

The Irish Press 1919-1948

Origins and Issues

Thesis in respect of the degree of

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of an MA in Communications is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

This thesis provides a broad history of the Irish Press during the years 1919-1948. It sets forth how, from 1919 onwards, Republican leader Eamon de Valera became convinced of the need for a newspaper sympathetic to his aims, and how he went about raising funds for the enterprise both in Ireland and the United States. The corporate structure of the Irish Press is also examined, with particular emphasis on the role of the Controlling Director and the influence of the Irish Press American Corporation. The Irish Press was first published in 1931, and the thesis examines its support for Fianna Fáil in the period under study. The work also examines the changes in the relationship between the party and the paper as Fianna Fáil became more entrenched in government. The role of the first editor of the Irish Press, Frank Gallagher, is considered. The changes in the attitude of the Irish Press to Fianna Fáil in the post-Gallagher period are also examined, with emphasis on the findings of the Fianna Fáil sub-committee on publicity. The thesis concludes that the period under review was characterised by the emergence of four key elements in the culture of the Irish Press: volatile industrial relations climate, fund-raising problems, links to Fianna Fáil, and a corporate structure which ensured dynastic control by the de Valera family.

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Introduction

The first issue of the Irish Press was published on September 5, 1931; its last issue appeared on May 25, 1995. During nearly 60 years of publication, it played a central role in Irish political and cultural life. The Irish Press sprang from a tradition of small, usually short-lived Republican journals stretching back to the end of the 19th century. These journals were collectively referred to as the “mosquito press” because, in the words of a journalist who worked on some of them, they were “small, difficult to kill and had a sting that was remembered”. (Gallagher 1927: 348). The early Republican journals were essentially political pamphlets rather than newspapers, but they provided a training ground for many journalists who were eventually to work for the Irish Press itself.

The need for a truly national newspaper which put forward a Republican viewpoint began to impress itself on Eamon de Valera in the early 1920s. During a visit to the United States in 1919, he has basked in favourable publicity, and had seen the influence positive coverage could have on public opinion. His American experience was in contrast to the coverage he and his fellow Republicans received in Ireland. In 1922, he wrote: “The propaganda against us is overwhelming. We haven’t a single daily newspaper on our side, and only one or two small weeklies.” (Coogan 1993:430). De Valera had been the subject of negative press coverage, firstly as a leader of Sinn Féin during the War of Independence, then as the leader of the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War, and then as leader of Fianna Fáil after its foundation in 1926.

By 1927, de Valera had begun to raise funds for the foundation of a daily newspaper. He made two trips to the United States to put in place a fundraising operation there, and put a trusted lieutenant, Robert Brennan (later Ireland's ambassador to the United States), in charge of fundraising in Ireland. Neither operation could be said to be an unqualified success, and both fell short of the targets set for them.

His decision in 1929 to ask subscribers to the Republican Loan – a bond drive set up in the United States in 1919, designed to raise money to fund the War of Independence – to invest their money in the planned newspaper had an important influence on the project. Firstly, it provided much-needed funding, but, because of the wording used in the documents by which investors handed over their money, it also gave de Valera personally a controlling stake in the new enterprise.

The Irish Press was formally incorporated in 1926, and its board included several of the country's most prominent businessmen. The Irish Press American Corporation, which represented those American supporters who had reinvested the money they had subscribed to the Republican cause in 1919-1920, was incorporated in 1930. These subscribers signed over power of attorney to de Valera, giving him control of the American Corporation, which in turn controlled 47 per cent of the Irish Press company itself. De Valera's control of the new paper was enhanced in the company's Articles of Association, which appointed him to the post of Controlling Director. This role gave de Valera wide-ranging power over the editorial content of the newspaper, over the hiring and firing of staff. The power he had, firstly as majority shareholder thanks to the American Corporation, and secondly as Controlling Director, gave him

in an unassailable position, immune from internal board pressures or outside commercial influence.

The initial publicity material put forward by those involved in setting up the Irish Press claimed its editorial policy would be free party politics (NLI: 18361). But the paper's influence on the fortunes of the Fianna Fáil party was soon evident. The party won 57 seats in the second General Election of 1927, but that figure increased to 72 in the 1932 General Election, allowing Fianna Fáil to form a government with the support of the Labour Party. Subsequently, in the General Election of 1933, Fianna Fáil increased their representation to 77 seats, enough to form a government on their own. The 1932 election was the first in which de Valera's party benefited directly from the support of the Irish Press, and the prosecution of the paper's editor on charges of seditious libel just before polling day added to the sense that the new paper was an agent of change in the political system.

The relationship between the Irish Press and Fianna Fáil during the period under study was a complicated one. Assuredly, the Irish Press supported Fianna Fáil at election time and at other times of political crisis, and the party in turn displayed a proprietary attitude to the paper. This attitude became evident during the "McNeill affair", a dispute between de Valera and Britain's Governor General between April and July of 1932 in which the Irish Press played a key role, at the direction of de Valera. After the resignation of editor Frank Gallagher, the relationship between party and paper became strained, as the new editor, William Sweetman, tried to move the Irish Press away from such a close association with the party. Under Gallagher, the Irish Press

“provided detailed political analysis”; under Sweetman, it “placed greater emphasis on description of people and events.” (Curran 1994: 280). These changes were not popular with Fianna Fáil supporters, who expected their Cumann meetings to be reported and their party events to receive publicity. In March of 1940, Sweetman was called before the party’s sub-committee on publicity to explain himself.

Study of the Irish Press in the period 1919-1948 show four key characteristics of what de Valera called his “great enterprise” emerge. The relationship with the Fianna Fáil party is, of course, of central importance. This thesis charts the relationship between the party and the paper, and shows the subtle changes it underwent in the period under review. In the early days, the Irish Press was a persuader for Fianna Fáil, trying to persuade voters that de Valera and his colleagues were capable of government. In the later period, after many years of Fianna Fáil rule, the Irish Pres became a defender of Fianna Fáil, and towards the end of the period under study, even began to talk down to and lecture its readers.

Another key characteristic of the Irish Press (both the newspaper and the corporate entity) at the time was the failure of the twin fund-raising initiatives in Ireland and the United States. Despite the great energy and ingenuity expended on both, the capital targets set were never met, and even by the mid-1930s, the company was £40,000 short of the £200,000 set as the minimum necessary to fund the enterprise.

A third key element of the early history of the Irish Press was its corporate structure. The role of the Controlling Director gave de Valera immense power over the

company, and his role as the representative of the shareholders of the Irish Press American Corporation strengthened his position even further.

The industrial relations culture at the Irish Press was also created at this time. From the very earliest days, the editorial side of the business was in dispute with the commercial side. The many letters of founding editor Frank Gallagher to the Board complaining of a lack of resources bear witness to a divergence between the two sides. As early as 1933, Gallagher wrote to the Board in defence of a wages clerk suspected of being involved in a strike. He spoke of “the Irish Press method: the half-spoken innuendo that seems to blast more than any charge that can be met.” (NLI: 19361). Gallagher had many battles with an American “efficiency expert” imposed by the management and the paper’s early years were beset by industrial disputes of one kind or another.

This work presents a broad history of the Irish Press in the period 1919-1948, and concentrates on these four areas which emerge as key themes: fundraising difficulties, corporate structure, links to Fianna Fáil, and industrial relations. It shows how the corporate structure of the company, put in place to ensure the Irish Press did not depart from the editorial path set by founder Eamon de Valera, led to many controversies and accusations of financial wrong-doing in the period under review, and sets out how the proprietorial attitude shown to the paper by Fianna Fáil officials led to strains between the party and the Irish Press towards the later 1930s and 1940s. The thesis examines the industrial relations climate in the Irish Press, which was beset by industrial unrest even before the first issue appeared on the streets, and also

examines the fundraising operations in Ireland and the United States, showing how both fell short of the amount hoped for.

The period 1919-1948 was chosen because it was during this period that these four key elements of the paper's history came into being. The period is also interesting because during these years, the Irish Press underwent several subtle but significant changes, from populist, pioneering organ to journal of the established political leadership. The period also includes those years in which de Valera became convinced that a sympathetic newspaper was necessary for Fianna Fáil to enter government, and also covers those years in which the fundraising operations of both sides of the Atlantic were set up. The year 1948 forms a natural break: it was in that year that Fianna Fáil were finally ousted from power, and 1948 also saw the first issue of the Sunday Press, whose publication marked the real end of the Irish Press's first, political phase, and heralded the beginning of a second, more commercial phase.

Literature review

For a country with one of the highest newspaper readerships in Europe (O'Brien, 2000, P1), there is a surprising dearth of critical literature on the Irish media. When it comes to literature on newspapers and their history, influence and political impact, the cupboard is especially bare. Most of the existing material, such as Hugh Oram's The Newspaper Book (1983) and Paper Tigers (1993) are history at a gallop, and are highly anecdotal and lacking in any critical analysis. Ivor Kenny's book of interviews with newspaper editors, Talking to Ourselves (1994), contains much analysis, but does not attempt to put the comments of the various interviewees in any historical context.

The attempts at history or memoir by journalists themselves are either highly subjective or lacking in any historical depth. Michael O'Toole's More Kicks Than Pence (1992) is a colourful and energetically written account of life at the paper, but it is of necessity subjective. Mr Smyllie, Sir, Tony Gray's 1991 biography of Irish Times editor Robert Smyllie, is a parade of anecdote. Frank Kilfeather's account of his time at the Irish Press in Changing Times, A Life in Journalism (1997), is again highly subjective in its antagonism towards the paper's management and the de Valera family.

More academic historians have approached the subject of the Irish Press obliquely, referring to it only insofar as it impacted on the lives of their subjects. Most

biographers of de Valera mention merely that he founded the paper, or pause to defend him against charges of self-interest in its operation. An exception is Tim Pat Coogan's 1993 biography of de Valera, Long Fellow, Long Shadow. Coogan dwells longer than any other biographer on de Valera's relationship with the Irish Press. However, given Coogan's own relationship with the paper (he was editor for almost 20 years) and his relations with the de Valera family, it is understandably a subjective view. More recently, John Horgan's biography of Sean Lemass, The Enigmatic Patriot (1997) also alludes to the Irish Press, and gives a good account of Lemass's short but important sojourn as the company's managing director.

Two studies – Catherine Curran's 1994 PhD thesis on the Irish Press and Populism in Ireland and Mark Anthony O'Brien's 2000 PhD thesis The Truth in the News? A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Relationship between Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press – provide by far the most valuable academic works on Irish print journalism. Curran's work measures the content of the Irish Press during its early years against theories of populism to decide if the paper could truly be said to be an exercise in populism. She provides a wide-ranging history of the Irish Press, concentrating mostly on the early period, when the Irish Press was at its most populist. Mark Anthony O'Brien's work – subsequently published in book form as De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press (2001) – charts the history of the Irish Press against the fortunes of the Fianna Fáil party. He provides a comprehensive history of the paper and the party, and analyses the impact of modernity on both. Another important contribution to the literature on the Irish Press comes from Edward Cahill, who considers the collapse of the newspaper group from a financial point of view in Corporate Financial Crisis in Ireland (1997).

This thesis differs from O'Brien's work in that it presents a broader history of the paper over a shorter period, going beyond its relationship with the Fianna Fáil party. Also, this thesis examines closely the various fundraising and financial problems which beset the early management of the company. It concentrates on the raising of the Republican Loan and the influence of the Irish Press American Corporation. It differs from Curran's work in that it is an historical survey rather than an exercise in mapping historical data onto a theoretical framework.

Methodology

The primary research for this thesis consisted of analysis of the content of the Irish Press from 1931 to 1948. The analysis concentrated on the content of the Irish Press at times when it was apt to make a statement regarding its stance on an important issue. Thus not only Irish Press editorials at election or by-election time were examined, but also those editorials – and indeed general coverage – relating to the League of Nations, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the 1937 Constitution and the Economic War were examined. The primary research also looked at The Nation, seen by many as a precursor to the Irish Press, and its contemporary national newspapers, the Irish Independent and the Irish Times. The content of the Irish Press and the other national titles during the various court cases between the company and their partners Ingersoll Publications during the 1990s was also studied with a view to extracting material relating to the corporate structure of the company and the role of the Irish Press American Corporation dating back to the 1930s.

The archival research examined material relating to individuals involved in the establishment or operation of the newspaper. Frank Gallagher's archive was especially helpful, as were those of Joseph Connolly, Joseph McGarrity and Erskine Childers. The archives of the Fianna Fáil party, especially its publicity sub-committee, provided an insight into the proprietorial attitude of the party towards the paper.

The company records of the Irish Press company stored at the Companies Registration Office were instructive too in showing the extent to which various share offers were taken up. It was also helpful to see the register of subscribers, who came mostly from the labouring and lower middle classes. It is regrettable that the archives of the paper itself, now owned by Irish Press plc, were not made available.

However, it was in interviews with former Irish Press journalists that a more rounded picture of the Irish Press took shape. Michael Mills, former political correspondent, and Stephen O'Byrnes, also a political reporter on the paper, were forthcoming on the attitude of the paper towards the Fianna Fáil party. Former Evening Press editor, Douglas Gageby (recently deceased) spoke warmly of the early, barnstorming days of the paper, and of his professional relationship with Major Vivion de Valera, who succeeded his father as Editor in Chief. Interviews with Michael O'Toole gave an insight into the curious fatalism that pervaded the Irish Press building at Burgh Quay. Michael O'Kane, former editor of the Sunday Press was also interviewed, as was Benedict Kiely, who spoke of the "circumambient" nature of Eamon de Valera's influence on the paper during the 1940s.

Chapter 1 – Early origins of the Irish Press: 1919-1926

1.1 Introduction

A reader perusing the news stands in Dublin in 1919 would be faced with a wide array of newspapers, periodicals and magazines. Popular English newspapers like the Daily Mail, owned by the Irish-born Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, the Daily Express, owned by William Maxwell Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, Northcliffe's newest publication, the Daily Mirror, society gazettes like the Daily Sketch, and sensationalist magazines like Sir George Newnes's Tit-Bits were all vying for the customer's attention. Then, as now, Irish national newspapers had to fight against English papers for their place in the market. It is difficult to ascertain exact circulation figures for this period; the Audit Bureau of Circulation was not then in existence (it was founded in 1931), and other sources refer to 1930 and onwards. However, from these later figures, it is possible to get a picture of the newspaper market in Ireland of the 1920s. In a leaflet entitled Need for a National Daily Newspaper in Ireland circulated in the US from 1930 (NLI: 18361), we can establish that the Daily Mail's circulation then stood at 70,000, with the Irish Times and the Cork Examiner each at around 30,000 each. From a later commentator (Browne 1937: 171) we know that the Irish Independent's circulation was 143-152,000 in 1937. From these figures, it is possible to put together a picture of the daily newspaper market in the Ireland of the

1920s. It shows three main Irish national daily newspapers pitted against several larger English imports.

A Dublin reader determined to buy an Irish paper could have the Irish Times, the staid, conservative, organ of the Anglo-Irish class, or he could have the Irish Independent, the staid, conservative bible of the respectable Catholic middle class. If he bought the Independent, he would get news of the events of the day, the utterances of the Catholic Hierarchy, the doings of the Irish National Party MPs in Westminster and dispatches from various parts of the British Empire. If he bought the Irish Times, he would get much the same, except more about the Unionist MPs in Westminster and less about the Catholic bishops. But if he wanted news of the Sinn Féin party that had formed itself into the first Dáil Éireann on January 21, 1919, if he wanted detailed reports of that Dáil's business, if he wanted to read the views of Eamon de Valera, who had been elected president of that Dáil, or the views of other Republican leaders, his choice was even more restricted. If he held Republican views, he would find the pro-Unionist stance of the Irish Times repugnant. The Irish Independent, while it had deferred to the Catholic Hierarchy in banning certain books from its review pages (O'Donnell 1945: 386-394), was also repugnant to many readers of Republican views: firstly, it had championed the employers' side in the 1913 lock-out (not surprisingly, as the Irish Independent's proprietor, William Martin Murphy, was President of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce at the time, and led the employers' side in the dispute), and secondly it had taken an anti-Republican line on the 1916 Rising.

An example is the paper's editorial dated April 26, 27, 28, 29, May 1, 2, 3, 4 (the extended publication date is presumably intended to cover the issues missed due to the Rising):

“No terms of denunciation that pen could inscribe would be too strong to apply to those responsible for the insane and criminal rising last week ... When we come to think of what the incendiaries have achieved, it is pitifully meagre ... The men who fermented the outbreak, and all who were responsible for the devastation around us, have to bear a heavy moral and legal responsibility from which they cannot hope to escape. They were out, not to free Ireland, but to help Germany ...”

Joe Walsh, former editor of the Irish Press, recalled that it was thought at the time that such editorials had fermented anti-Republican feeling to such an extent that they “had a bearing on the execution of some of the leaders of the Rising” (IP: September 5, 1981).

In this chapter, I propose to set the decision by de Valera to found the Irish Press company in the context of the Irish Press's predecessors, the many Republican journals which sprang up from the late 19th century to give voice to the nationalist view of Irish politics. I shall also examine why de Valera thought it politically necessary to have a mass-circulation newspaper sympathetic to the nationalist viewpoint, and how he set about raising money for the venture.

1.2 The early Republican Press

Between 1896 and 1903, several small publications sprang up, inspired by the ethos of the Gaelic League. Among these were An Claidheamh Soluis (March 1898-September 1919), The Leader (September 1900-December 1927), An Sean Van Vocht (January 1896-March 1899), the United Irishman (March 1899-April 1906) and the

Irish Peasant (February 1903-December 1910).

An Claidheamh Soluis was published by the Gaelic League itself and its first editor was Eoin MacNeill, founder of the Irish Volunteers. Influenced by Pádraig Pearse and Piaras Béaslaí, it campaigned to have Irish as a compulsory subject for matriculation to the National University of Ireland. The Leader's editor D P Moran campaigned on many issues that were later to be taken up by the Irish Press: the need to foster indigenous Irish industry, the need to protect agriculture, and the need to break the railroad monopoly. The paper attacked aspects of Irish life that were later to be Irish Press targets too: the subservience of the Catholic middle classes to the British was a favourite.

The Leader was not, however, in favour of protectionism, on the grounds that it would mean higher prices for the Irish consumer. The United Irishman begged to differ. Edited by Arthur Griffith, it proposed to develop Irish industry and agriculture behind a tariff wall. It identified itself with the independence movement in India, as the Irish Press was to do later. When the United Irishman closed, Griffith set up a successor: the Sinn Féin Daily (April 1909-January 1910) which had as its goal the establishment of "a truly national press".

From 1914 onwards, as the struggle for independence intensified, so the small scale publications which sprang up became more militant. The Irish Volunteer began publication in February, 1914. The official organ of the Irish Volunteers, the paper gave instructions on the use of rifles and had useful sections on how to demolish railway lines without explosives. (Curran 1996: 122).

The beginning of the Great War was to have a twofold effect on Ireland's papers: the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 meant that many of the more militant ones were suppressed, and the issue of Ireland's stance in the conflict was to split the nationalist press down the middle, with, on the one side, the constitutional nationalist papers supporting the Irish Party and Home Rule, and, on the other, a growing number of separatist and labour papers. The more mainstream constitutional nationalist papers such as the Freeman's Journal, and the National Volunteer, supported Irish enlistment in the British Army, but newer papers were vigorously against it. In March 1915, the British authorities in Ireland – with the support of Irish party leader John Redmond – suppressed Griffith's anti-recruitment paper Scissors and Paste (December 1914-February 1915). The irrepressible Griffith returned in June as editor of Nationality, published by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The Easter Rising in 1916 and the threat of conscription in 1918 served to weaken the Irish Party cause and to increase support for the separatist cause. This support was evident with the huge vote for Sinn Féin in the 1918 elections. (Curran 1996: 123).

