1918 he met D H Lawrence in Bloomsbury and later travelled to stay with Lawrence and his wife Frieda. The visit was so memorable it became a chapter in Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod* where White is the character Jim Bricknell. Lawrence describes their first meeting:

"Jim Bricknell was a tall big fellow of thirty eight. He sat in a chair in front of the fire, some distance back, and stretched his long legs far in front of him. His chin too was sunk on his breast, his young forehead was bald and raised in odd wrinkles, he had a silent half-grin on his face, a little tipsy, a little satyr-like. His small moustache was reddish. Behind him a round table was covered with cigarettes, sweets and bottles. It was evident Jim Bricknell drank beer for choice. He wanted to get fat- that was his idea. But he couldn't bring it off, he was thin, not too thin, except to his own thinking..."⁶⁶ Then the Bricknell character arrives to stay with the couple in their cottage:

"(he) saw Jim's tall, rather elegant figure stalking down the station path. Jim had been an official in the regular army, and still spent hours with his tailor. But instead of being a soldier he was a sort of socialist and a red-hot revolutionary of a very ineffectual sort... Jim's work in town was merely nominal and he spent his time wavering about, going to various meetings, philandering and weeping."⁶⁷



The front cover of Aaron's Rod by D H Lawrence (<http://www.abebooks.co.uk>)

The chapter recounts an intense discussion between Bricknell and the couple over his approach to life and religion as inspired by his statement "I think the greatest joy is to sacrifice yourself to love". This belief in love as the life-force that brought unity to everything and often exhibited by strong physical (often sexual) impulses is similar to White's explanation of his major life decisions in *Misfit*. Sometimes these impulses inform his spiritual and political decisions, sometimes they lead to impulsive behavior and at times to sexual pursuit. The impulse is often so powerful he feels it as a stirring in his chest.

In politics "The Irish problem was the sex problem writ large", Protestantism with male attributes, Catholicism with female ones and "Like the personal sex problem it was insoluble without a fundamental change in the relations of the partners".⁶⁸ In his personal life too the sexual side is a constant theme leading to his intense courtship of his first wife Dollie, to his time in the free love commune. In 1916 having left the front line he recounts being healed by an affair on the left bank in Paris and he is reported as having proposed the setting up of free love colonies in Ireland in the 1920's.⁶⁹

But the love impulse is also what informs his Christian activism and this is what is challenged by Lawrence whose character attacks relentlessly the naivety of his proposition. The argument is ended when Bricknell punches the Lawrence character three times in the chest and winds him. That ends the discussion and despite the sympathy of the wife, they part never to meet again. The impulsiveness of the action and the intensity of the argument are characteristic of White's own self portrait. In *Misfit* he recounts hitting Dollie during an intense argument on religion. D. H. Lawrence called this chapter : " A Punch in the Wind". (It is believed that White is also in a novel by Mary Manning, *Mount Venus*, where his character is called Captain Cock-eye!)⁷⁰

