**CASEMENT MEMORANDA TO FOREIGN OFFICE AND LORD SALISBURY ON HIS 10 AND 11 OCTOBER 1900 MEETINGS WITH KING LEOPOLD IN BRUSSELS**

**TNA FO 2/336**

**Casement memorandum to Foreign Office**

**10 October 1900**

**Memorandum of Conversations with the King-Sovereign of the Congo State. October 10th., 1900.**

On arriving at Brussels on the morning of the 10th October I called on Mr. Phipps and learned that the King had, on learning of my visit, invited me to breakfast at 1 o'clock.

There were present apart from the King, the Queen, the Princess Clementine, and the dignitaries de service of the Court. HRH the Duke of Aosta and Prince Victor Napoleon with whom His Majesty talked for some time after we had left the table.

Coming to me, the King, who greeted me most cordially, spoke for some time upon his object in the Congo Country.

Chief of these he seemed to put his desire for the well being and good government of the natives – a wish he asserted that was continually being impressed upon his officers.

But it needed time, he said, to obtain the desired results; progress in such a country was necessarily slow, and the natives must work, they must learn to appreciate the value of work.

I remarked that I thought the imposition of a hut tax would serve well in our colony of Sierra Leone – that it should impress upon the natives not only the value of work but a sense of responsibility, both to the tax collector, as for what went on under the roof so taxed, that in fact what a man had to pay for he would naturally come to regard as worth taking good care of, and that thus, this tax might be said to work as much towards the enlightenment of those meeting it, as to the profit of the Administration imposing it.

This view seemed to appeal to His Majesty who said that he had wished not to levy direct taxes upon the natives, but to induce them to develop their country by working its india rubber, to their own benefit and to the profit of the Companies interested.

This was not forced labour, although it was necessary to insist that the natives should work.

I said the problem of inducing the native to work confronted all the governments interested in African territory. Our own colonies perhaps more than any others.

Upon a remark of mine as to the greatness of His Majesty's task in ensuring good government over so widespread an area as his Congo Dominions, the King very promptly said they were by no means too large – these possessions were not a Colony and he did not think they were at all too large as African territories went today – certainly not when put in comparison with the great acquisitions in Africa made by Germany, by England and above all by France – many of them acquisitions effected since the date of the founding of the Congo State.

When he had inaugurated the state of things upon the Congo which is today the Congo Independent State, His Majesty said, it might have been held to be a large tract of country that had been acquired, but today he did not think it was too large beside those neighbouring territories, nor too great for the resources and capabilities of Belgium to develop. His Majesty added that before he did anything upon the Congo he had sought the views of England, and he had been thereby encouraged to go on with his work; he had then with the assistance of Stanley and others sought to carry out his ideas.

He seemed desirous of impressing me with the fact that England had in the early stages of his work approved of his efforts; and towards the end of our conversation His Majesty said that he desired to adhere strictly to his agreements with Foreign Powers relative to the Congo – and above all his agreements with England.

In conclusion His Majesty very graciously invited me to visit him tomorrow at the palace, to further discuss Congo affairs.

Brussels

10th October, 1900

**TNA FO 2/336**

**Casement memorandum to Foreign Office**

**11 October 1900**

**Memorandum of Conversations with the King–Sovereign of the Congo State. October 11th., 1900.**

According to His Majesty's wish, I went to the Palace at 12:45 today and was at once shown into the King's presence.

The conversation which followed lasted for an hour and a half, and was chiefly carried on by the King, who laid what he declared to be his plans on the Congo very frankly before me.

His Majesty began by asking me some personal questions as to my own connection with the Congo and then at some length referred to the impending settlement of his Eastern Congo frontier with Germany, – a settlement, he declared, not without interest to England, since England had come to an agreement with him in 1894 with a view to once acquiring for railway purposes a strip of territory not entirely within, but affected by the present German demands.

These demands were that the left or eastern bank of the river Rusigi, and the eastern shore of lake Kivu were, or should be German territory.

His Majesty stated that he had agreed to a joint Congo-German commission for the delimitation of the frontier; his policy being based on the recognition by Germany, through Prince Bismarck of the frontiers of the newly founded Congo State as these had been submitted at the time for European approval.

The German claim to the left banks in question, His Majesty continued, was only accepted by him if the event proved that they lay beyond the cartographical limits – or I should say the meridional limits – of the frontiers so determined as his by the assembled Powers; if they lay to the east of this limit they were not his, but if, as was scarcely in any doubt, to the west of that meridian then he did not see why he should abandon them to the German demand.