The Sinn Féin MPs formed themselves into the first Dáil, which was promptly proscribed by the British, along with all journals supporting it. The Dáil began then to publish its own paper, the Irish Bulletin. With assistance from Robert Brennan, Desmond Fitzgerald, Erskine Childers and Frank Gallagher – many of whom were later to work on the Irish Press – the Irish Bulletin became a daily publication with a circulation of about 2,000. Copies were sent to newspapers and governments all over the world, promoting the Irish cause and making propaganda against the British. For their part, the British tried valiantly to suppress it, but it always managed to move

offices just in time. At various stages it was printed in Robert Brennan's house in Belgrave Square, Rathmines, the Farm Products Shop in Baggot Street, and "International Oil Importers", Molesworth Street. The British authorities began printing a forged Bulletin with equipment they found during a raid on the Molesworth Street offices. The IRA moved quickly to stop this strategy, blowing up the British Army Auxiliary headquarters at the North Wall Hotel where the seized printing equipment was kept. (Curran 1996: 125)

1.3 De Valera and the raising of a Republican loan

As the Bulletin was being pursued by the British authorities, de Valera was in jail in Lincoln, his execution sentence having been commuted in deference to his American citizenship. He escaped and, after a brief visit home, decided to visit America to raise funds for the struggle for independence in Ireland. Accompanied by Dáil colleague Harry Boland, he arrived in New York on June 11, 1919. This visit, which caused some surprise among his comrades in arms in Ireland, had, on the face of it, no connection with the much later decision to set up a nationalist newspaper in Ireland. But the funds raised to support the struggle against the British would come to have a central influence on the finances of the Irish Press.

Upon their arrival, de Valera and Boland immediately set about raising money for a national loan. In Dublin, the Dáil had authorised the raising of a loan of \$1.25m. De Valera and Boland persuaded the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF) to divert \$250,000 of their funds to Ireland and sought advice from prominent Irish-Americans on how best to exploit Irish-American sympathy for Sinn Féin in their fight against the

British. Among those most closely associated with this fundraising drive were: Joseph McGarrity, leader of Clann na nGael in the US; Judge Daniel Cohalan, leader of the Clann in New York, and John Devoy of the influential Gaelic American newspaper. The suggestion was made that subscribers to a Republican Loan would be issued with bond certificates which they could exchange for real bonds once an Irish Republic was recognised. (Coogan 1993: 156).

De Valera's advisors suggested a higher figure than that authorised by the Dáil. "Ask for \$10m and you'll get \$5m," was McGarrity's view (Coogan 1993: 158). De Valera sent to Ireland for businessman James O'Mara – later appointed to the board of the Irish Press company – to administer the fund. The following notice appeared in the American press: "... a 10,000,000 dollar bond certificate issue of the Republic of Ireland will be launched about January 15 on the general pattern of the American Liberty Loan and the Red Cross drives ... I want to emphasise the fact that this will be a sentimental appeal and not an appeal to investors ... it will be distinctly understood by each subscriber to the Loan that he is making a free gift of his money. Repayment of the amount is contingent wholly upon the recognition of the Irish Republic as an independent nation ... The certificate will be exchangeable at par for gold bond of the Republic at the treasury of the Republic, one month after the Republic has received international recognition and the British forces have been withdrawn from the territory of the Republic." (Lavelle 1961: 150).

There was some demur at the idea of what amounted to an Irish insurgent raising funds in the US to carry on his insurgence in Ireland. Judge Cohalan was among those who thought the bond drive was illegal. The US State Department also had

reservations, as one diplomat observed: “To close our eyes and do nothing to prevent our territory being used to further rebellion against a friendly nation is not very creditable to our government.” (Carroll 1978: 152-3). However, the drive went ahead and \$5,123,640 was raised, most of it from “Irish domestic servants and others of like or lower intelligence”. (WSJ: February 4, 1920).

1.4 De Valera’s battle to keep loan funds

The disbursement of this money was to play a central role in the financing of the Irish Press. Ownership of and rights to the funds became the subject of a court case following the signing of the Treaty and the outbreak of civil war in Ireland. It is not possible to account for it all, but it is known that (i) de Valera left \$3m on deposit in the US; (ii) that he had considerable expenses while staying in the US (one witness describes scenes of profligacy in de Valera’s suite in New York’s Waldorf Astoria hotel where refreshment was given to “stray Hibernians and the hungry priesthood” [Thwaites 1932: 191-2]), and (iii) £81,000 (nearly \$500,000) was later paid over to the Provisional Government. (Coogan 1993: 391). That leaves perhaps \$1.4m unaccounted for. It is likely that this money was sent immediately (i.e. in February, 1919) back to Ireland to be used in the War of Independence.

De Valera made McGarrity and Irish trade consul Diarmuid Fawsitt trustees of the \$3m left on deposit in New York. He joined Stephen O’Mara, who had replaced his brother James as de Valera’s chief fund-raiser in the United States (and was later to become a director of the Irish Press), and Dr Michael Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, as trustees of the money sent back to Ireland (or what was left of it after the War of

Independence). In August 1922, the Provisional Government of Liam T Cosgrave began legal proceedings to recover the money raised in the Republican Loan.

In Ireland, de Valera and O'Mara objected, while Bishop Fogarty sided with the Free State Government. On July 31, 1924, Judge Murnaghan of the Dublin High Court found in the Provisional Government's favour. De Valera's side appealed, but the High Court's decision was upheld by the Supreme Court on December 17, 1925. De Valera returned £81,000 to the Department of Finance.

In America, the Provisional Government secured an injunction which prevented those banks with which the Republican Loan funds were lodged from handing over the money, or any interest accumulated, to de Valera, O'Mara or anyone acting for them. They then (August 1922) applied to the US Supreme Court seeking a declaration that the Provisional Government was the legitimate successor to the Republican Dáil and was thus entitled to the money subscribed to the establishment of the Irish Republic.

Meanwhile, de Valera was galvanising his allies in the US to oppose this action. Sean T Ó Ceallaigh, de Valera's envoy in New York, wrote to John Hearn, chairman of the Bondholders' Committee representing subscribers to the loan and an ally of de Valera's, on August 25, 1925, urging the committee to "get to work with a view to intervening in the present case for the preservation of the Funds for the Republic". (Coogan 1993: 391). The Bondholders' Committee was represented at the US Supreme Court hearing of the case when it was eventually heard before Judge Peters in March 1927. The judge ruled that the money should go neither to de Valera nor to Cosgrave, but should be returned to the original investors.

1.5 The Republican Press after the Treaty

After the split over the Treaty, the anti-Treaty side began publishing a journal called The Republic of Ireland (Phoblacht na hÉireann) in January 1922. Prominent Republicans like Cathal Brugha, Austin Stack, Countess Markievicz and Erskine Childers contributed to the paper. The pro-Treaty provisional government responded with The Free State (first published in February 1922) which published articles by Ernest Blythe, Kevin O'Higgins, Eoin MacNeill and Desmond Fitzgerald. This was no simple circulation war, however: in June 1922, the provisional government enacted press controls aimed at suppressing the anti-Treaty journals. These obliged printers to submit any articles referring to the conflict for approval prior to publication. Subsequently, The Republic of Ireland was restricted to a southern edition published from Clonmel under the editorship of Erskine Childers and Frank Gallagher.

In 1924, Republican sympathisers tried to buy the defunct title to the Freeman's Journal, but their efforts were thwarted by William Martin Murphy, owner of the Irish Independent, who stepped in and bought the title to merge it with that of his own paper. Further light was thrown on these events in a court case in the summer of 1932. In the course of the case, the court heard how the Independent company had bought the title and presses of the Freeman's Journal for £24,000 in 1924. The court also heard evidence that there was speculation at the time that Independent Newspapers bought the paper and its presses to forestall an attempt by a group of Republicans to step in and use the Journal as the launching pad for the Republican paper that eventually became the Irish Press. The fact that Independent Newspapers chairman

William Martin Murphy destroyed the presses of the Journal and merely incorporated the title into that of the Irish Independent lent credence to this theory. (EP: June 30, 1932).

1.6 Conclusion

As is evident from the number and endurance of so many nationalist publications, generations of nationalists have been aware of the need to put their point of view across in the public prints. When de Valera made the decision to take action to found the Irish Press is not certain, but the attitude of the mainly pro-British press in Ireland had been occupying his mind from the early 1920s on, as an onslaught of negative publicity took its toll, first on Sinn Féin in the war of independence, then on the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War, and lastly on Fianna Fáil.

During his visit to the US in 1919, de Valera had basked in favourable publicity from the American Press; he had seen the influence positive coverage could have on public opinion. As early as 1922, de Valera wrote to John Hearn, treasurer of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR), a body set up by de Valera during his visit to the US in 1919-1920: "The propaganda against us is overwhelming. We haven't a single Daily newspaper on our side, and only one or two small weeklies." (Coogan 1993:430). This attitude is echoed by Sean Lemass in a newspaper article in which he blamed the poor showing of Fianna Fáil in the local elections of 1925 on the "hostility of the Press linked to the hostility of the Church". (II: March 14, 1925).

In an impassioned letter to de Valera, Frank Gallagher, who would later become editor of the weekly paper The Nation and then of the Irish Press, describes the harm done to Fianna Fáil by the refusal of the existing national newspapers to report its affairs. “If we could break down the conspiracy of silence in the Daily Press, it would be worth 10 times what we’re doing in handbills.” (NLI: 183642).

The attitude of the Catholic Church may also have had an influence on de Valera’s decision to start a newspaper of his own. Throughout the 1920s, various Catholic societies had been objecting to the unhindered access to the Irish reading public allowed to the British press. The Catholic Truth Society and several “vigilance societies” were concerned that the content of British newspapers and periodicals, especially that content which referred to birth control and other issues of sexual morality, were having an injurious effect on Irish morality. This campaigning by the Catholic right may have had little influence on de Valera, but at the very least the existence of such campaigns show that de Valera’s call for an Irish, nationalist newspaper which would counter the “morally objectionable” (NLI: 18632) English newspapers was made against a background of some dissatisfaction with the existing press.

Chapter 2

The Irish Press 1926-1931

2.1 Introduction

The Fianna Fáil party was founded in 1926. They contested and lost two General Elections in 1927, winning 44 seats in the first and 57 in the second. Unless there was a political or constitutional crisis, there would not be another election until 1932. All the party's efforts were aimed at increasing their representation in the 1932 poll. And for de Valera, the Irish Press was a key component in that electoral strategy. He was keenly aware of the impact a lack of publicity for Fianna Fáil policies was having, writing to his close ally in the US Joseph McGarrity in 1927 that: "The newspapers here make it almost impossible to make any progress. We must get an Irish national newspaper before we can hope to win." (McGarrity: MS 17441).

Even after Fianna Fáil entered the Dáil in 1927, de Valera felt strongly that the press of the day did not treat him fairly. His official biographer amplifies this feeling of resentment: "Although Leinster House gave him one sounding board, the press did not satisfy him in its treatment of the ideas he expressed as his experience of parliamentary opposition increased. There seemed to him to be full coverage for the

Government's achievements, like the engineering scheme to dam up the Shannon river for electric power; like the decision of the League of Nations to register the 1921 treaty against British protests; like the participation in imperial conferences out of which came a declaration of autonomy for the dominions." (Bromage 1956: 259)

Another biographer echoes this: "The daily Press was unanimously opposed to Fianna Fáil, so Dev felt seriously handicapped in his efforts to get his party's policies across to the electorate." (Dwyer 1991: 153).

From the outset, Fianna Fáil's main policy was economic self-sufficiency, and in order to further that policy, the support of a number of constituencies of Irish society was necessary: Irish manufacturers, smaller farmers and the urban working class would all have to be enlisted if the dream of an Ireland economically independent from Britain could be realised. As time went on, de Valera became ever more keenly aware of "the hostility of the existing daily papers towards Fianna Fáil". (Manning 1972: 42). Another commentator points out that the Irish Press "was founded in response to an immediate and pressing need for a mass circulation daily to assist in Fianna Fáil's struggle for hegemony against the ruling party, Cumann na nGaedhael". (Curran 1996: 7). But that struggle would continue without a proper mouthpiece until 1931, while fundraising and general organisation took place. The fiery weekly paper The Nation did its best to counter the anti-de Valera and anti-Fianna Fáil stance of the mainstream press. The years between the foundation of the Irish Press company in 1928 and the appearance of the newspaper on the streets in 1931 were a time of consolidation and planning, but most of all of fundraising.

2.2 The early fight for funds

Prior to the first publication of the Irish Press in 1931, de Valera made three trips to the US. The first, from June 11, 1919, to December 10, 1920, was concerned with the raising of the Republican Loan. The second trip, from March to May 1927, and the third, in December 1927, were more or less directly concerned with raising money for the Irish Press. The March trip coincided with the hearing of the Republican Bonds case before Judge Peters, while his third, in December of the same year, was concerned wholly with securing funds for the foundation of the Irish Press. As we have seen, de Valera was in no need of further persuasion of the need for a sympathetic daily newspaper, but one commentator suggests that he was spurred into immediate action by a speech by Cumann na nGaedheal leader Ernest Blythe. “He had been persuaded to take this second trip [in 1927] by a statement of Ernest Blythe’s to the effect that the Free State Government was happy to be a member of the British Commonwealth. De Valera vehemently replied: ‘If we had a daily paper at this moment I believe that Blythe’s statement could be used to waken up the nation, but the daily press that we have slurs it over and pretends that nothing vital has been said. The English Press, of course, are boasting it whenever they can. This is natural enough for it is Britain’s final victory over what remained of the Collins mentality and policy.’” (Reynolds: Magill, August 1978).

De Valera was accompanied on the December trip by Frank Gallagher. On his arrival, de Valera issued a statement (December 28, 1927) to the press that the purpose of his visit “was concerned with the establishment of an Irish Daily newspaper” for which

the total capital needed would be £200,000, of which £100,000 (\$500,000) was to be raised in the US. (Coogan 1993: 415). On the same date, he wrote to McGarrity that he wanted to contact at least one thousand people who would subscribe \$500 each to the enterprise, adding that, “as the proposition is purely a business one, it should not be difficult to find them”. (NLI: 17441).

The fundraising got off to a promising start. Gallagher describes an event in New York’s Waldorf Astoria at which 24 people each subscribed \$500. (TCD: 165/200). But McGarrity was not optimistic. In January 1928, he wrote to de Valera that under the present depressed business conditions, it was better to approach “men of means” like Randolph Hearst for subscriptions. (NLI: 17441). As the year progressed, things did not improve. De Valera reduced the subscription limit from \$500 to \$50 (SFL: May 12, 1928). In September, a gloomy McGarrity wrote: “Things in a business way are bad in this country at present. Many of those who would give are not making [money] and avoid gatherings where subscriptions are likely to be asked.” (NLI: 17441).

Even on the west coast of America, where de Valera remained popular (as one commentator notes, his popularity in the rest of the US fell after the Civil War; most subscribers to the Dáil Loan went on to support the Free State side in the Civil War and to support Cosgrave’s government. [Sarbaugh 1985: 1522]), funds were slow in coming, despite de Valera playing up the importance of America in Irish affairs: “We want Ireland to look west to America, rather than look east to England. We want an Irish paper that will be as Irish as the Daily Mail is English.” (SFL: January 28, 1928).

Despite the arrival of Frank Aiken in October 1928, who set up a network of fundraising committees along the west coast, the money de Valera hoped for was not forthcoming. De Valera's frustration is evident from a letter to a fundraiser on September 29, 1929: "Up to the present, of the American quota of \$500,000 only \$135,000 has been subscribed ... The United States has so far been a sore disappointment." (Fianna Fáil: FF26). Another author notes: "It was quickly realised that the response in business circles was poor. The onset of the Depression severely restricted the availability of capital for investment in a venture such as the Irish Press." (Curran 1996: 10).

The Irish side of the fundraising operation – under the direction of Robert Brennan, formerly director of publicity for Sinn Féin – was initially well received. "The Board is certainly impressive, and seems to support the statement that the project is not too rigidly of one party. With the exception of Mr de Valera, who incidentally has considerable organising ability, all the directors are businessmen, and two are managing directors of successful companies. With a good management, the project has every prospect of success. There is ample scope for three Daily papers and the project ought to be generally welcome," wrote the Irish correspondent of the Sunday Times. (ST: March 27, 1927). The first advertisements announcing the new paper appeared in the Wicklow People on December 31, 1927. The provincial press was used to publicise the paper because the national papers refused to accept the advertisements. (Curran 1996: 9).

The growing network of Fianna Fáil party branches was also used to raise funds. "The [fundraising] campaign in Ireland provided an early example of the organisational

proficiency of the local Fianna Fáil cumainn. The 1928 Ard Fheis passed a resolution which called on all local party branches to become involved in the project. Each branch was assigned to canvass its local area for subscriptions, while a key party member was put in charge of fundraising in each constituency or district. While canvasses sought out individuals who could subscribe for blocks of 100 shares or more, it seems that the majority of £1 shares were sold on an instalment basis.” (Curran 1994: 142).

However, the Irish side of the fundraising operation soon encountered difficulties too. As one commentator has pointed out, “the paper appeared on the streets of Dublin just as the Great Depression was having its most devastating effect on international trade ...” (Curran 1994: 160). Its debut also coincided with the abandonment by the United Kingdom of the Gold Standard and considerable disarray at the League of Nations. Following the formal incorporation of the Irish Press in September 1928, further advertisements were placed in the provincial press appealing for investors. The advertisements offered 200,000 ordinary shares at £1 each, half of which were to be sold in Ireland. (NLI: 18361).

2.3 The Nation – holding the fort

As the fundraising continued, the need for a mouthpiece for the Fianna Fáil party was met to some extent by the re-launch of the weekly newspaper, The Nation. In March 1927, Sean T Ó Ceallaigh, a close associate of de Valera’s, decided to rejuvenate this staid old journal. Edited by Frank Gallagher, The Nation had a fresh, populist appeal and was aimed at the working classes and the rural poor. Its circulation never reached

the heights required by the party: it peaked at 6,000 (Walsh: IP September 5, 1981). Although The Nation had been published in various forms since 1842, the relaunched version of March 26, 1927 was more dynamic and populist than any of its other incarnations. In its editorial, "Where We Stand", it proclaimed: "The Nation stands for an Irish Republic ... for the freedoms for which the men and women of 1916 fought and died ..." In its early issues, it makes great play of the welcome the new Fianna Fáil leader Eamon de Valera was receiving on his tour of the US. Its issue of April 30, 1927, is given over to a collage of American Press clippings covering de Valera's progress.

The Nation did its best to win over support for the party. It made a strong bid to win the support of the working classes and the poor. In its first issue, the paper argued that Ireland was in the grip of the worst economic depression since the famine, and laid the blame at the door of the "imperialist" Cumann na nGaedheal government. Despite the railings of Frank Gallagher, who developed on The Nation the populist style that would later characterise the Irish Press, The Nation did not achieve enough popularity to be of use to Fianna Fáil.

2.4 Making a start: foundation of the Irish Press

When the Irish Press was incorporated in September 1928, the founding directors invested £500 each, with the exception of James Lyle Stirling, who invested £1,000. Later, Senator James Connolly, who replaced Stirling, invested £500. The founding directors were:

Eamon de Valera, Controlling Director, 84 Serpentine Avenue, Co Dublin; Teacher, Chancellor, National University of Ireland.

James Charles Dowdall, Villa Nova, College Road, Cork; Merchant, Senator, Director, Dowdall, O'Mahony & Co. Ltd.

Henry Thomas Gallagher, Tallaght, Co. Dublin; Merchant, Chairman and Managing Director, Urney Chocolates, Limited.

John Hughes, Laragh, Killiney, Co Dublin; Merchant, of John Hughes & Co., Dublin

Philip Busted Pierce, Park House, Wexford; Merchant, Managing Director, Philip Pierce and Co., Limited, Mill Road Iron Works

Stephen O'Mara, Strand House, Limerick; Merchant, Chairman and Managing Director, O'Mara & Co., Limited.

James Lyle Stirling, Granite Lodge, Dun Laoghaire; Merchant, Chairman and Managing Director, Stirling, Cockle and Ashley, Limited.

Edmund Williams, Coreen, Ailesbury Road, Co Dublin; Maltster, of D. E. Williams, Limited, Tullamore.

(Source: Irish Companies Registration Office).

As one writer has pointed out, the board “consisted of prominent Irish industrialists and businessmen who had an interest in promoting the cause of native Irish industry...” (Curran 1996: 13).