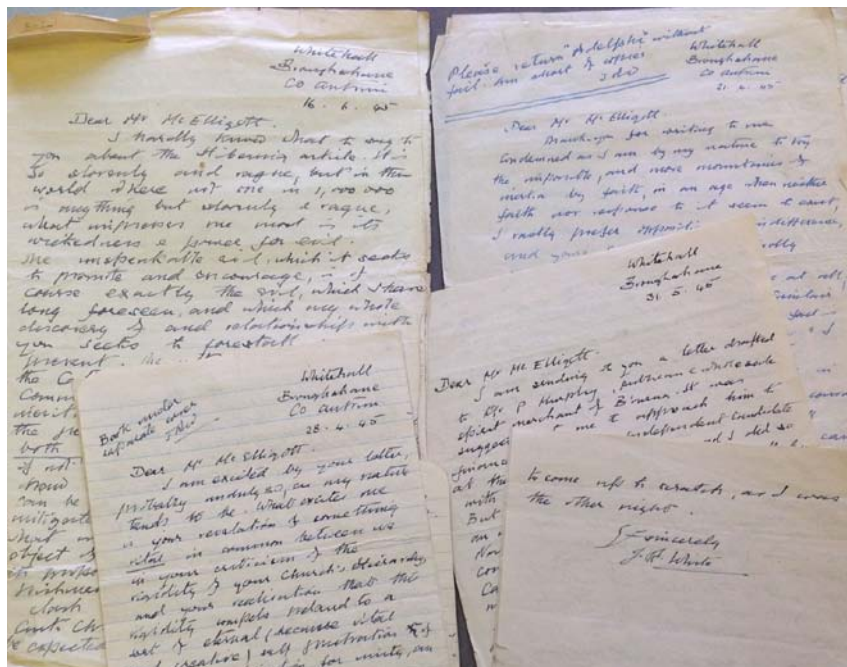
The following decade saw him become more radical in his politics and influenced by the Russian Revolution. He continued to be involved in protests and was jailed twice in 1920 in Dublin, once in Edinburgh and in 1922 was again arrested in Dublin.⁷¹ This time he failed in a Habeas Corpus motion before the Chief Justice where Hugh Kennedy and John A. Costello represented the State. He was approached by the Donegal Republican Workers Council to run as a candidate in the 1923 election. Before he left he made a speech in the Mansion House in Dublin where he condemned the republican physical force movement as morally and politically unsound and said he wanted to run as a 'Christian communist'. The offer was refused by the time he got to Donegal.⁷² He joined the Irish Workers League founded by Jim Larkin later that year and was a founder member with Roddy Connolly of the Communist Workers Party of Ireland in 1926. (In 1920 he had funded Connolly's trip to the Second World Congress of the Russian Communist Party, during which Connolly met Lenin).⁷³ White, together with Maud Gonne and Peadar O'Donnell, launched the party's national unemployment movement in 1926 with the aim of having a united action against unemployment (Sean Lemass and Sean McEntee were to address subsequent meetings). During 1927 he featured in British Secret service files for his involvement with a paramilitary group called the Workers Defence Corps created to defend workers interests but suspected of providing links between the IRA and Moscow.⁷⁴ White was served in 1931 with an exclusion order from Northern Ireland (other than Limavady where he could visit his daughter) following imprisonment for his role in street disturbances relating to the Workers Groups unemployment protests. In the disturbances he was charged with attacking the police with the cry of "Up the Reds. Up Moscow" but claimed to have been battered by six policemen. In an action reminiscent of a decade earlier Captain White paraded his wounds as proof of the assault and wore a blood stained bandage on his head as he stood in the dock at the Belfast Custody Court.⁷⁵

His autobiography *Misfit* was published in 1930 (and is said to have been proof-read by T.E. Lawrence - of Arabia). The original edition has two extra chapters from the 2005 reprint - one on his childhood and schooling and another on Sandhurst. In late 1993, he joined with Francis Sheehy Skeffington's son Owen on the founding committee of the Irish Secular Society which also included writers Denis Johnston and Mary Manning under the chairmanship of trade unionist John Swift. The society adopted a programme to end clerical management of schools, to end the exemption of churches from rates and taxes, to remove the ban on divorce, repeal the censorship of publications Act and to combat clerical influence in public and business life in promotion of sectarian interests. Following articles in the Irish Press and Irish Catholic which termed it anti-clerical and according to the later an " nefarious anti-God society" where " all the modern, hateful inhuman and unnatural practices are enthusiastically endorsed", it struggled to find places to meet and was wound down.⁷⁶

White organised an ex-servicemen branch of the Republican Congress in 1934 and worked with Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan .During the 1930s he was a committed opponent of Fascism writing on the twentieth anniversary of the execution of Roger Casement in a pamphlet called " *Where Casement would have stood today*" that: " He did not live to see, nor in his failure to analyse the essence of capitalism did he foresee, the horrid phenomenon of Fascism, trying to maintain the profits of

