CASEMENT

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CASEMENT

LIBERALISM, EMPIRE AND THE RADICALISATION OF THE THOUGHT OF ROGER CASEMENT

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ABSTRACT

THIS THESIS examines the political thought of Roger Casement (1864–1916). A knighted humanitarian imperialist famed for his exposure of widespread human rights atrocities in the Congo and Amazon, Casement was hanged for high treason following his revolutionary republican gun running into Ireland on the eve of the Easter Uprising. Examining the content and conditions of Casement’s seemingly paradoxical political ideas, it will be argued that his anti-imperialism was continuous with and derived from his humanitarian expansionism and his unique practical experiences of the contradictions of liberal imperialism. In so doing, this thesis demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of liberal thought as it was navigated by contemporary individuals, illustrating the extent to which arguments about self-determination and decolonisation were not just external critiques of empire, but developed from within empire itself.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I Imagine – I think that I see killed with my own eyes about twenty – women, and men, and children – shot, and beheaded, their heads cut off with a machete.”

Q. And you say you saw Indians burnt? – A. Yes.
Q. How do you mean? Describe this? – A. Only one I see burnt alive.
Q. Well, tell me about that one? – A. He had not work “caucho”, he ran away and he kill a “muchacho”, a boy, and they cut off his two arms and his legs by the knee and they burn his body.
Q. And he still living? – A. Yes, he still living...They drag the body and they put plenty of wood and set fire to it, and throw the man on it...he did alive. I’m sure of it – I see him move – open his eyes, he screamed out.

Statement of Augustus Walcott to Roger Casement, Amazon Investigation, 1 November, 1910.

I told Reigada that the people who were not afraid to get drunk had conquered the world!— the English, the Irish, Scotch, Teutons and Northerners generally, while the sober races had failed! The man who was not afraid “to give himself away” had probably a temperament that made for greatness lacking in the more discreet man who feared in vino veritas. When English gentlemen went to bed on their servants’ backs, a drunken English cabinet had smashed France and conquered the world! My homily on the virtues of drink v. sobriety ended...I returned to Booth’s and had a cocktail.


1 Statement of Augustus Walcott [23 year old Barbadian labourer in the Putumayo] made to His Majesty’s Consul-General at La Chorrera on November 1, 1910, Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District, PP 1912-13 (Cd.6266) LXVIII, pp.115-118.
INTRODUCTION
THE RIDDLES OF CASEMENT

THIS THESIS examines the political thought of Roger Casement (1864–1916). A knighted humanitarian imperialist famed for his exposure of widespread human rights atrocities in the Congo and Amazon, Casement was hanged for high treason following his revolutionary republican gun running into Ireland on the eve of the Easter Uprising. Examining the content and conditions of Casement’s seemingly paradoxical political ideas, it will be argued that his anti-imperialism was continuous with and derived from his humanitarian expansionism and his unique practical experiences of the contradictions of liberal imperialism. In so doing, this thesis demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of liberal thought as it was navigated by contemporary individuals, illustrating the extent to which arguments about self-determination and decolonisation were not just external critiques of empire, but developed from within empire itself.

Roger David Casement was born in September 1864 to an Irish Protestant family.3 The Casements lived on the continent and in London for the early years of Roger’s

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3 Casement was secretly baptized by his Catholic mother as a child. This event is often drawn upon as the beginning of his dual identity. Casement was, however, raised firmly within the Protestant Unionist tradition. He identified as a Protestant throughout his work, whilst also rejecting sectarianism and emphasising the importance of a united Ireland. See: Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 13 July 1911, NLI MS 10,464 (4); Casement, Letter to Jeremiah MacVeagh, 20 May 1911, NLI MS 13,080 (6/ii).
schooling, but following the death of his mother and the increasingly reclusive and eccentric behaviour of his father, Casement was sent at age nine to live with his great at the family home in Magherintemple, Northern Ireland. Here he attended Ballymena Academy under the protestant preacher Reverend Robert King, and developed a lifelong attachment to Ulster and the Glens of Antrim. When he was sixteen, Casement’s maternal uncle secured him a position as a desk clerk at the Liverpool-based shipping company, Elder Dempster. The company had considerable West African interests and an eventual monopoly over routes to the Congo, where Roger travelled in 1883, remaining in 1884 to work for King Leopold II’s purportedly philanthropic International Association of the Congo.

Roger Casement is well-known as an important humanitarian figure of the early twentieth century. In 1903, as British Consul to the Congo Free State, he travelled with a small troupe into the Congolese rainforest to investigate rumoured commercial monopolies and mistreatment of natives under Leopold’s rubber trade. His report on the journey, published by the British Government in 1904, documented the systematic dispossession, enslavement and decimation of the native population that was taking place in “the heart of darkness”, largely unbeknown to Europe. Casement’s expose, in addition to his lobbying work with Edmund Morel’s Congo Reform

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5 Correspondence and Report from His Majesty’s Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo PP 1904 (Cd.1933) LXII [henceforth referred to as the “Congo Report”].
Association,⁶ invoked international public outrage and led to the annexation of Leopold’s privately ruled Congo Free State by Belgium in 1908. In 1910, whilst Consul-General in Rio de Janerio, Casement undertook a similar investigation for the Foreign Office on the Peruvian-based, London-listed Amazon Rubber Company.⁷ This second investigation focused on the Putumayo region, revealing the murder and coercion of labour from indigenous forest people. Here Casement advocated immediate European-led intervention, and undertook a sustained philanthropic and diplomatic campaign with assistance from the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society, and the liberal British press.⁸ For three years Casement committed himself to pursuing criminals on the Putumayo, internally restructuring the Company as a vehicle for reform, pressuring the Foreign Office to publish his reports, and personally lobbying the State Department and President Taft for action. This humanitarian career of physical hardship and personal danger and sacrifice, including intense public criticism by those he implicated, was recognised by Britain in 1905 with his appointment to the Order of the Companion of St Michael and St George, and in 1911 with knighthood.

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⁶ Edmund Dene Morel (1873–1924) was a British journalist, activist and later politician who worked as a clerk for Elder Dempster on their Congolese trade. Here he realised that Leopold’s system could only be slavelabour, and worked as a journalist to draw this to the attention of the public and the British Parliament. When Casement returned from the Congo in December 1903 the two became close friends, founding the Congo Reform Association in March 1904, with Casement as a silent partner. The Association was an important lobby group and integral to Belgium’s annexation of the Congo in 1908. For more on Morel, as relates to Casement and the Congo see Adam Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa (London: Macmillan, 1999).

⁷ See: Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District, PP 1912-13 (Cd.6266) LXVIII.

⁸ E.g. Casement lobbied the Daily News, Truth and The Economist and there was a Parliamentary Select Committee on the matter. See: Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, ed., Angus Mitchell (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2003); Report and Special Report from the Select Committee on Putumayo, Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence. 1913 (H. Of C. Paper 148) XIV.
Roger Casement is also, however, a prominent figure in the history of Irish republican nationalism. Whilst publically immersed in Irish cultural revivalism and a strong advocate of Gaelic language education throughout his career, Sir Casement resigned from the Foreign Office in August 1913 and dedicated himself to concerns of Irish democracy. This included vocal support for Home Rule, a founding role in the Irish Volunteers, links to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and a fund-raising tour of the United States, before travelling to Germany in October 1914. Here he negotiated with German officials, garnering support for Irish independence through the acquisition of arms and the release of POWs to form a revolutionary, anti-imperial and republican “Irish Brigade”. Casement returned to Ireland in April 1916, aboard a U-boat, escorting a German ship loaded with arms that were destined for republican rebels. He was arrested and the ship scuttled, several hours after landing, three days before the Easter Uprising began. Sir Casement was then tried and found guilty of high treason in London, and sentenced to death. Attempts to appeal the decision were dismissed after Scotland Yard claimed to possess Casement’s “Black Diaries” which graphically detailed homosexual—sometimes—paedophilic, liaisons throughout his career.\(^9\) After he was stripped of honours and accepted into the Catholic Church, Roger Casement was hanged on 3 August 1916, his remains discarded in a mass limestone grave at Pentonville Prison.

The life and political thought of Roger Casement thus confronts us with a strikingly incongruous image. How did a man who spent his career as a Consul, on the forefront of commercial imperial expansion, knighted for his services to Empire and Crown, turn up, only a few years later, a radical anti-imperialist on a German U-boat\(^{10}\) full of guns, for an uprising against Britain in her “hour of need”? How could someone so involved in British public life, who typified Northern Protestant Unionism, develop intimate private relationships with radical separatists? Indeed, an examination of Casement’s biography reveals several seeming paradoxes. For example, how did an employee and supporter of Leopold’s International Association of the Congo become one of its fiercest critics? And how could a key advocate of imperial humanitarian intervention in Africa and South America argue the fundamentality of independence and self-determination in Ireland?

Although Casement is an important figure to humanitarianism and Irish nationalism, historical interrogation of these questions, and thus examination of his political thought, has been thoroughly insufficient. As Lucy McDiarmid has rightly observed, ‘Casement could be said to be over-remembered. He has received more biographies than any other figure of 1916, and he can be found, in one form or another, in poems, plays, orations, memoirs, songs, legends, jokes, allusions, anecdotes, paintings, monuments, documentaries, film-scripts, and – by the thousands – letters-to-the-

\(^{10}\) Whilst he switched part way through his journey due to mechanical concerns, Casement initially headed for Ireland aboard U-20, the submarine that sank the Lusitania
Yet despite, and perhaps because of this prominence, a clear understanding of his political thought is difficult to establish and remains rather wanting.

An understanding of Casement’s political thought has been undermined by two key preoccupations. Firstly, the symbolism of an ex-Foreign Office knight come republican nationalist revolutionary is incredibly divisive. Work on Casement has been emblematic of terse Anglo-Irish relations, and is characterised by an uninformative heroic martyr versus traitor dichotomy. Where he has been remembered at all by Anglo, Unionist and Belgian writers, Casement is often vilified, his humanitarian career underappreciated, and tensions in his thought explained as mere selfishness and intentional deceit. Casement was a ‘foul traitor’ whose investigations and rebellion were motivated by self-interest and German money. Essayist Rebecca Solnit was so struck by this sentiment as to suggest that ‘most of his biographers have openly disliked him in a way almost unique in the genre’, though this assertion is only partially true. Conversely, the hagiographic Irish nationalist scholarship presents Casement as a long-standing separatist and radical, despite evidence to the contrary, and overlooks the

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13 Essayist Rebecca Solnit was so struck by this sentiment as to suggest that ‘most of his biographers have openly disliked him in a way almost unique in the genre’, though this assertion is only partially true. Conversely, the hagiographic Irish nationalist scholarship presents Casement as a long-standing separatist and radical, despite evidence to the contrary, and overlooks the
paternalistic, racist, contradictory way he applied liberal humanitarianism to non-
Europeans. Whilst propagandist biography abounds, analytical critique is minimal.

Secondly, the importance of the Black Diaries to Casement’s death and legacy has
meant dispute over their authenticity has dominated the scholarship, and despite
increasingly complex forensic analysis, disagreement continues. Casement’s political
thought is then often explored through the lens of his sexuality and in troublingly
homophobic terms. Roger Casement has become “A Problem in Psychology”, where
his changing values are the result of his obsessive “anality” and attempts to sublimate it,
or a lack of parental affection. The apparent contradictions in his political action are
dismissed as a consequence of a “deceitful” “double” homosexual life; a product of

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15 Brian Inglis, Roger Casement (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973); René MacColl, Roger Casement: A New
Judgement (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956); Alfred Noyes, The Accusing Ghost of Roger Casement or Justice for
Casement (New York: Citadel Press, 1957); Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Diaries: His Mission to Germany and the
Findlay Affair, ed., Charles Curry (Munich: Arche Publishing Co., 1922); Giovanni Costigan, ‘The Treason of Sir
New Judgement (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956); Angus Mitchell has noted many of the Casement biographies
were written 1974–84 at the height of The Troubles, and that this has led to the entrenchment of binaries. Mitchell,
‘The Riddle of Two Casements’, p.114. Interestingly Mitchell himself has accused of present-day violent
16 There is a general consensus that the Black Diaries are genuine. Forensic analysis of the paper, handwriting and
word usage has supported their authenticity, but, as is made clear in Daly’s edited volume, these techniques would
not be considered sufficiently rigorous for contemporary forensic proof. Angus Mitchell provides the only credible
objections to the authenticity of the diaries, examining inconsistencies between the Black Diary and the White in
light of what we have learnt, since Casement’s death, about his movement. Casement’s white diaries show that he was
genuinely concerned for his life in the Amazon and Mitchell argues that carrying such incriminating evidence with
him was counter to his otherwise extreme caution. Mitchell also draws attention to the level of British complicity in
the atrocities in the Amazon as motive for forgery and points out that in 1910 Casement was nearly blind from a
tropical eye infection and so he wrote only in pencil, except for the Black Diaries. Mitchell’s position is however, an
exception amongst serious scholars of Casement.

Roger Sawyer, ‘The Black Diaries: A Question of Authenticity’, in Mary Daly, ed., Roger Casement in Irish and World
History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), pp.88-98; Dr Audrey Giles, ‘Report of Dr Audrey Giles’, in Mary
Daly, ed., Roger Casement in Irish and World History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), pp.202-237; James J.
History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), pp.238-243; Christopher Andrew, ‘Casement and British Intelligence’,
in Mary Daly, ed., Roger Casement in Irish and World History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), pp.74-87;
Herbert O. Mackey, Roger Casement: The Forged Diaries (Dublin: C.J. Fallon, 1966); Roger McHugh, ‘Casement:
mental illness and emotional instability.\textsuperscript{17} Whilst sexuality is undoubtedly an important part of identity, the controversy of the Black Diaries has meant Casement’s sexuality has been afforded disproportionate causal and explanatory power. Much of this debate has been separated from his political ideas and has failed to acknowledge or account for Casement’s genuine and serious concerns regarding the relationship between humanitarianism, imperialism and liberty at the turn of the century.

There are also practical difficulties in researching Casement’s political thought. The sensitivity of his consular work meant many documents were censored, whilst the seditiousness of his nationalism led him to sign pamphlets pseudonymously and burn correspondence with republicans.\textsuperscript{18} Casement was also a prolific author and is survived by letters, essays, speeches, poems, reports and diaries which cover a considerable historical period and multiple geographic spaces. Much of this material remains in private collections or unpublished in numerous public archives, influencing accessibility and thus the accuracy of analysis. Moreover, Casement’s writings cover a wide range of topics such as naturalism, anthropology, history, sexuality, politics, language, art and culture, making it difficult to characterise his thought as a whole. Historians have therefore tended to focus on aspects of Casement which make sense in isolation, such as “the humanitarian”, or “the rebel”, but rarely have they critiqued


\textsuperscript{18} Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 16 June 1911, NLI MS 10,464 (4).
both simultaneously, and in so doing examined the ambiguities and complexities of his thought. The “Casement in Irish and World History” conference, which brought together some of the best Casement scholars, typified this problem. Whilst ‘one of the key issues to emerge during the Academy symposium was the relationship between Casement’s opposition to imperialism and his support for Irish nationalism,’ the relationship between Casement’s support for imperialism and support for Irish nationalism was comparatively neglected.

There is then a disconnect between research and analysis in the existing scholarship. Earlier historians have often made interesting comments about the evolution of his thought, without providing much evidence, whilst the high-quality research of recent historians, which has brought to light many new documents, has not yet systematically examined what these mean. The sheer volume and inaccessibility of Casement’s

19 Margaret O’Callaghan, Helen Carr and Andrew Porter’s otherwise quality work is misleading by failing to engage with his work as a whole. See Andrew Porter, ‘Sir Roger Casement and the International Humanitarian Movement’, in Mary Daly, ed., Roger Casement in Irish and World History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), pp.11-25, also in Porter, ‘Sir Roger Casement and the International Humanitarian Movement’, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Vol.29, No.2 (May, 2001), pp.59-74; Margaret O’Callaghan, ‘“With the Eyes of Another Race, of a People Once Haunted Themselves”: Casement, Colonialism and a Remembered Past’, pp.46-63. See also Bernard Porter, Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp.239-290.

20 Daly, Mary E. ‘Introduction’ in Mary E. Daly ed., Roger Casement in World History (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2005), ix, O’Siochain’s contribution, ‘Roger Casement’s Vision of Freedom’, pp.1-10 is an exception, drawing out three key themes throughout Casement’s career, but fails to provide us with any analysis of the causal relationship between them or the nature of his radicalisation.


Casement has also recently attracted the attention of many anthropologists. This work is of a high quality but either does not engage with his political thought or engages with it in a problematically ahistorical manner. See: Séamus O
writing has often led historians to accept at face-value Andrew Porter’s claim that, ‘Casement did not emerge as an obviously systematic thinker. He wrote no book of lasting importance.\textsuperscript{22} For a man whose legacy continues to be so important to multiple histories, who was on the forefront of several major intellectual and political changes in the early twentieth century, and who wrote so much about it, this conclusion is difficult to accept.

When I began this thesis I therefore thought that dispelling the paradoxes of Casement’s political thought was a matter of research and analysis. This perception was certainly true, to some extent. By contextualising his ideas in broader contemporary debates about humanitarianism and empire, by comparing diaries, reports and letters throughout his entire career, and by identifying and analysing his pseudonymously published nationalist writings, many of which have not been used before, I have been able to recognise several major continuities.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet despite this, many difficulties in Casement’s thought remain. Analysis of a broad range of his writing reveals that his position vacillated considerably, simultaneously

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\textsuperscript{22} Andrew Porter, ‘Sir Roger Casement and the International Humanitarian Movement’, p.25.

\textsuperscript{23} Some of these sources were located using references in Casement’s other writings or those of his peers, however a reasonably comprehensive list has been compiled by Angus Mitchell in ‘John Bull’s other empire: Roger Casement and the press, 1898-1916’, in Simon Potter ed., Newspapers and empire in Ireland and Britain: reporting the British Empire, c.1857-1921 (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), pp.217-233.
supporting and denouncing empire in public and private throughout his career. Casement’s political thought was often overtly contradictory. This thesis argues, however, that these contradictions did not stem from hypocrisy nor do they render his thought incoherent. Rather, Casement’s conflicting political ideas derived from fundamental tensions in liberal imperial thought at the turn of the century, and can be understood by critiquing his engagement with these broader discussions.