2.5 Role of the Controlling Director

However, de Valera was by far the most powerful member of the board. The extent of his influence is spelled out in the articles of association of the Irish Press. Article 75 states:

“The first Controlling Director shall be Eamon de Valera who is hereby appointed such controlling director and who shall hold in his own name shares of the Company of the nominal value of Five Hundred Pounds. He shall continue to hold the said office of Controlling Director so long as he shall hold the said sum of Five Hundred Pounds nominal value of the Shares or Stock of the Company. The remuneration of the said Eamon de Valera as such Controlling Director shall be determined by the Shareholders in General Meeting.”

Article 77 further spells out the powers of the Controlling Director, which one biographer described as the “profane equivalent of the three divine persons in one God” (Coogan 1993: 420):

“The Controlling Director shall have sole and absolute control of the public and political policy of the Company and of the Editorial Management thereof and of all Newspapers, pamphlets or other writings which may be from time to time owned, published, circulated or printed by the said Company. He may appoint and at his discretion remove or suspend all Editors, Sub-editors, Reporters, Writers, Contributors of news and information, and all such other persons as may be employed in or connected with the Editorial Department and may determine their duties and fix their salaries or emoluments. Subject to the powers of the Controlling Director the Directors may appoint and at their discretion remove or suspend Managers, Editors, Sub-editors, Reporters, Secretaries, Solicitors, Cashiers, Officers, Publishers, Printers, Contributors of news and information, Clerks, Agents and Servants for permanent, temporary or special services as they may from time to time think fit and may determine their duties and fix their salaries and emoluments in such instances and to such amounts as they think fit.”

These articles gave de Valera control over the Irish Press for as long as he lived and ensured that no board of any political or commercial hue could countermand his instructions regarding the editorial content or commercial behaviour of the Irish Press.

Quite apart from the power vested in him as Controlling Director, the role of de Valera was central to the early fortunes of the Irish Press. In its publicity material, the founders of the Irish Press declared that “the new Daily will not be a propagandist sheet or a mere party organ”. (NLI: 18361). In practically the same breath, they announced that the editorial policy of the paper would be under the sole direction of Mr de Valera. His political activities came second in importance to his Irish Press duties in the pre-publication days of 1930 and 1931. A note from the time refers to his “late nights at the IP” (Coogan 1993: 429), while another biographer notes: “... while he was overseeing preparation for the first edition of the Irish Press, he delegated most of the Fianna Fáil work to others; but with the paper, he saw to everything ...” (Longford & O’Neill 1970: 274). Indeed, such was his commitment to the founding of the paper that he told the 1931 Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis that party work could go on without him but the work of the Irish Press was of supreme importance at that time. (Curran 1994: 142).

2.6 De Valera the persuader: the battle for hearts and cash

Throughout this period, de Valera used a dual appeal to investors. The first was a sentimental appeal based on the argument that the Irish Press would be a counter-balance to the British worldview put forward by the existing Irish press and by the large number of British newspapers circulating in the Irish market. The second could

be called an appeal to the head, based on the argument that newspaper publishing was a profitable business, and that a nationalist newspaper was, given the electoral support for Fianna Fáil, guaranteed a substantial circulation.

The need for a national newspaper to counter this tide of pro-British propaganda was a major theme in de Valera's speeches and writings during his visits to the US in 1927. On his arrival in New York in December 1927, he told a Press conference: "There is nothing so important for Ireland as a newspaper that will champion her freedom." (Dwyer 1991: 163). In other promotional material circulated in the US from 1930, de Valera and Gallagher played on anti-British sentiments: "The existing Daily Press is consistently pro-British and imperialistic in its outlook. In foreign affairs it invariably supports British policy and strives to arouse hostility against all possible rivals of Great Britain, not excepting the United States. During the European War, it was the main vehicle for lying British propaganda and was the sole agency in luring young Irishmen into a war in which 50,000 of them lost their lives." (NLI: 18361).

In support of his attack on the pernicious influence of the pro-British Press, de Valera quoted the Irish Jesuit polemicist and writer Father R S Devane SJ, who ventured that "A glance at the counter of any newspaper shop ... will convince even the most sceptical that we are in a condition of mental bondage." A new Irish paper would stem the tide of "objectionable" English newspapers, but might also provide a solution to "perhaps the most serious aspect of the problem ... that presented by juvenile literature ... [which served to] turn the minds of Irish girls and boys definitely away from Irish ideals, to make them despise Irish culture and the Irish national tradition. Many of the

boys' papers are in effect recruiting agencies for the British Boy Scouts, which in turn are a recruiting agency for the British Army and Navy.” (Devane 1930: 55-69).

As Catherine Curran points out, “the campaign against the British Press dovetailed neatly with Fianna Fáil’s populist campaign against dumping and monopoly domination of the Irish market”. (Curran 1994: 113). The reluctance of Cumann na nGaedhael to impose tariffs on British newspapers and magazines was criticised by Fianna Fáil. The issue helped to win them the support of some of the Catholic intelligentsia. In 1926, the Free State’s Minister for Justice established a Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature to prepare submissions in preparation for Censorship of Publications Act.

De Valera’s stance against British publications had several strands: the economic argument that “dumping” on the Irish market was wrong, which fitted in well with Fianna Fáil’s policy of protection for Irish industries; the ideological argument that the high circulation of these newspapers tended to corrupt Ireland’s youth and turn them against their own country, and lastly the (unspoken) commercial argument that if the UK papers were allowed to “dump” on the Irish market, then the battle of the Irish papers to win circulation would be all the harder. And this last argument was by no means a frivolous one, even taking into account the vast differences in appeal between the Irish papers and their British competitors. As we have seen, the Daily Mail had a large daily circulation (between 70,000 and 100,000), and the following table presented to the Government’s Commission on Evil Literature by the Catholic Truth Society shows that British Sunday newspapers had large readerships too (Devane 1927: 545-563):

Circulation of British Sunday newspapers in Ireland circa 1927

News of the World	132,444
Empire News	76,698
Sunday Chronicle	46,188
The People	30,600
Reynold's News	28,772
Sunday News	22,918
Sunday Herald	15,842
Total	352,803

The difficulty in which de Valera found himself when raising funds for the new enterprise is interesting. On the one hand, he had to appeal to business investors, who would not invest in the paper unless they could see it was founded on sound commercial principles. They would not subscribe their money to radicals writing intemperate leading articles. On the other hand, he had to win over the small investor and Fianna Fáil supporter, who was disenchanted with the status quo and wanted to read material that reflected his nationalist views. Thus de Valera writes to possible Irish-American investors in San Francisco in the San Francisco Leader of April 19, 1930: "The only reason in fact why I am engaged in this enterprise is to provide the Irish with a paper which will give them the truth in the news, without attempting to colour it for party purposes; also to supply the leadership for the necessary economic, political and social reconstruction in Ireland today."

Likewise, Gallagher's publicity material for business consumption gave assurances that "guarantees of considerable financial support in Irish business circles were already forthcoming", while other handbills told how the Republican electorate had been forced for too long to subscribe to a pro-imperialist press and that it would turn immediately to a paper which expressed its true national point of view. (NLI: 18631).

The absence of a newspaper that would truly reflect nationalist Ireland was a prominent argument used in the circular to prospective investors in Ireland. A leaflet drafted by Gallagher proclaimed: "It is proposed to establish in Ireland a Daily newspaper that will be truly Irish in purpose and character, will accurately reflect the tradition and sentiments of the Irish people and will inspire and assist them in the work of national regeneration and development." On a more commercial note, investors were asked to note that the Irish Times and the Cork Examiner both had circulations considerably less than 50,000 "yet both yield their shareholders handsome dividends". (NLI: 18632).

Developing the theme of a small nation struggling to assert its separateness amid a sea of smutty newsprint from its degenerate neighbour, the leaflet noted that there were 18 UK dailies on sale in the Free State, and that "the Daily Mail has a circulation between 70,000 and 100,000 per day". Later the tone becomes more censorious: "Seven of the morally objectionable English Sunday papers alone have a circulation of 352,803." The leaflet proposes that this situation be remedied by the publication of what it quotes Mr de Valera describing as "A paper that will be as Irish as the London Times is English." In a margin note on the circular, Frank Gallagher, wrote: "The greatest political need in Ireland today is to restore the confidence of the Irish people

in themselves and their economic future. The new daily paper will have that as one of its main objectives. It will not only preach this self-confidence, however. It will itself be an example of it. Granted that sufficient capital can be raised, the people would see Irish brain and Irish enterprise creating a great national institution which would more than pay its way.”

The financial argument was put succinctly in a letter from de Valera which formed part of his US fundraising drive. “At the Free State general election of 1927, 411,000 first preference votes were given to Fianna Fáil candidates ... they are all potential readers of the new paper ... Accounts recently published for the Irish Independent show that a daily newspaper may be made a valuable property. The annual profits of the ‘Independent’ are sufficient to pay a 7 1/2 % fixed dividend on the preference share capital of £200,000 ... Hence, once the proposed newspaper is established, a continued flourishing existence is assured to it.” (FF: 1930)¹

Despite these dual appeals, and despite all the effort expended on both sides of the Atlantic, the fundraising operation was not an unqualified success. At a meeting of shareholders in the Rotunda on February 19, 1929, company secretary Robert Brennan presented a report which showed that 124,679 of the 200,000 shares had been allotted. This seems a respectable figure, but the more important figure is the number of those shares which were “subscribed” (i.e. paid for). This figure stood at £64,864 and 10 shillings. (NLI: 18361). A prospectus filed with the 1928 returns of the Irish Press outlines how the process of allotment and subscription operated. A buyer paid two shillings per share on application, then another five shillings on

¹ Not contained in the Fianna Fáil archive, but part of a set of documents relating to the Irish Press framed in the party’s offices. The letters and other documents displayed are dated 1930.

allotment, then another five shillings two months after allotment, four shillings four months later, and another four shillings three months later and so on. (Irish Companies Registration Office).

2.7 The role of the Irish Press American Corporation

It seems that it was around this time (mid to late 1929) that a strategy which was to have a central effect on the fortunes of the Irish Press began to be employed. De Valera decided to appeal to the original subscribers to the Republican Loan – due to get their money back following the US Supreme Court judgement – to sign that money over to him for investment in the Irish Press.

In September 1929, he wrote to his American allies: “A large percentage of those who subscribed to the Republican Loan of 1919-1920 will be prepared to reinvest the money...if only they are properly approached ... I ask you to form canvassing committees and personally call on those who are about to receive back the Bond money from the Receiver and urge them to resubscribe the money.” (Fianna Fáil: FF26).

De Valera also appealed directly to the Republican Loan subscribers. His letter was accompanied by one from Frank P Walsh, Irish Press secretary in the US, dated January 30, 1930:

“Dear friend,

The money which you gave in the years 1919 to 1921 to help the cause of Ireland is about to be given back to you. You are probably one of those who gave your money at that time as a free gift, expecting no other return for it than the satisfaction of participating in a just cause and aiding the people of Ireland in a time of need. I feel

accordingly that when you read this leaflet you will be disposed to make this money available a second time - again in a good cause and for the benefit of Ireland.”

The circular continues: “... many ... like yourself ... have informed Mr de Valera that on receipt of their checks they will immediately endorse them and turn them into his account, so as to be available for the establishment of the needed Irish newspaper.

But it was not necessary, Walsh continued, “to wait for the actual distribution to take place ... This work can be proceeded with now, provided that the directors of Irish Press Limited have the assurance, by the legal assignment of a sufficient number of bond certificates to Mr de Valera, that the balance of the sum they require will become available when the Republican Loans are repaid.”

This legal assignment was enclosed with the circular; it read:

“In consideration of one dollar, lawful money of the United States of America ... I hereby sell, assign, transfer and set over unto EAMON DE VALERA, his executors, administrators, rights and assigns, all my right, title and interest in and to Bond Certificate No ... in the sum of \$... of the Republic of Ireland Loan and all sums of money, both principal and interest, now due on, or hereafter to become due on, or because of the obligation set forth and/or referred to in said Bond Certificate; and I do hereby constitute said EAMON DE VALERA my attorney, in my name and otherwise, but at his own cost, to take all legal measures which may be proper and necessary for the complete recovery on and enjoyment of the assigned Bond Certificate.”

(Fianna Fáil: FF26).

The Irish Press Corporation was incorporated in the State of Delaware on May 19, 1930. This is generally agreed to be the corporate body which represented the US side of the Irish Press operation. Those subscribers who made their shares over to de Valera effectively bought shares in the Irish Press Corporation, which in turn took a stakeholding in the Irish Press parent company in Ireland. The operation and ownership of the Irish Press Corporation has been shrouded in secrecy for over 70 years, and it is difficult to get a definitive account of its role in the Irish Press as a

whole. The first return lodged with the State of Delaware was filed on January 5, 1932, four months after the first issue of the Irish Press was published. It shows the total number of taxable shares at 100,000, but the “number of shares actually issued” is 46,049. This does not tally with de Valera’s figure of \$135,000 from a hoped-for total of \$500,000 and simply adds to the confusion around the status and role of the Irish Press Corporation. However, it is safe to conclude that the fundraising operation in the United States fell short of the total set for it.

The first return lists the business of the company as “issuing and transferring stock certificates”. There are 100,000 ordinary shares in the company, 61,497 of them issued. But by 1996, there is a remarkable difference. The share return shows that there are now 99,800 “class A” shares and 200 “class B” shares. In the earlier returns, there is no mention of preferred shares, or indeed any type of share other than “ordinary”.

The difference in importance of these A and B shares in the Irish Press Corporation is explained by evidence given by de Valera’s grandson during a later High Court action over the ownership of the Irish Press titles. “During evidence, Eamon de Valera revealed that he had acquired 100, or half the voting B shares in the American Company Irish Press Corporation from his uncle Terry de Valera in 1985 for £250,000. He owns all the voting shares which in turn control a 47pc stake in IP PLC.” (B&F: July 23, 1993).

All accounts of the role of the “arcane” (Coogan 1993: 420) operation in Delaware agree on several points:

- (i) That the Irish Press American Corporation controlled around 47% of the Irish Press company;
- (ii) That the Irish Press American Corporation was comprised of non-voting A shares and 200 B shares which carried all the voting rights;
- (iii) That de Valera set up a trust to administer these voting B shares. As we saw, those subscribers who signed over their Bond money to him also appointed him as their trustee, so he, and his successors, had control over the voting rights of the Irish Press American Corporation, and therefore its 47% stake in the Irish Press;
- (iv) That this control, together with his own shareholding, gave him effective control of the Irish Press.

(O'Toole 1992: 58-59; Cahill 1997: 280; Coogan 1993: 420-421; B&F: June 11, 1992).

There is some confusion as to the fate of the B shares after de Valera divested himself of control of the Irish Press upon being elected president of the Irish Republic in 1959. According to former Irish Press board member Elio Malocco, the 200 B shares were originally split between de Valera and his son-in-law Sean Nunan, and de Valera's shares were transferred to his son Vivion in 1959, while Nunan's went to Vivion's brother Terry. Terry was given to understand that Vivion's shares would go to him, but on Vivion's death found out that Vivion had transferred his shares to his (Vivion's) own son, Eamon de Valera. (This account appeared in the first, last and

only issue of Patrick magazine, published by Malocco, dated December/January 1998/1999 pp 22-27 and suppressed by injunction; it was never distributed).

There is also confusion caused by advertisements which appeared in Irish American papers in May 1993, offering \$10 a share for shares in the Irish Press Corporation. (II: May 13, 1993). Other reports tell of Eamon de Valera (jnr) buying up shares from the Carmelite religious order in New York. (B&F: June 11, 1992). It seems likely to this writer that Eamon de Valera (jnr) – who at the time of writing is still chairman of Irish Press plc – inherited half the voting rights from the Irish Press American Corporation through his father Vivion. It also seems clear, from his own evidence to the High Court, that he bought the rest from his uncle Terry de Valera in 1985. The issue of advertisements in the US papers offering to buy other shares is needlessly confusing: the advertisements do not make it clear if A or B shares were sought. We can be reasonably sure that first Eamon de Valera, then his son Vivion, and then his grandson Eamon, firstly through their roles as controlling director, and secondly through their control of the American shares, exerted an unusually tight control of the destiny of the Irish Press. It is hard to disagree with the verdict of former Irish Press editor Tim Pat Coogan: “All that is required to be said about this trust since its foundation is that it did what it was set up to do. It held the Irish Press for de Valera, and later his son and grandson, against all comers.” (Coogan 1993: 421).

2.8 De Valera's shareholding in the Irish Press

There is further confusion about the exact nature of de Valera's shareholding in the Irish Press. The yearly returns lodged with the Irish Companies Registration Offices (now located in premises on Parnell Street formerly owned by the Irish Press) are incomplete and in poor condition. However, it is possible to get some idea of de Valera's shareholding. The first return relates to 1928, the year the Irish Press was incorporated. De Valera is listed as owning 500 shares, the minimum amount for a director laid down in the company's articles of association. His stake remains at 500 until 1934, when he ceases to be listed as a director, yet his shareholding increases in that year to 51,140. He is again listed as a director in 1935, with a shareholding of 51,910. There is no indication of where the extra shares came from, nor why he relinquished his directorship in 1934. In 1937, his shareholding increased to 55,578 and then fell to 120 in 1938 and subsequent years.

It is possible to speculate on the mysteries of these returns: in 1934, de Valera's son Vivion joined the board, and it is generally accepted that it was at this time that de Valera handed over the day to day running of the Irish Press to him. This may explain de Valera's absence from the list of directors in that year. The extra shares under his ownership in 1934 may represent funds contributed by the American side of the fundraising operation, although the figures do not tally with the 47% stake in the Irish Press reportedly owned by the Irish Press American Corporation. The drop in his shareholding in 1937 may be related to the commencement of his second term as Taoiseach. However, this is impossible to confirm. It is known, however, that Vivion

de Valera joined the board in 1934, became managing director and editor-in-chief in 1951, and controlling director in 1959, when his father was elected president.

2.9 Conclusion

Drawing the strands of the various arguments together, it is not difficult to see how de Valera became convinced (i) that a Republican daily paper was needed and (ii) that it could be financially viable. For over a decade, he had been at the receiving end of a hostile press. During his visit to the US, he had seen the effects of favourable publicity, and his experiences there also served to highlight the inadequacies of the existing Republican journals back home. He also became convinced that, given the support for Fianna Fáil at the 1927 elections, a Republican newspaper could achieve a circulation larger than those of the Irish Times and the Cork Examiner, both of which were profitable organisations. The penetration into the Irish market of British newspapers like the Daily Mail and the News of the World also made an impression on him. These newspapers propagated a world view centred on the British Empire that was as repugnant to him as it was seductive to the Catholic middle classes.

It was at this time too several important characteristics of the Irish Press emerged. These were: the establishment of the role of the Controlling Director, the paper's close links with Fianna Fáil, and the failure of its fundraising drives to raise the capital deemed necessary.

Chapter 3

A paper at last, and an editor

3.1 Introduction

Reading the contemporary accounts of the launch of the Irish Press, it is difficult to escape the atmosphere of excitement surrounding its first issue on September 5, 1931. Douglas Gageby, later an editor of the Evening Press and the Irish Times recalls his father bringing him a copy of the first issue. “ ‘Dev has brought out a new paper,’ he told me. He brought it to me when I was home sick from school. He was very excited about it.” (Interview with the author, 24.10.97). The new paper was an immediate success, and its circulation maintained a generally upward trend over its first five years of existence. (NLI: 18361).

The initial circulation figures show that there was a ready market of readers willing to buy the new paper, but other difficulties mitigated against the Irish Press being an unqualified success. There were problems in securing advertisements for the new paper, and a dispute over the distribution of the paper on a train shared by its two rivals deprived it of revenue in the early days.

Whatever its advertising and distribution problems, the paper was at least blessed in its choice of editor. Frank Gallagher proved himself to be the ideal choice as the man to launch the editorial operation of the Irish Press. He was a painstaking editor, as his

daily schedule shows, and worked hard to bring de Valera's vision of "a paper as Irish as the London Times is English" (NLI: 18361) to fruition.