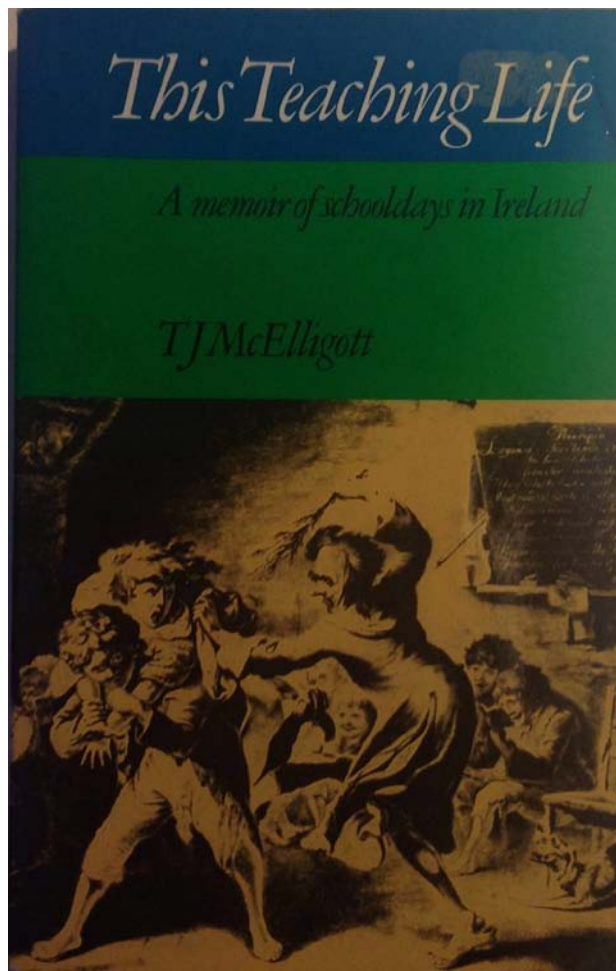
Capitalism by crimes and cruelties as black as those which he exposed in the Congo, but extending over Europe, Asia and Africa. But there can be no shadow of doubt where Casement, who stood, though in separate compartments, for the freedom of oppressed nations and oppressed classes, would have stood against the Fascism that seeks the permanent enslavement of both" 77

Jack White travelled to Republican Spain and served as a Red Cross worker for a time during the Civil War there. He became disillusioned with the communist led brigades but was impressed by the anarchists and found in their philosophy something that cohered with his own. On his return to Britain he became involved in the anarchist movement with leaders such as Emma Goldman and he wrote a pamphlet called the Meaning of Anarchism which according to Fearghal McGarry argued that workers must free themselves through revolution by direct action and the substitution of 'free humanity' from the state.⁷⁸ His new biographer Dr. Keohane sees how Anarchism would have appealed to him: " he had an approach from the start of his life which when examined through the prism of anarchism acquired a certain coherence. Although a superficial glance at his political views would suggest he was a very radical left winger who despite his idiosyncratic pacifism was not adverse to extreme agitation against the state, hindsight allows us to suggest that he had a perspective on the political struggle in Ireland which might have some relevance."⁷⁹ Some of this activism may have involved mirroring Casement in trying to assist in arming anarchists via Czechoslovakia.⁸⁰



A selection of the correspondence between Captain White and T J McElligott in 1945, held by the National Library of Ireland (NLI 10,419)

Jack White married again in 1937, Noreen Shanahan, from Dalkey, his second wife, was a Catholic as was his first (both committing mortal sins by their association with him, he liked to say, see letter to T J McElligott 21st April 1945).⁸¹ They were to have three sons and in 1938 following the lifting of the exclusion order he returned to live in the family home in Broughshane, which he had inherited in 1935 on his mother's death. He supported Ireland's neutrality in the war and together with the veteran of the Curragh Mutiny General Hugh Gough urged all-Ireland co-operation for a defense force for the island (an "Irish People's army of Home Defence) ⁸² His offer to serve in the Home Guard was refused by the Inspector General of the RUC because of his record. ⁸³ The war too brought some reflection by White on his achievement as a founder of the Citizen Army. Responding to the publication of R M Fox's history of the Army, White said that in founding what he called the 'first Red army of Europe' his aim was to achieve social justice without any shedding of blood, the principles it stood for had saved Ireland from conscription and enabled to make the 26 counties neutral and so: " If Ireland through the continuing creative potency of the Citizen Army seed, is destined to keep alive the fundamental opposition of Christianity and Socialism to all war, and help that seed to sprout, after two world wars, on Irish soil, I may end up by being proud."⁸⁴



Captain Jack White died of cancer in a Belfast nursing home in February, 1946, aged 66, having lived through another World War. His estate came to £81.⁸⁵ He was buried at Broughshane Free Presbyterian Church.

