

## The Tribune's turbulent times

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### Introduction

The *Sunday Tribune's* 30-year-story starts with *Hibernia's* demise, as an attempt to continue by other means that magazine's dissenting journalism. Set up by an unlikely partnership of John Mulcahy, proprietor-editor of *Hibernia*, and Hugh McLaughlin, commercial magazine publisher and *Sunday World* co-founder, the *Sunday Tribune* went through several distinct phases in its three decades: 1980-82, under the control of McLaughlin, with various associates; 1983-94, under the editorship and partial control of Vincent Browne, with changing investment partners, finally Independent Newspapers; 1994-2011, under the effective control of Independent Newspapers, with a succession of four editors. This chapter concentrates on the first two phases, from the founding years through Vincent Browne's editorship. In these 13 years, the *Tribune* sought to maintain a structure and perspective that was independent and distinct within the mass-market media of the time.

We review several key features of the *Sunday Tribune* of that period, and present a portrait of a newspaper that has a particular place in the history of Irish journalism and newspaper publishing. But we also describe the pervasive uncertainty about the *Tribune's* commercial potential and even its survival, as investors and senior executives came and went frequently, with unsettling effects on the continuing production of the newspaper.

### Rapid rise and self-destruction

The *Sunday Tribune* was launched in November 1980 as the first Irish national newspaper in compact size and with spot-colour available throughout the paper. Its content and layout were quite similar to those of *Hibernia* in its last years, not least because the core of the editorial and production team as well as regular arts and books contributors carried over from *Hibernia*. Among the significant additions to this group were Jim Farrelly (ex-*Irish Independent*) as news editor, Mary Holland (ex-*Observer*) as political analyst, particularly of Northern Ireland, Tom McGurk (ex-RTE) as magazine editor and feature writer, Geraldine Kennedy (ex-*Irish Times*, later to return there as editor) as political correspondent, and Colm Toibín, who was to become an internationally renowned author, as radio reviewer.

Sport had not featured in *Hibernia* and Mulcahy phoned Seamus Martin, then with the *Evening Herald*, to offer him the position of sports editor.<sup>1</sup> Martin, in turn, recruited reporter Eoghan Corry and columnists Breandán Ó hÉithir, Anthony Cronin and Eugene McGee and also 'had the "honour" of giving [Eamonn Dunphy] his first regular job in journalism'.<sup>2</sup> According to Dunphy's account, however, editor Mulcahy informed Martin that Dunphy was to be his soccer correspondent and Martin 'appeared to grimace'.<sup>3</sup>

In his first editorial for the *Sunday Tribune*, John Mulcahy declared the new paper's 'aim to hold an independent line in politics and a liberal one in economic and social affairs'.<sup>4</sup> But his partner, Hugh McLaughlin had let it be known there would be no resemblance to *Hibernia*.<sup>5</sup> Mulcahy found the relationship difficult and soon left, becoming perhaps the only person, through the sale of his shares to the Smurfit Group, to make a capital gain from the *Sunday Tribune*. Conor Brady, then planning a study break from *The Irish Times*, where he was night editor, records that he received a phone call from McLaughlin, whom he did not know, inviting him to become editor with an 'absolutely free

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<sup>1</sup> Seamus Martin, *Good Times and Bad – from the Coombe to the Kremlin*, a memoir (Mercier Press, 2008), p.55

<sup>2</sup> Martin, 2008, p.56

<sup>3</sup> Eamonn Dunphy, *The Rocky Road* (Penguin Ireland, 2013), p.254

<sup>4</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 November, 1980

<sup>5</sup> *Irish Times*, 12 September 1980

hand in editorial policy'.<sup>6</sup> Within weeks of taking up the position, Brady switched the paper's format to broadsheet, considered more suitable for the 'serious' journalism to which the *Tribune* aspired.

These were congenial times for a newspaper with strong political coverage and keen insight into events in Northern Ireland; the H-Blocks hunger strike had started in October 1980 and it rippled into politics in the Republic, as hunger-strikers and supporters stood for election in the June 1981 general election – the first of three to take place in less than 18 months. Geraldine Kennedy frequently supplied page 1 leads, including on alleged phone-tapping of phones at Fine Gael headquarters<sup>7</sup> and on rifts within Fianna Fáil. An exclusive interview in June 1981 with Fianna Fáil leader Charles Haughey in opposition was a prelude to many stories based on information from Haughey's opponents within the party, when he was in government. Conor Brady later recorded that he was urged by the former head of a semi-state body to 'curb the activities' of Geraldine Kennedy and that Hugh McLaughlin had a similar approach from 'some people around Haughey'.<sup>8</sup> McLaughlin also had a direct approach from Haughey himself<sup>9</sup> and in a radio interview following a report by Kennedy on a challenge to his leadership of the party Haughey said that he would be 'inclined to look after my own future' if he worked for the *Sunday Tribune*.<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy continued with her critical coverage of Fianna Fáil, including a report on the fund-raisers behind the party<sup>11</sup> and an interview with Haughey's rival George Colley<sup>12</sup>, who criticised low political standards and implied he might withdraw support from the government. Kennedy and reporter Darach McDonald reported on phone surveillance of parliamentarians, making their calls accessible to Haughey and others close to his leadership<sup>13</sup>; Kennedy's commentary asked: 'Did Haughey know?' A year later it emerged that Kennedy's own phone was being tapped at the time she was reporting for the *Sunday Tribune* on dissent within Fianna Fáil.

With audited average weekly sales in the first half of 1981 of 110,000, the new paper was comfortably outselling the 130-year-old *Irish Times*; the print run reached 140,000 during that year. Despite this early and notable success, however, the Smurfit Group withdrew their financial backing. In an editorial on the parting of the ways<sup>14</sup>, it was claimed that there was 'a certain feeling of relief in both camps' but also – and not for the last time – 'the future control of the *Sunday Tribune* must remain a subject of some speculation'. The editorial team continued to grow, however; new entrants included Emily O'Reilly, who joined from college as education correspondent, and Deirdre Purcell (billed as 'RTE newscaster') who contributed profiles and interviews.

