

**“Atrocities on the Amazon: The Diplomatic Struggle for Human Rights in the Putumayo Region of Peru.”**

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## Introduction

“These people have absolutely no human rights, much less civil rights.”<sup>1</sup>

The term “human rights” was not officially defined until the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Yet more than a quarter of a century prior, in 1910, Roger Casement, a British diplomat, advocated for the human rights of indigenous people in the Peruvian Amazon. He spent several months in the Putumayo region of Peru investigating allegations that the Peruvian Amazon Company abused local Indians in rubber extraction. Throughout his journey, Casement kept an extensive journal detailing the torture and atrocities he witnessed. He denounced the system as slavery, describing it as “a crime against humanity.”<sup>2</sup> Casement’s words still carry profound weight today: he is often lauded as the father of human rights in recognition of his advanced terminology and advocacy. Moreover, Casement transformed the diplomatic role in ensuring global human rights.

Roger Casement was born on September 1, 1864 in Dublin, Ireland and pursued an impressive career as a British diplomat and humanitarian in the Belgian Congo, Brazil, and the Peruvian Amazon. Casement first built his reputation uncovering Belgium’s colonial abuses in the Congo, where he worked from 1884 to 1904, attempting to alleviate the suffering of the Africans under that repressive colonial regime. Casement’s discoveries in the Congo served as the inspiration for Joseph Conrad’s popular novel, *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>3</sup> After his admirable work in the Congo, Casement was the ideal choice for investigating the atrocities in the Amazon, for he would not be cowed by colonial powers. Casement built his reputation on pursuing honest

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Sawyer, *Casement, The Flawed Hero* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 108. Casement made this statement during his testimony to Parliament about his Putumayo reports.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Casement and Angus Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (London: Anaconda Editions, 1997), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Sawyer, *Casement, The Flawed Hero*, 21.

discoveries of systems of abuse. Yet he maintained strong emotional ties with his Irish roots, and Casement eventually left the diplomatic service in 1913 to pursue his passion for Irish independence.<sup>4</sup> Throughout his observations of the effects of colonialism in the developing world, he lamented the plight of his native Ireland. This dedication eventually led to his death; he was hung for treason in 1916 after attempting to organize an Irish rebellion.<sup>5</sup> Casement was a complicated man, and his journals and correspondence reveal deep internal struggles as an agent of the British government trying to ensure the human rights of marginalized people.

The Putumayo abuse began at the turn of the twentieth century when Peruvian businessman Julio Cesar Arana formed the rubber company Arana Brothers. Utilizing a system of torture, floggings, rape, and murder, Arana Brothers forced Indians to extract rubber. Despite numerous investigations in the Putumayo, Arana remained smooth and cunning, denying misconduct and avoiding his responsibility in the situation. He seemed to face few consequences as his money and influence bought him absolute power in the region. Arana centered his operation on the Putumayo River, a territory claimed by both Peru and Colombia. In such a remote area, over a thousand miles from the nearest city of Iquitos, terror reigned. The Peruvian government lacked the capacity to control the region, so they relied on Arana and his company to claim the territory as Peruvian.

At this time, natural rubber was the only source for rubber on the international market, and the best source came from Amazonia. The Putumayo region was rich in a particular kind of rubber tree, which was cut down and stripped for its latex. While many places merely tapped the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree for rubber, thus leaving the tree intact, the Putumayo contained *Castilloa*

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<sup>4</sup> Jordan Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement: One Man's Battle for Human Rights in South America's Heart of Darkness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 253.

<sup>5</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 257.

*elastica* trees, which had to be destroyed to get the rubber. Because the trees were killed by the extraction process, the Company “had no incentive to create long-term commercial ties with the indigenous inhabitants,” as they did in other regions where rubber trees were tapped continuously for 50 years.<sup>6</sup> This strenuous labor demanded working crews, in which the Company forced local indigenous groups into rubber extraction using a great deal of abuse. The main groups, the Huitoto and Bora Indians, were estimated to have a population of around 50,000 at the first contact with the rubber company. By the end of the British investigation, the population had dropped to around 8,000, nearly eliminating their population and culture.<sup>7</sup>

In 1907, Arana Brothers was incorporated in London, becoming the Peruvian Amazon Company, with a board of British directors. That same year, a newspaper in Iquitos called *La Sanción* published accounts of startling abuse by the Company against the Indians coerced into rubber extraction. Arana dismissed the accusations as blackmail, attempting to discredit the paper’s editor, Benjamín Saldaña Rocca. Thus, the public ignored Saldaña Rocca’s articles. In 1908, however, a railroad engineer from the United States, Walter Hardenburg, found himself embroiled in the rubber tyranny. He had been travelling through the Amazon when he was captured by rubber traders who stole his belongings, and he essentially became a prisoner of the Company. As the agents took him down the river toward Iquitos, he saw the evidence of extensive beatings and whippings in the scars on the Indians’ backs, referred to as the “mark of Arana.”<sup>8</sup> When Hardenburg finally arrived in Iquitos, he tried to confront Arana for compensation for his mistreatment and appealed to the United States government, but he got nowhere. Yet, Hardenburg found a friend in Saldaña Rocca. The two men shared evidence and

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, February 5, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 25.

observations of the Company's inhumane treatment of the Indians. Saldaña Rocca petitioned the criminal court to charge 18 employees of Arana's company based on evidence of horrific violence, but by February 1908, Saldaña Rocca received threats against his life and barely escaped to Lima, leaving some of his evidence with Hardenburg.<sup>9</sup> Unsatisfied with the response from Arana and his own government, Hardenburg gathered further testimonials of the abuse before travelling to London to find an outlet for his story.

In London, Hardenburg met with the editor of the magazine, *Truth*, which was known for its dramatic stories uncovering various scandals. *Truth* published Hardenburg's account in 1909, receiving almost immediate backlash and rebuttals. The directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company wrote to *Truth* denying the atrocities. Furthermore, they claimed that even if the abuse had occurred, they bore no responsibility for it. The Peruvian chargé d'affaires in London also wrote to the editor of *Truth*, arguing that the allegations were false because the Peruvian government would have known about the abuse.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the legitimacy of Hardenburg's report was questioned, and the British government hesitated to get involved. Yet, the evidence grew when an additional report surfaced in October 1909, this time by Captain Thomas Whiffen, a British military officer. Whiffen's account confirmed the accusations by Hardenburg and Saldaña Rocca. With Whiffen's honest reputation known in the British government, the Foreign Office began contemplating a role in the matter, given the British links to Arana's company.<sup>11</sup>

While the British government might have felt some humanitarian sympathy for the plight of the abused Indians, Britain lacked justification to interfere in Peru's sovereign affairs. However, the British did have a political stake in the investigation. The Peruvian Amazon

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<sup>9</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 62.

Company employed a number of Barbadian workers, who, as British subjects, merited attention from a consular official. As Hardenburg and Whiffen's reports referred to the labor abuse of these Barbadians, the British government formulated a plan for ensuring their rights. Thus, the accusations prompted an investigation by the British Foreign Office of the treatment of Barbadian workers, as well as a related unofficial report on the general conditions of the rubber system and the treatment of Indians. Roger Casement soon became the obvious choice to lead the investigation; with his experience condemning Belgium's abuse in the Congo, Casement would not let the Company's immense power inhibit his report.

Casement set off to uncover disturbing human rights violations and to convince his government to pressure the Peruvian government into demanding justice. He advocated for a system of reform in the Putumayo and the punishment of the criminals. Casement's investigation would have profound effects on the understanding of human rights and the indigenous groups in the Putumayo, as well as on the transformation of the diplomatic role in ensuring these rights. Unfortunately, however, his successes were limited to his diplomatic influence. The power of the rubber industry remained difficult to dismantle, as most of the criminals escaped unpunished, and the Indians continued to suffer exploitation by commercial agents.

### **Historiography**

Casement has been a source of fascination for numerous historians and biographers due to his remarkable career and the dramatic circumstances surrounding his death. I consulted many of these secondary sources to strengthen my understanding of Casement's life. I relied extensively on Jordan Goodman's *The Devil and Mr. Casement: One Man's Battle for Human Rights in South America's Heart of Darkness*, which was the only book to focus exclusively on Casement's work in Peru. Goodman consulted numerous sources located in British archives that

I could not access, so his work helped fill in missing gaps in my research. Historian Angus Mitchell has dedicated much of his work to documenting Casement's life, and his information in *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* and *Roger Casement in Brazil: Rubber, the Amazon, and the Atlantic World 1884-1916*, provided complementary perspectives of Casement's devotion to humanitarianism. Although Goodman and Mitchell amplify Casement's own words, they also exhibit some bias toward his idolization, failing to acknowledge Casement's paternalistic views. Goodman refers to Arana as "The Devil," which brings an additional layer of bias. Moreover, one of Mitchell's main objectives is to disprove the existence of the "Black Diaries." The graphic diaries supposedly detail the homosexual exploits of Casement and served to turn public opinion against him during his trial for treason. Many historians debate whether the diaries were forged by the British government to influence the verdict. While I acknowledge the controversy surrounding Casement's sexuality, I have found no evidence to suggest that it was relevant to my investigation of his work advocating for the rights of the Putumayo Indians and his impact on diplomatic negotiations.

Other works, such as *The Lives of Roger Casement* by B.L. Reid and *Roger Casement* by Brian Inglis, explore Casement's entire life and career. These books strive to offer a balanced portrayal of Casement, although they do cede attention to speculations about his sexuality. The books were published in 1976 and 1973, respectively, so they lack some of the more recent published primary sources, such as Casement's journal. *Casement, the Flawed Hero*, by Roger Sawyer, dedicates three chapters to Casement's work in the Putumayo. Sawyer argues that Casement helped expand the British Foreign Office's commitment to consular officers' role in investigating human rights abuses. Sawyer's perspective strengthened my focus on the diplomatic aspect of demanding justice in the Putumayo.

I was fortunate to access a wealth of primary sources for my research, including Casement's journal recording his journey through the Amazon, where he chronicled many of the observations used to compile his report. While the journal itself was used as a primary source, it was published in 1997 with notes by Angus Mitchell, who helped to provide context and clarify additional information. Mitchell's content is cited separately from Casement's words. I also relied heavily on the document titled, "Correspondence respecting the treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District," which contained most of the communication between the British Foreign Office and the Peruvian and United States governments. This document, which was submitted to the British House of Commons in July 1912, also included Casement's official report and supporting documentation. The final source, which helped wrap up the case and likely warrants further investigation beyond the scope of this thesis, was the compilation of reports titled "Slavery in Peru" that was submitted to the United States House of Representatives in August 1913. This document included reports from U.S. officials, Casement's Blue Book, the Peruvian report about the abuse, and correspondence regarding the case. This collection of documents showed the changes, or lack thereof, in the Putumayo as a result of Casement's report. Although "Slavery in Peru" shifts to the United States perspective, U.S. officials were working with the British, and the report offers valuable information regarding events after July 1912, bridging my gap to British sources.