His political activism had continued up to a few months previously when he proposed himself as a candidate in the 1945 General Election as a republican socialist candidate for the Antrim constituency. Then a teacher in the Ballymena Academy, T J McElligott went to visit White in his home and attended what may have been his last public meeting in the upper room of the local Orange Hall in Broughshane. In a voice that 'Pavorotti might have envied' White commanded RUC men who were present and hoping to remain unobserved behind cobwebbed Lambeg drums to come out to the front where they could be seen. McElligott said White "commanded a rich vocabulary of language directed at a plethora of targets that included Hitler, the Pope, Lord Brookborough and de Valera but in particular the Orange Order and the Unionist Party for the control they exercised over coercion through the Special Powers Act".⁸⁶ (views he expanded on in letters to McElligott such as one on 16th June 1945)⁸⁷

McElligott, who also had a correspondence with White about Catholicism, writes : "Anyone who met Jack White remembered him. It was not so much his commanding appearance, though someone standing 6 feet 3 inches has an advantage in that respect. Nor was it his voice, that had not entirely lost the very distinctive accent of his native Antrim. It was what Denis Ireland in an unforgettable phrase called the 'apocalyptic grandeur' of the man who had spent a lifetime fighting, and always contra mundum..In his long and tempestuous life White's courage never failed, nor did his conviction that there was an alternative to the monolithic power of the Christian Churches which say as buttressing sectarian divisions. He remained close to the Presbyterian faith within which there was ever room for a robust tradition of dissent as well as vigorous theological dispute. This he welcomed though he dissented from that religion's sense of elitism and supremacy. His was the dilemma that has faced Labour in Northern Ireland, and still faces it of trying to effect a balance between Nationalist and Unionist aspirations."⁸⁸

McElligott said he would remember him not as the figure in Citizen Army uniform or in the broad-beam hat of his autobiography but as he saw him riding through the streets of Ballymena to the Saturday market on his grey horse, surrounded by the hubbub of market day, which at the time included not only locals, who had lived on the family estate, but refugees from Gibraltar, who were staying in the vicinity.

Captain Jack White's name did not make the 1945 General Election ballot paper just as in 2014 his portrait has not made the commemorative stamp. As McElligott says he was like a "twentieth century Don Quixote, he never ceased tilting at windmills" nor punching against the wind.

Further Reading:

1. Captain J. R. White, *Misfit, An Autobiography*, Dublin, 2005, which includes some of White's other writings and *Misfit*, London, 1930 which has two extra chapters on his schooling and military training.
2. Dr. Leo Keohane's forthcoming biography, *Captain Jack White DSO, Imperialist, Anarchist - an Alternative History*", Merrion Press, 2014 and also Dr Keohane's essays on White in *Saothar 38*, 2013 and Sandrine Brisset and Noreen Doody ed., *Voicing dissent; new perspectives in Irish criticism*, Dublin, 2012
3. Profiles of White by Andrew Boyd, Fearghal McGarry, Arthur Mitchell and Ken Doyle.
4. The Citizen Army is detailed in R. M. Fox *The History of the Irish Citizen Army*, 1943, Sean O'Casey, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army 1919* with more personal recollections in Frank Robbins, *Under the Starry Plough*, 1977 and Nora Connolly O'Brien, *James Connolly, Portrait of a Rebel Father*, 1935.
5. For the fictionalised White :D H Lawrence, *Aarons Rod*, 1922.

¹ Captain J.R. White, DSO., *Misfit, An Autobiography*, London, 1930. Only the 1930 edition has the account of his schooling and military training.

² Captain J. R. White, *Misfit, An Autobiography*, Dublin, 2005. p. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴ The letter referred to is April 15th 1912, published in the *Ulster Guardian*, 4th May, 1912 and in White (2005) p. 112

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶ J.R. White, Protestantism and Home Rule, *Irish Review*, January 1913, p. 565.

