

AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork.

24 February 2010

To:-

Mr. James McGuire
Managing Editor
The Dictionary of Irish Biography Project
Royal Irish Academy
19 Dawson Street
Dublin 2

Dear Mr McGuire,

THE ENTRY ON D D SHEEHAN IN THE DICTIONARY OF IRISH BIOGRAPHY

I have just had an opportunity to consult the DIB which you edited.

The first entry I read was that of D D Sheehan, the first Irish Labour MP, who represented the Irish Land and Labour Association and the All for Ireland League for Mid-Cork for 17 years. I have a personal and political interest in him as he represented this area and both my grandfathers supported him.

In contrast with all his Irish peers, in late 1918 he decided contest the General Election of that year for a London constituency in the Labour interest. Logically enough he left Cork to facilitate his future as a London MP. As he failed to get elected and as he remained absent from Ireland during the most crucial years in its modern history his decision to leave proved to be a political and personal disaster for him. His decision to quit Ireland was therefore a central fact in his life and deserves a full explanation in any account of his life.

In later years a myth was created to the effect that he left because of some threats to him in Cork for his political position on WW1 and that he returned when these threats were withdrawn.

The entry by Patrick Maume perpetuates this myth when it says that: "Sheehan's position in Cork grew increasingly untenable. The Sheehan family faced intimidation and were obliged to leave their home on the Victoria Road for London.....Sheehan moved to Dublin in 1926 after learning that the threats against him had been lifted." (Vol. 8, 877). No actual evidence is provided for these assertions. There is none.

When Sheehan left he was a well known MP, a journalist and a barrister. He had every opportunity to refer to any threats but nowhere did he do so. Neither did anybody else. Hitherto he had never been backward in coming forward to deal with his political opponents. I am sure the press would have been more than eager to report on threats to a sitting MP if there were any. There is not a contemporary hint of such threats.

None of his fellow Irish MP peers who also supported the war felt the need to leave the country and his closest colleague, William O'Brien, was later asked to stand for Fianna Fail.

In London after losing the election he went bankrupt and to cope with this he engaged in nefarious activities and became effectively a conman trying to obtain money from a variety of sources by fraudulent means. This got so notorious that in October 1924 it was reported to the Irish Grants Committee in London that the Commissioner of the Police in London had said *'the whole matter was under the consideration of the Director of Public Prosecutions with a view to criminal proceedings being taken. Captain Sheehan at that time disappeared.'* (National Archives, Kew, CO 762/24/14). This Committee dismissed the claim he made to it as yet another attempted fraud.

He returned to Ireland to escape the consequences of his behaviour in London. Therefore the only indisputable, documented, threat ever made to him was by the London police and he sought refuge in Ireland to escape it. There were no recorded threats that drove him in the opposite direction.

I must also draw your attention to Mr Maume's bibliography.

He appears to ignore the only biography ever published on the subject, "The Life and Times of D.D. Sheehan B.L." (3 Bridges Publishing, 2008) by John Dillon which makes no reference to threats that drove him out of the country. He also gives no publisher for any book listed.

Mr Maume gives Wikipedia as a source for claims that Sheehan left because he was threatened. Wikipedia is notoriously unreliable because of its polemical "do it yourself" nature. It is not subject to editorial checking for accuracy. The D D Sheehan "threat" was fully discussed and refuted in its 'Discussion pages' when it first appeared but those pages have been removed. The entry that remains reflects the tenacity of certain polemicists with an axe to grind.

Surely your Dictionary contributors and particularly "a member of the project staff" like Mr Maume should not give credence to such an ephemeral, censored and discredited source and at the same time ignore properly published, verifiable and uncensorable sources.

This Society has comprehensively refuted the allegations of threats against D D Sheehan in Cork and Mr Maume must be aware of this. Yet he has been allowed to use the Dictionary to perpetuate a myth that misleads and distorts the biographical facts on D D Sheehan.

I hope this entry will be suitably amended in future issues and an addendum issued as soon as practically possible.

Yours sincerely,

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