### **My Argument**

Although several historians have explored Casement's life, I will be adding to the literature with my focus specifically on Casement's work in the Putumayo. My argument focuses on the thoroughness of Casement's investigation, which transformed the understanding of human

rights for indigenous people in the Peruvian Amazon. I point out the paradoxes in Casement's observations, for while he advocated for an end to the abuse, he denied the intellectual capacity and agency of the Indians, whom he described as "grown-up children." Thus, a nuanced analysis of Casement's complex perspective is important as I praise his humanitarian work.

My research also focuses on the diplomatic aspect of the investigation. As I read more about the case, I grew frustrated with the startling lack of concrete action to protect the Indians. How could the accusations emerge in 1907, yet Casement was not sent to investigate until 1910? Why did it take the British Foreign Office a year and a half to publish Casement's report? Why did the Peruvian government fail to bring the criminals to justice and not protect their indigenous citizens? To answer these questions, I explored the diplomatic correspondence between the British and Peruvian governments, as well as the United States' later involvement. By utilizing the vast correspondence between the British Foreign Office and the Peruvian government, I analyze the strategies the British employed to pressure the Peruvian government to act. Additionally, I point out the Peruvian government's empty promises and methods of appeasing the British without enacting concrete steps for reform. I also argue that the United States' subsequent involvement increased pressure on the Peruvian government, although the U.S. representatives were easily fooled by Peru's claims of change. In the end, although the publication of Casement's report led to public outcry, justice in the Putumayo fell short. The Peruvian Amazon Company implemented minimal reforms, and the Peruvian government negated its responsibility in the region. Yet, Casement's investigation prompted increased diplomatic interest in international human rights and brought attention to the plight of indigenous groups. Thus, while Casement could not achieve the desired reform of Putumayo slavery, he did

make great strides for diplomacy, broadening the role foreign powers had regarding diplomatic oversight of human rights.

## Chapter 1

### The Foreign Office Decides to Investigate

As Hardenburg and Whiffen struggled to make their voices heard in London, the British government began formulating a response. On September 29, 1909, members of Parliament in the House of Commons questioned the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Thomas McKinnon Wood, about alleged ill-treatment of British subjects from Barbados in the Peruvian Amazon.<sup>12</sup> Parliament had read Hardenburg's accusations in *Truth*, and they were eager for a report from the Foreign Office. Parliament's questions reflected growing pressure in London to investigate the allegations. McKinnon Wood expressed confusion at the questioning, promising to look into the claims and report back. While the questions in Parliament focused on Barbadians, the article in *Truth* highlighted the abuse of the Indians, thus recognizing the constraints of a British investigation:

Whatever his thoughts and feelings about the suffering of the local population, Hart-Davies knew full well that no department of state had any right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country when it came to the plight of its own people; had he raised the issue of the Indians, the foreign secretary would simply have replied to this effect. But the Barbadians were another matter. They were British subjects and had the right to appeal to Britain for protection.<sup>13</sup>

The deliberations in Parliament reflected the need to emphasize Britain's legitimate involvement in the situation as they sought to protect the Barbadian workers.

Meanwhile, the Peruvian Amazon Company and the Peruvian government denied the accusations. The Company claimed that they had no reason to believe the reports of atrocities; moreover, they did not bear responsibility for potential abuses, as the British Board had not yet

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<sup>12</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 4. Goodman gathered his evidence from primary sources in the British National Archives and Parliamentary documents.

<sup>13</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 13.

become part of the Company at the times of the alleged occurrences.<sup>14</sup> The Peruvian chargé d'affaires in London also denied the allegations in a letter to the editor of *Truth*, arguing that the Peruvian government maintained control in the region and, therefore, would have known about any abuse. He insisted that the evidence published in the Iquitos newspaper was for “dishonest purposes” and that the Peruvian army could not possibly have committed the alleged “acts of inhumanity.”<sup>15</sup> *Truth* countered with more of Hardenburg’s evidence, and the arguments and allegations appeared in multiple British publications. The conflicting accusations added to the British Government’s sense that it needed to intervene to ascertain the truth, and if necessary, assign blame and enforce justice.

Thus, despite the fervent protests of the Company and the Peruvian government, the Foreign Office decided that they needed to investigate further. The Foreign Office wrote to the British Consul in Iquitos, David Cazes, requesting his judgement on the veracity of the allegations. Cazes claimed that the accusations were largely unfounded. He criticized the Iquitos newspaper and asserted that the Barbadians, who lodged a few complaints, had mostly returned home. Moreover, he assured the Foreign Office that the Barbadians’ grievances were unjustified, and he had observed good treatment of the Indians.<sup>16</sup> The Foreign Office, however, was unsatisfied with Cazes’ inconsistent response. They brought him back in to the office in London to discuss the case further; however, Cazes remained insistent that the reports were exaggerated, likely propagated by the jealous Colombian government with interests in the region.

Recognizing that Cazes offered little help, the Foreign Office sought other sources. They contacted Charles des Graz, the British minister in Lima, who reported that he lacked

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<sup>14</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 55.

information as the Putumayo was incredibly isolated from Lima. Curious about the rumors of an American report, James Bryce, the British ambassador in Washington, reached out to the State Department. The State Department responded that they had no record of such a report, despite the existence of United States consul Charles Eberhardt's analysis, "General Conditions in the Putumayo River District of Peru."<sup>17</sup> The report would have corroborated Hardenburg's account and helped the Foreign Office, but lacking access to its contents, they instead turned to des Graz's suggestion to contact Captain Whiffen, who had recently visited the region. Whiffen, as a British officer, was considered a more legitimate source, and his observations confirmed those published by Hardenburg.

Whiffen had set off to the Putumayo in hopes of finding out what happened to Eugene Robuchon, a French explorer who had disappeared while attempting to map the region for the Peruvian government. Whiffen traveled through the Putumayo on Company launches, but after several months, he determined that Robuchon was nowhere to be found. After Whiffen returned to London, the Foreign Office contacted him, and he submitted a report detailing his observations about the atrocities. Although Whiffen had not witnessed overt acts of violence, his conversations confirmed the horrible treatment of the Indians as he recounted to the Foreign Office stories of floggings, sexual abuse, and a system of slavery. He confirmed Hardenburg's allegations and expressed concern that Arana had not kept his promise to enact reforms.<sup>18</sup> The Foreign Office believed Whiffen's report since he was a British officer, yet they still lacked sufficient information about the condition of the Barbadians, the true concern that fell under their purview.

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<sup>17</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 67.

Thus, the Foreign Office reached out to the Colonial Office, trying to determine the status of the Barbadians in Peru. The Colonial Office was uncooperative, and the Foreign Office struggled to gather sufficient information. They were about to accept that the Barbadians had all departed Peru when Whiffen came in to the Foreign Office for an interview and revealed that there were still Barbadians in the Putumayo, many of them forced to remain because they were in debt to the Company. The Colonial Office lacked answers, but they suggested a consular officer travel to the region to investigate the situation. Both the Foreign Office and Whiffen dismissed this idea, doubting that a Consul could discover the true extent of the atrocities when traveling under the watch of the Company.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the continued pressure from *Truth* convinced the Foreign Office that they needed to explore other avenues for investigation. Bryce, the British ambassador in Washington, confirmed that the United States government believed Hardenburg's account to be true: "The Peruvian government, he added, had more or less accepted their claims by agreeing to compensate the two men [Hardenburg and his partner] for their losses."<sup>20</sup> The Foreign Office contacted the Peruvian Amazon Company directly. The Foreign Office sent their letter on November 24, 1909, detailing the indictment against the Company.

While the Foreign Office waited for a response from the Company, they extended their communication with the United States government about the situation. Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, instructed Bryce to provide the State Department with all of the evidence compiled about the allegations in the Putumayo "to enquire whether the United States Government would in the circumstances be prepared to join with His Majesty's Government in calling the attention of the Peruvian Government to the matter."<sup>21</sup> The Foreign Office recognized

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<sup>19</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 73.

the United States' growing influence in the region, hoping that joint pressure could give them more leverage for change. However, the United States was already involved in mediating a border dispute between Peru and Ecuador and could not risk their role by becoming embroiled in the Putumayo controversy.<sup>22</sup>

The Foreign Office received their response from the Company on December 30, 1909. The Company denied the allegations, labeled Hardenburg and Whiffen as blackmailers, and insisted any supposed atrocities had ended, negating their culpability. They also included a statement from Arana: "I absolutely deny that lawlessness has of late existed in the Putumayo Region, for neither the Peruvian Authorities, who efficiently fulfil their duties of maintaining order and administering justice, nor I myself would have allowed such a state of things to exist."<sup>23</sup> The Foreign Office realized they required a different approach with the Company, and cited the need for an impartial investigation by the Company to assuage public opinion. During this time, the Foreign Office received additional testimony from John Brown, Whiffen's translator during his explorations of the Putumayo. Brown detailed the abuse against Barbadians: "The other British subjects cannot get out, they are slaves. They are in need of help and there is no help they can get."<sup>24</sup> Brown's testimony, although questioned by racist elements in the Foreign Office, confirmed that British subjects remained in the Putumayo, thus necessitating a British investigation. As Goodman noted, "The presence of the Barbadians in the Putumayo was the Foreign Office's only entry point into a matter that, politically, was predominantly a Peruvian one. Only a British consul and an official of the Barbadian government, who could talk directly to the Barbadians, could assess once and for all whether the abusive system persisted."<sup>25</sup> As

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<sup>22</sup> Huntington Wilson to Stuart Fuller, April 6, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 80.

public outrage mounted and the Anti-Slavery society demanded answers, the Peruvian Amazon Company acquiesced, writing to the Foreign Office on June 8, 1910 that they would initiate an investigation in the Putumayo, and they agreed to allow a consular official to accompany them.

### **Defining Casement's Role**

As the Foreign Office debated which consular official to send along with the Company Commission, the Anti-Slavery Society suggested Roger Casement, whose work in the Congo had made him “the most experienced and most universally lauded investigator of human rights abuses of his day.”<sup>26</sup> The Foreign Office evidently agreed, and on July 21, 1910, Casement received a letter from the British Foreign Office, informing him that he had been selected to join the Peruvian Amazon Company's Commission to investigate alleged abuses in the Putumayo. His explicit instructions were to investigate the treatment of Barbadian workers who, as British subjects, merited attention from a British Consul. Yet, the unofficial charge of the investigation involved a larger question of the treatment of the native population and general conditions of the rubber industry. The broad nature of Casement's instructions challenged him as he struggled to perform his official responsibility to the Barbadians while balancing his moral duty to protect the abused indigenous population. In his journal, Casement reflected on the gravity of his assignment:

It would be necessary to exercise great caution in this respect – as indeed throughout the enquiry – so as to afford no ground for possible objection being raised by the governments of the territory visited. It would be necessary from the first to treat any such information obtained as of a confidential and separate character and it would not be intended for publication nor for direct transmission to the government or governments whose agents might be involved.<sup>27</sup>

Casement recognized the value of discrete diplomacy to avoid problems with his investigation.

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<sup>26</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 62.

