

EIRE AND GERMANY

*Some "Top Secret" Documents of
the Second World War*

Reviews of Two Volumes of Documents
from the Archives of the German Foreign
Ministry and the Reich Chancellery
captured after the Second World War,
and published by H.M. Stationery Office.

By

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FOREWORD

After Germany had capitulated a very large consignment, amounting to 400 tons, of documents from the archives of the German Foreign Ministry and the Reich Chancellery was discovered by the Allied Forces carefully hidden in the Hartz Mountains.

In June, 1946, the British Foreign Office and the United States Department of State agreed jointly to publish these documents. In April, 1947, the French Government was granted the right to participate in this project.

The two volumes dealt with here did not appear in chronological order.

Volume VII, "The Last Days of Peace," August 9—September 3, 1939, was reviewed by Sir Douglas Savory on February 19, 1957.

Volume IX was reviewed on October 17, 1956. It covers the period March 18—June 22, 1940.

ORIGIN OF EIRE'S NEUTRALITY

Documents reveal that handing over of Treaty ports was an act of folly

Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 (Series D, Volume VII)—"The Last Days of Peace," August 9-September 3, 1939. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956.

This volume gives the fullest particulars of the origin of the policy of neutrality adopted by Eire in the Second World War.

Mr. Hempel, the German Minister in Dublin, telegraphed on August 26, 1939, to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin a very important despatch in which he described a conversation which he had had with Mr. Walshe (referred to as "Secretary-General of the Irish Foreign Ministry in Dublin"), in which he stated definitely:—

"That Ireland would remain neutral except in the case of a definite attack, for example, dropping bombs on Irish towns. He could not think that such a

thing would happen through us (i.e., the Germans), as it would not appear to be in the German interest, while, on the other hand, Irish sympathy—especially in view of the strong, perhaps decisive influence of the American-Irish against an American-British alliance—could not be a matter of indifference to us. . . . He repeated the suggestion . . . that a formal declaration should be made that Germany has no aggressive aims in Ireland, but on the contrary has sympathy for Ireland and Irish national aims—mentioning, if necessary, Northern Ireland—that she regrets Irish suffering and will attempt to keep this to the unavoidable minimum."

A CALL ON

Mr. DE VALERA

In reply to this despatch Herr von Ribbentrop sent a telegram

from Berlin on August 29, 1939, to the German Minister in Dublin in which he wrote as follows:—

"In view of the deterioration in the political situation as a whole, resulting from the behaviour of Poland, it appears expedient that you should now make the declaration to the Irish Government which you suggested. I, therefore, request you to call upon Mr. De Valera without delay and make the following statement to him, which is intended to clarify the attitude which we shall adopt towards Ireland and also the attitude which we for our part expect from Ireland if hostilities cannot after all be avoided.

"In accordance with the friendly relations between ourselves and Ireland we are determined to refrain from any hostile action against Irish territory and to respect her integrity, provided that Ireland for her part, maintains unimpeachable neutrality towards us in any conflict. . . .

" . . . You are requested to deliver this statement in clear yet definitely friendly terms, and in doing so you can refer (without expressly mentioning Northern Ireland) to the wide sympathy felt in Germany for Ireland and the national aspirations of the Irish people. I also request you to add that we have taken steps whereby Irish Nationals resident in Germany may remain there even in the event of war, and in this connection we naturally expect Ireland to reciprocate in a similar way."

The German Minister in Elre telegraphed to the Foreign Minister in Berlin on August 31:—

"I carried out my instructions to-day in the presence of Walshe (Joseph P. Walshe, Secretary to the Department of External Affairs). De Valera repeated the statement previously mentioned in my report of February 23, 1939, that the Government's aim was to remain neutral. The final decision would have to be taken by the Irish Parliament in due course. It was also his wish to maintain friendly relations with Germany."