As an adventurer in Africa and as a British Consul, Casement’s thought was shaped by popular liberal imperial humanitarian discourses which argued the moral necessity of European expansion for the protection and enlightenment of indigenous societies. As he engaged with multiple sites of empire, however, Casement increasingly recognised that liberal imperialism not only legitimised and concealed, but in fact caused, widespread exploitation. There was a fundamental tension in liberal imperialism’s assertion of universal liberty, civility and humanity and its realisation through expansion, paternalism, and quite often, violence. Casement’s contradictory pro and anti-imperial thought stemmed from a consciousness of and an anxiety over this tension. Holding many racist and essentialist views on non-European savagery but also recognising the violence of imperial encounters, his position on how best to realise liberal outcomes fluctuated. This does not mean, however, that Casement’s thought was therefore incoherent.
Angus Mitchell has written about ‘The Riddle of Two Casements’; gay or straight, unionist or republican.\textsuperscript{24} I would like to propose that the question of Casement’s political thought in fact involves three Casements: the commercial imperial Leopoldian employee; the consular humanitarian knight; and the radical anti-imperial republican. And two riddles of duality: Leopoldian employee versus humanitarian critic; and agent of the British empire versus anti-imperial critic. By comparing his writings within the context of broader debates, I will argue the first riddle is resolvable by acknowledging the interconnectedness of commercial imperialist and “humanitarian” ideas. As a Leopoldian employee and as a humanitarian, Casement emphasised the importance of European expansion to the satisfaction of both native and European interests. The second riddle, however, is more difficult to resolve. Casement held pro and anti-imperial ideas simultaneously. I will therefore acknowledge and explore this contradiction, nonetheless identifying a growing scepticism through which Casement realised the systematic nature of exploitation and the inherent contradictions of liberal empire. Finally, I will then examine Casement’s republicanism, highlighting explicit links to his humanitarian investigations, the utilisation of similar categories of analysis, and his application of anti-colonial nationalism to empire internationally, arguing that his Irish politics were continuous with, and can only be properly understood in the context of, his broader critique of imperialism. By engaging with his career and thought critically and holistically, I will argue that Casement consistently sought liberal outcomes, but that as a result of his experiences, this liberalism was gradually separated from a belief in its realisation through empire.

\textsuperscript{24}Angus Mitchell, ‘The Riddle of Two Casements’, pp.99-120.
Whilst arguing that Casement’s experiences of empire impacted upon his political thought is to some extent obvious and intuitive, I will demonstrate that existing scholarship provides a reductive, psychologically inept account of this process. Sequential explanations – Casement was pro-imperial, then he witnessed atrocities, then he radicalised – fail to appreciate the extent to which liberal imperialism permeated his worldview, the length of time over which his radicalisation took place, or the contingency and dynamism of the process. Casement’s changing thought is better understood hermeneutically and as dialectical. He was not a discrete critic, but deeply involved in the ideas of empire he came to denounce, and so his self-realisation did not ‘culminate in law-like propositions.’ Rather, Casement’s involvement in these systems meant that his thought often lacked self-awareness. It was only by engaging with numerous imperial projects and reflecting upon the relationship between them that his critique became structural and international, realising his own ideological position and its tensions. Casement’s anti-imperial radicalisation was then dialectical and a form of immanent critique, derived from the interaction between the contradictions of thought and action, and liberalism and paternalism.

Whilst often apologist for empire, Casement therefore illustrates the volatility of liberal humanitarianism and its inherent potential for radical critique, calling attention to the contingency of liberalism’s realised form and its ambivalent relationship to empire.

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Writing from the 1880s until WWI, Casement traversed the period of high imperialism, the culmination of nineteenth century ideas about humanitarianism and expansionism, right through to the beginning of their decline, anticipating many twentieth century arguments about self-determination and decolonisation. His thought then also illustrates the extent to which twentieth century anti-imperial ideas were not merely against empire, but a response from within empire itself. Roger Casement embodied the fracture and implosion of an ideology on the cusp of a new era.
CHAPTER ONE

YOUNG CASEMENT

“A REGULAR IMPERIAL JINGO”

No control is exercised over the natives working in the town to force them to obey a contract they voluntarily may enter into, or to compel natives to work...Here, every native is a “loafer”, not only by “right divine” but also by right of Government sanction and approval. He only works while he feels inclined, or until he has earned enough to go and get dead drunk...

Roger Casement, Lourenco Marques, 6 March 1896

HENRY MORTON STANLEY’s mapping of the Congo Basin during his trans-African expedition (1874–77) sparked considerable European interest in the area. One such interest was that of the International African Association, established in 1876 by King Leopold II of Belgium as an ostensibly humanitarian organisation of scientists, geographers and philanthropists. The Association highlighted the opportunity to end slavery in the region, and was committed to exploring, developing and civilising. In 1879, this commitment increased as Leopold bought out foreign investment and re-established the organisation as the International Association of the Congo (henceforth the Association), employing Stanley to oversee infrastructure development and create treaties with natives to cede land and trading rights.

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Given the centrality of the Congo and heightened competition in the age of New Imperialism, diplomatic dispute soon arose amongst the major powers about African claims. A conference was therefore convened in Berlin in November 1884 to settle issues of sovereignty and spheres of influence.\textsuperscript{27} Here, Leopold argued the philanthropic nature of his privately owned enterprise, and for recognition of his Association as a state; a proposition accepted by the conference as it ‘would guarantee that a large part of the Congo would be denied to the other major powers.’\textsuperscript{28} The Congo Free State was thus established as a liberal humanitarian project. The state was bound by the conference’s General Act to ensure free trade and navigation, and was to end slavery and introduce civilisation through development of the region’s resources.\textsuperscript{29}

From as early as the 1890s, however, rumours of atrocities began to circulate, eventually prompting public concern and the commissioning of Casement’s investigation into mistreatment of natives and trade monopolies in 1903.\textsuperscript{30} What Casement uncovered shocked even the most hardened imperial veterans. Not only was the progressive civilising rhetoric of the Congo State utterly fallacious, evidenced by the absence of schools and the decimation of the population by sleeping sickness, but Leopold’s system of rubber concessions had created monopolies that were worked by

\textsuperscript{30} O’Siochain, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.96. For example see H.R. Fox Bourne, \textit{Civilisation in Congoland: A Story of International Wrong-Doing} (London: P.S. King and Son, 1903); Broeker, ‘Roger Casement: Background to Treason’, p.238.
native slave labour and maintained through systematic mutilation and murder. The Congo Free State was a philanthropic front for imperial profiteering, and had caused and effectively hidden the annihilation of entire tribes.

Casement’s Congo Report was published in February 1904 and attracted widespread outrage. Upon returning to London he also became close friends with Morel and the two established the Congo Reform Association, which was tremendously important to popular protest and Belgium’s annexation of the Congo in 1908. In 1910, the Foreign Office seconded Casement to investigate similar rumours in the Putumayo. Like Leopold, the Amazon Rubber Company, primarily owned by the Peruvian Arana family, championed its expansion of Peruvian frontiers and its bringing of commerce and prosperity to remote parts of the jungle. Casement’s investigation, however, uncovered widespread starvation and slavery, and he worked tirelessly on improving conditions until his retirement in 1913. In just under a decade, Roger Casement made an outstanding contribution to Europe and America’s awareness of exploitation and suffering in Africa and South America, for which he was knighted, and upheld as a humanitarian crusader and symbol of Britain’s commitment to liberal empire.

To begin the story of Casement’s political thought in 1903, however, and to examine only his transition from humanitarian knight to anti-imperialist revolutionary, is to

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32 Casement, Letter to Gerald Spicer, 19 July 1911, PRO FO 371/1202.

under-appreciate the complexity of his life and ideas. Casement arrived in the Congo in 1884. Although little evidence of his early career has survived, examination of his activities, the records of his peers, and his few remaining letters suggests he was neither the self-conscious humanitarian nor the critic of exploitative commercial imperialism he was in 1903. Casement later claimed he had believed the State was a philanthropic endeavour, however there are reasons to suspect he was much more informed and involved than is generally recognized.

Casement was intimate with key personalities and projects of the Congo Free State and was involved in aggressive expansionist activities. His job with Elder Dempster was acquired through family connections with its manager Alfred Jones, who was integral in arousing public support for the State at the Berlin Conference. In November 1884, after three voyages, Casement then accepted employment with Leopold’s Association. Stanley, as Leopold’s proxy, was at this time under instruction to conclude as many treaties with natives as possible, conceding to the Association ‘all sovereign and governing rights’ and labour to assist in improvements to the area, meaning that ‘all game, fishing, mining and forest rights, are to be the absolute property of the said

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Association’. Although Casement’s exact role in establishing trading stations for the Association is unclear, it was well understood that natives did not comprehend the terms of these unequal treaties, and it is clear that Casement’s Association work involved direct knowledge if not active participation in their creation. Similarly, Stanley and Casement were acquaintances, Casement writing to him personally and holding him as a ‘great explorer’, and Stanley, Casement as ‘a good specimen of the capable Englishman’. They dined together in the Congo, and upon the launching of Stanley’s steamer to undertake the Emin Pasha expedition, the two held a champagne breakfast to celebrate. Whilst Casement later explained his employment with Leopold as mere ignorance and naïveté, given his intimacy with Stanley it is not unreasonable to assume that he was in fact quite knowledgeable of conditions and activities throughout the Congo.

‘In 1886, Roger Casement left Leopold’s direct employment to work for Henry Shelton Sanford.’ Sanford was likewise a friend of Leopold and the Congo State, who had ensured American support for the Association at Berlin. Casement was involved in what was termed an “Exploring Expedition,” but the focus was primarily

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37 Terms of the treaty with the Chiefs of Ngombi and Mafela, 1 April 1884, quoted in Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost, p.72.
40 This was an expedition led by Stanley to rescue Emin Pasha, Governor of Equatoria, who was besieged by Mahdists. Casement declined an invitation to join the expedition which later became infamous for the large loss of life it entailed.
41 This event was recorded by Edmund Musgrave Barttelot, quoted in O Siócháin, Roger Casement, p.31.
42 Weale, Patriot Traitors, p.27.
43 O Siócháin, Roger Casement, p.27; Weale, Patriot Traitors, pp.24-25.
commercial, and entailed “punitive expeditions” against un-obliging natives.\textsuperscript{44} In 1888, and again in 1890–91 Casement then oversaw the surveying and construction of rail infrastructure between Matadi and Stanley Pool, used to later transport rubber under the conditions he critiqued. Casement held a managerial position, and it is well known that the recruitment and use of labour on the railway was brutal and often coerced.\textsuperscript{45} Joseph Conrad, who shared a tent with Casement at Matadi, tells us that ‘He was rather reticent as to the exact character of his connection with it [the Societe du Haut Congo]: but the work he was busy about then was recruiting labour.’\textsuperscript{46} Weale’s conclusion that, ‘Casement’s work on the project means that he was undoubtedly connected with the supervision of, if not the participation in, violent and brutal forced labour,’ is thus eminently plausible.\textsuperscript{47} There is no evidence to suggest that Casement’s work involved the scale or brutality of what he later witnessed, but he was instrumental to developing the infrastructure of exploitation, and he certainly supervised involuntary labour in his projects. Casement’s surviving documents from this period articulate no clear humanitarian intention, only a desire to escape the drear of office life in Liverpool, and despite his later claims to the contrary, he left the Congo because of personal disagreements, not moral qualms.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Casement, \textit{Letter to General Sanford}, pp.101-102; O Siochán, \textit{Roger Casement}, pp.28-29.
\textsuperscript{46} Conrad, quoted in O Siochán, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{47} Weale, \textit{Patriot Traitors}, p.32.
\textsuperscript{48} Casement’s initial motivation to go to Africa seems to have been adventure. See: Sawyer, \textit{Casement}, pp.19-20; Casement, \textit{Letter to Nina Casement}, quoted in Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.24. Casement later inferred that he left the Congo due to concerns about its direction, see Louis, \textit{Ends of British Imperialism}, p.131. However documents from the time suggest his departure related to personal disagreements. See: Casement, \textit{Letter to General Sanford}, pp.98-102.
Casement entered the British Foreign Service in 1892, working throughout Southern Africa, where he made important contributions to mapping areas untraveled by Europeans. He was then sent in 1899 to Lourenco Marques to spy on munitions in Boer territory. Here he showed tremendous enthusiasm for the British cause, organising a military raid, whilst telling friend Henry Foley that, ‘I may only hope the surrendered Boers will be treated as prisoners-of-war...and not as men on parole whose oaths of neutrality will secure them restoration to their farms.’

Likewise he informed the Foreign Office of Irishmen trying to seduce Irish regiments to join the Boers, and denounced their ‘frequent allusions to “Downtrodden Ireland” to ‘induce men loyal to their Queen to be false to their allegiance.’

He was subsequently awarded the Queen’s Medal for services in the South African War.

Although little documentary evidence has survived, Casement’s early career showed no signs of his later Anglophobia or anti-imperialism, nor is there any evidence to suggest he identified with humanitarianism. Casement was a Northern Protestant Unionist and his letters and employment from the period demonstrate a desire for adventure and a focus on commercial imperial expansion. Whether or not he was an active participant, Casement spent a considerable amount of time travelling throughout the Congo State and his intimacy with key personalities and projects meant that he was certainly complicit in the exploitation of natives. For a famous humanitarian,

88 Casement, Letter to Henry Foley, 3 August 1900, quoted in O’Siochán, Roger Casement, p.115.
89 Casement to Foreign Office, 5 March 1900, quoted in O’Siochán, Roger Casement, p.111.
90 Casement, 26 May 1903, Congo Diary, p.228.
Casement’s early career strikes one as rather inhumane. As he would later concede, he was ‘on the high road to being a regular Imperialist jingo.’\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{53} Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 1907, NLI MS 10,464 [3].
CHAPTER TWO
ARCH IMPERIALIST AND HUMANITARIAN CRITIC

SIR ROGER CASEMENT’S LIBERAL IMPERIALISM

‘Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end’

J.S. Mill, On Liberty (1857)\textsuperscript{54}

Whilst comprehensive analysis of Casement’s thought in his youth is not possible, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that he did not begin his international career as a committed humanitarian, and that he actively supported commercial imperial expansion, likely through violence and coercion. Casement’s fierce criticism of the Congo Free State and philanthropic work with the Congo Reform Association therefore seems contradictory. How could a man who was so involved in the development of the Congo rubber trade be so profoundly offended by the same system only a few years later? Casement’s turn from commercial imperialist to humanitarian crusader is in many ways as difficult to fathom as his move from British knighthood to republican anti-imperialist.

An absence of documents has led many historians to ignore or merely narrate this seemingly contradictory career change, whilst the scarce analysis that is offered often

draws upon simplistic, polarised explanations. One common argument amongst Casement sympathisers is to suggest that, like much of Europe, Casement initially supported the Congo State because he was misled by Leopold’s claims of philanthropy. This image of idealistic naivety and passivity is however untenable given any serious consideration of Casement’s relationships, jobs and surviving Association writings. A second much more damning explanation thus emerges, that Casement’s humanitarian turn was motivated by hypocrisy and opportunism. Indeed, in light of his early career, Belgium’s accusation that Casement’s investigation was to advance British interests, not indigenous rights, seems rather plausible. The atrocities uncovered gave strength to Britain’s claims about the humanity of its own empire whilst ensuring Casement’s personal success in the Foreign Service. Hypocrisy, or at least outright contradiction, is more subtly advanced by historians such as Weale who suggests the advent of guilt may explain his career change, but even these explanations nonetheless leave us with a paradoxical image that is unsatisfactorily explained through Casement’s homosexuality or flippant emotional character.

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56 Sawyer, Casement, pp.20-21; MacColl, Roger Casement, p.17; Louis, Ends of British Imperialism, p.131; O Siocháin, Casement, p.33.


58 Casement, 4 October 1903, Congo Diary, p.275; Casement, Amazon Journal, pp.75-81, esp. p.75; Casement, Letter to Sir Edward Grey, 1 May 1915, German Diaries, p.217. See Weale, Patriot Traitors, p.61 for Casement’s promotion.

59 Weale, Patriot Traitors, pp.44, 245; See also: Louis, Ends of British Imperialism, p.134-5, 149.
When considering the relationship between Casement’s early international career and his Foreign Office humanitarianism, we thus encounter our first “Riddle of Two Casements”. Even the British Government seemed perplexed as to how a man indulging in champagne breakfasts with Stanley could so quickly come to call Leopold ‘The Father of Dirt’ in official correspondence.\(^6\) As one Foreign Office official put it, ‘How did it come about that so many cases of ill-treatment of British subjects came to your notice in the eight weeks or so before you wrote your despatch…and that, practically, none came before or after?’\(^6\)

An examination of Casement’s writings and the discourses through which his humanitarianism was articulated, however, exposes a greater continuity than is immediately apparent. Although his change from Association employed expansionist to Foreign Office philanthropic critic brought him in direct opposition to his previous employer, in both roles he drew heavily upon, and is illustrative of, the complementary relationship between liberal humanitarian and commercial imperial ideas at the turn of the century. In both “commercial” and “humanitarian” periods of Casement’s career, development, expansion and commercial success were perceived as inter-dependent benevolent processes.

Casement, the Association employee, believed the best way to expand trade and guarantee its long-term viability was by ensuring the civility and autonomy of indigenous populations, who could then be relied upon to work and bring goods to

market. He argued to Sanford in 1888 that money for rail infrastructure ought to first be spent on ‘organizing a more extended and suitable administration of just laws-and ideas of Government…[and] relieving those on the Upper River from the terrible misery of Arab robbery and oppression in general.’ Moral and economic arguments were conflated as the success of commercial expansion was contingent upon the improvement of native interests. Although then he did not explicitly identify with humanitarianism in his Association period, his ideas on expansion and trade were complementary to the British liberal philanthropic tradition, and he in fact anticipated some of his own work. For example, in 1887 Casement travelled to Boma to pursue judicial action against a Belgian for brutally flogging natives; though there was no action taken and he was ‘laughed at for my pains.’ This complaint seems strange given Casement’s likely personal involvement in forced labour at the time, however it calls attention to the conditions he placed on imperialism’s legitimacy, even in his early career. Force for brutality’s sake failed to improve natives, making it counter to European goals of development, and therefore illegitimate.