The new paper was hit by a builders' strike just weeks before the launch date, but the workers agreed to return to work without the pay rise they were seeking. In the period under review, the Irish Press was affected by several industrial disputes, one of which led indirectly to Gallagher's eventual resignation. And, even before publication, Gallagher had several economies imposed on him, not least of which was his own salary: he expected £1,000 a year, but got £850, 15 per cent short of what he asked. (NLI: 18361).

Despite the various teething troubles affecting the new paper, it was a resounding success with the reading public. Its early years were characterised by a reasonably steady increase in sales. Gallagher proved a sure hand at the tiller, and largely succeeded in the task he set himself in that first editorial: "a newspaper technically efficient in all departments, assured of material success, yet seeking above all things the freedom and well-being of the nation." (IP: September 5, 1931).

3.2 The first issue of the Irish Press

The first edition of the Irish Press rolled off the presses in the early hours of the morning on Saturday, September 5, 1931. The start button on the giant presses was pressed by Margaret Pearse, the mother of 1916 hero and nationalist icon Pádraig Pearse. Over 200,000 copies of that first issue were sold, but little could its curious

readers suspect the extent of the effort, wrangling, planning and plotting that had preceded the launch.

Like most newspaper launches, it nearly didn't happen at all. In March 1927, the Irish Press bought the Tivoli Theatre in Burgh Quay, formerly the site of a music hall revue, but then in use as a cinema. As journalist and author Hugh Oram mentions, it had been the Conciliation Hall from where O'Connell led the repeal movement. "The Young Ireland movement had also been based there, so the building was a firm historical base for the new Republican-minded newspaper ... Later, when things went wrong, staff used to say it was still a music hall." (Oram 1982: 171). Reconstruction of the building began in August 1930, but the work was halted as a Dublin-wide building dispute brought all building work in the capital to a standstill. As Joe Walsh, who joined the paper in 1934 and later became editor of the Irish Press, recalled: "Staff engaged were on the payroll; funds were rapidly dwindling. Nearing desperation, the company made an appeal to the contractors and their workers who, patriotically, decided to resume work at the old rates of pay." (IP: September 5, 1981). The patriotic climb-down was in February 1931. Walsh continues: "The deteriorating economic climate also had serious repercussions: many hundreds of share holders who had made the initial deposit on their shares failed to complete payment, leaving a significant percentage of the share capital not fully paid up. Business and agriculture were languishing: advertising was decreasing." Walsh's account is backed up to some extent by early returns for the Irish Press in the Companies' Office: the figures for 1929 show that, of 124,679 shares allotted, just 64,864 were subscribed. The figures for subsequent years are incomplete.

The editorial staff who were cooling their heels while the builders' strike stretched on were an eclectic bunch. They were, as the first editor Frank Gallagher put it, comprised of "mixed elements, trained and untrained". (NLI: 18361). Hugh Oram gives a comprehensive account of the first staff: Gallagher was not first choice for the editor's job. Another journalist, Seamus O'Farrell, was favourite but was edged out as the launch date grew imminent. One of the pre-launch advisers on the Irish Press was Michael Rooney, who subsequently became editor of the Irish Independent. Once Gallagher's appointment was confirmed, the other staff positions could be filled. William Sweetman, later to be appointed as editor, was London editor; Bob Egan of the Connacht Tribune was news editor; M J McManus was literary editor (he held this position until his death on holiday in Donegal in 1951, and was succeeded by Benedict Kiely); John Moynihan, formerly editor of the Kerry Weekly Reporter and a colleague of Gallagher's from The Nation, was leader writer and assistant editor; James Kelly was the Irish Press's correspondent in the North and would later become an editor for the Independent group; Joe Sherwood, Cumbrian-born and late of the Cape Times in South Africa, was sports editor; his deputy was another Englishman, Herbert Moxley; Mick "Sport" Byrne was racing correspondent; Mitchell Cogley, later sports editor of the Irish Independent, was a junior sports reporter at the time of the launch; Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh was Irish editor; his learned brother Aonghus was appointed librarian; Jack Dempsey was advertising manager (later general manager); Paddy Clare was the night reporter and one of the "mixed elements" (ie former gunmen) spoken of by Gallagher. (Oram 1983: 171-4).

The lead story on that historic Saturday was of the devastating floods that had swept through Dublin and parts of Wicklow. The front page, with its banner headline

Emergency Measures to Aid Flood Sufferers, would have looked very brash to the thousands who paid one penny for the 12-page paper: it was the only national newspaper at the time to carry news on the front page. Both the Irish Times and the Irish Independent devoted their front pages entirely to advertising, and both published bigger editions than their fledgling competitor. The Irish Times of the day ran to 16 pages, while the Irish Independent had 18. The absence of small ads from the Press's front page allowed Frank Gallagher to give a bolder presentation of the news than his rivals, but in many ways he was making a virtue of necessity: many advertisers were deeply suspicious of the new paper, and many businesses who had their base in England, or looked there for investment, would not support a newspaper which was so blatantly aligned with the policies of Eamon de Valera and his Fianna Fáil party. Indeed, it was front-page news in the Irish Press when a Balrothery town committee voted to include the paper on the list of publications in which it placed its advertisements. (IP: September 9, 1931).

In its second issue, its front page contained several self-administered claps on the back: "The Irish Press has achieved nothing less than a national triumph," announced a page-one article. "... Five times the great machines had to pour out new supplies. They could not be printed quick enough for the hands stretched out for them." (IP: September 7, 1931). Another, breathlessly describing the drama of the first night of production, recounted:

"Mrs Pearse was waiting to press the button that would start the press revolving. It should start at two o'clock; it was two o'clock now, and how much work still to do? ... Chains of men came and went, passing and re-passing in the narrow gangways, carrying trays of grey metal, with the swift, precise teamwork of a fire brigade in action. Editors and managers were at their posts, vigilant, making decisions. The Chairman of the Board stood watching it all.

“In another room, silent still, was the huge press, which would take the plates and the paper on huge rollers – print the paper, fold it, cut it and send it out in counted piles. It was nearly three and the Press was silent still. The silence among the watchers was tense.

“A messenger ran in; ‘they are starting’. Down corridors and stairs we hurried, down the iron spiral staircase, single file; along the passage piled with immense wooden drums full of paper, into the printing room. The Chairman of the Board was there now, Mrs Pearse beside him. Men were climbing up to the machines and calling ‘Look out’ and laying on the heavy grey half-cylinders of metal that were the plates of the Irish Press. The watchers stood pressed against the walls very quiet. It was three o’clock.

“The whisper passed round: ‘each machine turns out fifty thousand an hour ...’ A shout and Mrs Pearse put out her hand. A hesitant cheer from the watchers as the immense rollers began to revolve – and a roar that must have been heard across the Liffey as they gathered speed, whirled into maximum power and The Irish Press, a white cataract, fell into the trays.”

It wasn’t all greased efficiency, however, as the Press’s circulation manager later recalled. Some 100,000 of the 200,000 issues of that first edition missed the special train arranged by the Irish Press following the refusal of the other newspapers to allow the paper share theirs. “There were too many people in the machine room and with quite a lot of excitement, distribution was delayed and we missed the train.” (IP: September 8, 1981).

The leading article of that first issue was dramatic and stirring, too. It promised an Irish paper for the Irish people, and not “an indistinct echo of certain sections of the British Press.” That first editorial also coined the phrase “The Truth in the News”, which the paper adopted as its motto, and it was here also that the phrase “this great enterprise” was first used in relation to the Irish Press. (The full editorial is appended in Appendix 1.)

These worthy sentiments were conveyed to the Irish public by a variety of means, not all of them conventional. The Irish Independent, still run by the influential Murphy

family, used its commercial clout to get the Irish Press banned from the trains of the Great Southern Railway, who insisted that the new paper hire a special train to distribute its papers. The ban saddled the Press with a £30,000 annual cost for arranging its own transportation (Walsh, IP: September 5, 1981). Walsh's account continues: "The train boycott was announced in August 1931, less than a week before publication day. This unforeseen financial burden coming on top of the delay caused by the building strike ate into the capital set aside for launching the paper. De Valera appealed to the railways tribunal and got this decision reversed. The Irish Independent took the matter to the High Court in August 1931, but the court upheld the original decision to ban the Press."

The sales representatives of the Independent and the Irish Times encouraged newsagents not to stock the new journal. (Walsh, IP: September 5, 1981). The Press was eventually let back on the train following a piece of subterfuge from circulation executive Pádraig Ó Criogáin: "We showed photographs of special trucks we were going to buy and we had plans for a complete road distribution service. The traffic manager of GSR at the time got worried and persuaded the Independent to reconsider its position on the special train." (IP: September 8, 1981).

Liam Pedlar, the circulation manager, an old de Valera worker in America and Ó Criogáin, an ex-Clann na nGael gunrunner, were in charge of distributing the paper. "Pedlar drew on his gunrunning experiences to ensure that the Irish Press arrived in Ballyfaremote in the arms of either a Fianna Fáil bus driver or a commercial traveller. Here it might be sold in one of the fiercely partisan shops that sold the Press or its rivals, but not both together. Or it might be taken on to a more remote townland by

the Fianna Fáil postman, or by a small farmer returned from the morning journey to the creamery. In one celebrated case in north Kerry, it was brought up the side of a mountain by a man with a good Fianna Fáil ass and cart.” (Coogan 1993: 430).

Advertising was another problem area for the new paper. De Valera’s policy of encouraging home industry at the expense, if need be, of British-based companies, was of course supported by the Irish Press. But it was most decidedly not the policy of the British manufacturers. And when the representatives of the Irish Press went to canvas the advertising agents of those British companies, they were told as much in no uncertain terms. One exception was the Dunlop company, which did agree to advertise in the Press, but not out of any feelings of affinity with its political line. Erskine Childers, recently graduated from Cambridge, was appointed advertising manager of the Press. After several attempts, he got an interview with a senior manager in Dunlop. Upon hearing his name, the Dunlop man insisted on knowing if he was “the same Childers as *The Riddle of the Sands*”? Upon hearing that the young Irish Press man was the son of the author, the Dunlop manager agreed to place a series of ads, quoting from his favourite book the while. (Coogan 1995: 420).

Other advertising salesmen were not so fortunate. “The excuses as relayed to the paper’s advertising representatives were many and varied but seldom true - the readers of that paper haven’t got purchasing power ... it is only read by rapparees ... its policy is not in the best interests of the consumers. Yet it is clearly evident from a perusal of the national dailies of that period that these were not the real reasons. Large detergent advertisements, for example, appeared in the Irish Times, the readers of which were small in number and on the whole wealthy. No one believed that these

readers did the family wash. It was seen as a form of subsidy. Finance and insurance institutions followed the soap companies' lead. Solicitors, auctioneer and the smaller businesses, with similar prejudices, rubbed shoulders with them in this pro-British, snobbish attitude towards those who dared to question the Treaty or to use the Treaty to end our economic dependence on Britain ..." (O'Toole 1992: 59).

3.3 The role of Frank Gallagher

If de Valera was the seminal figure in Irish politics of the time, then the man he chose to edit the first issue of the Irish Press was no less influential in the world of journalism. Frank Gallagher has been largely ignored by historians, most of whom, as Sarah Binchy points out in her work on Gallagher, have used his extensive archive of material in the National Library as a prism through which de Valera is examined (Binchy 1992: 1). Ms Binchy's study of Gallagher stressed the pivotal role Gallagher played in the formation of the Irish Press. My work in this chapter differs from hers in that it emphasises more Gallagher's struggle for funds, which is significant when set in the context of the Press's overall financial situation.

His journalistic career began on the Cork Free Press, a weekly paper owned by Home Rule MP William O'Brien. Gallagher describes his relationship with O'Brien as "like father like son". (Gallagher 1953: 225). He recalls sitting in O'Brien's Westminster chambers and listening to his mentor reminisce about the days of Parnell, the Land League and the growth of the Home Rule movement. At the age of 21, he was appointed the paper's London correspondent. It was an exciting time to be in London: the war with Germany was beginning, and for somebody as politically aware as

Gallagher, there was no shortage of copy. Privately, as a letter dated September 17, 1914, to his then girlfriend Celia Saunders shows, he was pro-German, but a stiff reminder from William O'Brien put him back on the path of political correctness. (NLI: 10050).

Gallagher's loyalties were severely tested by the 1916 Rising, but his sympathies were already with the rebels. He had joined the Irish Volunteers in Cork in 1913 and had attended drills. His influence can be seen in the coverage given to the Rising in the Cork Free Press: it began by being outraged at the destruction wreaked on Dublin city, progressed through a sneaking admiration to the "misguided but brave young men" (CFP: May 6, 1916) and ended up by attacking the government for the treatment of prisoners. At the time of the Rising, Gallagher was back in Cork as the editor of the paper, but he travelled to London to try to persuade O'Brien to take a more lenient line on the insurgents. The subsequent rise of Sinn Féin as the main nationalist party, eclipsing the Home Rulers, meant the closure of the paper. It published its last issue at Christmas of 1916, and the following year Gallagher found himself out of a job. He was typically energetic in his pursuit of another one, even to the extent of canvassing the Irish Times.

After the Sinn Féin landslide in the December 1918 elections, he became a central figure in the mosquito press of the new movement. It was so named, he recalls, because "it was small, difficult to kill and had a sting that was remembered". (Gallagher 1927: 348). Basically, it involved a running battle with the censor. As soon as a paper was banned by the censor, it was simply started up again under a new name and from a new location. Thus the Irish reading public was treated to a succession of

newspapers with ever various names but a remarkably similar content. It was a game of cat and mouse between the Irish newspapers and the British censor, and it was one at which Gallagher grew adept. His main opponent was Lord Decies, who wielded the blue pencil on behalf of Queen and Empire at the Censor's Office in Grafton Street in Dublin. As a journalist on the New Ireland weekly, it was Gallagher's job to bring the week's articles to his Lordship and try to persuade, implore and trick him into passing for publication as much as possible. He was not always successful, as another letter to Celia dated August 22, 1917, shows: "Oh woe and desolation! The censor has just suppressed three articles which should have appeared in this week's issue." (NLI: 10050). But after a while, he got the measure of the man he described, again to Celia in September 1918, as a "noble nonentity". (NLI: 10050).

His methods were simple, but effective. He would arrive late and engage his Lordship on his favourite subject: the Turf. He dragged out the conversation, so that Lord Decies had to hurry through the proofs, and just as the blue pencil was wavering over a particularly juicy piece of anti-Imperialist invective, he would start off on his Lordship's second most favourite subject: income tax. His last resort was to engage and defeat his opponent in simple argument, "because Lord Decies was fundamentally honest." He cites a typical example to Celia: "In one article, in which we were giving the Viceroy a drubbing, we referred to him as 'Lord French, hero of the Mons retreat'. Milord reacted violently. 'You can't say that'. I told him his judgments were sometimes hasty, and he did not let himself see the real meaning of the words he wanted to cut. 'You can't deny,' said I, 'that he was the hero of the Mons retreat. It was a very difficult withdrawal, milord.' 'Difficult,' he exploded, 'it was the most masterly military manoeuvre of the whole war!' 'Well,' said I, 'that's what we're

saying: Lord French, hero of the most masterly military manoeuvre of the whole war.’ ‘Yes,’ the poor man said, puzzled, ‘but you don’t mean that.’ ‘But you have just said yourself, Lord Decies, that that’s what the words mean.’ He gave me a long, pained and baffled look, but the phrase was saved.” (NLI: 10050).

In 1919, Gallagher moved to the Irish Bulletin, under the editorship of Erskine Childers. Here he learned to respect the facts: “Any exaggerations that remained from our pruning were cut out. All too-eager statements were brought down to a calmer note, for he [Childers] was a lover of the unembellished truth.” (Gallagher 1927: 119). The Bulletin died with Childers’s execution before the Treaty. Gallagher moved to the anti-Treaty An Phoblacht, where he worked as editor until his arrest. He spent most of the Civil War in jail. In one of his final leading articles for An Phoblacht, he lamented the “dishonest and hypocritical” daily Press. (AP: March 22, 1922). Soon after his release, he was to embark on a mission to rectify that.

In 1922, Gallagher was already in correspondence with de Valera over the possibility of starting a propagandist national newspaper. But it was nearly 10 years before his and de Valera’s dream of a truly Irish national paper was born. In the meantime, Gallagher took the post of publicity officer of the newly formed Fianna Fáil party, and accompanied de Valera on his fundraising trips for the new paper, writing stirring speeches for the Chief. He accompanied de Valera to the US twice in 1927 on fundraising trips. He was a loyal supporter of the Chief; indeed he was preparing a biography of de Valera at the time of his death in 1962. He was generally regarded as a sound man by the nationalist camp in Irish politics, and he seemed the natural choice to edit de Valera’s “great enterprise”. He formally applied for the job in a

letter dated November 15, 1930, stating "I would expect a salary of £1,000 a year with yearly increments to a maximum of £1,200." The reply, from company secretary Robert Brennan, was the first of many economies foisted on Gallagher by the board: he was offered the job at a salary of £850 a year. (NLI: 19361).

It was Gallagher's great challenge and great frustration to be involved in the design of a new newspaper from the ground up. He was involved in decisions concerning everything from the layout of the front page to the layout of the newsroom. On December 29, 1930, company secretary Brennan writes:

"Would you be good enough to let me have at your earliest convenience, your scheme of organisation for the Editorial Department, with particular reference to the points of contact with the other departments.

"For the purposes of your draft scheme, you may assume that we will start some time in June, or perhaps earlier, issuing at a penny, a morning paper of 12 pages, Daily Mail size, and that we will have to take into consideration the possibility of developing towards a greater number of pages for the morning paper, and the issuing later on of an evening paper, a weekly and Sunday newspaper.

(NLI: 19361)

Other missives concern the arrangements for the Irish Press's foreign coverage, the hiring of local correspondents throughout the country, the distribution of the new paper. His work schedule describes a working day which began at 11.30am and continued until 3.0am the next day:

11.30am: Read morning papers and compare our stories and treatments to theirs.

1.0-2.0pm: lunch.

2.0-3.0pm: thorough sifting through English papers.

4.30pm: leave for office.

5.0-6.0pm: see news editor, discuss contents, hear of that day's stories, read Cork Examiner.

7.30-8.0pm: Leader writers' conference.

8.15-8.30pm: General conference, all executives attend. Chief Sub, News Editor, Leader

Writers, Irish Editor, Make-up Editor, Sports Editor, Art Editor, Editorial Secretary. Editor presiding. Short discussion of that day's paper, mistakes pointed out, criticisms heard, proposals for special stories, pictures, changes, etc. News list for coming day read, general advice given on particular stories (to be handled carefully, or splashed, or back-paged, or referred to Ed). Comments on news list. Space allocation arranged. (Sport is heavy, wants two columns from news; news is pressed, wants space from sport, features, finance etc.)

8.30-8.45pm: Picture conference. Picture list read, values discussed, pages where to appear arranged. Suggestions for photographers. (Picture conference attended by Art Editor, Chief Sub, News Editor, Make-Up Editor). Art Editor takes list of pictures required (what is to go where, so that they shall be ready in the required order – pictures for early pages needed first etc).

8.45-9.15pm: Callers interviewed.

9.15-10.0pm: Correspondence dealt with.

10.0-10.15pm: See Financial Editor and Woman Editor, check on sports misses and see Sports Editor.

10.15-10.30pm: Signing of important letters.

10.30-11.0pm: Cutline (traditional newspapers' production break).

11.0-11.30pm: Deal with political copy and speeches requiring "policy" heads.

11.30-12.0midnight: Supervision of editorials.

12.0midnight-1.30am: The rush hour. Proofs gone through if possible; picture page passed; ticklish copy referred to editor dealt with; editorials revised in proof; lead discussed in conference with chief sub; short visit to stone if required to push the paper through the last 15 minutes.

1.30-2.0am: Rest and tag ends dealt with.

2.0-3.0am Read Independent for "sticks" (exclusive stories or stories at which the opposition excels).

One of the tasks unmentioned here was that of replying to hundreds of supplicants applying for jobs of every description. Some letters were from mothers on behalf of their worthy sons, some were from IRA veterans who had once helped out de Valera in the Civil War. De Valera's secretary passed them all on to Gallagher. The following is typical (Fianna Fáil: FF39):

Grey Street,
Dingle,
29.3.31

A duine uasal,

I am a sister of Tomas Agas [Ashe], and one of my boys aged 20 had applied for a position as reporter to the Irish Press.