Maintaining his image proved essential because he traveled with the Company Commission. Casement depended on the Company for lodging and transportation in the extremely remote regions of the Putumayo. Moreover, he knew his interviews and investigations would be under the watchful eye of Company agents whose interests were threatened by his enquiry. Indeed, Casement seemed rather pessimistic about the efficacy of his investigation:

We shall be fairly well hoodwinked I think – the good will be in a general cleaning up and more care for the future perhaps...The chief difficulty, for me, is the seeming necessity I am under of travelling everywhere as the guest of this Commission. It is very hard, well nigh impossible to arrive at an independent judgement or to take any independent line of investigation when from start to finish I shall be doing everything ‘by your leave.’<sup>28</sup>

Casement’s dependence on the Commission frequently frustrated him, for he resented the constraints on his ability to alleviate suffering.

Although Casement recognized the risk of his investigation interfering with Peruvian sovereignty, he also observed the lack of the Peruvian government’s control in the region. The absence of government power was important in disputing the Company’s claims. After all, the Company protested that the allegations of abuse were false because the Peruvian government maintained control of the region and would not allow such atrocities. However, Casement witnessed the absence of government authority, allowing lawlessness that facilitated the abuse of Barbadians and indigenous tribes. Casement condemned the judicial processes in the region: “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 justice won leaves the soil rank with misdeeds.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he feared that even if the Peruvian government exercised authority in the region, the Indians would continue to suffer. Casement was particularly affected by a

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<sup>28</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 112.

conversation with a rubber trader, Victor Israel, during his trip to the Putumayo. Israel remarked, “the Lima government [would] regard any such ‘conquest’ of a new tribe as a patriotic act deserving of territorial rights being conferred on the conqueror.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Casement lacked trust in the possibility of institutional reform, believing the Peruvian government would not be motivated to protect the Indians.

When Casement finally arrived in Iquitos, his suspicions of atrocities grew as his faith in Peruvian authority shrank further. He met with the Prefect of Loreto, Dr. Paz Soldan, who Casement believed was not being bribed by the Company like the previous prefect.<sup>31</sup> Yet, Paz Soldan remained steadfast in his assurances that the atrocities were blackmail. Indeed, he argued that Arana and his company were admired in Peruvian society: “The House of Arana,” he said, “had performed distinguished services to the State and stood high in the opinion of the Government.”<sup>32</sup> The Company not only controlled law and order in the region, but they had also managed to control public opinion. Moreover, Casement concluded from his meeting that finding an unbiased legal arm of the Peruvian government not under Company pay would be incredibly difficult. After gathering initial information in Iquitos, Casement ventured up the Putumayo, visiting several rubber stations and gathering evidence to formulate his report for the Foreign Office.

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<sup>30</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 80.

<sup>31</sup> The prefect was responsible for running the Department of Loreto, which, headquartered in Iquitos, encompassed the Putumayo region.

<sup>32</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 92.

## Chapter 2

### Casement's Report

After spending several months in the Putumayo, Casement returned to England and began to compile his copious evidence into a report for the Foreign Office. On January 7, 1911, he submitted a preliminary report to Grey in which he confirmed the “incontrovertible” testimony of the Barbadians to show innumerable charges of murder, rape, and constant flogging.<sup>33</sup> Casement detailed the course of his journey, which left him with no doubt that the claims of abuse were true. Moreover, he connected the case to the Barbadians, his original focus for the investigation: “Many of the acts charged against agents whom we met were of the most revolting description, and the Barbados men bringing these charges did not omit, in several cases, to also accuse themselves of shocking crimes, committed, they averred, under compulsion.”<sup>34</sup> Casement determined that the Company’s commission he had travelled with was also convinced of the abuse.

One of the most important additions to this preliminary report was a list of the Company agents who had committed barbarous crimes. Casement urged that the agents should be arrested and charged by the Peruvian government. Most of the criminals were Peruvians, and Casement recognized the danger that they would run away to escape punishment. Despite his advocacy for the Barbadian workers, he also suggested the arrest of one Barbadian, Armando King, who had shot and killed a young Colombian. Although King insisted on his innocence, Casement received disturbing reports from several sources. Casement remained steadfast in his belief in justice: “I added that even there in the wilderness he must not think these crimes could go on undetected or

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<sup>33</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, January 7, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 12. Casement’s reports were all sent directly to Sir Edward Grey, who, as Foreign Secretary, occupied the highest position in the British Foreign Office, reflecting the importance of Casement’s investigation.

<sup>34</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 12.

unpunished; that someday, perhaps soon, a civilized Government would take account of what was being done in the name of civilization, and then he might have to answer.”<sup>35</sup> After receiving Casement’s first report, the Foreign Office initiated communication with the Peruvian government about prosecuting the criminals.

Three weeks later, Casement submitted an additional report about the conditions of the Barbadians and a description of the Putumayo region. Casement began his report by explaining the purpose of his trip and his instructions for the commission, recognizing his duty to the Barbadians, as well as the underlying need to investigate the rubber system. He discussed the terms of the Barbadians’ contracts with the Company, which had been violated in multiple ways. They lacked medical access and were held in debt to the Company to buy products they needed to survive. Yet even more disturbing than the violation of their labor rights was the violent work they were forced to carry out: “It is certain that these men [Barbadians], instead of being used as laborers, were forced to act as armed bullies and terrorists over the surrounding native population...the Indians had to satisfy all the demands of the so-called commercial establishment that had planted itself in their midst.”<sup>36</sup> Casement was outraged that the Barbadians were forced to abuse the Indians.

Casement then proceeded to describe the conditions of the Indians in the region, whom he assumed were “docile” and “a mild and inoffensive people.”<sup>37</sup> He seemed surprised that the different tribes were in frequent conflict, with fighting that “perpetuated for generations disputes of obscure and often trivial origin.”<sup>38</sup> Often, Casement’s discourse reflected colonialist assumptions about the legitimate conflicts between indigenous groups as they maintained their

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, January 31, 1911, In *Correspondence*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 20.

own societies and power dynamics regardless of Western influence. Casement also assumed the Indians' inferiority in the face of the Company's overbearing influence:

The Indian, who may correctly be termed "a grown-up child," was at first delighted to have a white man with attractive articles to give away settling in his neighborhood and to bring in exchange India-rubber for these tempting trifles seemed easy. Moreover, the Amazon Indian is by nature docile and obedient. His weakness of character and docility of temperament are no match for the dominating ability of those with European blood in their veins. Yielding himself, first, perhaps, voluntarily, to the domination of these uninvited guests, he soon finds that he has entered into relations which can only be described as those of a slave to a master, and a master, be it observed, who can appeal to no law that recognizes his rights. The system is not merely illegal in civilized parts of the world, but is equally illegal in the Amazon forests, since those regions are all claimed by civilized Governments which absolutely prohibit any form of slavery in their territories.<sup>39</sup>

This passage provides insight into the paradox of Casement's approach to the Putumayo situation. While he exhibited racist beliefs about the intellectual capacity of the Indian as a "grown-up child," he also advocated for the Indians' rights as humans. He seemed to quickly conclude that Indians were naturally ripe for subjugation, rather than considering the skewed power dynamic that facilitated disproportionate control by the rubber agents. Yet Casement also condemned what he understood as a system of slavery. Thus, he could remind governments of their moral responsibility to protect the global population from systems of slavery.

Perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of Casement's report was his narrative voice. By naming his sources and eliciting sympathy for their plight, he reinforced the severity of the situation. For example, he relayed the story of a Barbadian named Quintin, who was beaten with 50 lashes for trying to buy food from an Indian girl. Later, Company agent Augusto Normand beat Quintin for letting two Indians escape, leaving him sick for months. Quinton also wounded his foot trying to capture the Indians, for he could not afford to buy shoes at the Company's exorbitant prices. Casement witnessed the marks from this abuse, which remained five years

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<sup>39</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 21.

later. Further testimonies told similar stories of abuse, as well as attempts by the Company agents to bribe the Barbadians' silence. The Barbadians' access to food was also limited, and they were punished when they tried to find other food sources. Ironically, Frederick Bishop lamented that he was forced to flog the same Indians who ensured his survival by helping him gather food.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the physical abuse, the Company kept the Barbadians in debt, encouraging them to gamble and forcing them to buy goods at inflated company prices. Moreover, the Company falsified financial accounts to keep the Barbadians in "what becomes a perpetual state of bondage."<sup>41</sup> Casement managed to help the Barbadians relieve their debt, negotiating a deal with the Company to refund all Barbados men twenty-five percent of their purchases. This debt relief proved sufficient for them to close out their accounts, and with their burden of debt assuaged, most of the Barbados men were free to accompany Casement back to Iquitos and leave the employ of the Company.<sup>42</sup>

After spending two months in the remote Putumayo investigating the various rubber stations, Casement returned to Iquitos, satisfied with the breadth of his investigation. He concluded his report by confirming his trust in the veracity of the Barbadians' testimonies, for he acknowledged their hesitation and reluctance to share about the crimes committed. Moreover, they incriminated themselves along with the station chiefs, thus demonstrating they were not acting all in self-interest. He also recognized the overlapping confirmation of the testimonies, whereby several Barbadians detailed the same abuse. Casement also used his own observations to confirm the abuse against the Indians: "I must have seen at least 1,500 to 1,600 native Indians—men, women, and children. The condition of these people itself was the best proof of

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<sup>40</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey 28.

<sup>42</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 33.

the truth, and often of the singular accuracy of the Barbados men's declarations."<sup>43</sup> Casement anticipated challenges to his report, so he acknowledged and refuted counter-arguments before they could question his legitimacy. He was determined that his report effect change.

Two months after his initial reports, Casement submitted his complete report, offering more details about the entire rubber system and the abuse of the Indians, along with supplemental evidence of his testimonies and the Company practices. In this report, he described the history of the region to explain how it became a center for rubber extraction. Casement emphasized the isolation of the region, which facilitated a lack of authority. Thus, once Arana created his rubber company at the turn of the century, the exploitation of Indians began unfettered. The "conquistadores" who arrived in the region managed to profit because they could force the Indians to extract rubber from the trees.<sup>44</sup> Once under their control, the Indians were considered property, and the rubber barons brutally repressed any attempts to "steal" their property.<sup>45</sup>

In his discussions of protection for the Indians, Casement suggested the possibility of a religious mission to provide a civilizing force. He referenced several documents from the Peruvian Ministry of Justice, published in 1907, that lamented the challenges of establishing a mission in such a remote region: "In this river [Putumayo] it is not possible to establish any mission owing to the abuses of the 'caucheros' against the Indians ('los infieles'), whom they maltreat and murder for no reason ('por motivos frivolos'), seizing their women and children."<sup>46</sup> At a time when most of the accusations were being denied, the church already recognized the abuse. Yet, their concern was not completely humanitarian. Rather, the Church believed the

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<sup>43</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, March 17, 1911, In *Correspondence*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 39.

rubber system hindered their ability to convert the Indians who needed to be Christianized. For example, Frei Prat remarked that the mission established on the Ampiyaco River produced “scanty results, owing to the very little support of the ‘caucheros,’ who are interested that the savages should remain in the grossest ignorance in order to exploit them with greater ease.”<sup>47</sup> The rubber agents were hostile to the missions, whose purpose of converting the Indians to Christianity threatened the agents’ ability to subjugate the indigenous labor force. The missionaries were also concerned about their own safety. In a letter to the Minister of Justice, the Apostolic prefect of San Francisco de Ucayali cautioned “if no effective remedy is applied, later on we shall not be safe even in the mission villages, nor shall we be able to spread our winning over and civilizing of the savages who dwell in our forests.”<sup>48</sup> He also expressed concern about the “correiras,” essentially the hunting of Indians, which had decimated the Indian population, thus limiting their number of converts. Despite some evident self-interest, the prefect also alluded to the system of slavery.<sup>49</sup> The British and United States governments continued to propose a religious mission in the Putumayo as a solution to the lawlessness of the region.