Similarly, as we shall see, Casement’s “humanitarian” Congo and Amazon investigations drew heavily upon liberal imperial ideas, supporting European commercial and colonial expansion when properly enacted. Civilisational development was essential to Casement’s philanthropy, and he was not only concerned about atrocities committed by Europeans, but also the violence and anarchy of native

63 Casement, Letter to General Sanford, p.102.
64 Casement, 1887, quoted in O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.32.
conditions. Casement, the humanitarian, believed in the civilising mission and protecting against all forms of degradation. Criticism was then not of the Amazon Rubber Company or the Congo State per se, but rather the particularly egregious and inefficient manifestations of European expansion and capital that had developed under the rubber trade’s concession system. Casement’s humanitarianism was a critique of commercial imperialism, but only of its poor implementation and failure to civilise. He believed that this system, when properly administered, was the most effective and ethical mechanism for modernisation.

Although his career initially appears contradictory, in both Association and Foreign Office periods, Casement’s work was underwritten by an ideology of liberal development that was pro-imperial insofar as colonisation and trade improved both native and commercial interests. I will now examine Casement’s reports, letters and diaries, from both his Association work and Foreign Office investigations, to explore in detail how these ideas were articulated, and the assumptions that were shared by philanthropy and imperialism in contemporary liberal discourse. Whether working for Leopold or as a humanitarian activist, Casement believed in the importance of civilisation, and that this was best realised through European systems of labour, free trade and settled cultivation. Casement’s humanitarianism was articulated through institutions of empire, and he so firmly believed in the mutual benefits of the civilising mission that he perceived temporary coercion as a just means to ensure development. Casement’s humanitarianism, in its emphasis on European intervention and development, can thus be characterised by largely racist and paternalist assumptions,
which were pro-imperial, and continuous with both his work for Leopold and contemporary liberal ideas.

**SAVAGERY, IMPERIALISM AND JUSTIFIED COERCION**

Casement’s rhetoric throughout his investigations is almost a parody of the nineteenth century imperial adventurer, highlighting many of the assumptions shared by imperialism and humanitarianism at the turn of the century. One is constantly exposed to “untameable”⁶⁵ “savages”⁶⁶ “cannibals”⁶⁷ and “dwarves”⁶⁸ dwelling naked in “anarchic and disorderly communities”⁶⁹ with their “primitive instincts”⁷⁰ and monkey-like children.⁷¹ For Casement, the enlightenment and prosperity of indigenous societies was constantly undermined by the native condition; the violence of savage cannibal enslavers, or the laziness of unproductive, pre-industrial simpletons.⁷² In 1903, the want of European civilisation with its transport, communication, health and education, was a self-evident truth that ‘no one who formerly knew the Upper Congo could doubt.’⁷³

Casement’s humanitarianism drew upon and spoke to a broader tradition of British liberalism and philanthropy, which was firmly situated within, and apologist for,

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⁷² This dichotomy is throughout the Congo Report, see for example Casement, *Congo Report*, p.30, vs. p.60.
empire. Although liberal humanitarian philosophy asserts the essential equality of mankind, as has been well established, liberal and humanitarian thinkers throughout the nineteenth century mobilised evolutionary, comparative and stadial sociological theories to justify paternalism and expansion. These assumed the current backwardness of non-Europeans and thus the ethical obligation of civilised Christians to ensure humanity’s progress through imperialism. Whilst this civilising mission acknowledged that expansion led by commercial greed was injurious, epitomised by the slave trade, the introduction of free trade, structured work, Christian education, and centralised administration was perceived as positive and morally necessary. These liberal institutions would promote law, civility and prosperity, freeing non-Europeans from their own poverty and savagery, whilst protecting against exploitation by imperial profiteers. Liberal humanitarianism was not only complicit in, but actively encouraged the expansion of empire, and Casement exemplified this liberal/paternalist duality in humanitarian thought.

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For example, his ideas on the legitimacy of the use of force. In the early 1890s Casement mapped untraveled terrain in the Niger Coast Protectorate, opening the area to further European expansion and trade, when he encountered native slavery and ritualised human sacrifice.\textsuperscript{78} Whilst his main objective did not relate to improving natives, in practice his activities relied upon their civility, and he justified the use of force and the expansion of trade as necessary to protecting natives from themselves. He warned local chiefs that such practices were ‘cruel and wicked,’ ‘opposed to the interest of the community,’ and that the ‘Government was resolved to suppress...with a strong hand if warnings failed to bring about its discontinuance,’ conceding that the destruction of certain tribes may be required to do so.\textsuperscript{79} Force was then a necessary first step to begin the process of civilising, for which indigenous people, when civilised, would be most grateful. ‘I have no doubt the Inokun will prove friendly to the white men once their country is opened up, and will welcome the presence of any official with power to open to them the markets of their neighbours, now...barred by the hostility of other branches of their own race.’\textsuperscript{80} Casement believed that European expansion would actively improve natives’ lives, and sacrifice ceased in the areas he had visited, either through the issuing of fines or the use of force, reinforcing ‘his commitment to the British Government as the proper vehicle for reform.’\textsuperscript{81}

Before his humanitarian investigations then, Casement drew upon liberal imperial ideas to justify expansion as having humane consequences. He saw coercion and the use of

\textsuperscript{78} Sawyer, \textit{Casement}, pp.28-29; O'Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, pp.58-60.
\textsuperscript{79} Casement 1894, quoted in O’Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.60.
\textsuperscript{80} Casement, 10 April 1894, quoted in O’Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.58.
\textsuperscript{81} Sawyer, \textit{Casement}, p.29.
force as sometimes indispensible to the process of civilisation, legitimate insofar as it was a means to satisfy the native and European common interest of modernisation. Nearly a decade later then, whilst undertaking his Congo investigation, he gave credence to the German Consul’s comment that ‘shocking barbarities are an essential item in the programme of civilised dealings with the Blackmen,’ arguing the Congo State had not ‘produced more laudable results than [in its] vigorous suppression’ of cannibalism and slavery, which were previously ‘widespread evils.’ Casement’s humanitarianism, like that of many contemporary philanthropists, supported European expansion, and was concerned with protecting ‘poor, docile forest tribes’ and ‘grown up children [of]... timid minds’ from themselves as much as from the nefarious excesses of commercialism.

The legitimacy of imperial force was, however, conditional upon the satisfaction of long-term goals of liberal development. Whilst coercion may be instrumental to ending practices such as sacrifice, violence was not ideal and brutality for its own sake was unacceptable. Coercion ought to develop the autonomous civility required for self-sustaining modernisation. Whilst Casement’s liberalism was paternalist, the goal of active intervention was its own redundancy. Once sufficiently civilised, indigenous people would recognise the benefits of modernisation, and could work for and trade with European powers efficiently and without coercion. Three key ideas which

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82 Casement, Letter to Foreign Office, 7 October 1903, PRO, FO 629/10. Also, see Casement, Congo Diary, 4 October 1903, p.273. Casement, Congo Report p.26. [emphasis added].
83 Casement, Amazon Journal, p.73; Casement, Amazon Journal, p.14f: Rescuing natives from their own savagery, see: Casement, Congo Report, pp.30, 44, 45.
84 E.g. the 1887 incident with flogging of natives mentioned above. O’Siochain, Roger Casement, p.33.
85 O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.104.
Casement believed were effective humanitarian mechanisms for permanently civilising indigenous people are thus reflected upon repeatedly throughout his Association, Congo and Amazon writings: organised labour, free trade, and settled cultivation. I will now interrogate these to better understand Casement’s humanitarianism, his ideas on liberal development, and the conditions of legitimacy he placed upon imperialism. This will further highlight the embeddedness of liberal humanitarianism in empire building as well as Casement’s consistent concern for liberal development, thus assisting us to later account for his changes in political action.

**LABOUR, CAPITAL AND LAND: CASEMENT’S CIVILISATING MODEL**

Casement’s conception of labour in his Association and Foreign Office work typified his belief in liberal development and the humanitarianism of commercial imperial expansion. In his 1888 resignation letter to Sanford, Casement complained that commercial expansion was constantly undermined by the fact that ‘the people do not work and that there is nothing like systematic labour to be found among the natives in any part of the country.’ Casement, Letter to General Sanford, p.102. Natives built houses and infrastructure only under the compulsion of absolute necessity, and agricultural practices were subsistence based. For Casement, native labour was frustratingly unstructured, undermining the mutually beneficial development of indigenous societies in two distinct ways.

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Firstly, structured employment improved material conditions through the building of infrastructure and the generation of commodities that could be traded.\textsuperscript{88} Labour created wealth and communal prosperity in a direct sense, liberating natives from the savagery of their own poverty.\textsuperscript{89} Indigenous labour was therefore deeply problematic. Its ad hoc nature could not realise the population’s productive capacity and undermined society’s commercial development and prosperity. ‘The general disinclination of all the Congo natives to anything like disciplined labour or to encountering present hardships for some ulterior benefit...[is] the great obstacle...to the proper development of the country in the interest of trade.’\textsuperscript{90} Structured European systems of labour were needed for sustained growth and economic engagement with Europe, which would materially improve the native condition and satisfy European commercial interests.

Secondly, without organised work, the individual did not discernibly contribute to the collective good, undermining society’s maturation and consolidation through its constituent parts. Casement defined individual labour, income and taxation as ‘duties’ that underwrote the development of ‘public interest.’\textsuperscript{91} Through structured employment natives were imbued with a sense of personal responsibility and could make a defined contribution to common prosperity, preparing the ground for future participatory citizenship. For example, Casement drew a strong parallel between local elections in Ireland and hut taxes in Sierra Leone, ‘calculated to bring home a sense of

\textsuperscript{89} Casement in O’Stiochain, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.100.
\textsuperscript{90} Casement, \textit{Letter to General Sanford}, p.102.
\textsuperscript{91} Casement, \textit{Congo Report}, p.27.
individual responsibility which in the end must tell for good. There we see the African savage being brought to individual participation in the public affairs of his country.\textsuperscript{92} Individual autonomy, through labour, income and taxation, was necessary for modernisation and future collective independence. Idleness was then a vice, not only for the ‘loafer [who]...only works while he feels inclined, or until he has earned enough to go and get dead drunk,’ but also for the ‘happy-go-lucky’ native who engaged in employment ‘according to his own fancy,’ as he renounced the educative role of labour in the formation of civilised personal discipline, to the detriment of employee and employer.\textsuperscript{93}

Casement therefore complimented the Congo State’s work in Leopoldville in this regard. The ‘workmen at Leopoldville struck me as being well cared for, and they were certainly none of them idle’; a sentiment echoed in his criticism of disorganised employment elsewhere in the Congo, and in 1910 in the Amazon.\textsuperscript{94} ‘Regular work...the one thing that would have reclaimed the wild Indian tribes from their irregular and fitful life has been entirely lost sight of.’\textsuperscript{95} In both humanitarian investigations, Casement believed that structured labour was an essential item in the civilisation of non-Europeans, and the legitimacy of imperial claims was contingent upon its implementation for mutual benefit.

\textsuperscript{92} Casement, 1899, quoted in O Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.104.
\textsuperscript{93} Casement, 6 March 1896, quoted in O Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.83; Casement, \textit{Letter to General Sanford}, p.102; Casement in Angola, 1899, quoted in O Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.100.
\textsuperscript{95} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.441.
Organised labour was in fact so fundamental that coerced labour was justified and consistent with humanitarian goals. Even after investigating the Congo atrocities, Casement advocated the granting of states and companies significant powers to control and discipline the labour of their subjects.\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, his Report was aimed less at coercion than at the failure of forced labour to teach indigenous people the link between work and prosperity. ‘They could, I perceive, trace no connection between this hastily-conceived exaction on their time and labour and a system of general contribution to the public interest’.\textsuperscript{97}

This belief in the humanitarianism of empire is likewise evident in Casement’s views on commercial expansion. It must firstly be remembered, however, that Casement was a consul whose role was to further British trade: ‘The principal object of the appointment of British Consular officers is the protection and the promotion of the commercial interests of Her Majesty’s subjects.’\textsuperscript{98} Continuity between his Association and Consular work, with regards to commercial expansion, is therefore to be expected. The Congo investigation was prompted by the “existence of trade monopolies” as much as “alleged cases of ill-treatment of natives,” and the Foreign Office certainly recognised that concern for human rights could advance British interests.\textsuperscript{99} Whilst Britain was keen to avoid accusations of imperial designs on the Congo, Casement’s public relations

\textsuperscript{96} For example, Casement’s comments as late as 1908 in Brazil, in O’Slocháin, Roger Casement, p.252.
\textsuperscript{97} Casement, Congo Report, p.27.
\textsuperscript{99} The focus on British concerns is demonstrated by the titles of relevant parliamentary documents, e.g., Despatch to certain of His Majesty’s representatives abroad in regard to alleged cases of ill-treatment of natives and to the existence of trade monopolies in the Independent State of the Congo, PP 1903-04 (Cd.1809) LXII.
campaign against South American rubber assisted the profitability of British rubber plantations in Asia.\textsuperscript{100}

Nonetheless, even in Consul Casement’s early letters, diaries and reports, a genuine belief in the benevolent nature of European commercial expansion is evident. The introduction of trade, particularly free trade, was fundamental to civilising natives and liberating them from their rudimentary existence. Casement’s 1899 Trade Report on Angola informed the Foreign Office that:

\textit{Without capital...nothing can be done...The individual seeker of work, whose chief object is the bare means of existence, will find nowhere market for his muscles or means of earning his daily bread. The foreign labourer could only hope to come in the train of the foreign capitalist, and so far little capital has been tempted into this part of Africa.}

\textit{...the greater extent of the country remains in the hands of its tribal possessors, subject to the rule of their native chiefs, and adopting only the rudest methods for extracting from the soil the bare necessities of life.}\textsuperscript{101}

This sincere belief in the humanitarian role of capital is also evidenced outside Casement’s consular duties. For example, he actively encouraged investment in the Congo by soap manufacturer William Lever, seeing the introduction of new industries and employers, as well as the diversification of trade, as an efficient and effective way to


\textsuperscript{101} Casement, Trade Report on Angola, 1899, quoted in O'Skochéin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.100.
improve the plight of indigenous people.\textsuperscript{102} For Casement, European capital improved prosperity and autonomy, and philanthropy and reform was not a counterbalance to, but best pursued through commercialism.

Casement was therefore tremendously critical of the uncommercial nature of rubber regimes. Morel’s work on Elder Dempster’s trade first alerted the British to the probability of slavery in the Congo, ‘nothing was going in to pay for what was coming out,’ and Casement likewise argued, ‘to call this “trade” is the height of lying.’\textsuperscript{103} The ‘Rubber “market,”’ was ‘nothing but guns,’ ‘workmen, instead of receiving a part of their monthly wages in cash… were remunerated by the Government in barter goods,’ whilst Putumayans received only presents which were susceptible to ‘vicious disorder and irregularity.’\textsuperscript{104} By failing to introduce proper commercial transactions, natives were not only exploited but denied the civilising potential of work and capital. No ‘adequate provision was made for inculcating the natives with any just appreciation of the value of work.’\textsuperscript{105}

Casement’s criticism, however, extended beyond the inability to civilise in the absence of genuine trade. He also argued that the failure to implement free trade was a cause of

\textsuperscript{102} Unfortunately, and rather ironically, however, Lever’s palm oil plantations led to similarly horrendous atrocities. See, Jules Marchal, \textit{Lord Leverhulme’s Ghost: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo}, trans., Martin Thom (New York: Verso, 2008).

\textsuperscript{103} For Casement and Morel’s involvement see Casement, Letter to Morel, 13 April 1911, BLPES Morel Papers F5/3; Casement, Letter to Morel, 22 April 1911, BLPES Morel Papers F8/24.

\textsuperscript{104} ED Morel, quoted in Hochschild, \textit{King Leopold’s Ghost}, p.180; Casement, 29 August 1903, \textit{Congo Diary}, p.262.


\textsuperscript{105} Casement, \textit{Congo Report}, p.33.
the atrocities themselves, further demonstrating the conflation of humanitarian and commercial imperial arguments in the liberal discourse from which he drew.\textsuperscript{106}

Despite the explicit terms of the General Act of the Conference of Berlin, Leopold undermined free trade in the Congo, ensuring a monopoly for his company through state institutions.\textsuperscript{107} He controlled basic resources needed for development, unlawfully detained natives so as to control all labour, and introduced excessive licensing, undermining freedom of movement and any potential competitors.\textsuperscript{108} The Congo Free State was the antithesis of liberal humanitarian arguments for free trade based on mutual advantage, and Casement was outraged, particularly by the imposition of arbitrary taxes.\textsuperscript{109}

Monopoly facilitated vicious exploitation and was directly linked to the perpetuation of atrocities. The Company held near exclusive control of labour, natural resources and wealth, but unlike a state, did not in return provide ‘any single one of the essential concomitants of civilised rule’.\textsuperscript{110} Rather, its rule, supported by police-like powers, was tyrannical, arbitrarily detaining, punishing and mutilating its workers with no political,

\textsuperscript{110} Casement in O Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.140.
financial or legal repercussions. Similarly, in Peru, monopoly capital meant workers were either not paid, or paid irregularly to an unfixed scale, whilst company stores lacked any goods worth buying, and were hugely overpriced. The absence of competitors or indeed any form of civilised rule gave the Arana Brothers licence to exploit the entire region.

In both investigations then, Casement argued for the creation of markets to civilise and materially improve natives, liberating them from rudimentary existence, but also, for the liberalisation of such markets to protect against tyranny and exploitation from European monopolies. Imperialism, free trade and humanitarianism were co-dependent processes.

Like many liberals, however, Casement’s free trade ethic was not exclusively for the civilisation of natives but emphasised mutual advantage. He criticised the commercial counter-productivity of oppression. By imprisoning, mutilating and starving workers, rubber companies had not only ‘cut down the Indian population by possibly three-fourths of its former total, but they had directly injured the economic resources of a large area of the country, and gravely imperilled the financial prospects of

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111 For unrestrained tyranny imposed by armed company guards see Casement, Congo Report, p.43.
113 Taussig also looks at how a lack of commoditised social relationships facilitated terror and torture in the Putumayo, see Michael Taussig, ‘Culture of Terror’, esp. p.479.
the enterprise with which they were associated.\textsuperscript{115} Competitive commercial changes would therefore be of benefit ‘ultimately to the company’s financial prospects,’ and to its British shareholders.\textsuperscript{116} Similarly Casement argued that although the Bateke people in the Congo were not ‘particularly desirable subjects for an energetic Administration,’ their near annihilation was ‘nonetheless to be deplored...for they formed...a connecting link between an incoming European commercial element and the background of would-be native suppliers.’\textsuperscript{117}

Casement’s humanitarianism not only endorsed capital as a benevolent force for civility, but also presupposed the importance of satisfying European commercial interests. Critique was scathing, but of the misuse and poor implementation of empire and capital, rather than of the systems per se. The rubber atrocities were particular instances of excess and if commercial structures were properly implemented, mutually beneficial dealings would prevail.\textsuperscript{118} Arguing the importance of capital, markets and waged labour, Casement’s humanitarian criticism was firmly within the prevailing liberal imperial ideology.