With Smurfit's withdrawal there was no strong force to restrain McLaughlin as he embarked on a diversification that was intended to support the *Sunday Tribune* as part of a larger stable. Jim Farrelly moved from the *Tribune* to lead a new title, the tabloid *Daily News*; it lasted just two weeks before closing and bringing down the whole enterprise in October 1982. Senior journalists sought to find alternative backers, approaching the insurance company, PMPA, and the venture capital arm of Allied Irish Banks, among others.<sup>15</sup> But just weeks after the *Tribune* closed, *Magill* editor Vincent Browne secured financial support from Tony Ryan, who had become one of Ireland's richest people through aircraft leasing, to buy the paper's title from the liquidator.

### Resurrection and a new agenda

It took just under six months, including negotiations with several print unions, to prepare the re-launch. Browne recruited Gerald Barry from RTE as political correspondent, Paul Tansey from the

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<sup>6</sup> Conor Brady, *Up With the Times* (Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p.50

<sup>7</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 25 January, 1981

<sup>8</sup> Brady, 2005, pp. 192-3

<sup>9</sup> Mark O'Brien, *The Fourth Estate - journalism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2017), p.189

<sup>10</sup> O'Brien, 2017, p.188

<sup>11</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 9 May 1982

<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 6 June 1982

<sup>13</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 27 June 1982

<sup>14</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 16 May 1982

<sup>15</sup> Martin, 2008, p. 60

*Irish Times* as business and deputy editor, and John Kelleher, an old associate, from RTE to be managing director. Barbara Nugent, as advertising manager, and Martin Dobey, as financial controller, made up the rest of the senior management team.

Browne set out his stall at length in an editorial, *Where We Stand*, that committed the paper to support a pluralist society and women's rights, and to cover Northern Ireland and the economy in depth.<sup>16</sup> The *Sunday Tribune* declared its position clearly on several current and conflicted issues: 'We are opposed to the constitutional ban on divorce, to the present laws relating to contraception, to the Catholic church's attitudes on mixed marriages and integrated education ... we are also opposed to the proposed constitutional amendment on the abortion issue'. At the same time, the editorial insisted that 'it is not fundamentally the editorial views of a newspaper that determine its editorial character, it is the standards it brings to its journalism'. As we shall see, however, the themes and positions highlighted in this editorial did very significantly shape the paper's journalism. The *Sunday Tribune* was strongly, and unusually, issues- and agenda-driven.

On page 1 in the first edition under his leadership, Browne announced: 'It's Great to be Back', firmly linking his project with that of the previous *Sunday Tribune*, which 'achieved an authority and credibility unmatched in the Irish Sunday publishing scene and we hope to advance from there'.<sup>17</sup> Also on page 1, strong stories on Fine Gael's internal divisions over the proposed constitutional abortion amendment and on an IRA vigilante punishment shooting in Dublin set the tone for what followed.

The constitutional amendment was a gift to the *Sunday Tribune* that kept on giving, up to the vote in September 1983 and beyond. There was continuing coverage of intra-party and inter-party rifts on the issue, including opposition within Fine Gael to party leader Garret FitzGerald and divisions within the Catholic church on the guidance to be given to voters. In an early example of the two-page analysis of an issue that became a *Sunday Tribune* hallmark, Emily O'Reilly and Joe Carroll examined 'The Pro-Life Campaign – How It Started. How It Succeeded. The People Behind It'.<sup>18</sup> A month after the vote, Carroll reported that senior Vatican officials thought the wording of the amendment was 'unsatisfactory' and the issue too complex to be decided in a referendum; Carroll explored at length 'Inside the Hierarchy', revealing unseen differences there.<sup>19</sup>

It was perhaps the *Sunday Tribune*'s attention to these issues that led to a call coming to the paper on a Saturday afternoon in February 1984 from someone with first-hand information of a terrible tragedy a few days earlier: a teenage girl and her baby had died following childbirth at a grotto in a Midlands town. The informant gave the name of the town, Granard, Co. Longford, and of the girl, Ann Lovett, and little more. After hurried inquiries and a long discussion about whether to use the girl's name, the *Sunday Tribune* had a report of ten short paragraphs whose publication had ripple effects far greater than the size of the report might have suggested.<sup>20</sup> The story was amplified in news media, later in song and performance, over the weeks and months that followed, as Ann Lovett became an instantly recognised symbol of something much greater than a single girl's experience.

A week after the initial report, the *Sunday Tribune* gave two pages to Ann Lovett's and related stories, including personal experiences of the religious-run Mother and Baby homes that made headlines again and again over the following three decades.<sup>21</sup> In other media, 'a flood of stories told of similar experiences and episodes'.<sup>22</sup> But in Granard, the predominant feeling was of hostility towards the *Sunday Tribune* and other media for 'bringing shame on the town'.<sup>23</sup> In continuing coverage in the

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<sup>16</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 17 April 1983

<sup>17</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 17 April 1983

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 24 April 1983

<sup>19</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 16 October 1983

<sup>20</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 5 February 1984

<sup>21</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 12 February 1984

<sup>22</sup> Colum Kenny, *Moments That Changed US* (Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p.43

<sup>23</sup> O'Brien, 2017, p.163

*Sunday Tribune*, Emily O'Reilly wrote of four other deaths of babies 'in unexplained circumstances'.<sup>24</sup>

The *Sunday Tribune's* openness to points of view beyond the spectrum generally covered in media was seen most clearly but also most controversially in relation to Northern Ireland and republicanism. In an exclusive report Vincent Browne and Gerald Barry – very often the authors, individually or jointly, of page 1 lead stories – detailed a signed commitment given in 1973, but not honoured, by the then Garda Commissioner to maverick republicans Eddie Gallagher and Marion Coyle, kidnapers of businessman Dieter Herrema.<sup>25</sup> In another exclusive, Browne interviewed republican fugitive Dominic McGlinchey, leader of the Irish National Liberation Army, who admitted his involvement in many murders and bombings.<sup>26</sup> In an accompanying editorial, Browne denounced McGlinchey's actions but defended the interview on the basis that 'the public should know more about him'. Gardai visited the newspaper's offices in an unsuccessful attempt to secure information about McGlinchey's whereabouts, whom they were actively hunting. Tony Ryan was very upset about the interview and 'summoned' Browne and John Kelleher were his Dublin house where the confrontation was physical as well as verbal.<sup>27</sup>

The already strained relationship between editor and sponsor was coming close to breaking point. The paper's sales for July-December 1983 were an average 93,266 per week, the response from readers was encouraging, and, according to a page 1 notice 'we have managed to cut costs drastically compared with the former *Sunday Tribune*'.<sup>28</sup> But there were frequent cashflow crises, which occasioned 'phone calls to Kilboy [Ryan's Co Tipperary home] on Friday evenings saying the paper couldn't come out unless money for the printer was immediately made available'.<sup>29</sup>

