

# Hungary and the two Roger Casements

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## INTRODUCTION

From an episode in the life of Louis Kossuth<sup>1</sup> which took place in 1849, Hungarian history and historiography knows about 'Roger Casement'. But contemporary writers<sup>2</sup> (like Kossuth and his circle) and later historians<sup>3</sup> took him to be an 'Englishman'. He was, in fact, an Irishman and the father of the well-known Irish nationalist, Sir Roger Casement (1864-1916), famous for his humanitarian activities in defence of indigenous peoples, and executed for his part in the 1916 Rising.<sup>4</sup> The understandable misidentification of Casement Sr. (1819-77) as an Englishman was also applied to other Irishmen active in Continental Europe, if for no other reason than that they all had British passports.

Casement's Hungarian adventure attained a certain significance in his son's life, as did the general Hungarian background of which it was part. The present chapter will look at the historical details of the 1849 event and at its significance, as well as that of the Hungarian example in general, for Casement Jr. But it may be best to begin with the episode itself and the way it was first presented to an Irish readership in the early years of the twentieth century by Casement Jr.

1 L. Kossuth, *Meine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1880), vol. 3, pp. 342-6. 2 Count Gyula Andrassy, Hungarian plenipotentiary to the Porte, wrote a letter to Arthur Görgey, commander-in-chief of the Hungarian forces, on 7 Sept. 1849, from Widdin: 'A másik angol meg Indiából jött hozzánk' (the other Englishman came from India), *Az emigráció iratai*, 17, in I. Hajnal, *A Kossuth-Emigráció Törökországban* (Budapest, 1927), p. 466. 3 Hajnal himself, and then every historian of the period after him, including the present writer: cf. Thomas Kabdebo, *Diplomat in exile* (Boulder, Col., 1979), pp. 62, 184. 4 General details of Casement's career can be found in his three most recent biographies: Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement* (London, 1973); B.L. Reid, *The lives of Roger Casement* (New Haven, 1976); Roger Sawyer, *Roger Casement, the flawed hero* (London, 1984).

## KOSSUTH'S IRISH COURIER

In 1904 one of the leaders of the growing nationalist movement in Ireland, Arthur Griffith, wrote a series of articles drawing lessons for Ireland from the experience of Hungary. These first appeared in the *United Irishman* and were published subsequently as a pamphlet entitled *The Resurrection of Hungary*.<sup>5</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 25 February 1905, the *United Irishman* published a piece entitled 'Kossuth's Irish Courier'. The article, signed 'X', was, in fact, by Roger Casement Jr.<sup>6</sup>

The article gave details of an episode in the life of Kossuth, which he subsequently described in his *Memoirs*. It told how, following defeat at Világos, Kossuth and his followers found refuge at Widdin, in Turkish territory on the Danube. Fearing that pressure from Austria and Russia would lead to their extradition, it was suggested that Kossuth should send a letter to the British prime minister, Lord Palmerston, appealing for British diplomatic intervention. The difficulty was in ensuring the letter's safe and rapid delivery. At this point an unknown 'Englishman' appeared, announcing that he had 'come from India to fight for Hungarian freedom'. After a brief consultation, the letter was entrusted to him, a dramatic journey was made, and the letter was placed in the hands of Lord Palmerston. British intervention did save the Hungarian patriots. Not until years later did Kossuth learn the name of his helper, and again it was during a fleeting encounter on a train in the United States that a gentleman handed Kossuth a card bearing the name 'Mr Roger Casement', and in pencil underneath 'I handed to Palmerston the letter from Widdin.'

## THE HISTORICAL EVENT

The service rendered to him by Casement, in handing an important letter to Palmerston, would not have been the only memory Kossuth had of Casement's activities. Casement's passport, too, seems to have had a particularly interesting journey in late 1849, either as divorced from its rightful owner, or as duplicated for the purposes of smuggling Hungarian nationals across the frontiers of the re-established Austrian empire.

Our main sources for the historical details of the Casement episode are the informants and the writers of memoirs, Mrs Kossuth, Mrs Pulszky, and the English journalist Charles Pridham. Fearing police spies, past and present, they were deliberately vague on vital clues.

<sup>5</sup> The pamphlet in book form was first published in 1904. The most recent study, explaining its Hungarian connections is Thomas Kabdebo, *The Hungarian-Irish 'parallel', and Arthur Griffith's use of his sources* (Maynooth, 1988), in Hungarian: 'A magyar-ír párhuzam és Arthur Griffith történeti forrásai', *Századok* (1991), 3-4sz. 309-331p. <sup>6</sup> The article was subsequently published in H.O. Mackey, *Life and times of Roger Casement* (Dublin, 1954), pp. 13-18.