The essentiality of European expansion to ensuring non-European improvement is thirdly manifest in Casement’s ideas on the use of land. Casement was highly critical of native agriculture, which he argued was built upon ritualised mysticism and

\textsuperscript{117} Casement, Congo Report, p.22.
\textsuperscript{118} Casement, Amazon Journal, p.427.
superstition or laziness and incompetence.\textsuperscript{119} Not only did ‘the native African seems to regard the cultivation of scanty patches of food-bearing soil as the only labour the earth requires at his hands,’ but the ‘native mind’ relied on subsistence without any considered cultivation, often destroying crops and rubber plants.\textsuperscript{120} ‘The vast majority of the people of this continent...cultivate the ground only for their own immediate needs...where he gathers for one day he sleeps for two and loafs for four.’\textsuperscript{121} The African or South American in his native condition lived ‘a life little better than animal.’\textsuperscript{122}

Casement therefore emphasised the legitimacy of imperial claims and echoed contemporary arguments about the reliance of civilisation on the establishment of European sovereignty.\textsuperscript{123} European control of native lands provided a space in which the civilising mission could take place and ensured the cultivation required for sustainable self-sufficient growth.\textsuperscript{124} Mobilising both paternalism and natural law arguments about cultivation, he justified the usurpation of land, arguing ‘care and labour and forethought – is a part we can play by such instruction and example.’\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{119} O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.61.
\textsuperscript{120} O Siocháin, Roger Casement, pp.58-59.
\textsuperscript{121} Casement, Angola 1899, quoted in O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.100.
\textsuperscript{122} Casement, 6 June 1894, quoted in O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.59.
\textsuperscript{123} Koskenniemi, The Gentle Civilizer of Nations, p.165.
\textsuperscript{124} This related to the demarcated space of sovereign claims in which the rule of law could take place as well as land upon which productive cultivation could occur. See Casement, Letter to Gertrude Bannister, 1 September 1909, in O Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.262; Casement, Amazon Journal, p.434. For the commonality of this idea contemporarily in international law see Koskenniemi, The Gentle Civilizer of Nations, p.5.
Europeans needed to ‘show the natives that the timber on the hills, and vines in the forest…[can] repay care and attention.’

Casement was therefore also critical of failures to correct indigenous methods and institute European style agriculture. In Brazil, he was angered by the ‘vegetable filibustering,’ the lack of diversification, and the reliance upon wild as opposed to plantation rubber. European agriculture not only improved the native condition, however, but also the company’s profitability. Without an understanding of work and cultivation, rubber was inefficiently harvested. When he visited the board meetings of the Peruvian Amazon Company in London throughout 1911, Casement was thus impressed that the Commission planned to replace wild rubber with plantations, which was ‘obviously a step in the direction of improving the condition of labour on the Putumayo,’ as well as the profitability of the enterprise itself.

Despite his move from loyal employee to critic of Leopold, and the apparent contradictions this entailed, Casement’s writings from his Association and Foreign Office work reveal tremendous continuity in his thought, as well as the co-dependence of “humanitarian” and commercial imperial ideas in contemporary discourses of liberal development. In both roles, Casement presupposed the superiority of European models of civilisation, as well as the duty to impose these for the satisfaction of mutual

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126 Casement, 1894, quoted in O’Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.59.
127 O’Siocháin, ‘Roger Casement’s Vision of Freedom’, pp.3-4; O’Siocháin, Roger Casement, p.252.
128 Casement, Memo on second meeting of Peruvian Amazon Co board meeting P.S.C.I, 28 June 1911, in Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.422.
interests. For Casement, modernisation was necessary and best realised through European systems of labour, commerce and agriculture, justifying initial coercion insofar as it ensured future autonomy and prosperity. Casement’s commercial imperialism and humanitarianism were deeply intertwined, co-justificatory ideas. Whilst then historians largely neglect Casement’s international career before the Congo investigation of 1903, or provide us with simple polarised narratives about his naivety or opportunist hypocrisy, analysis of Casement’s thought has revealed that his position was not only well considered, but consistent. The “two Casements” were both staunchly committed to goals of liberal imperialism.
CHAPTER THREE
IDEOLOGY, PRACTICE AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF CRITIQUE

Casement’s humanitarian critique endorsed the civilising mission to such an extent that it is difficult to understand how he possibly became an anti-imperialist rebel. Sir Roger Casement, the British Empire’s humanitarian, is not easily reconciled with the vehement anti-imperialist arms smuggler of a few years later, thus confronting us with our second “Riddle of Two Casements.” Identifying continuity between his expansionism and humanitarianism, however, is not to propose that he supported the atrocious practices in the Amazon and Congo. Casement was clearly shocked and traumatised by the scale and brutality of violence, and was so committed to ending native suffering that he was willing to undergo significant personal sacrifices to do so. Rather, what we have recognised is that he consistently adhered to a number of underlying ideas on the reciprocal benefits of European expansion. Whilst these ideas were pro-imperial, support for European expansion was not unconditional. Casement’s

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129 O Siolchán argues that his early Congo work was not as brutal, Roger Casement, p.32; see also Casement, 30 August 1903, Congo Diary, p.263. The shock and novelty of atrocities in 1903 is demonstrated by his response to the “Epondo case” whereby a little boy was seriously mutilated. The Belgians claimed that the cutting off of hands was a native practice and not committed by company officials. Casement and Conrad wrote to one another, however, confirming they had never witnessed such practices in their previous work; see Joseph Conrad, Letter to Roger Casement, 17 December 1903, The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, p.95.

130 The Foreign Office was so concerned about his emotional state that they felt he was no longer of use and ought to be brought home. See O Siolchán, Roger Casement, p.178; Louis, Ends of British Imperialism, pp.135, 143; Casement, Letter to Charles Roberts, December 1912, quoted in Mitchell, The Diaries Controversy, Amazon Journal, p.36.

131 Louis notes Casement donated one-third of his annual income to the founding of the Congo Reform Association; Louis, Ends of British Imperialism, p.145. For examples of personal involvement and sacrifice, pecuniary, social and physical, and threats to Casement’s safety, see Casement, Letter to Louis Mallet, Sunday 8 January, 1911, NLI MS 13,087 (8); Casement, Letter to Gerald Spicer, 12 December 1911, PRO FO 371/1450; Casement, 12 December 1903, Congo Diary, p.293; Casement, Amazon Journal, pp.104-108, 205, 269, 298-299, 300, 420, 474; Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 September 1904, BLPES Morel Papers F8/17 (83).
reasoning was instrumental and consequential. Commercial and imperial expansion and the use of force to introduce European systems were justified only if they ensured future prosperity for European and native by establishing civilised development. ‘Where the incoming colonist was of necessity bound to vanquish his savage neighbour before he could fell the forest, plant his corn, or secure homesteads for his wife and family.’\[132\] Whilst his humanitarianism had illiberal implications, Casement was outraged by practices he witnessed and this outrage was consistent with long-standing beliefs about ethical justifications for expansion. Casement saw that coercion in the Congo and Amazon was not a necessary temporary item in the civilising of natives. Practices were excessively barbaric, had no educative role and failed to develop autonomy or prosperity.

Casement not only epitomised contemporary humanitarianism in his engagement with liberal imperialism, but was also uniquely positioned to witness these ideas in practice on the forefronts of European expansion. This exposure to purportedly liberal imperial projects, and their failure, is crucial to understanding his anti-imperialism.

In 1907 Casement wrote to friend and intellectual Alice Stopford Green about the impact of his transnational imperial experiences on his liberal imperial ideas:

*At the Boer war time I had been away from Ireland for years...and every fresh act of duty made me appreciably nearer the ideal of the Englishman. I had accepted Imperialism – British rule was to be extended at all costs, because it was the best for*

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\[132\] Casement, *Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities*, NLI MS 13,087 (31).
everyone under the sun, and those who opposed that extension ought right to be “smashed”. I was on the high road to being a regular Imperialist jingo...Well, the war gave me qualms at the end – the concentration camps bigger ones – and finally when up in those lonely Congo forests where I found Leopold – I found also myself – the incorrigible Irishman. I was remonstrated there by British highly respectable and religious missionaries. “why make such a bother”, they said – “the state represents law and order – and after all these people are savages and must be repressed with a firm hand”...I realised then that I was looking at this tragedy with the eyes of another race – of a people once hunted themselves...whose estimate of life was not of something eternally to be appraised at its “market” price.133

This letter has formed the foundation of a broader historical consensus which explains Casement’s anti-imperialism as a reflection, during and immediately following the Congo, upon his experiences of empire.134 Casement related the Congo atrocities to the Association, the Boer War and his identification with Irish oppression, realising the violence of imperial encounters, the failure to fulfil many liberal imperial promises and the contradictions and anti-humanitarianism of pursuing expansion through commerce and coercion. He repudiated much of the civilising mission he had so fervently supported. Additionally, it is argued that Casement’s anti-imperialism was solidified in 1904–06 by disagreements with the Foreign Office over how to address the problems of the Congo. Casement’s disappointment with inaction led to disillusionment with

133 Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 1907, NLI MS 10,464 [3].
the British Empire as a model of philanthropy, and encouraged a separatist, radical Irish identity. This explanation of anti-imperialism and Anglophobia is further extended to include ‘not solely or even primarily humanitarian’ motives, framing the Foreign Office’s failure to defend Casement against Belgian criticism as an affront to his reputation and vanity. It is therefore argued that Casement remained in the Foreign Service until 1913 for financial reasons, and his writings following the Congo investigation support this, revealing Irish nationalism and antagonism towards Britain. Casement’s striking move from knighthood to treason in such a short period of time is therefore explained by anti-imperialism and Anglophobia arising from the Congo investigation and its aftermath, and as the natural consequence of long-standing grievances with Britain and her empire. Casement was conscious of problems with empire as early as 1904, but suppressed his anti-imperialism in public until 1913 when Home Rule became an increasingly pressing issue.

Whilst Casement’s experiences of empire certainly challenged his liberal imperial ideas, this explanation of his radicalisation is only partially true and fails to appreciate the anxiety, complexity and considered nature of his anti-imperial thought. A

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comprehensive survey of his writings reveals his commitment to liberal imperialism and
to the British Empire was much more deep seated than his letter to Green or historians
who have followed concede. He continued to pursue many of its policies, in private
thought and public action, after the Congo investigation of 1903, and indeed, well
after his letter of 1907. For example, we have already briefly explored his continued
support for liberal imperial ideas of labour, capital and land use in the Putumayo in
1910. This is not to suggest that Casement never held anti-imperial beliefs, as his letter
to Green and many others will demonstrate, but rather that his radicalisation was a
much longer and more complex trajectory than has hitherto been advanced.\footnote{\textsuperscript{38}}
Casement’s changing critique of imperialism involved no abrupt or totalising moment
of realisation in the Congo and was not the inevitable outcome of grievances with
Britain. He did not simply find Leopold and himself. Rather, his radicalisation
involved grappling with contradictions in liberal thought, exposed by reflection upon
imperial encounters throughout his entire career, and is better characterised by
vacillation, and as a dialectic of thought and action.

I will now analyse Casement’s self-conscious humanitarianism, during and following
his two investigations, to examine how these experiences challenged his liberal
imperialism. Despite his letter to Green and the subsequent scholarship, Casement
understood atrocities in both investigations as particular failures to properly implement

\footnote{\textsuperscript{38} Whilst a number of historians have recognised the complexity of Casement’s radicalisation this is generally asserted rather than explored, and often falls back on 1904–06 as an explanation. For example, Sawyer, Casement, p.52; Brooker, ‘Roger Casement: Background to Treason’, p.238; Porter, ‘Sir Roger Casement and the International Humanitarian Movement’, (2005) p.15. O’Callaghan’s explanation is much more comprehensive and draws upon radical ideas from Casement’s youth, however, this takes limited account of the impact of later imperial experiences and suggests his anti-imperialism was somewhat inevitable or natural; See O’Callaghan, “With the Eyes of Another Race, of a People Once Haunted Themselves”: Casement, Colonialism and a Remembered Past”, pp.46-63.}
European systems. His critique was constrained by his liberal imperial worldview and he continued to believe in native savagery and imperial benevolence, advocating the reform and extension of imperial institutions as a solution to exploitation. By revisiting Casement’s ideas on labour, capital and land, however, I will argue that the constant disconnect between imperial humanitarian goals and their realisation in the Congo, Putumayo, and throughout the colonial world, simultaneously led him to question the efficacy and legitimacy of these systems themselves. Casement was conscious of and anxious about the practical failings of the civilising mission. This anxiety initially manifested in partial denunciations of empire, without a total rejection of underlying systems or structures, however, his investigations increasingly highlighted the universality of imperial oppression. By engaging with numerous imperial projects, Casement identified atrocities not as failures to properly implement European systems, but as derived from the mentality of these supposedly liberating systems themselves. The civilising mission was a principal cause of exploitation, invalidating empire and prompting Casement to adopt radical, anti-imperial views. In his later Foreign Office work, Casement’s thought was overtly contradictory, as he vacillated between ardent affirmation and condemnation of empire. This contradiction and eventual radicalisation, however, derived not from his emotional flippancy, or even from his disillusionment following the Congo. Rather, Casement’s radicalisation was the culmination of a considered and complex dialectic of thought and action, the consequence of tensions and contradictions in contemporary humanitarian thought, exposed by his experience of practices on the forefronts of imperial expansion.
A VERY UNRADICAL CRITIQUE

Casement criticised regimes in the Congo and Peru for failing to properly implement civilising European systems of labour, capital and agriculture, arguing the absence of these contributed to atrocities. Such failures did not, however, invalidate European claims. Casement framed atrocities as particular instances of excess and continued to believe that native societies required European-led development. If liberal imperialism was properly enacted, humane, mutually profitable outcomes would prevail. Casement therefore lobbied for the reform and extension of existing imperial institutions. I will now explore his ideas on European law, commercial expansion and colonisation to demonstrate his continued support for empire and Britain throughout both investigations.

Casement’s documents for 1903–04 reveal an intense focus on obligations under local European and international law.139 Whilst an appreciation of legal responsibility was required for his consular work, positive law was fundamental to the way Casement critiqued and even conceived of the atrocities. Questions of justice were framed by legality. ‘It is clear to me that the situation thus created is not only prejudicial to the prior rights secured...in the Congo State by the terms of the Berlin Act, but is in direct conflict with the common law of this country.’140 The Congo Report constantly refers to the link between illegality and atrocity, recounting murder, violence, exploitative labour contracts, theft of native property and false imprisonment as consequences of

139 Casement, undated [1903], Congo Diary p.188; Casement, 30 May 1903, Congo Diary, p.229; Casement, Congo Report, pp.26, 32-33, 35, 37, 38, 41, 42, 45-46, 50, 54, 58.
140 O Siócháin, Roger Casement p.172.
arbitrary unlawfulness. Casement’s exasperation at the ‘faulty judicial system’ system was evident, but reverting to native systems was equally un-humanitarian as he saw the pre-European Congo as a society of slavery and cannibalism. He therefore sought to end atrocities through increased implementation and compliance with existing European laws and international treaty obligations. His report argued that there were existing regulations for the Congo and ‘Were their application enforced it is abundantly clear that a situation such as that I found in existence at W* could not arise.’ Companies had failed to follow established legal prescriptions, but these were particular, not ‘part of a systematic breach of instructions,’ and if corrected, justice and mutually profitable development would ensue.

Illegality and lawlessness are similarly dominant themes throughout Casement’s Amazon Journal, and atrocities are again attributed to such failings. Casement tells us that, ‘...to obtain justice in Peru or Brazil, or any other of these Latin States of the New World one must bribe and lie, cheat and corrupt, terrify and threaten so that your

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142 Casement, Letter to Felix Alexandre Fuchs (Acting Governor General of the Congo Free State), 12 September 1903, PRO, FO 430/338.
143 Casement, 3 June 1903, Congo Diary, p.230. Eg Casement, Congo Report, pp.30, 44.
144 Casement, Congo Report, p.42. See also Casement, Congo Report, p.53.
145 Casement, Congo Report, p.33.
146 For examples of Casement’s constant exasperation at the lawless state of the Putumayo and focus on legal reform, see Casement, Amazon Journal, pp. 112, 125, 128, 133-134, 138, 155, 158, 181, 184, 200, 206, 215, 259, 301, 308, 322, 354, 391, 440.
justice won leaves the soil rank with misdeeds.” Atrocities were ‘inevitable results…
in such conditions of lawlessness,’ so changing the legal system was primary to
improving the Putumayo. It was not, however, the injustice of Peruvian laws, but the
lack of equitable implementation that was problematic. Although there was ‘no sense of
equity in the man behind the paper,’ Casement believed that all the South American
republics ‘have excellent laws on paper,’ and so improving the plight of natives required
only better adherence to existing European systems of law. Interestingly, Casement
believed that if improvement was not forthcoming in Peru, natives could be protected
by a proper British company as ‘A British controlled enterprise has no right to base its
proceedings on a lawless formula,’ and British subjects have a ‘duty to God and their
country’s laws’ to behave honourably. Ethical behaviour was synonymous with legal
behaviour and Casement’s critique and conception of native rights was framed, and
indeed limited by, contemporary liberal notions of reform and justice through positive
law. This critique was not anti-imperial, radical or Anglophobic.

Casement’s continued belief in the liberal imperial civilising mission is likewise
illustrated by his active support for European commercialism following both
investigations. Whereas ‘Morel had a romantic vision of the pre-Leopoldian Congo, a
prosperous Congo thriving in trade,’ Casement understood indigenous society as poor
and violent, and passionately advocated free trade and foreign capital as instruments for

147 Casement, Amazon Journal, p.112.
148 Casement, Amazon Journal, p.128.
149 Casement, Amazon Journal, p.112.
In his letters to Morel on Lever’s soap company, Casement argued that, ‘in dealing with primitive peoples, like the Congo natives, you are dealing with people a very long way behind the Nigerian Mohammedans or Yoruba nations...I see in it [Lever’s going there] the advent of a good man with great power who may be helped and guided by friendly counsel to better and better the state of things he finds there.’