Casement detailed the horrifying treatment of the Indians. He explained how the Indians were condemned for killing white men, something that Casement saw as justified as their only way to assert autonomy. He believed their physical retribution was necessary because “the Indian knows the weakness of his own character as opposed to the resolute enterprise and enduring purpose of the white man.”<sup>50</sup> In effect, while Casement doubted their intellectual capacity, he excused Indians’ forms of self-defense—Casement denied their equality yet advocated for their humanity.

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<sup>47</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 40.

The power dynamics of the stations were deeply ingrained. The Company recognized the value of autonomy at the stations, for it increased their rubber yield. In a place where profit was the priority, the law often went ignored: “Provided rubber came in from the sections no question was asked as to what took place there. Each chief of section did as he pleased, and even Peruvian subordinates had frequent cause of complaint against their local superiors. Complaints, if made by a Barbados man or an inferior workman, were not attended to, and the chief of section knew no law but his own will.”<sup>51</sup> Casement explained the system of control at the rubber stations, wherein the white men oversaw the station, while the “rationales,” generally Barbadians or lower-ranked Peruvians and Colombians, meted out the punishment. The other enforcers were the “muchachos de confianza,” or Indian boys who were trained to subjugate other Indians. Casement seemed horrified by these muchachos and their violent tendencies, although he acknowledged they were likely forced into their actions.<sup>52</sup> Casement’s condemnation of the Indians while excusing the Barbadians demonstrated a problematic double standard.

### **Atrocities and Abuse**

Casement provided vivid descriptions of the disturbing punishments carried out against the Indians. The rationales followed orders from the section chiefs to flog Indians for misbehaving or failing to bring in sufficient rubber. Flogging was the preferred method of punishment because the Indians particularly hated it. It was deemed an effective method of subjugation, and Casement explained the violent appeal: “Some men like the Colombian negro Simon Angúlo seemed to have liked the task and to have been specially chosen for their ability in wielding the lash, so as, if desired, to draw blood or cut flesh at every blow.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, not only

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<sup>51</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 43.

was it a system based on ensuring the Indians provided enough rubber, but there was also a bloodthirsty interest in selecting the most painful punishment. Casement heard numerous testimonies about the prevalence of flogging, and he also saw the evidence of it himself. Most of the Indians, barely clothed, bore marks of lashes on their backs and buttocks. One evening, several Indians came to him asking for healing lotion to put on their wounds.

The “cepo,” or stocks, was another popular form of torture and punishment. Indian’s legs would be forced into small holes as their bodies were stretched in discomfort, often left there for days. The stocks made it easier to flog the Indians as they were held immovable. Casement’s words evoked the horror of the flogging, which often led to death: “Men and women would be suspended by the arms, often twisted behind their backs and tied together at the wrists, and in this agonizing posture, their feet hanging high above the ground, they were scourged on the nether limbs and lower back.”<sup>54</sup> Days after the flogging, their wounds infested with maggots, the victims would either succumb to death or be shot by the station chiefs, having become useless as labor sources.

As Casement tried to ascertain the extent of the abuse, one resident of the region estimated that 90% of the population had been flogged, a number Casement found highly likely.<sup>55</sup> The section chiefs tried to conceal the worst of the abuse, claiming that the marks were all old, and they had since enacted provisions to prohibit this punishment. However, Casement’s observations challenged that assertion. He managed to see more recent wounds, despite the Company hiding the most visible victims in the forest during his visit.<sup>56</sup> Casement recognized the illegality of these floggings, and, in addition, condemned them for being used not to punish a

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<sup>54</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 45.

crime or wrong-doing but to evoke “torture and terror...to make the Indian bring in more rubber, or stand in salutary dread of the local agent.”<sup>57</sup> In attempts to conceal their abusive practices, the section chiefs began implementing different forms of punishment. One popular method was to beat Indians with machetes, which while inflicting incredible pain, left minimal scarring. The chief at the Occidente station, however, simply held the Indians under the river water, leaving them half-drowned.<sup>58</sup> Casement described the disturbingly creative methods used to develop new forms of torture: “Flogging was varied with other tortures, designed like the semi-drownings of Velarde to just stop short of taking life while inspiring the acute mental fear and inflicting much of the physical agony of death.”<sup>59</sup> This abuse proved an integral part of the rubber system.

As in most instances of colonization and subjugation, female Indians suffered additional abuse. When placed in the stocks for punishment, the Company agents took advantage of their immovable position to rape them.<sup>60</sup> Many agents took young women as concubines, especially those in the vulnerable position of domestic labor. They did not, however, take the wives of Indians who worked in rubber extraction, for then those men would simply refuse to work; no amount of torture could convince them otherwise. Casement was impressed by this fidelity and commitment to marriage: “The Indians often displayed a fortitude in the face of impending torture and death that speaks for itself of the excellence of some of their qualities.”<sup>61</sup> This observation by Casement was contradictory, for, as noted, he also questioned the Indians’ intelligence and strength of character.

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<sup>57</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 49.

<sup>58</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 48.

<sup>59</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 52.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 57.

In addition to the flogging, the Indians were forced to carry rubber for long distances, often up to 60 miles, with no food provided by the Company. They bore loads over 50 kilograms, a difficult burden especially for their malnourished bodies. They frequently carried rubber amounts heavier than their own body weight. Often, small children would accompany their parents on their arduous journey, just so they could carry the small amounts of cassava bread, prepared prior to departure, that were supposed to sustain them.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, on this march, the Indians were tied up or chained at night in uncomfortable positions to prevent escape.<sup>63</sup> Then, when the Indians completed their long journey to the “fabrico” and turned in their rubber, they were given an “advance” for needed items. Thus, they were never sufficiently paid for their rubber, remaining dependent on the Company for minimal materials for survival.

Casement evidently anticipated rebuttals of his observations. Some of the Company agents argued that such torture could not be possible because section chiefs would not want to deplete their labor source. However, Casement saw no regard for life, and the system of slavery placed little economic value on the Indian’s life. Casement described the barbarous company agents’ practices: “He hunted, killed, and tortured to-day in order to terrify fresh victims tomorrow. Just as the appetite comes in eating so each crime led on to fresh crimes, and many of the worst men on the Putumayo fell to comparing their battues [practice of driving game toward the hunters] and boasting of the numbers they had killed.”<sup>64</sup> The inhumanity of these Company agents also brought on a form of cultural genocide. The criminals recognized the value of the elderly as cultural sources in the Indian tribes, for they offered advice and wisdom that could be used as a form of resistance. The Company agents killed almost all the elderly members of the

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<sup>62</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 46.

<sup>63</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 54.

tribe, thereby robbing them of leadership to help escape their conditions.<sup>65</sup> Casement greatly feared the decimation of the Indian population, as long-time residents described the already incredible reduction in numbers over the past decade.

As Casement concluded his report, he confirmed the brutal accusations through his own observations and the trustworthy testimony from the Barbadians. He returned to Iquitos where he met with the Peruvian prefect, impressing the “urgent need for prompt action by the Peruvian Government. If the disgraceful state of things existing on the Putumayo was not dealt with and the principal wrongdoers arrested, I assured him a deplorable impression would be created.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, Casement alluded to the forthcoming pressure from the British government to reform the system. The prefect promised to take action and protect the Indians, the start of numerous empty promises. However, with Casement’s full report detailing the system of slavery, the British government was equipped to force diplomatic negotiations.

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<sup>65</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 62

## Chapter 3

### The Foreign Office Urges Peru to Act

Casement's communication with the Foreign Office offered unequivocal condemnations of a system of slavery in the Putumayo. Convinced by Casement's evidence, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey began the diplomatic pressure to convince the Peruvian government to bring the perpetrators to justice. On January 15, 1911, he wrote to Charles Des Graz, the British Minister in Lima, urging him to inform the Peruvian government "confidentially and in a friendly manner" about the crimes in the Putumayo.<sup>67</sup> The British believed the Peruvian government lacked knowledge of the crimes, and upon receiving Casement's evidence, they would "in the interest of justice and humanity, take steps at once to punish the criminals and prevent the continuance or recurrence of the atrocities."<sup>68</sup> Grey also included the list of criminals compiled by Casement, so the Peruvian government could act swiftly. At the end of his letter, Grey offered a veiled threat; should Peru not act before the Foreign Office has to report to Parliament, Peru would face trouble from Britain: "As any impression that such crimes were to go unpunished, or that there is the least chance of their being repeated, would be most deplorable, and could not fail to arouse strong feeling."<sup>69</sup> Grey's instructions showed the Foreign Office's desire to resolve the case quickly. They believed, perhaps naively, that the Peruvian government would acquiesce to their influence. However, British demands for justice would continue for a year and a half as the Peruvian government attempted to delay and avoid British demands.

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<sup>67</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Charles Des Graz, January 16, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Charles Des Graz, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Charles Des Graz, 15.

Almost immediately, the Peruvian government began to make empty promises that they would comply with Britain's appeals for justice. Des Graz answered Grey with assurances from the Peruvian government that they would act quickly for justice. The Peruvian government sent their own commission of enquiry, led by Dr. Romulo Paredes, to the Putumayo to investigate and corroborate British reports. Yet, Grey worried that the Peruvian response would prove too slow, allowing the criminals time to escape. His correspondence with Des Graz then paused after January 25, while Grey waited for Casement's additional reports.<sup>70</sup> Grey's correspondence returned to the Putumayo issue on March 30, when Grey reached out to the British Ambassador in the United States, James Bryce. Grey instructed Bryce to communicate "unofficially" to the United States government about the British interactions with the Peruvian government in Lima regarding Casement's report.<sup>71</sup> Despite the United States' reluctance to get involved in the Putumayo situation, the British hoped the United States would at least support their actions and not work against them.

With Casement's initial report submitted, Grey urged Lucien Jerome,<sup>72</sup> the British representative in Lima, to unofficially inform the Peruvian government of Casement's report.<sup>73</sup> After almost a month with no response from Peru, Grey reached out again, asking if they had apprehended any of the criminals indicted in his telegram from January 16. He reiterated the need for Parliament to see that Peru proposed effective measures for reform.<sup>74</sup> Jerome responded six days later, believing he had convinced the Peruvian government of Britain's "friendly, but earnest desire" for Peruvian action.<sup>75</sup> Jerome also related valuable Peruvian government

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<sup>70</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Charles Des Graz, January 25, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Sir Edward Grey to James Bryce, March 30, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 152.