#### A 'permanent state of crisis'

Financial controller Martin Dobey, in one of a series of reminiscences on his blog (at [martindobey.blogspot.ie](http://martindobey.blogspot.ie)) remembered 'three years in almost a permanent state of crisis' as the paper established itself.<sup>30</sup> Ryan and Browne were destined, Browne said later, to be uneasy business partners, commenting ironically, 'We are much too alike, although he lacks my tact and I his patience'.<sup>31</sup> From an initial investment of £50,000 in shares and an agreed loan of £330,000, Ryan ended up pouring more and more money into the newspaper and came to view the newspaper's demands as constant and uncontrollable.<sup>32</sup> Less than a year after becoming involved, Ryan wanted out and eventually Browne managed to find a small number of friends, including USIT managing director Gordon Colleary, to buy his shares.<sup>33</sup> While the deal prevented closure, the company remained on a knife-edge.

In negotiations with the National Union of Journalists in early 1984, the company stated that 'special co-operation and commitments are required from the journalists involved in the newspaper to ensure its viability and success'.<sup>34</sup> The situation was such that the company made provisions in its agreement with the union for the possibility of the paper closing within a year. The company publicly committed to 'greater concentration of resources on the editorial side during the coming year'.<sup>35</sup> But despite the positive signs and an earlier denial that Ryan had put his shares for sale, in June 1984, 15 months after the *Sunday Tribune's* re-launch, he withdrew his support.

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<sup>24</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 July 1984

<sup>25</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 May, 1983

<sup>26</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 27 Nov., 1983

<sup>27</sup> Richard Aldous, Tony Ryan – Ireland's aviator (Gill & Macmillan, 2013), p.88

<sup>28</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 10 July, 1983

<sup>29</sup> Aldous, 2013, p.89

<sup>30</sup> Post at [martindobey.blogspot.ie](http://martindobey.blogspot.ie), 17 April, 2008

<sup>31</sup> Ivor Kenny, 'Vincent Browne – The *Sunday Tribune*', in Ivor Kenny: Talking to Ourselves – conversations with editors of Irish news media (Kenny's Bookshop and Gallery, 1994), p.123

<sup>32</sup> Interview by Pat Brennan with Martin Dobey, 9 April, 2017

<sup>33</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 July, 1984

<sup>34</sup> *Sunday Tribune* industrial relations documentation from personal papers of Deirdre McQuillan

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 18 April, 1984

When Ryan's departure was announced in the *Sunday Tribune*, Vincent Browne stated: 'I believe the future of the paper is assured'.<sup>36</sup> He and associates had paid Ryan £50,000 for the title and made a long-term arrangement to repay loans. Despite the public assurance about the paper's future the company's agreement with the NUJ covered 'the emergency period from 30<sup>th</sup> July 1984 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1985 or whenever an investor joins the company – whichever is the earlier'. *Tribune* staff were asked to accept wage cuts in an effort to reduce weekly costs by 7 per cent.<sup>37</sup> The final deal with the unions was completed on 17 July, 1984, Browne's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. But the crisis was far from over: finding the cash to pay the printers 'became a weekly obsession ... We spent the next two years not really knowing from week to week if we could make it ... it was really hand-to-mouth stuff'.<sup>38</sup>

The *Tribune* then set its sights on raising money through the newly established Business Expansion Scheme (BES) which allowed tax relief on investments of up to £25,000 per year for five years. The BES applied only to manufacturing companies and thus the *Tribune*'s company structure and printing arrangements were changed to meet this standard; effectively, the company 'manufactured' the newspaper each week. Investors were being lined up under the BES when a major libel case threatened to derail the campaign. Former Industry Minister Justin Keating took a defamation action against the *Tribune* for an article written by Browne in May 1984 about his role in the state's deal with Bula Mines. The court found in Keating's favour on 16 December, 1985 and awarded him £65,000. Browne insisted this would not undermine the stability of the newspaper.<sup>39</sup> But there were other libel actions pending and the *Tribune* made a concerted effort to settle these to allay investors' fears that money put into the company would be going out again in libel awards. Deals were done and numerous apologies published. About the same time as the Keating award was made, John Birrane, a British-based Irish businessman, contacted the *Tribune* and agreed a £250,000 investment.<sup>40</sup> (Keating, in the end, accepted far less than the court award.)

The BES investments brought in £500,000, as did the *Sunday Tribune*'s launch in 1987 on the Smaller Companies Market. Readers were invited to 'Buy the *Sunday Tribune*'<sup>41</sup>, with Browne and Dobey on-hand to take Sunday morning phone calls from interested parties. Sales of the paper reached a weekly average of 96,666 in 1987, a credible performance at a time when competitors' sales were falling. The share offer was fully subscribed and the money from new investors was used to enlarge the paper and broaden its coverage.

### Revolving doors

One key to securing the transition from the earlier version of the *Sunday Tribune* was Vincent Browne's offer of posts to *Tribune* journalists who had been laid off in October 1982. To these he added several writers who had cut their teeth on *In Dublin* magazine, thus rejuvenating the arts team – also with the recruitment of popular music industry personality B. P. Fallon as rock writer. The recruits from *In Dublin* included Michael Dwyer (cinema), Mary Raftery (radio) and Fintan O'Toole, who covered theatre but also general news, and Aidan Dunne (visual arts), who joined in 1987. Paddy Agnew came from *Magill* to be sports editor; Gene Kerrigan later followed Agnew, while later again, John Waters, who had contributed a column to the *Sunday Tribune* from 1984, went in the other direction to edit the magazine.

The *Sunday Tribune* became a scouting and informal training ground for new entrants to journalism, many of whom were later to go on to senior positions in other media. Orla Guerin, Lorna Donlon and Maggie O'Kane were among those who joined the *Tribune* in the mid-1980s soon after leaving college. All went on to build notable careers in British broadcast or print media. Rory Godson followed Donlon in winning an award as Young Journalist of the Year while with the *Sunday Tribune* and also pursuing a career later in Britain.