Even after his investigation, Casement continued to assert the importance of commercial expansion to protect against degradation, native and foreign. His critique thus stopped short of making more radical demands. For example, Casement believed that the concern of the Congo Reform Association ought to be the most abhorrent of atrocities, slavery, of which both Leopold and natives were equally guilty. He was therefore critical of Morel for his ‘attacks on things that are after all not essentials,’ such as the justice of commercial intervention or European control of native land. Casement’s criticism was not of European commercial expansion, but its poor implementation under Leopold, and whilst Morel saw ‘in the cloven foot – another concession,’ Casement sought to remind him that ‘while the concessionaire system is not the best there still may be good concessionaires.’

Similarly, in his Putumayo work, 1910–13, Casement was concerned about saving the Amazon Rubber Company, as he believed it to be the best vehicle for reform. He maintained that were the company destroyed, Putumayans would be left in their

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primitive state and to the exploitation of the next rubber prospector.\textsuperscript{156} He therefore argued that the company ought to be refinanced, its criminals removed and ‘better [European] men obtained and put in their places.’\textsuperscript{157} He advocated continued control of the region by the company, with greater British control, which would organise ‘its dealings with these primitive human beings…[t]o be more and more founded on freedom of intercourse, mutually profitable;’ a ‘decent British company prepared to see that where their workers go some sense of human rights and equity shall prevail.’\textsuperscript{158}

Even after both investigations then, Casement continued to echo the civilising mission’s commercial expansionism. When he returned from the Putumayo in 1911, he spent the year lobbying business and government to raise the capital necessary for the company’s salvation and attended board meetings to oversee the internal restructure.\textsuperscript{159} ‘What I am now trying for is to save the Company with a view to complete reconstruction…The reconstructed company will then be the best engine of reform and proper dealing with the Indians that could be obtained in such a remote region where no legitimate government control exists.’\textsuperscript{160}

Casement’s continued commitment to the liberal imperial civilising and the initially un-radical reformist nature of his critique is then thirdly illustrated by his support for formal colonialism. For example, Casement advocated and disagreed with Morel over

\textsuperscript{156} Casement, 23 September 1910, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.127.
\textsuperscript{157} Casement, 23 September 1910, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.127.
\textsuperscript{159} Casement, Letter to Gerald Spicer, 29 July 1911, PRO FO 371/1202; Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 1 July 1911, NLI MS 8358; Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 19 July 1911, NLI MS 8358. See also Casement, \textit{Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness}, pp.422, 475-482; Casement, Letter to Sir Edward Grey, 5 February 1912, Blue Book No.41 in Casement, \textit{Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness}, p.728.
\textsuperscript{160} Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 19 July 1911, NLI MS 8358.
the “Belgian Solution” of annexation in the Congo. Britain had limited legal right to intervene and Casement thought the ‘ineffective squibs of the Foreign Office’ and the ‘milk and water methods’ of the Aborigines Protection Society thoroughly inadequate to ‘choke off’ a ‘helldog’ such as Leopold.\footnote{Casement, Telegram to Morel, 15 September 1903, and Casement, Letter to Morel, 4 January 1907. Both quoted in Louis, \textit{Ends of British Imperialism}, p.152.} Whilst then Morel felt defeated by the Belgian parliament’s failure to recognise native tenure in land, Casement saw atrocities as the result of Leopold’s personal tyranny and supported Belgian annexation as a means to end this.\footnote{Louis, \textit{Ends of British Imperialism}, p.180; O’Siocháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.131; O’Siocháin and O’Sullivan, ‘Introduction’, \textit{Congo Diary}, p.30. Bernard Porter also looks at this idea in Morel’s thought. Bernard Porter, \textit{Critics of Empire}, pp.275-290. For this idea of formal sovereignty as a means to check commercial excesses see Koskenniemi, \textit{The Gentle Civilizer of Nations}, p.107.} In 1912 he informed Morel that, ‘The Congo reform movement is dead. Its work is done…The Congo reconstruction movement has come—and that is necessarily a Belgian work.’\footnote{Casement, Letter to Morel, 13 June 1912, quoted in Louis, \textit{Ends of British Imperialism}, p.151.} Rather than agitating for debates about sovereign rights and land ownership like Morel, Casement supported the official British position, regarding Belgian colonial rule as contingent only upon accordance with the Berlin Act—i.e., preventing atrocities, ensuring free navigation and relieving excessive taxation.\footnote{As noted above, Casement was critical of Morel for arguing over non-essentials such as land ownership. See Casement, Letter to Morel, 22 April 1911, BLPE Morel Papers F8/24; For official British view on the “Belgian Solution”, see Louis, \textit{Ends of British Imperialism}, pp.178, 180.}

Likewise, in the Amazon, Casement lectured rubber traders on the virtues of Britain’s empire. ‘I explained that in the relations of British subjects and uncivilised peoples our government did not allow private war to individual ends…British methods of colonisation and legal safeguards…were at the bottom of all economic progress.’\footnote{Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal} p.79.} Despite his anti-imperial and Anglophobic protestations to Green a few years earlier, to
Casement in the Putumayo, a company committing atrocities was English ‘in name only.’ The atrocities required ‘external intervention,’ and ‘by the action of His Majesty’s Govt.’ he believed the ‘system can be brought to an end.’

Indeed, explicit support for reform through colonial rule is present in Casement’s thought until at least December 1910, as evidenced by the forceful essay he wrote on his return from the Putumayo. The culmination of his outrage at the atrocities, Casement reflected upon the extreme exploitation of South American natives at the hands of Europeans, calling upon the historical imagery of the conquistador to demonstrate continuous oppression. He argued this did not end with the establishment of republican government, and that Spanish and Portuguese ‘invaders have succeeded in evolving no theory of government that took account of the subject peoples otherwise than as slaves or chattels.’ Despite the vitriol, however, the essay stopped short of a blanket condemnation of imperialism.

Even after the atrocities of two investigations and in the privacy of his own diary, Casement’s critique continued to make room for imperialism properly enacted. He drew a distinction between liberal imperialism and empire as a means to ‘get rich

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167 Casement, Letter to Sir Edward Grey, 15 May 1911, PRO FO 371/1201. For more on the need for foreign ‘civilised’ and British intervention, see Casement, Letter to Gerald Spicer, 12 July 1911, PRO FO 371/1202, and Casement’s support for a mission on the Putumayo, the epitome of the liberal humanitarian civilising institutions: Casement, *Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness*, pp. 40, 495.
168 Although the document was undated, Mitchell uses physical and circumstantial evidence to date it December 1910. See Mitchell in *Amazon Journal*, p.497. For a copy of the essay itself see Casement, *Amazon Journal*, pp.497-505. A toned down version of it was created as the historical background to his second 1911 report on the Putumayo, though it was never published with the report. See Casement, *Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities*, NL1 MS 13,087 (31), and Casement, *Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness*, pp.127-142 for information on the document.
quick,’ arguing that whilst Northern Europeans had justifiably colonised to settle, Southern Europeans colonised to conquer and enslave. ‘The one went to found a people, the other to find a people.’\textsuperscript{171} In both cases, it is true, the Indian suffered’, but in North America, ‘the aboriginal was attacked because his presence was incompatible with the settlement of the European cultivator…The crime of enslaving the conquered had no part in the crime of conquest. (The inevitable advance of the stronger and settled civilisation swept away the Indian hunting race.)\textsuperscript{172} The destruction of native culture was unfortunate but necessary and partially mediated by the resultant civilised and prosperous society that was founded. ‘The tragedy is there’ but ‘today, where the northern European subdued the forest and broke up the plain one of the greatest nations on earth has replaced the roving bands of redmen.’\textsuperscript{173}

Even after his investigations then, Casement supported liberal imperialism. ‘Europe, the mother of nations, must overflow and here [South America] is the field of overflow – waiting the stream of fertilising life.’\textsuperscript{174} To civilise natives, overcome current atrocities and prevent future ones, ‘South America needs European immigration and European government too.’\textsuperscript{175} Indeed, humane imperial expansion from Northern Europe was so required that Casement became hugely critical of the Monroe Doctrine.\textsuperscript{176} Whilst the US refused to improve the plight of native South Americans, it prevented benevolent

\textsuperscript{171} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.504; Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.500. See also pp.501-503.
\textsuperscript{172} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.501. This idea is also prominent in the other document, Casement, \textit{Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities}, NLI MS 13,087 (31).
\textsuperscript{173} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.501.
\textsuperscript{174} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.488.
\textsuperscript{175} Casement, Letter to Gertrude Bannister, 1 September 1909, quoted in O'Socháin, \textit{Roger Casement}, p.262.
\textsuperscript{176} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, pp. 313, 373, 343, 488; Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 April 1911, Morel BLPES Morel Papers, F5/3; Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April, 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp. S.19 D2/3; Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 6 June 1911, NLI MS 8358; Casement [signed A Catholic Reader], Letter to the Editor, \textit{The Nation}, 26 July 1911, in Casement, \textit{Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness}, p.312.
imperial powers from doing so. ‘If the United States cannot let light into the dark places of South American then she must stand aside or be swept aside. The Monroe Doctrine is a stumbling block in the path of humanity.’\(^ {177}\)

This benevolent empire was not just an abstract idea. Casement strongly believed that ‘if only the Monroe Doctrine could be challenged by Germany…there would come hope for the hunted Indians…who have had 400 years of “Latin Civilisation” to brood on.’\(^ {178}\) Germany had the capacity to civilise natives, but also the desire to settle, cultivate and colonise; imperialism properly enacted. Germany would introduce ‘honest clean laws and institutions,’ developing the Amazon into ‘one of the greatest granaries of the world.’\(^ {179}\)

Casement in 1910 was then a uniquely experienced consul who had witnessed many horrendous atrocities on the forefronts of European expansion, of which he was hugely critical and personally committed to resolving. This criticism, however, continued to accept the tenets of liberal imperialism in its assumptions about the backwardness of native societies and the moral duty of civilised Christian empires to ensure development. Casement still believed in liberal imperialism, properly enacted, and his critique was fundamentally un-radical in its attempt to reform existing European

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\(^{178}\) Casement, *Amazon Journal*, p.373.

institutions. Casement in December 1910 continued to echo the pro-imperial jingoist rhetoric of his youth.

_No sight could be pleasanter than the flag of Teutonic civilisation advancing into this wilderness... Germany, with her 70,000,000 virile men has much to do for mankind... Let loose her pent up energies in this Continent... Law and order would have meaning then, and justice and labour advancing up this mighty river would subdue the forest and found cities._

**Practical Failings, Philosophical Contradictions \& Simultaneous Radicalisation**

Whilst then Casement was confronted by practices in the Congo and Putumayo, his initial response was to reform, improve, and even extend institutions of empire. A sincere advocate of the liberal civilising mission, he ‘did not believe in turning the clock back.’

Casement’s investigations, arguments with the Foreign Office and letter to Alice Green do not, therefore, straightforwardly explain his later Anglophobia or radical anti-imperialist behaviour. Whilst he was conscious and critical of exploitation, he identified it as a superficial and resolvable symptom of poorly implemented expansion, and he demonstrated neither the definitive nor self-conscious anti-imperialism that led him to the gallows.

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[180] Casement, _Amazon Journal_ p.434.

This does not mean, however, that Casement’s investigations had no impact on his political thought, nor by rejecting explanations that focus on the aftermath of the Congo do we commit to a thesis which purports overnight radicalisation on the eve of his retirement.\textsuperscript{182} As his letter to Green indicates, Casement was articulating anti-imperial sentiments as early as 1907, and by examining his entire career, one recognises a clear shift in tone. Clinically declaring that atrocities in the Congo did not ‘form part of a systematic breach of instructions conceived in the interest of the native,’ upon leaving the Putumayo Casement decried the ‘crime’ of ‘rapid and crushing enslavement of a hapless people’ ‘is not alone that of the Spaniard or the Peruvian,’ asking ‘Has our Christian civilisation itself no share in the blame? Has our modern commercialism…no part in this enterprise of horror and shame?’\textsuperscript{183}

Whilst Casement continued to affirm imperialism, his writings reveal he was also conscious of problems with expansion from an early stage, and that his liberal imperial ideas were confronted by empire in practice. Examining his writings as a whole, it becomes apparent that he actively supported and vehemently denounced empire, in public and private, throughout most of his career. Casement’s changing political thought was not the sequential linear trajectory of radicalisation often proposed. Rather, his thought was overtly contradictory and dialectical; shaped by the interaction between thought and practice, liberalism and coercion. Although Casement’s liberalism

\textsuperscript{182} Eg Cunninghame Graham contends that Casement ‘first became a Nationalist, some fourteen months before his death.’ See Cunninghame Graham, Letter to H.W. Nevinson, November 1928, quoted in Myers, \textit{A Fever at the Core}, p.86.

\textsuperscript{183} Casement, \textit{Congo Report}, p.33; Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.504.
was articulated through institutions of empire, his investigations provided an opportunity to simultaneously recognise the practical failings of the civilising mission. There was no definitive moment of radicalisation, but his documents reveal a process of partial denunciation and reconsideration.\textsuperscript{184} Casement’s changing political thought was characterised by disgruntlement, vacillation and attrition as he increasingly identified the systematic nature of exploitation on the frontiers of European expansion.

I will now examine Casement’s thought holistically, particularly his reflections upon the relationship between imperial experiences, to interrogate the way in which ideas were challenged, reconsidered and changed as a result of practice; demonstrating that his critique became increasingly radical and structural. Firstly, I will show that through exposure to multiple imperial projects, Casement began to identify failures of the civilising mission as being systematic rather than particular, thus questioning the ethical justifications for empire. Casement’s crisis of liberal imperialism, however, was not merely a response to practical failings, but involved grappling with deeper philosophical tensions in contemporary humanitarian thought. Secondly, I will argue that this systematic understanding of imperial failure highlighted the role of liberal imperialism itself in causing and justifying exploitation; a more profound realisation which so invalidated empire that he was forced to adopt revolutionary anti-imperial ideas. European imperial systems of labour, capital and land were not only failing to protect natives from themselves and others but were underwritten by a logic of domination.

that would never realise freedom or humane outcomes. Whilst then Casement simultaneously moved between affirmation and denunciation of empire, these contradictions derived not from his own flippancy but rather his continued commitment to liberal development and his anxiety over how best to realise humanitarian outcomes. In the absence of mutually beneficial development, and in light of liberal imperialism’s illiberal implications, Casement began to separate his attachment to liberalism from its realisation through empire, and his humanitarianism moved from imperial paternalism to self-determination.

Firstly, whilst Casement advocated the essentiality of European labour, capital and agriculture, to overcoming native poverty and savagery, his writings also reveal an increasing scepticism with regards to the efficacy of European models and thus the validity of enforcing them. His liberal imperialism was challenged by inhumane practices on the frontiers of expansion and the consistent practical failings of the civilising mission. Throughout the Congo and Amazon Reports he noted the excessive and arbitrary labour demanded of natives with inadequate remuneration, the uncommercial nature of transactions and the lack of sustainable cultivation.185 Not only had Europeans failed to organise and civilise, however, but the systems they introduced were counterproductive, destroying the industrious, albeit primitive, qualities of pre-existing native culture. ‘Where formerly they were accustomed to take long voyages

down to Stanley Pool to sell slaves, ivory, dried fish, or other local products...they find themselves today debarred from all such form of activity. 386 European rule had not improved idleness or poverty, but rather had led to further deterioration, and Casement was conscious of and anxious about the civilising mission’s practical failings. ‘Indeed, it would be hard to say how the people now live or how they occupy their own time.’ 387

Engaging with numerous imperial projects, Casement came to see exploitation and deterioration were not just particular instances of excess. He realised the frequency of imperial violations, considered the relationship between them, and articulated the failure of the civilising mission as being systematic. In his 1907 letter to Green, Casement was aware of British and Belgian oppression in South Africa, the Congo and Ireland, and drew links between them. In 1910, he depicted a much more sustained parallel between the Congo and the Amazon, and throughout 1911, his analysis became increasingly structural as he identified colonial exploitation in Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria and most of South America. 388 By reflecting upon and comparing his investigations, Casement read and discussed the civilising mission’s failure in the

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387 Casement, Congo Report, pp.27, 30; Taussig, ‘Culture of Terror’, p.479.
broader geographical and historical context of imperial exploitation.\footnote{Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 April 1911, BLPES Morel Paper, F5/3.} Between Leopoldism on the Congo, Diazism in Mexico – and what I know of the Amazon Rubber Trade – there are more human beings being held today in hopeless slavery...than at the height of the overseas slave trade...Africa no longer exports slaves – her people are enslaved at home to European capitalists.\footnote{Casement, Letter to Morel, 20 April 1911, BLPES Morel Papers, F8/24; Casement, Letter to Morel, 1909, quoted in O Siocháin, Roger Casement, pp.119-120.} Oppression was not merely the tyranny of Leopold or the plundering of Iberian conquistadors, but was manifest wherever Europeans had made contact, including the British in Nigeria and South Africa.\footnote{Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 April 1911, BLPES Morel Paper, F5/3.} In December 1910 Casement lamented that whilst he could try to end atrocities on the Putumayo, he had only ‘broken the neck of that particular evil. The much bigger question remains – the future of the S. American Indians and Native people generally.’\footnote{Casement, Amazon Journal, p.488.}

Whilst there was no moment of definitive anti-imperial radicalisation, continuous and systematic exploitation clearly eroded Casement’s deeply held liberal imperial beliefs about the ethical justifications for empire. For example, by the Amazon, he had begun to identify “idleness” and “savagery” as discourses mobilised to justify coercion rather than statements of fact. His experiences questioned his own liberal imperial categories of thought. On the issue of domestic slavery, he claimed, ‘it sounds suspiciously like the indictment formulated against the Boras and other strong tribes who “won’t work,” that they are cannibals...The Indian, who is stout enough to resist enslavement is
always in the wrong, and therefore a “cannibal.” Casement identified liberal imperial assumptions as problematic, acknowledged such rhetoric was easily co-opted, and that this mentality became a justificatory myth for expansion and coercion.

Secondly then, a much more radical critique is simultaneously present in Casement’s later humanitarian thought. The systematic failure to civilise natives, and the abhorrent exploitation by rubber regimes in the name of development, suggested that savagery and atrocity were not merely failures but in fact consequences of the civilising mission. Casement’s international experiences led him to acknowledge an underlying problem in contemporary liberal humanitarianism. Whilst asserting the universal humanity of mankind and the importance of liberty, liberal imperialism simultaneously assumed the superiority of a European model of cosmopolitanism and the backwardness of native society, legitimising paternal coercion until a sufficient level of maturity was reached. As acknowledged above, liberal humanitarianism had illiberal implications, and this contradiction increasingly worried Casement. Not only was the civilising mission failing, but its rhetoric was easily co-opted to justify oppression, its abstract

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195 Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 1907, NLI MS 10,464 [3].
notion of civility placed no limits on “temporary” coercion, and its instrumental rationality legitimised present exploitation in the blind pursuit of future development.