I am writing to yourself personally to secure this job.

I have four grown up sons ranging in ages from 17 to 21. I have applied for places for them again and again and every time in vain.

Now this opportunity has occurred in our own party and I hope as Tomas's sister you will do me this favour. My heart is set on it as I detest emigration, and so do these boys.

This boy aged 20 is secretary to Fianna Fáil Comhairle Cumann and also GAA and in appearance and manner is Tomas over again.

The eldest 21 could do work on the premises, he is hardworking and healthy, such men will be employed around the works as porters and such.

Could you kindly get him in on some job there. Both these boys have the passage tickets to America, won't you help me dear sir to save them from such a fate.

Thanking you in anticipation, le meas mór,

Maire Devane.

If genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains, then Gallagher was a true genius. His attention to detail was legendary. He even took time to write to his correspondent in Kilrush, Co Clare, about the accuracy of her pig market reports. The entire fascinating correspondence has been preserved by Ann Gallagher, Frank's daughter. One commentator summarised it as follows:

"Letter to shareholder {who had originally written complaining that the pig prices were at times 10 shillings off the mark} thanking him for his interest, explaining that there had been a bit of this in the past and that 'strong letters' may be necessary to keep the correspondents in line. Memo to sub to find out the correspondent's name, stern letter to her, indignant reply from her viz: 'I am a reporter for over 10 years and can say that any of my reports were never contradicted...' She explains that individual prices may differ; she sticks to standard ones. To do otherwise would 'take a column in your paper'. Letter from Gallagher including text of correspondent's letter to shareholder: 'I would be glad of your comments on this.' The reply is not preserved."

(Binchy 1992: 29).

Another example of his meticulousness is his protracted negotiations with British United Press, an agency for British and foreign news. He was at pains in February 1931 to remind one J C Moore of the BUP that

“We intend to cover as large a field as possible, of foreign news – and by the way our paper will regard Ireland as a unit and not the Free State only, which, as you know, is not the whole country ... If we take BUP, we shall hope to secure from it the best possible news service ... from an angle which will be unbiased and not propagandist.”

An interesting dispute follows some solecism on behalf of a BUP correspondent over a matter of Catholic rite (he described a South American bandit celebrating, rather than merely attending, Mass every day). “As a precaution against just such happenings, we have a Catholic on our London staff,” a po-faced Gallagher informed Mr Moore. In a later letter, Mr Moore gets another broadside (June 2): “I would like to say that the representation of South American nationalists and others as bandits seems to us here to be hostile propaganda. It is not long ago since the news agencies described our own National Leaders as ‘gunmen’ so that we are sensitive to the truth in matters of this kind.” (NLI: 18366).

Gallagher’s politics are evident in the list of matters he wants covered by the BUP’s journalists. Anything that showed Britain up, anything that showed her colonies resisting British authority, any criticism of British foreign policy by other nations was to be given prominence. When people with Irish names were in the news, he wanted extensive coverage. He cites a recent rescue in which Irish people were involved, “though in none of the English reports did we get credit for these men”. At the end of this volley of letters, he bargains the hapless Moore down to £550 a year for the service, £150 less than the opening offer.

Not that it was all work and no play in those more genteel days. A letter from Aodh

de Blacam thanking him for an appointment to the paper concludes: “Would the coming Friday suit yourself and Mrs Gallagher for a drive to Glendalough?” (NLI: 18366). Back at the paper, Gallagher’s energy and capacity for taking pains became legendary. He was rigorous in his instructions to his staff; his general injunction to those both writing for and editing the new paper was: “Remember, Ireland matters most to the Irish Press.”

It was of course in keeping with the founding principles of the paper that it should seek a perspective on home and foreign news other than a British one. In a list of instructions to the first team of sub-editors hired by the paper was included a warning:

“Be on your guard against the habits of British and foreign news agencies who look at the world mainly through imperialist eyes.” Other instructions were:

Always give the Irish angle in headlines;

Do not use agency headlines: the other papers will have these.

Do not pass the word “bandits” as a description of South American revolutionaries.

Pirates and robbers in China are not necessarily communists and therefore should not be described as such.

These agency stories show an ignorance of Catholic practices and things: check all doubtful references in such copies.

Propagandist attacks on Russia and other countries should not be served up as news.

Do not make the Irish Press a Dublin paper - there are O’Connell streets in other cities too.

Ireland matters most to the Irish Press.

Every good journalist while he is writing is one of his own readers.

A good reporter or a good sub-editor can make almost any story live. A bad one can kill the best story ever thought of.

Write simple English: long words can be a trial to subs, comps and most of all to the reader.

Attempts at a “literary” style is the worst form of bad journalism.

Verify all quotations.

Acknowledge everything of importance taken from other papers.

When in doubt, find out.

Give the main facts of the story in the opening paragraphs. Keep the others for minor details.

People do not buy the paper for puzzles – explanatory footnotes are always good copy.

If you don’t understand your copy, the public won’t.

Women and children first – if there is a side to a story or illustrations of interest to women don't ignore it.

Remember the Free State is not Ireland and "Northern Ireland" is not either Northern Ireland or Ulster - it is the Six Counties.

(NLI: 18361).

It is interesting to note that the new paper is so concerned about the descriptions of insurgents in other countries. Perhaps this desire to be scrupulously impartial in describing the activities of rebels abroad stems from a memory of the treatment of Sinn Féin leaders like de Valera at the hands of the British press, in which they were described in pejorative terms not long before. Nor did he want his reporters kow-towing to the establishment, in which neither he nor de Valera had any great faith at the time. "It is not necessary to report every word of praise spoken to a policemen," he told his newsroom staff, adding that they should not include in their copy judges jokes "unless they are real jokes".

His concern that the Irish Press be a reliable source of news is also evident from his correspondence with the United Press Association, a leading American news agency at the time. "Should it finally be decided that we take your service," he wrote to the British manager of the agency, "I hope that we shall get some form of news of America other than is now supplied by agencies as a whole, namely an amalgam of gangster activities, divorces at Reno, Hollywood stories and prohibition raids. When one realises that America is a continent with intense political and cultural activity, it seems a shame that more is not heard of her nobler aspects." (NLI: 18361).

Gallagher's efforts at maintaining journalistic standards at the Irish Press paid dividends in terms of circulation. As his own tally of the circulation the of the first five years shows, the Irish Press recorded a more or less steady increase in sales:

Table 3.2

Circulation of <u>Irish Press</u> 1931-1936	
August 1931	54,740
October 1931	56,821
December 1932	90,444
December 1933	95,687
December 1934	100,480
December 1935	98,085
December 1936	105,332

(NLI: 18361)

3.3 A political staff for a political paper

It was natural in those days that a paper that unashamedly set out to give Irish Republicanism a voice should have attracted party activists and sympathisers to its standard. But the extent of the synergy between the Irish Press and the Fianna Fáil party seems to modern eyes to be remarkable and is further evidence of the close ties between party and paper. Robert Brennan, the first company secretary, went on to become Irish Ambassador to Washington. Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, the paper's first Irish language editor, was a successful Fianna Fáil candidate for the presidency. Frank Gallagher was the recipient of Fianna Fáil patronage, being appointed to the censor's office during the Emergency, and then to posts in the Government Information

Service, RTE and the Department of Health. Erskine Childers, the Press's first advertising manager, also served as a Fianna Fáil President. From the perspective of an age that values journalistic impartiality, the extent of the open partisanship of the early Press days is remarkable. Aodh de Blacam, who wrote the popular Roddy the Rover column, was a member for a time of the Fianna Fáil sub-committee on publicity, as was Liam Pedlar, the paper's circulation manager. And of course, two of the three controlling directors of the paper – Eamon de Valera and Vivion de Valera – were serving Fianna Fáil TDs during their directorships.

3.4 Conclusion

The Irish Press was immediately a great success, and the circulation of its rival, the Irish Independent, fell from 150,000 to 120,000 following its launch. (The Bell: Feb 1945; P386). The populist approach adopted by Frank Gallagher appealed to readers. The Fianna Fáil party too benefited from the favourable publicity the new paper afforded them. The fortunes of the paper mirrored those of the party to a surprising extent, as we shall see. The early years of political commitment in the 1930s brought party and paper great success. The sense of mission was palpable in the speeches of the party leaders, as it was in the leading articles of the paper. The relationship between the paper and the party was mutually beneficial: the party supporters subscribed to the paper, and the paper supported the party, not only “by confirming the convictions of the faithful, but also by converting previous non-voters or even unbelievers. The increasing turnout, from 69 per cent in the September 1927 election to 77 per cent in 1932, before rising to a record 81.3 per cent in 1933, probably owed a good deal to the popular enthusiasm generated by the Press”. (Lee 1989: 168).

Douglas Gageby, who first came across the paper as a Belfast schoolboy, reflects the opinion of many: “It had a great smack about it.” (Interview with the author 24.10.97). But the problems evident in the run-up to publication – the lack of funds, the unwieldy corporate structure – continued in the background, masked by the popular success of the new paper.

Chapter 4

The Irish Press 1932-1948

4.1 Introduction

The early years of this period represented a time of great activity and growth for the Irish Press, while the later years brought stasis and atrophy. The run-up to the General Election of 1932 was a hectic and heady period. The paper's circulation was growing and, with, for example, the editor's prosecution for seditious libel in February 1932 and the launch of the Evening Press in the October of the same year, there is a feeling of the Irish Press being at the centre of events. As one writer points out, "For the first year of its life, the Irish Press was especially radical." (O'Brien, 2000, P71), When Fianna Fáil was elected to government in 1932, the tone of the Irish Press changed to accommodate the new circumstances of its political masters. With the subsequent re-election of Fianna Fáil in January 1933, June 1935 and June 1943, the tone of the paper became ever more conservative and didactic. This was also a period in which the problems which beset the Irish Press company and came to prominence. Almost from the day of publication, editor Frank Gallagher was in conflict with the board over editorial budgets. During the last 15 years of its existence, publication of the Irish Press was frequently disrupted by industrial action; its first years were also punctuated by disputes of various kinds, and during Gallagher's time, the treatment of a wages clerk led to a strike and also, in part, to Gallagher's eventual resignation. The close links between the Fianna Fáil party and the paper were forged during this period. The party had a proprietorial attitude to the paper, almost regarding it as

another arm of government. The paper's support for the party forced it into many rhetorical shifts and contortions. Towards the end of this period, when a progressive wing of Fianna Fáil began to emerge, led by Sean Lemass, the paper became torn between support for this new guard and loyalty to the party's old guard, led by the more conservative Sean McEntee. It was also during this period that the complicated and inflexible financial structure of the Irish Press company was put in place. The establishment of the Irish Press Corporation, examined in the previous chapter, and the continuing shortfall in share allocation, meant the company was never on as sound a financial footing as it had planned to be.

4.2 The Irish Press— making the argument

Fianna Fáil's campaign for the 1932 general election – the first election since the Irish Press was launched – was based on a policy of anti-imperialism and national development. De Valera supported small scale industries set in rural communities, distrusting large conglomerates and their motives towards Ireland. Fianna Fáil opposed the link between Ireland's currency and sterling, and objected to the way in which British manufacturers were allowed to sell below-cost in Ireland, so forcing native manufacturers out of business. The Irish Press was born into turbulent times. The Irish Press's appearance was timely in one sense: the Great Depression was at its height, as was ordinary people's distrust of international high finance; sterling had just collapsed and Britain had been forced to abandon the Gold Standard, so pointing up the danger of having Ireland's currency allied to an economy outside her control; the League of Nations was in disarray over its failure to rescue world trade, seeming

to prove how small nations were at the mercy of large in matters of international trade. These issues “provided the newspaper with ample opportunity to make the case for Fianna Fáil’s programme of national self-sufficiency”. (Curran 1994: 160).

In the first seven months of its existence, the editorial stance of the Irish Press closely mirrored Fianna Fail policy. The paper supported calls for protectionist policies, called for independent banking system, as per Fianna Fáil policy, supported Fianna Fáil’s call for an Irish central bank after British banks forced an interest rate rise on their Irish counterparts.

As Catherine Curran points out, other campaigns in those early days of the Irish Press closely mirrored Fianna Fáil policy. The paper took up cudgels on behalf of railwaymen employed by the Great Southern Railway, who were battling against layoffs and low pay. The paper criticised the plans for a 20 to 30% cut in the workforce and called for a state-run railway network to replace the monopoly operated by the GSR. The argument was given extra bite by the fact that the GSR was owned by the Murphy family, who also owned the Irish Independent newspaper. The Irish Press gave plentiful support to the fledgling Irish Shipping Company, founded by Staffords of Wexford in October 1931 in opposition to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, which had run a monopoly up to then. The paper then went into battle against the practice of “dumping” by foreign manufacturers (various campaigns targeted cheap Russian suits, tinned salmon and sugar) on the vulnerable Irish market. In each of these cases, Frank Gallagher’s editorials were at pains to point out the need for state intervention to regulate industry and take it out of the hands of monopolies, for a government dedicated to providing full employment, for protection of Irish industries

against large-scale foreign production, all of which were planks in Fianna Fáil's election platform. (Curran: 1996; P160 *et seq*).

The Press was also keen to establish both its own and the party's Roman Catholic credentials. After all, fewer than 10 years before, many of the party faithful were involved in armed struggles of which the Catholic Hierarchy did not officially approve. Nine months after the election, the Press announced that Fianna Fáil had “translated the sweetness of Christianity into social progress ... bank deposits have risen, savings in the form of Post Office certificates have enormously increased, bank clearances have gone up...[Fianna Fáil's social policy was] “Christianity translated into economics. There is no social or economic change Fianna Fáil has proposed or brought about which had its fullest justification in the encyclicals of either Leo XIII or the present Pontiff.” (IP: January 23, 1933). Another author has noted that Fianna Fáil's policies in the early 1930s were “an amalgam of nationalist and quasi-socialist policies often stolen from the manifestos of left-wing Republican organs, tempered by Gaelic antiquarianism and Catholic social teaching found in Papal encyclicals.” (Daly: 1992; P61)

As the 1932 general election neared, the propaganda war intensified. Cumann na nGaedheal's basic appeal to voters was that the country had enjoyed unprecedented prosperity in the preceding decade. Government spokesmen attempted to link Fianna Fáil with communism. Their attacks were taken up by the Irish Independent. A typical headline of the time in the Independent was: “FF Policy Of State Ownership – Soviet Parallel”. (II: January 30, 1932). The Irish Press fought back by using every

opportunity to point out that the government was being backed by both the Unionists and the British government.

During this pre-election period, in January and February of 1932, one of the topics aired at length in the Irish Press was the treatment of IRA prisoners and suspects by the Free State Government. With a steady flow in information from his IRA sources, Gallagher was able to expose systematic brutality against Republicans by the Garda Síochána, arguing that “the beating of prisoners appeared to be becoming part of the system of government”. (IP, September 5, 1932). He also berated the awful conditions under which many prisoners were held in the Free State’s prisons in a series of stinging editorials. At that time, attacks against the forces of the Free State Government were frequent, and a Special Powers Tribunal – in effect martial law – had been set up to dispense summary justice. On February 5, 1932, Gallagher was brought before this military tribunal and charged with seditious libel over his series of articles. The prosecution charged that he was trying to “bring the administration of the law into disrepute and to scandalise and vilify the Government and the Garda Síochána.” (National Archives: S, 2858). Gallagher argued that they were fair criticism. After the testimony of over 50 witnesses was published, the general public was beginning to agree with him. The timing of the trial could not have been more unfortunate for the Provisional Government: polling day for the next election had been set for February 16. Gallagher’s counsel concluded his summing up on the eve of polling day thus: “I doubt not but that the members of the Tribunal will secure to their countrymen the right and liberty of exposing injurious, tyrannical power by speaking the truth.” (IP: February 16, 1932).

A fine of just £100 was imposed on the newspaper and the prosecution's costs were refused, the verdict being delivered the day after polling day. The paper's readers responded by sending in £500 in contributions to help pay the fine. "The whole saga ultimately helped raise the public profile of the paper and it soon built up a reputation as the best paper in the country for hard accurate news, with its circulation being boosted by the publicity surrounding the trial." (O'Brien: 2001, P40).²

The Irish Press was predictably upbeat when de Valera and his cabinet took their seats: "All good Irishmen have cause for rejoicing in the events which occurred yesterday in the Dáil" it said as it hailed Fianna Fáil's majority of 13 and accused Cosgrave's Cumann na nGaedheal of being out of touch with the people. (IP: March 10, 1932). And so the Irish Press had fulfilled the function de Valera had envisaged for it: it had given Fianna Fáil a mouthpiece, challenged Cumann na nGaedheal and the newspapers which supported it, and helped Fianna Fáil into office. It also helped legitimise Fianna Fáil as "the political wing of the cultural nationalist ideologies published on a daily basis in the paper." (O'Brien: 2000; P29). As de Valera wrote in 1932 to Archbishop Mannix in Australia, "had the risk [of founding the Irish Press] not been taken, I doubt if the present government would be in power." (De Valera papers: 1453/1).

Indeed the role of the Irish Press in helping Fianna Fáil into power became the subject of a heated debate in Dáil Éireann in 1933 (Dáil Debates, Vol 48, Col 1880 *et seq*).

Deputy Michael Cleary of Fianna Fáil accused Cumann na nGaedheal leader William

² The quotation is from Mark O'Brien's 2001 book *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press*, which is based on O'Brien's 2000 PhD thesis *The Truth in the News? A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Relationship Between Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press*. This quotation appears in the book, but not in the thesis. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from O'Brien are from the earlier work.

Cosgrave of being upset because “the Irish Press, it must be admitted, played a big part in removing Deputy Cosgrave across the floor of the house.” Cumann na nGaedheal’s James FitzGerald-Kenny replied that the paper was “a political pamphlet, pure and simple”. De Valera rose to defend the paper, stating that it was not “a party newspaper in the sense of a party controlled organ.” Fianna Fáil, he said, “did not own or control it”; rather, the shareholders owned it and the policy was “controlled by the Board of Directors”. De Valera would intervene in the running of the paper only if the paper “were to depart from...supporting the movement for Irish independence and...the policy of economic independence also.”

De Valera persisted in public denials that the Irish Press was a party newspaper while at the same time (i) holding the post of Controlling Director and Editor-in-Chief, and (ii) monitoring the paper’s coverage of political events, and changing articles and pages of the paper if he saw fit. Former Irish Times journalist Frank Kilfeather, whose father T.P. Kilfeather was a political reporter with the Irish Press in the 1930s, has given this account:

“It was disingenuous of Dev to say that the paper wasn’t owned and controlled by Fianna Fáil. He ran it and his son ran it after him and another de Valera was running it when it closed. So for 50 years it was de Valera controlled. And Dev *was* [his italics] Fianna Fáil. The party, right up to the day it closed, believed, quite correctly, that it would get full support [from the Press papers] during a general election. As a political reporter in the old, barnstorming days of the Press, my father was close to Dev. He used to tell me stories about Dev phoning the newsroom every night to know what was coming out in the paper the next day. He often had no hesitation in changing copy, in changing a whole front page. My father covered many of Dev’s election campaigns. After giving a speech, Dev would come over to Dad and ask him to read back certain passages. If he was not satisfied, he would amend it. He would even change the grammar. He was a stickler for detail ...”

(Kilfeather 1997: 148).

Despite the immediate success of the Irish Press in terms of both its circulation and its effect on the fortunes of Fianna Fáil, financial difficulties remained. The situation had improved by 1932, but not dramatically. In a handbill circulated in February 1932, there is an almost plaintive cry for investors:

“40,000 shares still available for subscription – The Directors of the Irish Press are being urged to enlarge the present issue ... They do not feel justified in doing this until the full amount of the capacity originally asked for has been secured. They are also being asked to launch an Evening as well as a Weekly paper. The capital of £200,000 was fixed as the minimum necessary to establish and run successfully a full series of national newspapers. Of this sum, 160,000 shares of £1 0s. 0d. each were applied for and allotted, and the Directors were forced to confine the activities of the company to the production of a Daily newspaper only. That newspaper, in its seven months’ existence, has already established itself as the popular national journal of Ireland, and has rendered signal service to the nation. It is felt that the time is now propitious for a forward stride and that this is the time for all to give a helping hand in making secure the position of this great national newspaper undertaking. There are 40,000 shares of £1 0s. 0d. each still available for subscription ...” A year later, the company was still almost 40,000 short of its target of 200,000. It had accumulated losses of £98,115.