⁷ Captain J. R. White, *Misfit, An Autobiography*, Dublin, 2005. p. 106.

⁸ J. R. White, A Ride in Andalusia, *Irish Review*, April 1913, p. 63.

⁹ J.B. Armour to W.S Armour 19 September 1913 in J.R.B. Mc Minn, *Against the Tide*, PRONI Belfast, 1985, p. 130.)

¹⁰ J.R. White, *Misfit*, 2005. p. 116. see also account of Ballymoney in Seamus O Siochain, *Roger Casement*, Dublin 2008 pp 358 to 370

¹¹ Roger Casement to Alice Stopford Green, 21 September 1913, NLI, MS 10464)

¹² J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005. p. 117.

¹³ Appendix G in J.R.B. Mc Minn, *Against the Tide*, PRONI Belfast, 1985.

¹⁴ Meeting reports in *Irish Times* and *Freeman's Journal* 25th October 1913.

¹⁵ Angus Mitchell, *Roger Casement*, Dublin, 2013. p. 179.

¹⁶ *The Times*, London, 25 October 1913.

¹⁷ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005 pp. 129-137.

¹⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 3rd November, 1913

¹⁹ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005, p. 145.

²⁰ Padraic Colum, *Arthur Griffith*, Dublin, 1959 p. 118.

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- ²¹ Dublin Correspondent (Francis Sheehy Skeffington), *Daily Herald*, 12th November 1913. See also Donal Nevin ed, *James Larkin, Lion of the Fold*, Dublin, 2006 for these events in particular Nevin's own essay on the Citizen Army, p. 257.
- ²² see Darrell Figgis, *Recollections of the Irish War*, London, 1927 p. 9
- ²³ R. M. Fox, *History of the Irish Citizen Army*, Dublin, 1943. p. 44.
- ²⁴ *Freemans Journal*, 14th November, 1913
- ²⁵ *Irish Times* 19th November, 1913, accounts also from *Freemans Journal*.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Captain Jack White to Roger Casement, 17th November 1913 NLI, MS,13073 (16)
- ²⁸ *Irish Independent*, November 20th 1913,
- ²⁹ William Martin Murphy statement to 1915 Inquiry, *Sinn Fein Rebellion Handbook* 1915 p 191.
- ³⁰ *Irish Times*, 19th November 1913.
- ³¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 20th November 1913.
- ³² *Irish Independent*, 20 November 1913
- ³³ Sean O' Casey, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*, Dublin, 1919. p. 6, see also Donal Nevin, James Connolly, Dublin 2005 and Padraig Yeates, *Lockout -Dublin 1913*, Dublin, 2000.
- ³⁴ Jack White letter to Lady White, 29th November, 1913, quoted in J.R. White, *Misfit*, 2005. p 170.
- ³⁵ see F X Martin, F V Byrne, *The Scholar Revolutionary Eoin Mac Neill and the Making of a New Ireland*, Dublin 1973 and F X Martin ed., *The Irish Volunteers, 1913-1915*, Dublin, 1963.
- ³⁶ R. Casement to Eoin MacNeill, 24 November 1913, NLI 36,203.
- ³⁷ Accounts from *Freemans Journal* and *Irish Independent*, 26th November 1913..
- ³⁸ Bureau of Military History WS 264 (Aine Ceannt) Irish Military Archives Dublin,
- ³⁹ Mac Neill to Casement 25th November 1913, NLI 36,203/1
- ⁴⁰ MacNeill to Casement 27th November 1913 NLI 36,203/1
- ⁴¹ Telegram 8th December 1913 O'Brien Papers NLI 156,73.
- ⁴² Nora Connolly O'Brien, *James Connolly, Portrait of a Rebel Father*, Dublin 1935 p 154.
- ⁴³ William O'Brien (as told to Edward MacLysaght), *Forth the Banners Go*, Dublin, 1969. p.118.
- ⁴⁴ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005 p 177.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid* p163 and Irish and Sunday Independent accounts of hearings 15,16,21, 22, 23,29 March 1914.
- ⁴⁶ Fox 1943 p 65 and NLI 15673 (2)
- ⁴⁷ Jack White to Lady White 16th April 1914 in White, 2005, p.200.
- ⁴⁸ Tom Clarke to John Devoy, May 14th 1914, John Devoy (edited by Desmond Ryan and William O'Brien), *Devoy's Post Bag*, Dublin 1948.
- ⁴⁹ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005. p. 202
- ⁵⁰ O'Casey, 1919. p. 42.
- ⁵¹ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005 p 217
- ⁵² Maurice Moore account of Derry in his History of the Irish Volunteers series, *Irish Independent* 18th January 1938.
- ⁵³ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005 pp 202-206
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211
- ⁵⁵ Capt. J. R. White to Sir Ian Hamilton quoted in White, 2005 p. 217
- ⁵⁶ White, 2005. p 222.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 223
- ⁵⁸ Lord Roberts to Lady White 31st October 1914 quoted in White, 2005. p. 225.
- ⁵⁹ White, 2005 p 227
- ⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, May 25th 1916.
- ⁶¹ White, 2005. p. 230
- ⁶² J. R. White to Thomas Johnson, 14th January 1917, Thomas Johnson Papers NLI 17,238. Also Andrew Boyd, *Jack White, First Commander Irish Citizen Army*, Belfast, 2001. pp 32-33.
- ⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 21st June 1917, also Sonja Tiernan, Eva Gore-Booth: An image of such politics, Manchester, 2012.
- ⁶⁴ J.R. White, *The Significance of Sinn Fein, 1918*
- ⁶⁵ Correspondence in William O'Brien Papers NLI, 15673
- ⁶⁶ D.H. Lawrence, *Aarons Rod*, London, 1922 Chapter 3. See also Mark Kinhead-Weekes, *D H Lawrence, Triumph to Exile 1912-1922*, Cambridge, 2011.
- ⁶⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Aarons Rod*, London, 1922. Chapter 8, p 73 (Cambridge 1988)
- ⁶⁸ J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005 p. 100.