<sup>72</sup> Jerome filled in for Des Graz in Lima during much of this correspondence.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, March 30, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 153.

<sup>74</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, April 21, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, April 27, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 153

telegrams about the investigation in the Putumayo. The telegrams revealed the inefficacy of the Peruvian government as they detailed the escapes of various criminals. Many fled to Brazil, which lacked an extradition agreement with Peru. Throughout the correspondence, the British government encouraged Peru to negotiate an extradition treaty with Brazil, hoping it would facilitate the pursuit of justice. However, the negotiations failed, and many criminals remained out of reach.<sup>76</sup>

Even though the telegrams reflected no real success in detaining criminals, Grey expressed approval of surface-level indications that Peru was taking action. Jerome's telegram on May 4 reflected the challenge of extradition from Brazil; criminals from the Putumayo that had escaped with kidnapped Indians were stopped in Brazil. However, while the Brazilian government agreed to return the Indians to their rightful home, they opposed extradition of the criminals without a treaty with Peru. Though the Peruvian government told Jerome that they were attempting to negotiate such a treaty with Brazil, it never came to fruition. Jerome also mentioned the changing public opinion in Peru, largely as a result of the *Asociación Pro-Indígena*, which advocated for indigenous rights.<sup>77</sup> Public opinion in Peru represented a challenge because many Peruvians denied the citizenship rights of indigenous people. The British government, prompted by Casement, recognized that changing the perception of indigenous inferiority was essential to ending the system of slavery. The British understood how public backlash could help motivate the Peruvian government to protect the Indians.

Writing to Jerome on June 20, Grey attached copies of Casement's final report, including a Spanish translation, hoping to underscore the necessity for Peruvian action. Grey's urging echoed previous statements in which the Foreign Office requested Peruvian action that they

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<sup>76</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, 154.

<sup>77</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, May 4, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 155.

could relay to the British Parliament. Parliament, evidently, was growing dissatisfied with the Foreign Office's delays as they waited on the Peruvian government. With the strong evidence of Casement's final report, Grey was confident Peru would finally be convinced to act.<sup>78</sup> This confidence emerged numerous times; the Foreign Office thought they had skillfully prompted Peruvian action. Yet Peru accepted their demands in person while ignoring them in enacting actual legislative reform. Parliament, however, remained unaware of Peru's promises, and thus remained more insistent on evidence that Peru would address their concerns. In a July 6 telegram, Grey urged Jerome to inform Peru's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that they must provide Britain with proof of their actions to bring criminals to trial, or they would be forced to publish Casement's report.<sup>79</sup> Grey also forwarded a copy of this telegram to Ambassador Bryce in Washington, hoping he could ascertain if the British would receive any diplomatic support from the United States in Lima.<sup>80</sup>

Jerome recognized the impatience of Grey's telegram and arranged a meeting with President Augusto Leguía to underscore the importance of the situation. The president assured Jerome he would speak to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and instruct him to take immediate action. Leguía "begged" Jerome to tell the British government that he would take the necessary steps, but he wanted the memo to remain private and unofficial for the time being.<sup>81</sup> This interaction epitomized the Peruvian government's attempt to take advantage of the British government. Their conciliatory words did not match their actions as they sought to appease Britain without any substantial action on Peru's part. Yet, Grey seemed to accept Peru's obsequiousness, replying to Jerome that he was pleased with his interaction with the president.

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<sup>78</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, June 20, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 155.

<sup>79</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, July 6, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 155.

<sup>80</sup> Sir Edward Grey to James Bryce, July 6, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 156.

<sup>81</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, July 13, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 156.

Grey also revealed a new objective in this telegram. Not only did the British government want the criminals brought to justice, the British had also decided the best way to prevent future abuses in the region was to establish a religious mission. Grey urged Jerome to communicate their goal to the Peruvian government and ask them to provide this future mission with an annual subsidy.<sup>82</sup> The suggestion of a religious mission reflected the British government's belief, largely due to Casement's reports, that the Peruvian government could never control the region, so they needed an alternative presence to protect the Indians from abuse.<sup>83</sup>

### **Peru Confirms Abuse but Delays Justice**

The Peruvian government continued to produce a façade of action in the Putumayo. Dr. Paredes and the commission completed their investigation, concluding that egregious crimes had been committed in the Putumayo. Jerome passed along more Peruvian telegrams to Grey that detailed Paredes' commendable work which led to the issuance of 215 warrants. Several days later, they had already arrested several criminals.<sup>84</sup> Yet, as Casement feared, these criminals were mostly low-ranking officials simply following orders, while the main culprits had escaped to Brazil. Grey urged the Peruvian government to communicate their names to the Brazilian government and request that Brazil inform Peru if the men left.<sup>85</sup> This suggestion proved interesting because Peru still lacked an extradition treaty with Brazil, yet Grey believed they could leverage diplomatic relations to at least share information between the countries. Yet, information sharing can rarely be one-sided, so Brazil's reluctance may have been prompted by the lack of reciprocity from Peru. More telegrams coming out of Peru indicated the government's

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<sup>82</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, July 21, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 156.

<sup>83</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, March 17, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 37.

<sup>84</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, July 25, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 157.

<sup>85</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, July 27, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 157.

attempt to diminish the basis for the accusations.<sup>86</sup> While the Paredes report acknowledged the abuses, the government asserted that most of the crimes had occurred before 1907. They also laid blame upon the Barbadian workers who Casement had attempted to protect. The Peruvian government boasted that they had so many warrants out, the gaol would be too small to hold all the criminals.<sup>87</sup> These telegrams indicated the lack of cohesive policy from the Peruvian government as they struggled to prove their own competence, while minimizing the severity of the abuse.

Evidently, the Foreign Office was temporarily appeased by Peru's claims of taking action through the Paredes commission, as correspondence about the subject ceased until October. Then, Grey received a letter from Jerome detailing new challenges. Jerome relayed rumors that Judge Valcarcel, who had been appointed to prosecute the Iquitos criminals named in Paredes' report, had left Iquitos. Jerome learned of this information from the newspaper, *Prensa*, despite denials from Peru's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another newspaper, *El Comercio*, reported that one of the criminals, Pablo Zumaeta, had been permitted to escape. Jerome intended to meet with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to express his frustration and also hoped to convince the United States Minister to express his displeasure to the Peruvian government.<sup>88</sup> Grey responded to Jerome on October 14, instructing him to question the Peruvian government about the newspaper rumors, "As they have come as a most painful surprise to His Majesty's Government, at a time when they thought the Peruvian authorities had awakened to a sense of their responsibilities and were acting a manner that could not fail to evoke the approval of all civilized nations."<sup>89</sup> Grey also urged the appointment of a new, "unbiased" judge to replace Valcarcel. Furthermore, Grey

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<sup>86</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, July 27, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 157.

<sup>87</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, 158.

<sup>88</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, August 28, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 158.

<sup>89</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Lucien Jerome, October 14, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 158.

relayed information about the alleged locations of several of the notorious criminals, including Victor Macedo in Lima and Elias Martinengui in Callao. It seems surprising that Grey was not more outraged that two of the criminals were living quite openly in Peru and should have been easily apprehended, yet the Peruvian government's avoidance ran deep. At the end of his letter, Grey issued a reminder that these criminals, in addition to abusing the Indians, also mistreated Barbadian workers. Thus, Grey reinforced Britain's legitimacy of involvement as they demanded justice for their subjects.

Jerome responded with the results of his meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister, as all Peruvian officials seemed to do, denied Jerome's concerns. He assured Jerome that Valcarcel had not left Iquitos. He also claimed there was no evidence of Zumaeta's escape although several of Jerome's sources confirmed otherwise. Yet, despite frustration with Peru's inaction, the British government continued to push forward. Jerome received a letter from Casement, guiding him to prepare Normand's<sup>90</sup> extradition from Argentina and the arrest of Macedo in Lima. Jerome also confirmed to Grey that the United States Minister in Lima, Henry Clay Howard, was supporting the British side.<sup>91</sup>

In November, Des Graz returned to Peru from London and assumed responsibilities of the Putumayo investigation. Grey updated him on the progress of the British investigation, including Jerome's telegram from October 19, and instructed him to question the Peruvian government about the steps they were taking to arrest the criminals and bring the prisoners in Iquitos to trial.<sup>92</sup> Des Graz responded that he met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who

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<sup>90</sup> Augusto Normand was a section chief accused of horrendous abuse, including burning Indians alive, dashing the brains out of children, and cutting of Indians arms and legs. His capture was especially important to Casement.

<sup>91</sup> Lucien Jerome to Sir Edward Grey, October 19, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 159.

<sup>92</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Charles Des Graz, November 29, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 159.

assured Des Graz he had sent a letter about arresting Fonseca and Montt<sup>93</sup> and would send a follow-up telegram to Iquitos inquiring about the progress. The Minister also assured Des Graz that the Peruvian government was eager to see the criminals “suitably punished,” but they faced strong local opposition.<sup>94</sup> The hypocrisy is clear: he attempted to justify the government’s delays by blaming communication and public opposition, yet the government’s interest in the commercial success of rubber and power dynamics held more sway. Casement frequently referenced the corruption he witnessed in the Putumayo, as unpaid government agents were easily bribed by the Company.<sup>95</sup>

As Britain grew more frustrated with the Peruvian response, President Leguía involved himself further in the situation. On December 13, Des Graz relayed a telegraph from the Peruvian president to the prefect of Iquitos, in which the president demanded the capture of the criminals in Brazil and an immediate punishment of the guilty. He also reiterated that the slowness of the proceedings made the Peruvian government look irresponsible in England.<sup>96</sup> Aware that his international reputation was on the line, President Leguía therefore attempted to demonstrate his good intent. Leguía also met with Des Graz, assuring him that he was “personally determined that the ends of justice should not defeat him.” Leguía expressed his horror at Casement’s report and emphasized his role in pressing the Iquitos court to proceed with the case. The president repeated a common boast from the Peruvian government: they had issued almost 300 arrest warrants.<sup>97</sup> However, as Grey would have reflected, issuing warrants without enforcing them proved futile in the pursuit of justice.

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<sup>93</sup> Fonseca and Montt were two of the worst criminals condemned in Casement’s report, yet they remained in Brazil unpunished.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Des Graz to Sir Edward Grey, December 3, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 159.

<sup>95</sup> Casement, *The Amazon Journal*, 92.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Des Graz to Sir Edward Grey, December 13, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 160.

<sup>97</sup> Charles Des Graz to Sir Edward Grey, November 17, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 160.