(Irish Companies Registration Office).

4.3 The Evening Press and Evening Telegraph

Some of those losses may be due in part to a short-lived attempt to introduce an evening paper in the summer of 1932. The original publicity material designed to attract investors to the Irish Press also mentioned plans for an evening and a Sunday newspaper. Less than a year after the daily began publication, the Evening Press was launched. A brighter paper than its morning sister, its layout was less densely packed. It contained eight pages and cost one penny. Its first issue, published on Friday, June 3, 1932, sold 100,000 copies. (EP, June 4, 1932). This figure may be treated with caution, as it was carried in the second issue of the evening paper. Records of its staff

are difficult to come by. Its last issue was published in October 1932, a mere five months after its first. In all probability, it was produced by the same reporting staff as the Irish Press, but had a small sub-editing staff of its own.

Like its sister paper, it greeted its readers with confidence, but struck a less serious note, remarking that it: “means to be a bright paper. Those who read evening papers want to feel happy about it. The day’s work is done, the day itself is closing. The Evening Press will remember that, and in its make-up, its features and its manner of presenting news it will avoid dullness and have life on every page.” (The editorial in full is appended in Appendix 2.)

The rhetoric of the leader was complimented by a plethora of news stories of a religious bent. The Eucharistic Congress had the population in a frenzy of liturgical activity. “450,000 People On Retreat In Advance Of Eucharistic Congress” said the lead story of that first edition. Other editions carried pictures of Catholic priests on retreat/being ordained. There was a series by the great Republican writer Dorothy McArdle called “Seven Days in the Hills – a series of six articles which offer a seven-day plan for exploring the hills and glens of Leinster in a small car”. There was a series on how to build your own radio set. It carried late news and racing results up to 5.0pm. There was too a discernable attempt to treat stories in a lighter way. This was apparent in the coverage of the Eucharistic Congress itself. Eschewing long reports of the proceedings, the Evening Press ran the headline: “Count McCormack In Papal Robes Mistaken For Mussolini”.

Less than a month into publication, the Evening Press carried a front-page report that

it intended to change its name to the Evening Telegraph. (EP: June 6, 1932).

“Numerous readers,” read the report, “have suggested that, owing to the similarity between its name and that of the Irish Press, it is desirable that a change be made ...

On Monday June 30 the Evening Press will be known as the Evening Telegraph.”

Independent Newspapers, however, threw a spanner in the works. The title of Evening Telegraph was the property of the Freeman’s Journal, a paper they had taken over some years before and had incorporated into the Daily Irish Independent. They went to court to protect what they saw as illegal use of a title to which they owned the rights. The court heard how Independent Newspapers bought the Freeman’s Journal and the title of the Evening Telegraph for £24,000 when the Journal went into liquidation in 1924.

During the course of the trial, evidence was given that newsboys had difficulty shouting “Evening Press stop press!” whereas “Herald stop press!” and “Mail stop press!” were easy to shout. On Monday, July 18, Justice Meredith in the High Court delivered judgment in favour of the Irish Press company, saying that Independent Newspapers had in effect discarded the Evening Telegraph title. He said that Independent Newspapers were free to bring another case if they could prove actual damage caused by the name change of the Evening Press. However, the fact that the board of the Irish Press even considered the radical step of changing the paper’s name indicates a circulation situation which required a desperate remedy. The paper ceased publication in October of 1932. It was to be another 22 years before the Irish Press sallied forth again into the tempestuous waters of the evening newspaper market.

4.4 The Irish Press: defender of the faith

Once in office, Fianna Fáil set about implementing its programme of reforms, prominent among which were its pledge to remove the oath of allegiance to Britain, and to withhold the £1.5m due annually to the British government in land annuities. The Irish Press continued its role as amplifier for Fianna Fáil policy. When the oath was abolished, the paper noted its removal was “as momentous as anything that had happened in Irish politics for many years” and that the nation owed a debt to Fianna Fáil that was “not easy to express”. (IP: May 20, 1932). On the subject of land annuities, the Irish Press again supported the Fianna Fáil position. When the British government made public a secret agreement signed by Cumann na nGaedheal promising to pay the annuities, the Irish Press used the disclosure to portray that party as unpatriotic. (O’Brien, 2000, P78). The paper supported Fianna Fáil’s call to have the matter brought to independent international arbitration, as opposed to arbitration by a Commonwealth Commission as proposed by the British.

The British government responded by placing a 20% duty on Irish imports to Britain, thus firing the first shot in the Economic War. Fianna Fáil in turn responded by imposing duty on imports of coal, steel, sugar and cement. As the row worsened, the Irish Press sought to placate its readers, telling them that, if a trade war between Ireland and Britain were to happen, that Ireland would survive and emerge the stronger for it. The paper gave prominence to reports of support for de Valera’s stance in the US. When de Valera introduced tariffs on English goods, the Press again sought to reassure the Irish public by interviewing prominent Irish businessmen and traders who forcefully asserted that the country could deal with any shortages that might

arise. It also carried reports of dismay among British businessmen at the attitude of their government to the dispute, attempting to show that the trade war was hurting the British just as much as the Irish. One of the paper's most popular columns during the Economic War was "An Feirmeoir Beag", which gave guidance on self-sufficiency and supported Fianna Fáil's ruralisation policy throughout this period.

In many ways, the Economic War suited Fianna Fáil, as de Valera could make the case that "frugal fare" was "the price for economic freedom". (Fanning: 1983, P114). It also showed that, where economic and nationalist interests collided, "the latter took priority, at least for de Valera." (Daly: 1992; P62). De Valera himself stated that "if the British succeed in beating us, then we'll have no freedom." (IP: Nov 19, 1932). When the Economic War was at its height, there were 1,900 tariffs in operation, and a raft of legislation had been enacted to promote "import substitution" and to regulate the operation of foreign-owner companies in the Irish market, but, as one commentator points out, the initial spurt in manufacturing output and employment in Ireland was short-lived and "was already over by the mid-1930s". (O'Grada, 1997, P108).

In January 1933, de Valera called a snap General Election to test the reaction to his policies, and again the Irish Press went into rhetorical battle on behalf of the government, denouncing Cumann na nGaedheal as unpatriotic and noting that "in ten months Fianna Fáil created the situation in which Britain had to yield something". (IP, Jan 5, 1933). "Despite the hardship that the Economic War had so far caused, Fianna Fáil won an overall majority; winning seventy-seven seats to Cumann na nGaedheal's forty-eight." (O'Brien, 2000, P82). Stung by coverage of the election and its results in

some British newspapers, especially the Daily Mail, the Irish Press called for a tax on British newspapers on sale in Ireland. (IP, Jan 27, 1933). The Fianna Fáil government duly obliged and, in the Finance Act, 1933, there was provision for a duty on daily newspapers imported into the State. Subsequently, the sales of both the Irish Independent and the Irish Press rose, the former from 123,000 in 1935 to 134,000 in 1937 and 140,000 in 1939, and the latter from 95,000 in 1935 to 100,000 in 1937 and 110,000 in 1939. (The Bell, 1945, P392).

The Economic War also formed the backdrop for another controversy involving de Valera and the Irish Press in the early years of its existence. As we have seen, part of the platform on which de Valera was elected in 1932 and re-elected the following year was the withholding of land annuities from Britain. Both de Valera and the British sought to secure American opinion on their side of the dispute. Britain scored a propaganda point by announcing that they were going to meet the war debt repayments to the US despite the fact that (i) most other European countries were defaulting on theirs, and (ii) Ireland's refusal to pay land annuities was an additional drain on Chancellor Neville Chamberlain's purse. As one biographer notes "for de Valera, who was always particularly conscious of American opinion, the whole thing was particularly disturbing, especially at this time, but it did not take him long to pull a propaganda stroke of his own ..." (Dwyer 1991: 178). The stroke referred to was the decision to repay the Republican Loan in the US, with a 25% premium added.

The decision did get him out of his American difficulty: with US public opinion enraged by European countries defaulting on their debts, the announcement that Ireland was moving to repay hers before they fell due – and with a bonus – made front

page headlines across the US. It also had a considerable effect on the finances of the Irish Press. When de Valera eventually got around to paying over the money promised in this grand gesture of January 1933, the extent of the windfall to the de Valera and the Irish Press became clear. In a press release issued by the Free State's representative in the US on April 3, 1935, it was announced that anyone who had not applied for a refund under the Peters' decision of 1927 would get \$1.25 and those who did get a refund of 58 cents on the dollar would be paid the balance of 67 cents. The amount due to de Valera and the Irish Press as a result of thousands of American bondholders signing over their interest in the bonds to de Valera for the foundation of the new paper in 1927 was generally accepted to be about £100,000, coincidentally the amount the paper was in debt, according to the accounts circulated at that shareholders' meeting in July 1933.

In a hot-tempered debate on the issue in the Dáil over two days, (July 5 and 6, 1933), de Valera was accused of "looting the public purse for a party organ". Batt O'Connor remarked: "The indecent haste about it is that you want to get control of the money to help you out of your difficulties with your daily paper ... Think of the conditions of the farms...the cutting of the salaries of the teachers and the civil servants ..." He urged de Valera to "put country before party politics and a party newspaper ..." (Dáil Debates 1933: Vol 8, cols 1735-1986). De Valera weathered the storm and the Bill, paying £1.5m to the bondholders of the Republican Loan (including the £100,000 that would fall due to de Valera and the Irish Press) was passed. His supporters dismissed the controversy as an opposition fabrication: "Other charges were levelled at him for the methods used to finance the Irish Press of which he was a controlling director, a 'kept' paper it was called. The facts that a number of Americans had transferred their

interest in the Republican bonds to him for his journal was known, and when he insisted that the bondholders be repaid by the Government, his motives were deemed ulterior. ‘The Irish people,’ he retorted, ‘know full well that I personally never got one penny out of anything I did for Ireland.’ Nor did his son Vivion, who became a director, receive any money from the newspaper”. (Brommage 1956: 251).

4.5 The Irish Press as an arm of government

Commentators have noted that the radical, iconoclastic, populist tone of the Irish Press became more muted once Fianna Fáil entered government. “After de Valera assumed office, the role of the Irish Press changed from that of a proactive to a reactive journal.” (O’Brien, 2000, 86). The paper’s role as the mouthpiece of the new government was demonstrated at the Ottawa Commonwealth Trade Conference of 1932. The Irish Press was the only paper to have a reporter with the Irish Government delegation, “an indication of the new privileged status of the paper in relation to the State” (Curran 1994: 241). In its reports of the conference, the Press highlighted the dynamic, clear-sighted action of the Irish delegation in contrast to the confusion of the Dominions which led to the collapse of the conference. The details of the 1933 budget appeared in the Irish Press before they were announced in the Dáil. (O’Brien, 2000, P83). The so-called McNeill Affair, involving a diplomatic clash between de Valera’s government and the Governor General, showed the extent to which the Irish Press was seen – and used – as an extension of the Fianna Fáil party.

It had long been de Valera’s intention “to demean and eventually dispose of” (Coogan 1993: 456) the office of Governor General of Ireland. De Valera was happy to use the

papers to provoke a controversy over the Governor Generalship, and later had little compunction in trying to reign in the same papers when the controversy took a turn which showed him in an unfavourable light. The controversy began with a report in the Irish Press on April 24, 1932, of an incident at the French Legation the day before. Fianna Fáil ministers Frank Aiken and Sean T Ó Ceallaigh walked out of the function as soon as the Governor General arrived. The Irish Press report stated: "Later the Governor-General arrived. This was a surprise, and Mr O'Kelly and Mr Aiken then left." On April 26, McNeill wrote to de Valera: "There can be no doubt as to the meaning of that categorical statement. It conveys to the public that two members of the Executive Council ... left the dance in consequence of my arrival ... Also, the Irish Press is known to be under your personal control, and statements of the kind to which I refer in that newspaper can only mean that that it is part of a considered policy that the Governor-General should be treated with deliberate discourtesy by members of your council and by the newspaper which you control."

De Valera's reply was a masterly put-down: "Whilst making allowance for your justifiable annoyance at the occurrence of which you complain, I must confess that the tone of your letter has surprised me not a little...As regards the Irish Press: It is a newspaper. It gathers its news as other newspapers do, and publishes what it gathers at the discretion of its editors. Any particular item of news would, it is true, be suppressed were I to issue an express rider to that effect, but ever since the paper was founded I have carefully refrained from giving any such orders ..." He went on to suggest that the Governor-General communicate his social engagements to the Government in advance so that "such an incident will certainly not occur in the future". This was tantamount to asking McNeill to facilitate the Executive Council in

boycotting all functions he attended. McNeill replied that he still insisted on an apology “not merely on my personal or official account, but with regard to the honour and self respect of Irish public life.” Again de Valera’s reply was unyielding: he “regarded the whole affair as unfortunate and regrettable, and one that should not have been permitted to occur. Further than this I am unable to go”.

Less than a month later, another incident was the occasion of more friction. McNeill had invited guests to stay with him in the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park during the Eucharistic Congress. He had sought the Government’s response to these invitations, but “de Valera delayed giving a decision until McNeill had committed himself to inviting his guests.” (Coogan 1993: 457). The Department of External Affairs informed McNeill that his guests were an embarrassment to the Government. McNeill wrote to de Valera protesting at the delaying in telling him where he stood. During the Congress, neither McNeill nor his party was invited to any of the official functions associated with the event. McNeill waited until the Congress was over before pressing for an apology over the way he had been treated. Unless one was forthcoming, he would publish the correspondence between the two men, he said. De Valera formally instructed him not to, but on July 10, McNeill had copies of the letters delivered to the city’s newspaper offices. De Valera promptly sent gardai after them, instructing the editors not to publish. They acquiesced. The gritty McNeill then sent copies to papers in the North and in the UK, who were not so easily intimidated by de Valera, and prepared to publish. De Valera took steps to prevent the circulation of the papers in the Republic, but it was too late. Realising that it was inevitable that the correspondence be published, he directed the Irish newspapers to publish it too. Once again, the editors of the Irish papers carried out his wishes.

The reports in the daily press on Tuesday July 12, 1932, have a surreal quality about them, with accounts of gardai, army and other officers of the state chasing these letters about the city, boarding ferries and trying to intercept newspapers all over the place. The Irish Press's report is typical. Headlined "Confidential Documents Given To The Press", it goes on to give a timetable of events:

9.30pm (Sunday) [July 10, 1932] – Letters delivered from Viceregal Lodge at newspaper offices.

11.50pm – Message from Minister for Justice that police warning was being issued against publication.

12.30am (Monday) – Telephone message from Garda Síochána that on July 8th the Executive Council had declared the letters "confidential State documents" which should not be published.

1.30am – Instruction given to Garda Síochána to prevent circulation of newspapers containing the letters.

1.50am – Newspaper offices visited by General W R E Murphy and two other garda officers to ensure no publication of letters would be made.

5.35am – Garda officers at Dun Laoghaire examine incoming English papers and direct that Daily Herald and News Chronicle not be allowed to circulate. Similar action is taken at Dundalk and other Border towns.

3.30pm Following official statement issued: "In disregard of the advice of the Executive Council formally tendered to him, the Governor-General has issued for publication certain letters which passed between him and the President of the Executive Council. As these letters have today appeared in foreign newspapers, the Executive Council has decided to authorise publication in the Irish Free State of the entire correspondence.

The role of the Irish Press in the incident was crucial. The paper carried the original account of the walk-out at the French Legation. Other newspapers carried reports of “gossiping comments regarding the departure of the Ministers. The statement in the Irish Press is not a report of gossip” (McNeill to de Valera, April 26, 1932). This implies that the Irish Press had access to the facts of the matter, while its rivals were restricted to publishing speculation. It is disingenuous for de Valera to suggest that the appearance in the Irish Press of this item had nothing to do with him. The newspaper he founded had been publishing for less than a year and, as the editorial it ran on the McNeill incident shows, links between the paper and its Controlling Director were still strong. The Irish Press described the publication of the letters by the Governor-General as “an act of premeditated and unprecedented disregard for his constitutional position...Not only has he disobeyed and defied, he has not hesitated to use everything to his hand in an attack on Mr de Valera and his Ministers... He has not even left the Eucharistic Congress out of his polemical letters ... We doubt if such an example of arrogant pettiness had been provided in our time...From a simple reading of the correspondence itself the public will learn most. On the one hand the courteous letters of the President of the Executive Council ... On the other hand, Mr McNeill’s letters are embittered, growing in rancour as the correspondence progresses.” It concludes that McNeill “is wholly unsuited to the position which he occupies.” (IP: July 12, 1932).

The new role of the Irish Press as defender of the government position was also demonstrated in the paper’s treatment of a plan by de Valera to reintroduce the Public Safety Act, the very piece of legislation under which editor Frank Gallagher had been prosecuted for seditious libel under the Cosgrave government. Cosgrave’s concern

had been the activities of the IRA and other Republican groups; de Valera was moving against the Army Comrades Association, the Blue Shirts. The Irish Press, which had attacked the legislation as draconian when faced with its power in 1931, saw merit in its reintroduction in 1933. "Faced with the open defiance of an organisation whose head has himself described it as 'a formidable insurrectionary force' and potentially an extreme danger to the peace and stability of the country, the Free State Government ... had to act." (IP: August 23, 1933).

4.6 The resignation of Frank Gallagher

Gallagher's editorship may have begun in a blaze of journalistic glory, but almost from the first, he was in conflict with the board over resources. The paper's circulation was increasing, but he was having to bring out a paper with fewer staff and resources than his rival across the river in Abbey Street. Soon Gallagher was sending memos to the board bemoaning these circumstances. One such memo compares his staff to that of the Irish Independent. "I have no Assistant Editors, the Independent has two; I have two leader writers, the Independent has five; I have 10 subs, the Independent has 12; I have a part-time Finance Editor, the Independent has a full-time one." (NLI: 18361).

Indeed, a row with the board was the reason behind his first letter of resignation on September 3, 1933. The dispute began over the board's refusal of his request for £5 expenses for a journalist travelling to London, "an endeavour for which the Irish Independent considers it normal to spend £25". He points out that "the Irish Press is a new paper; its editorial (ie, its principal) machine had to be created from nothing. It

was created by me out of the most mixed elements, trained, partly trained and untrained ...” (NLI: 18361). His resignation was not accepted on this occasion, but it was one of many battles with the board, and later with the general manager J J Harrington (imported from America) over matters of resources. The appointment of Harrington did much to poison the atmosphere in the offices of the Irish Press. “Mr Harrington has the American view of workers – they must be shown who is the boss and the way to show them is to sack someone important,” Gallagher said in his resignation letter, adding that he had seen Harrington shouting at one of the senior journalists in front of his subordinates: “he continued to do so until strongly checked by me”.

In a letter to de Valera dated July 17, 1933, he objects strongly to Harrington’s plan to “remodel the editorial office to counter abuses, such as the smell of drink in the sports room ...” (NLI: 18361). In the same letter, he bemoans his lack of resources: “Last night we carried no pictures of the Fr Griffin memorial because our art editor was afraid to bring his man back by car. The Independent did and beat us.” This war of attrition brought another letter of resignation on October 10, 1934, in which he gave six months notice. The board accepted his resignation at a meeting on April 29, 1935. The resignation is effective from May 1, but Gallagher accepted their request to stay on for two further months. He finally left in July 1935.

The role played by de Valera in Gallagher’s resignation should not be underestimated. As Controlling Director, de Valera had immense influence over the general direction of the paper, as well as its day-to-day content. Gallagher, as letters in his archive show, wrote several times to de Valera to seek his support when going in to argue

with the board over various economies they wished to foist on him. This support was not forthcoming, and de Valera refused to back his editor over various issues relating to the pay of sub-editors, journalists' expenses and the demotion of a wages clerk suspected of union agitation during a strike of workers in 1934. Gallagher's disenchantment with the atmosphere which prevailed in the Irish Press is evident from a letter he wrote to de Valera concerning the sacking of the clerk: "I want to get out of your mind any suspicion that there is some dark evil in him for which he is to be dismissed. That I know is the method of the Irish Press; the half-spoken innuendo, which seems to blast more than any charge that can be met and answered." (NLI: 18361). According to one commentator, de Valera's acceptance of Gallagher's resignation marked a turning point for the paper, and signalled a watershed between the old, campaigning paper of the early 1930s and a "more popular, less overtly political paper, one that was designed to appeal to the middle classes which were being increasingly attracted by Fianna Fáil." (Curran 1994: 316).