In October 1849, in the company of an unnamed Hungarian officer,<sup>7</sup> Mrs Theresa Kossuth, the ex-governor's wife, escaped from the clutches of the Austrian authorities (who were, incidentally, holding her children).<sup>8</sup> Mrs Kossuth travelled under the false name of Mary Smith, while her gentleman escort held a passport that had been made out in the name of Roger Casement.

Evidence shows that Casement, having visited Kossuth's camp in September 1849, went to Vienna and there conferred with the British ambassador, Lord Ponsonby. He then proceeded to London. (He might also have met Mrs Kossuth, personally, in the east of Hungary but for the fact that one go-between mistrusted him.)<sup>9</sup>

The early publication of Kossuth's letter<sup>10</sup> (or copy of his letter) in Britain seems to suggest that, having talked to Lord Ponsonby in Vienna in October,<sup>11</sup> Casement hurried on to London, where he met Palmerston. His meeting with the British foreign minister (otherwise unrecorded) must have taken place on or shortly after 9 October. On that date a copy of the letter was published in the London *Daily News*.

It is possible that, while Casement delivered the top copy of the letter to Palmerston, he handed over a second copy to Kossuth's ex-ambassador, Francis Pulszky, in London. Pulszky had direct access to the *Daily News*, which was a paper friendly to the Hungarian cause. Alternatively, the letter could have been given to the *Daily News* by Charles Pridham. While Casement was travelling to London via Vienna, Charles Pridham travelled to Turkey from Vienna. He may have received a second copy from Kossuth himself and conveyed that to the *Daily News*.

Meanwhile Ambassador Ponsonby assured his foreign secretary that the refugees were safe in Turkey, but requested an 'exercise of the fleet' to the Dardenelles to insure their safety.<sup>12</sup>

7 A captain of the infantry regiment (Theresa Pulszky, *op. cit.*, p. 33). 8 Since 25 September 1849. One may include here two accounts of Mrs Kossuth's escape: one is by Emilia Hogl (later Mrs Robert Rombauer); the other is by Theresa Pulszky, based on her recollections of Mrs Kossuth's own story: Robert Rombauer, 'Egy magyar nő élete az emigrációban', *Budapesti Szemle*, 1813, pp. 286-97; Theresa Pulszky: 'Escape of Madame Kossuth', in *White, red and black*, by F. & T. Pulszky (London, 1853), vol. 1, pp. 17-45. 9 If the conjectures were right, Casement, on the way back from Turkey, and Mrs Kossuth, going towards Turkey, could have made contact in the Banat, in late September 1849: Theresa Pulszky, *op. cit.*, p. 34. 10 Kossuth to Palmerston, Widdin, 20 September 1849: Hajnal, *op. cit.*, pp. 482-6. cf. *Daily News*, London, 9 October 1849. 11 The date of Casement's arrival in Vienna (2 October) seems to be a conjecture by Hajnal (*op. cit.*, p. 147) and it cannot be corroborated exactly. A correspondent of the *Daily News* and *The Times*, Charles Pridham, is in Vienna at around this time (Charles Pridham, *Kossuth and Magyar land*, London, 1851, pp. 199-200). His account of what took place and whom he met is deliberately obscure. He may have met Casement in Vienna, at the beginning of October and he may have conveyed Kossuth's letter directly to the *Daily News*. 12 Ponsonby to Palmerston, 9 Oct. and 15 Oct., 1849 (PRO FO 7/370).

At length, Mrs Kossuth and Mrs Pulszky reached safety well before Kossuth himself, who was interned in Turkey until the autumn of 1851. Mrs Pulszky joined her husband, the Hungarian plenipotentiary, Francis Pulszky, in the autumn of 1849 in London. Her journey may or may not have been aided by Casement himself,<sup>13</sup> but Pulszky seems to have also received letters from Kossuth, possibly via Casement.<sup>14</sup>

From the reports and correspondence of various Hungarian officers in Turkey (as related by Hajnal) it is possible to say that Casement arrived in Widdin before 7 September and left after 20 September. He may have been in Vienna at the beginning of October and he could have arrived in London before 9 October. It was possible at the time to cover the distance in eight days even between Pest and London.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HUNGARIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE LIFE OF ROGER CASEMENT JR.