## United States Involvement

Despite initial reluctance from the United States to get involved in the Putumayo, the Foreign Office continued to keep them apprised of the situation. In fact, after months of discussion about the issue between Peru and Britain, the United States government began to express more interest in the Putumayo. In a telegram on July 21, 1911, Ambassador Bryce informed Grey that he had received a response from the United States: they “heartily sympathize[d]” with the British on the matter. The U.S. government also informed their Minister in Lima to “express informally at a favorable opportunity” their approval of Peru’s actions taken to end abuse and the hope for further pressures to prevent future cruelties against the natives.<sup>98</sup>

As the months dragged on and Britain grew increasingly frustrated with Peru’s lackluster response, they recognized the need for more effective pressure. This meant utilizing the United States’ influence in Peru. Ambassador Bryce had already reached out to people from the State Department in Washington with minimal success. Thus, after Casement left his second visit to the Putumayo, distraught at the lack of justice, he decided to travel to the United States to plead his case. Bryce helped arrange meetings between Casement and State Department officials. With his first-hand experience and passion for the case, Casement was able to convince the United States government to take a more active role in pressuring the Peruvian government.<sup>99</sup>

On January 12, Bryce wrote to Grey that he realized that publication of Casement’s report was imminent, so he believed a meeting with Casement would assure the United States’ compliance. Bryce and Casement both believed it would be beneficial for the United States to appoint a Consul to Iquitos, who could work with the British consular official there. As the two countries escalated their involvement, Bryce wanted them to agree on a definitive line of action

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<sup>98</sup> James Bryce to Sir Edward Grey, July 21, 1911, in *Correspondence*, 157.

<sup>99</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 174-175.

to take in unison: “Pressure applied upon the Peruvian Government by Great Britain and the United States would probably have the effect of inducing the Peruvian Government, not only to regularize its title to the district by negotiation or by arbitration with Colombia, but also to establish a proper administration over such part as may be deemed or declared Peruvian.”<sup>100</sup> They hoped to codify Peru’s control in the region, rejecting the excuse that Peru could not protect the Indians because they lacked authority.

Several days later, Grey sent Bryce an update after Casement’s departure for England. He included a telegram from the U.S. Secretary of State, Philander Knox, to the U.S. representative in Lima, Henry Clay Howard. Knox echoed Casement’s concerns that justice would fail because the corrupt local influence was stronger than the government’s efforts. He urged Howard to cooperate with the British and add additional pressure on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasizing that lack of action would result in publication of the report and the outrage of the press. Knox was certainly ready to exert his influence, even questioning Peru’s governing capability: “Such an exposition of the situation as may be foreseen might induce the public opinion of the world to believe that Peru had shown herself unable to properly exercise sovereign rights over the disputed region.”<sup>101</sup> Knox’s fervent castigation of the Peruvian government proved somewhat surprising, considering the minimal U.S. involvement previously. Yet, the United States likely recognized the escalation of the case and increased their involvement. Bryce also confirmed that Knox agreed this should be the Peruvian government’s last chance to act. The next step would be the publication of Casement’s report in England.

On January 23, Grey relayed to Bryce the contents of his meeting with the U.S. Chargé in London, Mr. Phillips. Grey was pleased with Knox’s willingness to act, although he elected to

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<sup>100</sup> James Bryce to Sir Edward Grey, January 12, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 162.

<sup>101</sup> James Bryce to Sir Edward Grey, January 19, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 161.

suspend his decision about publishing the report, promising to consult Knox before making his judgement. He expressed to Phillip the advantage of a consul at Iquitos, citing Casement's concerns that Arana would force the natives back to work after "this fuss" was over, thereby resulting in their extermination.<sup>102</sup> Yet, despite Grey's hopes for the United States' full support for publication, the Peruvian government continued to project a façade of action that the United States came to believe.

### **Casement Weighs In**

While the Foreign Office continued to develop their relationship with the United States about the Putumayo situation, Casement tried to push for greater action. Casement returned to the Putumayo for a second visit, and he sent Grey an extensive letter on February 5<sup>th</sup> to update him on the "actual state of things in connection with the promised reforms on the Putumayo."<sup>103</sup> Casement had hoped Paredes' report would prompt justice, for it showed that a representative of the Peruvian government confirmed the atrocities, thus denying claims about a biased outside power. In contrast to Peru's lackluster efforts, Casement praised Brazil's attempts to apprehend the criminals Fonseca and Montt, excusing the remoteness of the region as the reason for their failure. Perhaps his leniency toward Brazil's efforts stemmed from his admiration of their federal government protections for indigenous tribes and their ability to change public opinion to value native people. Casement saw this method as a model for Peru to implement to improve the treatment of natives throughout the Amazon Basin.<sup>104</sup>

Throughout the letter, Casement emphasized the lack of enforcement of justice, despite the claims by the government and Peru's issuance of numerous warrants. In Iquitos, he found

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<sup>102</sup> Sir Edward Grey to James Bryce, January 23, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 163.

<sup>103</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, February 5, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 164.

<sup>104</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 164.

that only nine people had been arrested, mostly inferior agents who primarily carried out orders. This confirmed Casement's fear that subordinates would take the blame for the actions of the true criminals. The authorities also insisted that they could not proceed to trial until all the other criminals implicated were also apprehended. Casement found this logic confusing and possibly illegal as the failures of the justice system abounded. Moreover, Casement argued that the police proved an ineffective enforcement mechanism as they were easily bribed. They ignored most of the warrants, allowing the criminals to continue to work in the Putumayo and force the Indians to bring in rubber. On the occasions they went in search of criminals, they never found them, although the Company men returned to their stations soon after the police departed. Especially egregious to Casement was the knowledge that Pablo Zumaeta, the managing director of the company at Iquitos and one of the most culpable criminals, managed to avoid his arrest warrant, remaining inside his home in Iquitos. He bought the complicity of the police, appealed to the court to annul the warrant, and returned to public life without trial or investigation of the charges. The case of Zumaeta seemed to confirm Casement's fear that justice would be close to impossible. These enforcement failures led Casement to conclude that the Foreign Office should not expect the punishment of the criminals; indeed, it probably went beyond the abilities of the local justice system. He repeated his opinion that: "custom sanctioned by long tradition and evil usage whose maxim is that 'the Indian has no rights' are far stronger than a distant law that rarely emerges into practice."<sup>105</sup> Thus, Casement understood the challenge of protecting the Indians when public sentiment denied their rights and remained unsympathetic to their suffering.

Nonetheless, Casement also recognized the potential benefits of Paredes' report, which consisted of an "exhaustive examination" and extensive interviews that confirmed "incredible

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<sup>105</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 166.

charges of cruelty and massacre.”<sup>106</sup> Paredes was working on sending the report to the Lima government, which Casement assumed would then be shown to the British representative in Lima. Moreover, the value of the report was not only in the confirmation of the crimes: “It also outlined a project of judicial and magisterial administration for that region, which, if put into execution by the Peruvian Government, should do much, I believe, to end the organized enslavement and ill-treatment of the Indian inhabitants.”<sup>107</sup> While Paredes’ report seemed the only beacon of hope to Casement, it would be largely ignored by the Peruvian government, the contents only known to the British government thanks to Casement’s personal investigation.<sup>108</sup>

Casement’s return to Iquitos also enabled him to identify additional practices that impeded justice. Although the prefect assured him that the government’s action had been hampered by a frontier conflict with Colombia, Casement criticized the lack of evidence of any effective initial steps. Moreover, he recognized that the magistrate for the region was unpaid, thus enabling the Peruvian Amazon Company to bribe his compliance. Casement also learned that soon after he and the commission departed, the community was “demoralized” and returned to the old conditions of exploitative rubber collection. This regression showed Casement that his demands had been ignored, for the local agents believed they “retain[ed] forcible exploitation of the Indians as their right by conquest.”<sup>109</sup> Casement found that the Indian population continued to shrink: “The human sacrifices attained such proportions that human bones, the remains of lost tribes of Indians, are so scattered through the forests that, as one informant stated, these spots ‘resemble battlefields.’”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 166.

<sup>107</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 166.

<sup>108</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 166.

<sup>109</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 167.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 169.

Interestingly, Casement did not place all of the blame on the Peruvians. As an Irishman and avowed anti-imperialist, he condemned the whole international system that facilitated the exploitation. He cited Britain's integral involvement in the rubber trade; even if the Company left the region, Britain still participated in transportation of rubber and created a market for its consumption. Thus, he argued that consumers should want to end the system, making justice the priority of all: "It is in the best interests of commercial civilization and the vital needs of traditional communities on the river that the system of ruthless and destructive human exploitation should be sternly repressed."<sup>111</sup> Casement urged other countries to unite in "assisting the best elements of Peruvian life to strengthen the arm of justice."<sup>112</sup> Casement certainly hoped diplomatic pressure could convince Peru to act, but he also approved another alternative. As previously suggested, he believed the presence of a Christian mission would be beneficial. The Foreign Office responded a month later, expressing their approval of his proceedings throughout his visit.<sup>113</sup>

### **The United States Hesitates**

On February 17, Des Graz informed Grey that he and United States Minister Howard had met with President Leguía and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, explaining the situation and demonstrating their joint action unofficially and informally. Once again, Leguía repeated his desire for punishment of the criminals, citing the steps his government had already taken, and asking the British for suggestions for further action. Des Graz emphasized the need for the government in Lima to exercise its authority in Iquitos and prompt a trial. Des Graz also suggested the president listen to Paredes' testimony for a project of reform. Although the

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<sup>111</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 169.

<sup>112</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, 169.

<sup>113</sup> Louis Mallet to Roger Casement, March 7, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 171.

President claimed this would prove politically difficult, he agreed to receive Paredes.<sup>114</sup> Grey's response showed his frustration. He forwarded Des Graz's telegram to Bryce, remarking that the president's comments were a repetition of what they had been told all along, and the Peruvian government continued to disregard the suggestions in Casement's report. As a result, Grey concluded that no action could progress without publication of Casement's report, and he wanted Bryce to inquire about the United States' view. Bryce responded a month later, confirming that the United States deferred to Britain regarding whether to publish the report. Grey prepared for publication.<sup>115</sup>

Yet, several days later, the United States began hesitating in their condemnation of Peru. Bryce relayed a telegraph from the State Department in which the Assistant Secretary of State, Huntington Wilson, deferred to Britain's judgement, yet also gave Peru the benefit of the doubt. Wilson believed the "sincerity of the Central Government at Lima in expressing its desire and purpose of carrying out these reforms."<sup>116</sup> The United States lamented the Peruvian government's difficult task due to the remote region and communication challenges, arguments Britain had received from Peru for close to a year. Yet the United States also regarded the report as a tool to *support* the Peruvian government by giving them, via public opinion, the power to act. Grey seemed unimpressed, for two months later, he instructed Mitchell Inness at the Foreign Office to request the State Department's approval to include some of their correspondence in the papers they would bring before Parliament. Knox responded, granting his permission for the letters' inclusion, yet he also expressed the United States' hesitation in publishing the report due to encouraging measures in Peru. Knox had received Paredes' report, and he approved of Peru's

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<sup>114</sup> Charles Des Graz to Sir Edward Grey, February 17, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 170.

<sup>115</sup> James Bryce to Sir Edward Grey, March 28, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 171.