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<sup>36</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 8 July, 1984

<sup>37</sup> *Irish Times*, 11 July, 1984

<sup>38</sup> Dobey interview, 9 April 2017

<sup>39</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Dec., 1985

<sup>40</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 26 June, 1988

<sup>41</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 27 Sept., 1987

Others who worked with the *Sunday Tribune* relatively early in their journalism careers included Aileen O'Meara, Kevin Dawson, Fergal Keane and Anne-Marie Smyth, all of whom went on to long periods with RTÉ. Among those joining the *Sunday Tribune* with established track records in newspaper journalism were Ed Moloney returning from the *Irish Times* in 1986 to cover Northern Ireland, Ciaran Carty moving from the *Sunday Independent* as arts editor and Deirdre McQuillan, who had established herself in women's magazines and contributed strongly presented fashion coverage and other feature material to the *Sunday Tribune* as Lifestyle Editor. In sport, David Walsh joined the *Sunday Tribune* from the *Irish Press* and, through his special interest in the Tour de France, developed a relationship with cyclist Paul Kimmage, introducing him to journalism and working with him on investigations of drug use in cycling that became a decades-long theme for Walsh, later senior sports writer with the *Sunday Times*, and for Kimmage as contributor to the *Sunday Independent*.

Design and photography were key parts of the *Sunday Tribune*'s distinctiveness. Award-winning designer Andy Barclay had stayed with the paper from its first version, having previously worked with *Hibernia* and the *Belfast Telegraph*. He did notable and bold layouts particularly for the colour magazine, while staff photographer John Carlos was supported by a changing crew that included Derek Speirs, Eamonn Farrell and Billy Stickland, all of whom became leaders in the field as independent operators or agency-owners. Fergus Bourke, an art photographer with a long-standing specialism in theatre, was assigned the photography for the *Sunday Tribune*'s innovative Kindred column which presented the writers' views on and memories of their siblings or other family relations; Bourke's stark black-and-white pictures were a critical component of the regular feature.

Freelance contributors of many different kinds were an important element of the *Sunday Tribune*'s total package. These included satirist Dermot Morgan, who wrote a weekly column from 1984 before becoming much more famous as Father Ted in the cult television series of the same name, Mary Holland, who contributed her columns, mainly on Northern Ireland, up to 1985 when she moved to the *Irish Times*, and broadcaster David Hanly.

Whether staff members or freelances, *Sunday Tribune* journalists came and went with great frequency. Fintan O'Toole estimated that the *Sunday Tribune* under Browne lost five books editors, three business editors, two arts editors, three sports editors, three chief sub-editors and three news editors.<sup>42</sup> To that could be added three managing directors, the last of them Barbara Nugent, who was three years in that position before leaving due to 'irreconcilable differences' (*Irish Times*, 15 February 1989), only to return soon after for a further two years. Northern Editor Ed Moloney commented later that Browne 'could never make a friend without falling out with them', but also stated: 'If there was one man who made me the journalist I later became it was Vincent'.<sup>43</sup>

#### Ahead of its time

The *Tribune* had entered the newspaper market well ahead of its main competitors in terms of production and printing technology, with a look that was fresher, cleaner, more modern. In 1983, the editorial mix of news, sports, arts, and business filled 32 broadsheet pages, with a separate 16-page lifestyles and features magazine, carrying full-colour advertisements. In 1989, after finances had improved, the paper was redesigned with a second broadsheet section which increased sport and business coverage.

Arts coverage was a consistently strong and substantial part of the *Tribune* package, reflecting its ambition as a quality broadsheet. When the *Irish Press* dropped the long-running New Irish Writing page, the *Tribune* stepped in. Novelists Joseph O'Connor, Anne Enright and Hugo Hamilton were among those whose stories were published. As O'Connor later told Arts Editor, Ciaran Carty, the call from the *Tribune* was pivotal. 'I don't think anything as exciting will ever happen to me [again] ... I wouldn't have been one of those very brave writers who kept on trying for years and years ... I would have stopped'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Nov., 1990

<sup>43</sup> Post at Ed Moloney's blog, thebrokenelbow.com, 8 Feb., 2011

<sup>44</sup> Ciaran Carty, Hall of Fame Interviews, Hennessy Literary Awards (Hennessy Literary Awards, 2016), p.13

The decision in late 1984 to wrap the magazine around the broadsheet gave the paper a full-colour glossy front page and a stand-out presence on the newsstands. The wraparound was originally intended as a once-off photographic souvenir of the visit of President Ronald Reagan to Ireland but became the format for the *Sunday Tribune* until April 1992 when high-quality colour printing on newsprint became available. The colour cover played to Browne's strengths as a former magazine editor; a typical *Tribune* cover featured a strong news image and a provocative headline, as, for example, during the long-running Kerry Babies tribunal (see below), a cover with a colour close-up photograph of Joanne Hayes and the lines, 'What the Gardai did to Joanne Hayes', 'By Deirdre Purcell, Woman Journalist of the Year'.<sup>45</sup>

The *Tribune* used the colour cover to push the paper's authority, offering readers 'the inside story' or an exclusive take on a running story, sometimes also with an irreverent and quirky perspective. When Charles Haughey dismissed Brian Lenihan, the man he had called his 'friend of 30 years', the *Tribune* cover featured a close-up shot of a pensive Haughey with the headline, 'Some Friend'.<sup>46</sup> The cover was also used as a vehicle to boost sales, featuring personalities who were reckoned to attract readers, notably broadcaster Gay Byrne, then in his heyday. When Deirdre Purcell wrote Byrne's autobiography in 1989, the newspaper sustained stories about him for six weeks, including two full covers, bringing *Tribune* sales over 120,000.<sup>47</sup>

But the colour wraparound was printed on a Friday and, while Sunday newspapers are generally less dependent on breaking news than dailies, big news events can happen on the weekend and, at such times, the *Tribune* was at a disadvantage. Both the Bradford and Hillsborough football stadium tragedies were Saturday events, well covered by the *Sunday Tribune* but not on its cover. The *Tribune* could not promote its own scoop by photographer John Carlos who captured the dramatic moment (on a Saturday) when a Garda opened fire in central Dublin during incidents after the release of IRA suspect Evelyn Glenholmes.<sup>48</sup> The cover that Sunday featured actor Clint Eastwood who was running for mayor in Carmel, California. (Carlos later won the Photographer of the Year for his picture.)