⁶⁹ Leo Keohane, *Captain Jack White DSO*, in Sandrine Brisset and Noreen Doody ed., *Voicing dissent; new perspectives in Irish criticism*, Dublin, 2012. p. 245. Attributed to Rory Campbell interviews.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.245.

⁷¹ Manchester Guardian, April 30, 1921 and Irish Times, 16th September 1922.

⁷² J. R. White, *Misfit*, 2005, p 311.

⁷³ Andrew Boyd, *Jack White, First Commander Irish Citizen Army*, Belfast 2001. pp. 37,38.

⁷⁴ Paul MacMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels*, Boydell Press, 2008 p 209.

⁷⁵ Leo Keohane, *Captain Jack White* in *Saothair* 38, 2013 p161 and Kevin Doyle, *Captain Jack White*, <http://struggle.ws/anarchists/jackwhite/bio.html>, James Kelly, *Bonfires on the Hillside*, Belfast 1995.

⁷⁶ see account in John Swift, *Report of Commission on Vocational Organisations (and its times 1930-40's)* in *Saothar*, Vol 1 No 1, May, 1975.

⁷⁷ Captain J. R. White, *Where Roger Casement would have stood today*, 1936.

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⁷⁹ Leo Keohane, 2012. also J R White, *The Meaning of Anarchism*, 1937 reprinted in White, 2005.

⁸⁰ claims by Albert Melzer see Máirtín Ó Catháin, *A Wee Black Booke of Belfast Anarchism (1867-1973)*, Belfast, 2004 and Boyd, 2001 .

⁸¹ J R White to T J McElligott NLI 10,419

⁸² Arthur Mitchell, *White, James Robert* in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>

⁸³ Keohane, 2013. reference 25.

⁸⁴ J R White letter in *Irish Times* 3rd September 1943.

⁸⁵ Arthur Mitchell, *White, James Robert* in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>

⁸⁶ T J McElligott, *Jack White of Ballymena*, *Ballymena Guardian*, 3rd August 1989.

⁸⁷ J R White to T J McElligott NLI 10,419

⁸⁸ T J McElligott, *This Teaching Life*, Dublin 1986.