<sup>116</sup> James Bryce to Sir Edward Grey, March 28, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 172.

comprehensive approach to reform. Knox also urged the British government to consider Peru's Presidential Decree of April 22, which established a commission to propose a reform plan. The decree acknowledged the crimes committed in the Putumayo, although avoided some responsibility by claiming they primarily occurred prior to 1907. With this decree, Peru decided they needed to establish "a regime, which while affirming the sovereignty and interests of Peru therein assures the rights of its inhabitants, especially of the natives."<sup>117</sup> The decree claimed that a reform plan would be presented for the study and approval of the National Congress before July 28, 1912. Knox seemed enamored of this decree, citing it as an indication of imminent legislation to control the Putumayo region. Thus, he hoped the Foreign Office would postpone publication of Casement's report to allow Peru to proceed with this new development. Finally, Knox made an important note: should Britain proceed with publication, he wanted this letter, expressing his support for the Peruvian government, included. This specification indicated Knox's desire to avoid backlash from Peru, for he could claim to be on Peru's side. It is unclear whether the United States was really duped by Peru's actions, or whether they were merely attempting to protect their diplomatic influence in Peru.

Either way, Grey decided to proceed with publication. On June 27, he responded to Inness, remarking that while he appreciated the Peruvian government's "animation" with this decree, he did not believe publication should be delayed: "My information leads me to the belief that fresh legislation is not so much required as a more rigid application of existing laws which should be perfectly adequate for the suppression of the state of affairs."<sup>118</sup> Moreover, Grey learned that the presentation of the reform plan had been delayed until Jan 1, 1913, another unacceptable attempt to delay justice, especially after he had just found out about a large

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<sup>117</sup> Mitchell Inness to Sir Edward Grey, May 25, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 172.

<sup>118</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Mitchell Innes, June 27, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 174.

shipment of rubber which could only have been possible with a return to the old system of forced labor.<sup>119</sup> Grey also believed publication would speed up the establishment of a religious mission, a measure they had deemed necessary for reform. As these factors surfaced, Grey sent a letter to the United States, informing them of his decision.<sup>120</sup> Several days later, Grey began presenting the report to Parliament.

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<sup>119</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Mitchell Innes, 174.

<sup>120</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Mitchell Innes, 175.

## Chapter 4

### Casement's Report Sparks Outrage and Further Investigation

As the Foreign Office prepared Casement's report for publication, they continued to urge the Peruvian government to implement reform in the Putumayo. The British sent a new consul, George Mitchell, who would work along with the United States consul, Stuart Fuller, to explore improvements and monitor Peruvian progress. As Mitchell and Fuller conducted their investigation, they discovered minimal changes to protect the Indians as the commercial interests continued to facilitate exploitation. The diplomats concluded that the Peruvian government lacked sufficient political will and capacity to enact effective changes. Yet, even as Mitchell and Fuller criticized the lack of reform, interest in the case waned. Mitchell and Fuller were the last Western representatives to pursue justice in the region as the collapse of the rubber industry and the start of World War I in 1914 turned the United States and Britain's attention elsewhere.

Yet before the Western powers lost interest, the reaction to the publication of Casement's report prompted swift action by Britain and the United States. The press expressed outrage at the content of Casement's "Blue Book" in Parliament. Numerous articles condemned the abuse of the Indians, bringing public attention to the remote region. As constituents called for change, the British and U.S. governments were prompted to expand their pressure on the Peruvian government. On July 15, *The London Times* declared "the bluebook shows that in an immense territory which Peru professes to govern the worst evils of the plantation slavery which our forefathers labored to suppress are at this moment equal or surpassed. They are so horrible that they might seem incredible were their existence supported by less trustworthy evidence."<sup>121</sup> The implication of this quote seemed to resonate in Britain and the United States. The accusation

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<sup>121</sup> Philander Knox to Congress, February 4, 1913, in *Slavery in Peru*, 5.

pushed the U.S. government to adopt a resolution in the House of Representatives on August 1, 1912 to request information from the State Department regarding the validity of this statement in *The Times*. One year later, the State Department submitted a 440-page report detailing Consul Fuller's observations, the Paredes report, Casement's Blue Book, and the State Department's correspondence regarding the Putumayo.

### **The United States Completes Its Own Investigation**

The State Department's report revealed the continued lack of progress by the Peruvian government in pursuing justice and protecting the Indians. In his letter of submittal, Secretary Knox explained the process of sending Fuller as a consul, as well as the difficulty he and the British Consul Mitchell faced in gathering information. Despite the United States' initial faith in Peru's ability to change, Knox condemned the inefficiency of the process, remarking that "whatever amelioration of labor conditions has been effected falls short of the demands of common humanity, and that the efforts of the Peruvian government to work a remedial change and clear itself before the bar of the world's opinion have been for the most part painfully inadequate and unhappily misdirected."<sup>122</sup> Thus, upon sustained contact with the Peruvian government, the United States also discovered that it delayed and avoided reform despite its promises.

As Fuller prepared for his new assignment, he received instructions from the State Department on the best way to proceed. In a letter to Fuller, Huntington Wilson, acting Secretary of State, updated Fuller on his instructions to work with the British officer. Wilson referenced the State Department's meetings with Casement, and the State Department's request that the British delay publication of Casement's report. Yet Wilson also thought the report's publication

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<sup>122</sup> Philander Knox to Congress, 6.

could help raise funds for establishing a religious mission in the Putumayo, and he instructed Fuller to assess the viability of a mission.<sup>123</sup> Fuller wrote back when he arrived in Iquitos, already expressing difficulties. He had a brief chance to meet with Mitchell before he left for a three-week trip upriver. Perhaps the biggest blow, however, was that the Prefect Paz Soldan, who had seemed committed to stopping the abuse, was preparing to leave for three months in Europe. Fuller relayed doubts that Paz Soldan would ever return after being threatened by powerful actors in Iquitos.<sup>124</sup>

One month later, Fuller's cynicism about the ingrained power of the rubber agents had grown as he spent more time investigating the situation in Iquitos. He observed that the Company men in Iquitos held great wealth and influence. The people in Iquitos seemed to love Pablo Zumaeta, who had previously been indicted in Paredes' report as a significant criminal yet managed to get his arrest warrant thrown out. Indeed, by the time Fuller arrived, Zumaeta had been elected to several powerful positions in Iquitos. The fact that he was elected, not appointed, indicated the extent to which the Company had ingratiated themselves in the eyes of the Iquitos population. Fuller reflected on this strange dynamic: "[Peruvians,] while they may not approve of the cruel and inhumane treatment, generally regard the Indians as placed here by Providence for the use and benefit of the white man and as having no rights that the white man need respect."<sup>125</sup> Thus, the problem lay not only with the Company and the Peruvian government, but also with the Peruvian people who regarded Indians as exploitable. Fuller's observations reinforced those recognized by Casement in his report. Casement even suggested methods to shift public opinion.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Huntington Wilson to Stuart Fuller, April 6, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, May 31, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 13.

<sup>125</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 1, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 14.

<sup>126</sup> Roger Casement to Sir Edward Grey, February 5, 1912, in *Correspondence*, 164.

Fuller's letters to the State Department continued to describe the system of slavery and peonage. He lamented the difficulty of dismantling the system because Peru needed to compete with other rubber sources.<sup>127</sup> Fuller also discovered an additional form of labor abuse, which involved a system of trading women and children from Ucayali as "wards" for unpaid domestic labor.<sup>128</sup> Yet the citizens of Iquitos seemed to justify this system by claiming the wards were like part of the family, echoing arguments used to justify slavery in the United States. Fuller expanded on the failure of justice in the Putumayo case. Those accused of the worst crimes remained out of reach of the Peruvian authorities; in fact, the government had given up on catching most of the criminals.<sup>129</sup> As Fuller pondered a method to rectify the situation, he urged "energetic and continued pressure from Lima" as well as "money from the Peruvian government for administration and judicial purposes in the Department of Loreto."<sup>130</sup> Fuller, a newcomer to the case, had not yet lost his earnest confidence in the Peruvian government's commitment to enact justice.

Fuller expressed a great belief in the need for strong governmental reforms, for he doubted the capability of the Company's reforms to halt the atrocities. He recognized the local corruption: the justice of the peace for the Putumayo, Manuel Torrico, was also an employee of the Company. Fuller also commented that the possibility of losing territory to Ecuador or Colombia seemed to be the only motivation for reform.<sup>131</sup> Fuller suggested the threat of this territory loss could be an effective catalyst for change, although he could not take that position officially. The Company seemed to capitalize on this fear as they argued that the Colombians did

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<sup>127</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 1, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 15.

<sup>128</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 16.

<sup>129</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 20.

<sup>130</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 15, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 27.

not treat the Indians well, so Peru must retain control of the territory if there could be any hope for reform.<sup>132</sup> The Company and the Peruvian government often blamed Colombians for the crimes for which the Company was accused.

Fuller, meanwhile, attempted to establish his legitimacy in investigating the situation for his government. He contacted the acting prefect in Iquitos on July 10, asking what measures were being taken to protect the Indians and punish the guilty. He justified his inquiry under the guise of assessing the situation for Church missions.<sup>133</sup> If the United States would send funds and its citizens as missionaries, the U.S government needed assurances of safety. In his report, Fuller also included a translation of Peruvian President Leguia's declaration to create an auxiliary commission which would review Dr. Paredes' plan for reform and the need to delay the reforms until January 1, 1913. This delay prompted the British Foreign Office to publish Casement's report, no longer accepting Peru's avoidance of justice.

Fuller had only been in Iquitos for about six weeks when Casement's report was published. Although the British government expected, and perhaps hoped for, some outrage in Iquitos, Fuller reported that the report received little attention. Rather, the Lima newspaper *El Oriente* published telegrams that denied the accusations and claimed the abuse was false. Fuller also explained the local resentment in Iquitos as the residents saw the United States and the United Kingdom as meddling in Peru's sovereign affairs. Fuller provided evidence of this animosity, including an article titled, "English Philanthropy and the Crimes of the Putumayo." The Peruvian author condemned the British and American "humanitarians," criticizing problems and abuses in their own countries and cautioning against outside interference: "We must mistrust whether the solicitude that these two powerful nations have in making us appear to the world like

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<sup>132</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 16, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 10, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 28.

a nation of savages, where it is necessary to penetrate to punish and civilize, may not conceal a menace to our national sovereignty.”<sup>134</sup> The article manipulated the Peruvians’ patriotic pride to muster resistance to the Western incursion. The author also argued that the abuse had ended, and the leaders were hiding out elsewhere, therefore precluding the need for British and American intervention. While the article demonstrated the opposition faced by Fuller and Mitchell, they continued to develop their plans for their investigations.

