

CAB/37/147/7

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SECRET.

GERMANY AND THE SINN FEINERS.

THE enclosed note, which I have received from Mr. Basil Thomson, Assistant Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, may be of interest to my colleagues.

H. S.

Home Office, May 2, 1916.

Mr. Bullard, an American, who happened to be staying with Sir Horace Plunkett at the time of the Irish rising, told me his experiences to-day.

He had talked to a great number of people in the Dublin streets, both on Monday evening and all the subsequent days till Friday evening, when he left. Among these were a number of Sinn Feiners and neutrals. He says that all the Sinn Feiners were counting upon a German invasion of the east coast, which would draw away the British troops and make the rising possible. As soon as they found that troops were moving into Ireland they realised that the game was up, and they all wanted to surrender, but they feared that they would be shot out of hand if they did so, and that is why the house-to-house fighting was maintained so long. Mr. Bullard said that all the national flags were hoisted at the Post Office in the hope of drawing in the supporters of all nationalist organisations, Redmondites and national volunteers as well as Sinn Feiners. The stories about the shooting of unarmed British officers, &c., were not true, the attitude of the Sinn Feiners in the early stages being to be as conciliatory as possible.

He spoke to one man who was asking anxiously whether the Germans had yet landed on the east coast. Mr. Bullard said, "Do you mean the east coast of England or Ireland?" The Sinn Feiner replied that he had never thought of that, but he supposed it meant Ireland.

This belief fits in pretty closely with what Sir Roger Casement said in his statement. There had at some time been a definite undertaking on the part of the German Government to send over officers and men to support the Irish rising, but the Germans had gone back on it. A copy of this part of his statement is appended.

Mr. Bullard is of opinion that if the Irish-Americans knew that the Germans had let the Sinn Feiners down it would have a very marked political effect, for it would cause a definite split between the Germans and the Irish in America, and would also withdraw the Irish from the Indian revolutionary movement in California. He suggests that it would be useless to do this by any newspaper communiqué, which would at once be suspect, but he thinks that if the evidence could be shown confidentially to leading Irish-Americans of position the effect would be much greater.

APPENDIX.

Extract from Notes of Interviews with Sir Roger Casement.

I knew nothing about the ship's cargo except that she had rifles, machine guns, &c. I wanted more, many more rifles, cartridges, &c., and I was told that was all could be sent. There were 20,000 rifles.

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The proposal came upon me as a thunder-clap. I came out of bed without the doctor's advice and came from Munich, and they put it to me that I should go. Of course there could be no question. It arose in this way—my friends wished me to stay in Germany, and when I came to that part of the letter written by a friend of mine in which he was asking for this help, the official letter said, of course Sir Roger Casement should stay in Germany. I said, "Under no circumstances could I stay. If there is going to be fighting in Ireland I must go," and the officer in charge of the business, a high official, said, "You cannot stay." Mr. Monteith begged me to go, and I said, "You have nothing to do with it." Then we discussed merely details as to whether a large armament could not be sent, and these military officials said, "No, it is impossible to send more at that time, at any rate," and certain essential parts of what my friends were asking for were not being sent.

"If you are desirous of knowing," I said, "I have been here for a year and a half, and begged you again and again to send rifles to Ireland, and you refused always. Now you spring it at my head at the eleventh hour, when I have long given it up, of hoping to arm my countrymen. At last you have come with this offer of the belated help, and it synchronises with what I can only regard as a hopeless rising in Ireland, where my countrymen will be shot down. Obviously I think it is cowardly, dastardly, and I go alone." They wanted me to take all my Irish boys. We had a terrible fight and I won the day. I said, I won't do it. I shall not have it said that I handed these men over to the hangman.

On the 7th March Monteith came to me from Berlin telling me that they proposed to land arms in Ireland, and I wrote him that if arms are to be sent first, make sure that you can establish communication with the people in Ireland, otherwise it is murderous. I propose to go to Ireland myself, and take one or two men myself, and send one man back. I then wrote a telegram from the hospital urging upon them the necessity of sending a submarine with me, as I am the only person who can speak authoritatively. I never dreamed of a rising then. The rising would take place on the 23rd April, whether arms came or not. They wanted artillery, &c., and they told us that this could not be given us, and they would not give us any officers. They said they would give us so many rifles and machine-guns, and you can take your Irish Brigade. I said "No; that will be murder." I said I would go myself. They said, "You must take some used to machine-guns, as this is a military necessity." We had a long conversation, and I said, "I leave it to you, with your military knowledge." I said that the danger would not lie from the shore but from the sea, and our machine-guns will not be any good against a warship. If my friends can organise a rising on the 23rd April I'll go myself first, and I landed in Ireland and knew the thing to be hopeless. The General Staff told me that the Irish Brigade were not under my orders. I said "You can make them go if you like, but you will see that they won't go," and in the end they gave in. If you want this thing to succeed, and think that gunners are vitally necessary, I do not think they are necessary. They said "Not at all. It will be a success, and you will be able to dictate terms to the British Government."