The *Tribune* sought to mitigate this problem when a big event was scheduled for a Saturday. The cover for 1 July, 1990, printed before Ireland's quarter-final defeat in the football World Cup in Italy, featured goalkeeper Packie Bonner's full-stretch penalty save in an earlier game against Romania, with an inset team photograph and the headline, 'They've Done Us Proud', which worked whether Ireland won or lost. Boxer Barry McGuigan's Saturday night world championship fight against Eusebio Pedroza on 9 June 1985 presented greater deadline challenges and the solution was unorthodox but ingenious. Two covers were printed, one featuring a story about Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish man who shot Pope John Paul II in 1981, and the other a close-up action shot of McGuigan with the headline, 'Champion of the World'. By placing a £5,000 bet against a McGuigan win but also selling two extra colour advertisements exclusive to that edition, the *Tribune* covered the cost of both covers. McGuigan won, the late edition carried the McGuigan cover and the ads covered the cost of the print run and the bet.<sup>49</sup>

On 26 April 1992, with the benefit of new printing technology and with award-winning designer Stephen Ryan at the helm, the *Tribune* was relaunched as a three-section, 56-page colour broadsheet. A week earlier, the paper published a farewell to the wraparound cover, noting that Charles Haughey was the person most often featured – 41 times: 'Sometimes it drove us mad. Frequently it must have driven our readers mad. Almost always it drove Charlie Haughey mad'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 25 Jan., 1985

<sup>46</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 4 Nov., 1990

<sup>47</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 3 Sept.-8 Oct., 1989

<sup>48</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 23 March, 1986

<sup>49</sup> Dobey interview, 9 April, 2017

<sup>50</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 19 April, 1992

### Priority themes: Pluralism and women's rights

Equality for women was one of the four key issues highlighted in Vincent Browne's first editorial, 'Where We Stand'.<sup>51</sup> Objectivity, he wrote, 'does not preclude editorial or personal opinions – opinions which are certain to inform the presentation of cases, and more particularly, the selection of issues'. It was a time of extraordinary events which put into sharp focus the position of women in Irish society. In April 1984, two months after the Ann Lovett case, mentioned earlier, the mutilated body of a baby boy was found on a beach in Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry, and the Garda murder squad devoted its full attention to a single mother 80 kilometres away in Abbeydorney. Joanne Hayes, like Ann Lovett, had concealed her pregnancy and had given birth at home, alone. Her baby died and the body was hidden on the family farm. Yet, under Garda questioning, Joanne and her family confessed to involvement in the violent killing of the Cahirciveen baby.

The Kerry Babies Tribunal, set up to investigate how this happened, sat for 11 weeks in 1985 and Deirdre Purcell was there every day for the *Tribune*. For Joanne Hayes, it was a harrowing ordeal. No detail of her personal or, indeed, gynecological life was left unexamined as the Garda sought to defend the investigation. Purcell wrote, 'Joanne Hayes is not on trial in Tralee. You repeat that to yourself now and then as you watch and listen'.<sup>52</sup> As the hearings went on, *Tribune* headlines and cover stories were dramatic and unambiguous: 'The Kerry Babies Barristers: the men behind the tears', and 'They Shoot Horses, Don't They?'.<sup>53</sup> A *Tribune* editorial concluded that Gardai had abused their power and 'Joanne and her family were denied rights which should be taken for granted in a normal civilized country'.<sup>54</sup> The *Tribune* printed a photograph of the body of the Cahirciveen baby with multiple stab wounds to his back, and with the caption, 'It is a wrenching reminder of a far more horrible event than that which took place in the Hayes house in Abbeydorney'.<sup>55</sup>

As the Tribunal dissected the reproductive life of one woman, the Dáil was debating legislation liberalising the sale of contraceptives. Fianna Fail opposed the government bill but Des O'Malley broke ranks and abstained, his now famous 'I stand by the Republic' speech leading to his expulsion from the party. O'Malley was on the cover of the *Tribune* that week with his speech printed in full.<sup>56</sup> But the larger fight between Garret FitzGerald's Coalition government and the Catholic church was over divorce. The *Tribune* supported the government's stance, believing 'the success of the referendum would represent a formidable symbol of the willingness of the Republic of Ireland to accommodate views and beliefs at variance with the tenets of the majority of the population'.<sup>57</sup> The newspaper believed 'the duty [of the electorate] is to vote yes'<sup>58</sup> but columnist J. J. O'Molloy had brought a dose of realism with 'Divorce in our time? Don't hold your breath'.<sup>59</sup>

In February 1992 the Attorney General sought and received an injunction preventing a 14-year-old rape victim leaving the country to obtain an abortion. The X-case, as it became known, was covered over two successive weeks in the *Tribune* which devoted the front covers and eight inside pages to the controversy. The paper's editorial stated, 'The constitutional amendment on abortion should be simply deleted', leaving the issue to the legislature.<sup>60</sup> The *Tribune* sought to talk to the people most directly affected; journalist Nicola Byrne was dispatched to a London abortion clinic to report on the journey taken by many Irish women. The women's stories were published over two weeks and a full page was given over to readers' views.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 17 April, 1983

<sup>52</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 20 Jan., 1985

<sup>53</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 27 Jan., 1985

<sup>54</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 6 Oct., 1985

<sup>55</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 6 Oct., 1985

<sup>56</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 24 Feb., 1985

<sup>57</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 22 June, 1986

<sup>58</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 22 June, 1986

<sup>59</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 29 Sept., 1985

<sup>60</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 23 Feb., 1992

<sup>61</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 23 Feb. & 1 March, 1992



Underpinning the *Tribune's* commitment to covering women's issues was the talent of its many women journalists and the fact that, atypical of the industry at the time, women occupied many senior positions, both editorial and commercial. It is unlikely that there were many other companies on the Irish stock exchange that listed a commitment to equality for women in the company prospectus.<sup>62</sup>

#### Priority theme: Northern Ireland

The *Sunday Tribune's* controversial interview with on-the-run INLA leader Dominic McGlinchey in 1983 was a clear indication the paper would talk to all 'sides' in the northern conflict. Another INLA activist Dessie O'Hare, whose criminal and murderous activities earned him the media moniker, The Border Fox, later took to phoning the newspaper. One of these calls came while O'Hare and associates were holding dentist John O'Grady in a 23-day kidnap ordeal. The *Tribune* ran the interview in the late edition on 1 November, 1987, quoting O'Hare as saying that O'Grady was alive and well but adding, 'I am the Border Fox and foxes are very clever'. Even as O'Hare made that phone call, Gardai were in the *Tribune* office asking about earlier contacts.

