

WEEK 10 INTRODUCTION TO READING

Roger Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District" (1913). House of Commons Sessional Papers. Accounts and Papers, vol. 68, 1912-1913.

In 1909, the British diplomat Roger Casement was stationed in Rio de Janeiro. That same year, British public opinion was aroused by articles in the London magazine Truth, which described slavery-like working conditions on the rubber plantations of an Anglo-Peruvian company operating in Putumayo district of Peru. In response, the British government sent Casement to investigate, and Casement's report confirmed the worst of what Truth had reported.

Seven years later, Casement was hanged for treason because of his support for independence for Ireland. At his trial and sentencing, a barely concealed subtext was Casement's homosexuality. In urging that Casement be denied appeals of his death sentence, a legal advisor to the British cabinet wrote: "Of later years he seems to have completed the cycle of sexual degeneracy and...has become an invert..., who derives his satisfaction from attracting men..."¹

WEEK 10 QUESTIONS

Roger Casement, "Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of British Colonial Subjects and Native Indians Employed in the Collection of Rubber in the Putumayo District" (1913). House of Commons Sessional Papers. Accounts and Papers, vol. 68, 1912-1913.

1. For Roger Casement, and for the Foreign Office, the central purpose of Casement's visit to the Putumayo region

¹ Quoted in Michael Taussig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 14.

was to confirm or refute allegations of atrocities by the Anglo-Peruvian rubber consortium operating in the region. What kinds of evidence does Casement use to verify the allegation?

2. What activities of this Anglo-Peruvian rubber consortium appear to be contrary to economic rationality?

3. How does Casement explain these activities?

4. Casement provides accounts of erratic—if not absurd—“payments” and “advances” to Indians for rubber. Briefly describe these “payments” and “advances.”

5. What do you think the “payments” and “advances” may have meant to the Indians?

6. What do you think they meant to the employers?