By thinking about exploitation as systematic rather than particular, Casement began to frame the civilising mission as a cause of oppression, invalidating ethical justifications for imperialism altogether.

This anti-imperial radicalisation is firstly evident in Casement’s conclusion that arguments for involuntary labour, as instrumental to civility, caused rather than ended oppression. Throughout his investigations he witnessed many atrocities perpetrated in the name of civilising labour – ‘if I saw women and children seized as hostages’ it was ‘forced labour conceived in the true interest of the native’ – and he became scornful towards coercion justified as a humanitarian mechanism.196 By the Putumayo he had begun to speak ironically of the “civilising campaign” of ‘beneficent civilisation’ ‘teaching natives the beauties of labour’ through violence alone, a growing ambivalence epitomised by a conversation with rubber trader, Victor Israel.197 Israel told Casement that, ‘these tribes in their unconquered state were no use to anyone…they had to be conquered and made to work.’198 Casement thus

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196 The La Lulanga Company regularly held wives and children at gunpoint, their justification being the need to educate native men about the vices and unprofitability of idleness; see Casement, Congo Report, pp.46-47. This sentiment is repeated in Congo Report, pp.45, 52; O’Stiochain, ‘Roger Casement’s Vision of Freedom’, pp.7-8; O’Siochain, Roger Casement, pp.118-120; Casement, Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities, NLI MS 13,087 (31).


198 Casement, Amazon Journal, p.78.
asked for particulars as to how such a “conquest” was actually effected. The Indians it was
clear did not abandon their forest freedom voluntarily and come gladly to collect
rubber... How were the preliminaries of “trading” or labour established?
“Ooh!” he said, “there is fighting of course. They resist and often kill parties and burn the
houses— but in the end they are reduced.”
“And the Peruvian government,” I asked “looks on with approval?”
“Of course— it is the only way the tribes can be civilised...” 199

Whilst he went on to advise Israel of the proper methods of civilising labour, à la the
British Empire, engaging with the civilising mission in practice highlighted the
complicity of arguments for coercion in sustained acts of oppression, violence and
incivility. In practice, civilising labour meant, ‘not only was their liberty restricted, but
arbitrary and wholly illegal punishments were frequently inflicted upon them.’ 200 In the
Amazon Casement thus concluded that European coerced labour was slavery. “To my
mind the state of dealings with the Indians that had been described was slavery; ‘the
wilder the Indian the wickeder the slavery.’ 201

By exposing the contradictions of accepting coercion, Casement’s experiences of empire
drew attention to the active role liberal imperialism played in creating and legitimising
atrocities. ‘Indians who actually prefer their forest freedom to the whip, the cepo, the
bullet and the raping of their children’ were ‘spoken of in terms of reprobation as lazy,

199 Casement, *Amazon Journal*, p.79.
idle and worthless – and this by men who never leave their hammocks all day, and whose only “work”...is to terrorise and rob.\textsuperscript{202} Liberal empire was underwritten by an instrumental logic which perpetually justified acts of coercion as morally legitimate means to realise future civility without interrogating the efficacy or morality of either the means or goal itself. By the Putumayo, Casement was conscious and openly critical of this logic. He found the company “harking back to the Leopoldian arguments – expediency “the only way”, “the beginning of things”, etc,’ when in fact, ‘We are dealing here with first principles of right and wrong, and all the argument in favour of this damnable thing is, originally, inspired by greed, and only maintained by concealment of fact.’\textsuperscript{203}

Casement’s imperial experiences also highlighted the contradictions of liberal humanitarian thought with regards to commercial expansion and free trade. The Putumayo involved the negligence and complicity of a British company, with British shareholders and British buyers.\textsuperscript{204} Despite Britain’s championing of its humanitarian commercial expansion, the Putumayo revealed that the centre of philanthropy and international trade was equally involved in the exploitation of indigenous societies.

\textit{The Aranas brought their wares (50,00 Indian Slaves) to market in London. Not, be it observed, to Madrid or to Lima, but to London. And they found English men and English finance prepared without question to accept their Putumayo estates...} The

\textsuperscript{202} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.250.  
\textsuperscript{203} Casement, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.179. 
\textsuperscript{204} Mitchell argues the dominance of the British in the Amazonian region throughout the century. See Mitchell, \textit{The Diaries Controversy}, \textit{Amazon Journal}, p.47.
Rubber was there. How it was produced, out of what a hell of human suffering no one knew, no one asked, no one suspected. Can it be no one cared?205

Unlike the Congo then, where subordination ‘to the lust of gain’ was a Leopoldian trait, the Amazon exposed the involvement of imperial capitalist ideology itself in atrocities. The Putumayo investigation prompted Casement to ask, ‘Has our Christian civilisation itself no share in the blame? Has our modern commercialism...no part in this enterprise of horror and shame?’206

Casement continually reflected upon experiences of commercialism in empire and by 1911 criticism of capitalist exploitation was much more prevalent. Not only were commercial enterprises complicit in imperial atrocities, but commercialism drove exploitation. ‘The object of the “civilised” intruders, in the first instance,’ was to subjugate the native population ‘and put them to what was termed civilised, or at any rate profitable, occupation,’ whilst the ‘subduers formed themselves into bands and parties dubbed commercial associations.’207 Commercialist ideology legitimised and propelled exploitation. Africans were ‘enslaved at home to European capitalists,’ and, ‘induced by American & other capitalists & the upward price of rubber,’ South and Central America had witnessed ‘an enormous expansion of the most disgraceful slavery...in the last 25 years.’208 Contrary to the civilising mission’s goal of ending domestic and international slavery, Casement believed that ‘slavery is spreading,’ and,

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207 Casement, ‘Reports on treatment of Barbados men employed by the Peruvian Amazon Company’, p.10.

208 Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 9 April 1911, NLI MS 10.464 (4). [emphasis added].
that ‘stock gambling & share markets [are] pillars of the scheme.’

The civilising mission’s championing of free trade as a means to realise future autonomy and prosperity dehumanised the liberal imperial project in the interim, encouraging life to be ‘eternally to be appraised at its “market” price,’ whilst providing a blanket justification for profiteering.

Liberalisation allowed might to prevail over right and for murder and slavery to be ‘called the march of civilization!’ By considering the practice of expansion in a number of imperial spaces, Casement increasingly saw exploitation as synonymous with commercialism. ‘These methods – wholly damnable and atrocious as they are – are termed “ensuring the economic development of a country!”’

‘Wherever, in fact, there are wild Indian tribes…we learn of the same merciless methods, and of British or American companies being founded on the proceeds.’

Casement began to view benevolent civilising capitalism as a fallacy.

“Commercial interests” are practically modern Civilization itself. They make & unmake Govts. And destroy people, just as they make war…“Commercial interests” represent profits…Show them profits – and they won’t trouble about making (or breaking) the welfare of peoples.

By engaging with numerous imperial projects Casement thus came to identify exploitation as caused by liberal imperial ideas rather than just their poor

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210 Casement, Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 1907, NLI MS 10,464 [3].
211 Casement, ‘Reports on treatment of Barbados men employed by the Peruvian Amazon Company’, p.10; Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 26 May 1911, NLI MS 8358; Casement, Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities, NLI MS 13,087 (31).
212 Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 26 May 1911, NLI MS 8358.
213 Casement [signed A Catholic Reader], Letter to the Editor, The Nation, 26 July 1911, in Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.511.
implementation. It is however his changing ideas on land which illustrate the truly anti-imperial implications of this philosophical crisis.

As examined above, Casement framed colonial sovereign claims as an essential demarcation of the space in which the civilising mission could take place and mobilised natural law arguments about cultivation to justify usurpation as necessary to mutual prosperity and sustainable growth. By engaging with multiple imperial projects, however, he realised that this basic assumption of liberal imperialism was itself the greatest cause of destitution and poverty. European control of native lands removed the capacity of indigenous people to realise self-sufficiency and to protect themselves against exploitation, whilst the conflation of property with sovereignty in practice provided legal protection for tyranny and absolutism; ensuring exploitation in empire and thereby threatening liberty at home in Europe. Engaging with and reflecting upon his experiences of expansion, European claims to native land, and thus liberal imperialism itself, became utterly unjustifiable by its own definitions.

Whilst Casement was highly critical of the Amazon Rubber Company’s managers, in October 1910 he suggested for the first time that, ‘the true criminal is the government of Peru, far off, uncaring...passive, and when called on for help...ready to kill too, and so extend the frontiers and get more revenue-bearing territory.’ Despite its republican form, Peru’s ‘ruling class,’ defined by its Spanish heritage – “Peruvian” as distinct from “Indian”– was engaged in a quasi-colonial, unequal and unjust relationship with native

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216 Casement, *Amazon Journal*, p.278; Casement, *Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities*, NLI MS 13,087 (31).
people, having usurped their land with no intention of fulfilling attendant duties of rule; ‘Peru has many inhabitants, but very few citizens.’

Peru’s sovereign claim then caused exploitation in two ways. Firstly, the State’s territorial claim afforded protection and legitimacy under international law to expansion and exploitation in the Putumayo, advancing the interests of elites at the expense of natives. The Putumayo ‘was practically a no-man’s land, lying remote from any restraining authority or civilising influence…claimed by three separate republics.’ The Peruvian ‘Arana Brothers [had, however,] acquired possession of the majority of the Columbian undertakings in these regions…sometimes by sale…and sometimes by other means.’ The Government encouraged this ‘requisition’ whereby ‘the natives were…counted as part of the property that accrued to each free-booter through the strength of his own right arm,’ as it ensured de facto control of a region rich in rubber and labour in the name of Peru; thereby extending ‘the frontiers [and]…revenue-bearing territory.’ The State owed to the Aranas ‘all the benefits the nation derives from its enterprise,’ and Casement realised in 1910 that the Putumayo represented not a company in conflict with Government policy in the untameable depths of the Amazonian jungle, but commercialism in line with, and protected by, Peru’s colonial agenda. The sovereign claim by European rulers was not a delimited

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219 Casement, ‘Reports on methods of rubber collection and treatment of natives on the Putumayo’, p.27.

220 Casement, ‘Reports on treatment of Barbados men employed by the Peruvian Amazon Company’, p.10.


space for civilising but a defined territory in which the usurpation of property, and thus slavery and tyranny, could be ensured.\footnote{Casement, Letter to Sir Edward Grey, 26 June 1911, in Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.416; Casement, Letter to Gerald Spicer, 15 November 1911, PRO FO 371/1203. For problems with sovereignty in international law as a claim to exclusivity without clearly defined obligations, and thus as a justification for tyranny, see Koskenneimi, The Gentle Civilizer of Nations, esp. pp.126, 175.}

This problem was not, however, confined to Peru. The imperial mindset had legitimised usurpation throughout the New World without demanding the fulfilment of attendant duties to indigenous populations. Imperial sovereign claims had allowed ‘so-called Republics’ such as Columbia, Bolivia and Brazil to utilise their position as ‘trustees of civilization’ to facilitate the ‘wholesale enslavement of weaker men for their revenues’ in a form of what Casement characterised as ‘legalised piracy.’\footnote{Casement [signed A Catholic Reader], Letter to the Editor, The Nation, 26 July 1911, in Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.511-512; Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 26 May 1911, NLI MS 8358; Casement, Historical Background to the Putumayo Atrocities NLI MS 13,087 (31).} By July 1911, Casement thus explicitly, albeit pseudonymously, questioned European sovereignty throughout South America. ‘By what right of public morality are those who live on the enslavement and torture of defenceless thousands of Indians tolerated as Christian representatives at the Court of a Christian Sovereign?’\footnote{Casement [signed A Catholic Reader], Letter to the Editor, The Nation, 26 July 1911, in Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.512.} Ownership and control of native lands without the fulfilment of attendant duties such as cultivation, protection and governance, was illegitimate and the sovereignty of ‘pirate strongholds’ should not therefore be respected.\footnote{Casement [signed A Catholic Reader], Letter to the Editor, The Nation, 26 July 1911, in Casement, Sir Roger Casement’s Heart of Darkness, p.512.}
Casement identified liberal imperial justifications for the usurpation of land as a myth legitimising coercion.\textsuperscript{227} By 1911, however, he contended that even when European rulers fulfilled attendant duties, oppression ensued. A second more radical critique of the humanitarianism of European claims to native land thus emerged, as he argued that the naïve and misguided benevolence of liberal imperialism, in its justifications for dispossession, led to dependency, desperation and enslavement.

Whilst Casement consistently believed that productive land was central to happiness and prosperity, by 1911 he had witnessed the systematic failure of Europeans to teach or institute proper cultivation.\textsuperscript{228} In his letters to Travers Buxton\textsuperscript{229} and Morel he therefore shifted his focus from European to native control and ownership. ‘If a native owns land, he can live by it, and feed himself…and ultimately grow more than he…needs…and so you get the root of all healthy commerce planted too – for he sells off his surplus.’\textsuperscript{230} If then, by contrast, ‘you deny his ownership of the soil, you render him a landless alien in his own country and drive him into the slave pen,’ and this is precisely what had happened throughout the colonial world.\textsuperscript{231}

Imperial state control of native lands had systematically dispossessed indigenous people and undermined their realisation of self-sufficiency, making them poor, dependent and thus vulnerable to the exploitation of landlord and enslaver. Quite simply, Casement

\textsuperscript{227} Casement, Letter to William Cadbury, 26 May 1911, NL1 MS 8358.
\textsuperscript{228} Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 April 1911, BLPES Morel Paper, F5/3.
\textsuperscript{229} Of The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society.
\textsuperscript{230} Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp. S.19 D2/3.
argued that ‘if the Indians were protected in their land ownership, they would not be the easy prey they are today to the exploiter…The slavery of the Indians has grown surely and fatally from that assumption – that the land does not belong to the people, but to the “State.”’\textsuperscript{232} The liberal imperial civilising mission, even when properly enacted, was then a cause of exploitation as it failed ‘to recognise and register the \textit{native} claims to land, resting, not on the title deeds emanating from a politician, but from the obvious long association of the claimant and his forebears with the soil in question.’\textsuperscript{233} It was ‘of little permanent value fighting the slaver, if you don’t go to the root of things and first fight these claims to land ownership by States…We can smash slavery today on the Putumayo perhaps – but it will arise again in a new form if you leave the Indian tribesmen without legal recognition of his tribal right to live on the soil of his own country.’\textsuperscript{234}

The foundation of liberal imperialism, that expansion was legitimate and an important means to end slavery, was thus rejected and we can recognise overtly anti-imperial conclusions in Casement’s Putumayan writings. By 1911 Casement was arguing that, ‘The \textit{people} must fight for their lives and freedom always – and to root them in the soil and exalt agriculture and debase landlordism must be their weapon.’\textsuperscript{235} The assumption ‘that the land does not belong to the people, but to the “State”’ must ‘be fought wherever it lifts its head: for once it is admitted by the freedom-loving world of

\textsuperscript{232} Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp. S.19 D2/3.
\textsuperscript{233} Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp. S.19 D2/3.
\textsuperscript{234} Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp. S.19 D2/3.
\textsuperscript{235} Casement, Letter to Morel, 8 April 1911, BLPE\textit{S} Morel Paper, F5/3.
Northern Europe, it would, I believe, destroy our civilisation itself.\textsuperscript{236} The tyrannical implications of the usurpation of land justified fighting against imperial ideas, for the sake of non-European and European alike, and a much more rebellious and violent tone permeates Casement’s later work.\textsuperscript{237} Casement told the British public that ‘big-game shooters’ ought to visit South America and ‘sight their rifles at the beasts of prey that feed on these hopeless men, women and children’.\textsuperscript{238} By the end of 1911, these beasts of prey included colonial governments and the systems of liberal empire itself.

This chapter has shown that Casement simultaneously advocated both pro and anti-imperial ideas in private and public throughout his career as he consistently sought liberal humanitarian outcomes, but was unsure how best to realise these. Casement’s radicalisation was not straightforwardly a response to the Congo investigation and antagonisms with the Foreign Office, but drew upon his experiences of empire in multiple sites across his career and is characterised by vacillation but growing scepticism. Whilst his thought was embedded in and constrained by liberal imperialism, and he initially advocated reform and extension of existing institutions, he began to realise the systematic nature of the civilising mission’s failure. More importantly, however, he also identified a fundamental tension in liberal imperial philosophy’s model of liberty and humanitarianism through paternal coercion.

\textsuperscript{236} Casement, Letter to Travers Buxton, 18 April 1911, RH MS Brit. Emp, S.19 D2/3. Fitzmaurice also notes the regularity of this concern amongst liberal critics of empire: that tyranny in the colonies posed a threat to liberty at home. See Fitzmaurice, ‘Liberalism and Empire in Nineteenth-Century International Law’, p.126.
recognising the manner in which these ideas had caused and justified exploitation throughout the colonial world. Not only had the civilising mission failed to actualise humane outcomes, but he lost faith in the capacity of empire to ever realise freedom. Casement’s changing critique of expansion was then dialectical, derived from the contradictions exposed by the interaction between liberal imperial ideology and his unique experiences of empire, resulting in anti-imperial conclusions.
CHAPTER FOUR

NOT JUST A "CRUDE APPEAL TO NATIONALITY VERSUS IMPERIALISM"

ROGER CASEMENT AND IRELAND

In the early hours of Good Friday 1916, a sleep-deprived Roger Casement and two republican compatriots left the German U-19 they had travelled in for the previous six days, to row ashore amidst rough swell at Banna Strand in County Kerry, Ireland. Temporarily capsizing, it took the men over two hours to reach the shore, where they failed to rendezvous with the German steamer they had accompanied, carrying 20,000 guns, or the Irish Volunteers supposed to assist in the unloading. The Irish Republican Brotherhood military council had miscalculated date of shipment’s arrival.239 Whilst his comrades searched for help, Casement sat alone at a nearby abandoned fort and was arrested that afternoon by Royal Irish Constabulary patrolmen for his suspicious behaviour. He seemingly made little effort to evade capture, and no attempt was made to rescue him.240 Spending the night at Tralee police station, he was

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239 Sawyer, Casement, p.125.
240 Despite several opportunities in the early hours of his arrest and transportation to do so. Sawyer, Casement, p.126; O’Siochain, Roger Casement, p.440.
transferred to London for interrogation by Scotland Yard and then imprisoned in the Tower, whilst the Easter Uprising took place, awaiting trial for high treason.