"Among the danger points mentioned by De Valera were

in particular any violation either by Britain or by us (the Germans) of Irish territorial waters, exploitation of the anti-British radical nationalist movement, and finally any hostile action against the population on the other side of the Northern Ireland frontier who wanted to return to the Irish State. My general impression was one of sincere effort to keep Ireland out of the conflict, but of great fear which De Valera discussed in the usual doctrinaire fashion which betrays his real weakness. Nevertheless, our 'démarche' has made a definitely favourable impression. . . . The Government also wanted a short announcement in the Press that, in view of friendly German-Irish relations, I, on behalf of the Reich Government, had promised respect for Irish neutrality, and De Valera for his part also said that the maintenance of friendly relations with Germany, as well as with other countries, was desirable, and referred again to the declaration of February 17 that the policy of the Irish Government was directed towards neutrality. The Government consider it important that our announcements should be identical and simultaneous. Please telegraph whether you agree and the date of the announcement."

In reply to this telegram the State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, Herr Weizsäcker, telegraphed from Berlin on September 1, 1939, as follows:—

"We are in agreement with the Press announcement as proposed by De Valera. But when our promise is referred to, the words 'conditional on a corresponding attitude by Ireland' must be added. Publication would take place here (in Berlin) in the morning Press of September 3rd."

This was the very day on which war was declared by Great Britain against Germany.

CHURCHILL FORECAST

It was thus that the prophecy made by Mr. Winston Churchill, as he then was, in the House of Commons on May 5, 1938, was fulfilled when he was opposing the

agreement made by Mr. Neville Chamberlain to hand over to Eire the strategic ports of Queenstown, Berehaven and Lough Swilly.

Mr. Churchill said that when the Irish Treaty of 1921 was being negotiated he had been instructed by the Cabinet to prepare that part of the agreement which dealt with strategic reservations. He said he had been advised by Admiral Beatty, who had behind him the whole staff of the Admiralty in prescribing the reservations of the three ports as "the indispensable minimum for strategic security" in a war against an enemy possessing a numerous and powerful fleet of submarines.

"These ports are the essential basis from which the whole operation of hunting submarines and protecting incoming convoys is conducted."

THE "NOOSE"

He tells us that in 1921 the Irish delegates made no difficulty about this. They saw that it was vital to our safety that we should be able to use these ports, and therefore the matter passed into the structure of the Treaty without any serious controversy.

He insisted that the danger which had to be considered was that Ireland might be neutral. He asked what guarantee there was that Southern Ireland would not declare neutrality if we were engaged in war with some powerful nation.

The first steps certainly which such an enemy might take would be to offer complete immunity of every kind to Southern Ireland if she would remain neutral. He pointed out that Mr. De Valera had given no undertaking except to fight against "Partition" as the main object of his life.

He concluded by saying that the ports might be denied in the hour of need, and we might be hampered in the gravest manner in protecting the British population from privation and even starvation. "Who would wish to put his head into such a noose?"

This speech was made while Winston Churchill was still in opposition. After he had become the Head of the Government in 1940, the first speech which I heard him make in the House of Commons on the very day that I took my seat on November 5, 1940, showed clearly how his prophecy with regard to the handing over of the ports had been fulfilled to the very letter.

He said:—

"More serious than the air-raids has been the recent recrudescence of U-boat sinkings in the Atlantic approaches to our islands. The fact that we cannot use the South and West coasts of Ireland to refuel our flotillas and aircraft and thus protect the trade by which Ireland as well as Great Britain lives is a most heavy and grievous burden, and one which should never have been placed on our shoulders, broad though they be."

Mr. De Valera replied to this speech in the Eire Chamber of Deputies on November 7, 1940, when he said:—

"There can be no question of the handing over of these ports as long as this State remains neutral. There can be no question of leasing these ports. They are ours. They are within our sovereignty and there can be no question as long as we remain neutral of handing them over on any condition whatsoever. Any attempt to bring pressure to bear upon us by any side—by any of the belligerents—by Britain—could only lead to bloodshed."