Upon this point the King again drew my attention to the interest England, he thought, should take in the settlement. His Majesty seemed to wish to convey to me that unless he were supported he should be reluctantly forced to give way to Germany upon a point that it was to English interests he should not recede upon.

His Majesty then referred at considerable length to the Congo agreement of May 1894 wherein, he said, he had not been (this he put forward most confidentially) altogether well treated by the British Government.

These entirely confidential remarks of the King, I cannot but think were intended less for my personal edification than as rather constituting the moral basis of a claim for considerate treatment by Her Majesty's Government of questions which might yet arise between His Majesty and ourselves.

Viewed thus, there is, I hope, no violation of confidence in repeating them.

As regards the part of that agreement affecting German interests the King said that when Germany had protested in London against the lease to England of the strip of land acquired for railway purposes. The British Government desirous of emerging with dignity from the position it found itself in had been released from the appearance of having to give way to German demands by a seemingly spontaneous request he had readily addressed to Her Majesty's Government, expressing as his own the desire that the offending clause of the agreement should be withdrawn by Her Majesty's Government.

The King then went on to contrast this act of friendship on his part – not in specific terms of contrast but unquestionably meant as such – with the lack of support afforded him by Her Majesty's Government when difficulties for him arose with France upon another clause of that agreement.

A word spoken in time at Paris by Her Majesty's Government would have saved, so he declared, the Congo Government the very unpleasant (I think the word used was stronger) withdrawal Monsieur Hanotaux had forced upon him.

But that word had not been spoken; and Her Majesty's Ambassador at Paris had even been intentionally absent during the climax of these negotiations (so at least the King said his opponents gave him to understand) until by the absence of all support it became known that he had been compelled to sign the agreement with France.

The British Government was strong enough – as events proved – to have spoken that word, and although he did not complain, His Majesty sought to show me very clearly that he felt somewhat deeply the inability of Her Majesty's Government to then maintain him, its own tenant, in the lease it had had itself granted him.

I said, since he appealed to me for an expression of opinion on this point, that I knew nothing of the subject, nor was it, as His Majesty must recognise the place of so subordinate an official as myself to express an opinion upon such matters; but since His Majesty honoured me by asking the personal view of one so simply placed as myself, I said I feared that something more than a word at Paris would have been necessary.

A word, and a very plain word had once been spoken on a kindred subject which the French Government had not at all regarded until later events compelled the recognition of its force in France.

His Majesty reflected that had the agreement of 1894 with himself been maintained by England, his occupation of that country under M. van Kerckhaven would have effectually barred the way to the French advance to Fashoda; and that the word might have been spoken more profitably to England, and quite as successfully insisted on in 1894 as in 1898.

I expressed no opinion upon this point, but listened to His Majesty's elaboration of what he seemed to regard as a grievance not altogether of the past.

His Majesty referred to the reported outrages on the Congo which had provoked in England, as also in Belgium, hostile comment upon the Congo Administration – comments that were sometimes, he feared, well founded, since it was impossible to have always the best men in Africa; and indeed the African climate seemed to frequently cause deterioration in the character of the men previously deemed of the highest standing; he instanced the case of the Prince d'Arenberg in German East Africa **[jailed for murdering his native servant]** as supporting this view.

Our conversation turned later upon the commercial point of view, and the King said he hoped to establish a profitable trade on that for his territories by the Nile; that he asked nothing from England in this respect, save only not to be stopped.

There was complete equality in trade, he declared, upon the Congo, save only that the Congo Government reserved under the name of “Domaine Privé” certain districts of the country whence a revenue for public purposes was derived.

This revenue did not at all – as was sometimes most unthoughtfully asserted – enter into His Majesty's pocket, but was essentially devoted to the public service.

By this means, the King said, the Congo country was governed without resort to direct taxation of the natives.

His Majesty laid stress upon the paramount duty of guarding the frontiers of the state. The assertion of this duty was perhaps provoked by a statement of mine to the effect that I thought British occupation of the wilder parts of Africa was much slower but possibly surer than that of other European Powers enjoying sovereignty there; that where others were satisfied with launching into the vague unknown within their borders, expeditions and flags which could leave no permanent good behind them, I thought we were content to go slowly, so that, where we went we established effective and useful administration.

As a result, our ports were, I believed, in the main real centres of beneficial authority upon the native mind.