Political developments in the North spanned the negotiation and aftermath of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, the rows and frustrations over extradition and the beginning of the Hume-Adams talks which eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Browne, Barry, J. J. O'Molloy and Northern Editor Ed Moloney came at these from different angles. The paper was notable for the extent to which it engaged with events in the North, sending reporters from Dublin to talk to as broad a spread of people involved as possible. Emily O'Reilly spent a night with a Catholic family under siege from loyalists<sup>63</sup> and she also spoke at length to sectarian killer and UVF leader John Bingham; her interview could be published in full only after his murder.<sup>64</sup> It was a time of regular paramilitary 'executions' of people deemed to be informers or troublesome for other reasons. The *Tribune* printed a close-up colour photograph of the body of one such victim – Eamonn Maguire – on its cover, with the headline 'In Cold Blood'.<sup>65</sup> The editorial was unequivocal: 'Every one of those involved – and yes it does include Gerry Adams, Danny Morrison, Martin McGuinness and the rest who, if nothing else, are apologists for this kind of abomination – stand guilty of a despicable and mean act that defies all human values'.<sup>66</sup>

*Sunday Tribune* editorials on Northern Ireland continued to argue through the darkest days that the nationalist cause was justified but violence was not; there were political means available to address these problems. The paper sought to understand the republican mindset, however. Condemning the fatal ambush of eight members of the IRA by British security forces at Loughall in May 1987 under the headline 'Murder is Murder is Murder', the editorial stated: 'The eight IRA men, while killed in the act of attempted killing, are themselves victims in another sense of the Northern situation'.<sup>67</sup> The *Tribune* noted that the IRA drew recruits from a deeply and systematically alienated community. An editorial on the inquiry into the killing of three IRA members in Gibraltar in March 1988, stated: 'It is difficult, certainly at this remove and from an Irish nationalist perspective, to regard these killings as anything other than premeditated murder'.<sup>68</sup>

After the IRA's November 1987 bombing of an Armistice Day commemoration in Enniskillen, killing 12 people, *Tribune* editorials argued for allowing, albeit with safeguards, extradition to Britain. It was a contentious issue, given the view that there was scant justice for Irish nationalists in British courts. After the release of the Guildford Four, an editorial noted there was not 'a single word of apology from the British'.<sup>69</sup> The Birmingham Six were then still behind bars and the *Tribune* covered their

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<sup>62</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 27 Sept. 1987

<sup>63</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 24 Aug., 1986

<sup>64</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 21 Sept. 1986

<sup>65</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 6 Sept. 1987

<sup>66</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 6 Sept., 1987

<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 10 May 1987

<sup>68</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 2 Oct., 1988

<sup>69</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 29 Oct., 1989

plight extensively up to their release in 1991, including reporter Kevin Dawson's exclusive interviews with the men from prison.<sup>70</sup>

#### Priority theme: the economy

The *Sunday Tribune* was committed to scrutinise in detail the management of the economy where 'the absence of accountability has been particularly glaring'.<sup>71</sup> A decade's record of high levels of foreign borrowing was contrasted with the continuously rising level of unemployment. The founding editorial argued that 'redistribution can mean only that those in jobs agree to hold back their wage demands to allow resources to be freed for others to be employed'. The redistribution part of the agenda was reflected less in the paper's economic coverage and more in that of social issues such as poverty and drugs abuse arising from or related to unemployment.

In a profile of Charles Haughey, then leader of the Opposition, Browne identified as 'real crimes' the economic policies he pursued as Taoiseach in 1980-81 when 'he allowed public expenditure to get out of hand'.<sup>72</sup> This remained the emphasis of economic coverage; in that respect, the *Sunday Tribune* in the 1980s was less disruptive than in some other areas of coverage but rather reflected an emerging orthodoxy which has strongly influenced public policy in the following decades. The theme of wasted spending recurred frequently, as, for example, in Paul Tansey's exclusive page 1 report on the £350 million over-run on the ESB's coal-fired power station in Moneypoint, Co Clare.<sup>73</sup> Waste was a central theme of an exploration by Tansey, Browne and economist Seán Barrett of the 'state of the nation'.<sup>74</sup> In another extended examination of the theme, an editorial commented that even with 'enormous' public expenditure and 'staggering' waste the incidence of poverty was high.<sup>75</sup> Ahead of the January 1986 budget, Tansey explained 'why we each owe £5,714'<sup>76</sup> and, a week later, an editorial raged that the budget 'signalled the government's own confession of failure', as not cutting spending meant maintaining a high tax burden.<sup>77</sup> The editorial acknowledged the difficulty of making deep cuts but then went on to question the need for several named government departments, some major government agencies and for diplomatic representation in 15 listed countries, starting with Argentina, Austria and Australia.

The concern about public spending easily turned into an argument about limiting public pay which was claimed to be '£15 million over'.<sup>78</sup> Public sector workers were often a target, which made life difficult for reporters working on these stories. In advance of a threatened teachers' strike over pay, the headline over Lorna Donlon's otherwise balanced report was 'Should Cooney Fire the Teachers?'.<sup>79</sup> This triggered outraged letters from teachers, published over a full page, but with an editorial in the same issue again making the case against their demand for a pay increase.<sup>80</sup>

Another year later Ireland was seen as 'A Nation in Peril' requiring 'a strategy for survival [that] has got to commence immediately'.<sup>81</sup> In a full-page editorial, Browne wrote that 'another four years of the kind of government we have got used to could well see the country go beyond the possibility of survival'.

Tansey's business coverage – and that of the *Sunday Tribune* in general, and Des Crowley in particular – often had a critical dimension. Tansey claimed that US companies were treating Ireland as a tax haven<sup>82</sup> and, as excitement rose in political and financial circles about the potential of offshore

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<sup>70</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 28 Jan., 1990

<sup>71</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 17 April, 1983

<sup>72</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 Jan., 1984

<sup>73</sup> 'ESB squanders a billion on doubtful project', *Sunday Tribune*, 5 June, 1983

<sup>74</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 20 Nov., 1983

<sup>75</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 30 Dec., 1984

<sup>76</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 26 Jan. 1986

<sup>77</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 2 Feb., 1986

<sup>78</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 13 Oct., 1985

<sup>79</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 9 March 1986

<sup>80</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 16 March 1986

<sup>81</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 18 Jan., 1987

<sup>82</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 4 Nov., 1984

oil discoveries, he warned of the lure of ‘fool’s gold’ and estimated that a reported find could bring ‘pennies from heaven’, while Crowley observed that Ireland had ‘oil millionaires before we had oil’<sup>83</sup> and oil economist Peter Odell later warned against the lure of ‘oil that glitters’.<sup>84</sup>

However, there were contradictions here as in other areas. As Tansey was writing about ‘fool’s gold’, Browne in the same edition congratulated exploration company Atlantic Resources and its chairman, Tony O’Reilly, on their success.<sup>85</sup> Browne then qualified the compliment, noting that the *Sunday Tribune* had ‘little reason to praise O’Reilly – he went to considerable pains to obstruct the relaunch of the paper – but it [is] only fair to acknowledge the contribution he has made to the country’.