VIEW OF Mr. J. M. ANDREWS

Lord Chatfield, who was First Lord of the Admiralty at the time, had said that he was influenced in consenting to the handing over of the Treaty ports by the political opinion that there was hope that an improved atmosphere would be created which would enable the Navy under circumstances of war to use the ports by consent.

Dramatic Disclosures

I pointed out, in reply, that:—

"Had this Article not been abrogated under agreement with the Free State in 1938 the neutrality of Eire with all its disadvantages would have been rendered impossible."

The late Rt. Hon. J. M. Andrews described how he had gone over to London specially to protest against this agreement.

When Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, referred to the agreement as an act of faith, Mr. Andrews made the retort: "No, it is an act of folly."

Mr. MacDonald, who was subsequently appointed United Kingdom High Commissioner in Canada, told the Women's Canadian Club that "Eire's neutrality has exposed Britain to great dangers. It has increased the possibilities of enemy espionage on our shores, aggravated the danger of U-boat attacks against Atlantic convoys and left open a flank in our defences against invasion."

Mr. O'Kelly, who was at that time Deputy Prime Minister of Eire, showed that there was no gratitude to Great Britain for this valuable concession when he said on June 8, 1938:—

"In the last six years look how we have whipped John Bull every time. Look at the last agreement we have made with her. We won all round us. We wiped her right, left and centre, and with God's help we shall do the same again."

Lord Maugham had succeeded Lord Hailsham as Lord Chancellor on March 9, 1938, but he tells us that this matter of the Anglo-Irish agreement had been settled in the Cabinet before he came on the scene.

IGNORANCE

He says, however, that his predecessor "told me that he had

strongly protested against these provisions of the Anglo-Irish agreement but had been overruled."

Lord Maugham says he felt the same consternation as Churchill, and that the debate of May 5, 1938, was painful reading in the light of subsequent events, and he adds:

"The truth, I think, is that Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. MacDonald did not understand the mentality of the Southern Irish, nor did they bear in mind the claim made by Mr. De Valera in 1937 that 'the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas constituted a sovereign independent and democratic state.'"

"This was, in effect, a repudiation of the Treaties of 1921 and 1925, made without the smallest ground or justification. To give up the three vital harbours to a Government dominated by such a man was a useless display of generosity for which, in fact, Southern Ireland was completely ungrateful."

"Eire during the war, though one of the dominions of the Crown, retained in Dublin representatives of the Axis States with unlimited powers of activity contrary to British interests, and she actually protested against the landing of American troops in Northern Ireland, a territory over which she had no more rights than over Wales."

The last word on these agreements signed on April 25, 1938—less than 18 months before the outbreak of the Second World War—was made by Sir Winston Churchill, when he said: "A more feckless act can hardly be imagined."

DOUGLAS L. SAVORY.

Volume IX opens on March 18, 1940, with the meeting on the Brenner Pass, at which Hitler disclosed to Mussolini his plans for a knock-out blow in the West; it ends with the signature, on June 22, 1940, of the Franco-German armistice at Compiègne. During these three months Hitler successively invaded and occupied Denmark and Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, and defeated France.

Each of these successive invasions is of very great importance from the historical point of view, and would deserve a special article in our columns. Another subject which would merit detailed treatment consists of the German efforts in the United States to sway public opinion and influence the Presidential elections in that country. In fact, these elections form one of the main topics in this volume.

1916 ERROR

Ulster people will be especially interested in the documents setting forth the relations between the Foreign Office in Berlin and Herr Eduard Hempel, who was the German Minister in Dublin from 1937 to 1945. A memorandum by the director of the political department in Berlin, Herr Woermann, is first given, in which he relates a conversation which he had on May 21, 1940, with the Irish Chargé d'Affaires, who made the remark:

"That Ireland wished to maintain neutrality towards all Powers and said personally that Ireland, in the last war against England, had struck too early. This mistake would not be repeated. In view of the German successes the question, however, was whether Ireland would not come too late."