The reaction from his staff bears testament to the high regard in which he was held. Letter after letter pays tribute to his achievements as editor, and laments his treatment at the hands of the board and of Mr Harrington. His secretary Kathleen O'Connell wrote that she was "too upset to say much", while sports editor Joe Sherwood says: "Boss, it can't be true. I know it's not true. You are coming back." (NLI: 18361). But he wasn't. He did contribute a long-running weekly column on literature, entitled "Books from my Shelf", but that was the extent of his contact with the paper he had done so much to create. He was typically meticulous to the end, writing a memo to de Valera explaining why his deputy William Sweetman should succeed him. As the weeks passed, the air of despondency did not lift at Burgh Quay, as a letter from M J

McManus in August 1935 shows: McManus found himself in the first week “endeavouring to write leaders on subjects I had never thought about” in a place of “doom, suspicion and intrigue”. (NLI: 18341).

Perhaps the last word on Gallagher should go to Senator Joseph Connolly, who was a member of the board of the Irish Press from the beginning. “Under Frank Gallagher’s editorship the paper established itself as a trustworthy and reliable journal, bright without being cheap, cultured without being ponderous and above all Irish through and through in the things that mattered. It was to me a tragedy not only for the paper but for the country when Gallagher ceased to be editor. From that time the tone of the paper gradually deteriorated. A new and undesirable streak crept into its columns and has continued to grow until the present time...one looks back with nostalgia when Frank Gallagher, M J McManus and Aodh de Blacam gave the people the right lead and direction on all that really mattered in Catholic Ireland...Gallagher’s leading articles dealt with every aspect of the national situation and were, I think, the best contributions to national journalism since Arthur Griffith had written in the earlier years.” (Connolly 1958: 281-4).

4.7 The post-Gallagher Irish Press

From 1935 onwards, there is a marked change in the paper. The fact that editor Frank Gallagher resigned in that year is also significant, as his departure can be seen to symbolise a breaking with the first, campaigning, radical days of the paper and the ushering in of a new, more conservative approach. Old stalwart columns like An

Feirmeoir Beag were dropped by the new editor Bill Sweetman.³ The design of the paper was overhauled, with more typefaces, shorter stories and greater use of photographs. The content too was softer, focusing on Fianna Fáil's welfare plans and shying away from calls for more radical reform. There was a greater concentration on human-interest stories in the paper, and less focus on arguments and issues. There was more news from Hollywood, and the mood of the paper was more urban than before. Catherine Curran's analysis (Curran 1994:280) that Gallagher's departure marked the end of the "radical phase" of the paper and the beginning of a new conservative, commercial phase seems accurate. In terms of content, the paper appears less radical, less pioneering. Leading articles supported Fianna Fáil welfare plans, but the paper distanced itself from more radical reform. From 1936 onwards, the layout of the paper changed too. The stories were shorter, with new typefaces, and more reproduction of photographs taken with new flash cameras. "Whereas the old style reporting had provided detailed political analysis, the new Irish Press placed greater emphasis on description of individuals and events". (Curran 1994: 280). The "An Feirmeoir Beag" column, which had emphasised ruralisation, was dropped. (Ibid).

However, the new-look paper's support for Fianna Fáil policy was unwavering. It supported de Valera's 1936 campaign to have the King of England removed from the Constitution, it supported his 1937 Constitution, welcomed his election as Taoiseach in coalition with Labour and backed his moves to have the Treaty ports returned. It criticised the union of the opposition parties under the banner of the United Ireland

³ As O'Brien (2001, P67) points out, "the paper went through several editors in the mid-1930s". Among them were John O'Sullivan, who worked as a sub-editor under Gallagher, and John Herlihy, who was involved in the Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington case in 1937. The board eventually saw the wisdom of Gallagher's original recommendation for his successor and appointed Bill Sweetman as editor in May 1938.

Party, or Fine Gael: “The Opposition have sunk their differences in order to differ more energetically with the Irish nation ... the name for the organisation is United Ireland. There is one great recommendation for this name – it bears not the slightest resemblance to Cumann na nGaedheal, Centre Party or National Guard. It is a perfect disguise.” (IP: September 10, 1933). It was not entirely slavish in following the party line, however. When the authorities stopped a group of Republicans from marching to Bodenstown in the summer of 1936, the Press carried a report of Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington’s remarks to the crowd before they were moved on. Sheehy-Skeffington, who was the first drama critic of the Irish Press, said: “I am glad for one thing: that is that the mask is off the Fianna Fáil government who can never more raise their heads and call themselves Republicans.”

The same Sheehy-Skeffington was at the centre of an embarrassing row involving de Valera and the Irish Press in relation to de Valera’s new constitution. The document represented “a curious blend of Catholic and nationalism ideologies”. (O’Brien, 2000, P84). Article 44 recognised the “special position” of the Catholic Church, Articles 2 and 3 claimed jurisdiction over the north, and Article 41 recognised the woman’s “life within the home” and stated that women should not “be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”. According to O’Brien (2000, P85), Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington wrote to the chapel (branch) of the National Union of Journalists at the paper to say she would have to resign her membership as the paper had decided not to accept further material from her because of her agitation concerning the clauses in de Valera’s Constitution affecting the status of women. The chapel decided to investigate the claim, and said that, if substantiated, it would write to the editor and to de Valera himself. “Knowing how important the

Irish Press would be in securing a positive vote for the Constitution, both de Valera and the paper's then editor John Herlihy backed down". Indeed, the support of the paper for the constitution soon became evident in its editorials on the matter. When the Women Graduates Association took issue with the kitchen sink role allotted to them in the document, the Press devoted considerable space to refuting their argument. The leader writers poured scorn on "the learned ladies whose zeal in the national cause has in many cases been conspicuous by its absence." (IP: June 26, 1937).

As Catherine Curran's analysis points out, the paper's tack changed from one of attack when Fianna Fáil were in opposition to one of defence once they were in power. For instance, in 1937 when the Irish Independent published a feature saying poverty and hunger were widespread in the country, the Irish Press responded by showing what government schemes were available. And when the Independent reported that west Cork was particularly badly hit by poverty, the Press reported "The People Of Adrigool Have Confidence In The Government". (IP: April 5, 1937).

As the party became more conservative and more anxious to gain the support of the middle classes, so too did the paper. Indeed, the paper showed considerable dexterity in appearing to maintain some consistency of conviction as it followed Fianna Fáil policy through a series of notable about-faces. The leader writers of the Press managed to support the 1938 trade pact with Britain, having vigorously pursued a no-surrender policy during the Economic War; they supported the new Fianna Fáil campaign for efficiency and new investment in industry, having previously castigated

industry as the great evil of modern times and promoted small-scale rural crafts as the way forward.

Another about-turn performed by the leader writers of the Irish Press concerned the paper's attitude towards the Spanish Civil War. When Fianna Fáil was in opposition, the paper expressed sympathy for the Republican side. (Indeed, reporter Paddy Clare was given leave to fight for the International Brigade.) But when the war broke out in 1936, de Valera was in power, and the paper supported his policy of neutrality. This meant that the Irish Press to all intents and purposes ignored the conflict in Spain, providing its main rival with an opportunity to increase its circulation at the expense of the Irish Press. The Irish Independent supported Franco and carried a daily half-page report entitled "In War-Torn Spain". As one author has noted, "... in the Spanish War, the Irish Press did not particularly favour either side; the Irish Independent's policy was pro-Franco and the means by which this policy was expressed was sensational. From the beginning of that war, the Independent's sales, previously falling, climbed and its competitor paid the price of impartiality with a flattening out of its rapidly rising circulation graph." (The Bell, Feb 1945, P394).

The Irish Press again rallied to the Fianna Fáil flag for the General Election of 1938, calling for a large turn-out as "not only good democracy and good nationalism and therefore good for the only national party" and pointing out that Fine Gael "did not possess even the shreds of an intelligible national policy". (IP, June 8, 1938). Fianna Fáil won an overall majority of 16 seats. As the Second World War loomed, the Irish Press seemed to become more than ever an arm of government. Whereas in its early, populist days, the paper had encouraged people to unite against the status quo, in

September 1939 and throughout the war, it showed a tendency to lecture its readers about their duty. Typical was the paper's editorial on September 4, 1939, the very eve of war: "...our responsibilities as citizens is to see that by no word or act of ours shall...lead us beyond what the State has proclaimed our national purpose to be." As O'Brien (2000, P90) has noted: "the paper began to speak down to the people."

4.8 A parting of the ways: the Fianna Fáil sub-committee on publicity

Despite what seems to the modern reader like slavish adherence by the Irish Press to the Fianna Fáil party line, certain sections of Fianna Fáil were not happy with the policy of the paper. The party's sub-committee on publicity, dominated in its early days by Senator Colonel Maurice Moore and Frank Aiken, then Minister for Defence, had frequent cause to bemoan the party's treatment at the hands of the paper. One indignant committee minute complains: "Considerable difficulty has been experienced in securing publication of matter in this journal and it is affording very little co-operation in the work. Steps must be taken to ensure more satisfactory results in the future ... It was decided to refer the question of the relations between this committee and the Irish Press to the National Executive." (Fianna Fáil: FF380, September 18, 1933).

Despite frequent public disavowals of a direct, official relationship between Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press (as one writer noted: "Members of the government have

denied any official connection; which is quite accurate without being wholly true. [The Bell, March 1945, P475]), the party's publicity sub-committee continued to regard the paper as being entirely at its disposal. Members obviously felt they had a great influence on the day-to-day running of the paper. There are records of them deciding that May 22, 1937, should be the date that the Press publish its "10 Years of Fianna Fáil" supplement, (Fianna Fáil: FF 380, April 5, 1937) and agreeing that the paper should go ahead with a supplement marking de Valera's visit to the US. (Fianna Fáil: FF 380, February 20, 1939).

The sub-committee did not have any qualms about making its views known about what it saw as the general deterioration of standards at the Irish Press towards the end of 1939:

"The series of articles on Germany appearing in the Irish Press by arrangement with the London Daily Telegraph was considered harmful to the National interest and to the interests of the paper, and it was agreed to ask the Executive [Council] to make representations to the Editor with a view to their discontinuance.

"Arising out of this discussion, it was felt by the Committee that the whole tone of the news presentation in the Irish Press left much to be desired from the point of view of our neutrality in the European War. The Committee was of opinion that steps should be taken to remedy this position.

(Fianna Fáil: FF380, December 12, 1939).

Indeed, the Fianna Fáil government did not see any incongruity in suggesting to the German embassy, which had complained of the articles, that they supply a series of articles of their own, which could also be published in the Irish Press. (O'Brien, 2000, P94). The dissatisfaction of the party with the paper carried on into the 1940s, as can

be seen from a subsequent publicity sub-committee minute: “Arising out of a letter from Deputy M J Kennedy regarding the suggested adoption of Cumainn of a pledge to buy only the Irish Press, the Committee, while in favour of the principle, felt that there should be a quid pro quo on the part of the Irish Press before action on the lines described could be recommended to the organisation.” (Fianna Fáil: FF380, January 15, 1940).

The committee became even more heated by the Press's coverage of the campaign to gain a reprieve for Irish Republicans sentenced to jail in Birmingham: “On January 31st the Press devoted a 3 col heading and 53 inches to the list of British Army dead in France, but could not find space until next day for the appeal for a reprieve which got only two inches on a dead page. The Secretary wrote to the Irish Press in protest, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for a reply, but even this was ignored. The Committee decided to draw the attention of the Executive [Council] to this continued ignoring of representation by the paper with a view to having the whole matter considered by the Taoiseach.” (Fianna Fáil: FF 380, February 5, 1940). The “whole matter” came to a head when the editor of the Irish Press was “invited” to appear before the sub-committee to discuss party grievances with the paper. The Secretary's report of the meeting, which took place on March 28, 1940, and lasted for two hours, is interesting:

“The main points of discussion included:

- (1) Necessity for closer contact between local organisation and ‘Irish Press’ correspondents;
- (2) Publication of a weekly feature of Cumainn reports, giving more space to members’ views;
- (3) Possibility of occasional write-up of organisation’s doings in important centres such as Cork, Limerick, etc;
- (4) More reference to Government’s achievements in constituencies where by-elections are pending;
- (5) Publication of Cumainn resolutions thanking Ministers of Deputies for work done;

- (6) Arrangement for adequate coverage of important Constituency or County Conventions;
- (7) Complaints of insufficient space given to speeches by Fianna Fáil member of the Oireachtas or public bodies;
- (8) Importance of more Editorial comment on Fine Gael statements and British war aims (in relation to Partition);
- (9) Possibility of series of articles on self-sufficiency policy; prices compared with other neutral countries etc;
- (10) Complaints of bias in War reports and insufficient use of Radio to check usual news services;
- (11) Suggested broadening of the correspondence column;
- (12) Ways and means of helping to increase circulation and advertising.

“Mr Sweetman, while denying that there was any ground for complaint in certain of the matters raised, promised to give consideration to suggested improvements ...”

(Fianna Fáil: FF380).

Another insight into the character of Sweetman and his attitude to the Irish Press's role as mouthpiece for Fianna Fáil comes from a recollection by a former colleague of Sweetman's, Douglas Gageby: “Sweetman had great nerve. There were three things you were told when you joined the Irish Press: one was the Eamon de Valera had only one ‘n’; the second was the there was no such place as Navan, it was An Uaimh; the third was that Kells was to be referred to as Ceannanais Mór. Dev would ring up and ask for Sweetman. ‘Mr Sweetman, that speech of mine today...’ ‘Yes, sir, we have it here’ ‘Did I end by saying such and such?’ ‘Yes, you did.’ ‘Very good.’ One day, the call came through. ‘Mr Sweetman, you know that speech I am giving in Navan tonight ...?’ ‘Just a moment sir while I have a look at the news list. No we have no record of it.’ ‘I’m making a very important speech in Navan tonight ...’ ‘Oh, here it is...An Uaimh’.” (Interview with the author).

The party's dissatisfaction with the paper extended to even higher levels of the Fianna Fáil hierarchy. A minute from a May 1939 National Executive meeting conjures up an image of an intense, committed clippings clerk saving all the brickbats hurled at the party from Abbey Street: "It was agreed to refer to the Irish Press for publication a folder entitled 'The Irish Independent and Neutrality'." (Fianna Fáil: FF 342, May 1, 1939). Later during the war, they did not hesitate to mobilise the Irish Press in defence of the Government: "The Irish Press should be approached ... with a view to the publication of a special supplement which would allow the progress made in social, economic and political fields under the present Government to be shown. It was also decided that Mr Little should interview the editor-in-chief of the Irish Press regarding summaries of reports of public institutions published in that journal which were regarded as being unnecessarily critical of Government policy." (Fianna Fáil: FF342, April 28, 1941).

The fact that the party was moving away from a situation where the Press was its only mouthpiece is noticeable in the minutes of Fianna Fáil Publicity Sub-Committee. From the early 1930s, it is primarily concerned with how the new Fianna Fáil government is perceived by the press in general. A typical minute from these days reads: "During the week ending December 18th, hostile criticism was refuted in, and material supplied to 15 home and 6 foreign papers". (Fianna Fáil: FF380, December 18, 1933). At the beginning of the 1940s, members continue to exercise themselves over the treatment of party policy and party leaders at the hands of the press, and especially the Irish Press: "...it was noted that the Irish Press made a poor defence of the Budget" (May 11, 1941) "...The unfavourable treatment by the Irish Press as contrasted with the Irish Times of the news of the Government supplying coal to meet

a shortage in the railways was noted” (October 13, 1941) “...the Irish Press was discussed and from the position of the Fianna Fáil organisation it was considered very unsatisfactory” (July 13, 1942) “...It was agreed that the attitude of the Irish Press towards the general election publicity was unsatisfactory” (January 30, 1943). But as the decade progressed, the time of the committee is more taken up with radio coverage, lectures and broadcasts, and discussion of the Irish Press all but disappears.

4.8 Conclusion

The war years were a time of retrenchment for the paper. Douglas Gageby, who joined the paper in 1945, recalls that “ The Press had saved money during the war. The papers were very small – four pages or so – and there was very little money spent.” (Interview with the author, October 10, 1997). Wartime was also a time of rare co-operation between the rival newspapers: “Old animosities were temporarily forgotten as the three national newspaper companies pooled together to buy two lorries to distribute their papers.” (O’Brien, 2000, P94).

In early 1943, de Valera introduced legislation extending the life of the Dáil, pleading that the Emergency made the extension necessary. Due to widespread opposition, he was forced to withdraw it. In the period before the 1943 General Election, the Irish Press again rallied to the Fianna Fáil flag, dismissing calls for a national government, and announcing that it was “not only folly but madness to suggest at this moment of peril, the people should hand over the government to a bunch of squabbling groups”. (IP, June 21, 1943). The election resulted in a Fianna Fáil-led minority government, at which the Irish Press express disappointment, for Fianna Fáil has been entrusted with

“the onus on forming a government without having received the overall strength required to carry out that grave responsibility”. (IP, June 26, 1943). The Irish Press also extolled the virtues of de Valera’s famous radio broadcast in which he replied to remarks by Winston Churchill which criticised Ireland’s neutral stance during the war. The streets were deserted at 10.0 that night, reported the paper, as de Valera delivered his reply from the studios of Radio Éireann. “It is a reply for which Irish people all over the world will thank the Taoiseach for having made, for it sets out in an unanswerable form the reasons which determined this nation’s policy throughout these past five years,” said the Press editorial. (IP: May 17, 1945). (Indeed, the Press published the speech in pamphlet form some time later.)

The lifting of newspaper censorship at the end of the war involved the Irish Press in another controversy in which the paper again supported the government position. Both the Irish Independent and the Irish Times complained that they had been unfairly treated by the censor, whose office, according to the Independent, “operated in a stupid, clumsy and unjust manner ... frequently inspired not by national unity but by party political motives”. (II, May 12, 1945). The Irish Press, however, defended the censor, feeling it “incumbent to pay tribute to the sense and impartiality which characterised the very difficult work the censors were called upon to do”. (IP, May 12, 1945).

Soon after, the Press was again offering uncritical support to de Valera and Fianna Fáil for the election set for February 4, 1948: “To vote Fianna Fáil is the duty of all who would not hand us over to the frustration that afflicts so many European nations, nations which have long envied Ireland the blessing of a region securely founded in a

government certain of a parliamentary majority.” (IP: January 2, 1948).

In the run-up to the 1948 general election, the stance of the Irish Press had come almost full circle since the contest of 1932. Just as they had ridiculed Cumann na nGaedheal’s arguments in favour of stability and continuity in 1932, now they supported them when they were put forward by Fianna Fáil. Just as they had bristled when the establishment had tried to link Fianna Fáil with Communism in 1932, so now they gave prominent coverage to Ministers who tried to similarly smear the radical new party Clann na Poblachta (founded in 1946). Indeed, the Press’s attitude to Sean MacBride’s party is interesting, as the party’s policies were very close to those of early Fianna Fáil, stressing self-sufficiency, economic independence from Britain and the return to a rural society. The Press dismissed the policies of the new party; editorials poured scorn on their proposals and warned about the threat to Christian democracy from the international threat of communism. For instance the Press derided as slave labour Clann na Poblachta’s policy of afforestation, conveniently forgetting that they bore a striking similarity to de Valera’s proposal for labour camps during the Emergency. The attacks on Clann na Poblachta were invested with an extra spice with the departure of Aodh de Blacam, author of the immensely popular Roddy the Rover column, to the MacBride camp. His attacks on Fianna Fáil, accusing them of complacency and of abandoning the old policies of protectionism and self-sufficiency, put the Irish Press on the defensive. There was a new, didactic tone to the Press editorials, as if “the position of voice of the government had created a tendency to ‘talk down’ to and lecture its readership.” (Curran 1994: 320). The Press’s coverage of de Valera’s campaigning showed how complacent the paper had become. The accounts of the Fianna Fáil leader’s progress

through the western counties reads like an account of a state visit, with descriptions of the great man moving among the people. It sums up the change that had taken place in the Press: description had taken over from analysis and argument.