Casement’s fatal return to Ireland was the culmination of two years abroad in aid of Irish independence. Resigning from the Foreign Office at the end of his Putumayo work in August 1913, he became embroiled in the Home Rule debacle and was an important public agitator for the Irish Volunteers, invited by Redmond to negotiate the future of the Nationalist movement at the House of Commons on 7 May 1914. Disillusioned by the delay of constitutional solutions, however, Casement began to advocate outright separatism and was present at a meeting of key Irish nationalists in London the very next day, which decided to run guns into Ireland. As a well-known Northern Irish Protestant and international humanitarian campaigner, Casement then journeyed to the US to raise funds for republicanism, and, following the outbreak of war, travelled to Germany. Here he sought and obtained a German declaration of support for Irish independence, and tried to establish an “Irish Brigade” from POWs, to be landed in Ireland as a liberating force in the event of a German naval victory. Casement claimed the importance of keeping Irishmen out of the war, in order that they may ‘shed their blood’ for a ‘free Ireland’ in the fight for their ‘right’ to ‘self-government.’

241 John Redmond (1856-1918) was an Irish Nationalist MP and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party who sought moderate constitutional Home Rule. At the outbreak of war he urged the Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British Army.
242 Mitchell, Casement, p.85; Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’.
244 Casement, ‘The Duty of Christendom’, Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914, p.29, Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.5.914.3; Casement, ‘Speech from the
democratic and liberal form of empire than that of Britain, he was disappointed by
German diplomats in Berlin and the lack of enthusiasm amongst Irish POWs regarding
the Brigade.\(^{245}\) He spent most of 1915 despondent and isolated, suffering from severe
bouts of depression.\(^{246}\) In March 1916 however, Casement learned of the planned
uprising in Ireland. Whilst he could not secure the desired number of guns or any
German officers, and no longer had faith in the goodwill of the German Government,
he conceded the importance of arming republicans and volunteered to accompany the
shipment in the hope he could convince the nationalist leadership to postpone the
uprising.\(^{247}\) He left Germany a committed revolutionary, and accepted it was likely he
would die in the advancement of the Irish cause. ‘To save my own countrymen from
taking part in a great crime I should not shrink from a hundred acts of “high treason”,
or ever shirk the consequences.’\(^{248}\)

Whilst Britain was aware of Casement’s nationalism and growing Anglophobia – from
their interception of German cables, but also from his public denunciations – the
rapidity of his move from respectable, knighted public servant to revolutionary plotter,

\(^{245}\) Casement, 'The Far Extended Baleful Power of the Lie', *The Continental Times*, 3 November, 1915;

\(^{246}\) Casement, *British Versus German Imperialism: A Contrast* (New York: Neutral Publishing Company, 1914);
Casement 'The Causes of the War and the Foundations of Peace', in Herbert Mackey, ed., *The Crime Against Europe*
(Dublin: C.J. Fallon Limited, 1966), pp.3-16; Casement, 'The Keeper of the Seas', [August 1911], 'The Balance of
Power', [September 1912], 'The Enemy of Peace', [March 1913], *Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A
possible Outcome of the War of 1914* Casement, 'Alsace, Ireland and a Poet', Letter to the Editor of the Freeman's
Journal, 17 January, 1914. For his growing disillusionment in Germany see Casement, *German Diaries* esp. pp.73,
161, 197-201.

\(^{247}\) Casement tells us that he did not keep a diary for 1915 because events were so bleak that they only depressed him.
Casement, *German Diaries* p.197; Reinhard R. Doerries, 'Hopeless Mission: Sir Roger Casement in Imperial

\(^{248}\) Richard Kirkland, 'Franz Fanon, Roger Casement and Colonial Commitment' in Glenn Hooper and Colin

\(^{248}\) Casement, 'The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite', *The Continental Times*, 15 November, 1915 [written 30
October 1915].
gun-runner and spy was nonetheless perceived as shocking and the action of a mentally-ill man. Casement had not only shifted from a Northern Protestant Unionist to a public Home Ruler, but a vehement loather of England, that ‘bitch and the harlot of the North Sea,’ arguing that English Government in Ireland ‘derived not from right, but from conquest,’ ‘that no English Government whether it called itself Whig or Tory was capable of treating Ireland with justice,’ and that the British empire, ‘whether it call itself an empire or a democracy,’ would be built on the ‘spirit of imperial exploitation.’ Self-government was then a ‘right, a thing born in us at birth’ that no ‘debating society on the banks of the Liffey [Home Rule]’ could grant, only ‘100,000 armed and disciplined Irishmen...[with] the barrel of a well-aimed gun.’ Given Casement’s consular career of pursuing the empire’s commercial interests, the symbolism of his knightining in 1911, and his continued work on the Putumayo until late 1913, his commitment to undermining Britain and conspiring with her enemies at the outbreak of war only a few months later seems rather inconsistent. As he acknowledged himself, ‘it is not every day that even an Irishman commits High Treason – especially one who has been in the service of the Sovereign he discards and not without honour and some fame in that service.’ Indeed, in between his revolutionary plotting in London in May 1914, Casement continued to play the

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250 Casement, 9 February 1916, Germany Diary, p.196.
251 Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock’, p.152.
252 Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’.
255 Casement, 7 November 1914, Germany Diary, p.20.
respectable public servant, giving evidence at the Royal Commission on reform and improvement of the Civil Service.\textsuperscript{256}

Casement’s revolutionary republicanism, however, need not be understood through paradox and duality, or be characterised as sudden. I will now briefly examine the content and nature of his Irish nationalism in order to elucidate the relationship between his consular career and treason, arguing that his objection was not merely to England’s oppression of Ireland, or even to the particular undemocratic form of Britain’s empire. Rather, his understanding of exploitation was systematic, international, and, much like his humanitarian investigations, took issue with the manner in which liberal imperial thinking was both a facilitator and cause of oppression.

Casement’s Irish nationalism can only be properly understood as informed by and as an extension of the growing scepticism seen in his investigations. This chapter will explore this continuity by engaging with three ideas, essential to the logic of liberal empire, which Casement began to question at the end of his Putumayo work, and by acknowledging his continued critique of these in his writings on Ireland. Firstly, by examining his thought on Irish economic dependence, a continued criticism of civilising rhetoric will become apparent. Secondly, his views on Unionism and democratic participation will be explored to highlight his understanding of international and positive law as a legitimising force of conquest. And thirdly, by

\textsuperscript{256} Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service Minutes of Evidence, pp.1914-16 (Cld. 7749) XI.
interrogating his objections to Home Rule, his identification of instrumental rationality as a cause of oppression will be exposed. In all three cases, Casement’s nationalism drew upon and was articulated through international examples, informed by his previous experiences of empire and then applied to new colonial contexts globally. By acknowledging this continuity and the internationalism of his anti-colonial nationalism, this chapter will then examine the manner in which Casement’s Irish republicanism was fundamentally anti-imperial, not just anti-British. Casement’s Irish writings critiqued the underlying systems and structures of empire, arguing that imperialism depended upon a logic of coercion and domination. A genuine liberal, he thus lost faith in the capacity of imperial rule for humane development and argued that these systems ought to be challenged, advocating self-determination in Ireland and elsewhere as the only way to realise freedom and justice. This chapter will argue that Casement’s Irish republicanism was informed by his previous experiences of empire and was applied to new colonial contexts, highlighting the internationalism of his anti-colonial nationalism, and examining the manner in which contradictions of liberal imperial logic empowered and justified his revolutionary anti-imperial action.

**CIVILITY, LEGALITY AND INSTRUMENTALITY:**

**CASEMENT REJECTS THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL EMPIRE**

As I have argued in the above examination of the Congo and Putumayo investigations, Casement became increasingly critical of the civilising mission. He identified atrocity not as a mere failure to properly implement humanitarian programmes, but as a
consequence of liberal imperialism’s acceptance of “temporary” coercion; the civilising mission caused and justified exploitation. Criticism of this tension is likewise prominent in his writings on Ireland 1911–16, leading him to more definitively reject liberal imperialism’s claims to be liberal or humanitarian.

Casement’s essays and newspaper articles in this period consistently emphasise English dependence upon and economic exploitation of Ireland.\textsuperscript{257} Ireland’s geographical position, as the route to all westward markets, facilitated British maritime commercial dominance and ensured the military security of the English mainland, from which an empire could be built. ‘This highly favoured maritime position depends...upon an unnamed factor, the unchallenged possession and use of which by England has been the true foundation of her imperial greatness. Without Ireland there would be no British Empire.’\textsuperscript{258} It was not only Ireland’s favourable geographic position that was utilised, however, as England also appropriated its wealth, produce and people in the extension and protection of London’s interests.\textsuperscript{259} England had ‘held Ireland in her grip for centuries,’ reducing it to an ‘unparalleled’ ‘economic...political, religious and moral servitude.’\textsuperscript{260}

\textsuperscript{257} Poor Old Woman [Casement], \textit{The Elsewhere Empire} (Dublin: Patrick Mahon Printer, 1914); Irishman [Casement], ‘The English Hypocrite; Irish Freedom, December 1912 (written 31 October 1912); Casement, ‘The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite’; Casement, John Bull’s Other Empire, 1914. Cambridge, University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.7.914.7; An Irish American [Casement], ‘From “Coffin Ship” to “Atlantic Greyhound”, \textit{The Irish Review} (Dublin) Vol. 4, No. 37 (Mar., 1914), pp. 1-11; Shan Van Vocht [Casement], \textit{Ireland, Germany and the Next War} (Belfast: Davidson & McCormack Limited, 1913). Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.4.913.5; Casement, \textit{Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914}. Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.5.914.5; Casement, ‘The Causes of the War and the Foundations of Peace’, pp.3-16.

\textsuperscript{258} Ireland, \textit{Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914}, p.4 Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.5.914.5.

\textsuperscript{259} Casement, ‘The Freedom of the Seas’, [November- December 1913], \textit{Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914}, p.32, Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.5.914.5

\textsuperscript{260} An Irish American [Casement], ‘From “Coffin Ship” to “Atlantic Greyhound”,’p.5.
Much like European powers in Africa and South America, Casement argued that this exploitative imperial relationship was difficult to challenge as it had been hidden and sustained by civilising rhetoric. Despite its dependence upon Ireland, ‘England,’ through an effective campaign of isolation, had ‘established the legend that Ireland was a poor and worthless country and the people idle, dissolute and disorderly.’ The famine had been caused by poor local land management and an unproductive population, and the “smallness” of Ireland justified, and indeed ethically necessitated, English control. Accordingly, ‘Government’ in Ireland was ‘determined to improve the people (at all costs).’ Drawing on categories prominent in his earlier humanitarian critique, Casement highlighted the manner in which discourses of labour, capital and productive agriculture had been mobilised to construct a mythology of Irish poverty and ineptitude that legitimised English rule. His nationalist writings rebuffed these as utter ‘fallacy’. For example, he tells us that ‘in the six years 1846–51 Ireland lost over 2,000,000 people, either from starvation, famine, fever or flight to America,’ but in the same period, ‘exported not less than £100,000,000 of foodstuffs–corn, cattle and provisions to England.’ It was not then that ‘man did not work here. He worked well and produced much. But another man, with an organised system of robbery under arms, took from him.


262 Casement, 'The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite'; Casement, *British Versus German Imperialism*, pp.15-17;

263 An Irish American [Casement], 'From “Coffin Ship” to “Atlantic Greyhound”, p.4.

264 Casement, 'The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite'.

265 Casement, 'The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite'.

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Similarly, his explanation of the Irish famine paralleled previous arguments about the role of liberal imperial claims to native lands in causing atrocities.\textsuperscript{266} Despite the civilising mission’s benevolent ideal of cultivation, he had argued in Peru that the usurpation of land had denied natives self-sufficiency and the products of their own labour, making them vulnerable to starvation or highly exploitative employment relations. In Ireland, the imperial claim, through the Act of Union, likewise empowered the (foreign) State and denied Irish control and ownership of land, causing widespread destitution.\textsuperscript{267} “The people died by the hundred thousand from hunger, while the soil they tilled, but did not own, produced in one year an export of £20,000,000 worth of food taken away by England. The producer died of starvation, while the idle and worthless in another land fed upon his toil.”\textsuperscript{268} Images of idleness and savagery had been used to legitimise English economic exploitation, whilst usurpation of land and denial of native inhabitants’ right to ‘fruits of their own labours,’ had annihilated the population.\textsuperscript{269} “Irish “barbarism” had perished of hunger on the most fertile plains of Europe.”\textsuperscript{270} British control of Ireland was neither benevolent nor necessary, invalidating, for Casement, any ethical pretensions of their imperial claim.

This mobilisation of civilising rhetoric to hide and sustain exploitation was not just limited to Ireland, the Congo or the Putumayo, but highlighted structural issues with

\textsuperscript{266} Carr highlights the continuity between his Irish and Putumayan experiences on the issue of land, Carr, ‘Roger Casement in the Amazon, the Congo and Ireland’, pp.186-189.
\textsuperscript{267} Casement, ‘Ulster and Ireland’, The Fortnightly Review, No.DLXIII New Series, 1 November 1913, pp.803-805; Irishman [Casement], ‘The English Hypocrite’; Casement, ‘The Keeper of the Seas’, [August 1911], Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914, p.22, Cambridge University Library, Rare Books Room, Hlb.5.914.5; Poor Old Woman [Casement], The Elsewhere Empire.
\textsuperscript{268} Casement, ‘The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite’.
\textsuperscript{269} Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock’, p.157.
\textsuperscript{270} Casement, ‘The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite’.
imperial thinking more generally. Casement’s nationalist anti-colonialism was explicitly international, as he criticised the civilising mission as a system of thought that justified domination internationally and historically. He compared Irish extinction to the plight of both North and South American natives and England’s economic exploitation to Peru and Mexico’s debt bondage, but Ireland was only one instance. England had ‘set out to lay low every free people that had a country worth invading...India she overran by the same methods as had given to Ireland’. Britain demanded ‘right of pre-emption to all fertile, “unoccupied” lands of the globe not already in possession of a people capable of seriously disputing invasion, with the right of reversion to such other regions as may...prove financially exploitable, whether suitable for colonization or not. ‘Boasting of their love of freedom’ the English went to ‘barbarous Africa to civilise the African, and when they enslaved him instead...it was because they perceived these naked natives to be, in the phrase of John Locke, “a people of beastly living, without God, law, religion or commonwealth.” The civilising empire was characterised by perpetual acts of usurpation, dispossession, denial of basic rights and utter neglect, and he understood Irish issues such as landlordism imperially. Whether in Madeira, Teneriffe, Agadir, Tahiti or Bagdad, he argued ‘England is the landlord of civilization, mankind her tenantry, and the earth her estate.’

272 Poor Old Woman [Casement], The Elsewhere Empire.
274 XXX [Casement], ‘Ireland a slave depot’, Irish Freedom, February 1914.
Imperial exploitation sustained by civilising rhetoric was not just limited to Britain’s empire, either. Casement also created historical analogies with Rome and Athens and discussed the militaristic expansionism of France, Russia and Germany to argue that, ‘the names change but the spirit of imperial exploitation, whether it calls itself an empire or a democracy, does not change.\textsuperscript{276} Irrespective of liberal, civilising or benevolent claims, exploitation was internationally and historically caused by the system of imperialism which relied upon coercion and domination. In writing about his own country, Casement came to denounce empire altogether. Irish freedom was of foremost importance, but he drew attention to Turkish conquest and Balkan uprisings to argue Ireland was but the ‘Western Macedonia.’\textsuperscript{277}

The themes of Casement’s Irish nationalism were then not sudden or a break from his broader thinking on empire. His nationalism was an extension of previous critiques of the civilising mission, and by recognising these problems internationally, he was led to more definitively anti-imperial conclusions. This growing and systematic challenge to the underlying structures of empire is likewise illustrated by his critique of codified legal thinking as a mechanism for affirming imperial exploitation. As we saw above, Casement initially understood atrocities as a lack of adherence to European legal

\textsuperscript{276} Casement, ‘The Causes of the War and the Foundations of Peace’, pp.7-8, 15; Poor Old Woman [Casement], \textit{The Elsewhere Empire}(Dublin: Patrick Mahon Printer, 1914);

systems. His notion of justice and rights was conscribed by positive law. By the end of his Putumayo investigation, however, he began to question local and international European law, particularly respect for the sovereign claims of corrupt South American governments, acknowledging the manner in which codification gave status to exploitation, allowing for a form of ‘legalised piracy.’ In his writings on Ireland, particularly in his examination of Unionism and imperial centralisation, he further explored the way such legal thinking had been employed internationally to justify imperial claims that were wholly unethical. Acknowledging that such justifications for imperialism were problematic, he thus challenged empire itself.

The Act of Union to Casement was a legal myth that gave legitimacy to domination. ‘English rule’, ‘English-made law,’ and ‘English government in Ireland’ was represented as having the sanction of Ireland itself, since the Parliament was styled in law that of Great Britain and Ireland.278 Challenging Unionism could thus be characterised as a challenge to institutions of order and justice, and an affront to the collective will of the Irish people.279 Whereas, in fact, Casement argued “‘Union’ meant economic servitude and ‘the military occupation of Ireland as a conquered country,’ empowering the conquerors to enshrine inequitable relations.280 Through the Act of Union, ‘the policy of plunder, misappropriation of funds, defamation of character and destruction of industrial life became “legalised”.’281 The constitution of Ireland was then not the ‘achievement and pride of the people,’ and could not ‘rest on

their own freewill and…determination to maintain it. The legal relationship between England and Ireland could only be maintained through violence and repression. The ‘chief representative’ of the constitution was the British Army, ‘armed not to protect the population but to hold it down,’ and law acted as a mechanism to codify and justify this oppression. The Act of Union meant that ‘disunion must now be regarded as sacrosanct and maintained to the end of time.