#### Personalities in the news and in its coverage

Big personalities such as Tony O’Reilly, as much as big issues, shaped the *Sunday Tribune*’s character. The two dominant and contrasting political figures in the Republic, Garret FitzGerald and Charles Haughey, fuelled much reporting, analysis, comment and imagery, as did Browne’s contradictory views of these personalities whom he criticised strongly and also admired. In FitzGerald’s last months as Taoiseach, the *Tribune* was relentlessly critical of the government: ‘Garret, the Game is Up’<sup>86</sup>, ‘As the Country Braves the Snow, Garret Stays in the Bunker’<sup>87</sup>. Yet when FitzGerald resigned, the *Tribune* cover declared, ‘Garret: we will not see the likes of him again’.<sup>88</sup> As mentioned above, Browne charged Haughey with ‘crimes’ in his management of the economy but he was comfortable with Andy Barclay, a keen natural history and wildlife enthusiast, and photographer John Carlos visiting Haughey’s privately owned island, Inishvickillaune, to produce a flattering and rare feature about it.<sup>89</sup>

Personality-focused coverage also came in extended profiles and in Deirdre Purcell’s interviews that became a staple of the paper. But Purcell’s work for the *Sunday Tribune* in that time also included reporting on famine in Ethiopia before it became the stimulus for Band Aid in 1985 and an exclusive interview with US presidential candidate Gary Hart in 1987, when he sought refuge in the west of Ireland from US media pursuit of his alleged extra-marital affairs. Purcell and others were given space to stretch themselves – and to show their own personalities – in other formats. Purcell spent a long evening in the Leeson Street night clubs with photographer John Carlos.<sup>90</sup> As well as providing political and social features and being sent to South Africa to report on the dying apartheid regime in summer 1985, Emily O’Reilly went behind the scenes at a fashion show<sup>91</sup> and at a snooker tournament during an appearance by the erratic Hurricane Alex Higgins<sup>92</sup>.

Through 1988-89 Gene Kerrigan followed the William Dunne action against Holles Street maternity hospital, eventually writing a book on it, and Kevin Dawson followed the unfolding story of the damage to Kenneth Best from a rogue batch of the whooping cough vaccine. In 1993 reporter Veronica Guerin tracked down Bishop Eamon Casey in Ecuador and the resulting interview, with exclusive photographs from John Carlos, ran over three weeks, totalling 12 pages.<sup>93</sup> Guerin was on her way to becoming a public personality, having developed a distinctive style of work largely detached from the editorial team of which she was a nominal part. The *Tribune* news editor of the time, Alan Byrne, recalled that ‘the Casey story was one of the few stories where she was encouraged

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<sup>83</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 14 Aug., 1983

<sup>84</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 16 Oct., 1983

<sup>85</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 14 Aug., 1983

<sup>86</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 16 Oct., 1986

<sup>87</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 18 Jan., 1987

<sup>88</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 15 March 1987

<sup>89</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 9 Sept., 1984

<sup>90</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 29 May 1983

<sup>91</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 28 Aug., 1983

<sup>92</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 April 1984

<sup>93</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 14, 21, 28 Nov., 1993

to do it by us. It was clearly the biggest story in Irish journalism at the time'.<sup>94</sup> Despite this, Guerin left the *Tribune* for the *Sunday Independent* soon after on bad terms with Vincent Browne.<sup>95</sup>

Columnists also provided personal insights and, in some cases, opinions contrary to the socially liberal thrust of current affairs coverage. This was certainly the case for the pseudonymous J. J. O'Molloy, as mentioned earlier, but also for shorter-lived *Tribune* columnists, Independent Senator (later minister) Shane Ross, adviser to the Catholic bishops and later President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, and Fine Gael TD John Kelly, all of whose opinions were to the right of the *Sunday Tribune's* dominant editorial view.

Contrarianism was encouraged notably in the case of Helen Lucy Burke who first contributed to the *Sunday Tribune* on gardening, then occasionally on restaurants, and then as the paper's established – and increasingly feared – restaurant critic. She took some time to find her strong voice, writing after some months as a restaurant reviewer that a lobster terrine 'tasted like brawn from a delicatessen', that 'rage set in at having to pay £1.95 each for vegetables. This petty meanness seemed on a par with the skimpy paper napkins', and that the crême brulée was 'mawkishly sweet, a disgraceful £1.95'.<sup>96</sup>

The promise of restaurant reviews like this became an essential part of the *Sunday Tribune's* offering, as did contrarian coverage of football from Eamon Dunphy. As well as writing critically about the Irish international team he provided contemptuous coverage of the League of Ireland, which he repeatedly called the Famous Fried Chicken League in reference to its long-time lead sponsor. Writing on a short-lived manager of Dundalk FC, John Dempsey, he said Dempsey found 'the Famous Fried Chicken League was a joke. The Irish grounds were kips with rough, unprepared pitches. The League of Ireland was a cowboy outfit'.<sup>97</sup> Dunphy's second stint with the *Tribune* lasted less than two years, however; he went on to a longer spell with the *Sunday Independent*.

#### Over-reaching ambition

Fintan O'Toole reflected on Browne's achievement in 1990 that 'it is simply impossible to think of anyone else who could have kept the *Sunday Tribune* going through its early years never mind establishing it as the viable Sunday quality paper'.<sup>98</sup> And therein, he added, lay the problem: 'The fundamental difficulty through Vincent Browne's remarkable career in journalism is that he has far too much energy and far too many ambitions for one man, yet he is virtually unable to delegate to others'.

Earlier that year, the *Sunday Tribune* launched an ambitious new venture aimed at securing its financial future as an independent newspaper. It had the opposite effect and marked the beginning of the end of Vincent Browne's time as editor. *Dublin Tribune* was a 28-page, free, weekly broadsheet newspaper, with nine local editions, delivered directly to 165,000 homes. It was a lively mix of Dublin news and sports from a staff of 18 reporters, columns from established commentators such as Nell McCafferty and Shane Ross, and edited by former *Sunday Independent* editor Michael Hand.