In the event, Fianna Fáil (68 seats) were forced into the opposition benches when Fine Gael (31 seats), Labour and National Labour (19 seats), Clann na Talmhan (7 seats) and Clann na Poblachta (10 seats) formed what would today be called a Rainbow Coalition. It was the end of 16 years in power, many of which had been spent presiding over cutbacks, shortages and rationing of various kinds. "Fianna Fáil looked as worn out as the country itself." (O'Brien, 2000, P96).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

It was in the period 1926-1948 that four key elements of the Irish Press were put in place. The corporate structure of the company was established by the Articles of Association in 1926, and then underwent a significant change with the incorporation of the Irish Press American Corporation in 1930. This structure established the all-powerful role of the Controlling Director and ensured the dynastic nature of the de Valera family's control of the company. It was during these years too that the company's identification with Fianna Fáil was established and that the company's fundraising efforts took place. This was also the period in which the industrial relations tone was set for the company. These four factors came, in my view to be defining characteristics of the Irish Press during the period under review. It might be a fruitful exercise for a scholar of the 1990s to examine the extent to which these four factors contributed to the eventual collapse of the Irish Press group in 1995.

5.2 The relationship with Fianna Fáil

The role played by the Irish Press in legitimising Fianna Fáil was a crucial one. Electoral support for Fianna Fáil was growing in the years before the paper began publishing, but it is by no mean certain that, without the platform provided by the

Irish Press, that de Valera's party would have secured a sufficiently large percentage of the vote to form a government, either on its own or with the support of independent deputies. It is certain, however, that with the support of the Irish Press, Fianna Fáil was able to form a government after the general election of 1932. In six months, from September 1931 to January 1932, the paper had changed the perception of Fianna Fáil from a party of dangerous radicals to a serious political party capable of government.

The paper and the party had the same political origins in the cultural nationalist vision of Eamon de Valera. It was a vision of an Irish Ireland which was not articulated by any of the national newspapers available in Ireland at the time of the Irish Press's birth.

The Irish Press succeeded in demonising Cumann na nGaedheal and its supporters as "unpatriotic, urban-based imperialists" (O'Brien 2000, P307) while at the same time giving voice to de Valera's vision of a Catholic, nationalist, rural community. It attacked with gusto what it saw as the Cumann na nGaedheal government's subservience to Britain and supported anti-Empire movements all over the world. At every opportunity, it put forward de Valera's agenda for an independent, agrarian, anti-corporate, self-sufficient society and contrasted that agenda favourably with the conservative, laissez-faire policies of Cumann na nGaedheal. The primary role of the Irish Press in that crucial first year of its existence was to propound Fianna Fáil policy, to show it as a viable alternative to the Cumann na nGaedheal Free State administration, and to reassure its readers that Fianna Fáil were capable of taking charge of the country and managing its economy and its relationship with Britain. Essentially, the Irish Press was a persuader for Fianna Fáil.

Once Fianna Fáil assumed power in 1932, the role of the Irish Press changed. In the years that Fianna Fáil were in power, the Irish Press was not merely charged with persuading its readers about the merits of Fianna Fáil policy, but also with defending the party in times of crisis. Throughout the controversies over the removal of the Oath, the McNeill Affair, the withholding of land annuities and the Economic War, the paper defended the government's stance from attack from the British government, from international public opinion and from opposition parties. The paper's tone changed from that of a campaigning, radical, anti-Establishment journal to that of a conservative newspaper interested in preserving the status quo and opposed to radical change. This change of tone is most evident in (i) its treatment of Clann na Poblachta, which was beginning to threaten Fianna Fáil position as the voice of nationalism, and (ii) its tone in lecturing or talking down to its readership during the Emergency. Where once it had stood shoulder to shoulder with them, now it told them what their duty was. It had become a defender of Fianna Fáil.

During several controversies involving the Irish Press during these years, such as the McNeill Affair and the row over the repayment of the Republican Loan, de Valera stated that he had no say in the day-to-day running of the Irish Press. This is at odds with the evidence, which shows that he had no compunction in changing the way in which the paper reported the news. In the McNeill Affair, the Irish Press was used as a propaganda tool in a very direct way, and the minutes of the party's Publicity Subcommittee show that Fianna Fáil had a proprietary attitude towards the paper, presuming to decide when it would carry commemorative supplements and offering

the German Ambassador access to its columns to refute a series of articles on Germany taken from the London Daily Telegraph.

From its very conception in 1919, when de Valera first became convinced of the need for a national newspaper to put across his views, to its birth in 1931, and throughout 16 years of unbroken Fianna Fáil government from 1932 to 1948, the links between the Irish Press and the Fianna Fáil party were close. However, towards the end of the period under review, the beginnings of a split in the hegemony of Fianna Fáil were taking place. The catalyst for the disagreement was a plan to introduce a system of children's allowances in 1944. The debate on this initiative centred on Sean Lemass and his innovative Department of Industry and Commerce and Sean McEntee and his conservative Department of Finance. This divergence of views among the senior ranks of the party "would be greatly amplified in the free trade debates of the 1950s." (O'Brien, 2000, P96). The Irish Press supported Machete's view, but the first cracks in the monolith of de Valera's cultural nationalism had appeared.

The dilemma over which section of Fianna Fáil to support became a familiar one for the Irish Press. As the party fragmented over various issues in the period 1948-1995 the paper was left plaintively calling for unity. This lack of engagement with the process of change contrasts sharply with the radical, populist early days of the newspaper. The predictable nature of its support for Fianna Fáil, or, in the absence of a unified Fianna Fáil policy, its calls for party unity, together with the many rhetorical u-turns the paper was forced to make in the transition from a persuader for Fianna Fáil to a defender of the party, damaged the credibility of the paper. "In a sense, the paper has never fully escaped the legacy of populism, the contradiction between tradition

and modernity, which has been the hallmark of politics in Ireland.” (Curran, 1994, P368). Although the Irish Press supported Lemass in the debate over the opening up of the Irish economy in 1957, it was somehow caught with one leg in the past. The fact that it was in the control of the de Valera family from 1926 to 1995 meant it could never ultimately decouple itself from de Valera’s cultural nationalism of the 1930s, whereas the Fianna Fáil party managed to change and develop from the late 1950s onwards, as de Valera’s influence began to wane.

Jim McGuinness, who became editor in 1954, describes the dilemma of the Irish Press of (i) not being as useful to Fianna Fáil in a more sophisticated, modern Ireland, and (ii) not being free enough of Fianna Fáil to reach out to a more general, less politically affiliated audience, well:

“These clear delineations were beginning to become blurred...I felt that this welcome lack, if you like, of extreme partisanship...made the job of the Press coming out as an honourable, constructive supporter of one party was deficient in two ways. It didn’t make it as formidable a tool in the hands of the Fianna Fáil party as it would have been and it didn’t enable it to reach out to people as a newspaper in the way that it could do if it took a more objective view.”

(Interview with the author, August 7, 1997)

The paper's close ties with Fianna Fáil, and with the de Valera brand of cultural nationalism in particular, were forged in the period 1919-1948, but they continued to influence the paper until its closure. Throughout many of the modern-day crises to have affected Fianna Fáil, such as the Arms Crisis, the Haughey-Colley and the Haughey-O'Malley divisions, the paper felt, in the words of its last editor Hugh Lambert, "hobbled by the past," unsure "which Fianna Fáil to support". (O'Brien, 2000, 312)

5.3 Corporate structure

The conjunction of two separate threads regarding the corporate structure of the Irish Press contrived to insulate the board of the company from any outside interference and from the influence of market forces. The first of these was the creation, in the company's Articles of Association, of the role of Controlling Director. This figure was endowed with absolute power over the commercial and editorial policies of the company. The Controlling Director was also endowed with the power to choose his own successor. The second was the way in which Eamon de Valera went about persuading the investors in the original Republican Bond to transfer their investment to the Irish Press. The ownership of this money was transferred, not to the Irish Press company, but to de Valera personally as Controlling Director. Furthermore, the legal documents which the original subscribers were entreated to sign entrusted the money to de Valera and his successors in perpetuity. Thus the coming together of these two circumstances, whether by design or not, contrived to secure control of the Irish Press company for de Valera and any he chose to succeed him.

The way in which the Irish Press was constituted, with sole executive power concentrated in the person of the controlling director, may have been suited to the early mission of the paper to put forward the Republican point of view to the public. It is easy to understand de Valera's early fear that the Irish Press might easily be blown off the course he had plotted for it when he first dreamed of the paper in the early 1920s. But by the time he handed control over to his son in 1959, the mission of the Irish Press was largely accomplished. During the period under review here, Fianna Fáil had been in power for 16 years. For that time, the Irish Press had put across the Fianna Fáil point of view. There was no longer a culture of ignoring, or denigrating the utterances of Republican leaders in the Irish national press. So the controls set in place in the early, pioneering days of the early 1930s were no longer necessary in the late 1940s. Indeed, it is possible to argue that such a rigid structure and tight control prevented the market from influencing the management of the Irish Press in any way whatsoever.

Furthermore, the fact that subscribers on both sides of the Atlantic were mostly people of modest means meant that there were no institutional investors who might have applied greater pressure for transparency or change. An examination of the early returns for the Irish Press at the Irish Companies Registration Office shows that subscriptions came in small amounts. According to the companies regulations, share allotments of more than £8 in value had to be registered with the Companies Office, so along with each annual return is a list of the smattering of shareholders who had paid up since the last return. These lists provide an insight into the type of investor the Irish Press attracted: NT (national teacher), labourer, maidservant and farmer are the

most common occupations, with “gentleman” and “married woman” less frequent. The preponderance of trades like bootmaker, cooper and blacksmith also strike the modern reader. The amount invested was almost universally the minimum £1. Some clerics managed £10, while an investment of £100 or more stands out among the pages and pages of smaller “speculators”. One commentator points out:

“Paradoxically, the predominance of small shareholders made it easier to gain control of the paper than would have been the case had it been financed in the main by commercial interests.” (Curran 1996: 8).

Other writers and analysts have been keen to show that de Valera and his family acted for personal gain. In the accounts in Coogan, and indeed in the Dáil attack by Browne, there is the inference that de Valera was benefiting financially from his role in the Irish Press. This writer does not believe that to be the case. There is no evidence of a great personal fortune being amassed by the de Valera family. It appears that de Valera, having created his “great enterprise”, could not let go. To this writer, it appears de Valera believed himself to be acting from the highest motives and was genuinely wounded by the attacks on him. Such was his idealistic fervour when it came to the Irish Press that he thought little about appearances. He was so sure of his own morality that he believed his personal charisma alone would banish any base imputations of wrong-doing. In considering the fate of the Irish Press, it ultimately matters little whether de Valera had 500 shares or 5,000 shares. It matters only that de Valera first conceived, then funded and lastly ran the paper like a personal fiefdom, and that the way he structured the company allowed him and his descendants to do so for over 60 years. It seems likely to this writer that (i) de Valera’s creation of the role of Controlling Director was motivated by a concern to protect the nationalist ethos of

the paper, and (ii) that the legal copper-fastening of the transfer of funds from the Republican Loan investors was undertaken from the same motives.

However, the fact that the company was thus arranged, with an omnipotent Controlling Director at its head, and the fact that the Controlling Director was entitled to choose his successor, turned the Irish Press company into a de Valera dynasty. The dynastic nature of the company, together with its rigid hierarchy, made it particularly unsuited to adapting to change. “Of all the national titles, the Irish Times was the first to recognise the need for change. While the Independent followed suit in the 1970s, the Press titles waited until the recession-ridden 1980s to modernise their titles – a delay that would ultimately prove fatal.” (O’Brien, 2001, P234). Taken together with its institutional nostalgia for the cultural nationalism of the 1930s, this rigid corporate structure was a recipe for commercial stasis.

5.4 Industrial relations

There was a builders’ strike just as the premises of the Irish Press was nearing completion in 1930; the newspaper group’s demise came in a flurry of industrial action, including several strikes, works-to-rule and a lock-out. Nor were the periods in between notable for their industrial calm. The years 1933 to 1935 were punctuated with sackings, resignations and claims of wrongful dismissal. The troubled industrial relations which contributed to the eventual downfall of the company had their origins in this period, and the tone was set by the treatment of founding editor Frank Gallagher. Gallagher had brought the paper great success in terms of circulation, but advertising revenue was slower to come in. The general lack of resources meant that

Gallagher was forced to produce the Irish Press with 20% fewer staff than his main rival, the Irish Independent. Wages at the fledgling Irish Press were also lower than at the Independent. In this period, Gallagher had frequent clashes with the board, including one over his sanctioning of £5 expenses for a journalist relocating to London. The Independent rate for the same circumstance was £25, but the board saw fit to accuse Gallagher of extravagance. This accusation led to one of many resignation offers from Gallagher.

The appointment of an “efficiency expert”, John J Harrington, from the United States, and the constant fretting over finances of Vivion de Valera, who joined the company in 1933, put Gallagher under immense pressure regarding the management of his editorial budget. The interference of Harrington and Vivion de Valera eventually proved too much for Gallagher, and he left in 1935. The pretext for his resignation was the systematic victimisation by Harrington of a wages clerk who had a minor involvement in yet another Irish Press strike, but the origins of his unease with his treatment by the board went back further. “Gallagher was revered by his staff and he trained most of them, so pressure on him from Harrington and the board, together with his resignation, caused an upheaval that contributed to the long-standing division between management and editorial staff that lasted into the 1980s.” (Cahill, 1997, P286).

The high-handed approach of Harrington, the reluctance of Eamon de Valera to intervene in the many disputes involving Gallagher and the board, the confrontational nature of disputes between unions and management in the period 1931 to 1948 all contributed to the creation of an “us and them” split between the commercial and

editorial sides of the company. As one commentator remarks of later disputes:

“Negotiations with the Press Group were always confrontational; a result perhaps of the abysmal industrial relations culture that had afflicted the company from day one.”

(O’Brien, 2000, P303).

5.5 Fund-raising

The fund-raising operation for the Irish Press was a failure on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite mobilising every resource at his disposal – from enlisting some of Fianna Fáil’s top administrators to galvanising the party’s local cumainn – the amount raised was disappointing. The fact that de Valera was trying to raise money at the height of the Great Depression contributed to the shortfall between the amount sought (£200,000) and the amount raised (£160,000). Even these amounts are misleading, at least in respect of the Irish fund-raising operation, as the amount pledged was by no means the same as the amount subscribed. The early annual returns of the Irish Press company show that the shares allotted exceeded the shares “subscribed”: the money from the company’s small subscribers arrived in small amounts over the first years of the paper’s existence. A picture emerges in the early to mid-1930s of a business under-funded by 20%, some £40,000 short of the “minimum necessary” to establish the newspaper. Random checks on the returns of the Irish Press American Corporation show that the number of issued shares rose to 61,497 by the mid-1950s. The Irish Press company itself increased its nominal share capital to 250,000 in 1935, but even by the time of its closure in 1995, subscribed capital amounted to £228,637, a figure that had not increased since the mid-1940s. (Irish Companies Registration Office).

It is clear that these four factors which came to define the Irish Press - poor industrial relations, under-capitalisation, inflexible corporate structure and out-dated loyalty to Fianna Fáil – all came into place during the timeframe covered by this thesis.

Appendix 1

Leading article in the first issue of the Irish Press, September 5, 1931

“Our Purpose

The Irish Press greets the Irish people.

Our intention is to be the voice of the people, to speak for them, to give utterance to their ideals, to defend them against slander and false witness.

Our purpose, also, is to speak to the people, to offer them guidance in times of difficulty, to uphold and strengthen them in hours of crises, always to direct them towards those things which matter to them most.

Our service will be to the whole people. We are not the organ of an individual, or a group, or a party. We are a national organ in all that that term conveys. To us the Irish nation is a brotherhood, a separate community whose sub-divisions may have aims peculiar to themselves, but all of whom may call this country their own and strive to make it great.

Our policy is simple and can be stated simply. In national affairs we stand for independence, for that greatest temporal blessing a nation may enjoy, the full liberty of its people.

We seek the establishment of a free Government based on Christian principles and founded in social justice.

Our ideal, culturally, is an Irish Ireland, an Ireland aware of its own greatness, sure of itself, conscious of the spiritual forces which have formed it into a distinct people having its own language and customs and a traditionally Christian philosophy of life.

The realisation of those ideals calls for one quality more than any other – an honesty that is above question. We have given ourselves the motto: Truth in the News. We

shall be faithful to it. Even where the news exposes a weakness of our own, or a shortcoming in the policies we approve, or a criticism of the individuals with whom we are associated, we shall publish it if its inherent news values so demand. In foreign news truth may not be so easy to discover, for like all papers the Irish Press must rely for accounts of certain foreign happenings on agencies which see international events from their own angle. We shall, however, never consciously use this journal to mislead our friends or to misrepresent those who oppose us.

Until to-day the Irish people have had no daily paper in which Irish interests were made predominant. There has been nothing comparable in Ireland to the great English, French, and American dailies, which look naturally out upon the world from their own national territory and speak authoritatively for their peoples. Until to-day there was no Irish newspaper which could be quoted abroad as expressing the distinctive outlook of this nation on international affairs and on the problems of industry and economics which beset the world. The absence of such a journal has been a grievous loss to this country. The Irish Press makes good that deficiency. Henceforth other nations will have a means of knowing that Irish opinion is not merely an indistinct echo of a certain section of the British Press.

We cannot give ourselves a higher purpose than to make this paper what those who have so long waited for it desire it to be. The ten thousand Irishmen and women, here at home and beyond the seas who have made this great enterprise possible, were inspired by no hope of gain. Their aim was that Ireland should have a newspaper technically efficient in all departments, assured of material success, yet seeking above all thing the freedom and well-being of the nation.

(IP: September 5, 1931).

Appendix 2

Leading article in the first issue of the Evening Press, June 3, 1932

“Good evening everybody!

The Evening Press in this, its first issue, tells its readers what it means to do.

It means first of all to be a newspaper [EP emphasis], not forgetting the things of interest all over the world, nor failing to report humanity’s doings in every land, but giving Irish news its right place.

Hundreds of correspondents, a large staff of reporters, special representatives – all these will gather the happenings of the day for the Evening Press and give them to its readers.

Thirdly it means to be a bright paper. Those who read evening papers want to feel happy about it. The day’s work is done, the day itself is closing. The Evening Press will remember that, and in its make-up, its features and its manner of presenting news it will avoid dullness and have life on every page.

Finally, the Evening Press will be a national newspaper. It is founded because the Irish people, the ordinary people – not this class or that class, this party or that party – just the ordinary people have come to believe in themselves, have come to realise they are the Irish nation. So they are and the Evening Press will represent them.

Its policy will be THE PEOPLE [EP capitals]. In the name of the people it will stand for national independence, convinced that until we have that we cannot give to civilisation the greatest things in us.

It will stand for Irish things, for Gaelic things first – for the national language, for

national customs, for national pastimes and for a full and rich national outlook.

The Evening Press has no antagonisms. Without concern for who is hurt, it will stand for the truth; and also without concern for who is hurt, it will stand against whatever tends to injure the status, the culture, the progress of the nation. It may have to oppose parties and men. It will do so openly and above board, as strongly as it can, but as fairly as it can.

That is our policy and our purpose. Confident that it is the right policy and the right purpose, the Evening Press has adopted it. In pursuing it, it will keep one wise rule: to be bright in all it does; and one great ideal: to be just to all our people.”

List of abbreviations

AARIR: Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic

AP: An Phoblacht

BUP: British United Press (news agency)

B&F: Business and Finance

EP: Evening Press (June – October, 1932)

FF: Fianna Fail archives

FOIF: Friends of Irish Freedom

GSR: Great Southern Railway

II: Irish Independent

IP: Irish Press

NLI: National Library of Ireland

SFL: San Francisco Leader

ST: Sunday Times

TCD: Trinity College Dublin

WSJ: Wall Street Journal

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