Why his father's Hungarian adventure and the Hungarian struggle for independence should have come to the forefront of Casement Jr.'s consciousness when it did, when he himself was forty years of age, must be assessed in the context of his career as a whole. The year 1904 marked the beginning of his intense concentration on Irish affairs, which lasted until his death in 1916.

The 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, though commanding little popular support when it took place, set in motion a series of events, which ultimately led to the break with England and the establishment of the Irish Free State. More than anything else it was the execution of the leaders of the rebellion that transformed public opinion. Following court-martials, fifteen were executed by firing-squad, at intervals, between 3 May and 12 May. The last of the leaders to be executed, on 3 August, was Sir Roger Casement, this time by hanging and after a much-publicised trial. Casement had been in Germany trying to win support for the planned rising and attempting to raise an Irish brigade from amongst the ranks of Irishmen who had enlisted in the British army and were then prisoners-of-war in German camps. Having failed to persuade more than a handful of the

<sup>13</sup> It was Mrs Gustáv Emich who 'had acquired' a false passport for Mrs Pulszky, in the autumn of 1849 and accompanied her to England: ('Sz': Pulszky Teréz. *Hazánk s a Külföld*, 14 March 1867.) I believe that many of the answers lie in the Lansdowne family archives, alas not open to researchers. Lansdowne (Henry Petty, 3rd marquess of Lansdowne) had been helping the Pulszkys from 1849 onwards. We do not know who their contacts were. <sup>14</sup> This is, again, a conjecture of the author's. There were other 'Englishmen' trusted with secret or semi-secret messages who had visited Kossuth's camp. Apart from the aforementioned Pridham, there was Charles Frederick Henningsen (author and correspondent of the *Daily News*) and two captains, Longworth and Herbert. <sup>15</sup> Blackwell to Emery, Pressburg, 7 Jan. 1848: Thomas Kabdebo, *Blackwell Küldetése* (Budapest, 1990), p. 284.

latter to join him, and realising that only extremely limited amounts of arms and ammunition were forthcoming from the German authorities, Casement became convinced that to continue with plans for a rising was folly. He persuaded his hosts to permit his return to Ireland by submarine in an attempt to stop the rising. He was however, apprehended shortly after landing and quickly transferred to Dublin and then London.

In contrast to the other leaders, Casement had spent most of his adult life outside Ireland, having had a distinguished career as a British consular official, serving in Africa and in South America. His fame principally derived from two special reports, the first, on atrocities perpetrated on the native population of the Congo Free State mainly in connection with the extraction of rubber; the second, on an even more gruesome episode in the Peruvian territory of the Putumayo River (a tributary of the Amazon), where the Indian population was decimated, again in the context of the rubber trade. It was following submission of this latter report that he received a knighthood. British fury over his treason was, accordingly, all the greater.

While Casement seems always to have been proud of his Irish identity and to have cultivated from his youth an interest in Irish history, during the early part of his career he also seems to have been able to reconcile this attachment with a commitment to the ideals of an expanding British empire. This seems clear from his writings while in the service of the British foreign office: the period of his first position in the colonial service in the (then) Oil Rivers Protectorate (1892-5), through his time as British consul at Lourenço Marques (1895-8), and at St Paul de Loanda (1898) – punctuated by his involvement in the Boer War – and, finally, during his Congo period, culminating in his Congo investigation (1903). A change seems to have begun during the Boer War, where he subsequently claimed to have been shocked at the treatment meted out to Boer prisoners. Certainly, by the time of his Congo investigation, his feelings of Irishness began to affect his attitude to colonial oppression in general and to the British empire in particular. Writing in 1907 to Alice Stopford Green, he said: ‘Well, the (Boer) 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!’<sup>16</sup>

A major consolidation of his changed attitude came about during a long period of leave, much of it spent in Ireland, which followed submission of his official Congo Report. He was influenced by a new vibrancy which manifested itself in Irish public life – in the language movement, in the cultural and literary movements, and in political life. It was at this point, during 1904, that Casement read Griffith’s Hungarian articles. He was influenced by the lessons of the

<sup>16</sup> NLI Ms. 10,464: Casement to Alice Green 20/4/07.

Hungarian experience, as outlined by Griffith, but he was also attracted to the Hungarian case for the personal reasons, discussed above.

Casement Sr. had died in 1877, when his son, Roger, was twelve, but he had often told the Kossuth story to his children, and it had clearly made sufficient impact on young Roger that he both remembered its details and was anxious to share it with an Irish audience. Kossuth had taken his helper to be an Englishman, describing his behaviour as typifying the English 'character'. For Casement Jr., who had begun to believe that there was an affinity between Irish people and oppressed peoples elsewhere, because of shared historical experience, it was important that both his father's Irishness and his action in leaving India and the British army to help the Hungarian cause be recognised.