It must be remarked with regard to all these documents that we have here only the official English translation of the original German. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that English style has been sacrificed to literal precision

and the English text reads much more like a translation from German than a piece of literary English.

"LIBERATION" OF

ULSTER

On May 23, 1940, Herr Hempel telegraphed from Dublin to the German Foreign Ministry among other statements the following:—

"Any German assistance, especially a simultaneous proclamation of the liberation of Northern Ireland as a German war aim (a matter in which in itself there is, in my opinion, no German interest) would probably give the anti-English Nationalist Movement a powerful impetus."

"In the present situation, there must, in my opinion, also be borne in mind the possibility that De Valera, exploiting England's dangerous position, will take up again more strongly the realisation of his main aim, namely, the return of Northern Ireland. He has been working in the U.S.A. for a long time for support to this end. Pressure on England might be thought of in the first place as being exercised in such a way that he would point out to the English that there was again a great danger in Ireland becoming involved in the War as long as no decisive step has been taken in settling the Northern Ireland question. I even think that it might be conceivable that the French Government could be interested. Any successes would greatly strengthen De Valera's position in the case of future difficulties."

From the point of view of German relations with Eire a very untoward incident now occurred. This is related in a telegram from Herr Hempel in Dublin to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. It is marked "Most Urgent — Top Secret," and is dated May 24, 1940. The following is the text of the telegram:—

"The Irish radio this evening gave a detailed account of the arrest of the Irishman, Held. In the search of the house, plans of Irish ports and defence establishments, transmitters, 20,000

dollars, a secret code, a parachute of unknown type, insignia of the German Luftwaffe, German World War decorations, a military cap and a black tie of German origin were said to have been found in the room occupied by the German, Brandy."

This discovery naturally aroused serious apprehension in the minds, not only of the Eire Government, but of the general public as to the serious danger of a German invasion of Ireland. In order to remove this fear a telegram was sent by Herr Woermann to the German Legation in Eire dated June 1, 1940. It is marked "Top Secret," and the Director of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry says:—"Please destroy this telegram after you have read it." The telegram says:—

"Enquiries made of the competent authorities have revealed that B(randy) was actually entrusted with special missions directed exclusively against England and was to make use of personal connections with the Irish. Any activity directed against the Irish Government was expressly forbidden. From a group of certain Irish personalities subversive plans against the Irish Government were frequently submitted, and probably also to B., but they were always rejected."

REASSURANCE AND WARNING

It is clear, however, that the Eire Government was still far from being reassured with regard to the danger of a German invasion of Ireland, and consequently Herr Woermann found it necessary to send another telegram to the Legation in Eire. This was marked "Most Urgent and Top Secret." The telegram is dated June 15, 1940. It contains the following statement:—

"In accordance with your suggestion you are empowered to get in touch with the Irish Government in a confidential way regarding the Held-Stuart case. Before the trial starts, and in referring to reports on this case, make the following statement of the German Government's attitude:—"The Irish Government must be clearly aware that the struggle between the German Reich and England

was now entering upon its decisive stage . . . Just because of this, however, we considered it important to inform the Irish Government once again that our sole objective in the struggle was England. We believed that Ireland, whose enemy through history was known to be England was fully aware that the outcome of this struggle would be of decisive importance for the Irish nation and the final realisation of its national demands . . . If your statements along this line meet with ready response you will be able to follow them up with the warning that matters such as the charge against Held should also be treated in a correspondingly careful manner by the Irish Government and, above all, in the Press."

