

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

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Mr Dawson.
Are you aware of the background?

Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

23 December 1999

Cof. 4/1/2000
cc A-6 London
Sec Rec (2)
Counsellor A1
4th Counsellor

Rt. Hon. Tony Blair M.P.
British Prime Minister,
10, Downing Street,
London SW 1.

Dear Tony,

I think we can look back on the developments of this year with a great deal of satisfaction, and look forward with a fair degree of confidence to next year. We have all come too far to fail. I would like to thank you warmly for your own enormous contribution since May 1997 and for the assistance given by both Mo Mowlam and Peter Mandelson. The openness of the new Labour Government in Britain made an enormous difference in enabling us to bring to fruition a project which began under our several predecessors.

I would like to raise with you a matter of largely historical interest, but of some background importance nevertheless to our relations.

Sir Roger Casement, whose remains were returned from Pentonville in a much appreciated gesture by Harold Wilson as Prime Minister in 1965, was a very distinguished British public servant, who was knighted. He became a strong Irish Nationalist, and he was executed for his part in the 1916 Rising. He was of Ulster Presbyterian stock, though he died a Catholic. He was famous for exposing the iniquities of the slave trade in the Belgian Congo and Brazil.

There is a heated ongoing historical controversy, as to whether certain diaries he is alleged to have kept in addition to his conventional diaries are genuine.

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The so-called 'black diaries', which purport to relate various homosexual experiences were supposedly discovered in his home by the intelligence services in 1916, and were discreetly used to discourage pleas for mercy. It remains a point of contention to this day, whether the additional diaries are genuine or forged. There are a number of modern techniques of analysis that can be brought to bear to determine fairly conclusively which is the case.

The Royal Irish Academy are organising a seminar on this next Spring (draft programme enclosed). I know a lot of material relating to this has been released to the archives or exists in libraries on both sides of the Irish Sea. But it is possible that the Home Office and/or the intelligence services even at this distance in time may be able to throw full light on the truth. While I know that it is your position that the intelligence services do not comment on their activities, official histories have been written of the pre-World War 11 period, where the same restrictions clearly no longer apply. Putting the historical record straight and settling the issue one way or the other, which ought to be possible, given that it is a question of fact rather than a value judgement, would be beneficial in closing an unhappy episode in Anglo-Irish relations, and would of course have significance for both traditions in Northern Ireland. I would appreciate any light that could still be shed from hidden recesses on your side.

Best wishes to yourself and Cherie for both Christmas and the coming Year.

Yours sincerely,

Taoiseach

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