On his return to Ireland after an abortive consular posting to Lisbon, he wrote to his friend, Mrs Mary Hutton: 'The *Resurrection of Hungary* also came back from Lisbon – and I shall read it during my enforced convalescent leisure.' He went on to tell her of his father's Hungarian intervention, and continued: 'He used to tell me this story when I was a little boy – and then, long ago I came across it in a Review of Kossuth's book in a London paper. So the *Resurrection of Hungary* has a special interest to me.' Further statements in his letter reflect his mood at the time: 'I may some day do something for my country. Yes, any man – or woman – who loves Ireland would gladly go to the scaffold – or to any shameful end – to strike such a blow for Ireland's honour and right as the Hungarians did in '48.'<sup>17</sup>

Early in the following year, 1905, he referred to the Hungarian incident to several of his friends, including Alice Stopford Green, Kate ffrench, his brother Tom, and his cousin Gertrude Bannister.<sup>18</sup> Tom replied: 'I got the *United Irishman* and Hungary Pamphlet ... How similar Ireland is to Hungary but we have no men like Deáke (*sic*) and Kossuth. All the spirit seems to have been knocked out of poor Ireland and I am afraid they never will get the right men to lead them. It is such a pity.'<sup>19</sup>

Arthur Griffith had put forward the strategy of Deák, who represented the 'peaceful' alternative to Kossuth's 'forceful' ways, as a model for Irish imitation.<sup>20</sup> This involved an avoidance of armed revolution in favour of systematic passive resistance. Casement was excited, as he showed in a letter to his cousin Gertrude. England 'will find we can play a more dangerous game than any we have yet attempted – Passive Resistance on a gigantic, national scale. No taxes, no recruits, no public service in any department the passive resistance can influence – such shall be the reply of Ireland.'<sup>21</sup> One concrete way to withdraw Irish support for England would be to stop Irishmen enlisting in the English armed forces. With

<sup>17</sup> NLI Ms. 8612, Mary Hutton Papers. R.C. to M.H. 15/12/04. <sup>18</sup> NLI Ms. 10464, R.C. to Alice Green, 34/2222/05; Ms. 13073, Kate ffrench to R.C. 25/2/05. <sup>19</sup> NLI Ms. 13076 (1/i) Tom Casement to R.C. 10/3.05. <sup>20</sup> Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 135. <sup>21</sup> NLI Ms. 13074 (2/ii) R.C. to

Alice Stopford Green, an ardent Irish nationalist, and Bulmer Hobson, a young man who had joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1904, Casement helped to write an anti-enlistment leaflet which was circulated in Ulster.<sup>22</sup>

Casement's next consular appointment was in Brazil. Here another of the Hungarian ideas was given expression – that of the dual monarchy.<sup>23</sup> From the time of his first consular appointment in Lourenço Marques he had noted that exports from Ireland were not distinguished within the overall British statistics. Casement began to rectify this. By the time he reached Santos, not only did he give attention to Irish exports: he had official letterhead printed with the words 'Consulate of Great Britain and Ireland'.<sup>24</sup> As his biographer, Roger Sawyer, points out, he put the thinking behind this into words some years later, when addressing potential members of his Irish brigade in Germany: 'The King you serve is, in law, King of Great Britain and Ireland. There is not such person as the King of England in law.'<sup>25</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

His father's Hungarian experience enabled Casement Sr.'s more famous son to link Ireland's struggle for independence with that of Hungary and to identify his father's actions as those of an Irishman, who could identify with the Hungarian cause as one used to viewing the plight of oppressed peoples from the inside. The 'Irish-Hungarian' policy, as the Sinn Féin policy was sometimes called in its early days, played a significant part in Casement Jr.'s thinking for some time.

Gertrude Bannister. 22 Ibid. p. 136, and Sawyer p. 48, and note 15 p. 168. In *Ireland yesterday and tomorrow* (Tralee, 1968), Bulmer Hobson wrote: 'A four-page leaflet was issued and very widely distributed. In its first draft it was written by Alice Stopford Green; Roger Casement added a bit, and I added more.' The pamphlet was *Irishmen and the English army*, Dungannon Club Publication No. 1. 23 See Sawyer, op. cit. p. 61-2. 24 Ibid., p. 52. 25 Ibid., p. 62.