TALK WITH MR. WALSH

In spite of these telegrams, the Eire Government was still far from being satisfied, and Hempel describes an interview which he had with the Ministry of External Affairs in Dublin, and he relates in detail a conversation which he had with Joseph Patrick Walshe, who in the appendix to this volume is described as—"Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs in Eire, 1922-1946"—and is given in Thom of 1952 as Eire Ambassador to the Holy See. The telegram is marked "Top Secret," and is dated June 17, 1940. In this telegram Hempel writes:—

"I carried out the instructions with Walshe to-day. The conversation, in which Walshe expressed great admiration for the German achievements, went off in a very friendly way. I started out by saying that I had reported on the Held affair and the reaction here, especially the increasing Irish fear of Germany. Walshe's reply that it would produce the best effect if we were to declare that we would not make a landing in Ireland, could only meet with a negative reaction on my part, and I added that such a declaration was impossible in the present military situation."

Hempel goes on to say: "In this connection it interested him, especially what I have told him about the importance of the outcome of the war for the final realisation of Irish National demands."

NEUTRALITY

The last document in this volume referring to the relations between Germany and Eire is by far the most interesting of all the talks contained in this series. It is also marked "Top Secret," and is a telegram dated Dublin, June 21, 1940, and is addressed to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin. Hempel reports as follows:—

"De Valera requested me yesterday to call on him for a lengthy conversation, which was held in the presence of Walshe in a forthright and pleasant manner."

In the course of this conversation De Valera said:—

"With Germany's closer approach anxiety had increased, as was understandable, concerning possible German intention to use Ireland as a base for attacks on England by exploiting 'the weak minority which was working against the Government's policy.'"

De Valera went on to say:—

"Except for the minimum of loose connection with the British Empire provided for constitutionally, which was exclusively intended to facilitate the future return of Northern Ireland to the Irish State, and except for the strong economic dependence of Ireland on England, Ireland stands in exactly the same position towards us as toward England."

Hempel continues his dispatch as follows:—

"In a discussion to-day on another subject, Boland (who is described in 'Who's Who' as Assistant Secretary to the Department of External Affairs in Dublin in 1938, and Permanent Secretary in 1946, and is now Eire Representative to U.N.O.) referred to yesterday's conversation with De Valera and told me in strict confidence that English pressure for the abandonment of Irish neutrality—apparently accompanied by the bait of future concessions in respect of Northern Ireland—had recently increased again, but that De Valera had rejected all advances 'most vehemently.'"

HEMPEL AND ULSTER

Hempel concludes with a reference to Northern Ireland, in which he says:—

"In my opinion the recent efforts of groups in Northern

Ireland working for England to undermine Ireland's neutrality by a gradual rapprochement at first, especially in the field of co-ordination of defence measures, have, at present, no prospect of success. Lord Craigavon, whose position is indeed under attack by his own rank and file, is said, furthermore, to have rejected all advances for a rapprochement with the Irish State. In these circumstances the influence of the United States for a settlement of the Northern Ireland question, said to have been exerted by Roosevelt in a moderate degree solely for the self-seeking purpose of securing the Irish-American vote, is probably no longer being felt. In view of German strength, it seems to me that the idea of possible German action for the return of Northern Ireland would now also find ready acceptance in non-radical nationalist circles."

Hempel evidently still has on his mind the case of Held, because he adds:—

"Despite the few reports I have received of growing pro-German feeling in the country and ostensibly also in the army, my general impression is that the case of Held has, on the whole, also turned feeling against us."

BROKEN PROMISES

If the discovery of the plans of Irish ports and defence establishments in the house of Held in Dublin had roused such fears of a German landing in Ireland, it may well be asked what would have been the consternation at this time had it been known then, what has since been ascertained, that thousands and thousands of photographs and post-cards of all Irish ports and principal towns had been discovered in a garage in Brussels. No citizen of Eire could then have had the least doubt that the Germans, in spite of all their promises, had no intention whatever of observing the neutrality of Eire, and would have invaded it in exactly the same way as they had occupied Denmark and Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium, in spite of the most solemn promises which they had made to the contrary.

DOUGLAS L. SAVORY.

NEUTRALITY

The first document in this volume is the statement of the Committee on the part of the House of Representatives, dated March 1, 1917, in which it is stated that the Committee has been authorized to investigate the situation in Mexico and to report thereon to the House.

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