His Majesty quickly said that for a Great Power like England this gradual process of expansion was possible. Since none would dare to contest its assigned limits but that for him, for a weak child like his Congo State it was vital to maintain his treaty frontiers and to keep at every essential point a sufficient force upon it.

Otherwise it might at any moment it might be asserted that his territories were a “no man's land”; or his native subjects might commit outrages across the borders within neighboring territories, which could give their Governments occasions to complain – or even to take action in a way detrimental to the Congo State.

Throughout our conversation His Majesty again and again referred in very admiring terms to England and to the help that could be afforded him by English countenance.

I thought it well to remark, as bearing upon this, that public opinion that was so powerful a factor in our affairs, was greatly interested in unrestricted commerce, and that any measures tending to facilitate trade dealings on the Congo would be welcomed in England in influential commercial quarters.

His Majesty said the Congo Government had powers to buy out the railway company, whose tariff he admitted was excessively, nay, enormously high, but that, although he felt strongly this excessive tariff – which cost his own government administration a fifth of its yearly income in payments to the company, he also felt it might be unjust to those who had come forward at a time when a profitable outcome to their investment was doubtful, and had risked their capital in constructing that line, to now deprive them of the fruit of their foresight.

The gist of His Majesty's remarks to me was, I think, summed up in the following words, which I will endeavour to reflect almost as uttered.

“Finally”, he said, “I will say to you that I want to observe my agreement with all the great Powers and above all with England;

As sovereign of this country – Belgium – I am responsible to Europe for the maintenance of order in this central point of Europe; – there must be here no outbreak of disorder, no recurrence of the Commune of Paris.

We are seven millions of Belgians, and two millions of them are workmen, and I can only maintain order here, I can only fulfill my obligations to the Great Powers to keep the peace here, by finding an outlet for the work of these workmen.

Do you not think I am right?”

His Majesty repeated this inquiry more than once, and to it I replied that these objects were most laudable and that I felt certain they must command the sympathy of all my countrymen.

“Yes”, – he went on – “I sit here to try to do this; am I not right to try to help my people – my two millions of workmen to find a little sugar a little tea – a few added comforts to their daily bread? We are only a small people, and you are a great people, all I ask is that a few, only a few of the crumbs (this word the King repeated several times) that fall from your well stocked English table may be for my people.

And Yet in England you are suspicious of us, you are sometimes mistrustful of me; you stand in my way when I try to do this; but I want you to realise truly my objects. Those are my objects. And yet when we try to make railways in Asia; when my people push into out of the way parts of the world in pursuit of this laudable object you often say in England – 'Ah – these Belgians, we can't have them there'. “

I said I hoped my countrymen would not be found treading on the toes of the Belgians in this respect; and that so far as it lay within the scope of my duties upon the Congo I trusted I should always be found trying to facilitate good relations between my countrymen and His Majesty's people.

In taking leave of His Majesty, who very cordially asked me to write to him if at any time I might wish to do so, I said I felt sincerely grateful for the gracious manner in which His Majesty had received me at Brussels.

Brussels

11th October 1900

**TNA FO 2/336**

**Casement to Salisbury**

Confidential

12 Aubrey Walk

London

14 October 1900

My Lord,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a Memorandum of conversations I had with the King-Sovereign of the Congo State during my recent visit to Brussels.

The Most Honourable

The Marquess of Salisbury KG

etc etc etc

Mr. Phipps having asked for copies of these memoranda, I propose, unless your Lordship should direct them to be sent direct from the Foreign Office to myself dispatch copies to His Majesty's Legation at Brussels.

I have the Honour to be

My Lord,

Your Lordship’s most obedient,

Humble servant

Roger Casement.

**Copy of 2 memoranda to be sent Confid to Mr. Phipps for his imprimatur.**

**FO note:** The King might have been a lawyer perpetually retained for the criminal.??

Oct. 29. ?? 1900

London 14 October

Consul Casement

2 Inclosures

Received by hand Oct 15

Mr. Casement's visit to Brussels

Memorandum of his conversations with the King-Sovereign of the Congo State ??

**TNA FO 2/336**

**Foreign Office to Casement**

Draft

Mr. Roger Casement

HM Consul for the Congo Independent State

FO October 19, 1900

Sir,

I am directed by the Marquess of Salisbury to acknowledge the receipt of your dispatch of the 14 instant enclosing Memorandum on the subject of the conversation you had with HM the King of the Belgians on the Congo Independent State on your recent visit to Brussels.

I want to convey to you Lord Salisbury's thanks for these memoranda which H.L. has read with the greatest interest.

(signed) ??