This use of law, to enshrine tyranny and inequality through false objectivism, was similarly repeated in imperial relations throughout the world. Casement’s nationalist writing called upon themes of imperial centralisation, militarism and conquest to distinguish between legal and moral rights to rule. He argued that ‘In the British Empire, Imperialism, means, and has never meant anything else, but the Absolutism of England. This undemocratic relationship was institutionalised and legalised by imperial governance whereby ‘there is a supreme and absolute England to which Ireland, India and Scotland are subject…none of which are permitted a voice in Imperial policy or…state self-government. Under empire then, positive law had been systematically employed to deny rather than ensure rights. Casement remarked that ‘if we turn to the coloured races we find that the great mass of the subjects of this

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282 Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock’, p.156.
283 Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock’, p.156.
284 Casement, ‘Ulster and Ireland’, p.806.
286 Casement, British Versus German Imperialism, p.4.
287 Casement, British Versus German Imperialism, p.2; Shan Van Vocht [Casement], Ireland, Germany and the Next War (Belfast: Davidson & McCormack Limited, 1913); Casement, ‘The Emerald Isle and its Giant Parasite’.
Empire have less rights within it than they possess outside its boundaries.\textsuperscript{288} British imperialism was then not a liberal institution of enlightenment but, an ‘autocratic’ force of oppression, acquired by conquest and confirmed by law, as evidenced by the ‘well-nigh continuous campaigns of annexation of the British army in India, Burma, South Africa, Egypt, Tibet and Afghanistan,’ Soudan and Somaliland.\textsuperscript{289} This imperial relationship of might disguised as and supported by right, however, was not just limited to Britain. Imperial conquest supported by legal thinking was also manifest in Russian aggression against its neighbours and French militarism, which, ‘since it was overthrown at Sedan, has carried fire and sword across all Northern Africa, has penetrated from the Atlantic to the Nile, [and] has raided Tonquin, Siam, Madagascar, Morocco.\textsuperscript{290}

Imperial exploitation was systematic and international, and this tyranny had been disguised and legitimised by legal codification, which denied recourse to interrogate the substantive content of legal claims. Casement argued that, ‘the greatest calamity that ever befell Ireland was when open violence gave place to law.’\textsuperscript{291} Because, whilst ‘there was always hope of recovery from the sword...there is no recovery from the ligaments of a healer who wrests...the law to his purposes.’\textsuperscript{292} By defining and thus denying rights through positive law, imperial powers had constructed a powerful moral and intellectual hegemony that successfully silenced dissension by branding it ‘illegal’ and


\textsuperscript{291} XXX [Casement], ‘Ireland a slave depot’, \textit{Irish Freedom}, February 1914.

\textsuperscript{292} XXX [Casement], ‘Ireland a slave depot’.
thus illegitimate. The structural and procedural components of positive law denied imperial subjects the capacity to question its justness. Just as a challenge to unionism could easily be portrayed ‘as aimed at the law itself,’ ‘we are asked to believe that French militarism is maintained by a “democracy”…Without appealing to the captive Queen of Madagascar for an opinion on the authenticity of French democracy.’

Throughout his nationalist writings, in his focus on Unionism, Home Rule and self-government, Casement therefore appealed to notions of rights and justice as distinct from positive law, and challenged the systems of thought that legitimised imperialism. The contradictory illiberalism of liberal empire began to justify rebellion. Using Burke’s writings on India he sought to highlight the fundamental moral ineptitude of law in his own land. ‘Whenever the law itself is debauched and enters into a corrupt coalition with violence, robbery and wrong’, as the Act of Union had done with the British Army and British commercialism, ‘then all hope is gone; and it is not only private persons that suffer, but the law itself when so corrupted is often perverted into the worst instrument of fraud and violence.’ The English claim to Ireland was a ‘usurped’ one, and English law had been corrupted by greed. Much like the sovereign claims of Peru and other South American ‘pirate strongholds,’ English control was legal but unjust, and Casement appealed to a transcendent moral right to challenge this relation. ‘As good Christians no less than as good Irishmen,’ he argued,

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294 Edmund Burke, quoted in XXX [Casement], ‘Ireland a slave depot’.
295 Casement, British Versus German Imperialism, p.7.
‘we must get rifles.’ The duty of Christian Ireland is to arm; to arm quickly and to arm well.296

If colonial people had been conquered and had no access to just legal protestations, then conquest could only be met with rebellion, and such rebellion was morally right in seeking to restore freedom. Casement’s nationalist writings 1911–16 reveal an increasing anti-imperial and revolutionary conclusion, articulated in an international context. Speaking of British responses to independence movements in Eastern Europe, he tells us, ‘we are assured…that the claim of the Balkan Allies to expel Turkey from Europe rests upon a just and historic basis…that the Turk has held his European provinces by a right of conquest only. What the sword took, the sword may take away.’297 But, thinking internationally about empire and independence, he argued ‘the moral argument brings strange revenges. If Turkey has no right to Adrianople…what right has England to Ireland, to Dublin, to Cork? She holds Ireland by exactly the same title as that by which Turkey has hitherto held Macedonia…a right of invasion, of seizure, of demoralisation.298 If the legal right that underwrote imperial claims was morally defunct and merely a justification for conquest, then, as the British had argued about the Balkans, conquest could be met in Ireland through rebellion. In fact, he argued that Ireland’s mistake had been to not arm itself earlier, for ‘no people can

296 Poor Old Woman [Casement], ‘The Volunteers’, Irish Freedom, June 1914.
expect freedom except through sacrifice...The history of freedom is written in letters of blood.”

Casement’s nationalist writings therefore furthered his earlier scepticism regarding the morality of the legal foundations of imperialism. By exploring the problems of codification in Ireland through the Act of Union, he recognised the role law had played in empire internationally as an ex post facto justification for conquest, and therefore argued the validity and necessity of subject peoples challenging imperial rule through extra-legal rebellion. Casement called attention to the natural rights of subject peoples to fight against incursions upon their freedom. The continuity and internationalism of Casement’s anti-imperial turn is then thirdly manifest in his critique of Home Rule as a form of instrumental rationality, and his advocacy of self-determination for all subject peoples.

As we saw above, Casement initially supported temporary coercion and paternalism as a means to ensure future native autonomy and prosperity. By the end of the Putumayo investigation, however, he recognised the way in which instrumental rationality had caused and justified widespread exploitation. In 1910 he began to argue that means-justifies-the-end thinking had given a near blanket affirmation to any form of interim coercion, and even well intentioned acts, such as the taking of native lands for cultivation, presupposed a logic of domination which denied natives the right to pursue their own self-realisation, often with tragic consequences. Instrumental rationality, was

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a structural component of liberal imperial thinking that was devoid of clear substantive content and thus open to interpretation and exploitation by imperial profiteers.

Interestingly, Casement’s growing separatism was articulated along similar lines. His initial plan upon retiring in 1913 was to settle in the Cape, but he travelled via Ireland to farewell friends, where the ‘Carson campaign in Ulster [against the Home Rule Bill] was in full blast’ making it ‘very hard to leave.’ At the end of 1913 Casement became an important agitator for Home Rule, and was intimately involved in the Irish Volunteer movement. In 1914, however, Home Rule was delayed by the looming war with Germany and his position shifted from constitutional solutions to complete independence. He argued that whilst Britain brandished its democratic credentials and support for the freedom of small nations, it had continually denied democracy in Ireland ‘in the interest of morality’ by claiming it was not yet sufficiently developed, united or independent. Arguments about the emerald isle’s smallness, poverty and disunity had been utilised to justify British absolutism as necessary to its wellbeing. To Casement, this reasoning was a perpetual excuse that vindicated tyranny, with no genuine intention of realising democratic change.

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300 Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’.
301 The Irish Volunteers were established 1913 in response to the Ulster Volunteers who vowed to defend Ireland from Home Rule. Casement was involved from the second major meeting of the Volunteers, spoke at many of their public events, helped draft their manifesto and was a member of the arms committee. See Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’; Casement, ‘Manifesto To The Irish Volunteers’, The Irish Review (Dublin), Vol. 4, No. 42 (September-November, 1914), pp. 281-286.
302 Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’.
304 Casement, German Diaries pp.71, 18.
The current Home Rule Bill was then just another instance of means-justifies-the-end thinking which perpetually legitimised coercion, as a temporary interim measure, and thereby undermined genuine liberty. Ireland was told that Home Rule needed again to be delayed for the war, and Redmond encouraged the Volunteers to enlist in exchange for future increased democratic control. Casement sought to remind the Irish public however, that ‘the British Liberal Party has been publicly pledged for twenty-eight years to give self-government to Ireland. It has not yet fulfilled that pledge.’

Britain ‘now offers to sell, at a very high price, a wholly hypothetical and indefinite form of partial internal control,’ that was but a ‘promissory note, payable after death – a scrap of paper that might or might not be redeemed.’

The assurance of future democracy in Ireland was ultimately a false one, and Home Rulers’ continued support for English government in order to attain future freedom showed ‘ignorance of their country’s history and position.’ Even if Home Rule passed, it was still a concessional measure that offered only ‘paltry rights’ with no ‘powers to encourage industries, trade, shipping, or any form of external intercourse with other countries.’

Home Rule was ‘bait,’ an ‘imperial necessity’ used to enthrone Ireland in English imperial militarism with no intention of granting national freedom and the Irishman who accepted it was ‘a voluntary traitor to his country.’ Home Rule was a ‘bare and empty formula’ that accepted the continued absolutism of England in the hope of future freedom.

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305 Casement, Open letter to the Irish Volunteers, New York, 19 September 1914, NLI MS. 17,001.
306 Casement, Open letter to the Irish Volunteers, New York, 19 September 1914, NLI MS. 17,001; Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock,’ p.156; Casement, Open letter to the Irish Volunteers, New York, 19 September 1914, NLI MS. 17,001.
Conditional future freedom was unacceptable, and Casement’s writings 1914–16 became radical and republican in his demand for independence that was firstly total and secondly immediate. As noted above, he believed ‘no English Government whether it called itself Whig or Tory was capable of treating Ireland with justice,’ and therefore Ireland must seek complete self-government. The whole idea of imperial rule, ‘whether it call itself an empire or a democracy’ had been built on, and would continue to be built on the ‘spirit of imperial exploitation.’ Ireland therefore ‘wants but one thing in the world. She wants her house to herself and the stranger out of the house.’ Similarly this freedom must be fought for without delay. ‘England...fears the Irishman who acts; not him who talks. She recognizes only action, and respects only deeds.’ Ireland must therefore immediately pursue ‘her place amongst the nations of the world.’ ‘If this be a war for the “small nationalities”...then let it begin, for one small nationality, at home.’ ‘Our duty as Irishmen is to give our lives for Ireland.’

By the end of his life then, Casement rejected British rule of Ireland in any form, and in his speech upon conviction for high treason, passionately argued Ireland’s right to self-determination.

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311 Casement, ‘Why I Went to Germany’.
314 Casement, 2 November 1914, German Diaries, p.71.
315 Casement. British Versus German Imperialism, p.12.
316 Casement, Open letter to the Irish Volunteers, New York, 19 September 1914, NLI MS, 17,001.
Self-government is our right, a thing born in us at birth, a thing no more to be doled out to us or withheld from us by another people than the right to life itself— the right to feel the sun or smell the flowers, or love our kind.

Where all your rights have become only an accumulated wrong...then, surely, it is a braver, a saner and a truer thing to be a rebel in act and deed against such circumstances as these than tamely to accept it as the natural lot of men.\textsuperscript{317}

Britain’s imperial rule of Ireland was utterly unacceptable. Casement’s objection was systematic, however, international and anti-imperial, not merely nationalistic. He argued that there was a profound ‘moral and spiritual separation...between the imperial conception as nourished in Britain and the growing hope of the great millions of mankind who make up the greatest realm of her empire.\textsuperscript{318} Whilst it could make concessions, there was little to be done to save ‘that system of world exploitation centred in London’ from dissolution.\textsuperscript{319} With the independence of Ireland then would follow India and Egypt, and as he made clear to English imperial critic Wilfred Blunt,\textsuperscript{320} his was not merely a ‘crude appeal to nationality versus imperialism.\textsuperscript{321} ‘Wherever I go to-day in Ireland...I say that we stand in the forefront of human

\textsuperscript{317} Casement, ‘Speech from the Dock’, p.157.
\textsuperscript{318} Poor Old Woman [Casement], The Elsewhere Empire.
\textsuperscript{319} Poor Old Woman [Casement], The Elsewhere Empire.
\textsuperscript{320} Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840–1922) was an English poet and essayist known for his travels of India and the Middle East and criticism of the British Empire. He was interested in the Irish cause, as well as in Indian and Egyptian freedom, and Casement was aware of his work. Whilst in London in May 1914 Casement contacted and had lunch with Blunt and the two subsequently exchanged a number of letters. See Blunt, Wilfred Scawen, My diaries; being a personal narrative of events 1888-1914 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), pp.424-457. Casement spoke of Blunt, The Land War in Ireland (London: Stephen Swift & Co, 1912); Blunt, India under Ripon: A Private Diary (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1909).
\textsuperscript{321} For more on Blunt’s critique of empire see: Gregory Claey, “The “left” and the critique of empire 1865-1900: three roots of humanitarian foreign policy”, in Duncan Bell ed., Victorian Visions of Global Order (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.244-250.
\textsuperscript{321} Casement, Letter to Wilfred Blunt, 16 May 1914, in Blunt, My diaries, pp.455, 457.
freedom—fighting a battle that is world-wide.\textsuperscript{322} He thus argued for the independence of all small nations whereby ‘an idyllic peace would settle down upon the nations, contentedly possessing each in its own share of the good things of life, and no questionable ambitions would be allowed to disturb the buying and selling of the smaller and weaker peoples.\textsuperscript{323}

Although Casement did not live long enough to comprehensively reflect upon the relationship between his Irish fight for self-determination and his broader understanding on empire, it is clear that his thought was international and anti-imperial, not just nationalist. As he remarked on the Balkan uprisings, if Turkey’s claim to Europe was invalidated by its foundation of conquest and repression, then ‘the Englishman in India, in Egypt…in China; the highly Christian Frenchmen in Tonquin; the Dutchman in Java; the German in China; the Russian in China; the Yankee in the Philippines; the English and Russian “friends” of Persia – all these may be shortly asked to go, bag and baggage, back to the home of “Peace on Earth, Good Will to all Men.”\textsuperscript{324} Liberal empire was an inherent contradiction, underpinned by a logic of coercion and domination that was incapable of realising its purported humanitarian goal of liberty. It served only as a cause and justification for widespread atrocities. The ‘spirit of imperial exploitation’ thus ought to be fought in Ireland and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{325}

\textsuperscript{322} Casement, Letter to Wilfred Blunt, 14 May 1916, in Blunt, My diaries, p.456.
\textsuperscript{323} Casement, 'The Enemy of Peace', [March 1913], Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A possible Outcome of the War of 1914, p.12.
\textsuperscript{324} Irishman [Casement], 'The English Hypocrite'.
\textsuperscript{325} Casement, 'The Causes of the War and the Foundations of Peace', p.15.
CONCLUSION
CASEMENT CONTRA CASEMENT

Despite the seeming absurdity of the knight-errant’s return to Ireland on a U-
boat with a ship full of arms, Casement’s revolutionary anti-imperialist ideas and his
treasonous behaviour were continuous with and derived from his celebrated consular
career. Initially epitomising liberal imperial ideology in his beliefs about the
benevolence of European civilisation and the necessity of expansion, Casement’s career
provided an opportunity to engage with these ideas across multiple sites of empire.
Although his radicalisation was not a clear linear trajectory, by reflecting upon the
relationship between imperial experiences, Casement identified the systematic nature of
exploitation and framed oppression as caused by the mentality and programme of the
civilising mission in which he was so involved. Whilst purporting a humanitarian
agenda, liberal imperialism was an inherent contradiction, underwritten by a logic of
domination that concealed and sustained perpetual acts of coercion and barbarity
against natives. Casement’s Irish nationalism can only be properly understood in the
context of this broader critique. In discussing Ireland Casement drew upon similar
categories of understanding, made explicit links to previous experiences and compared
Ireland to colonial situations more generally. Grappling with the philosophical
contradictions of liberal empire exposed by its practice, his critique was structural and
international and led him to a rejection of empire altogether.
The life and political thought of Roger Casement therefore draws attention to the diversity, density and fluidity of liberal thought and its relationship to empire, shedding light on how individuals engaged with and navigated these complexities. Casement not only demonstrates the complicity of liberalism in empire, but also contributes to the broader literature on the liberal tradition’s involvement in anti-imperialism and scepticism. Humanitarianism was a volatile discourse that was often an apology for empire, but equally contained capacity for critique. Casement therefore also calls attention to the socio-historical contingency of liberalism’s form and that neither domination nor liberation was inherent to its concept. He identified an absence of clear substantive content, criticising liberal humanitarianism’s abstractedness as was exploited by imperial profiteers, whilst also utilising this malleability to mobilise his own critique.

As a thinker straddling two centuries, however, Casement not only informs an understanding of the decline of liberal imperialism, but also highlights the origin of twentieth-century arguments for decolonisation and the right to self-determination in late nineteenth-century thinking about empire. Casement’s political thought forms a

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background to the ‘Wilsonian moment’ in 1919.\textsuperscript{328} Firstly, experiences of liberal imperialism’s contradictory instrumentality, freedom through coercion, led Casement to advocate democracy and the right to self-rule as the only way to realise liberalism’s goals of civility, autonomy and liberty. Engaging with problems of empire, Casement articulated the fundamentality of the right to self-government in a manner that pre-empted the rhetoric popularised a few years after his death. Nehru later claimed he ‘seemed to point out exactly how a subject nation should feel’, and reading the language of Casement’s speech from the dock, it is unsurprising that Wilson himself held files of Casement’s writings.\textsuperscript{329} Secondly, by engaging with multiple sites of empire, making comparisons between them and applying ideas of Irish freedom to colonial contexts generally, Casement demonstrates that anti-colonial internationalism was not simply a response to grievances and opportunities arising from WWI. His anti-colonialism transcended national concerns and was rooted in a systematic understanding of the exploitation of liberal empire and its civilising mission.

Anti-imperial thinking at the turn of the century was not simply against empire, but generated by a critique within empire. The Wilsonian moment of liberal internationalism was derived from the contradictions of liberal imperialism and the subsequent separation of liberalism from its realisation through empire. Like empires before it, Casement both argued and demonstrated that the critique and decline of liberal imperialism was ultimately immanent. ‘Rome the Empire lost her ideals as she


\textsuperscript{329} Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted in Leopold’s Ghost, p.286; See Mitchell, ‘Riddle of Two Casement’s’, p.102, footnote 12 for Woodrow Wilson files on Casement in the Library of Congress.
extended her frontiers...Rome was the first great illustration, but not the last in history, that where wealth accumulates men must decay.\textsuperscript{330}

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