Fuller, satisfied he had gathered all the information he could in Iquitos, soon prepared for a trip up the Putumayo to visit the Company stations and investigate any progress on the conditions of the Indians. Moreover, Fuller would travel with the British Consul Mitchell, although they insisted they were conducting separate investigations. Fuller and Mitchell’s ability to assess the truth, however, was dampened by their need to travel on Company launches.<sup>135</sup> The men planned to depart the first week of August, and on August 5<sup>th</sup>, Fuller relayed his last piece of correspondence before the communication blackout in the Putumayo.<sup>136</sup> Fuller informed the State Department that he had spoken with a Peruvian military officer who revealed that the Company still carried out abuse against the Indians. The local authorities failed to do anything but deceive the Peruvian government. When the officer attempted to speak out, he was reprimanded to confine himself to military, not civil, affairs.<sup>137</sup> This confirmation of abuse from a Peruvian military officer reinforced the need for substantial, committed change in the Putumayo.

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<sup>134</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, July 31, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 41.

<sup>135</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 38.

<sup>136</sup> While traveling up river, Fuller was not able to send letters back to the United States because of lack of secure transportation for his communication.

<sup>137</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, August 5, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 43.

Although Fuller was forced to repeatedly justify his presence to the Company authorities, who resented his interference, he was eager to complete his investigation. Fuller sent his report of conditions in the Putumayo on October 28, assessing that the Company had made small improvements, yet the Peruvian government still failed to do anything to ameliorate the conditions. Fuller and Mitchell's investigations were even more complicated than expected. Not long after they departed Iquitos, the men learned that the Peruvian Consul General at Manaus, Carlos Rey de Castro, would join them. Fuller was not pleased by Rey de Castro's presence, noting that Casement had found evidence in the Company's accounts to indicate that the Company bought Rey de Castro's loyalty.<sup>138</sup> In fact, in a meeting with Casement, Dr. Paredes had described Rey de Castro as "one of those primarily responsible for the ignorance in which the government at Lima had been willfully kept of the true state of things on the Putumayo."<sup>139</sup> Worse, the two consuls were joined by Arana and his brothers, making any independent conclusions difficult. Altogether, it was clear that the Company hampered their efforts. For example, Rey de Castro tried to delay the investigation at multiple points, and the consuls found themselves being spied on constantly by Company personnel, unable to talk to the Indians alone. Fuller concluded that to truly understand the local situation, a government agent would need to live there for one year independently and well-paid. This type of honest person, Fuller added, would be difficult to find.<sup>140</sup>

As Fuller observed the conditions at the rubber stations, he concluded that the Company's reforms were minimal. Señor Tizon, who Casement believed was one of the few Company agents invested in reform, assured Fuller that the Company had abolished the commission-based

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<sup>138</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, October 28, 1912, in *Slavery in Peru*, 46.

<sup>139</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 165.

<sup>140</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 50.

payment system for white employees. Tizon argued that without the need to bring in a higher quantity of rubber, the Company eliminated the incentive for abuse.<sup>141</sup> Though Fuller acknowledged that the abuse was not as severe, and the floggings were more intermittent, he believed the commission system still existed, prompting the Indians to work in fear. The rubber system itself remained incredibly flawed: “Say what you will, it is nothing more nor less than forced labor, whether it is secured and kept by the rifle or by a system of peonage based on advances of merchandise.”<sup>142</sup> In the rare moments when Fuller was able to conduct honest, unsupervised interviews with Indians, they told him they primarily wanted the white people out of the area. Although their conditions had improved slightly, the Indians of course resented the rubber system forced upon them. According to Fuller, they possessed little concept of the Peruvian government, instead regarding Arana as the “chief of all Peruvians.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, the Indians lacked any identity as Peruvians themselves. Their hoped-for solution was resistance to the incursion of other Peruvians into their area.

As Fuller reflected on the legal ramifications of the situation, he criticized Paredes’ indictments as faulty, wondering if the report was flawed on purpose to make prosecutions difficult.<sup>144</sup> Yet, Fuller argued that political and economic issues continued to motivate interest in Putumayo reform, but only because: “Fear for political sovereignty of Peru in the region that has been aroused rather than solicitude for the welfare of the Indians.”<sup>145</sup> The Company, nonetheless blocked reform and was waiting for the attention to dissipate, so they could replenish their rubber supply. Indeed, they saw good reason to let the Indian population recover, whereby they would

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<sup>141</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 58.

<sup>142</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 60.

<sup>143</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 61.

<sup>144</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 56.

<sup>145</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 57.

have access to a renewed labor source. Although Fuller, like Casement, feared a vacuum of power created by the Company's departure would worsen conditions, he urged greater punishments of Company criminals and more effective reform strategies. Fuller concluded his report by lamenting the difficulty of establishing missions in the region, especially foreign ones, due to local resistance and lack of Company support.<sup>146</sup> As it happened, Fuller's concern for the missions as a solution, and the British and American hope for a civilizing Church presence would both go untested. Fuller's report, along with other documentation regarding the Putumayo case, were brought before the U.S. House of Representatives on August 1, 1913. While the United States condemned the system and called for reform, their role in demanding Peruvian action declined. The difficulty of achieving substantial change, as well as Britain's fading interest, allowed the case to fall out of public interest.

### **Western Interest Wanes**

The British government also debated the issue, questioning numerous witnesses, including the Company owners and Julio Cesar Arana himself. In November 1913, the select committee on the Putumayo issue promoted a petition with three recommendations. Committee members wanted to modify the Slave Trade Acts to include British companies in the illegality of slave owning and slave trading. They also wanted to reexamine the British antislavery treaties with foreign powers. Finally, the committee suggested the Foreign Office should expand its training of consuls to investigate treatment of indigenous populations in remote regions of the world.<sup>147</sup> The committee's reforms reflected suggestions promoted by Casement, who believed the British government could play a larger role in ensuring rights for disenfranchised groups

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<sup>146</sup> Stuart Fuller to Secretary of State, 62.

<sup>147</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 248.

across the world. Thus, Casement not only revolutionized understandings of human rights, but he also expanded the role of diplomacy in protecting those rights.

Yet, even as the British government seemed to be increasing its international commitment to the rights of the abused, Casement's role in the Putumayo case waned. Instead, Casement began to focus on Irish issues, drawing parallels between the suffering of the Irish at the hands of British imperialism to the subjugation of the Indians by white Peruvians. Although Casement suggested various lines of questioning for the Parliamentary inquiry, he was cynical about the possibility of change:

He held out no hope that diplomacy would lead to a better life for the victims of Arana's brutality. 'The outcome then is certain. The Peruvian Govt. will really do nothing. They will promise & leave everything as before to the men on the spot & the F.O. will, perforce, be required to accept this ending & so the whole question closes. The other blackguards will lift up their heads, & in a brief space the old game will go on with renewed vigor.'<sup>148</sup>

Frustrated with years of the denials and empty promises from the Peruvians, Casement lamented the difficulty of reducing the Indians' suffering. Casement resigned from the Foreign Office on August 1, 1913.<sup>149</sup>

Indeed, Casement's cynicism was warranted. Despite the Parliamentary suggestions to improve international protections against slavery, the British government soon moved on from the Putumayo issue. Europe was facing its own problems with the onslaught of World War I; July 9, 1914 marked the last time the British government or British newspapers would mention the Putumayo.<sup>150</sup> Although Arana agreed to testify in front of Parliament in England, he managed to avoid most of the direct questions, denying his own culpability in the abuse. He also escaped

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<sup>148</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 224. Casement expressed this cynicism in a letter to Charles Roberts, the member of Parliament chairing the Select Committee on the Putumayo.

<sup>149</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 253.

<sup>150</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 249.

his arrest warrant issued in Peru, easily hiding out in Brazil for a while before returning to Peru with his warrant thrown out. Arana assumed a comfortable life in Lima, even serving as a senator in the early 1920s. Ironically, he ran his campaign on promises of Indian protection.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal*, 69.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, Casement found his reputation tarnished in Britain after he was arrested in 1916 for participating in the Irish rebellion. As his trial progressed, the British government brought forth the supposed Black Diaries as evidence, hoping to sway public opinion against Casement. In light of this public shame, Casement was found guilty and hung for treason on August 3, 1916, prematurely ending his legacy of humanitarianism.<sup>152</sup> As much as Casement's work in the Putumayo had influenced action by the British and United States governments in pressuring the Peruvian government to enact reform, his influence quickly faded as the two countries sought an end to their involvement in the Putumayo. In September 1913, the United States consulate in Iquitos closed, and in May, 1916, the British legation in Lima declared an end to "the intervention of His Majesty's Government in the further investigation of charges that were originally formulated by a man whose name is now the subject of universal reprobation."<sup>153</sup> Thus, the context and driving force for diplomatic pressure dissipated, allowing a renewal of abuse against the Indians.

The Franciscans established a mission at La Chorrera in November 1912, yet it only lasted five years, the efficacy of its purpose limited by the Indians' fear of whites.<sup>154</sup> Not long after Casement's execution, a group of Indians led an uprising at the Atenas station in an attempt to rid the region of whites, according to Father Leo Sambrook, the Irish missionary in charge of the La Chorrera mission. He believed the current punishments were less severe than those Casement had witnessed, but the Indians continued to be beaten and refused to accept the abuse any longer. However, the retaliation by the white men from Iquitos violently repressed further

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<sup>152</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 257.

<sup>153</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 264.

<sup>154</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 265.

rebellion. The missionaries soon departed as their proselytizing proved ineffective in reducing violence. Despite the sharp decline in the Indian population and the speculations of herbal abortifacients, wherein the Indians would rather abort their children than bring them into a world destined for abuse, the number of Indians remained stable after 1912, at around five thousand. Considering estimates of fifty thousand Indians in the region prior to the incursion of the rubber company, the decimation of human life is disturbing.

Perhaps, the factor that saved the Indians from complete extinction was the shift of the rubber production industry from harvest in South America to new plantations in Southeast Asia. As rubber demand grew in the international market, many botanists and businessmen attempted to create rubber plantations to increase production. However, the Amazon soil was not conducive to plantations, and the proximity of planted rubber trees made them vulnerable to disease.<sup>155</sup> Instead, the plantation efforts moved to Southeast Asia, where cheap land and labor facilitated high rubber production: “By 1913, the Asian plantations were already easily outproducing the Amazon.”<sup>156</sup> Certainly, the Indians, lacking power and resources to resist Peruvian incursion, remained vulnerable long after Casement’s report; however, it appeared the abuse had abated somewhat. In the end, in border negotiations with Colombia in the 1920s, Peru lost the territory of the Putumayo, thus ending Arana’s business venture there.<sup>157</sup>

Casement was certainly a complex man; despite some paternalistic views, he undeniably advanced the cause of human rights for indigenous populations around the world. His work in the Putumayo prompted diplomatic pressure from Britain and the United States that forced Peru to at least face the issue, rather than deny its existence. Although the Peruvian government

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<sup>155</sup> Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, 32-33.

<sup>156</sup> Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom*, 218.

<sup>157</sup> Goodman, *The Devil and Mr. Casement*, 260.

effectively failed to enact justice and protect the Indians, the system of slavery was not allowed to continue unhampered. Some reforms were made, and the Indians were not totally wiped out. At the very least, Casement pioneered the diplomatic role in eradicating global slavery and promoted an early understanding of human rights.

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