At the time, freesheet newspapers were seen as potential money-makers and there was a real fear that if the *Tribune* didn't grab this business opportunity, someone else would. As Browne recalled, '...if we waited... we believed that the Ingersoll organisation, which at the time had very successful free newspapers in the US, notably in St. Louis, would move in and rob us of the chance'.<sup>99</sup> Ralph Ingersoll had already invested in the ailing Irish Press group and was for a short time feted as a man who could work newspaper magic: 'His newspaper pedigree is second to none,' wrote the *Sunday Tribune*.<sup>100</sup> The son of a media magnate, he built his empire on local freesheets in the United States and in Britain and it was thought he would do the same in Dublin.

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<sup>94</sup> Emily O'Reilly, Veronica Guerin – the life and death of a crime reporter (Vintage, 1998), p.40

<sup>95</sup> O'Reilly, 1998, p.48

<sup>96</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 July, 1984

<sup>97</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 1 July, 1984

<sup>98</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Nov., 1990

<sup>99</sup> Kenny, 1994, p.125

<sup>100</sup> *Sunday Tribune*, 9 July, 1989

So, the *Sunday Tribune* got in first, taking advantage of its technological lead over competitors. It was the first to introduce ‘direct input’ by journalists of editorial copy<sup>101</sup> and on-screen page make-up soon followed, bringing down production costs. Circulation had topped 100,000 and in the year to April 1990 a profit of £246,000 was reported. Arguably, it was a good time to expand. As Martin Dobey remembers it, ‘the business was doing fine and *Dublin Tribune* killed the *Tribune*. But it was a fantastic idea, a good piece of work, very ambitious’.<sup>102</sup>

The *Dublin Tribune* had a profound impact: after five successive years of rising profits the company reported a loss of £1.4 million in the six months to the end of September 1990<sup>103</sup>; this became a loss of £2.3 million for the 12 months to 31 March 1991<sup>104</sup>. The losses continued and in November disgruntled investors sold 29.85 per cent of *Tribune* shares to Ireland’s largest media group, Independent Newspapers.<sup>105</sup> It was a blow to Browne for whom the *Tribune*’s independence was a large part of its *raison d’être* but he and colleagues ‘sought to make the most of it’.<sup>106</sup> He eventually proposed that Independent Newspapers be allowed to take over the *Tribune*, to save jobs and bring stability and on the basis of ‘undertakings on editorial independence which I believed would stick’.<sup>107</sup> When Independent Newspapers sought to acquire a majority shareholding, the matter was referred to the Competition Authority and Browne made a personal intervention with minister Des O’Malley seeking to persuade him that the takeover should be supported.<sup>108</sup> O’Malley ruled against the merger in March 1992, the *Dublin Tribune* continued publishing and losing money until May 1992 and Browne remained in the editor’s chair until 20 January 1994 when he was sacked by the *Tribune* Newspapers board.

### The long tail

In the *Sunday Tribune*’s remaining 17 years it had four editors, of whom the last three – Matt Cooper, Paddy Murray and Noirin Hegarty – came from and went to positions in the wider Independent Newspapers group. Peter Murtagh was the exception to this pattern, working with the *Irish Times* both before and after his period as *Tribune* editor (1994-96). Each of these editors negotiated their own editorial autonomy within the overall control of the *Tribune* by Independent Newspapers.

Many outstanding journalists worked with the title during this time and major stories in the *Sunday Tribune* often pointed the way for other media. Hegarty memorialised her tenure as editor with a collection of articles from the *Tribune* in those last five years of its existence.<sup>109</sup> Introducing the volume, she made no reference to the earlier history of the newspaper; the record of the *Sunday Tribune* as a distinctive, critical presence in the Irish newspaper market was not even a dim memory.

The paper’s impact in the market was declining from the mid-1990s and, as sales fell, the subsidy from Independent Newspapers became an increasingly necessary lifeline. From Independent Newspapers’ perspective, keeping the *Tribune* afloat was a deterrent to other media groups from entering or expanding in the Sunday newspaper market. It may have been effective in distracting The *Irish Times* from its plans for a Sunday edition, to which it dedicated significant resources. It did not, however, prevent the continuing development of the *Sunday Business Post* nor the gradual growth of the *Sunday Times*’s Irish edition.

The *Tribune* became subject to the same rationalising pressures as other elements of the Independent group, eventually accommodated in the same headquarters building as all other titles. Twenty years after Independent Newspapers first invested in the *Sunday Tribune*, it withdrew its life-support. Tony O’Reilly, as long-time chair of Independent Newspapers, had been a relatively benign patron of the *Tribune*. According to one of his biographers and *Tribune* editors, O’Reilly was sidelined within the

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<sup>101</sup> Post at [martindobey.blogspot.ie](http://martindobey.blogspot.ie), 17 April, 2008

<sup>102</sup> Dobey interview, 9 April, 2017

<sup>103</sup> *Irish Times*, 27 March, 1991

<sup>104</sup> *Irish Times*, 29 Feb., 1992

<sup>105</sup> *Sunday Business Post*, 18 Nov., 1990

<sup>106</sup> Kenny, 1994, p.128

<sup>107</sup> Kenny, 1994, p.127

<sup>108</sup> Kenny, 1994, p.128

<sup>109</sup> Noirin Hegarty (ed.), *The Trib – highlights from the Sunday Tribune* (Y Books, 2011)

Independent group in 2011 when it came to the decision to close the Sunday paper.<sup>110</sup> Whatever his and his colleagues' precise motives for becoming involved with the *Sunday Tribune*, by 2000 the accumulated debt to the Independent group was 'of the order of £12 million'.<sup>111</sup> At the paper's closure in January 2011 the *Tribune*'s debts to Independent News & Media were estimated at about €40 million<sup>112</sup> or accumulated losses on Independent's investment at €60 million<sup>113</sup>. By any measure, it was an expensive adventure.

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<sup>110</sup> Matt Cooper, *The Maximalist – the rise and fall of Tony O'Reilly* (Gill & Macmillan, 2015)

<sup>111</sup> John Horgan, *Irish Media – a critical history since 1922* (Routledge, 2001), p.142

<sup>112</sup> *Irish Times*, 2 Feb., 2011

<sup>113</sup> Cooper, 2015, p. 84